

Concepts of Communicative Competence

As already mentioned in the introduction, communicative competence is of central importance not only for scientific purposes, but also for practical application. A certain amount and quality of communicative competence is needed not only in social interaction at the interpersonal level, but also at organizational and public levels, as well as for intercultural exchanges. Many individual and social problems in our societies arise, however, because people are not sufficiently competent with respect to certain aspects of communication. The consequences concern interpersonal relationships, academic and professional success, but also psychological and health problems. Higher levels of communicative proficiency which include effectiveness and appropriateness facilitate a better social, psychological, and physical life.

Communicative competence is a term in linguistics that refers to the ability to use the language correctly and appropriately to accomplish communication goals. The speakers should have a good understanding of some aspects of the language in order to communicate effectively, including linguistic (grammar, syntax, morphology...), sociolinguistic, and socio-cultural aspects. This will help them to use the language appropriately. Therefore, the term of Communicative competence is a term coined by *Hymes* (1966) in reaction to *Chomsky's* (1965) notion of "linguistic competence". Communicative competence is the intuitive functional knowledge and control of the principles of language usage.

1- About Competence

Saussure's distinction of langue/parole led to the appearance of Chomsky's linguistic theory and his distinction of competence/performance. However, they explain each of the two paradigms in different points of view.

1.1 Langue and Competence

In 1922, Saussure introduced the three controversial terms: "language", "langue" and "parole". "Language" is the faculty of speech or ability to speak that all human beings possess, whereas "langue" is composed of all aspects and features of language taken as a whole assuming that it is an individual's possession, Saussure's langue refers to languages as supra-individual entities. "Parole" is the actual use of utterances; and an external appearance of langue, it is the usage of the system but not the system. A good deal of confusion happened among linguists in translating these concepts to English, since Saussure is from Swiss origins, however, it is understood in English, as a language that, the product of the use of a langue is language, and, if it is the product of speech, it is parole. Chomsky's distinction of competence/performance came as a reaction to Saussure's langue/parole; this reaction was revolutionary and provided a better sense than Saussure's theory did about langue/parole. For Chomsky (1965), competence refers to the tacit knowledge of the language and differs from person to person; he claims that it is related to the mental capacity of the individual. It refers to something psychological or mental (i.e. something in an individual's mind or brain).

1.2 Competence and Performance

The concepts of "competence" and "performance" are used differently by various researchers. These terms were proposed for the first time by Chomsky (1965). For him,

competence is concerned with grammaticality of an ideal native speaker language, whereas, performance is concerned with the production and perception of a speech. A competence is the knowledge in your mind about a particular language. Performance is the use, expression or manifestation of that knowledge. Performance is the result of competence. If mentally you are capable of producing language, you are competent and have knowledge about a particular language that is translated and manifested in real utterances. For example, speaking is a formal recognition of competence, thus it is a performance. The hidden knowledge which you have in the mind and that enables you to speak is competence.

This distinction of Chomsky corresponds to De Saussure's „langue“ and „parole“. Langue and competence are related in terms of abstract knowledge. De Saussure mentioned that knowledge is shared in the society. He viewed langue as a book, printed in multiple copies that should be distributed throughout a community. However, Chomsky thought that competence is a psychological phenomenon. It is genetic; it refers to individuals. Hymes (1972) criticized Chomsky saying that, competence should also describe the knowledge and the ability of individuals for appropriate use in the communicative events in which they find themselves in any concrete speech community. Moreover, he stated that the competence underlying a person's behavior is identified as one kind of “performance”.

2- The Development of Communicative Competence

2.1 Linguistic competence

Chomsky (1965) emphasized the difference between linguistic competence, the speaker-hearer's knowledge of his language and performance, the actual use of language in concrete situations, he points out that linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogeneous speech-community, who knows its language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interests, and errors (random or characteristic) in applying his knowledge of the language in actual performance. Hence, linguistic competence refers to the speakers' correctness of formal system of language which includes pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary.

What is then a theory of linguistic performance? It is a theory of how, given a certain linguistic competence, we actually put it to use - realize it, express it. It is also a theory of the limitations of the mechanisms, which enable us to express our own linguistic competence.

2.2 Communicative competence

“Just like the linguistic competence which tells you whether the sentence is grammatical or not, communicative competence tells you whether an utterance is appropriate or not within a situation” (Charles Lin, 2004, p.1).

Dell Hymes (1972) was the first to point out that the Chomskyan notion of competence dealing with the ideal speaker-listener in a homogeneous speech community provides no place for competency for language use, i.e. this theory fails to account for the whole socio-cultural dimension. As a linguist and anthropologist, Hymes was concerned on the one hand with linguistic theory, and on the other hand with the socio-cultural aspect of language.

