



## Dell Hymes and the Ethnography of Communication

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### **Abstract:**

*This study explores Dell Hymes's ethnography of communication, presenting his theoretical contributions to understanding language as a social practice. It examines the concepts of the speech community, communicative competence, and the SPEAKING model, highlighting how Hymes expanded linguistic theory beyond structural analysis to include cultural, social, and contextual factors in communication. Through a synthesis of anthropology, linguistics, pragmatics, and sociolinguistics, this study underscores the importance of communicative competence and its components in analysing discourse and social interaction.*

**Keywords:** *Dell Hymes, ethnography of communication, speech community, communicative competence, SPEAKING model*

## Dell Hymes et l'ethnographie de la communication

### **Résumé :**

*Cette étude explore l'ethnographie de la communication de Dell Hymes, présentant ses contributions théoriques à la compréhension du langage en tant que pratique sociale. Elle examine les concepts de communauté linguistique, de compétence communicative et du modèle SPEAKING, soulignant comment*

*Hymes a élargi la théorie linguistique au-delà de l'analyse structurelle pour inclure les facteurs culturels, sociaux et contextuels dans la communication. À travers une synthèse de l'anthropologie, de la linguistique, de la pragmatique et de la sociolinguistique, cette étude souligne l'importance de la compétence communicative et de ses composantes dans l'analyse du discours et de l'interaction sociale.*

**Mots-clés :** *Dell Hymes, ethnographie de la communication, communauté linguistique, compétence communicative, modèle SPEAKING*



## Introduction

Before delving into the communicative approach proposed by Hymes through *The Ethnography of Communication*, it is essential first to present an overview of his life and scholarly contributions.<sup>1</sup>

Dell Hathaway Hymes, born on 7 June 1927 in Portland, Oregon, was a linguist and social scientist with a profound interest in folklore and anthropology. He was the founder of the ethnography of communication through his study of language use and concentrated his research on the languages of the Pacific Northwest. He was among the first to advocate for the establishment of a distinct branch of anthropology, namely, linguistic anthropology.

His life revolved around language, social life, and folklore. His studies emerged as a response to Chomsky's linguistic theory, particularly his concepts of competence, performance, and the ideal speaker-listener. Because Hymes viewed humanity as inherently social rather than individual and language as a form of social behaviour, he consistently emphasised the role of language in social life. His research offered a new perspective on the description of communities, their discourse, and the communicative factors within them, seeking to uncover the codes and rules that hold meaning for the society under study.

With his transition to a faculty of education, his theory entered the field of teaching and learning through his study of actual classroom interaction, leading him to develop a new programme in educational linguistics. In the final stages

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<sup>1</sup> Strazny, Philipp. *Encyclopedia of Linguistics*. Vol. 1. New York and Oxon: Taylor & Francis Group, 2005, 484–85.

of his life, he once again dedicated himself to analysing oral narratives, maintaining his conviction that language must always be studied within its social context.

### **His life and achievements**

His life was rich with accomplishments until his passing on 9 November 2009. Over the course of eighty-two years, he achieved numerous academic and professional milestones. He began with a bachelor's degree in 1950, followed by a master's degree in 1953, and then earned his doctorate in 1955 with a dissertation entitled *Linguistic Analysis of Native American Texts Collected by Franz Boas*.

Thus, the life of Dell Hymes revolved around language, social life, and folklore, and it was upon these foundations that his research and writings were built.

In this study, we examine the key pillars of his linguistic thought and his pragmatic approach. From these, we attempt to develop our analysis of *Dīwān al-Safīna* to uncover the forms and content of popular communication reflected in the collection, focusing on four central elements: the ethnography of communication, the speech community, communicative competence, and the analytical model.

