

**Linguistic and communicative competence: a parallel on two different and  
complementary language approaches in an English teaching context**  
**Competência Linguística e Comunicativa: um paralelo entre duas abordagens linguísticas  
no contexto de ensino de Língua Inglesa**

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***Resumo:** O objeto do presente trabalho se baseia em um estudo complementar das competências linguística e comunicativa, assumindo a relevância de ambas as teorias em nossos contextos de ensino de Língua Inglesa. Primeiramente, as pesquisas de Chomsky serão abordadas, mais especificamente seu conceito de competência linguística, que se faz amplamente presente em nosso ensino de línguas estrangeiras. Após, os estudos sociolinguísticos serão explicitados, principalmente o conceito de competência comunicativa de Dell Hymes, o qual é visto como uma reação ao ponto de vista de Noam Chomsky. Finalmente, com o apoio pedagógico do clássico filme Hollywoodiano "Ball of Fire" (1941), propomos uma análise do mesmo como sugestão para melhor abordar e desenvolver o aspecto cultural da linguagem em nossas aulas de Língua Inglesa, tendo em mente que este é um aspecto comumente desconsiderado.*

***Palavras-chave:** competência linguística, competência comunicativa, ensino de língua inglesa.*

***Abstract:** The object of this paper relies on a complementary study of Linguistic and Communicative Competence, assuming the relevance of both theories in our English teaching contexts. First, Chomsky's research regarding Generative Grammar is revisited, more specifically his concept of Linguistic Competence, which is largely taken into consideration in our current English classrooms. Then, Sociolinguistics studies are approached, mainly Dell Hymes's development of Communicative Competence, seen as a reaction to Noam Chomsky's point of view. Finally, with the pedagogical support of the classic Hollywood film "Ball of Fire" (1941), we propose an analysis of it as a suggestion to masterly apply and develop language cultural feature in our English classrooms, considering that this is a common disregarded aspect.*

***Key-words:** linguistic competence, communicative competence, English teaching.*

## **1. Introduction**

“The point of view creates the object”: this famous Saussure’s line is very well-addressed when it comes to the teaching of a foreign language. Since language is a very wide and complex object, we need to select a point of view from which we will research on; this concept of ‘point of view’ is related to the Greek word *theory* and, as we all know, a point of view is also an incomplete view. Research on language is a never-ending and fascinating process, through which we will develop a determined kind of grammar based on our previous reasoning. Thus, conflicting point of views on language analysis is commonplace, since the great unquestionability, in linguistics, is the complexity of its object.

As Sarmento points out,

The concept of language is fundamental to understand the teaching practice of a foreign language. Language can be considered a logical code apart from social and cultural actions. Whenever individuals need to communicate, they simply resort to this code that was taught and learned. In this case, language and culture are separated. Another view considers language as a social fact. In this case, we learn and teach the code in association with its possible actions, it is the joint construction of actions with language. Language, society and culture are considered in an interconnection. (Sarmento, 2004:1)<sup>1</sup>

Our aim, in this paper, is to give a brief historical view on two main theories on language that, in a first view, may seem opposite: Chomsky’s Linguistic Competence and Hymes’s Communicative Competence. Our main goal is to advocate for the complementarity of these theories in our teaching contexts: our students need the linguistic code (Chomsky, 1971) as much as they need the cultural and communicative backgrounds (Hymes, 1974). Having in mind that, in most of our classrooms nowadays, we still see a greater focus on the linguistic code – and, usually, this is the *only* focus -, we will propose, at the end of this paper, a film analysis aimed at highlighting the possibility of the development of cultural competence awareness in our students.

## 2. Methodology

This is a qualitative study based on a content analysis method. First, the literature review on both linguistic theories, Chomsky’s and Hymes’s, will be developed to better explicit their excellences and limitations. Then, we will highlight the good implications of culture

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<sup>1</sup> O conceito de linguagem é fundamental para compreender a prática de ensino de língua estrangeira. A linguagem pode ser considerada como um código lógico dissociado de ações sociais e culturais. Aprendemos e ensinamos o código para que os indivíduos lancem mão deste quando precisarem comunicar-se. Neste caso, linguagem e cultura estão separados. Uma outra visão considera linguagem como um fato social. Neste caso aprendemos e ensinamos o código associado às suas possíveis ações, é a construção conjunta de ações com a linguagem. Considera-se linguagem, sociedade e cultura interligados. (Sarmento, 2004:1) Tradução nossa.

contents in an English classroom, assuming that the linguistic code is already well and much addressed in our foreign language schools. Finally, the classic Hollywood film “*Ball of Fire*” (1941) will be our suggestion to masterly apply and develop the language cultural aspect in an English teaching context.

