TEMA 4: LA COMPETENCIA COMUNICATIVA: ANALISIS DE SUS COMPONENTES.

UNIT 4: COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE: ANALYSIS OF ITS COMPONENTS.

<u>**OUTLINE**</u>

1. INTRODUCTION

2. THE CONCEPT OF COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

   2.1- DEFINITION

   2.2- HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF THE CONCEPT

        2.2.1-Chomsky´s approach
           · Basic principles
           · Problems involved in his theory
        2.2.2-Campbell and Wales´ approach
        2.2.3-Habermas´approach
           · Basic principles
           · Similarities with other conceptions
        2.2.4-Halliday´s approach
           · Basic principles
           · Signficance
        2.2.5-Dell Hymes´ approach
           · Contributions to Chomsky´s conception
           · Determinants of the communicative competence

3. COMPONENTS OF COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

   3.1- GRAMMATICAL COMPETENCE

   3.2- SOCIO-LINGUISTIC COMPETENCE
        · Concept
        · Importance

   3.3- DISCOURSE COMPETENCE
        · Concept
        · Discourse competence VS Grammatical & Socio-linguistic competences

   3.4- STRATEGIC COMPETENCE
        · Concept
        · Implications

4. CONCLUSION

5. BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. **INTRODUCTION**

In the early 1970s the term communicative competence emerged as an important theoretical construct in explorations of the relationship of language to society and culture. Scholars in Great Britain (Campbell and Wales), West Germany (Habermas) and the US (Hymes) introduced the term in a variety of interpretations. Although each interpretation has contributed to the indispensable role the concept has come to play in a number of disciplines, the American anthropologist Dell Hymes´use of the term, perhaps because it was a direct challenge to the prevailing linguistic theory of the time, has had the most significant impact on linguistics and language teaching.

2. **THE CONCEPT OF COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE**

2.1- DEFINITION

Communicative competence is a linguistic term which refers to a learner's second language ability. It not only refers to a learner's ability to apply and use grammatical rules, but also to form correct utterances, and know how to use these utterances appropriately

Linguistic competence refers, then, to the knowledge of a language system. The term first emerged in the work of Noam Chomsky, where it referred specifically to syntactic competence, and was specifically opposed to linguistic performance. The term was used more broadly by Dell Hymes in formulating the concept of communicative competence. The term unlies the view of language learning implicit in the communicative approach to language teaching

2.2- HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF THE CONCEPT

2.2.1- Chomsky´s approach

Basic principles

In 1965 the American linguist Noam Chomsky made a distinction very similar to the one that Ferdinand de Saussure had made between langue and parole in 1916. The distinction made by Chomsky was between competence (a speaker intuitive knowledge of the rules of his/her native language) and performance(what he/she actually produces by applying these rules).

In *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* (1965) Chomsky writes:

"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 interest and errors in applying his knowledge of the language in actual performance"

Problems involved in his theory

One of the major problems that arise from the foregoing is Chomsky´s line of demarcation between competence and performance. Although a distinction of this kind is undoubtedly both a theoretical and a methodological necessity in linguistics, it is by no means certain that Chomsky himself draws it in right place. It can be argued that he describes as matters of performance (and, therefore, as irrelevant) a number of factors that should be handled in terms of competence. Hymes, Jackobovits, Campbell and Wales, Widdowson, Cooper and others, all reject Chomsky´s restricted view of competence.

- **Campbell and Wales´s approach**

Campbell and Wales accept Fodor and Garrett´s one clear sense of the distinction between competence and performance, i.e. "in which competence in any sphere is identified with capacity or ability, as opposed to actual performance, which may only imperfectly reflect underlying capacity". But they point out that Chomsky´s competence omits by far the most important linguistic ability: "to produce or understand utterances which are not so much grammatical but, more important, appropriate to the context in which they are made", and they continue "by context we mean both the situational and verbal context of utterances".

- **Habermas´approach**

Basic principles

Habermas preserves Chomsky´s distinction of competence and performance but criticises his conception of competence as a monological capability, on the grounds that it provides an inadequate basis for the development of general semantics and because it fails to take account of the essential dimension of communication (in a highly idealised sense).

Similarities with other conceptions

In fact, his view of communicative competence as comprising knowledge of the universal formal features of language that make human communication possible has more in common with Halliday at the latter´s most idealised level of theorising. Habermas sees his initial ideas for a theory of communicative competence as providing the kind of basis he thinks necessary for developing general semantics, and he is interested in the possible application of such a theory for social analysis.

- **Halliday´s approach**

<u>Basic principles</u>

Deriving from Firth, Halliday is interested in language in its social perspective and so he is concerned with language use to account for the language functions realised by speech. These language functions are defined in terms of formal features of language which enable communication to take place. In this sense Halliday´s macro-language functions relate to Habermas´s communicative competence.

