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CHAPTER – 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

In Saudi Arabia, Grammar - Translation Method has been extensively practiced by teachers in schools and colleges but it has not been effective at all. Consequently it has not made any impact on the overall strategies of communicating in English as a Foreign language. In other words, the method could make no significant contribution in relation to the ability of developing Saudi Students' oral communicative competence. However, it was assumed that the mastery of the grammatical structures will enable the Saudi students to achieve their objectives of communication in real communicative situations.

Therefore, there was an emphasis on teaching and learning the rules of grammar and long lists of vocabulary translated into the learners' native language. Reading and writing were the major focus: little or no systematic attention is paid to listening and speaking. As a result, Saudi students have developed the ability to produce correct grammatical sentences but they lack the skills of communicating in the target language. Richards (1992: 161) states that:

*Because the Grammar - Translation method emphasizes reading rather than the ability to communicate in a language, there was a reaction to it in the 19th century and later there was a greater emphasis on the teaching on spoken languages.*

It is believed that learners who are familiar with the grammar of the second language and have a good sense of vocabulary still 'fail' or in other words, let themselves down in real conversation.
Hatch (1978) is of the view that if one learns how to converse, one learns how to interact verbally, and out of this verbal interaction syntactic structures are developed. Dornyei and Thurrell (1994) and Bhatia (1998) consider learners' interaction in the classroom as a 'key factor' in the process of acquiring the second language as well as one that enables learners to solve communication problems that they may encounter in real communicative situations.

This means that learner's grammatical competence can be developed through interaction, and not vice-versa. However, this does not devalue the importance of grammar, but it shows that students will not be able to communicate merely by their mastery of the rules of grammar of the second language as is the case of the teaching situation in Saudi Arabia. This means the ability to use language or 'Communicative Competence' (CC) which in turn enables them to acquire a variety of competencies such as Linguistic Competence, Discourse Competence, 'Sociolinguistic Competence and Strategic Competence.

1.1 COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

The term "Communicative Competence" was coined by Dell Hymes (1972) a sociolinguist who was convinced that Chomsky's (1965) notion of competence was limited. In view of Chomsky's (1965) strong claim that competence is to be associated exclusively with a knowledge of the rules of grammar, Hymes (1972) proposed a broader notion of competence, that of communicative competence. This notion intends to include not only grammatical competence (implicit and explicit knowledge of the rules of grammar) but also sociolinguistic competence (knowledge of the rules of language used). He is (ibid) of the view that there are rules of grammar that would be useless without rules of language used.
1.1.1 Definition of Communicative Competence

Richards (1992:65) defines Communicative Competence as:

The ability not only to apply the grammatical rules of a language in order to form grammatically correct sentences but also to know when and where to use these sentences and to whom.

Ellis (1994:13) indicates that:

Communicative competence includes knowledge that speaker has of what constitutes appropriate as well as correct language behavior and also of what constitutes effective language behavior in relation to particular communicative rules.

Littlewood (1981:87) defines Communicative Competence as:

A degree of mastery of a very considerable range of linguistic meaning and appropriacy in language and his or her ability to develop effective strategies for communicating in the second language.

Savignon (1983: 9) is of the view that:

Communicative Competence is relative, not absolute, and depends on the cooperation of all the participants involved.

Brown (1987 : 199) supports Savignon's idea. He says:

Communicative Competence is a dynamic interpersonal construct that can only be examined by means of the over performance of two or more individuals in the process of negotiating meaning.
According to Canale and Swain (1980) and later in Canale's (1983) definition, four different components or sub-categories make up the construction of Communicative Competence. The first two subcategories reflect the use of the linguistic system itself. "Grammatical Competence" is that aspect of Communicative Competence that encompasses knowledge of lexical items and rules of morphology, syntax, sentence-grammar semantics, and phonology. It is the competence that we associate with mastering the linguistic code of language or the "Linguistic Competence". The second subcategory is "Discourse Competence" the complement of grammatical competence in many ways. It is the ability to connect sentences in stretches of discourse and to form a meaningful whole out of a series of utterances. In other words, it focuses on discourse of supra-sentential (above the sentence) level - those properties of language which bind the sentences together such as cohesion and coherence; whereas grammatical competence focuses on sentence level grammar.

The last two subcategories define more functional aspects of communication. "Sociolinguistic Competence" is the knowledge of sociocultural rules. This type of competence requires an understanding of the social context in which language is used by participants, the information they share and the functions of the interaction. They are concerned with style, register, appropriateness (degree of politeness and so on).

