COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN LANGUAGE TEACHING (LT)

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the notion of communicative competence in language learning, and it relates the discussion to the application of the theory of communicative competence to the teaching of English as a foreign language, especially to the one we are now doing at the State University of Medan in English language and literature Department. There are four main components of communicative competence namely (1) Grammatical Competence, (2) Sociolinguistic Competence, (3) Discourse Competence, and (4) Strategic Competence. Every component of communicative competence gives some contribution to the language learners and makes them aware of developing their English in terms of linguistic competence and linguistic performance. Linguistic competence is understood in terms of acquiring knowledge of language structure. Linguistic performance is understood in terms of using and expressing the linguistic forms.

Kata kunci : *Communicative Competence In Lt*

INTRODUCTION

Everyone might accept that language is a means of communication by means of which members of a community can communicate and interact one another. In order to be able to communicate the speakers should have communicative competence. This competence consists of some elements or components. In this article I will discuss the notion of communicative competence and the components. Then I will relate the discussion to the application of the theory of communicative competence to the teaching of English, especially to the one we are now doing at the State University of Medan, in English Department. I would like to argue that what we have been doing so far is just providing our students with only one component of communicative competence. The students are still lacking some more competences which enable them to communicate effectively and appropriately.

1. The Nature of Communication

Communication involves at least two individuals. One is speaker or the sender who sends message using certain code and the other one is the hearer (who also becomes speaker in his return) who receives the message, interprets it and may give response. In such a send and receive situation there is an exchange and negotiation of information between the individuals should share an understanding of codes and the topic discussed so that they can interpret what is being expressed, otherwise there is no communication. "Communication then is …… a process of expression, interpretation and negotiation" (Savignon 1983:8).

The meaning the speaker intend and the meaning he conveys are often not the same. I am going from thoughts and feelings to their symbolic representation, either in spoken or written forms, gestures, design, colors, etc, the speaker has to make choices of this linguistic and non-linguistic form. The choice made depends on the social

context of the speaker. After making a choice the speaker expresses his thoughts and feelings and the way expresses depends on his psycho-physical condition.

Ervin (1973:245) says that the forms of communication may be viewed as having four aspects namely channel, code, variety, sociolinguistic varieties and non-linguistic vocal signals. The channel might be spoken language writing, telegraphic signals etc. the code or variety consists of a systematic set of linguistic signals which occur in defining setting sociolinguistic variants are linguistic alternative which linguistic regard as free or optional variants within a code. Non-linguistic signals include the range of properties called paralinguistic which lack the arbitrary properties of linguistic signals.

By following Canale (1983) and Savignon (1983) the natures of communication can be described as follows :

1. Communication is a form of social interation which involves a high degree of unpredictability and creativity in form and message. This implies that communication is carried out in social context and the participants can not confirm or ascertain what one will say and how he will say it. Therefore the participants are very creative as to the use of language and message they want to express.

2. Communication takes place in discourse and socio-cultural context and is carried out under limiting conditions. There are various kinds of situation and forms in which communication such as memory, fatigue, and distractions. However the context itself provides cues as to correct misinterpretation of the utterances.

3. Communication always has a purpose and involves authentic as opposed to textbook-contrived language. The purpose of communication may be to established social relation, to persuade, to promise, to give information etc. an authentic situation is one in which communication is likely to take place or naturally occures. In such a situation, there is an uncertainty on the participants, but after communication takes place the level of uncertainty is reduced.

4. Communication is dynamic and relative. It involves negotiation of meanings between participants and depends on the cooperation of the participants.

5. Success in communication is judged on the basis of actual outcomes. A nonnative English speaker who was trying to find the railway station considered to be successful when he is able to get to the station despite the fact he might say, 'How to the railway station?' to a passer- by and who was given the way to the station.

6. Communication applies to both written and spoken language as well as to many other symbolic systems.

2. Communicative Competence and Its Components

The term 'Communicative Competence' was introduced by Hymes in the mid – 1960s, and since then it has been popular among teachers, researchers, and others interested in language. Prior to this, the terms competence (linguistic competence) and performance were introduced by Chomsky, 'Competence' and 'Performance' have theoretical difference, competence can be defined as a presumed underlying ability, and performance can be regarded as the overt manifestation of that ability. Competence refers to what one knows, while performance is what one does. This implies that communicative competence is the underlying systems of knowledge and skills required for communication. Actual communication is realization of such knowledge and skills under limiting psychological and environmental conditions such as memory, perceptual constraints, fatigue, nervousness, distraction, and interfering background noises.

Communicative competence is an essential part of actual communication but is reflected only indirectly, and sometimes imperfectly due to general limiting conditions

such as those previously mentioned. Canale (1983) says that the relation between communicative competence and actual communication is also a source of disagreement and confusion. Some linguists say that skill in communicating are a part of a theory of communicative competence. My view in this article is that, both knowledge and skills underlie communication in a systematic and necessary way and are therefore included in the communicative competence.

