

ASPECTS OF COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN A LANGUAGE TEACHING

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ABSTRAK

Tujuan dari paper ini adalah untuk mendiskusikan secara ringkas tentang dua aspek dari '*communicative competence*' yang sangat penting dalam pengajaran bahasa asing. Kedua aspek tersebut adalah *grammatical competence* dan *sociolinguistics competence* yang merupakan hal yang penting dalam pengajaran bahasa asing yang digunakan sesuai dengan topik situasi dan interaksi orang yang menggunakan bahasa asing tersebut. Disamping itu, bentuk bahasa dalam bentuk grammar juga harus diajarkan secara bersama karena arti dan fungsi bahasa tersebut sangat berpengaruh dalam berkomunikasi baik secara verbal maupun non-verbal. Dalam pengajaran bahasa asing, pemilihan penggunaan bahasa yang tepat (*appropriate language*) sangat berpengaruh dalam kemampuan berkomunikasi khususnya dalam pengajaran bahasa asing.

Kata kunci: *Communicative competence and performance, appropriateness, grammatical competence*

A. INTRODUCTION

In class in practice, the communicative language teaching, as Johnson (1981:10) says, acknowledges the teaching of communicative competence as its aim. As such, it distinguishes itself from the traditional approach which stresses heavily on the teaching structural competence, and which leads to the discontent among educators, teachers, and applied

linguists. For example, it was Newmark (1966) who speaks of the structurally competent students who are unable to perform a simple communicative task. It is then apparent that the competence to produce grammatically correct sentences is not enough in itself as Hymes (1972) states that 'There are rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless'.

The main aim of this paper is to discuss briefly the theory of communicative competence and justify the two aspects of it to be considered in a language teaching.

B. A BRIEF DESCRIPTION ON THE THEORY OF COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

The terms ‘Communicative Competence’ seems to be a loose term which can be interpreted by different writers for different purposes. Rooted from the work of Chomsky (1965), then developed by Hymes in 1972, the term now has become a catch phrase for everyone who engages in syllabus and teaching material design, applied linguistics, and classroom practice. It is Chomsky (1965) who originally proposes the notion of competence and performance in which the first refers to knowledge of grammar and of other aspects of language or the ideal speaker and listener’s knowledge of the language; while the latter refers to the actual use of language in concrete situations [Chomsky 1965:4, quoted by Taylor, 1988:149]/

Hymes (1972) contributes his ideas on communicative competence and criticizes Chomsky’s notion on competence and performance which disregards the fact that one of the things one knows about the language is how to use it appropriately. He objects in particular to the ‘absence of a place for sociocultural factors and the linking of performance to imperfection’ (Hymes, 1972:272, quoted by Taylor, 1988:154).

According to Hymes communicative competence is the ‘implicit and explicit knowledge of the rules of grammar and knowledge of the rules of language use’ (Hymes 1972, quoted by Canale and Swan, 1980).

Unlike Chomsky, Hymes does not imagine that the speech community is homogeneous, instead the speakers include non – native speakers or second language learners.

The theory of communicative competence he suggests consists of four types of knowledge:

1. Whether (and to what degree) something is formally possible;

2. Whether (and to what degree) something is feasible;
3. Whether (and to what degree) something is appropriate;
4. Whether (and to what degree) something is in fact done.

From his suggesting, one might infer that the knowledge of communicative competence he proposes includes the grammatical / structural knowledge or linguistic competence and the sociolinguistic competence which concerns with the idea of appropriateness according to the context in which the language is used. It is apparent that he does not ignore the importance of structural knowledge in the realization of communicative competence. In other words, one might say that the communicative competence he proposes consist of, at least, two aspects, namely, the grammatical (linguistic) and the sociolinguistic aspect. And both are related to each other very closely as Hymes (1972) says that there are rules of grammar that would be useless without rules of language use and Canale and Swain (1980) states that there are rules of language use that

would be useless without rules of grammar.

They then, after discussing the term 'communicative competence' conclude that 'communicative competence' refers to the relationship and interaction between grammatical competence, knowledge of the rules of grammar and sociolinguistic competence, or knowledge of the rules of language use. Canale and Swain also conclude that communicative competence should be distinguished from communicative performance, which is the realization of these competencies and their interaction in the actual production and comprehension of utterances (1980:6).

As different writers interpret the term 'competence' in different ways for different purposes, Taylor (1988) tries to draw a distinction between competence and proficiency in which the first refers to the static concept, having to do with structure or form, whereas the latter is essentially a dynamic concept concerning with the process and function. Performance is the what is done when proficiency is put to use. Since the term

'communicative competence' has been abused that it has lost its precise meaning ('ability to perform'), he then proposes to replace it with 'communicative proficiency', which has a number of components, such as 'grammatical competence', together with the associated 'grammatical proficiency', and 'pragmatic competence' together with 'pragmatic proficiency' and 'strategic competence' with 'strategic proficiency'.

One might argue here that the term 'performance' introduced by Chomsky also implies the knowledge of proficiency possessed by the speaker in trying to convey information in a real communication, since the actual use of language in a concrete situation requires the knowledge of proficiency of that language. This means that there is no real difference between the term 'performance' and 'proficiency' in that both refer to dynamic concepts of putting the competence knowledge into use.

Richards (1983) also tries to interpret Hymes' idea in communicative competence. According to him,

Hymes' notion includes the idea of appropriateness and knowledge of different communicative strategies or communicative styles according to the situation, the task and the roles of the participants. Besides, the choice of an appropriate strategy for performing a speech act depends on the age, sex, familiarity, and roles of the speaker and hearer.

