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## MYTHS OF ORIGIN AND THE COMMUNICATIVE TURN

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### Abstract

This article focuses on the notion of communicative competence, which is widely held responsible for the occurrence of the *communicative turn* in language teaching methodology. Comparing North American and German discourses about communicative language teaching, this article focuses on two sources that are claimed to be the origins of the communicative turn: Habermas (1971) and Hymes (1972). Both define communicative competence, albeit in different ways. Given the differences between them, the communicative turn and the discourse of communicative language teaching appear inconsistent from the outset. Claiming that the communicative turn resulted from the discovery of communicative competence, which has been declared the ultimate goal of language education, is therefore dubious. The question arises why these historically incommensurable notions of communicative competence have largely been overlooked. A closer look at the commonalities between applied linguists' attempts to foster communicative language teaching reveals that the success of communicative competence as an overall goal for language education can at least in part be attributed to sociohistoric aspects of zeitgeist as well—which apparently led many to overlook conceptual inconsistencies. The article concludes that the 'myths of origin' of the communicative turn ought to be considered in today's historiography of language teaching methods and CLT as well, as they contribute to our understanding of why communicative language teaching has to be regarded as an umbrella term for teaching approaches that are based on particular social, political, educational and linguistic premises and imaginations.

### Keywords:

communicative language teaching ♦ communicative competence ♦ communicative turn ♦ anthropology

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*Collecting definitions of communicative competence is fun. Teachers, methodologists, and textbook writers have used the term in many interesting if confusing ways. Some use it assuredly, some tendentiously, others cautiously. Some still have trouble pronouncing it!*

—Savignon 1983: 1

## 1. Introduction: Telling the story of CLT

Maintaining that language learning ought to enable students to communicate in another language is by no means new; it dates back several centuries (as shown, e.g., by Doff 2002; Kelly 1969; Klippel 1994; Musumeci 1997, 2011). It was only in the 1970s, however, that the notion of the *communicative* gained momentum and became a central concern in theories of L2 teaching (Howatt and Smith 2014; Howatt with Widdowson 2004; Hunter and Smith 2012), leading to what we now refer to as the communicative turn. Today, the communicative turn is widely recognized as a milestone in the history of foreign/second language teaching (e.g., Adamson 2004; Byrnes 2006; Larsen-Freeman 2000; Richards & Rodgers 2001; Thornbury 2011). It gave rise to what has come to be known as *Communicative Language Teaching* (CLT), or the *Communicative Approach*, and it has dominated pedagogical thinking in the field of second and foreign language teaching for several decades. In fact, as Richards (2006: 2) asserts, “[p]erhaps the majority of language teachers today, when asked to identify the methodology they employ in their classrooms, mention ‘communicative’ as the methodology of choice.” Yet despite the enormous popularity of CLT, Richards (2006: 2) asserts that it is far from clear to language educators what CLT actually is: “when pressed to give a detailed account of what they mean by ‘communicative,’ explanations vary widely.” Apparently, despite its widespread support, its proponents do not agree on what the communicative turn actually is, was, or entails. In order to avoid the impression that, in CLT, *anything communicative* goes, its proponents continue to specify and clarify what CLT is, and what it is not (e.g., Richards 2006; Savignon 2005, 2007, 2013). What remains consistent across many accounts of CLT is an agreement that it “sets as its goal the teaching of communicative competence” (Richards 2006: 2; see also the contributions to the

“Perspectives” section in the *Modern Language Journal* [Byrnes 2006], whose focus is “Interrogating Communicative Competence as a Framework for Collegiate Foreign Language Study”).

The present article takes a closer look at the variations in the stories of the communicative turn, specifically the central notion of communicative competence, which is commonly declared the goal of CLT. My decision to examine the (hi)story (or stories) of the communicative turn was inspired by a peculiar trend: Although applied linguists and language teaching methodologists in the English-speaking world tend to refer to Dell Hymes’ work on communicative competence in their accounts of the communicative turn, scholars in the German-speaking world refer rather to Jürgen Habermas’ notion of communicative competence. Since both Hymes and Habermas developed markedly different concepts of communicative competence, it is worthwhile to investigate how *both* of them could be declared instrumental in the emergence of the communicative turn—and consequently what the respective constructions of the communicative turn look like.

In what follows, I will first introduce Dell Hymes’ and Jürgen Habermas’ concepts of communicative competence. Since neither of the two was concerned with foreign or second language teaching, it is important to take into account the respective contexts that informed each author’s work, before discussing the impact of each conception of communicative competence on theories of language teaching and the communicative turn.

## **2. Conceptualizing communicative competence**

### **2.1. Communicative competence—Dell Hymes**

Dell Hymes’ (1972) theory of communicative competence was originally presented in 1966 at the “Research Planning Conference on Language Development Among Disadvantaged Children” at Yeshiva University and aimed to contribute to understanding the “language problems of disadvantaged children” (Hymes 1972: 269; see also Brumfit & Johnson 1979: 45). “This paper is theoretical,” Hymes (*ibid*) explains, because “one knows too little about the subject to say something practical.” Trying to change the situation of children with language problems would require the application of a “basic science that does not exist” (*ibid*). This lack of an adequate “basic science” or theory is the problem he addresses in his paper.

Hymes turns towards linguistics, the field most likely to produce a theory relevant to his concerns, and demonstrates its shortcomings when it comes to questions of real-world language problems. He quotes Chomsky's thoughts on what linguistics is primarily concerned with:

Linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogeneous speech community, who knows its language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interest, and errors (random or characteristic) in applying his knowledge of the language in actual performance. (Chomsky 1965: 3)

Subsequently, Hymes takes apart each element of this definition and illustrates its inapplicability when it comes to understanding problems disadvantaged children may have. The primary concern with the “ideal speaker-listener” and her/his “perfect knowledge” seems as problematic to Hymes as the presumed “homogeneous speech community” within which this ideal speaker-listener is situated. He points at the social and cultural blindness that underlies Chomskyan linguistics, arguing that “to cope with the realities of children as communicating beings requires a theory within which sociocultural factors have an explicit and constitutive role; and neither is the case” (Hymes 1972: 271). Even Chomsky's notion of performance, which may at first sight be related to real-world language use and thus helpful for Hymes' purposes in his paper, proves to be problematic given Chomsky's association of “actual performance” with “limitations,” “distractions,” and “errors.” Scrutinizing these notions of competence and performance, Hymes concludes that “[i]t takes the absence of a place for sociocultural factors, and the linking of performance to imperfection, to disclose an ideological aspect to the theoretical standpoint” (Hymes 1972: 272). In other words, Hymes sees Chomskyan linguistic theory as ideologically biased, in that it completely ignores empirical dimensions of language use and the unequal distribution of power and participation amongst language users. He summarizes his critique in a biblical comparison:

It is, if I may say so, rather a Garden of Eden view. Human life seems divided between grammatical competence, an ideal innately-derived sort of power, and performance, an exigency rather like the eating of the apple, thrusting the perfect speaker-hearer out into a fallen world. Of this world, where meanings may be won by the sweat of the brow, and communication achieved in labor [...], little is said. The controlling image is of an abstract, isolated individual, almost an unmotivated cognitive mechanism, not, except incidentally, a person in a social world.” (272)

More recently, Tom Wolfe (2016: 26) echoed this point, arguing that Chomsky “didn’t enjoy the outdoors, where ‘the field’ was. He was relocating the field to Olympus. Not only that, he was giving linguists permission to stay air-conditioned.” Hymes’ critique, in turn, entails *ex negativo* what he sought to accomplish with his suggestions for his own model of communicative competence, namely, to relocate linguists into the non-air-conditioned field and to situate the study of language in a worldly, post-Eden context. His main aim was to shift the focus of language study towards understanding more about the members of speech communities, as diverse as they are, and their difficulties and successes in language use.

Hymes subsequently proposes his own model of what a theory of language must incorporate, on the basis of the discredited Chomskyan definition. He takes issue with Chomsky’s presumed homogeneity of speakers and the ideal speaker-listener, calling for “a theory that can deal with a heterogeneous speech community, differential competence, [and] the constitutive role of sociocultural features” (Hymes 1972: 277), and proceeds to target the very idea of grammatical correctness as the sole indicator of language competence, arguing that “[s]ome occasions call for being appropriately ungrammatical” (ibid: 277). To Hymes, the notion of appropriateness is complementary to Chomsky’s focus on correctness, if one wants to understand and judge language use. A theory of language, therefore, has “to account for the fact that a normal child acquires knowledge of sentences, not only as grammatical, but also as appropriate. He or she acquires when to speak, when not, and as to what to talk about with whom, when, where, in what manner” (ibid). Furthermore, Hymes seeks to critically reconsider the dichotomy of competence and performance, arguing that what is needed is a theory of *competence for use* that encompasses actual language use as well as people’s ability to make judgments about language use. Transcending the boundaries between competence and performance, Hymes takes “*competence* as the most general term for the capabilities of a person [...]. Competence is dependent upon both (tacit) *knowledge* and (ability for) *use* (ibid: 282; orig. emphasis).

On the basis of these considerations, Hymes defines communicative competence with respect to four areas:

- Whether (and to what degree) something is formally *possible*;
- Whether (and to what degree) something is *feasible* in virtue of the means of implementation available;

- Whether (and to what degree) something is *appropriate* (adequate, happy, successful) in relation to a context in which it is used and evaluated;
- Whether (and to what degree) something is in fact done, actually *performed*, and what its doing entails. (Hymes 1972: 281)

Communicative competence, according to these criteria, includes the ability to both use language and to judge language use in terms of correctness and appropriateness. It combines linguistic (“formally possible”), psycholinguistic (“feasible”), sociolinguistic (“appropriate”) and probabilistic (actual occurrence) dimensions of language use.

Hymes situates his approach at the crossroads of linguistics and anthropology, advocating that “anthropology recognize interests and needs of its own, and cultivate them; making use of linguistics, it should formulate its own ethnographic questions about speech and seek to answer them” (Hymes 1968: 133). Since, according to Hymes, the “value of the concept of communicative competence is in part that of a comprehensive, regulative, heuristic guide” (Hymes 1987: 225-26), the proposed model does not specify what exactly the feasibility and the appropriateness of utterances may entail. Neither does he make any suggestions as to how the probability of utterance may be accounted for. Rather, Hymes intends to suggest the direction for further research (based on an “ethnography of speaking”; Hymes 1968). “In sum, the goal of a broad theory of competence can be said to show the ways in which the systematically possible, the feasible, and the appropriate are linked to produce and interpret actually occurring cultural behavior” (Hymes 1972: 286). As such, the proposed fourfold model must be viewed as an attempt to link the two fields that can contribute to the study of language in use: anthropology and linguistics. Hymes, in retrospect, characterizes the situation he was confronted with at the time as “grammars without context, ethnographies without speech. The results could hardly be integrated, though the interdependence of language and culture in everyday life is evident” (Hymes 1987: 219). In this light, the four dimensions of communicative competence he outlined pay tribute to linguistic as well as to ethnographic dimensions of language use.

To conclude, Hymes’ model remains very general; it is concerned with the diversity of actual language users and language use in sociocultural contexts, and it is not focused on foreign or second language teaching. Before I move on to discuss its appropriation in Applied Linguistics and language teaching methodology, I will turn to Jürgen Habermas’ concept of communicative competence.

## 2.2. Communicative competence—Jürgen Habermas

The German philosopher Jürgen Habermas, originally associated with the Frankfurt school of social sciences, developed a theory of communicative competence upon what has been referred to as his “linguistic turn” (McCarthy 1973: 135) in the late 1960s and 1970s, which led to the publication of one of his major works, *Theory of Communicative Action*, in 1981. He first published preliminary thoughts on a theory of communicative competence in 1971, followed by a more elaborate, yet condensed, version included in Habermas (1984)<sup>1</sup>, which comprises a collection of lectures from the 1970s.

Habermas was chiefly concerned with the development of a critical social theory that spelled out the prerequisites for a democratic society whose members can in principle be thought of as emancipated social actors. In this context, language played an important role; Habermas considers it the common means by which social actors participate in any kind of social dialogue with the intent of reaching a mutual understanding. Due to their “capacity for linguistic interaction [...] social actors are [...] already implicitly aware of their status as free agents” (Baynes 2016: 39), and in order to engage in the kind of social dialogue and mutual understanding Habermas envisions, he proposes that social actors are to develop what he calls “communicative competence.”

