STATUS OF SOCIOLINGUISTIC COMPETENCE WITHIN MODELS OF COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE.

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Abstract

In today's globalized society, the ability to express oneself in a foreign or second language is a vital skill. For a speaker to be able to be considered a bilingual speaker, he or she must have the capability to talk about any subject in any situation from the dinner table to a speech at the inaugural ball. According to the American Council on the Teaching on foreign Languages (ACTFL) scale for language proficiency, superior level of speaking means the learner is approaching such a capacity. To reach the superior level of speaking ability, one must be able to speak about abstract topics and speak appropriately in a wide variety of settings with very few errors. However, even after studying another language for many years, learners often **still never achieve this level of proficiency and have great difficulty in expressing themselves in** that language to a native speaker. Reasons for this continued difficulty in communicating in the second language can include problems with pronunciation, lack of knowledge on actual speech use of idiomatic expressions and slang, and learner differences in the ability to acquire language and in motivation to produce native-like speech. Another important contributing factor **for incompetence in the language is that the speaker does not know which utterances are** appropriate in the social situation in which he or she is speaking. This ability to adjust one's speech to fit the situation in which it is said is called *sociolinguistic competence,* and without this ability, even the most perfectly grammatical utterances can convey a meaning entirely different from that which the speaker intended.

Keyword's: communicative competence, non-linguistic, sociolects, sociolinguistic competence**,** perfectly, grammatical.

Introduction

The ability to speak a language that is not one's own has become a vital skill, and the world's politics and economy ride on the ability of individuals to effectively communicate across cultural boundaries. The

key to communication lies in successful expression of one's intended meaning, which is not always as easy as one would hope. All too often, students who have studied a foreign language for years will go to the country where that language is spoken only to find that despite years of study, they are still unable to express their meaning to native speakers. To make matters worse, the language learner may say a perfectly grammatical utterance that the native listener can understand, but the speaker might not know the normal social meaning communicated by such an utterance in the circumstance at hand in the target language culture.

For example, a Japanese learner of English living in the United States may wish to express extreme gratitude to someone, and uses the phrase "I am so sorry." In Japan, an apology can function as an intense way of giving thanks; however, a direct translation of such an utterance into English does not have the desired effect since English does not use apologies for expressing gratitude. What results is utter confusion, as the American listener wonders why the Japanese speaker is apologizing, and the Japanese speaker is hurt that the American did not acknowledge his giving of thanks.

The following chapter deals with the concept of communicative competence and its structure as it is necessary to understand relations between the segments that are related to sociolinguistic competence.

Hymes defines "competence as the most general term for the capabilities of a person" and that it "is dependent upon both knowledge and use." Moreover, Hymes explains the direct relationship between general interactional competence and linguistic competence. The first competence defines the role of the second. Hymes highlights the knowledge of distinction of verbal and nonverbal codes and their interrelation. Therefore it is important to take into account "the concept of performance" while discussing development of linguistic competences. There are the three aspects of communicative competence taken from Hymes: "grammatical possibilities in a language, feasibility and appropriateness".

In order to elucidate the concept of communicative competence, Canale and Swain (1980) and Bachman (1990) state the following dimensions of the competence: the grammatical, the psychological and the social which are to be included in language teaching and learning. In particular, Hymes (1972, p. 284) incorporated both "the rules of grammar and the rules of use" into the certain framework defined by answering question "Whether (and to what degree) something is formally possible, feasible, appropriate and done?" Canale and Swain's (1980, p.27) model of communicative competence consisting of grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence and communication strategies. Canale later

added discourse competence. Zhuang disagrees with the emphasis they place on appropriateness while restraining it just to the context and on the other hand, that they do not consider the grammatical accuracy to be equally important in the concept as other features. However, it is necessary to acquire sociolinguistic skills to complement "pedagogical application in communicative language teaching". The mentioned types of knowledge are bound to be interlinked by the communicative approach.

The third model of communicative competence is suggested by Bachman. It is represented by language competence, strategic competence and psychophysiological mechanism forming communicative language ability. Zhuang summarises that the theoretical framework of communicative competence focuses on three components: organizational competence, pragmatic competence and strategic competence. Zhuang describes organizational competence to be dealing with grammatical and contextual abilities. Pragmatic competence focuses as well as on "signs and the persons it refers to" and the relationship between them as on "the users of language and the context of communication".

Finally, Council of Europe in respect to these models identifies linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence which serve as aims of all teaching efforts elaborated in Companion Volume with New Descriptors to Common European Framework of Reference for Languages newly issued by Council of Europe.

In order to maintain interpersonal relationships, it is necessary to understand culturally deep-rooted ways of politeness used within each society. It is one of the main elements of sociolinguistic competence and therefore the following chapter focuses on this subject.