It is important to stress the fact that the linguistic and the communicative competences are being used together to explicit the great necessity of both of them underlying our teaching practice: as already mentioned, our students make use of the linguistic code as much as they do regarding the cultural background that concerns the target language. Nevertheless, having in mind that in our current teaching classes we still see a greater focus on the linguistic code, our suggestion aims to develop the communicative competence, highlighting the importance of cultural aspects in class. If teachers and students are able to develop a more accurate awareness regarding the cultural feature of language, we are certainly in the right path to more complete and challenging English classes.

### **3. Literature review**

Language, even before thinking capacity or intelligence, is the main mechanism through which men are distinguished from other animals. A question long raised by psychologists and philosophers is related to knowing if thought, itself, could be conceived out of the speaking or writing context (Vygotsky, 1991). Whether that is possible or not, the evidence that language has a primordial importance in our lives, since ever, is more than a fact. Besides, without language, it would be impossible to develop any kind of effective and successful communication, any kind of ideas interchange, and, maybe, any kind of reasonable interchange at all.

Therefore, language is almost as necessary for human lives as the air we breathe. It surrounds us in a way we just cannot conceive ourselves without it. It’s natural, then, to ask about its nature. Many scholars have developed theories regarding language; sometimes, these theories are interpreted as opposites, one defeating and overcoming the other, constituting a battle in which only one can triumph. Our approach, in this essay, as already mentioned, is to advocate in favor of the complementary feature of them, elucidating the most impressive characteristics of each one.

#### **3.1. The linguistic competence in generative grammar**

How is it possible, for a child, to acquire the ability of dealing grammatically with words in a so early stage of their lives, with poverty of stimulus and, also, lack of a formal teaching? That is the question raised by Noam Chomsky, the main responsible for the development of Generative Grammar, near 1965, which was decisive to define the concept of Linguistic Competence.

Linguistic Competence is seen by Chomsky (1965 apud Raposo, 1992) as a system of linguistic knowledge which is possessed by all and any speakers of a language; it's a universal human property, common to any human being, no matter race, economic class or physical characteristics, and independently of his/her intellectual and personality attributes. This system allows the speakers to go from a finite number of rules - specific of any language - to the production of an infinite number of new sentences. Besides, it also allows people to distinguish grammatical sentences from ungrammatical ones.

This concept comes to confront the behaviorist psychology idea, defended by Burrhus Frederic Skinner, which used to explain human behavior through the belief of power of habits, through a process of conditioning in which humans were submitted, acting in a constant dichotomy of stimulus/answer (Raposo, 1992). Chomsky realized this theory was not able to explain the process of human communication, which comes to be much intriguing and challenging. If every human being uses the same biological system to produce sounds, it is, at least, allowable to think that we are genetically programmed to act in that way, to communicate and to be understood: "Language is not learnt. It grows in the mind. It is, thus, wrong to think that language is taught and misleading to think of it as being learnt" (Chomsky, 1976:175-176).

The most notable aspect of Linguistic Competence, as Chomsky himself emphasized, is the 'creativity of language', the speaker's ability to produce new and different sentences and to be immediately understood by his/her hearer, constituting an unheard-of dialogue of grammatical sentences every time they establish a conversation; and all this thanks to this universal character of this innate system.

A normal child acquires this knowledge on relatively slight exposure and without specific training. He can then quite effortlessly make use of specific rules and guiding principles to convey his thoughts and feelings to others, arousing in them novel ideas and subtle perceptions and judgments. For the conscious mind, not specially designed for the purpose, it remains a distinct goal to reconstruct and comprehend what the child has done, intuitively and with minimal effort. Thus language is a mirror of mind in a deep and significant sense. It is a product of human intelligence, created anew in each individual by operations that lie far beyond the reach of will or consciousness. (Chomsky, 1971:4)

Regarding the actors in dialogues, we must attempt to the fact that Chomsky considers the competence of idealized speakers/hearers. Factors as memory limitations, distractions, changes of intention in the course of speaking are not taken into consideration. This abstraction

is made from a completely homogeneous speech community, where speakers are unconscious of their latent knowledge of language.