Concerning appropriateness, Johnson (1981:11) explains that it must conform to the students' aims, to the role relationship between the interlocutors, to the setting, topic, linguistic context.

Based on Hymes' idea, applied linguists, syllabus and materials designers later develop the syllabus, teaching methodology and materials, and even the theory of communicative competence. For example, Munby (1978), Yalden (1978), Canale and Swain (1980), Johnson and Morrow (1981), Brumfit and Johnson (1979).

Canales and Swain (1980) proposes the theory of communicative competence which minimally includes three main competencies:

Grammatical, Sociolinguistic and Strategic competencies.

Grammatical competence includes knowledge of lexical items and rules of morphology, syntax, phonology. While, sociolinguistic competences consists of two sets of rules: sociocultural rules of use which specify the ways in which utterances are produced and understood appropriately with respect to the actual components of communicative events outlined by Hymes, and rules of discourse which combines utterances and communicative functions. Concerning the strategic competence, it is made up of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies that may be called into action to compensate for breakdowns in communication due to performance variables or to insufficient competence. There are two main types of these strategies: those that relate primarily to grammatical competence and those that relate more to sociolinguistic competence (Canale and Swain, 1980:pp 28-31)

Commenting on the strategic competence, Stern (1978) points out that competence is most likely to be

acquired through experience in real-life communication situations and not through the classroom practice that involves no meaningful communication.

From what has been discussed above, one might sum up that the communicative competence consists of two aspects which are closely related and interacted to each other, namely the structural / grammatical / linguistic and the social / sociolinguistic competence. Both are of fundamental importance in the whole area of language teaching. The linguistic competence concerns with the language form, whereas the sociolinguistic competence concerns with the appropriateness, that is, how to use the language appropriately according to the topic, situation, and the people involved in the interaction. And, in my opinion, the teacher should take into account these two competencies in his/her procedures or activities in teaching a language. The language form must be taught because meaning and function are expressed through form and without form there could be no communication, either

verbally or non-verbally. On the other hand, when one uses the language, one tries to be able to perceive the social situation in which one is operation and to be able to match the language one uses to the situation. And for the foreign language learners, there is a double task: to be able to perceive the situation and to be able to select appropriate language. Therefore, considering those two aspects of communicative competence in the area of communicative language teaching, the learners should be helped to produce grammatically correct sentences which are presented as a communicative system in a context of use and so as an integral part of the patterns of social behavior. In other words, the teacher should set up communication activities which enable the students to experiment with any language items and to see how far they can communicate with them in situations where all the choices of language used are made by the people engaged in the communication.

In order to achieve a successful communication in the classroom, Morrow (1981:60:66) mentions five

principles of communicative methodology that should be carried out.

1. Know what you are doing
Exactly activity performed by the teacher should be based on the learners' needs. The teacher should know what the students might actually want to perform in the foreign language.

2. The whole is more than the sum of the parts.

This principle concerns with the ability to deal with strings of sentences and ideas in the real mode and which must be processed in 'real' time. The students should be able to work with stretches of language above the sentences level, with real language in real situations. This needs the ability to perform the synthetic and analytical procedures.

3. The processes are as important as the forms.

There are three processes which can be isolated or incorporated in teaching procedures.

First, information gap in which one student must tell another something that the second student does not already know. This is analogue with the real communication in real life where communication takes place between two or more speakers one of whom knows something that is unknown to the other /s.

Second, choice, and this means that the students have choice in terms of what they will say and how they will say it. They have to choose not only what ideas they want to express, but also what appropriate language forms are to be selected. Deciding on these under time pressure is an aspect of communicative ability which the students should always practice.

Third, feedback. When two speakers involve in the interaction, there is an aim in their minds that should be reached. The tactic and strategies exploited in using the language are very important in

acquiring successful communication. This means that the students should be given a lot of practice in using language for real purposes.

4. To learn it, do it.

This means that the students can learn to communicate if they are given an opportunity to practice communicative activities involving the stages of presentation, practice and production.

5. Mistakes are not always a mistake.

This means that the teacher should not always make criticism of what the students produce in order not to destroy their confidence in his ability to use the language.

Concerning the communicative activities, Li Xiauju (1984) proposes three conditions for any activity to be called 'communicative' /

1. There should be need, purpose and substance for communication.

2. There should be real situation and real roles. This means it needs a great deal of communication practice in real situation and real roles, and not false situation which do not produce mental reaction.

3. There should be freedom and unpredictability.

While, Harmer (1983) mentions seven activities for oral communicative activities, and six activities for written communicative activities. The seven activities for oral communicative ones are reaching a consensus, relaying instructions, communication games, problem solving, interpersonal exchange, story construction, simulation and role play. And the six activities for written communicative ones are relaying instruction, exchanging letters, writing games, fluency writing, story construction, and

writing reports and advertisements.

In short, as regards the communication activities which are based on the communicative methodology, one might say that these activities should cater for the learners' needs and which encourage the students to practice using language in real situations and real role, and which offer a greater freedom to them to select the language they would like to use. And, it is likely that the activities could be role play, simulation, games, problem – solving or information gap as they can express themselves quite freely.

C. CONCLUSION

In this paper I have outlined the theory of communicative competence and justified the two aspects of communicative aspects which are related and integrated to each other

that the language teacher cannot afford to neglect either aspect. The two aspects should be given high priority when teaching a language, and they should be taught using a communicative approach which stresses the importance of considering the learners and their needs. The teacher should lead them to become an independent or an autonomous persons.

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