

THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE FOR PERSUASIVE COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

Persuasive communication is increasingly recognized as a fundamental process in organizational, political, and social contexts. This article argues that communication competence is a key determinant of the effectiveness of persuasive communication. Persuasive communication is defined as a symbolic, intentional process through which communicators aim to influence others' attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors. The article examines three major models of communicative competence (Munby, Canale & Swain, Bachman) and evaluates their applicability to persuasive communication. The methodology relies on theoretical analysis, synthesis of existing literature, and comparative examination of classical and contemporary models of communicative competence, supplemented by an updated review of recent sources (2020 – 2024). The main theoretical contribution is the development of an integrated conceptual framework linking communicative competence dimensions directly to persuasive strategies and mechanisms. Conclusions highlight the theoretical implications for communication studies.

Keywords: persuasive communication, communicator, communicative competence, competence models, persuasive strategies

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Introduction

Throughout history, scholars have attempted to explain the communicative act from various disciplinary perspectives – rhetoric, sociolinguistics, pragmatics, discourse analysis, and cognitive linguistics. One of the most complex areas of study has been persuasive communication, which requires not only an understanding of communication processes but also insight into influence mechanisms and social interaction.

Persuasive communication can be defined as “*a symbolic process in which communicators intentionally attempt to influence others by creating, transmitting, and reinforcing messages designed to shape attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors*” (Perloff, 2021, p. 12). Unlike general communication, persuasive communication is inherently goal-oriented, intentional, and evaluative, as its success depends on

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the ability of the communicator to induce change or reinforcement in the target audience.

In contemporary contexts, persuasive communication has wide applications: journalism, advertising, marketing, public relations, political communication, and leadership. In all these spheres, persuasive communication can only succeed if the communicator possesses sufficient knowledge, skills, and abilities – collectively referred to as **communicative competence**.

Thesis Statement: This article argues that communicative competence, conceptualized through modern theoretical models, is a necessary and critical condition for effective persuasive communication. By analyzing the main models of communicative competence and linking them to persuasive mechanisms, the article provides a framework that enhances both theoretical understanding and contemporary relevance.

Methodology

This article adopts a theoretical research methodology, structured around three main approaches:

1. Analytical-synthetic review – A systematic review of literature on communicative competence and persuasive communication, with emphasis on both classical and recent sources.

2. Comparative analysis – Examination of three influential models of communicative competence (Munby, 1978; Canale & Swain, 1980; Bachman, 1990) and assessment of their relevance for persuasive contexts.

3. Critical review of recent studies (2020 – 2024) – Integration of findings from contemporary research (e.g., Bojic, 2023; Perloff, 2021; Dillard & Shen, 2022; Petty & Briñol, 2021; Hoffmann et al., 2020; Johansson & Karlsson, 2021; Chmielecki, 2022) to ensure the study reflects current theoretical and applied perspectives.

The methodology is qualitative, conceptual, and integrative. It does not include empirical data collection but instead develops a new theoretical contribution by explicitly linking communicative competence dimensions (grammatical, sociolinguistic, pragmatic, and strategic) to mechanisms of persuasive influence (logical argumentation, emotional appeal, credibility, and symbolic framing).

Specifics of Communication Competence

Communication competence has been a subject of sustained research interest, with increasing attention in recent years due to the complexity of global communication environments. Contemporary studies emphasize that communication competence is not only about transmitting information effectively

but also about strategically adapting communication to context and persuasive goals (Perloff, 2021; Dillard & Shen, 2022; Petty & Briñol, 2021).

Recent authors define communication competence as the ability to select appropriate behaviors in interaction, adapt to socio-cultural and organizational contexts, and achieve communicative goals (Johansson & Karlsson, 2021). Competence is viewed as a dynamic construct shaped by linguistic, pragmatic, and social factors (Chmielecki, 2022).

This definition underscores its centrality for persuasion: communicative competence determines how well arguments, appeals, and messages align with the audience's expectations, emotions, and cognitive frames (Hoffmann et al., 2020; Bojic, 2023).

Three Main Models of Communication Competence

The Model of John Munby

According to John Munby (1978), communicative competence has three main elements:

1. **Socio-cultural orientation** – Language as a socio-cultural phenomenon; competence and community, contextual adaptation, and communication requirements.