The fourth subcategory is "Strategic Competence". Canale and Swain (1980 : 40) describe strategic competence as:

The verbal and nonverbal Communication Strategies that may be called into action to compensate for breakdown in communication due to performance variable or due to insufficient competence.
Savignon (1983: 40-41) paraphrases this as:

The strategies that one uses to compensate for imperfect knowledge of rules- or limiting factors in their application such as fatigue, distraction and inattention. In short, it is the competence underlying our ability to make repairs, to cope with imperfect knowledge, and to sustain communication through paraphrase, circumlocution, repetition, etc.

The components of communicative competence can be illustrated as follows:

1. Grammatical Competence
   
   Linguistic Competence

2. Discourse Competence

3. Sociolinguistic Competence

   Functional Competence

4. Strategic Competence

Though Communicative Approach came as a reaction against the traditional methods and sought to improve learners' Communicative Competence, it can be noted that more and more materials in modern course books are designed to develop 'Linguistic Competence' in the learners. On the other hand, 'Strategic Competence' which is regarded as the most important element in communication is utterly neglected. Therefore, learners' Communicative Competence cannot be improved merely by developing some of its components (i.e. Grammatical Competence and Discourse Competence) which represents the linguistic system. Thus, activating strategic competence is of crucial importance to foreign language learners. Researchers in this field indicate that a lack of strategic competence may account for situations when students get stuck and are unable to carry out their communicative intent.
Nunan (1987: 136) has pointed out this phenomenon, he says:

While a great deal has been written on the theory and practice of communicative language teaching, there have been comparatively few studies of actual communicative language practice.

1.1.2 Definition of Strategic Competence

Richards (1992: 354) defines strategic competence as:

An aspect of Communicative Competence which describes the ability of speakers to use verbal and non-verbal communication strategies to compensate for breakdown in communication or to improve the effectiveness of communication. For example, a learner may lack a particular word or structure and may have to use a paraphrase or circumlocution to compensate.

This indicates that, communication strategies are the means of strategic competence, and that the use of strategy is called for only when the learner faces some problems in a communicative situation. Varadi (1992: 137) points out that "the original insight into communication strategies was based on a mismatch between communicative intention and linguistic resources". This implies that communication strategies are used only when a speaker perceives that there is a problem which might interrupt communication.

In fact, strategic competence occupies a special place in understanding communication. It is the way we manipulate language in order to achieve our communicative goals. Paribakht (1985) conducted an empirical study in which she investigated the Strategic Competence in relation to language proficiency. She compared native and non-native speakers' Communicative Strategies (CS) used in a task which required the subjects to describe concrete and abstract concepts (e.g., Palanquin and Hammock versus Fate and Honesty). The study involved 60 subjects, 20 native speakers of English, and two of CS used by the
three groups was minimal. The groups did differ, however, in the relative frequency with which they used a number of CS types. In comparison with advanced learners and native speakers, initial learners made more use of their knowledge of the world and of paralinguistic knowledge (i.e., mime and gestures) when they had to compensate for the limitations of their linguistic knowledge. This led Paribakht to conclude that CS use and L2 proficiency levels are related.

Chen (1990: 156) states that:

One can develop learners' Communicative Competence by building up their strategic competence, that is their ability to use Communicative Strategies that allow them to cope with various communication problems that they might encounter.

Chen (ibid) conducted a study on 12 Chinese learners to explore the relationship between learners' language proficiency and their Strategic Competence. He adopted a concept-identification task as the communicative task. There were 24 concepts 12 concrete and 12 abstract; each concept within the concrete and abstract category had the same difficulty level. Each subject was required to communicate two concrete and two abstract concepts from the 24 to a native speaker interlocutor in an interview situation. The subjects were asked to convey the items to the native speakers, who did not know which concepts were being transmitted - without using the exact target words so that they were forced to make use of CSs. The native speaker's task was to identify the concept and at the same time to rank the communicative effectiveness of the strategy used to convey each concept. The major findings were:

1. The frequency of the CSs employed by the Chinese EFL learners in their target language communication was found to vary according to their proficiency level. The CSs employed by the low-proficiency learners significantly outnumbered those employed by the high proficiency learners.
2. The relative frequency with which Chinese EFL learners selected different types of CSs in their target language communication was found to vary according to their proficiency level. Linguistic-based CSs were more frequently employed by the high-proficiency learners whereas knowledge-based and repetition CSs were more extensively used by the low-proficiency learners.