Habermas’ concept of communicative competence must therefore be viewed as a theoretical construct that was intended to capture what social actors must acquire in order to participate in dialogue freely and rationally. Inspired by Wittgenstein’s notion of language games, or *Sprachspiele* (Wittgenstein 1953) as well as Austin’s (1962) and Searle’s (1970) works on speech act theory, Habermas views communication—the use of and reflection on language—as social action. More specifically, he theorizes communicative action on the basis of pragmatics, and outlines communicative competence as part of his theory of *Universal Pragmatics*. To this end, Habermas takes Chomsky’s notion of competence as a starting point, maintaining, however, that the theory of communicative competence he envisions must encompass, yet must also exceed, what Chomsky called linguistic competence. He elaborates:

The general competence of a native speaker does not extend merely to the mastery of an abstract system of linguistic rules, which [...] he introduces into a communication in order to function as sender or receiver during the transfer of information. That is, it

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<sup>1</sup> To my knowledge, the 1971 chapter has never fully been translated into English. In this article I nonetheless quote from the English translation of parts of the chapter (published in 1970), as well as from the most recent English translation of the 1984 monograph (Habermas 2001).

is not enough to understand language communication as an application—limited by empirical conditions—of linguistic competence. (Habermas 1970: 366-67)

Habermas' critique of the Chomskyan approach does not focus on the latter's notion of competence itself, but on the scope of Chomsky's definition of linguistic competence. Accordingly, Habermas broadens the scope of competence and includes pragmatic aspects of speech, developing an idealized (purely theoretical) notion of communicative competence:

[I]n order to participate in normal discourse the speaker must have at his disposal, in addition to his linguistic competence, basic qualifications of speech and symbolic interaction (role-behaviour), which we may call communicative competence. Thus communicative competence means the mastery of an ideal speech situation. (ibid: 367)

Referring to speech act theory, Habermas points out that pragmatic features of speech, by which he means the “illocutionary force which is already generated with the structure of speech situations itself” (ibid: 368), can be verbalized and are thus themselves linguistic in nature, a phenomenon Habermas refers to as “the peculiar reflexivity of natural languages. It is the basis for the capacity of the competent speaker to paraphrase any expressions of a language in that language itself” (Habermas 2001: 73). His theory of communicative competence therefore incorporates the ability of social actors to participate in metacommunication (which he terms *discourse*):

Universal pragmatics aims at the reconstruction of the rule system that a competent speaker must know if she is to be able to fulfill this postulate of the simultaneity of communication and metacommunication. I should like to reserve the term *communicative competence* for this qualification. (Habermas 2001: 84; emphasis in the original)

In an ideal speech situation, Habermas concludes, participants communicate and can reach a mutual understanding (consensus) both with regard to the propositional contents and the illocutionary domain. Furthermore, Habermas' theory of universal pragmatics is based on the assumption that speech acts are universal, similar to Chomsky's assumption that language components are universal.

Above all, communicative competence relates to an ideal speech situation in the same way that linguistic competence relates to the abstract system of linguistic rules. The dialogue-constitutive universals at the same time generate and describe the form of intersubjectivity which makes mutuality and understanding possible. Communicative



competence is defined by the ideal speaker's mastery of the dialogue-constitutive universals, irrespective of actual restrictions under empirical conditions[...]. The idealization exists in the fact that we suppose an exclusively linguistic organization of speech and interaction. The ideal speech situation can then be analysed according to the functions of pure dialogue-constitutive universals. (Habermas 1970: 369)

The emphasis on the “purity” of speech indicates that Habermas seeks to theorize an ideal speech situation that is devoid of complications, misunderstanding, and any other *empirical* disruptions. Again, this is similar to Chomsky's wish to study the ideal native speaker and her/his competence—irrespective of real, *empirical* performance. Habermas explains what he considers the necessity of idealizing speech situations and thus disregarding “all the empirical conditions under which grammatical rules can be realized either perfectly, inadequately, or not at all” (2001: 70), arguing that just as Chomsky “posits the fictitious case of the complete and constant fulfillment of postulates (that are fulfillable in principle),” he also chooses a fictitious case of an ideal speech situation, since “[e]very logical or conceptual analysis of rule systems must operate on this supposition.” Thus the ideal speech situation is characterized by “pure intersubjectivity” and “complete symmetry in the distribution of assertion and dispute, revelation and concealment, prescription and conformity, among the partners of communication” (Habermas 1970: 371).

In an attempt to identify pragmatic (“pure dialogue-constitutive”) universals, Habermas (2001: 82-85) distinguishes between four “classes of speech acts”:

1. *Communicatives* (which serve to “express the various aspects of the pragmatic meaning of speech as such”; e.g., to say, to express, to question, etc.);
2. *Constatives* (which serve to “express the meaning of the cognitive use of sentences”; e.g., to confirm, to contend, to deny, etc.);
3. *Representatives* (expressives, which serve to “express the pragmatic meaning of the speaker's self-representation to an audience”; e.g., to believe, to hope, to fear, etc.);
4. *Regulatives* (which serve to “express the normative meaning of the interpersonal relations that are established”; e.g., to endorse, to agree upon, to confirm, to warn, etc.).

This breakdown of pragmatic universals may suggest that Habermas is venturing into the world of linguistics and pragmatics; however, he is not primarily concerned with the

identification of speech acts. Rather, his interest lies in the development of a “critique of society and is emancipatory in aim” (Berns 1990: 97).

As a theoretical model, Habermas’ ideal speech situation serves two main functions. First, he maintains that, in order to understand the actual deformities of communicative events, it is necessary to be aware of what the actual ‘undeformed’ event would look like. Hence, he does not neglect the “uneven distribution of dialogue-constitutive universals in standard communication between individuals and social groups” (Habermas 1970: 372). However, the ideal speech situation as depicted in his model serves as a theoretical projection against which real-life communication can be analyzed critically. Such a critical analysis will inevitably reveal the actual deformities (viewed largely as deriving from unequal power relations in society) and can thus potentially lead to a critical social theory, i.e., a theory of communicative action. Habermas does not neglect the *de facto* inequality of interlocutors in society and the fact that “we are quite unable to realize the ideal speech situation” (Habermas 1970: 372), however, his theory seeks to anticipate what this ideal speech situation might look like. Secondly, Habermas points out that the anticipation of an ideal speech situation is present in all actual speech situations:

No matter how the intersubjectivity of mutual understanding may be deformed, the *design* of an ideal speech situation is necessarily implied in the structure of potential speech, since all speech, even of intentional deception, is oriented towards the idea of truth. (Habermas 1970: 372; emphasis in the original)

It seems that Habermas assumes a communicative will to truth and consensus that is integral to the idea of an ideal speech situation. Arguing that all communication is somehow oriented towards truth also implies that truth (and consensus) are achievable only in communication. This consensus-theory of truth lies at the core of Habermas’ thoughts on communicative competence. Ultimately, he links communicative competence to critical thinking and emancipation when he concludes that it enables interlocutors to make a “distinction between a ‘true’ (real) and ‘false’ (apparent) consensus” (Habermas 2001: 84). Communicative competence enables social actors to see through ideology, manipulation, and false consensus, and to reach ‘true’ consensus—and is thus essential for participation in a democratic society.

