「語言能力」與「語言表現」定義之討論與界定及其應用於溝通教學法中之初探

Defining the notions of competence and performance and discussing the most important implications of incorporating this distinction in communicative approaches to TESL

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摘要

語言能力(competence) 與語言表現(performance)的觀念在英語教學中極為重要,其與語言教室中應將何種知識傳授給學生至為相關。本論文旨在探討、闡明此觀念,並對其定義加以界定。本文首先從Chomsky,Hymes 與 Halliday 的不同觀點去討論此兩種觀念,進而對其如何應用於英語教學之溝通教學法中加以探究與舉例說明。本文最後一部分為簡短之總結與建議,冀能拋磚引玉,提供英語教學工作者些許關於此問題之研究方向之參考,以便增進學生實際以英語溝通之能力。

Abstract

The notions of competence and performance are crucial in teaching English. They pertain directly to what should be taught in a language classroom. This paper aims to define and distinct the notions of competence and performance. In the beginning, the different perspectives of Chomsky, Hymes and Halliday on this topic are examined and discussed. In the following section, the most important implications of incorporating this distinction of the above two notions in communicative approaches to TESL are discussed. And in the last part, a conclusion and some suggestions are made, in which some directions about this topic are provided for further research to enhance English learners' ability in the social use of the language.

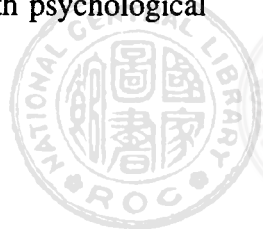Key Words: competence; performance

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I. Introduction

Teaching in a private university of technology in Taiwan, I am quite often haunted by the question: What should I teach? Many students have their own goals. Some of them want to travel abroad; others want to study abroad. Some are interested in learning English only for the reason of their future career (as is the situation that those who have better English communication skills tend to have better opportunity of being hired or promoted by a company); others are more interested in learning everyday English so that they can communicate with foreigners. I can certainly teach the structure of English. But is it enough? Will they be able to communicate with people in America just by mastering the language structure? The notions of competence and performance seem to answer this question.

II. Theory

1. Chomsky's perspective

The notions of competence and performance were first set out in Chomsky's Aspects of the Theory of Syntax (1965). For Chomsky, competence refers to the speaker-listener's underlying knowledge of his language, while performance refers to the actual use of language in concrete situations. Competence, according to him, is concerned with the knowledge of an ideal speaker-learner, in a homogeneous speech community who knows the language perfectly. The application of the knowledge in actual performance is not affected by grammatically irrelevant conditions such as memory limitation, distractions, shifts of attention or interest and errors. Competence is exclusively concerned with formal aspect of language, especially at sentence level. Various factors such as those mentioned above affect the actual use of language. But this is the domain of performance, which is identified with the criterion of acceptability. In other words, competence distinguishes itself from performance, because competence is an idealization: it is the ideal speaker-listener's knowledge operating within "a completely homogeneous speech community" (1965:3), whereas performance represents an incomplete and a degenerate reflection of the ideal speaker-listener's competence, as manifested in natural speech by "numerous false start, deviations from rules, change of plan in mid-course, and so on". It is clear that Chomsky confined his attention to the rules of language needed for a generative grammar, focusing on sentence level utterance and excluding variation.

This definition, however, takes us to a dead end instantly. One of my students once greeted me cheerfully as she entered the room. She said, "How are you doing, Ms. Lin?" Although nothing wrong with it grammatically, something is odd about the use of this expression. "How are you doing?" is not totally appropriate in the light of a teacher-student relationship. Higher degree of formality is expected in a situation such as this. It is much more suitable to say "Hello. How are you?" to a teacher. Chomsky's definition of competence cannot account for inappropriate use of language like this example since it is concerned only with the formal structure of language. His notion of performance cannot provide us with satisfactory explanation, either, since it is concerned only with psychological constraints, not with sociocultural features.