Indeed, says Hymes, what one is inevitably concerned with is “performance” - the actual use of language in a concrete situation; its use moreover by speaker-listeners who are far from “ideal” and whose language behavior cannot be characterized as that of any “homogeneous speech community”. Hymes points out that Chomsky’s narrow concept of competence represents a “Garden of Eden” view which disregards questions of use by relegating them to the area of performance. This limitation of Chomsky’s linguistic competence led Hymes to coin the term “communicative competence”, as described by Hymes (1971), communicative competence is a wide term including not only linguistic Knowledge but also knowledge of a set of sociolinguistic codes and rules for using them. Communicative competence, he claims is the most general term for the speaking and hearing capabilities of a person - competence is understood to be dependent on two things : (tacit) knowledge and (ability for) use. The actual theory of communicative competence that he suggests involves knowledge (and abilities) of four types.

1. “Whether (and to what degree) something is formally possible.
2. Whether (and to what degree) something is feasible in virtue of the means of implementation available.
3. Whether (and to what degree) something is appropriate (adequate, happy, successful) in relation to a context in which it is used and evaluated.
4. Whether (and to what degree) something is in fact done, actually performed, and what doing it entails.

2.3 Pragmatic Competence

Just as Hymes reacted against Chomsky’s concept of competence-performance and proposed communicative competence instead, Oller (1970) too attacked transformational generative grammar and proposed pragmatics as an alternative.

Oller defines pragmatics as “the relationship between linguistic contexts and extralinguistic contexts. It embraces the traditional subject matter of psycholinguistics and also that of Sociolinguistics”. Oller goes on to say that “pragmatics is about how people communicate information about acts and feelings to other people, or how they merely express themselves and their feelings through the use of language. Such a definition of pragmatics is too wide in the sense that it fails to distinguish pragmatics from many other disciplines interested in functional approaches to language, including psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics.

Another definition favored in the literature equates pragmatics with the ability of language users to pair sentences with the contexts in which they would be appropriate. According to Levinson (1983) such a view enjoys much support among linguists and philosophers but unfortunately it involves many problems.

A more restricted view of pragmatics has been proposed by Katz and Fodor (1963) who suggest that pragmatics should be concerned solely with principles of language usage and should have nothing to do with the description of linguistic structure. Katz and Fodor propose that a theory of pragmatics would essentially be concerned with the disambiguation of sentences by the contexts in which they were uttered.

As for Chomsky (1981), pragmatic competence is defined as the ability to place language in the institutional settings of its use, relating intentions and purposes to the linguistic means at hand. Chomsky distinguishes pragmatic competence from grammatical competence. Grammatical competence in this instance is limited to knowledge of form and meaning

whereas pragmatics is concerned with knowledge of conditions and manner of appropriate use. For Chomsky, theories of grammatical and pragmatic competence must find their place in a theory of performance that takes into account the structures of memory, our mode of organizing experience and so on.

3. Intercultural Communicative Competence.

Intercultural communicative competence is seen as an extension of communicative competence. While communicative competence refers to the speaker's ability to interpret messages and to negotiate meaning with other speakers within a particular speech community. Intercultural communicative competence is conceived as the speaker's ability to interact effectively with people from other cultures that he/she recognizes as being different from his/her own. It is understood as the ability to cope with one's own cultural background in interaction with others. Language is an inseparable part of culture because the beliefs, ideas, and identities of a group of people are constructed and communicated through the use of language. That is why intercultural communicative competence should be understood as the ability to identify cultural issues that are necessarily expressed through real language in use. In this sense, Byram (1997) believes that authentic literary texts, which are essentially loaded with real language, offer EFL learners the opportunity to develop intercultural communicative competence, since not only people, but "documents" and "cultural products" created by a distinctive society help learners to know about and appreciate events, thoughts, and national memories of a culture. In general, all kinds of reading materials such as newspapers, magazines, and books are implicitly with diverse levels of cultural expression because, over all, they are the product of a particular community essentially depicting cultural content.

The teaching of literature in the EFL classroom should not be understood as merely teaching the literary texts themselves. Literary texts should be studied through appropriate teaching approaches that might promote meaning negotiation and knowledge construction. The socio-constructivist approach to learning seems to be a salient model to encourage learners to read and discuss authentic literary texts. Socio-constructivism, proposed by Vygotsky (1978, p. 88), advocates knowledge as being socially constructed, rather than received because "human nature presupposes a specific social nature and a process by which children grow into the intellectual life of those around them." Students construct knowledge in the socio-cultural environment in which they live and interact as they become the center of the learning process. Hence, learners are no longer conceived as passive receivers waiting for the teacher to "fill" their minds with information. On the contrary, learners are engaged in experiencing the world so that they construct their own knowledge within meaningful contexts, sometimes through trial and error, because making mistakes is a normal part of the learning process.