In a frame of social relations, non-native speakers want their status to be considered equal and therefore they are afraid to overstep social norms.(Kasper, 1990 p.1) The author claims that politeness needs to be viewed in a complex perspective of wide range of contexts - not only social, but also discoursal, cultural and historical (Kasper, 1990, p. 23). In addition to that, unmarked absence of politeness and marked opposite of rudeness point out those politeness forms and meanings mentioned by Kasper that indicate the fact that neither politeness nor rudeness can be considered independently by the virtue of the fact that they belong to a common continuum.

Comprehension of the politeness conception of the target language is one of the prerequisites of successful communication. Fraser refuses "normative perspective" of politeness, considering this category to be influenced by factors that are closely and specifically related to context and therefore it is not reasonable to form just a compilation of guidelines. Furthermore Fraser (1990, p. 219-236) advocates this

phenomenon to be perceived as an interactive concept applicable to all cultures. Another point to be taken into account is reliability of the concept and as such Fraser argues that conversational maxim point of view presented by Grice's Cooperative principle is not appropriate for the above-mentioned purpose because the maxims do not allow to assess influence in a more particular way.

And although, there is no definition to clearly identify the difference between linguistic and non-linguistic politeness , Fraser is convinced about the fact that the responsible attitude of the speaker towards the hearer in the interaction influences the decision which linguistic form to use. This approach is shared in face-saving and conversational-contract perspectives and for this reason Fraser decided to compare and contrast these two conceptions. The finally chosen Brown and Levinson's face - saving view, however, needs to be tested to reach viable theory of politeness. One of Fraser's final remarks regarding the better understanding of the notion of politeness is that we must take into consideration "what factors influence a speaker's choice to be heard as polite."

Hymes encapsulates this competence as the patterns of socioliolinguistic behaviour of the target language which represents the rules of speaking. Discussing the theory of sociolinguistic dimensions, Hymes analyses the concept of verbal repertoire suggested by Gumperz (1964); the concept of linguistic routines and the domains of language behaviour elaborated by Fishman (1966, p. 424-39). These three theories participate on clarifying the major aspects of the competence: the capacities of persons; the organisation of verbal means for socially defined purposes and the sensitivity of rules to situations.

Another point of view can be found in English Language teaching. Muniandy perceives sociolinguistic competence as sociocultural rules of language and discourse in which case it is important to understand the social context of the language consisting of the rules of participants, the shared information and the functions of the interaction. In this sense, one of the elements of the competence Muniandy regards is the sensitivity to dialect or variety of English in respect to the fact that Malaysian English variety has been classified as three 'sociolects' ranging from 'high' social to 'low' social dialect. And likewise, sensitivity to registers is mentioned to belong to capabilities influencing sociolinguistic understanding of any language.

Wolfson approves of the idea of different patterns of interaction existing within diverse speech communities whose members share understanding of adjusting the speech conduct according the particular situations. Besides considering what is appropriate to say and when including conversational topics and forms of address there are also

speech acts (e.g. greetings, compliments, apologies, invitations and complaints) that are to be used, interpreted and a suitable reaction needs to be chosen. Otherwise it can lead to communication failure to such extent that mutual trust can be damaged and further development of relationship almost impossible with the participants facing unintended insult, injustice or harm in spite of the speaker's intentions. Finally, Hymes' (1972) term of communicative interference can be likened to a literal translation of the rules of speaking of one speech community to another.

The claim of significant influence of distinctive features of society and its culture on its members in communication enlightens the role and importance of sociocultural competence.(Hasil et. all, 2006 p.182). All five levels of language (phonetics, morphology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics) are being modulated fundamentally by these aspects and for this reason they require assiduous attention in order to reach meaningful and effective communication in order to avoid communication misunderstanding.

As a conclusion of the above-mentioned ideas, it is the matter of fact that culture plays important role in the process of developing relations between the members of groups with different cultural identity. And therefore it is crucial to comprehend the notion of culture in its whole.

Objects, pictures and things a teacher brings may be miscellaneous and of different size, weight and colour. These materials are picked either intentionally or accidentally, nevertheless, even those chosen at random may be used for improvement of sociolinguistic skills if teacher has them in mind a priori. The following example adopted from Harmer (2012, p.177) illustrates how it can work. Objects chosen for activity can be: a napkin, a telephone number written on a piece of paper, a key and padlock, broken mobile (not used anymore), a pen, an elastic band, few coins and an earring. Pupils will be asked to take one of 'evocative' objects out of a non-transparent bag and invent a story using particular speech act/acts. They can either write it down or get ready to act the story out. Pictures as a means of teaching are very effective and flexible. (Harmer, 2012, p. 178) They can be found in magazines or books, teachers can draw them or take a picture of something real. Another option is to use them to create flashcards with different types of text added either front or back side and there are even sequences of pictures available online or as a comic stories the texts of which may be erased in order to give opportunity to pupils to fill them in with their own ideas. (Harmer, 2012, p. 178) The above-mentioned flashcards are especially relevant for drills according Harmer (2012, p. 178) and they can be used also for sociolinguistic markers (vocabulary, phrases, speech acts etc.); register differences; social conventions and habits. Pictures in