## **1. The Ethnography of Communication**

Ethnography is considered one of the oldest branches of knowledge within anthropology. The term is composed of two elements:<sup>1</sup> *ethno*, meaning “people” or “ethnic group,” and *graphien*, meaning “description” or “depiction.” It is therefore also referred to as “descriptive anthropology,” defined as “the descriptive study of the way of life and

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<sup>1</sup> Saville-Troike, Muriel. *The Ethnography of Communication*. 3rd ed. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003, 13.



customs of a particular people or community.”<sup>1</sup> The earliest recorded use of this term was in Germany in 1810, in a lecture delivered at the University of Berlin by the German historian Barthold Niebuhr (1776–1831).<sup>2</sup>

Many scholars have documented the lives of local tribes and peoples across the Americas, Africa, Australia, and Asia, providing detailed accounts of their tools, customs, traditions, and diverse cultures. This descriptive work serves anthropology in its study and development of human societies. Thus, the ethnographer is primarily concerned with describing so-called "primitive" societies. At the same time, the anthropologist focuses on analysing them structurally or synthetically, an important distinction between their respective areas of interest and practice.

In another definition, ethnography is understood as “fieldwork in which the researcher participates in the daily life of a different culture, observing, recording, and attempting to convey the perspectives of the so-called primitive peoples, and then documenting these findings.”<sup>3</sup> On the basis of this definition, the principal concerns of ethnography are as follows:<sup>4</sup>

- What people do in their daily lives, as well as what they know, think, and feel.

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<sup>1</sup> Whitehead, Tony L. *What Is Ethnography?* University of Maryland, College Park, (2004), 14.

<sup>2</sup> Fahim, Hussein. *Qissat al-Anthropology [The Story of Anthropology]*. Kuwait: National Council for Culture, Arts, and Letters, (1986), 29.

<sup>3</sup> Augé, Marc, and Jean-Paul Colleyn. *Anthropology*. Translated by Georges Kner. Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-Jadid al-Muttahida, 1st ed., 2008, 71.

<sup>4</sup> Duranti, Alessandro. *Linguistic Anthropology*. New York: Cambridge University Press, (1997), 90.

- How they communicate with one another and how they make decisions.
- How objects are categorised and how tasks are organised and divided.
- How are family life and domestic life structured?

Thus, ethnography examines all forms and cultural practices within a community, alongside the study of social and cultural contexts, processes, and meanings within cultural systems. This field provides a set of methods and techniques, the foremost and most important of which is *fieldwork*. Fieldwork enables direct interaction with the studied communities and addresses the two questions that summarise the scope of ethnographic research:<sup>1</sup>

- What makes a group of people constitute a single community?
- How do individuals choose a way and style of life that is unique and distinct from that of other groups and societies?

As noted, one of the primary concerns of ethnography is the study of communication within a community. Many researchers have called for a connection between linguistic forms and cultural practices, as these forms are the fundamental components of a society and its most significant manifestations. This perspective was strongly advocated by the linguistic anthropologists Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf,<sup>2</sup> who asserted that there is a necessary and inseparable relationship between linguistic categories and structures and the way in which people perceive and interpret the world.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Duranti, Alessandro. *Linguistic Anthropology*, 90.

<sup>2</sup> Mu‘ādh, Maha Muhammad Fawzī. *Anthropology of Language*, 18–19.

<sup>3</sup> Augé, Marc, and Jean-Paul Colleyn. *Anthropology*, 52.



Linguistic anthropology thus emerged as one of the four principal branches of anthropology, with a focus on the study of behaviours across a range of interactions, including casual conversations, celebrations, theatrical performances, singing, and lamentation.<sup>1</sup> This development relied heavily on the principles of the ethnography of communication, a field formalised in the 1960s by Dell Hymes and John Gumperz in their 1964 study entitled *The Ethnography of Communication*.