While Linguistic Competence deals with knowledge of language in an abstract way, Chomsky defines the term *performance* to refer to its use, as a sort of a material update of linguistic competence, the use of language as we perform and witness day-by-day (Raposo, 1992).

It is important to emphasize that, regarding linguistics, the grammatical theory of Chomsky is, undeniably, the one which most influences exerts and the one which stands out for its dynamism. As Steven Pinker (2002:14) pointed out: "In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the most famous thesis that language is pretty much like an instinct was elaborated by Noam Chomsky, the first linguist to reveal the complexity of the system and, maybe, the main responsible for the modern revolution in cognitive and language sciences." As a matter of fact, the impact caused by Chomsky's thesis was remarkably impressive, inducing other scholars to work on different linguistic aspects, which will be explored in more detail in the next section.

### **3.2. The communicative competence and the emergency of sociolinguistic approaches**

In 1962, in response to the abstract nature of linguistic competence, Dell Hymes published an article dealing with the notion of Communicative Competence, which focused on socially-situated performance. This concept reflects the language user's grammatical knowledge of phonology, morphology, syntax, as well as the social knowledge about when and how to use the utterances in an appropriate way.

It is important to say that Communicative Competence is also a reaction regarding the inadequacy of Chomsky's dichotomy between *competence* and *performance*. Hymes (1974) uses the ethnographic exploration<sup>2</sup> of communicative competence (that included communicative form and its function in a complete relation to each other) to address Chomsky's abstract notion of competence; this approach is now known as the Ethnography of Communication.

Hymes (1974) brings a broader version of language competence, first proposed by Chomsky; he does not claim that a child or any language user does not need or have the linguistic competence, but Hymes emphasizes that, besides and along with this competence, language users need to use the grammatical sentences appropriately, according to hearers, places, times – in short, according to the specific situations they find themselves in. The linguistic competence, therefore, must be considered inside a major whole, in which linguistic and social/cultural knowledge are undeniably mixed. The communicative competence, as the linguistic one, is also acquired by children; it could, as a matter of fact, be seen as a survivor

instinct, since a language user has and needs to have this ability to produce determined speech according to the situation he/she is in. The main criticism related to Chomsky's point of view regards the omission of the users' ability to adequate their discourse - this was not accounted for in the Generative Grammar.

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<sup>2</sup> The ethnographic research is based on an analysis of what is happening in the moment of interlocution among the interlocutors in a determined context of speech.

Linguistic theory treats of competence in terms of the child's acquisition of the ability to produce, understand and discriminate any and all of the grammatical sentences of a language. A child from whom any and all of the grammatical sentences of a language might come with equal likelihood would be, of course, a social monster. Within the social matrix, in which it acquires a system of grammar, a child acquires also a system of its use, regarding persons, places, purposes, other modes of communication, etc. – all the components of communicative events, together with attitudes and beliefs regarding them. They also develop patterns of the sequential use of language in conversation, address, standard routines, and the like. In such acquisition resides the child's sociolinguistic competence (or, more broadly, communicative competence), its ability to participate in its society as not only a speaking, but also a communicating member. (Hymes, 1974:75)

A criticism over Chomsky's work, regarding this point, is probably not accurate. Studying language related to society was never his purpose – Chomsky worked with universal properties of communication, a conjunction of principles which are common to every possible human language on earth; he was a syntactician and his research relied on this field of knowledge. All his studies related to syntax of different languages made him believe there must be a mechanism, sedimented in our brain, which is part of our biology - genetically programmed -, that allows us to produce and understand an infinite number of new sentences. This language system (innate system for language learning), advocated by Chomsky, is autonomous, separated in our brain architecture. The leader of the Generative enterprise was a theorist, he did not have the purpose to make empirical research – that is the reason why he dealt with ideal speakers/hearers in a homogeneous community, with a hypothetical/deductive method.

Hymes's purpose in adding the communicative competence to the linguistic one would be emphasizing the importance of adequacy of discourse in society. The second competence, the communicative one, was developed to improve, to polish the speakers' ability, or, more probably, to portray the ideal speaker-hearer more realistically. Both competences, together, are the reflection of a successful speaker, a speaker inserted in a real community, with its own cultural and social influences.