3. A positive relationship was found between the Chinese EFL learners' proficiency level and their communicative effectiveness. High proficiency learners were more efficient in their use of CSs than were low-proficiency learners.

4. Not only the language proficiency, but also the language distance between the learners' and L1 and L2 was found to affect their choice of CSs. No obvious L1-based CSs were employed by Chinese EFL learners of both high and low proficiency due to the lack of formal similarity between the learners' L1 (Chinese) and L2 (English).

So far, the most comprehensive study of CS is the one conducted by the University of Nijmegen researchers (Poulisse 1990). The Nijmegen project was set up to investigate the proficiency effect, the relationship between CS use in L1 and L2 and the effectiveness of various CS types. Only compensatory strategies were studied.

The project involved 45 Dutch learners of English at three different proficiency levels. They were tested on four tasks which required the subjects (a) to refer to 20 photographed objects for which they did not know the conventional English Names, (b) to describe 12 novel graphic designs both in Dutch and in English, (c) to retell in English four one-minute stories told to the subjects in Dutch, and (d) to have a fifteen-minute conversation with a native speaker of English. The data collected this way totaled 35 hours of speech (# approximately 110,000 words).
The results from this study indicate that the proficiency effect is more subtle than that suggested in previous studies. Although the least proficient subjects clearly used most CSs, they did not always use transfer strategies.

These findings indicate a positive relationship between the learners' language proficiency and their Strategic Competence. Therefore, it seems possible to develop students' communicative competence by increasing their Strategic Competence and that can be achieved by using CSs which construct the mechanism of Strategic Competence.

1.2 SPEAKING AND SPEAKING PROFICIENCY

There are some overlaps between these terms: speaking, speaking proficiency, oral proficiency, oral fluency, oral production and oral communication in the literature. Therefore, I use in this study 'oral communicative competence' as a blanket term to avoid the confusion that may occur. This discussion will lead to the characteristics of a good communicator as defined by different writers.

The term 'speaking' is used in the literature to mean different things. It means 'oral production' if speaking is listed as one of the four language skills: Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. This means of the term 'speaking' dominated ELT and FLT. Textbooks are based on this kind of division (classification) of language skills. Learners of foreign languages as well as a big number of teachers if asked to give the meaning of 'speaking' would probably say 'producing speech'. The other meaning of 'speaking' in the literature is 'oral communication'. This is clear from some language testing literature. Under the title 'Testing Spoken Language' the tasks designed involve both production and reception. The third meaning is a kind of disguised one. Some literature on language testing labels 'speaking' as production and reception but the focus is on oral production. So the problem here is that a precise definition of the term speaking is lacking.
The description and definition of the term 'speaking proficiency' suffers from the same confusion associated with the term 'speaking'. One of the main sources for describing 'speaking proficiency' is the literature on language testing. But as mentioned above there are two types of description of 'speaking proficiency': one that involves both 'production' and reception and the one focusing on 'production' only.

As a result of this confusion some authors use alternative terms for 'speaking proficiency'. One of those prevalent terms is 'fluency' Lennon (1990). Lennon points out that the term 'fluency' has two senses in the literature - a 'narrow sense' and a 'broad sense'. The narrow sense refers to 'fluency' as 'one of the criteria of Oral Proficiency' and the broad sense is 'oral proficiency'. The latter sense of the term was used by some authors who wrote extensively about 'fluency', e.g. Fillmore (1979), Leeson (1975), and Brumfit (1984). In the following sub-section more details will be given about these approaches to studying and analyzing speaking and speaking proficiency.

Widdowson (1978) makes a distinction between "Language Usage" and "Language Use". "Usage" is the manifestation of the language system, both phonological and grammatical. 'Use' is the use of language for a communicative purpose. When discussing the term 'speaking' he points out that this term could be an example of 'Usage' or 'Use'. Some of the examples he has given to clear this distinction are the following:

- She speaks slowly and distinctly.
- She speaks frankly about her marital difficulties.