This field is concerned primarily with describing and analysing culture, linguistics, and the interpretation of both linguistic and non-linguistic symbols. Despite this awareness of the interrelationship between culture and language, neither linguists nor scholars of linguistic anthropology and ethnography, in practice, achieved significant integration in their research.<sup>2</sup>

In the early 1960s, interest began to emerge in studying language and speech as they intersect with social organisation and other cultural domains. Hymes's contributions marked a turning point: in April 1958,<sup>3</sup> He participated in the "Language and Style" conference at Indiana University, presenting a paper on the "Ethnography of Literature." This work examined practices, beliefs, and participants' ability to acquire a culturally patterned use of language. At this conference, he met Roman Jakobson, who further influenced his scholarly trajectory.

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<sup>1</sup> Duranti, Alessandro. *Linguistic Anthropology*, 96.

<sup>2</sup> Saville-Troike, Muriel. *The Ethnography of Communication*, 13.

<sup>3</sup> Hymes, Dell. "Toward Ethnographies of Communication." *American Anthropologist* 66, no. 6, pt. 2 December 1964: 12. Blackwell Publishing.

In 1962, Hymes published an article entitled “The Ethnography of Speaking,”<sup>1</sup> In which he launched a new field: the study of communicative behaviour<sup>2</sup> as a cultural system, examining its connections to other systems of life. Through this approach, ethnography began to address a new body of information regarding communicative behaviour and its role in shaping social life.

Hymes identified the following areas of focus for the ethnography of communication:<sup>3</sup>

- A descriptive study of communication patterns and functions, particularly speech patterns.
- The nature and definition of the speech community;
- The means of communication;
- The components of communicative competence;
- The relationship between language, the world, social organisation, and the fundamental concepts of linguistics and sociology.

Its primary concern is to investigate “what a speaker needs to know in order to communicate appropriately within a given speech community, and how they acquire that ability.”<sup>4</sup> Answering these questions and making use of all the speaker’s knowledge and skills is achieved through **communicative competence**, which comprises several elements that will be discussed later.

Since ethnography is fundamentally grounded in fieldwork, the ethnography of communication likewise

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<sup>1</sup> Bauman, Richard, and Joel Sherzer. *The Ethnography of Speaking*. Department of Anthropology. *Annual Review of Anthropology*. University of Texas, (1975), 95–96.

<sup>2</sup> Saville-Troike, Muriel. *The Ethnography of Communication*, 13.

<sup>3</sup> Hymes, Dell. “Toward Ethnographies of Communication.” *American Anthropologist* 66, no. 6, pt. 2 December 1964: 10. Blackwell Publishing.

<sup>4</sup> Saville-Troike, Muriel. *The Ethnography of Communication*, 14.



regards the speech community or discourse community as its field of study. Within this setting, observations are conducted, questions are posed, participation in activities takes place, and existing assumptions and hypotheses are tested against reality. Language is approached, above all, as a cultural form and a social entity.

## **2. The Speech Community**

Language is a reflection of society and serves as its collective memory, preserving communal knowledge and experience. It is the primary means by which reality is revealed and collective thought is organised. For this reason, the ethnography of communication places particular emphasis on the speech community, which Hymes considered fundamental.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the primary unit for studying communicative behaviour is.

Owing to its importance, numerous definitions of the speech community have been proposed, each shaped by the disciplinary perspective of its proponents, including linguistics, history, anthropology, dialectology, the philosophy of language, or sociolinguistics. The complexity of precisely defining this concept is evident in these varied interpretations.

For example, some definitions are limited strictly to language itself, as in the work of Bloomfield (1933) and

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<sup>1</sup> Hymes, Dell. Defined six units: the speech community, setting, event, communicative act, style of communication, and ways of speaking.

Chomsky (1969). Bloomfield defined a speech community as “a group of people who use the same set of speech signals.”<sup>1</sup>

The early focus was on linguistic systems, defining a speech community as a specific social group residing within a particular geographic area with a shared cultural and historical heritage.<sup>2</sup> This view prevailed until Chomsky shifted the perspective from a structural understanding of language to a cognitive one. He criticised descriptive and structural analyses as dominant at the time and introduced a theoretical approach to explore the human capacity for language production, treating language as a social phenomenon. Chomsky also introduced key concepts, such as the distinction between competence and performance and the notion of the ideal speaker-listener.<sup>3</sup>

With the advancement of both anthropological and linguistic studies, the concept of the speech community has evolved.<sup>4</sup> Hudson defined it as the convergence of numerous characteristics required for language use, whereas Lyons viewed it as the shared rules of speech and the interpretation of linguistic performance. Hymes, in turn, defined it as a set of shared attitudes and values regarding linguistic structures and their uses.