This necessity to have a broader picture of speakers, considering societal aspects in the material analysis of speech, gained relief with the effort of many academic students and professors, from several and different areas of knowledge, who coined the term *Sociolinguistics*

and established its object of study - which turned out to be the linguistic diversity. Sociolinguistics came to light, therefore, in 1964, in a congress held in UCLA, and it was characterized as being interdisciplinary, joining professionals and raising questions regarding other areas of human knowledge, as anthropology, psychology, sociology, and, obviously, linguistics. Several scholars (who became respectful references in the tradition of studies concerning the relation between language and society) were in this congress: John Gumperz, William Labov and Dell Hymes himself, who helped the consolidation of this field, broadly known and studied currently.

Probably, much because of this interdisciplinarity, sociolinguistics has shown itself as a discipline of difficult frame and delimitation. A discipline which is essentially human requires practices and dialogues with several knowledge fields, in order to raise questions and reflections with other points of view, always considering the human condition in its speech act and social context.

The complexity of human speech in its social context was studied by Dell Hymes through the *Ethnography of Communication*, as already mentioned in this article. The *Ethnography of Communication* demonstrated, through the study of several societies, that the most witnessed situation is the one in which the members of a determined society have a range of different 'styles', different dialects and even different languages, with which they frequently play, switching and alternating variants according to their goals and intentions at some specific moment (Calvet, 2002). At this point, Hymes argues against the idea of homogeneous community, used by Chomsky. An interesting point to be highlighted is that, even separately, Chomsky and Hymes ended up working with many societies, cultures and languages to find out what they have in common, in order to systematize similar features: Chomsky's works, related to syntax of different languages, made him believe in the existence of universal properties present in every speaker; Hymes's works emphasize that, no matter what society or culture the speaker is in, the existence of dialects, variations and styles in the same community is evident. Speakers are able to make use of different linguistic materialities to produce some effect on their hearers, according to the momentary intention or objective the speaker aims at – linguistic usage, when appropriate, is able to provide many advantages to the speaker. Both researchers try to know many different cultures to make their studies more valid and reliable – each one dealing with different (but not incompatible) areas of linguistics.

William Labov, another important scholar founder of sociolinguistics, was the first one to make empirical research, showing how inextricably the linguistic variants are connected to the social ones. One of his research was performed aiming to focus the attention to the phonetic use of the consonant /r/, in post vocalic position, in words like *car*, *card*, *four*, *fourth*, based on

the following hypothesis: “If two subgroups of New York speakers are arranged in a certain order in a social stratified scale, this order will turn out to be the same regarding the use of /r/”. Labov (1972 apud Calvet, 2002:32) verified this hypothesis in three big and famous New York stores, observing the linguistic practice of the employers. The method was pretty simple: to ask the employers where a given product was located, in order to obtain the answer ‘*fourth floor*’ (known beforehand) and check if the consonant /r/ was pronounced or not. The stores chosen presented notable differences regarding geographical localization, applied prices, means of communication in which advertising was inserted, etc. Having in mind that the pronunciation of this consonant is a prestige mark, Labov’s initial hypothesis was confirmed: the employers who worked in stores attended by people from a higher economic/social class used to have the pronunciation of /r/ more explicit, while the employers who served lower-class people tended to only lengthen the last vowel (Calvet, 2002).

Society, then, plays an important role in linguistic practice. The French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu (1990 apud Calvet, 2002), advocates that language is also an *exterior sign of richness*. Drawing a parallel between economics and linguistics, Bourdieu correlates the economic market to the linguistic one. Words like *products, values, interchanges, capitals* and *strategies* can be associated with the linguistic practice. Ferruccio Rossi-Landi (1968 apud Calvet, 2002:108) points out that “a linguistic community shows itself as a kind of enormous market, in which words, expressions and messages circulate as commodities”.

Just like Dell Hymes pointed out, the speakers afford a range of variants that will be used according to their purposes (otherwise they/we could be considered *social monsters*); Bourdieu (1990 apud Calvet, 2002), in the same argumentative line, emphasized the fact that the more variants we know (linguistic capital), the more we will be free to play in the market, using strategies of condescension (“we are home”, “we speak the same language”), derived from manipulation:

Speech is not only a message, destined to be decoded; it is also a product we give to others’ appreciation, and which value will be defined in the relation with other (rarer or more common) products. The linguistic market effect is present even in the most common trades of everyday-living. (...) Communication instrument, language is also an exterior sign of richness. (Bourdieu, 1990 apud Calvet, 2002:106).

Thus, our apparently simple act of communication is constantly subject to our interlocutors’ appreciation. An example of how we can work with the relation between society and linguistic practice, applying it in our English classrooms, will be demonstrated in the next section.