The first example is one of 'Usage', while the second is an example of 'Use'. The first example shows the 'manner in which language is manifested'. The second one indicates 'the manner in which language is realized as communication'. Then he prefers to reserve the term 'speaking' for 'usage' and he used another term for use: 'talking'. 'Talking' here means both production and reception, i.e. reciprocal act.
Bygate (1987) sees speaking as a skill which is made up of two skills:

(1) Motor - Perceptive Skill: 'Involving perceiving, recalling and articulating in the correct order sounds and structures of the language'. He continues. This is relatively superficial aspect of skill which is a bit like learning how to manipulate the controls of a car on a deserted piece of road far from the flow of normal traffic. It is the context-free kind of skill.....[p.5]

(2) Interaction skill: He suggests that:

Good communicator should also be able to say what he wants to say in a way which the listener finds understandable by using skills like: 1) Using conventional routines (information routines and interaction routines and 2) Negotiation skills (negotiation of meaning and management of interaction [p.22]

Bygate seems to focus on oral production when he speaks of how to convey meaning and how to adjust one's talk to the need of the listener. He also focuses on interaction skills such as turn taking, negotiating meaning etc.,

Nunan (1989) speaks of 'speaking' as one of the four language skills and as a skill which is interactive in nature. The example he gives of the traditional meaning speaking, 'oral production', is 'giving a lecture'. But he focuses much on the interactional nature of speaking. He summarizes the requirements of developing successful oral communication as follows:

- 'the ability to articulate phonological features of the language comprehensibly',
- 'mastery of stress, rhythm, intonation patterns,'
- 'an acceptable degree of fluency,'
- 'transactional and interpersonal skills',

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Fillmore (1979) speaks on fluency with exclusive reference to production. He suggests four types of native-speaker fluency:

1) 'the ability to fill time with talk,'
2) 'the ability to talk in coherent, reasoned and 'semantically dense' sentences,'
3) 'the ability to have appropriate things to say in a wide range of contents,' and
4) 'the ability to be creative and imaginative in language use' [p.93]

Brumfit (1984), who discusses fluency and accuracy points out that this definition and characterization of fluency is very useful and it signifies a deep underlying approach to the nature of language learning and language use. He makes a comparison between Fillmore's (1997) and Leesson's (1975:136) characterization of fluency.

Leeson defines fluency as:

The ability of the speaker to produce indefinitely many sentences conforming to the phonological, syntactical and semantic exigencies of a given natural language on the basis of a finite exposure to a finite corpus of that language.

As Brumfit suggests, this definition is more inclined towards 'accuracy and 'form'. On the other hand, Crystal (1975: 85) deals with fluency as one of the criteria of good conversational language. He suggests the following criteria for good conversational language.
1. 'fluency'
2. 'intelligibility' and
3. 'appropriateness'.

1.3 FACTORS AFFECTING SAUDI STUDENTS' ORAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

1.3.1 Learner's Attitudes, Expectations and Learning Styles

Most language teachers agree that motivation of students is one of the most important factors influencing their success or failure in learning the language. Motivation in language learning can be defined in terms of the learners' overall goal or orientation.

Gardner and Lambert (1972) Ellis (1985) distinguish three types of 'motivations', 'instrumental motivation', which occurs when the learner's goal is functional (e.g. to get a job or pass an examination), and 'integrative motivation', which occurs when the learner wishes to identify with the culture of the second language group. The third kind of motivation is 'task motivation' the interest felt by the learner in performing different learning tasks.

However, it can be stated that most of the Saudi learners seem to have instrumental motivation for learning English. They deal with English just as a school subject, nevertheless some of them seem to be aware of the fact that English is an international language and that it is needed for their future performance.

With regard to attitudes, this can be defined in relation to the learners who have sets of beliefs about such factors as the target language culture and their own culture. These beliefs are referred to as 'attitudes'. For instance, it is widely believed that, if a learner believes strongly that his/her own culture is superior to other cultures, he/she will probably not be a good language learner.
This, indeed, plays an important role in the learning of the second/foreign language and at the same time leads to some other constraints, such as, lack of interest and boredom, resistance to any teaching and learning techniques and failure in achieving any progress in the target language.

White (1989) believes that if we want to teach communicatively in a traditional setting we have to be aware of the learner's expectations about the process of language and teaching and items to be taught.

According to Johnson (1983), the students come to class with specific assumptions about language learning. They may believe that the most effective way of learning a language is by receiving clear rules for writing sentences or through rote memorization of vocabulary and structure charts.

Knapper (1987) states that some students want traditional didactic teaching which thus encourages passivity and adoption of 'surface' learning techniques because it is easier for them. What they need however is to be equipped with appropriate lifelong learning skills.