In writing of the early 1970s, Halliday developed a socio-semantic approach to language and the speaker´s use of language. At the heart of this approach is his language-definition notion of meaning potential, the sets of options in meaning that are available to the speaker-hearer. This meaning potential relates behaviour potential to lexico-grammatical potential: what the speaker can do, can mean, can say. These stages display systematic options at the disposal of the speaker. That is, a social theory determines behaviour options (what the speaker can do) which are translated linguistically as semantic options (what he/ she can mean) which are encoded as options in linguistic forms (what he/ she can say), the options at each stage organised as network of systems.

<u>Significance</u>

Halliday´s approach to the question of the language user´s competence is different from the others discussed in the important sense that he rejects the distinction between competence and performance as being of little use in a sociological context.

- **Hymes´s approach:**

In an effort to widen the Chomskian concept of competence, Hymes (1972,1974) was among the first to use the term "*communicative competence*". For Hymes, and for other linguists and sociolinguists, the ability to use a language competently not only entails knowing the grammatical rules of a language but also knowing what to say to whom in what circumstances and how to say it. In Hyme´s view: "There are rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless"

He also states that" in speaking of competence, it is especially important not to separate cognitive from affective and volitive factors, so far as the impact of theory on educational practice is concerned".

<u>Contributions to Chomsky´s conception</u>

Hymes´s criticism is that Chomsky´s categories of competence and performance provide no place for competency for language use.i.e. the theory fails to account for a whole dimension,

the sociocultural. The Chomskyan restriction of the concept of competence to the perfect knowledge of an ideal speaker-listener, in a homogeneous speech community, unaffected by socio-cultural or psychological constraints, cannot account for the communicative function of language. Applied linguistics needs as theory that, in Hymes´s words, "can deal with heterogeneous speech community, differential competence, the constitutive role of sociocultural features", relativity of competence in two, three or four languages, contextual styles, etc. Hymes points out that linguistic theory itself needs such a theory for its foundations to be secured and he suggests that the key may be provided by the notion of competence itself, which he recasts as communicative competence.

Determinants of the communicative competence

Dell Hymes maintains this competence is dependent upon the four features listed below:

1. Whether (and to what degree) something is possible.

2. Whether (and to what degree) something is visible (in relation to the means available)

3. Whether (and to what degree) something is appropriate (adequate, happy, in relation to the context in which it is used).

4. Whether (and to what degree) something is performed (actually done and what the doing entails).

These four sectors of his/her communicative competence reflect the speaker-hearer´s grammatical (formally possible), psycholinguistic (implementally feasible), sociocultural (contextually appropriate) and de facto (actually occurring) knowledge and ability for use. The fact that the grammatical sector is only one of four parameters of communicative competence shows the extent of this recasting of Chomsky´s notion of competence, which consisted only of grammatical competence

In addition, all these show that the linguistic competence is largely a part of Communicative competence. Dell Hymes' criticism of the concept of linguistic competence is that it is an abstraction without any relevance to actual use. The same criticism has been directed against the notion of communicative competence. According to Widdowson, if linguistic competence is an abstraction of grammatical knowledge, communicative competence is an abstraction of social behaviour

3. COMPONENTS OF COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

The theoretical framework for communicative competence proposed here minimally includes four areas of knowledge and skill:

- Grammatical competence.
- Socio-linguistic competence.
- Discourse competence.
- Strategic competence.

It is assumed that this theory of communicative competence interacts with other systems of knowledge and skill (e.g.world knowledge) as well as with a theory of human action (dealing with such factors as volition and personality). Furthermore, it is assumed that certain competences described here are involved in uses of language other than communication.

This proposed framework is based on the research reported in Canale and Swain and other current work in this area and followed by the LOGSE. The purpose of this section is to sketch briefly the contents and boundaries of each of this four areas of competence and to discuss this theory in the light of other recently proposed theories of communicative competence.

3.1- GRAMMATICAL COMPETENCE

This type of competence remains concerned with mastery of the language code (verbal or non-verbal) itself. Thus, included here are features and rules of the language such as vocabulary, word formation, sentence formation, pronunciation, spelling and linguistic semantics. Such competence focuses directly on the knowledge and skill required to understand and express accurately the literal meaning of utterances; as such, grammatical competence will be an important concern for any second language programme.

Note that it is still not clear that any current theory of grammar can be selected over others to characterise this competence nor in what ways a theory of grammar is directly relevant for second language pedagogy.

<u>3.2- SOCIOLINGUISTIC COMPETENCE (REGISTER)</u>

Concept

In Canale and Swain this component included both sociocultural rules of use and rules of discourse; here, only the former set of rules is referred to. Sociolinguistic competence thus addresses the extent to which utterances are produced and understood appropriately in different sociolinguistic contexts depending on contextual factors such as status of participants, purposes of interaction, and norms or conventions of interaction.