To conclude, Habermas’ notion of communicative competence remains very general as well, and he was not at all concerned with language teaching. Furthermore, the discrepancies between Hymes’ and Habermas’ approaches to communicative competence are striking. I will

discuss these in more detail in the following section, before returning to the world of language teaching and the communicative turn.

### 2.3 An odd couple: Hymes and Habermas

Although Hymes and Habermas use an identical term—communicative competence—and both refer to pragmatics and to Chomsky’s definition of competence, their respective theoretical considerations could hardly be more different. They approach the realm of the communicative from an anthropological-ethnographic (Hymes) and a social-philosophical perspective (Habermas) respectively, and their interests diverge accordingly. Hymes’ central concern is the empirical dimension of language use and how users judge such use, while Habermas is primarily concerned with a purely theoretical model that explicitly excludes the empirical dimension.

While Hymes criticizes Chomsky’s approach and develops his concept of communicative competence out of his critical revisions of the linguist’s thoughts and assumptions, Habermas refers to Chomsky’s work in order to explain his own pragmatic extension of “competence.” In Habermas’ concept of communicative competence, the very notion of competence as a potentially universal capability remains intact. Interestingly, both were apparently aware of each other’s work, and both expressed their dissatisfaction with the other’s notion of communicative competence. As early as 1970, Habermas, in a footnote to the English translation of his 1971 chapter, distances himself from Hymes’ work and explains:

I propose to use the term similar to that in which Chomsky uses ‘linguistic competence.’ Communicative competence should be related to a system of rules generating an ideal speech situation, not regarding linguistic codes which link language and universal pragmatics with actual role systems. Dell Hymes, among others, makes use of the term ‘communicative competence’ in a socio-linguistically limited sense. I don’t want to follow this convention. (374, fn 13)

It is striking that Habermas characterizes sociolinguistic approaches to language and language use as “limited.” This clearly indicates that his own interest lies in a delimitation of communicative competence (i.e., a universal, non-empirical approach). Conversely, Hymes takes issue with Habermas’ approach in a later publication, arguing that the “ideal of consensus through unlimited turntaking [...] is inadequate as a model of practical action, if the differential distribution of abilities in actual groups is not taken into account” (Hymes

1987: 225). Furthermore, he attacks the culture-blindness of theories that claim to aim at universal truth and applicability:

It does not come to mind that claims and universals might be affected by one's cultural and class background [...]. Do not participants in conversations intend to cooperate? Are not speaking truthfully, clearly, to the point, and the right amount obvious norms? Perhaps in the self-conception of polite Western society. (Hymes 1987: 222)

Hymes' critique of the (Western) cultural bias in Habermas' idea of universal pragmatics and his concern with the ideal speech situation highlight the fundamental incompatibility of the two approaches. If we recall Hymes' earlier critique of Chomskyan linguistics, we have to concede that Habermas, too, refuses to eat the apple and takes communicative competence back to the Garden of Eden. Indeed, the notion of the ideal speech situation seems to be born in paradise: "The thought that there could be a state of communication which would be such that the games of truth could circulate freely, without obstacles, without constraint and without coercive effects, seems to me to be Utopia" (Foucault, interview 1984, op. cit. Conway 1999: 60). As outlined in the previous section, the utopian project was, however, meant to be part of Habermas' social critique; the idealization was intentional.

To conclude, Hymes and Habermas critique each other's concept of communicative competence as lacking. Habermas finds a sociolinguistic perspective too narrow, and Hymes critiques the (cultural) blind spot of the idea of universal pragmatics and the ideal speech situation. Nevertheless, both play an important part in the emergence of CLT.

### **3. Hymes, Habermas, and the Communicative Turn**

Given the fact that neither Hymes nor Habermas were concerned with foreign or second language teaching and, moreover, given the incommensurable discrepancies between their two notions of communicative competence, it is all the more peculiar that both approaches have been referred to as the origins of, and thus instrumental to, what we call the communicative turn in language teaching.

Depending on whether one takes Hymes' or Habermas' notion as a theoretical basis, one will inevitably arrive at different versions of the (hi)story of CLT and the communicative turn. A closer look at two of the most widely-quoted publications on CLT will illustrate this: Canale and Swain's (1980) seminal article and Piepho's (1974) influential monograph, both of which take the notion of communicative competence as the theoretical basis of their respective

consideration of CLT. However, Canale and Swain refer to Hymes' model, while Piepho bases his argument on Habermas' model.<sup>2</sup>

### 3.1. Hymes and CLT

Most importantly, Hymes' thoughts about communicative competence led scholars and teaching methodologists to acknowledge the importance of sociocultural domains of language use as an important dimension in foreign and second language education, as these offers a complementary component to a field that was at the time dominated by a rather narrow focus on grammar and correctness. However, how exactly sociolinguistic competence was to be accounted for, and how it could be taught, remained largely open.

Canale and Swain's article, programmatically published as the very first article in the first issue of the journal *Applied Linguistics*, explicitly seeks to identify and discuss "the theoretical bases of communicative approaches" (Canale and Swain 1980: 1). Published almost a decade after Hymes (1972), when CLT was already widely touted as the new approach to language teaching (e.g., Brumfit and Johnson 1979; Munby 1978; Savignon 1972; Widdowson 1972, 1978), Canale and Swain conducted a singularly comprehensive critical analysis of several accounts of communicative competence that had emerged in the 1970s. They conclude that "we have not arrived at a well-defined theory of communicative competence" (1980: 26) and propose what they call "a tentative theory of communicative competence" (ibid: 28), conceding that "there will no doubt be modifications to our proposed theoretical framework" (ibid: 31). Their framework draws, inter alia, on the work of Dell Hymes and can serve as an example of how Hymes' notion of communicative competence was adapted and integrated into theories of CLT.

Canale and Swain discuss the four components of Hymes' model and interpret each component as a separate competence, thus arriving at a framework of communicative competence consisting of four interacting competencies: "grammatical competence," "psycholinguistic competence," "sociolinguistic competence," and "probabilistic systems of competence" (Canale and Swain 1980: 16). On the basis of these four competencies derived from Hymes, and with reference to other models of communicative competence, Canale and Swain then develop their own framework, which comprises grammatical competence,

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<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, in both publications we find a reference to *both* Hymes and Habermas. However, Canale and Swain do not discuss Habermas' model, and Piepho does not discuss Hymes' approach. The mere mention of the titles without further consideration of the actual theories developed by the two authors can thus be considered an instance of *black-boxing*. See also Block (1996) and Sheen (1999) on the phenomenon of black-boxing.

sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence. (Three years later, Canale added a fourth component, discourse competence, which had been included in sociolinguistic competence in the original framework; Canale 1983).