#### **4. Culture in our English classroom**



As English teachers, we must all bear in mind that this world known language is not a 'property' of only English native speakers anymore, assuming that more than 70% of the communication in this language happens among non-native speakers (Keys, 1999 apud Sarmiento, 2004:25). So, teaching this foreign language with an only focus on native speaker interactions is not the best solution, since our students will probably interact with a great variety of people coming from many different linguistic and cultural communities, which are also constituted by numerous speech communities.

Teaching culture should never be seen as a matter of morality, and it is precisely at this point that lies the complexity of approaching culture in our classrooms. Even if we were only focusing in English native speakers, the matter would not be plain: speakers from which country? And from which speech community? Thomas (1983 apud Sarmiento, 2004) stresses that the teachers' role is not to make students behave like people from the target culture, but to enable students to interpret the meanings of this culture:

For Hall (1993) foreign language education must cover at least two processes: the first is to supply the learners with linguistic resources that will enable a competent performance in a variety of scenarios, and the second is to provide the students with means to analyze the types of necessary linguistic resources and the ways these resources are applied by native speakers of the target language. In classroom, we must show them the process through which they can learn how to detach from practice and become aware of the way in which meaning is socioculturally built by a group of people. The mere exposition to practices is not enough. The goal of language teaching should include a process of teaching learners ways to individually discover, analyze and criticize sociocultural uses of a language. (Sarmiento, 2004:14)<sup>3</sup>

It is well known that foreign language students, in an instructional study context, do not have the opportunity to participate in a wide range of groups in which this language is daily used; besides, it is also impossible to predict all plausible sociocultural interactions and situations. Nevertheless, the foreign language teacher can discuss different contexts and social interactions in class that may sensitize the student to different social contexts in their own community and in the other ones as well (Sarmiento, 2004).

In the next section, an analysis of a movie scene which discusses exactly one of these possible cultural interactions will be proposed.

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<sup>3</sup> Para HALL (1993), o ensino de língua estrangeira necessita envolver pelo menos dois processos: o primeiro é fornecer aos aprendizes os recursos lingüísticos que o capacitem a um desempenho competente em uma variedade de cenários e o segundo é fornecer aos alunos meios para que eles próprios analisem os tipos de recursos lingüísticos necessários e as maneiras em que esses recursos são usados por falantes daquela língua. Em sala de aula, devemos mostrar aos aprendizes o processo através do qual podem aprender a se distanciar da prática e tornarem-se conscientes dos modos em que o significado é socioculturalmente construído por um grupo de pessoas. A mera exposição às práticas não é suficiente. O objetivo do ensino de línguas deveria incluir o processo de ensinar aos aprendizes maneiras de, individualmente, descobrir, analisar e criticar os usos socioculturais de uma língua. (SARMENTO, 2004) Tradução nossa.

#### 4.1 Working with a classic Hollywood film in our classrooms

The film we chose to analyze in a prospective classroom is the comedy *Ball of Fire*, released in 1941, directed by Howard Hawks, co-starring Gary Cooper and Barbara Stanwyck. Gary Cooper plays a professor of English, who participates in a project along with seven other professors of different areas, who together are writing an encyclopedia. Professor Potts realizes his writings on slang are very outdated. He decides, therefore, to start a research. He walks around the city looking for subjects, and that's how he meets Miss Sugarpudd O'Shea, a singer whose fiancé is a mobster (the always welcome presence of actor Dana Andrews) who wants to marry her, so she cannot testify against him.

The Snow White and the seven dwarfs' motif with the involvement of the mob would be enough material for a comedy. However, having the contribution of two geniuses of screenwriting, Billy Wilder and Charles Brackett (together they worked in some masterpieces such as *The Lost Weekend*, *Sunset Boulevard* and *Ninotchka*), the film becomes stronger and more enduring. The dialogues are built considering the nature of the characters; consequently, the professor, trying to grasp meaning out of his subjects' speeches, is a very interesting comedy device.