These definitions clearly indicate that the understanding of the speech community has transformed. Initially, emphasis was placed on analysing and describing linguistic and semantic features, grouping speakers into communities on the basis of stable indicators (a single language, a shared

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<sup>1</sup> Morgan, Marcyliena. “Speech Community.” In *A Companion to Linguistic Anthropology*, edited by Alessandro Duranti, 6. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003.

<sup>2</sup> Morgan, Marcyliena. “Speech Community,” 7.

<sup>3</sup> Morgan, Marcyliena. “Speech Community,” 7.

<sup>4</sup> Saville-Troike, Muriel. *The Ethnography of Communication*, 14.



geographic area, a unified identity, and a common heritage). Later, the concept expanded to incorporate both language and discourse, with a focus on how language is used to construct relationships and identity.

The term *community*, as used in the social sciences, reflects its structure, functions, political and geographical boundaries, beliefs, cultural and social understandings, and even physical traits such as skin color, which may symbolise membership in certain groups. The speech community thus represents a shared dimension that encompasses members' practices, purposes, and communicative goals.<sup>1</sup>

In specific discourse analysis dictionaries, the term *speech community* appears under the equivalent expression *communauté de communication* ("communicative community").<sup>2</sup> Hymes introduced this concept in 1967 and 1973, using the original term *speech community* to define the organised external forms of linguistic communication. Within the scope of the ethnography of communication, this concept is central to analysing utterances in their nonabstract form, allowing them to be understood as a distinctive component of a group's identity.

A communicative community is described as a collective of speakers who constitute a group by virtue of shared rules that govern the production and interpretation of at least one linguistic variety. A communicative community is therefore

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<sup>1</sup> Saville-Troike, Muriel. *The Ethnography of Communication*, 15.

<sup>2</sup> Charaudeau, Patrick, and Dominique Maingueneau. *Maʿjam Taḥlīl al-Khiṭāb [Dictionary of Discourse Analysis]*. Translated by ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Mahīrī and Hammādī Ṣumūd. Tunis: Dar Sifātra, National Centre for Translation, (2008), 103.

not defined by the specific languages spoken within it but rather by how those languages are used.<sup>1</sup>

Notably, the speech community occupies the highest level of the units of analysis established by Hymes. This framework seeks to reveal the ways in which communication occurs within a community and how all its elements interact with cultural systems. Language, as one of society's symbols, contributes to the formation of the speech community alongside other symbols such as beliefs and behaviours, and understanding how these symbols are used is essential. Hymes affirmed that the mutual relationship between language and other symbols participates in communicative behaviour.<sup>2</sup> Constitutes what he termed **communicative competence**, which will be addressed in the following section.

### 3. Communicative competence

Hymes continued to seek an understanding of the codes underlying human communicative behaviour. After defining the speech community, which he considered the fundamental unit, and describing it as those who share rules regarding *who* may speak and *how*,<sup>3</sup> he moved beyond mere linguistic knowledge to examine the contexts of use required by communicative situations.

Hymes observed that participants in communication might possess linguistic competence, enabling them to know the language and produce grammatically correct sentences.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Morgan, Marcyliena. "Speech Community," 9.

<sup>3</sup> Yano, Yasukata. "Communicative Competence and English as an International Language." *Intercultural Communication Studies* 12, no. 3 (2003): 54. Waseda University.