2. Hymes' perspective

Hymes (1979) was not satisfied with Chomsky's use of the terms competence and performance. He found that Chomky's view of competence was far too narrow since it included only grammatical competence, and did not deal with the issue of appropriacy: the knowledge not only that a sentence is grammatically well-formed but that it is appropriately used in a specific context, i.e., when, where, how, and with whom a particular language use should occur. In his theory of communicative competence, Hymes integrates sociocultural features with linguistic competence and psychological constraints, which is the domain of performance in Chomsky's theory. Besides the absence of a place for sociocultural factors, Hymes also objected to Chomsky's linking of performance to imperfection. Hence in reaction to Chomsky, Hymes (1979) proposed his notion of communicative competence, which is defined as an individual's capabilities in terms of both knowledge and ability for use of language. The four parameters that underlie communicative competence are:
a. Possibility; whether (and what extent) something is formally possible.
b. Feasibility; whether (and what extent) something is feasible in virtue of the means of implementation available.
c. Appropriateness; whether (and what extent) something is appropriate (adequate, happy, successful) in relation to a context.
d. Occurrence of actual performance; whether (and what extent) something is in fact done, actually performed, and what its doing entails. (1979: 21-24)
Communicative competence is dependent upon knowledge and ability for use, both of which subtend all four parameters.

It is clear, then, for Hymes, communicative competence covers a number of different elements, "ranging from grammatical competence on the one hand to sociolinguistic competence on the other" (Taylor, 1988:156). Furthermore, Hymes argues that aspects of linguistic competence depend on other aspects of communicative competence. As he says:

> There are rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless. Just as rules of syntax can control aspects of phonology, and just as semantic rules perhaps control aspects of syntax, so rules of speech acts enter as a controlling factor for linguistic form as a whole. (Hymes 1979:15)

Of performance, Hymes says that it refers to actual use and actual events. Performance, however, is not identical with a behavioral record, or with the imperfect or partial realization of individual competence. It takes into account the interaction between competence, the competence of others, and the cybernetic and emergent properties of events themselves. (1971)

3. Halliday's perspective

Halliday proposes another view to a theory of communicative competence. He is interested in language in its social perspective and is concerned with language use to account for the language functions raised by speech. He proposes the notion of meaning potential, the sets of options in meaning that are available to the speaker-listener. This meaning potential relates behavior potential to lexico-grammatical potential: what the speaker can do → can

mean → can say. A social theory determines behavior options (what the speaker can do) which are translated linguistically as semantic options (what he can mean), which are encoded as options in linguistic forms (what he can say), the options at each stage being organized as networks of systems. He rejects the distinction between competence and performance as being of little use in a sociological context. "Can do" interacts with "does" in a direct relation as potential to actualized potential. His meaning potential is similar to Hymes' communicative competence except that Hymes defines this in terms of what the speaker knows, whereas Halliday is talking about a potential — what he can do.

III. Applications

1. Teaching knowledge and also ability to use the knowledge for communication

Are the above models capable of providing answers to my question raised earlier? Those which Hymes and Halliday propose seem promising. Hymes' model makes the scope of instruction clear. That is, any classroom instruction is to be designed so that students may acquire knowledge necessary for communication and also ability to use the knowledge for communication. Merely knowing whether and to what extent something in the language is systematically possible is not sufficient for efficient communication. Contextual appropriacy plays an equally important role.

Halliday, on the other hand, will give teachers or material producers some suggestion regarding how to approach linguistic form from the standpoint of meaning. Let us look at the following example:

A: How do you like my new hair style?

B:

How can B answer A's question of he doesn't like A's new hair style? Rubin (1976) categorized ways of expressing 'no.' In this case, B can choose a) to say 'no' directly, b) to be silent, c) to avoid responding directly, d) to give excuses with positive answer, e) to divert and distract the addressee, and so on. Table 1 gives an example summary.

If B chooses	B says:
a	I don't like it.
b	(nothing)
c	It's interesting.
d	It's nice, but I liked the old style better.
e	Where did you get it done?

Table 1

Which option B chooses depends on the situation. B has to take into account the time, the place, and how close he is to A, and so on. Is it appropriate to say "I don't like it" when A is very satisfied with his new hair style and when B is not that close to him? It would be more appropriate to choose other options.

Let us look at another example. In their study of apology, Olshtain and Cohen (1981) discuss two dimensions that affect the choice of semantic speech formulas: the severity of the offense and the status of the recipient. Thus a more serious offense might bring about an expression of apology like "I'm terribly sorry" (high intensity) as opposed to "I'm sorry"

(low intensity). Similarly, one may offer an apology of higher intensity to a recipient of a higher status. (Olshtain and Cohen, 1981, p.22)

They further give five semantic formulas that seem to emerge when the offender is positively inclined to apologize. (Olshtain and Cohen, 1981, p.22)

a. An expression of an apology.

               Example: I'm sorry. I apologize.

b. An explanation or accord of the situation

               Example: The bus was delayed.

c. An acknowledgment of responsibility.

               Example: It is my fault. I was confused.

d. An offer of repair.

               Example: I'll pay for the broken vase.

e. A promise of forbearance.

               Example: It won't happen again.