2. **Socio-semantic basis of language knowledge** – Language as a semantic system embedded in social structure; communicative approach as a tool for meaning-making.

3. **Discourse level of action** – Competence as realized through discourse (written and spoken), where speech acts reflect both linguistic forms and non-linguistic organization.

Munby (1978) stresses that communicative competence entails the ability to use language forms to perform communicative actions and understand sentence functions in context. This resonates strongly with persuasive communication, where adapting discourse to context is essential.

The Model of Canale and Swain

Canale and Swain (1980) proposed an integrative model of communicative competence that has become foundational. Their framework rests on several assumptions: communication is goal-directed, context-dependent, interactive, and evaluated by behavioral outcomes.

The three main competencies are:

- **Grammatical competence** – knowledge of lexical items and grammar.

- **Sociolinguistic competence** – socio-cultural rules of use and discourse rules.
- **Strategic competence** – verbal and non-verbal strategies to manage communication breakdowns and enhance persuasion.

Canale (1983) further refined this framework, highlighting contextual competence (combining structures into different text types), sociolinguistic competence (mastering social codes), and strategic competence (overcoming communication difficulties). For persuasive communication, strategic competence is especially relevant: it equips communicators with tools to adapt messages dynamically to audience reactions.

The Model of Lyle Bachman

Bachman (1990) proposed three main components:

1. **Organizational competence** – grammar and discourse management.
2. **Pragmatic competence** – use of language in context, including illocutionary and sociolinguistic conventions.
3. **Strategic competence** – applying language knowledge effectively in communication situations.

This model aligns strongly with persuasion, as it highlights pragmatic competence, or the ability to understand and produce context-appropriate speech acts. Persuasion is inherently pragmatic: its success depends on how well communicators adapt language functions to situational demands (e.g., appeals to logic, emotion, or credibility).

Critical and Comparative Analysis of the Three Models of Communicative Competence

The models of Munby (1978), Canale and Swain (1980), and Bachman (1990) represent three influential frameworks that have significantly shaped the theory and practice of communicative competence. While all three share the understanding that competence extends beyond linguistic knowledge to encompass social and pragmatic dimensions, they differ in scope, conceptual coherence, and applicability to persuasive communication.

Munby's Model is primarily sociolinguistic and context-oriented. It introduces the idea that communicative competence is not an abstract skill but a function of social interaction, purpose, and cultural norms. Munby's emphasis on *socio-cultural orientation* and *socio-semantic basis* situates communication within a specific social order. The strength of this model lies in its recognition that meaning and persuasion are culturally constructed and contextually dependent. However, its main limitation is that it remains highly descriptive and structurally

focused, offering little insight into the psychological or strategic mechanisms through which persuasion occurs. From a persuasive communication standpoint, Munby's model explains *why* adaptation to context is necessary, but not *how* communicators should achieve persuasive impact.

The Canale and Swain Model (1980) represents a methodological and pedagogical refinement, introducing a structured typology of competences—grammatical, sociolinguistic, and strategic. The model's most enduring contribution is the inclusion of strategic competence, which explicitly recognizes the speaker's ability to compensate for breakdowns and manage communication for specific goals. This dimension provides the first theoretical bridge to persuasion, as it connects communicative flexibility and audience adaptation with effective influence. Nevertheless, its limitations stem from its pedagogical orientation: the model was designed for language teaching rather than rhetorical or persuasive analysis. It lacks explicit treatment of emotional, cognitive, and ethical factors that define persuasion in interpersonal and mass communication.

Bachman's Model (1990) advances the theoretical sophistication of communicative competence by integrating *organizational*, *pragmatic*, and *strategic* components. Pragmatic competence, in particular, makes this framework directly relevant to persuasion because it encompasses illocutionary acts (intentions, requests, arguments) and sociolinguistic conventions (politeness, appropriateness). Bachman's approach acknowledges that communication is purposeful and contextually bound, aligning with the persuasive goal of changing attitudes and behaviors. A key strength is its focus on performance – the actual use of competence in real communicative situations. Yet, like its predecessors, the model predates digital and AI-mediated communication. It does not account for algorithmic mediation, multimodal content, or interactive feedback loops that characterize persuasion in contemporary contexts.

