

LINGUISTIC COMPETENCE AND COMMUNICATION

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Abstract: This paper examines the role played by the linguistic component within the process of communication, through aspects relating to competence and performance. Linguistic competence is seen as facilitating (inter)personal communication in the context of social interaction, if one takes into account the pragmatic aim of the process of communication, in a functional-communicative approach to foreign language learning. Thus, the communicative competence can be a key factor in promoting the individual's socio-cultural integration, since the operational aspect of knowledge is valued on the way towards achieving the ability to learn, in the spirit of long-life learning.

Keywords: competence, performance, communication, pragmatic, functional

Introduction

In order to define "communication", experts have resorted to various trends within the field of linguistics, referring to components which bring into discussion the concepts of competence and performance. The former refers to the ability of applying grammar rules, building grammatically correct phrases, and using them correctly, in the appropriate context. Competence can be approached from both a pedagogical, as well as a linguistic viewpoint. The pedagogical aspect underpins an entire theory of education, language learning, and communication, through the functional character it imparts to the whole process. The linguistic component deals with the abstract knowledge of languages, by taking into account an innate trait of the human being, i.e. the ability to learn languages. The interplay of the two components mentioned above helps to define the linguistic communication competence, and yields the socio-cultural context which fosters the growth of the human personality through communication, as a form of building interrelationships. Thus, social and operation rules for the language can be inferred, while the communication competence can be defined as the ability that allows for the production and interpretation of messages, as well as for the negotiation of meaning in specific contexts, pertaining to the communication situation.

Competence and performance in communication

For a few decades now, researchers have been tempting a definition for the two correlative terms of competence and performance, within the field of communication, both approached not only from a strictly linguistic viewpoint, but also as an indicator of social integration, by placing the speaker in a given situational context, and thereby triggering reactions, opinions, and emotions, i.e. activating all the mechanisms which can make the individual's social insertion possible. The linguistic competence involves the process of acquiring language forms by putting together the signified, and the signifier in the context of signification, i.e. of making sense¹. The communication competence refers to the way in which the individual uses one's own linguistic competence for personal, as well as interactive communication. Therefore, the relationship between the two

¹ Ferdinand de Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale*, ed. C. Bally and A. Sechehaye, Payot, 1916

dimensions of the term of “competence”, i.e. the linguistic, and the communicative one concern the complementary aspect of linguistics in relation to social interaction.

Likewise, the term of “performance” consists of the same components, i.e. linguistic performance, and interpersonal communication performance, both of them concerning the cognitive aspect, as well as the social one. The linguistic aspect of performance aims at meeting academic standards, while the communicative one is manifested in the capacity for contextual language manipulation.

One should not overlook the fact that language is just another sign system which makes interpersonal communication possible, and is widely used by the humankind for interacting with other people. In the field of education, communication entails sending a modeling message by means of a sign code, the linguistic code in this instance. Therefore, the linguistic competence provides the support for personal communication: it is not in itself a goal of education, in the spirit of communication, it only has instrumental value. Given the pragmatic character of communication, foreign language syllabuses have nowadays shifted the focus from the linguistic aspect of competence, which related performance to a higher level of language knowledge. Instead, attention has been given to the reasons people have for learning foreign languages. It is a fact that the learners’ communication competence, including the ability to comprehend texts from various subjects is partly achieved during the language classes, by learning the vocabulary items, as well as by acquiring the logic of discourse, for different functional styles. Thus, the instrumental value of the foreign language becomes manifest in the acquisition by learners of the communication competence which will give them access to all language registers within the dimensions typical for communication, namely text comprehension and production.

Thus, through its collateral impact, the foreign language class is a useful tool for all the other subjects of study. Consequently, the evaluation of the communication competences should not be restricted to the particular field of a subject, but rather extend to the other subjects of study, as well as skills and attitudes comprised by the eight key-competences, all of which lead to the social integrating competence.

Communication from the linguistic and pragmatic perspectives

As far as the study of foreign languages is concerned, the implementation of the communicative-functional approach in teaching, which relies on the integrated study of the language, communication, and literary texts, has shifted the focus from building up knowledge, to acquiring competences. Thus, the communication competence emerges as a system of creative strategies allowing the learner to understand the value of the linguistic elements in context, thereby developing its ability to put into practice the knowledge about the role of the language and the way it works. Therefore, the communication competence does not concern the amount of knowledge a speaker has about a particular language; instead, what really matters is the functional value of knowledge, which will generate interaction activities. Furthermore, one must admit that communication cannot be approached without taking into account the social aspect, i.e. why the integrative dimension of the process should also be taken into consideration.

