

Course 3. Redefining Competence

Introduction

An important innovation in sociolinguistic research was the redefinition of the notion of competence. The notion of competence was reformulated by the American linguist and anthropologist Dell Hymes in the late 1960s as a reaction to Chomsky's view. The shift occurred as a result of including the social variables in describing language.

1. Communicative Competence

Competence was defined by Chomsky as a person's knowledge of the rules of the grammar of the language, which enables him to produce only grammatical sentences. Competence is grammatical and limited to the rules for producing well-formed sentences.

However, some linguistically correct sentences are not suitable for some contexts, and they cause failure in communication. Similarly, certain incorrect sentences can be quite appropriate in a given context.

Eg.

- What time is it?
- We are on Sunday.

Sociolinguists claim that it is important to know about how to use the grammatical sentences appropriately in a particular context. In addition to rules of grammar that indicate how to construct well-formed sentences, a native speaker possesses rules of use which show how to use sentences appropriately.

Competence was redefined to include social context and its components as an essential element. So, sociolinguistics, in the works of Dell Hymes, extends Chomsky's concept of 'linguistic' competence to the concept of Communicative competence, which is defined as the knowledge of how to use language appropriately. Hymes criticized Chomsky's idea of linguistic competence and his failure to account for linguistic variation. A normal child acquires knowledge of sentences, not only as grammatical, but also as appropriate. He

acquires competence as to when to speak, when not, and as to what to talk about with whom, when, where, and in what manner.

2. Components of Communicative Competence

Three main models of communicative competence have been identified, the model of Canale and Swain, the model of Bachman and Palmer and the description of components of communicative language competence in the Common European Framework (CEF). In Canale and Swain's Model (in the 1980s'), four components are proposed.

2.1. Linguistic Competence

It is knowledge of the phonology, grammar and lexicon of the language. Grammatical competence is mainly defined in terms of Chomsky's linguistic competence. It is concerned with mastery of the linguistic code (verbal or non-verbal) which includes vocabulary knowledge as well as knowledge of morphological, syntactic, semantic, phonetic and orthographic rules. This competence allows the speaker to use knowledge and skills required for comprehension and production of the literal meaning of utterances.

2.2. Sociolinguistic or Pragmatic Competence

It is the knowledge of the rules of speaking or the appropriateness rules. Along the lines of Hymes's principle of the appropriateness of language use in a range of social situations, the sociolinguistic competence includes knowledge of rules and conventions which allow the comprehension and language use in diverse sociolinguistic and sociocultural contexts.

2.3. Discourse Competence

It is the knowledge of how to construct longer stretches of language (conversations, speeches, email messages, newspaper articles ...) and how to understand them as a coherent whole. Canale (1983) described discourse competence as mastery of rules that determine ways in which forms and meanings are combined to achieve a meaningful communication (cohesion in form and coherence in meaning).

2.4. Strategic Competence

Strategic competence consists of knowing the verbal and non-verbal communication strategies that are evoked to compensate for breakdowns in communication due to insufficient competence in one or more components of communicative competence. These strategies include paraphrase, circumlocution, repetition, reluctance, avoidance of words, guessing, changes of register and style or modifications of messages. This means how to recognize and repair communication breakdowns, how to behave when you do not understand a word, how to express oneself if one does not find a word, etc.

3. The Ethnography of Speaking (Communication)

Hymes proposes a kind of sociolinguistic analysis that he calls the ethnography of communication. It specifies how speech forms differ according to social context in a given speech community. Having all such kind of information in mind enables the speaker to use language appropriately in social interaction within the speech community. The goal of this approach is to formulate a universal theory of language and human behaviour.

This research is based on field work: observations, asking questions, participating in group activities. Hymes proceeds by determining the following communicative elements in ethnographic studies:

-Speech community: It is the group of people who share the same linguistic repertoire and the same rules for speaking and interpretation of speech performance, sociocultural understandings and presuppositions with regard to speech.

-Speech situation: It is the context within which speaking occurs: meeting, party, classroom, court of justice, etc.

-Speech events: They are verbal conversations like greetings, a sermon, a job interview, etc. Speech events are governed by fixed rules and norms which may be different in different communities.