From a comparative perspective, the evolution from Munby to Bachman reveals a shift from social-contextual understanding (Munby) through strategic adaptation (Canale & Swain) to pragmatic realization (Bachman). Each model progressively broadens the view of competence – from structural to functional and finally to performative dimensions. The convergence among them lies in the recognition that communicative competence requires integration of linguistic knowledge, sociocultural awareness, and strategic management.

However, the divergence lies in their depth of explanation regarding *persuasive function*. Munby provides a sociological base but lacks operational tools; Canale and Swain offer cognitive and strategic dimensions but understate emotional or affective appeal; Bachman incorporates pragmatics but not digital interactivity. Therefore, a modern synthesis requires reinterpreting their concepts in the context of 21st-century persuasive communication – where communicators interact with algorithmically shaped audiences through hybrid human-AI channels.

In conclusion, while the three classical models remain foundational, their applicability to persuasion today depends on their integration into a more comprehensive framework that includes technological mediation, emotional intelligence, and ethical transparency. The evolution from Munby through Canale and Swain to Bachman illustrates a continuous progression toward a dynamic, context-sensitive, and goal-oriented understanding of communicative competence – principles that remain essential for persuasive effectiveness in both traditional and digital environments.

Mechanisms of Effective Use of Communication Competence in Persuasive Communication

Persuasive communication is essential in professional contexts such as marketing, leadership, and politics. Communicators must design and deliver messages that not only convey information but also influence.

Cripe (2019) identifies two skills central to persuasive competence:

1. **Message design** – anticipating the impact of communication strategies by using logically convincing arguments or addressing audience concerns.

2. **Presentation skills** – developing persuasive delivery through practice, feedback, and observation of experts.

García (2017) emphasizes mechanisms of persuasion triggered by images, colors, and words, particularly in advertising. This aligns with contemporary digital persuasion research, which highlights the role of visual and symbolic framing in shaping attitudes (Hoffmann et al., 2020).

More recent studies stress the role of empathy, credibility, and authenticity as mechanisms enhancing persuasion. Persuasive influence today depends on communicators' ability to balance rational arguments with emotional resonance and relational trust (Johansson & Karlsson, 2021; Chmielecki, 2022).

Thus, communicative competence in persuasion involves integrating linguistic accuracy, socio-cultural adaptation, strategic flexibility, and empathic resonance.

Summary and Conclusions

This article examined the relationship between communication competence and persuasive communication, arguing that communicative competence constitutes a necessary foundation for persuasive effectiveness. By defining persuasive communication as a symbolic, intentional, and goal-directed process (Perloff, 2021), the study highlighted the inseparable link between competence and persuasion.

The analysis of three classical models – Munby (1978), Canale and Swain (1980), and Bachman (1990) – demonstrated that each provides conceptual ele-

ments relevant to persuasion. Munby's focus on socio-cultural orientation emphasizes the contextual adaptability of communication; Canale and Swain highlight strategic competence as a key resource for persuasion; Bachman underlines pragmatic competence, central to aligning language with social functions.

Building upon these models, recent theoretical perspectives (Dillard & Shen, 2022; Petty & Briñol, 2021; Hoffmann et al., 2020; Johansson & Karlsson, 2021; Chmielecki, 2022) suggest that persuasion requires not only linguistic and sociolinguistic accuracy but also adaptability to digital, symbolic, and multimodal contexts.

The main theoretical contributions of this article are as follows:

1. It integrates classical and contemporary perspectives, showing how communicative competence models provide a conceptual foundation for understanding persuasive communication.

2. It systematizes communicative competence dimensions (grammatical, sociolinguistic, pragmatic, strategic) and links them directly to mechanisms of persuasion (logical argumentation, emotional appeal, credibility, symbolic framing).

3. It proposes an integrated framework where persuasion is seen as the applied dimension of communicative competence, thus positioning competence not merely as a prerequisite but as a structural factor shaping persuasive outcomes.

4. It highlights the necessity of reinterpreting communicative competence in light of current communicative environments – digital platforms, hybrid communication settings, and multimodal persuasion.

By consolidating these perspectives, the article contributes to the theoretical advancement of communication studies, demonstrating that persuasive communication is not an isolated skill but the applied manifestation of communicative competence in goal-oriented influence.

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