Bell (1976:20) says that communicative competence refers to the knowledge possessed by the language user, not only of the formal code, but the social implication of linguistics choice which are available to him as he uses it in the course of his life as the participant in the speech events which are so much a major constituent of human society. The implication of this statement is that, communicative competence also includes the ability of the speaker to choose linguistic forms and this choice depends on the participants and speech event. Hymes (1982:22) indicates that communicative event is comprised of some elements or components such as the various kind of participants (*senders* and *receivers*), available channels code shared by the participants, the setting, the forms of message, the topic and the events themselves. This clarifies that communicative competence also covers the appropriateness of linguistic forms in the social and cultural contect. Hymes (1981 cited by Johnson) also says that there are rules of use without which the rule of grammar would be useless. In English we say 'Good morning', even it is cloudy, foggy, or raining and we never say 'Bad morning', as a greeting. Linguistic form (grammar) can not explain why we express this greeting, but it is a fact and we can say that it is rule of use. In Bahasa Indonesia we say 'Selamat pagi' (meaning literally 'Safe morning'). 'Good morning' and 'Selamat pagi' can not be explained by grammar but we express them as a means of communication.

We should consider a linguistic form in term of its form, referent, context and function. Only by considering all these can we understand the meaning better and this means we can communicate better. The ability of the speaker to use linguistic form, to express its literal meaning and to perform his intention (function) in appropriate context is what we call communicative competence. This concept leads us to an idea that a speaker having a communicative competence should know who he speaks to, about what, where, when and for what purpose.

Canale (1983:6) says that communicative competence is comprised of some components, namely: (I) Grammatical Competence, (2) Sociolinguistic Competence, (3) Discourse Competence, (4) Strategic Competence. In the following part I will elaborate the components.

a. Grammatical Competence

Grammatical competence is concerned with mastery of language code. It is linguistic competence as described by Chomsky. This competence refers to the mastery of linguistic code, ability to recognize lexical, morphological, syntactic and phonological description of a language and to manipulate these features to produce words and sentences. Knowledge of grammar is not linked to a certain theory of grammar only and nor is it concerned with the ability to express rules of grammar explicitly. When a person can explain and demonstrate how rules of a language work, it does not mean that he has acquired grammatical competence of the language. He is said to have grammatical competence when he is able to apply the rules to produce grammatically acceptable sentences and to determine whether sentences are

grammatically acceptable or not. This means that grammatical competence focuses directly on the knowledge and skill required to produce and understand grammatical sentences and literal meanings of utterances.

It is not yet clear whether there is any current theory of grammar which can be selected over others to characterize this competence nor in what ways a theory of grammar is directly relevant for second or foreign language teaching (Canale 1983: 7). But it is certain that grammatical competence is an importance factor for the learners learning a language.

b. Sociolinguistic Competence

Sociolinguistic Competence is an interdisciplinary field of inquiry having to do with the social rules of language use (Savignon 1983:37). This competence requires an understanding of the social context in which language is used. The context is depend on some factors such as status of participants, information they share, purposes of interaction, and norms or conventions of interaction. An utterance is considered appropriate or not in terms of this social context.

The appropriateness of utterances refers to both appropriateness of meaning and form. Appropriateness of meaning is concerned with how communicative functions, attitudes and ideas are judged to the proper in a given situation. For example it is not appropriate that a secretary to order the manager to type a letter. Different cultures have different ways of performing functions. For example in Australia it is common that a student calls a lecturer by his first name. In Indonesian culture, it is considered in appropriate that a student calls his lecturer by his first name. A student is required to respect the lecturer and therefore he can not call the lecturer directly by his name. I can not call Dr. John Smith by 'John instead, I should call him 'Bapak' (Literally meaning father ……. of knowledge or Bapak Smith).

Blum Kulka (1980 cited by Canale) Indicates that there are three types of rules in determining how effective a given communicative function is conveyed and interpreted ; pragmatic rules refer to situational precondition that must be fulfilled if one wants to carry out communicative function (e.g. to give a command one must have power or right to do so). Social appropriateness rules determine whether a given function is normally marital status. Linguistic realization rules involve a number of a consideration such as the frequency with which a given grammatical form is used to convey a given function.

c. Discourse Competence

Discourses competence concerns mastery of how to combine grammatical forms and meanings to achieve a unified spoken or written text. Savignon (1983:38) says that this competence involves the ability to interpret a series of sentences or utterances in order to form a meaningful whole and to achieve unity of text which area relevant to a given situation. Unity of a text is achieved through cohesion in form and coherence in meaning. Cohesion deals with how utterances or sentences are linked structurally and facilitate interpretation of a text. Halliday (1985:313) says that unity is a text can be achieved through structural components and cohesive devices. Structural components are made up of thematic structure (theme & Rheme) and information structure and focus (Given & New). Cohesive devices consists of references (*personal pronouns, demonstratives, comparatives*), ellipsis and substitution (*clausal, verbal, nominal*), conjunction (*additive, adversative..*) and lexical cohesion (*synonymy, repetition, collection…*) Coherence refers to the relationship among different meanings i.g. literal

meaning, communicative functions, attitudes and feeling. A text may be not cohesive structurally but is coherent by its propositional bases.