However, without an understanding of the cultural and social contexts that allow them to use this competence appropriately, effective communication cannot occur. In response, he revised the prevailing focus of his time, which was influenced by Chomsky's cognitive approach to linguistic behaviour. Chomsky conceptualised linguistic theory in terms of "an ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogeneous speech community, who knows his language perfectly, and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interest, and errors in applying his knowledge of the language in actual performance."<sup>1</sup>

Hymes, in contrast, emphasised field studies of linguistic communities, focusing on how speakers use their language in ways that align with cultural, social, and psychological contexts in their interactions. This perspective led him to introduce the concept of **communicative competence**, which extends beyond grammar to include the ability to use language appropriately in context.

### 3.1. From Chomsky's Linguistic Competence to Hymes' Communicative Competence

The concept of communicative competence is among the most significant innovations of modern linguistic study. Dell Hymes was the first to introduce this notion in his 1971 research, which served as a response to Chomsky's concept of linguistic competence.

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<sup>1</sup> al-Būshīkhī, 'Izz al-Dīn. *al-Tawāṣul al-Lughawī: Muqāraba Lisāniyya Wazīfiyya [Linguistic Communication: A Functional Linguistic Approach]*. Beirut: Maktabat Lubnān, 2012, 19.

The term *linguistic competence* marked the beginning of linguistics' movement away from focusing exclusively on language structure *in and of itself*. Chomsky shifted attention to the cognitive system underlying linguistic behaviour, limiting an individual's knowledge of their language to two components: competence and performance.

Competence is "the implicit knowledge that a speaker possesses regarding the structures of language, which enables them to comprehend and produce an infinite number of sentences,"<sup>1</sup> Alternatively, more precisely, "the linguistic knowledge of the native language of an ideal speaker-listener, representing the innate biological function of the mind that allows individuals to generate an infinite set of grammatical sentences that constitute their language." Performance, by contrast, refers to "the actual use of language in limited situations."<sup>2</sup> This understanding became central to linguists, particularly applied linguists who focused on analysing, clarifying, and applying this concept, especially in the field of language education.

Dell Hymes, however, objected, observing that "the grammatical rules a speaker possesses are not sufficient for appropriate communication in society. One therefore requires a competence characterised by the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in context, with all its various elements. For communication to be successful, the utterances and sentences used must be suited to both the situational and discursal context."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Garmadi, Juliette. *al-Lisāna al-Ijtimā'īyya [Sociolinguistics]*. Translated by Khalīl Aḥmad. Beirut: Dār al-Talī'a lil-Ṭibā'a wa-l-Nashr, 1st ed., (1990), 100.

<sup>2</sup> Yano, Yasukata. "Communicative Competence and English as an International Language," 75.

<sup>3</sup> al-'Anānī, Walīd Aḥmad. *Taḥlīl al-Khiṭāb wa-Ta'līm al-Lugha al-Ajnabiyya: Lisāniyyāt al-Naṣṣ wa-Taḥlīl al-Khiṭāb [Discourse Analysis and Foreign*



In response to this limitation, and in his effort to study communicative behaviour within human societies, Hymes introduced the term **communicative competence**,<sup>1</sup> Which he defined as "knowledge of the psychological, cultural, and social rules governing the use of language within a given social context."<sup>2</sup>

**Table 1:** Hymes's Communicative Competence vs. Chomsky's Linguistic Competence<sup>3</sup>

Hymes	Chomsky
1) Linguistic analysis must go beyond the sentence to the discourse.	1) Linguistic analysis is limited to the sentence.
2) The subject of linguistic research is the ability of a real speaker-listener existing within social life.	2) The subject of linguistic research is the ability of the ideal speaker-listener.
3) Competence varies from one individual to another and involves interpreting utterances in specific contexts.	3) Competence is uniform among all members of the speech community; it is universal in nature.
4) All instances of performance should be traced	4) Competence enables the production and

*Language Teaching: Text Linguistics and Discourse Analysis*]. Proceedings of the International Conference. Vol. 1. Jordan: Dār Kunūz al-Ma'rifa, 2013, 154.