general possess a great potential to initiate speaking and writing activities that integrate productive skills needed for interpersonal and intercultural communication . (Harmer, 2012, p. 178) Pictures immediately decode message respecting relationships between people providing non-verbal information about their mimics, posture, mutual distance, gestures and other features etc. that illustrate the message, hence, they are very helpful in learning meaning. Besides the drills, pictures can be used for initiation of discussions or communication games, etc. (Harmer, 2012, p. 178) The only task for teacher is to link them with appropriate sociolinguistic item. Cards related to the subject matter are also suitable for matching, ordering or selecting (Harmer, 2012, p.180) an so they improve higher thinking processes that support pupils ability to analyse situations.

Course books have been occupying the most probably the number one in methodologists' discussions as regards their usefulness and for this reason, it is indispensable for teachers to become aware of their pros and cons. (Harmer, 2012. p. 181) Course books of good quality are designed with coherent syllabus and sufficient language control as well as audio CDs and CD-ROMs providing audio and extra resource material. Another significant attribute is ascribed to motivation and appeal of the book. Considering the lower secondary level, texts and their content, pictures and symbols allowing orientation and overall layout etc. influence pupils' motivation and encourage them to use them. They have an intrinsic need to experience success and the perception of their own progress. The discernment of success and progress have an impact on pupils' motivation and personal aspirations.

Disadvantages of the course books according Harmes (2012, p. 182) lie in the way they are designed and used. The teaching sequence usually follow Presentation, Practice and Production (PPP), despite the fact that there have been other options complying with needs of learners and respecting the nature of language. An alternative submitted by Harmer comprises of three elements Engage, Study and Activate (ESA) named 'Straight arrows' (2012, p. 66) that seem to be similar to the PPP , especially, when they are used with fixed and inflexible approach. The third teaching practice implies the use of learner's own words to 'Activate' the new language. Nonetheless, ESA enables two more combinations of teaching procedures. The 'Boomerang' procedure can be likened to task-based or deep-end approach. Learners are asked to do some task or play a game which will make them engaged and will show their educational needs that they will focus on afterwards. The third procedure listed by Harmes (2012, p. 66), named 'Patchwork, is the most variable as it can follow several courses of actions. The purpose of this variability was to offer teachers versatile tool to be used for differing

functions of teaching aims. Harmer (2012, p. 67) explains that it is useful for" teaching grammar points but not for analysing their own language use after communicative task". Although, the ESA is more flexible than the PPP, it is not solution for every possible situation. An idea is to adopt a "do-it-yourself" (DIY) approach (Harmer, 2012, p.182) and to rely on teacher's own knowledge, experiences and resources. This requires they will be able to design lessons that will combine in a coherent syllabus. (Harmer, 2012, p. 182) If school requires to follow an educational policy set by a government, a teacher may keep the main line of a prescribed syllabus and use her/his knowledge of individual needs of every class to make choices about methods, techniques and the order of teaching procedures to adjust the course of education. Specifically, development of sociolinguistic competence may need such adjustments if the course book do not deal with this area of language teaching adequately. In order to ensure proper training for teachers, it is essential to encourage teachers to develop their capability to be able to find appropriate solution to any teaching situation flexibly and not to be afraid of improvise up to certain level.

To sum up, teachers can use a plain paper and a pencil until they keep in mind the main goal - to help their pupils to learn to communicate the way which will enable them to develop and maintain relationships.

Conclusion

The teaching of culture and sociolinguistics in the classroom can be done using cultural models and speech acts. One should consider, however, the student's stage of cultural awareness acceptability, with students who have had a chance to experience the target culture perhaps receiving more benefit from instruction. Culture is also a good topic for stimulating high-level conversation that uses an abstract content, and is probably best emphasized in the advanced level language classes. Ironically, a model such as the Kluckhohn Model, which appeared culturally biased to the students in my sample, may have the positive effect of engendering serious high-level discussion and reflection on cultural differences and thus serve to sharpen the perception of them, making them more receptive to the exercise that followed. Also, one must decide exactly what aspect of culture to teach, since much of culture elludes being taught. Finally, when teaching sociolinguistics, activities that clearly break down the situational components such as status and gender as factors in determining manner of speech allow for students to practice analyzing the effects of these components on language, which appears to be a possible way for students to increase their sociolinguistic awareness.

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