Knowledge and skill of discourse should be distinguished from grammatical and sociolinguistic competence. To illustrate this difference I would like to take an example and analyze it on the basis of theory given by Widdowson (1975:25): speakers A what did the rain do? Speaker B: The crops were destroyed by the rain. B's reply is grammatically and sociolinguistically acceptable and appropriate. But the reply does not tie in well with A's question. The violation is clear not to be at the grammatical or sociolinguistic level but at the discourse level. It involves the organization of sentences and information in text in English in which given (shared or old information) should precedes New (new information).

d.   Strategic Competence

Strategic competence refers to the mastery of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies that may be used to compensate for breaks downs in communications because of limiting conditions in actual communication and to enhance the effectiveness of communication. In actual communication a speaker, especially foreign language learner may discover that he is unable to recall an idea or grammatical form or how to say something appropriately. To overcome this inability he may apply a certain strategy. This strategy is very helpful for him to overcome or to compensate his weaknesses in grammatical sociolinguistic and discourse competence. Tarone, Cohen, (1983) define communication strategy as a systematic attempt by the speakers (learner) to express or decode meaning in the target language rules have not been formed… Faerch and Kasper (1983) say that communication strategies are potentially conscious for solving what an individual presents itself as a problem in reaching a particular communication goal. Dumas (1983), Faerch and Kasper (1983), Blum Kulka (1983) some types of communication strategies can be described as avoidance, paraphrase, code switching, reconstructing, approximation and many others.

3.   Applications For Language Teaching

It is clear from the previous discussion that in order to be able to communicate appropriately and effectively in the communicative situation, a speaker should have knowledge and skill not only grammatical or linguistic competence but also sociolinguistic rules, discourse and communication strategy.

In the following parts, I will discuss some applications of the theory the communicative competence in language teaching.

1.   Knowledge –Oriented and Skill- Oriented in L.T.

In the previous discussion it has been pointed out that there is clear distinction between communicative competence and actual communication. Communicative competence possessed by the student does not guarantee that he is able to communicate appropriately in actual communication. This means that we should teach the students both knowledge and skill of how to apply or exploit them. The students should practice applying the knowledge in the authentic situation.

2.   Coverage of Competence Area

The teaching materials should cover the four components of communicative competence. We provide the students with grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence. It is misleading to say that one competence is less or more crucial

than the others. There is no evidence to support that grammatical competence should take priority while the other components are less crucial.

3. The students' Communication Needs

The materials should meet with the students' interests and communication need. The four components vary in level and intensity according to these needs and interest. The needs and interest are specified with respect to grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence.

4. The learner's Native Language Skills

The learners' communication skills that they developed through the use of their inative language are very helpful in developing their skills in communicating in the target language. The teachers should exploit these skills in learning to communicate in the target language.

5. Syllabus

The material to be taught to the students should be oriented to communication. In such a communication-oriented language the syllabus program should be designed to bear structures in relation to their uses. The material should be specified in such a way that it is clear for the students how they should express meaning (perform function) to certain participants, in a certain place and occasion. This implies that the syllabus should specify the materials in terms of function, nation, setting, role and participants.

6. Testing

To evaluate the achievement of the students, communicative test should be applied. Such a type of test can be used to measure the knowledge and skills of communicative competence. Some criteria of communicative performance, tests are interactive, unpredictable, purposive, authentic, contextualized and based on performance.

7. A Brief View On The Teaching of English at the Unimed Medan

In our English program at the Unimed (State University of Medan), North Sumatra, we are much inspired by transformational theory of language developed by Chomsky. To us, language is finite rules which generate all sentences. This implies that teaching English is just teaching grammatical rules. We concentrate our teaching on providing the students with grammatical (linguistic) competence.

We believe that when the students have knowledge of grammatical rules they can produce grammatically acceptable sentences and they can communicate effectively. This idea misleading one, I can realize this when I came to study at the university of Sydney, Australia. The students are still lacking some more competences which enable them to communicate effectively and fortunately.

8. Conclusion.

After discussing communicative competence and its applications in language teaching I came to the conclusion that communicative competence should be the main objective in the teaching of English as a foreign language. Only by providing the students with this competence, we can expect them to be able to communicate appropriately in actual communication.

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