A closer look at how Canale and Swain arrive at these categories shows that they change Hymes' model considerably in the process of amending it for use in an L2 teaching and testing context. Most importantly, they do not include Hymes' notion of competence; i.e., his assumption that it "is dependent upon both (tacit) *knowledge* and (ability for) *use*" (Hymes 1972: 282, as cited in section 2.1 above). They omit "ability for use," arguing that it has neither been researched sufficiently, nor can be easily linked to L2-learning-related questions (Canale and Swain 1980: 7). Hence, only the notion of "(tacit) knowledge" remains in Canale and Swain's concept of competence.

On this basis, Hymes' four components are reframed as four different kinds of *knowledge* in Canale and Swain's framework, which results in a considerable shift from Hymes' (1972: 277) original model. The first component Hymes mentions is "whether (and to what degree) something is formally possible." One can conclude that communicative competence, accordingly, requires (tacit) knowledge about what is formally *possible* (that can be "correct" or not, as a matter of degree) and the ability to use language accordingly (see also Widdowson 2003: 87). In Canale and Swain's framework, however, this component is captured under the rubric "grammatical competence," i.e., grammatical knowledge, which had arguably been a long-standing goal in L2 teaching and learning. As such, it is much narrower than Hymes' notion and ignores his original intentions and the scope of his definition. Rather, it resembles Chomsky's notion of grammatical competence, and moreover, is in sync with what many language educators had for centuries promoted anyway: the importance of knowing the rules of grammar. Given the many voices that argued for a less form-focused and more "communicative" approach to L2 teaching, Canale and Swain thus interpret Hymes' first component primarily in light of current debates in L2 teaching and testing and take it as a supporting argument for the necessity of teaching grammar, albeit in an integrated way, within a communicative approach.

The second component in Hymes' model, feasibility, is omitted in Canale and Swain's model, as they do not consider it relevant (ibid: 8), while they base the second competence of their own framework, "sociolinguistic competence," directly on Hymes' model. According to Hymes, communicative competence includes (tacit) knowledge of "whether (and to what degree) something is *appropriate* (adequate, happy, successful) in relation to a context in

which it is used and evaluated,” and the ability to use language accordingly. Labeling it “sociolinguistic competence,” Canale and Swain define this component as comprising knowledge of two kinds of rules: sociolinguistic rules and rules of discourse. Canale and Swain (1980: 30) caution the reader that not enough is known about sociocultural rules or rules of discourse yet; however, they speculate that “[k]nowledge of these rules will be crucial in interpreting utterances for social meaning” (Canale and Swain 1980: 30). The use of the word “rules” here is striking, as it shifts Hymes’ focus on *appropriacy* to correctness. The underlying assumption that sociocultural dimensions may in principle be rule-governed is not derived from Hymes, but reflects Canale and Swain’s attempt to link sociocultural dimensions of language use to the world of L2 teaching and learning: Just as grammatical competence requires knowledge of grammar rules, so, too, does sociolinguistic competence require knowledge of sociolinguistic rules.<sup>3</sup> Viewed through the lens of L2 instruction, Hymes’ open, heuristic framework of communicative competence has thus become subject to a normative shift.

In conclusion, it is evident that a lot of the critical and crucial edges in Hymes’ original arguments and the components of communicative competence he had identified were lost in Canale and Swain’s *translation* of his model into the world of L2 teaching and testing. Removed from the original context of developing a theory that could account for the language problems of disadvantaged children, Hymes’ approach was modified to fit the needs of the day in L2 teaching and language study.

What this suggests is that, although CLT and the communicative turn emerged around the same time Dell Hymes published his work on communicative competence, his concept may not be appropriately considered the—or even one of the—origins of communicative language teaching or the communicative turn. I will return to this point below.

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<sup>3</sup>As regards the fourth dimension of Hymes’ model, Canale and Swain argue that, despite its importance, since little is known about the probability of utterances, it cannot (yet) be part of a framework for communicative competence. The third competence Canale and Swain add to their framework, strategic competence, is not derived from Hymes, but draws largely on Savignon’s 1972 study and other L2-learning-related considerations. For a critical and in-depth discussion of Hymes’ concept of communicative competence and its L2-related pedagogical potential—as well as its limitations—see Widdowson (2003). Many of Widdowson’s points are salient also with respect to the application and applicability of Hymes’ work in applied linguistics and L2 teaching in particular. Extensive discussion of the questions Widdowson addresses, however, would exceed the scope of the present article.

### 3.2. Habermas and CLT

Generally, attempts to link theories of L2 teaching and learning to Habermas' notion of communicative competence focus on the importance of dialogue and negotiation in the language classroom. This is often explicitly political and led L2 teaching methodologists to think about language education as part of a general education for democracy. References to Habermas' model were, however, based on an inherently problematic assumption, as I will discuss in more detail below, since they assumed a general possibility of manifestly rendering ideal speech situations.

In his seminal monograph entitled *Communicative competence as the overarching goal of EFL teaching (Kommunikative Kompetenz als oberstes Lernziel des Englischunterrichts,*" the German EFL teaching methodologist Hans-Eberhard Piepho (1974) set out to develop a framework for EFL teaching geared towards fostering students' communicative competence. Piepho refers to Habermas' notion of communicative competence, and declares it the ultimate goal of communicative pedagogy. He explains that the notion of communicative competence is used to

describe the agency of self-confident persons in a democratic and humane society, without constraints, deficits, and pressures [...]. Communicative competence denotes the ability to communicate successfully, without hesitations and inhibitions, using linguistic means that one sees through and whose effect one has learned to estimate. (Piepho 1974: 9; my translation; see also Berns 1990: 97)

Apparently, this explanation is based on an interpretation of Habermas' ideal speech situation, taking it as a realistic, empirical scenario that can be achieved if interlocutors communicate freely, possess a critical knowledge of language use, and have learned to distinguish between true and false consensus.