▪ <u>Appropriateness of utterances</u> refers to both appropriateness of meaning and appropriateness of form. The former concerns the extent to which particular communicative functions (e.g commanding, complaining and inviting), attitudes (including politeness and formality) and ideas are judged to be proper in a given situation. For example, it would generally be inappropriate for a waiter in a restaurant to command a customer to order a certain menu item regardless of how the utterance and communicative function (a command) were expressed grammatically.

▪ <u>Appropriateness of form</u> concerns the extent to which a given meaning is represented in a verbal and/or non-verbal form that is proper in a given sociolinguistic context. For example, a waiter trying to take an order politely in a tasteful restaurant would be using inappropriate grammatical form (here register) if he were to ask: "OK, chum, what are you and this broad gonna eat?". This notion of appropriateness of form thus includes what many authors have called "interactional competence", which addresses appropriateness of kinesics, paralinguistics and proxemics.

Finally, it is clear that the notion of naturalness or probability of occurrence can also play an important role in determining the appropriateness of meaning and form; however, this notion may be of limited value given the unpredictable and creative aspect of communication noticed above.

Importance

There is a tendency in many second language programmes to treat sociolinguistic competence as less important than grammatical competence. This is mainly due to two reasons:

1st) It gives the impression that grammatical correctness of utterances is more important than appropriateness of utterances in actual communication, an impression that is challenged by data from first language use and second language use.

2nd) This tendency ignores the fact that sociolinguistic competence is crucial in interpreting utterances for their "social meaning". For example, when this is not clear from the literal meaning of utterances or from non-verbal clues (e.g.sociocultural context and gestures).

There are, no doubt, universal aspects of appropriate language use that need not be relearned to communicate appropriately in a second language. But there are language and culture-specific aspects, too. Vulnerable work on this last pint has been carried out by Blum-kulba, Brown and Levinson, Cazden, Clyne, Gumperz, Richards, Scollon and Tannen, among others.

For example, Blum-Kulba distinguishes three types of rules that interact in determining how effectively a given communicative function is conveyed and interpreted: pragmatic rules, socio-appropriateness rules and linguistic rules.

- <u>Pragmatic rules</u> refer to the situational preconditions that must be satisfied to carry out a given communicative function (e.g. to give a command, one must have the right to do so).
- <u>Social-appropriateness rules</u> deal with whether or not a given function would normally be conveyed at all and, if so, with how much directness (e.g. asking a stranger how much he or she earns).
- <u>Linguistic-realisation rules</u> involve a number of considerations, such as the frequency with which a giev grammatical form is used to convey a given function, the number and structural range of forms associated with each function, the generality of forms across functions and situations, and the means of modulating the attitudinal tone of a given function.

Her preliminary findings are that universality of sociolinguistic appropriateness decreases as one goes from pragmatic rules to social realization rules. Clyne reports similar findings. Blum-Kulka´s own concluding statement expresses very well the importance of socio-linguistic competence for second language pedagogy: "It is quite clear that as long as we do not know more about the ways in which communicative functions are being achieved in different languages, (second language) learners will often fail to achieve their communicative ends in the target language, and neither they nor their teachers will really understand why".

3.3- DISCOURSE COMPETENCE

Concept

This type of competence concerns mastery of how to combine grammatical forms and meanings to achieve a unified spoken or written text in different genres.

- By genre is meant the type of text: for example, oral and written narrative, a description, an argumentative essay, a scientific report or a set of instructions, and a conversation, each represent a different genre.
- Unity of a text is achieved through cohesion in form and coherence in meaning (topic 29).
- Cohesion deals with how utterances are linked structurally and facilitates interpretation of a text. For example, the use of cohesion devices such as pronouns, ellipsis, conjunctions and parallel structures serves to relate individual utterances and to indicate how a group of utterances is to be understood as a text.
- Coherence refers to the relationships among the different meanings in a text, where these meanings may be literal meanings, communicative functions, and attitudes.

It is clear from Charolles´work that the role of cohesion devices is to serve such rules of coherence. The important work of Freedle, Fine and Fellabaum and Halliday and Hasan seeks to identify the types of cohesion devices that serve different aspects of coherence and thus contribute to the equality and unity of a text (texture/textuality).

Discourse Competence VS Grammatical & Sociolinguistic competences

Its is reasonably clear that this notion of discourse knowledge and skill can be distinguished from grammatical competence and sociolinguistic competence. For example, consider the following conversation (Widdowson 1978, p27):

Speaker A: What did the rain do?

Speaker B: The crops were destroyed by he rain.