Within the field of education sciences, the communication competence is defined primarily through the ability to activate knowledge, display certain attitudes, and contextualize them in interactions. The complexity of the process should also be considered from the perspective of the formative impact of the two fundamental actions, i.e. text comprehension, and text production, both orally, and in writing. The evaluation of the role of the linguistic communication has led to the necessity of choosing, in the teaching of foreign languages, the approach which sees the language as

a communication tool, rather than a subject of study in itself. Thus, by taking into account the latest trends in curricula, the issue of language and communication has seen significant changes, as the focus is now placed on the pragmatic aspect of learning a foreign language. The curricula for foreign languages have had to be updated, in order to meet the pedagogical requirement for an education focused on long-life learning, and the active integration of learners within a knowledge-based society. Curricula nowadays approach the language as an instrument for communication, and implement the communicative-functional model, a result of the pedagogy of communication, characterized by a well-marked functional character, along with the integrated development of the oral expression and reception abilities, and written expression and message reception, respectively. The new integrating approach to language is also done from an interdisciplinary perspective, and is in agreement with documents issued by the EU in the field of linguistic policies. Therefore, foreign language teaching, e.g. teaching the English language, has a major impact on communication, as a typically human activity, due to its significant formative and informative potential, as well as cultural heritage. The communicative-functional paradigm emphasizes the communicative competence as a factor that can substantially facilitate the individual's integration within a socio-cultural space. This pragmatic approach, which underpins the new curricula, argues that an utterance does reveal a state of facts, but also the thoughts, and feelings that the ideas stated trigger in the audience, as well as in the speaker. So, in the relationship between the individual and its socio-cultural environment, the integrating aspect of communication becomes essential: thus, the social dimension of communication is activated, as a catalyst for shaping the individual's personality, as well as allowing the individual to express oneself, in relation to the personality of the group to which the speaker belongs.

The communication situation

The pragmatic meaning takes into account both the situation in which the utterance is made, and the particular way in which this occurs. So, the curricula show that it is important to see the communication situation in the process of teaching/learning/evaluation as the meeting place for the components of the communicative frame, e.g. the personal, temporal, spatial, social, and discursive coordinates. The communicative roles form an integral part of the communicative situation, both the one held by the sender, and the one of the receiver, as the addressee. Defining these roles is critical, to the extent that learners understand the fact that each role entails performing certain actions, by virtue of being involved in a genuine communication situation.

According to the latest trends in the teaching of foreign languages, this subject is considered to have an implicit pragmatic character: the sender is defined, from the pragmatic viewpoint, as the initiator of the verbal action, which involves a dynamic role in communication. The action uttered by the sender is meant for the receiver to perform, so if communication is to be achieved, then there will be a dialogue, as a form of manifestation of the verbal interaction. Thus, the linguistic code and a social code work together within the process of communication, in order to define the communication situation. The result is the emergence, in the learners, of a social and civic competence, by understanding the behavioral codes, generally accepted within different societies and environments, and by becoming aware of the interaction between one's national cultural identity and the European one.

The communication competence- a critical competence

According to the Common European Framework, the user's general individual competences mainly rely on the knowledge, skills, and existential competence that this person possesses, as well

as on his/her ability to learn. Under these circumstances, the linguistic communication competence should be perceived as such, and building it requires an open and flexible curriculum, in the spirit of long-life learning. Within the Common European Framework, the linguistic communication competence is defined by the interplay of three specific components, namely the linguistic component, the socio-linguistic component, and the pragmatic one, presented in their fundamental elements as a synthesis of knowledge, aptitudes, and skills. The linguistic component aims at forming the lexical, phonetic, and syntactic skills, whereas the socio-linguistic component capitalizes on the socio-cultural parameters of the language user, and the pragmatic component materializes in the functional use of the linguistic resources (i.e. by achieving the communicative functions, and speech acts), by observing the descriptors for interaction exchanges.

The user's linguistic communication competence can be noticed when carrying out various communicative activities, involving the reception/production/interaction, achieved either orally, or in written form, or in both. Communicative activities such as oral and/or written reception, as well as production, are instrumental to any interactive activity aiming both to inform, and change attitudes and mindsets in the receiver.

The pragmatic competence features the functional use of the linguistic resources, through the communicative functions, and speech acts, in general, and refers to discourse cohesion and coherence, to the selection of the most adequate texts, in terms of type and genre, in relation to the communicative intention. Unlike the linguistic competence, in the case of the pragmatic competence, the major impact of interactions and cultural environments is decisive for achieving the communicative performance.

The focus on competences, rather than objectives, in the new curricula is based on the operational aspect of knowledge. Therefore, competences can be measured by means of the skills which determine, in time, the individual configuration of the existential competence, by acknowledging the importance of the ability to learn, i.e. by placing the individual within a space open to long-life learning. Gradually the individual realizes that the amount of information is not very useful for one's social integration: what matters is the extent to which the individual can operate with this information.

Performance should be perceived as a qualitative index for the individual's functioning, for social efficiency, having the communicative, interactive function as its basic indicator. Performance is defined by the individual's degree of social integration, from the perspective of his/her linguistic, social, and cultural communication competence.

Conclusion

The linguistic competence, if integrated into the more comprehensive communicative competence, and exploited in a communicative-functional approach, aiming towards the operational aspect of knowledge, can be instrumental to the individuals' social integration.

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