However, learning a foreign language, for most Saudi students, means memorizing and repeating after the teacher. This reflects the traditional learning and teaching methods in Saudi Arabia to a very large extent. From a very early age children use rote methods of learning as they learn the 'Holy Koran' and once these methods have been successfully employed, they try the same ones with other subjects as well as the foreign language. For example, when the learners come to study their first language 'Arabic' they learn many grammatical rules and structures by heart without knowing in many cases how to use these rules and structures. Therefore, when they come to study the foreign language, they expect that the same methods and techniques can be applied for learning the target language.
1.3.2. Teachers' Proficiency and Attitude

In Saudi Arabia, most of the teachers of English come from other Arab countries where English is studied as a foreign language. Usually, there are three distinct categories of such teachers. The first group comprises teachers who hold ESL or EFL teaching qualifications. The second group is made up of teachers of other subjects such as History and Geography but who have no specific qualifications in the teaching of English language. These are people who teach English by virtue of being able to speak it themselves. The third group are those teachers who apart from not having any formal training in the teaching of English are also inexperienced teachers.

Keeping the teachers' proficiency and attitude in mind, it is necessary to mention that most of the teachers of the first group do not have a good command of the language itself regardless of their 'out-dated' methods of teaching. They make many pronunciation mistakes and the learners pick up these mistakes by imitating their teachers who are the best models around. Teachers hardly use English outside the classroom in real life communicative situations.

Usually, teachers feel more secure and relaxed when they use the methods that they have been using and are familiar with, specially those who have been teaching English for a long time in Saudi Arabia.

1.3.3. Parent's Attitude

There are some parents who simply hate the idea of their children having to learn English, and at home they say negative things about the subject to the hearing of their children. Some of our students are, as a result of influence of their parents, led to think that learning English means acquiring a foreign culture and considering this culture superior to their own Saudi culture. Thus, parental attitudes have negative effects on teaching and learning English in the Saudi classes.
1.3.4. Learner's Inhibition

Due to the factors mentioned earlier in the above section, such as untrained and incompetent teachers, negative attitudes of the parents towards the target language and so forth inhibit the learners. They can never attain speaking proficiency in the target language with such negative factors working against them. They just feel English as a burden imposed on them by the educational institutions. There is no incentive for integrative students to the extent that they do not dare to open their mouths in the class because of the fear of punishment and humiliation in front of the whole class. Naturally if students are not encouraged and unless the teachers adopt a more positive attitude, the students will always feel inhibited to use the language.

1.3.5. Classroom organization

Organization of classes is especially vital because the way a class is organized effects learning and teaching. In Saudi Arabia, school classes are not organized in a way that helps learners to communicate easily, to do tasks together and to learn from each other's experience. Moreover, group work and pair work which are regarded the most important modes in teaching the foreign/second language are not common. Choral practice and mechanical drilling are widely used in teaching English in Saudi schools.

Large classes are a serious problem in Saudi schools and that is due to the high demand for education all over the country. For example, classrooms that were built to accommodate forty to fifty students, at present accommodate more than one hundred and twenty, especially in the main cities. This causes a lot of difficulties for teachers as well as students. For example, a teacher finds it difficult to monitor/help those students who are at the back of the class because he/she cannot even walk or move in the classroom easily.
The organization of group work in Saudi Arabia is very similar to Forrestors' (1964) ideas; the class is organized into sections - either by rows running across the class or by blocks running from back to front. This way of organization is not effective compared to other ways of organizing group and pair work, because the principles underlying these approaches attempts to help learners to learn successfully with focus on learners' autonomy in their learning as well facilitating communication among learners.

Bibic (1974) and Taska (1978) are of the view that group work breaks the traditional of lock-step teacher-centered classroom, and paves the way for more individualized attention, more communicative use of language in personalized peer-centered exchange. Bernard's (1986) believes that pair work encourages fluency and enables students to speak at length without being constantly interrupted by their teachers, obsessed with grammatical accuracy.

1.3.6. Faulty Examination System

Examination is an important element. Its importance is obvious because it provides positive feedback to the teachers as to the progress of the students. There is a close link between classroom methodology and examination. They are mutually complementary and both have to be changed or revised. For example, if the examination results are not satisfactory it implies that the methodology has to be reviewed and a change brought in accordingly.