<sup>1</sup> Charaudeau, Patrick, and Dominique Maingueneau. *Ma'jam Taḥlīl al-Khiṭāb* [*Dictionary of Discourse Analysis*], 112.

<sup>2</sup> Bouṭaba, Rachida Jalāl. *al-Maqām wa-l-Hāl wa-Muqtaḍā al-Hāl* [*Context, Situation, and Appropriateness*]. PhD diss., University of Algiers, 2008–09, 124.

<sup>3</sup> al-Būshīkhī, 'Izz al-Dīn. *Ibid.*, 25.

back to the competence they reveal.	interpretation of grammatical sentences.
5) Language is a social practice.	5) Performance reflects the abstract nature of competence only imperfectly.
	6) Language is essentially a system for expressing thought, or a mirror of the mind.

A close reading of Hymes's definition of communicative competence, together with the comparative table, reveals that, in addition to linguistic knowledge, a language user must also possess psychological, social, and cultural knowledge. This enables the speaker to discern when it is appropriate to speak or remain silent and to ensure that their speech aligns with the context by knowing how to ask questions, initiate conversation, and bring it close.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, communicative competence surpasses Chomsky's linguistic competence while also encompassing it. It integrates all the knowledge a speaker possesses, linguistic, cultural, and social, which aids in understanding context and selecting the language appropriate for communicative situations.

Furthermore, communicative competence introduces functional considerations that assist in comprehending communicative contexts, including the following:<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Saville-Troike, Muriel. *The Ethnography of Communication*, 18.

<sup>2</sup> Yahyā, Aḥmad. "al-Ittijāh al-Wazīfī wa-Dawruhu fī Taḥlīl al-Lughā" ["The Functional Approach and Its Role in Language Analysis"]. *Ālam al-Fikr [World of Thought]* 20, no. 3 (1989): 95. Kuwait.



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- Allowing for intentionality and purpose in expression;
- Recognising that speakers and listeners possess multiple skills derived from their membership in specific social and cultural environments;
- emphasising the importance of social traditions, customs, and cultural heritage in how language is used, understood, and analysed.

### 3.2. Components of Communicative Competence

Regarding the components of communicative competence, 'Izz al-Dīn al-Būshīkhī states, "Hymes, along with many other researchers, offered numerous attempts to define the components of communicative competence, yet none of these assumptions proved conclusive."<sup>1</sup>

However, he provides a framework that summarises the knowledge contributing to communication from an ethnographic perspective. This framework encompasses a set of linguistic elements, interactions, and cultural phenomena that collectively serve to describe and explain communicative competence.<sup>2</sup>

1. **Linguistic knowledge:** This includes the following:
  2. a. Linguistic elements;
  3. b. The oral component;
  4. c. Patterns of speech events;
  5. d. A set of possible variations.
6. **Interaction skills:**
7. a. Recognition of salient features in communicative situations;

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<sup>1</sup> al-Būshīkhī, 'Izz al-Dīn. *al-Tawāṣul al-Lughawī*, 32.

<sup>2</sup> Saville-Troike, Muriel. *The Ethnography of Communication*, 14.

8. b. Selection and interpretation of appropriate forms that define roles and relationships (rules of language use);
9. c. Organisation of discourse and its processes;
10. d. Study of the rules of interaction and interpretation;
11. e. Strategies for achieving communicative goals.
12. **Cultural Knowledge:**
  13. a. Social structure (status, power, rights to speak);
  14. b. Values and attitudes;
  15. c. Cognitive maps;
  16. d. Processes of knowledge and skill transmission.

