



## Introduction

In the field of language teaching and learning, be that first, second or a foreign language, competence is a synonym for proficiency or abilities (Hadley, 2001). Over recent decades, the definition of competence has evolved in accordance with various theories on languages and learning. A number of scholars, however, have urged that in this new era, a whole new definition is required for the type of competence that can adapt to current needs. This paper argues for semiotics competence as new indicator of proficiency for EFL learners in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This paper will first review the existing theory of competence and methods, introduces the definition of semiotics competence, and new definition of it. This paper will present curriculum that support semiotics competence, and evidences that how this supports semiotics competence. The purpose is to create some changes for EFL learning and teaching.

## Existing Theories of Competence

When language learning is framed by structural linguistics or behaviorist learning, as was popular in the mid-twentieth century, it is regarded as learning observable and measurable pieces of language through imitation, repetition, memorization and reinforcement (Brown, 2000; Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Competence in language during that particular era was therefore conceptualized either as “structural accuracy” (Hadley, 2001), or as the ability to accurately master language elements. From this perspective, language is a static object,



form, or product out there for language learners to acquire, and language learning is to learn a language per se or to gain correct language forms. Many learning processes completely neglect language learners as a critical variable. Therefore, this approach measures success in language learning according to the number of correct language forms that language learners learn.

In contrast to such structural linguistics and behaviorist learning, Chomsky, the innatist proposed that competence was one's implicit knowledge of a language system, and performance was one's overt production (Brown, 2000). To Chomsky, competence was seen as the state of an idealized "speaker-listener" and was universal, whereas performance varied (Brown, 2000; Savignon, 1997); thus, to Chomsky, linguistic competence was implicit and essentially an innate capacity incapable of being measured. From this perspective, language is ingrained in learners and is universal, and language learning is an innate process taking place in a "black box" in the brain. Competence is an innate capacity that is difficult to measure.

Unlike Chomsky, Hyme's position on competence in language focused on real speaker-listener "language in use" and "social interaction," with competence to Hyme being "both tacit knowledge and ability for use" (Savignon, 1997). What Hyme was proposing was communicative competence, which involves not only knowledge of linguistic code (linguistic competence), but also knowledge of the use of language in an appropriate context (sociolinguistic competence), and the cohesive and coherent use of language (strategic competence) (Savignon, 1997). Competence therefore varies according to, and dependent upon, the abilities of those using the language in various