In Saudi, all English examinations are grammar-based, reading comprehension, vocabulary definition, etc. Such kind of testing is indeed related to what is taught - grammatical correctness or accuracy; this is what teachers teach their students and expect them to memorize and learn by heart in order to pass their final examinations by the end of the school year. Students' speaking ability is not evaluated at all and therefore it is completely neglected by teachers and students. The Saudi examination does not seem to be making any difference between language tests and tests in history or other subjects. In fact the whole evaluation system including the question paper, question settings, and marking system is not at all sensitive to the nature of language teaching/learning and the performance evaluation techniques.
For instance, the communicative approach is concerned with the belief that, as Brumfit and Johnson (1979:204) put it: 'testing (as teaching) must be concerned not only with 'ability to use it'. We must do more, that is, than ask the student whether he knows that Exponent X is appropriate to Intent Y in context Z; we must find out whether he is able to produce Exponent X when he intends Y in context Z". According to this view, not only accuracy that is tested, but also fluency and appropriacy. In other words, students are tested on levels, use and usage.

1.4. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Saudi students join the Saudi universities with the same mentioned expectations, attitudes and rote learning styles that they have adopted in the primary stages of learning English.

This situation continues at the tertiary level where students try to apply the same traditional methods and techniques for improving their speaking abilities and that result in low achievement of oral communicative competence. This phenomenon becomes more prominent at the tertiary level because students are expected to master speaking ability at this level before they become teachers of English at the preparatory and secondary schools. At the same time, students become more aware of the problems and difficulties they encounter in the target language and as a result they avoid communicating with proficient speakers of English in real communicative situations even after their graduation and even after when they became teachers of English.

1.5. RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

The Saudi students' low achievement in oral communicative competence at the tertiary level has always been the main concern of the mass media, experts and advisors of English language in Saudi Arabia. Moreover, Saudi students of English complain that they feel disappointed because they have not achieved the expected standard even after they had spent some years of study at the Saudi universities and colleges.
Bernards (1988: 20) described this situation. He indicates:

Saudi teachers of English face many serious problems when communicating orally with proficient speakers of English and that is due to the traditional methods of teaching the target language in the Saudi schools and universities.

AL-Sayed's (1993:69) observation regarding the low standard of English language in all Gulf countries too expresses a similar concern:

Indeed, school English instruction in the Gulf countries cannot legitimately be expected to produce students who are proficient in English, in English literature, or any other content area, in this languages. The quality of graduates of even English Departments in the Gulf universities remains a subject of concern among several groups: the students themselves do not feel secure in the use of English after four years of course work in English literature and language;

The need for research in this area therefore arises from the problems and obstacles those Saudi students of English encounter when they are involved in real communicative situations. This study will be relevant to the entire Saudi society, since the subjects selected for the study are those teachers - trainees who will become later teachers of English at preparatory and secondary levels in Saudi Arabia.

1.6 HYPOTHESES

The researcher hypothesizes that there is a correlation between:

1. The students' low oral proficiency and traditional teaching methods,
2. The students' low oral proficiency and lack of communication strategies,
3. The students' low oral proficiency and lack of learning strategies,
4. The students' low oral proficiency and lack of exposure to the target and its culture.
1.7 BASIC RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

Which of the following factors affect the Saudi students' oral communicative competence most and lead to communication breakdown?

1. Traditional methods of teaching
2. Lack of communication strategies
3. Lack of learning strategies
4. Lack of exposure to the target language and its culture.

1.8 SELECTION OF THE TERTIARY LEVEL

The selection of the tertiary level is based on the following two reasons:

Firstly, in Saudi teaching situation, preparatory and secondary schools, teachers have no control over the choice of textbooks or materials prescribed for their students. This is always the choice of the Ministry of Education. Therefore, teachers of English at these stages are compelled to follow a rigid syllabus according to specific plans prescribed by the Ministry of Education. This situation is different at the Saudi Colleges and Universities. Here, teachers are free to select and adopt the materials that suit their teaching situation. This flexibility paves the way of any recommendations, suggestions or remedial work to be implemented in the English Departments/English Language Centers easily to develop students' oral communicative competence.

To sum up, it is hoped that this study will find out the main reasons behind Saudi students' low oral communicative competence which apparently lead to their communication breakdown in real communicative situations with competent speakers of English and non-Arab speakers. At the same time it will help to raise their awareness of the usefulness of communication strategies in overcoming their difficulties and solving communication problems that may occur in the target language.
Secondly, data have been collected from the students who have come from different parts of the country to study in Eastern provinces of Saudi Arabia: Eastern Province represented by the students and the teachers of King Faisal University, and students and the teachers of Dammam Teacher’s College so that the findings of the present study can be validated and applied to the other Saudi Universities as the English language situation is the same.