Though young, Professor Potts is completely reclusive in his intellect, insomuch that when he sees Miss Sugarpudd he is not at all attracted to her beauty, that is to say, his rational mind does interpret that she is undeniably beautiful, but he is not attracted to her because of this, what astounds him is her language. When Potts goes to her backstage, which is the first time they speak to each other, there's a small misunderstanding, she believes he is a cop, while Potts, in turn, is absolutely fascinated by the words she uses and by the way she combines them. When she asks "say, are you a bull or aren't you?" he tries to approach her informality by saying: "well, if bull is the slang word for professor, then I'm a bull". We, the viewers, know she was using the word "bull" referring to "policeman", but he does not, and therefore the reason she decides to take refuge in the eight professors' house remains a mystery to him.

At first, what puts them together is a mutual interest in taking advantages of each other. He wants her participation in the research, and she wants to hide. Slowly she begins to like him, but when she needs, she is able to deceive him, as in the hilarious scene when he asks her to leave:

Sugarpudd: All right, I'll go. But if I'm going to go anyway, I guess I might as well spill it.

Potts: Spill it? Spill what?

Sugarpudd: Why do you suppose I came here in the first place?

Potts: To help with the research.

Sugarpuss: I did not. I came on account of you.

Potts: Me?

Sugarpuss: And not on account of you needed some slang. On account of because I wanted to see you again.

Potts: Miss O'Shea, the construction "on account of because" outrages every grammatical law.

Sugarpuss: So what? I came on account of because I couldn't stop thinking about you after you left my dressing room. On account of because I thought you were big and cute and pretty.

Potts: Pretty?

Sugarpuss: Yeah. I mean you. Maybe I'm just crazy, but to me, you're a regular yum-yum type.

Potts: Yum-Yum?

Sugarpuss: Yeah, don't you know what that means?

Potts: No, we never got to that.

Sugarpuss: Well, we've got to it now, and I'm glad it's out. I don't give a whoop whether the others went for me. You're the one I'm wacky about, just plain wacky. Can you understand that?

(00:52:36,210 to 00:53:22,460)

We know she is not interested in him, but she seduces him in order to stay a few more days in the house. This particular scene is a great example of a well written script, because many parts of this dialogue are referred later in different tones, giving us the neat impression of story development. As for instance, the "on account of because" which appears in another sequence, when Miss O'Shea declares she understood what is wrong with it: *"It's saying the same thing twice, you know, like calling somebody a rich millionaire. You call it a pleo... No, wait a minute, a plea..."* and he corrects her pronunciation: *"pleonasm"*. In a simple scene, when he is nervous because he is going to propose marriage to her, we perceive she is innocently getting closer to him. That is how Hollywood transposes a situation of culture shock, even though they face many difficulties trying to understand each other, a mutual interest added to a very well structured growth in sympathy result in obvious emotional attachment.

In a classroom situation the film *Ball of fire* has a lot to offer. Since the cultural contrast in the film is guided by language, it consequently reflects its main features. As, for instance, language is a historical phenomenon, which even in a syntagmatic overview reveals a handful of variations. Also, competence is an attribute of any native speaker and in this regard it is interesting to note how much Gary Cooper's character appreciates the informal language used by common people. He is an intellectual and he knows slangisms to be a part of the general

wealthiness of a language; the premise is that true intellect recognizes no reason for prejudice. Other motion picture productions tend to emphasize the prestige of a formal usage of language at the expense of other variants, the most famous example would be *My Fair Lady* (Cukor, 1964) in which Audrey Hepburn's character is coached to speak the formal variant in order to become presentable in high society.

When it comes to *language in use*, examples in movies, TV series, talk shows, interviews - and in any real world registers - are simply endless. This is great news, assuming that teachers have a great source of materials to work with in class: language surrounds us and everything is in our every-day-living, in our real world.

## 5. Final words

The importance of developing both competences, linguistic and communicative, in our English classes, is undeniable. One complements the other, and the research on them must never have an end. The focus on Sociolinguistics and Dell Hymes' (1974) concept of Communicative Competence currently has enormous implications in the relations established through the usage of language in society: the old right/wrong dichotomy has been overcome by the notion of adequate/non-adequate. Empirical studies, like Labov's (1972 apud Calvet, 2002), and the concept of 'linguistic market', developed by Bourdieu (1990 apud Calvet, 2002), shows how the social and extralinguistic variables are connected to the linguistic one. As Dell Hymes and Pierre Bourdieu highlighted in their works, we must have in mind that successful language users are the ones who have the knowledge of a great range of variants together with the wisdom of suiting them to the specific situations they might be in. If teachers and students are able to develop, together, a more accurate awareness regarding this particular feature of language, we are certainly in the right path to a more complete understanding of this never-ending complexity that constitutes us.

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