Hymes summarises the aspects of communicative competence in four dimensions:

1. **To what extent is something possible (grammatically)?** This refers to the possibilities and openness of language.
2. **To what extent is something feasible?** This is based on the available means of implementation, which focus on the psychological aspects employed in language use, such as memory, mental planning of speech, and comprehension.
3. **To what extent is something appropriate:** This is within the context in which language is used, referring to linguistic registers and styles adopted by speakers in different situations and selecting suitable vocabulary and modes of expression while observing social customs and traditions.
4. **To what extent something has been performed (in terms of actual utterance):** This relates to what the speaker has said and the behaviour this speech enables. It examines both the speaker and listener



simultaneously: what the individual can produce as a speaker and what they can comprehend as a listener.<sup>1</sup>

At the conclusion of this section, and following the presentation of Hymes's vision of communicative competence, its components, and its dimensions, we summarise the components he identified as follows:<sup>2</sup>

1. **Linguistic competence:** This represents the first and most essential component of communicative competence, encompassing knowledge of syntactic, semantic, and phonological rules.
2. **Sociolinguistic competence:** This covers all aspects of the context in which speech occurs, as linguistic competence alone is insufficient if the context is not appropriate for communication.
3. **Discourse Competence:** This includes knowledge of the rules that ensure discourse cohesion and coherence.
4. **Strategic Competence:** This involves both verbal and nonverbal knowledge employed by speakers and listeners to ensure the success of communication and interaction through mutual influence and responsiveness.

#### 4. The Analytical Model "SPEAKING"

A model is defined as "a construct composed of symbols and general principles, designed to represent a set of interrelated points concerning a particular structure or

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<sup>1</sup> Yahyā, Aḥmad. "al-Ittijāh al-Waḥīfī wa-Dawruhu fī Taḥlīl al-Lughā" ["The Functional Approach and Its Role in Language Analysis"], 94.

<sup>2</sup> Yano, Yasukata. "Communicative Competence," 77.

process.”<sup>1</sup> Linguistics, exceptionally functional linguistics, has contributed to the development of theoretical models for describing and interpreting linguistic phenomena and their overarching principles.

These models are grounded in the view of language as “a system intrinsically connected to discourse and social communication a symbolic system that fulfils multiple functions, foremost among them the function of communication.”<sup>2</sup> Functionalist approaches, therefore, seek to “study linguistic structures within the social context in which they occur.”<sup>3</sup>

Among their key principles is the study of competence, which is defined as “the speaker’s knowledge of the rules governing language use according to context, as well as the communicative purposes intended through such use.”<sup>4</sup>

Building on these principles, Hymes, in his study of oral folklore and his analysis of Native American myths within the framework of the ethnography of communication, sought to understand oral narratives, which he viewed as vehicles for transmitting the implicit knowledge and values of indigenous peoples, as well as their ways of thinking and perceiving the world. He argued that analysing these narratives would lead to a deeper understanding of language itself. Drawing upon various disciplines, such as anthropology, linguistics, literature, sociology, psychology,

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Ismā‘īlī ‘Alawī, Muḥammad. *al-Tawāṣul al-Insānī: Dirāsa Lisāniyya* [*Human Communication: A Linguistic Study*]. Jordan: Dār Kunūz al-Ma‘rifā lil-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī‘, 2013, 111.

<sup>2</sup> al-Mutawakkil, Aḥmad. *al-Wazā‘if al-Tadāwuliyya fī al-Lughā al-‘Arabiyya* [*Pragmatic Functions in the Arabic Language*]. Casablanca, Morocco: Dār al-Thaqāfa lil-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī‘, 1st ed., 1985, 10–11.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., same page.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., same page.



pragmatics, rhetoric, and criticism, Hymes developed a model for describing and analysing linguistic interactions. This model emphasised that a speaker requires not only knowledge of vocabulary but also an understanding of the context in which language is used.

Initially, Hymes's model consisted of sixteen<sup>1</sup> components:

1. Message form
2. Message content
3. Setting
4. Scene
5. Speaker/sender
6. Hearer/receiver
7. Audience/addressee
8. Outcomes (results)
9. Key
10. Channel
11. Forms of expression
12. Rules of interaction
13. Rules of interpretation
14. Forms of differentiation
15. Purposes (objectives)
16. Interlocutor

Owing to the model's extensive number of components and to make analytical work more practical, Hymes consolidated and simplified them into **eight easily memorable elements**, captured in the acronym

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<sup>1</sup> Aya, Kurnia. *The Theory of Dell Hymes*, 2–3.