Piepho proceeds to explain that the EFL classroom can be an appropriate site to "observe pragmatic communicative universals and acquire them in role plays, in which ideal speech situations are presented" (ibid: 19). Observing and acquiring pragmatic communicative universals, Piepho proceeds to explain, "shall lead students not simply to talk but allows them to experience examples of unrestrained behavior and interaction that is not restricted by false norms" (ibid 19-20; my transl.). Furthermore, to Piepho, the EFL classroom lends itself to applying the utopian ideal outlined by Habermas. Referring to the "utopian" nature of language use and cultural experience in the EFL classroom, Piepho maintains that "[e]specially in the L2 classroom, these utopian roles are obvious, since using the English



language and identifying with social contexts of another cultural environment are based on a presumed reality anyways, which students have not yet experienced” (Piepho 1974: 135; my translation).

It is evident that Habermas’ theory of communicative competence was misrepresented in the attempt to declare it a (realistic) learning goal in foreign/second language education. What propelled such attempts was a political ideal fuelled by hope for a more egalitarian classroom that mirrored a democratic society, alongside the intention to get students to participate in dialogue, speak their minds, and not simply to obey rules. Piepho’s work triggered a wealth of discussion among language educators in West Germany, some of whom strongly supported the general trend of his pedagogical approach, while others attacked his intentions and called for a “less ideological,” more pragmatic approach to language teaching (e.g., Pauels 1983; for further discussion, see Schmenk 2005). To this day, German-speaking overviews of language teaching methods refer to Habermas and Piepho as instrumental in the emergence of CLT, whether or not they provide evidence for their views (e.g., Henrici 2001; Hüllen 2005; Neuner 2007).

It most likely exceeds our imagination today that the L2 classroom—of all places—could possibly be suspected to be an appropriate site for creating ideal speech situations and practicing egalitarian discourse. This vision may become more accessible to today’s readers when one takes into consideration the specific political and cultural context of post-1968 West Germany. Many educators welcomed Habermas’ utopian ideal in the Federal Republic in the 1970s, given the general political orientation of the post-war generation towards democracy and overcoming the authoritarian structures and attitudes of the past. Habermas’ theoretical accounts were considered most appropriate for an education geared towards critical thinking and emancipation; and the notion of the communicative soon became central to many critical educational theories (leading also to what has come to be called *Kommunikative Didaktik* [communicative pedagogy]; e.g., Baacke 1971, 1972, 1975; Schäfer and Schaller 1973). Viewed in this context, Piepho’s work sought to link language teaching to the critical educational movement—and the *zeitgeist*—of his time (Schmenk 2005; Schwerdtfeger, 1996). Given the explicit focus on “communication” that generally characterizes the work and texts of *Kommunikative Didaktik*, it does not seem all that surprising in retrospect that some language educators, too, were in principle able to relate to many of the goals embedded in general education and attempted to reframe their own field according to the “communicative” objectives discussed in contemporary critical educational theory.

Besides, what is of particular interest here is that Piepho also wrote extensively about practical implications for L2 teaching. Applying his theoretical considerations of education for communicative competence to the actual language classroom, he recommends teaching the linguistic means necessary to express individual intentions, namely, to teach pragmatic universals. Again he refers to Habermas, arguing that the distinction the latter makes between different classes of speech acts (as introduced above in section 2.2) can serve as a useful categorization for EFL syllabus construction as well. Subsequently, however, Piepho (1974: 46-77) turns toward the lists of notions and functions developed by Wilkins (1972), and argues that in principle, the semantic-notional and the functional-linguistic items listed by Wilkins cover a large part of what communicative competence involves, though not all of it (Piepho 1974: 46).<sup>4</sup>

Habermas' social philosophical theory and his thoughts on pragmatic universals, therefore, had been broken down and interpreted in a way that made them compatible with the lists of functions and notions identified by Wilkins (1972), which were expanded on and published shortly afterwards in *The Threshold Level* (van Ek 1975). This trivializes Habermas' concept of communicative competence yet further and renders the claim that Habermas' work can be considered an origin of the communicative turn dubious, at best. Similar to the modifications that Hymes' model was subjected to in attempts to make his ideas compatible with current issues in L2 teaching and testing, Habermas' theory of communicative competence was modified and re-interpreted so as to fit the needs of language educators.

#### 4. Myths of origin

The discussion of Hymes' and Habermas' concepts of communicative competence, as well as the appropriation of both in some theories of CLT, has shown that although both concepts are claimed to have played an important part in the communicative turn, the very nature of the respective part they play has yet to be determined. Besides, the two conceptions are incommensurable, which has, however, largely been overlooked or glossed over in the attempts to further CLT worldwide, and it has not kept researchers from simply declaring both

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<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that, apart from Piepho's own suggestions for CLT classroom practices, which remain largely confined to functions and notions, his writings and the subsequent debates among language teaching methodologists prompted a wealth of suggestions for foreign and second language teaching from many contemporary scholars and practitioners, whose aim was to broaden the scope of language education so as to contribute to the development of democratic dialogue and international understanding (e.g., Barkowski 1982; Edelhoff 1978; Kramsch 1984; Neuner et al. 1981; Riley 1985). Since Piepho continues to be credited as having introduced communicative competence to the German-speaking discourse of CLT, I limit my discussion to his interpretation of Habermas' theory and its application to the world of language teaching.

Hymes and Habermas ‘ancestors’ of CLT (among other methods), despite their incompatibility (e.g., Savignon 1991, 2005, 2007, 2013<sup>5</sup>; cf. Berns 1990).

Furthermore, looking back to the communicative era in the 1970s, we must conclude that neither Hymes’ nor Habermas’ notions of communicative competence can be considered instrumental in the emergence of CLT. In retrospect, it becomes obvious that various approaches and teaching methods that somehow subscribed to *teaching communication* had already been promoted widely *before* applied linguists and teaching methodologists started to theorize communicative competence with reference to Hymes or Habermas. Two examples can illustrate the implications of this: Savignon (1972) and the Functional-Notional Syllabus (van Ek 1975; van Ek & Alexander 1980; Wilkins 1972, 1976).

Sandra Savignon, in her monograph entitled *Communicative Competence: An Experiment in Foreign-Language Teaching* (1972: 8) defined communicative competence as “the ability to function in a truly communicative setting—that is, in a dynamic exchange in which linguistic competence must adapt itself to the total informational input, both linguistic and paralinguistic, of one or more interlocutors.” Her primary concern in this study was the development and testing of activities that allowed for meaningful communication in the classroom and were thus deemed to foster the students’ ability to communicate. Her definition of communicative competence was not based on theory or theoretical considerations but served mainly to capture something that arose from her experiences in the course of classroom teaching in the US, namely, the desire to overcome drill-oriented practices of language teaching and the predominant focus on grammatical correctness in audiolingual teaching approaches (Savignon 1972: 8-18). The phrase “communicative competence” was therefore chosen rather intuitively and was not based on a theory of communication or of communicative competence. Later (Savignon 2005: 635; 2013: 134) she explicitly refers to several sources of the term: Jacobovits (1970), Habermas (1970), and Hymes (1971), albeit without detailing or discussing the respective definitions of the term.