-Speech acts: They are functional utterances. Speech acts make up speech events: a request, an assertion, an apology, a greeting, a prohibition, a promise, an invitation

4. Components of Speech Events

4.1. Setting: including the time and place, physical aspect of the situation such as arrangement of a room.

4.2. Participants: identity including personal characteristics such as age, sex, social status, relationships with each other.

4.3. Ends: including the purpose of the event itself as well as the individual goals of the participants.

4.4. Act: sequence or how speech acts are organized within a speech event and what topics are addressed.

4.5. Key: it refers to the tone and manner in which something is said or written.

4.6. Instrumentalities or linguistic code i.e. language, dialect, variety and channel i.e. speech or writing.

4.7. Norm: refers the standard socio-cultural rules of interaction and interpretation.

4.8. Genre: is the type of event such as letter, poem, or prose.

Course 4: The Speech Act Theory

Introduction

The Speech Act Theory is an approach that stresses the function of bits of language: It is concerned with the functional classification of speech. It belongs to the domain of pragmatics i.e. the study of meaning in its social context, which is contrasted with semantics, which deals with purely linguistic meaning. It was put forward by the British philosopher J. L. Austin in his book 'How to Do Things with Words' (1962) published after his death. The theory was developed by a number of others, notably the British philosopher John Searle.

1. Speech Acts

Austin believes that the function of speech is not only 'constate' things. Speech is used to suggest, to make a promise, to invite, to make a request, to prohibit, to give an order, to offer an apology, and so on. It is used to perform an action in a given context. Utterances are viewed as 'acts'. The speech act is an utterance intended to convey communicative force and interact. It is a communicative activity defined in connection with the intentions of speakers as they speak and the effects they have on listeners. 'Language functions as a piece of human behaviour. It is a mode of action and not an instrument of reflection' (Malinowski).

2. Levels of Speech Acts

According to Austin, each utterance has three kinds of meaning. A speech act has three levels:

-The Locutionary meaning (the propositional meaning): It is the literal meaning of the utterance. It is conveyed by the particular words and structures which the utterance contains (**saying** something). For example, if the teacher says to the student, 'it is cold today', the locutionary meaning would concern the low temperature. So, we can say it is the lexico-grammatical structure of the sentence. It is controlled by the speaker.

-The Illocutionary meaning: It is the inherent social function of the utterance (doing by speaking). For example, the illocutionary meaning of ‘it is cold today’ is a request to shut the door or window. Illocutionary meaning is to be determined according to the context. It is the functional meaning and is controlled by the speaker too.

-The Perlocutionary meaning: The result or effect (action or state) that is produced by the utterance in that given context (The effect of what you say). It is the response of the receiver, for example, the action of shutting the door or window. This meaning is controlled by the hearer and not the speaker.

Example

- Utterance: I'll call the police if you don't leave my garden.

- Locutionary act: the speaker is going to call the police.

- Illocutionary act: a request or threat

- Perlocutionary act: the hearer is required to leave.

Today, the term speech act is usually restricted to the illocutionary act and its effect is referred to as the ‘illocutionary force’.

3. Classification of Speech Acts

Speech acts are usually classified according to their illocutionary meaning. Usually the meanings are explicitly stated in verbs, but sometimes they are implicit. The philosopher Searle identified five types of speech acts.

3.1.Representatives: A speech act which represents states or events in the world, such as asserting, claiming, reporting, describing, predicting, believing, swearing.

3.2. Expressives: a speech act that expresses the speaker's psychological attitude toward some state of affairs: apologizing, congratulating, thanking, deploring, condoling, welcoming, greeting.

3.3.Directives: A speech act that has the function of getting the listener do something: commanding, requesting, urging, inviting...

3.4. Commissives: A speech act that commits the speaker in varying degrees to do something: promising, threatening, vowing...

3.5. Declarations: A speech act that alters a state of affairs in the world: sentencing, arresting, marrying, nominating, naming.

Illocutionary acts are related to the external factors where speech takes place (speech events). It is impossible to understand their meaning without reference to such factors. And since the structure of speech events differs from one community to another, the interpretation of the illocutionary meanings is not the same in different communities. So a native speaker's knowledge of his language incorporates his knowledge of the way speech acts are formulated and interpreted in a given community.