**SPEAKING**,<sup>1</sup> with each letter representing an analytical tool, as detailed below.<sup>2</sup>

1. **S - scene and setting:**

The *scene* encompasses four elements: topic, genre, structure, and functional purposes. It also considers factors external to the communicative event that nonetheless provide insight into how the speech community under study is organised. The descriptive questions for this component include the following:

- What is the type of communicative event?
- Why is it taking place?
- Where and when does it occur?
- How are participants spatially arranged (e.g., in rows, circles, around tables, on the ground)?
- What geographical and spatial concepts and beliefs are familiar to participants?
- What is the significance of directions (north, south, east, west) and locations?
- What beliefs are associated with time?

Together, the *scene* and *setting* provide a clear picture of the time and place in which the communicative event occurs.

2. **P - Participants:**

This component includes both senders and receivers, encompassing the roles they play and the relationships that connect them, which define them as members of a speech community. Descriptive questions for this element include the following:

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<sup>1</sup> Hymes, Dell. *Foundations of Sociolinguistics: An Ethnographic Approach*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1974.

<sup>2</sup> Johnstone, Barbara, and William Marcellino. "Dell Hymes and the Ethnography of Communication." *Research Showcase*, Carnegie Mellon University, Department of English, Dietrich College of Humanities and Social Sciences, (January 2010), 4, 8.



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- Who is participating in this communicative event?
- How are they organised?

Understanding participants' organisation is essential for interpreting the roles they assume and their modes of participation. Additional guiding questions include the following:

- What is the hierarchy of the group under study?
- What are the duties, responsibilities, and rights of each party?
- What is the historical background of the group, and what are the participants' attitudes toward this history?

Other questions related to participants' language and culture, such as the following:

- Is language use significant in defining or determining social roles?
- How are emotions such as joy or anger expressed?
- What are the characteristics of a good speaker, considering age, gender, and other social factors?

3. **E – Ends:**

This component encompasses all the purposes, goals, and expected outcomes of the communicative event. These goals and outcomes may be unified or multiple in nature.

4. **A – Act sequence:**

This refers to the structure and order of the communicative event. The sequencing of events plays a key role in the success of communication, as this organisation can encourage participants' engagement and interaction.

5. **K – Key:**

The significance of this element lies in its role in describing and analysing communicative events. The *key* may take the form of language, dialect, gestures, or any cues that serve as keys to interpreting the discourse.

6. **I - Instrumentalities:**

This includes all channels and modes of expression that contribute to the effectiveness of the communicative event.

7. **N - Norms:**

These are the rules governing events, participants, and interaction patterns. Such norms are often identified through participants' reactions and behavioural responses.

8. **G - Genre:**

This refers to the type of communicative act or event, which may take the form of a story, poem, joke, conversation, or other speech genres.

With these eight elements, the **SPEAKING** model can be applied to a wide range of discourse events. Researchers may focus selectively on specific elements, depending on the speech community being studied and the research question being addressed. For example, if the research focuses on identity, the analyst may prioritise *Participants*, *Acts*, and *Setting* (PAS) to explore individuals' actions and behaviours, thereby determining their membership and role within a speech community during communicative events.



## Conclusion

Dell Hymes's *ethnography of communication* marked a paradigm shift in linguistic studies by moving beyond structuralist and cognitive approaches to embrace the social, cultural, and contextual dimensions of language. Through concepts such as the **speech community**, **communicative competence**, and the **SPEAKING model**, Hymes demonstrated that effective communication depends not only on grammatical knowledge but also on cultural norms, social roles, and pragmatic appropriateness. His interdisciplinary framework, which draws from anthropology, linguistics, sociology, and pragmatics, continues to provide a powerful lens for analysing discourse, highlighting language as a dynamic social practice that reflects and shapes human interaction.

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