At the same time, on the other side of the Atlantic, in the course of the Council of Europe’s *Modern Languages Project*, David Wilkins (1972: 146) expressed similar discontent with the language classroom practices at the time: “However fluent one’s mastery of a language—fluent in the sense of the ease with which grammatically acceptable sentences can be

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<sup>5</sup> Several times, Savignon mentions the focus on Habermas’ work in L2 teaching methodology in West Germany (Savignon, 1991: 263; 2005: 636; 2007: 209). However, she proceeds to explain what CLT is and what it is not, without addressing the inconsistencies in the different notions of communicative competence.

constructed and produced—it will serve as nothing if one cannot use it to achieve the desired communication effects.” Language teaching, Wilkins concluded, must therefore “be concerned with effective communication” (ibid). The Council of Europe’s efforts to further a “greater understanding among the peoples of Europe” (van Ek 1975: 1) highlighted the importance of language teaching and of teaching languages in a way as to allow Europeans to communicate with one another, to overcome language barriers, which led to the development of the Functional-Notional syllabus. At its heart lay a concern with fostering learners’ “communicative capacity” (Wilkins 1976: 18). The Functional-Notional syllabus “takes the communicative facts of language into account from the beginning without losing sight of grammatical and situational factors” (Wilkins 1976: 19).

The “communicative facts” referred to here are the functions and notions listed in the syllabus (see also van Ek 1975; van Ek and Alexander 1980). A syllabus that is constructed on this basis is therefore considered “potentially superior to the grammatical syllabus because it will produce a communicative competence” (Wilkins 1976: 19). What is most striking in this explanation is the use of the indefinite article—“a communicative competence”—as it suggests that Wilkins does not concede a theory of communicative competence; neither does he attempt to define the phrase explicitly. It is not a “term” but a phrase based on common sense notions of “communicative” and “competence.” Thus, the use of the phrase here seems rather incidental.<sup>6</sup>

Similar to Savignon, Wilkins argues from a context of frustration with widespread teaching practices and syllabus design at the time, and argues in favor of a curriculum that focuses on communicative aspects. “Competence” in these instances is interchangeable with “capacity,” and “communicative competence” is not defined as a theoretical concept but coined as an

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<sup>6</sup> It is interesting in this context that the debates in the United States soon turned away from a focus on communicative competence, favoring the notion of “communicative proficiency” instead. The publication of the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines (1996) and the National Standards (1996) have arguably reinforced this trend. Interestingly, in the “Perspectives” section of the *Modern Language Journal* (2006), which was dedicated to the interrogation of “Communicative Competence as a Framework for Collegiate Foreign Language Study” (Byrnes 2006: 244), almost all contributors focus their discussions of communicative competence on the notion of oral proficiency and its limitations (Larson, Rifkin, Schulz, Steinhart, Swaffar). In addition to the ACTFL publications, Swaffar (2006: 247) also mentions Savignon’s (1972) study and acknowledges that it “first lent the term serious credence in the US FL community.” The only contributor who does not contextualize the discussion of communicative competence with reference to the ACTFL publications is Kramsch, who focuses on the notion as “coined by Dell Hymes in 1972.” She points out that the “communicative revolution” was not only concerned with changing instructional approaches but “was also a social revolution” that “favored a democratic spirit of dialogue and interaction” (Kramsch 2006: 249). She subsequently argues that due to the trivialization and instrumentalization of communicative competence, it has become obsolete (ibid: 250), which leads her to coin and conceptualize a new term, “symbolic competence” instead.

alternative to the dominant—at the time—orientation of language teaching and its focus on isolated language practice, grammar, skills and drills (whether in audiolingual methods or in grammatical and situational syllabi). Concurrent notions of communicative competence are not so much focused on what exactly it is but on the innovation of teaching and testing practices.<sup>7</sup> It was only in the course of a *scientification*<sup>8</sup> of applied linguistics and teaching methodology that communicative competence became a ‘term’ that had to be defined and theorized.<sup>9</sup>

Savignon and Wilkins are but two authors (among many) who used the phrase “communicative competence” in a rather commonsensical, intuitive way. What this suggests is that the notion of communicative competence has been unclear from the outset, and that attempts to refine it and develop a definition that links it to other existing definitions from different academic disciplines (be this Habermas’ or Hymes’ concepts or others) are to be viewed as retrospective attempts to appropriate the concepts and make them fit the needs of L2 teaching, thereby decontextualizing and modifying them considerably.

The origin(s) of CLT and the communicative turn appear much less clear than various accounts of CLT and the history of language teaching suggest (e.g., Adamson 2004; Hüllen 2005; Neuner 2007; Richards and Rodgers 2001; Richards 2006; Savignon 1983, 1987, 1991, 2005, 2007, 2013; Thornbury 2011). There seem to have been many developments in L2 teaching and discussions about learning goals that led to the emergence of a new “fashion in language teaching methodology” (Adamson 2004) that was eventually called CLT and

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<sup>7</sup> Widdowson (1978) in his detailed descriptions, analyses, and suggestions for revised teaching practices that are focused on communication does not mention “communicative competence” but talks about “communicative abilities” (67-69). Moreover, he critiques the belief that the Functional-Notional curriculum would lead to a shift towards communication in language teaching: “The ‘communicative’ approach is [...] very much en vogue at present. As with all matters of fashion, the problem is that popular approbation tends to conceal the need for critical examination. There seems to be an assumption in some quarters, for example, that language is automatically taught as communication by the simple expedient of concentrating on ‘notions’ or ‘functions’ rather than on sentences. But people do not communicate by expressing isolated notions or fulfilling isolated functions any more than they do so by isolated sentence patterns.” (Widdowson 1978: ix).

<sup>8</sup> I borrow the term “scientification” [*Verwissenschaftlichung*] from Hüllen (2005), who observed this tendency in L2 pedagogy in Germany in the 1970s, when it became an academic discipline that was taught at almost all universities (see also Doff 2016). A similar observation can be made in the English-speaking world with the emergence of Applied Linguistics (de Boot 2015).