B´s reply is grammatical and sociolinguistically appropriate with our framework but does not tie with A´s question. The violation in this example seems to be at the level of discourse and to involve the normal organisation of sentences (and texts) in English in which topic (shared information) precedes comment (new information) (*The rain destroyed the crops)*, Widdowson points out. Note that the principle of discourse restricts the grammatical form of utterances that can co-occur with A´s question, fostering out compatible ones regardless of the grammatically and sociolinguistic appropriateness. This interaction of grammatical,

sociolinguistic and discourse rules is suggestive of the complexity of communicative competence and is consistent with the distinction that is proposed here among these three areas of competence. However, it is not clear that all discourse rules must be distinguished from grammatical rules and sociolinguistic rules.

3.4- STRATEGIC COMPETENCE

Concept

This component is composed of mastery of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies that may be called into action for two main reasons:

a) To compensate for breakdowns in communication due to limiting conditions in actual communication (e.g. momentary inability to recall an idea or grammatical form) or to insufficient competence in one or more of the other areas of communicative competence.

b) To enhance the effectiveness of communication (e.g.deliberately slow and soft speech rhetorical effect). For example, when does not remember a given grammatical form, one compensatory strategy that can be used is paraphrase. Thus if a learner did not know the English term "train station", he or she might try a paraphrase such as "the place where trains go" or "the place for trains". Of course such strategies need to be limited to resolving grammatical problems: actual communication will also require learners to handle problems of a sociolinguistic nature (e.g.how to address strangers when unsure of their social status) and of a discourse nature (e.g.how to achieve coherence in a text when unsure of cohesion devices).

Implications

Interesting discussion and examples of communication strategies may be found in. Howard, Palmer, Stern, Terrel, Swain, and Tarone (Topic 40):

Terrel argues strongly that communication strategies are crucial at the beginning stages of second language learning. Two possible objections to actually teaching such strategies in the second language classroom are that they are universal and are picked up in mastering the first language. However, in Swain and Canale it is pointed out that although a general strategy such as paraphrase is indeed universal and used in first language communication, learners must be shown how such a strategy can be implemented in the second language (e.g what the equivalent forms are for "power vocabulary" items such as English "place", "person", and

"thing"). Furthermore, learners must be encouraged to use such strategies (rather than remain silent if they cannot produce grammatically accurate forms, for example) and must be given the opportunity to use them.

The potential value of such strategies to the second language learner can perhaps be highlighted more if we think of the second language as a learner of the first language. For example, consider a teacher of French as a second language who speaks only French to a group of anglophone learners. From the students´point of view, the teacher (speaking only French) can be viewed as a learner (of English as a second language) who knows almost no English and yet is trying to communicate effectively. To the extent that the teacher is understood by relying on communication strategies are crucial for communication to take place at all.

This particular example is not as bizarre as it may seem on the surface; for instance, there is a striking resemblance between teacher´s speech to second learners and the learner´s own second language output. The point is this if the teachers are trained in the use of techniques to make themselves understood in the second language by learners, then why should learners not also be instructed in such techniques?

Finally, according to the LOCE, our aim as teachers is not only to teach a foreign language, but to help students to develop their communicative competence. Thus, we should work on the four components stated above and, following the present day educative system, also on a fifth one named by the LOCE as ***sociocultural competence***, that is, a certain level of familiarity with the social and cultural contexts in which a language is used.

4. CONCLUSION

In this unit we have discussed the content and pedagogical applications of the theoretical framework for communicative competence proposed by Canale and Swain (1980) and Canale (1983). Following the title of this unit, we have attempted to clarify the essential aspects of this theoretical framework by talking about the nature of communication, the distinction between communicative competence and actual communication and the components of communicative competence. In addition, through the influence of communicative language teaching, it has become widely accepted that communicative competence should be the goal

of language education, central to good classroom practice (e.g. Savignon 1998). This is in contrast to previous views in which grammatical competence was commonly given top priority. The understanding of communicative competence has been influenced by the field of pragmatics and the philosophy of language concerning speech acts as described in large part by John Searle and J.L. Austin.

5. BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alatis, J.1980. Current issues in Bilingual Education: Issues in Assessment and Pedagogy. Washington DC: Georgetown UP.
- Faerch, C.& Kasper, G. 1983. Strategies in Interlanguage Communication. London: Longman.
- Givon, T. 1979: Discourse and Syntax. New York: Academic Press.
- Horowitz, R. & Samuels, S. 1987: Comprehending Oral and Written Language. San Diego: Academic Press.
- Hymes, D.1992. Discourse and Language Education. Cambridge: CUP.
- Pride, J. & Holmes, J. 1972: Sociolinguistics. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Richards, J. & Schmidt, R. 1983: Language and Communication. London: Longman.