<sup>9</sup> In this light, it appears even more salient that Canale and Swain’s (1980) article was published in the very first issue of the newly founded journal *Applied Linguistics*.

theoretically framed with reference to different concepts of communicative competence.<sup>10</sup> Given the multitude of potential origins scholars have referred to in their accounts of the communicative turn, it is not surprising that theory and practices associated with CLT continue to vary widely today.

## 5. Conclusion

What brought about the communicative turn in the 1970s cannot be attributed to the publications of Dell Hymes or Jürgen Habermas on communicative competence. Neither can it be explained with reference to specific theoretical frameworks or a shift in actual teaching practices. All of these occurred, yet none of them could reasonably be considered instrumental in the development of the communicative turn. Rather, the simultaneity of publications that all aimed to make L2 teaching ‘more communicative,’ less focused on ‘drill or kill,’ not primarily concerned with grammar and correctness, more authentic, etc., suggest that the driving forces of CLT came from within L2 teaching, not from theories that were retroactively constructed as origins. The thorny question of the place of grammar in L2 teaching seems to have played a crucial role from the outset, and continues to trigger many debates—and a variety of viewpoints—about the place of grammar in CLT, and how to teach it.<sup>11</sup>

In order to account for the role that Hymes’ and Habermas’ notions of communicative competence have played in applied linguistics and L2 teaching methodology, one has to consider that their thoughts were viewed and interpreted through the lens of L2 teaching, and thus fitted to the needs of the field from the outset. Furthermore, the trimmed-down versions of Hymes’ and Habermas’ theoretical accounts were appropriated by teaching methodologists and applied linguists to confirm their *prior* observations, experiences, beliefs and convictions. References to social philosophical thinkers, anthropologists or sociolinguists were not instrumental to the development of CLT and of communicative competence as its core notion, but they made the communicative claim appear more widely acceptable and more scientifically grounded.

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<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, Widdowson (2003: 71) argues that “ideas about communicative language teaching as a general pedagogic approach had their origin in the design of courses of English for specific purposes in the late sixties,”—thus introducing yet another potential path of the (hi)story of CLT.

<sup>11</sup> The role of grammar and how to teach it within a communicative framework can be considered one of the most prominent debates throughout the history of CLT, as already evident in Canale and Swain (1980) and Piepho (1974), and in the attempts to integrate Hallidayan (1973, 1978) systemic functional linguistics into communicative language curricula (for an overview see Widdowson 2003), but also more recently in, e.g., Katz and Blyth (2009), Koike (2009), or Maxim (2009).

Another dimension to be considered in this context is Adamson's (2004: 611) observation that the promotion of particular teaching methods is always related to particular values systems. With respect to communicative approaches, Adamson underlines their orientation towards the value system "Social and Economic Efficiency" with its focus "on human capital and the needs of society":

Language teaching, according to this philosophy, provides the learner with a social skill that is also valuable in the job market (thus determining the languages that are included in the curriculum). Methods associated with the Communicative Approach would, to a large extent, be promoted in such a curriculum, as the methods are oriented toward enabling the learners to function in social situations. (Adamson 2004: 611).

Whether or not the communicative turn can be considered an instrumentalist turn in language teaching philosophy remains an open question. It will only be possible in retrospect to see whether the hopes and desires of a generation that wished to educate people in heterogeneous speech communities to talk to one another and to participate in democratic dialogue ultimately gave way to reframing language education in an essentially instrumentalist way, as a most useful skill in a multilingual world. Ultimately, whether or not the ideals of an education for democracy and social participation that some scholars originally associated with the emergence of CLT will enter the cultural memory of the field depends on the willingness and interest of future generations of language educators in recalling the beginnings of the communicative turn, acknowledging its historical contingency, and situating themselves vis-à-vis former and current sociopolitical and cultural contexts. As long as FL teaching methodology is primarily focused on developing new approaches and accountability models that are chiefly geared towards measuring the efficiency and success of language instruction, a turn towards reflecting on the past of the profession and its former educational ideals seems unlikely, and strangely at odds with much of the predominantly instrumental thinking in many FL education circles today.

The conceptual inconsistencies and incommensurability of different accounts of communicative competence have not stopped many researchers and practitioners from developing a plethora of ideas for teaching communicative competence. At the cost of losing sight of the crux of their endeavors—communicative competence—they keep focusing on the "doing" part of teaching, on innovation and practical applications. Conceptual clarity seems to be of much less importance—yet the priority of "applying" something that is not clear will inevitably perpetuate, and most likely increase, the basic conceptual fog. Anyone who is

involved in teacher training, for example, is confronted more often than not with an abundance of commonsensical notions of communicative competence; not only among students and teachers in training, but also among colleagues and administrators—and in research publications.

What all these considerations suggest is that although L2 teaching methodologists and applied linguists refer to various, and often incompatible, notions of communicative competence, and have thus contributed to today's myriad ways of describing and conceptualizing CLT, the fact that “communicative” rapidly became one of the most frequently used word in the course of the 1970s<sup>12</sup>—and CLT became so popular that it led to a new *era* of language teaching—warrants further investigation. In order to reconstruct this shift, the historiography of language teaching and especially the “communicative era” (Howatt with Widdowson 2004) needs to situate it “within broader social, political, economic and cultural transformations,” as suggested by Howatt and Smith (2014: 93). It strikes me as remarkable that at a particular point in time, the “communicative” emerged as central to many different domains in Western societies, and that many coined—and used—the phrase “communicative competence,” though interpretations of this notion vary across and within different cultural and historical contexts.

A genealogy of CLT will have to take this phenomenon into consideration and contextualize it accordingly. What is commonly referred to as the communicative turn in L2 teaching is likely but one instance of a much broader cultural-historical development that emerged with the rise of mass communication and mass media in particular. It is surely no coincidence that the International Communication Association, for example, founded in 1950, saw a rapid increase in members during the 1960s; that collegiate programs in Communication Studies began to attract high numbers of students in the 1970s; that in 1973 the International Communications Association added *Human Communication Research*<sup>13</sup> to its publication program; that a German philosopher developed a theory of social philosophy that was based on communication, which triggered a critical educational movement whose basic concern was communicative pedagogy; and that an American anthropologist critiqued the failure of linguistics to account for language as communication amongst members of a stratified society, so as to address the problems of disadvantaged children.

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<sup>12</sup> For the field of ELT in Britain this has clearly been demonstrated by Hunter (2009) and Hunter & Smith (2012) in their corpus analysis of the ELT Journal.

<sup>13</sup> See [http://www.icahdq.org/about\\_ica/history.asp](http://www.icahdq.org/about_ica/history.asp)



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