The choice of formulas varies from one situation to another. For example, a student is invited to a professor's house for dinner and he spills a glass of red wine on an oriental rug. He would probably choose a, c, and d to make a set of speech as follows: "Oh, I'm terribly sorry, I wasn't paying attention to the glass. I'll clean it up right away."

2. How can sociocultural competence be dealt with in a classroom?

First, the speech-acts sets in the target language must be described. And then, a variety of interactive discourse situations that a specific learner(s) would encounter must be considered. This procedure produces a list. Let us assume a group of Taiwanese students are planning to participate in a home-stay program in the United States. A partial list of apology situations, for example, would be like this:
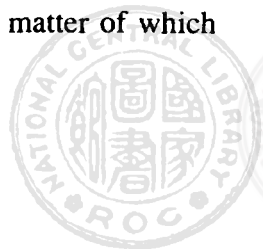
a. being late for class

b. breaking something in the host family's house

c. forgetting an appointment

The next step is to expose the students to the patterns used most commonly by native speakers of English. It can be done through video clips or models. For situation 1 in the list, the following discourse may be used: I'm sorry I'm late. The bus didn't come on time.

The five formulas are also to be introduced to students with those models. Students are then given numbers of concrete situations to create appropriate apology. Various sub-formulas under each major formula are to be incorporated in the course of instruction. For the third formula, an acknowledgment of responsibility, subformulas such as 1) accepting the blame, e.g., "It is my fault," 2) expressing self-deficiency, e.g., "I was absent-minded," and so on can be introduced so that students may express apology in a variety of ways.

As these examples show, structure of language alone is not sufficient for communication and sociocultural factors play a very crucial role in communication. Hymes' theory of communicative competence is satisfactory with respect to this point. Pedagogically, instruction should be sensitive to these sociocultural factors. It is an instructor's responsibility to design a curriculum and prepare materials in such a way that both sociocultural factors and grammar are integrated. These two are not separable and it is not a matter of which comes first. They can and should be taught together from the beginning.

IV. Conclusion

The notions of competence and performance as proposed by Chomsky and extended or redefined by Hymes have important implications for language teaching. These are especially relevant to issues such as what to teach and how to teach.

1. What to teach

In the traditional language classroom, "rules of grammar" were emphasized, often to the exclusion of "rules of use". The analysis and drill of isolated grammatical structures often failed to help learners reach a satisfactory level of communicative competence in the target language. Awkward situations occurred now and then when language learners met and talked with native speakers of the target language. For example, the Chinese learners would usually ask the American tourists questions concerning their age and salaries even on their first encounter. I am not surprised if the Americans found that shocking. To them, the Chinese seemed to intrude into their private life. However, what the Chinese learners had intended was to show their friendliness and concern. By asking personal questions, they hoped to show that they and the Americans were good friends. To avoid incidents of this kind, language teachers should help learners to acquire knowledge of sentences not only as grammatical but also as appropriate. Of course, we should be careful not to interpret communicative competence as meaningful communication at the expense of grammaticality, which is the first of Hyme's four parameters of communicative competence. Indeed, as Canale and Swain (1980) pointed out that "there are rules of language use that would be useless without rules of grammar." (1980:5)

2. How to teach

In order to help language learners acquire communicative competence, language teachers should try their best to create a language environment which facilitates the acquisition of this competence. One way to create such an environment is to employ communicative activities in language classrooms. Paulston (1990) and Long (1990) discussed the potential of role-play and problem-solving activities. These activities motivate communication, and allow students to play a variety of roles in a wide range of communicative situations. In order for these activities to be effective, the culture of the target language should be well reflected through them. Furthermore, the teacher should draw learners' attention to the similarities and differences between rules in the socio-linguistic components.
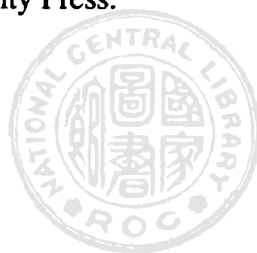
V. Limitations and suggestions

At present, there are still many controversial issues with regard to the teaching of communicative competence. For instance, how the components of communicative competence interact to determine communicative competence in a certain context? What is the relationship between function and structure? How can language teachers specify so many rules of communicative competence in both their own culture and another culture? These questions are important and need to be explored further. There is no doubt that this will be a long process. However language teachers do not have to work alone. They can draw insights from other disciplines, such as sociology, ethnography, psychology, anthropology, linguistics, and speech communication. One thing that we language teachers should be sure about is that as long as the goal is to help learners to function in another language, we are moving in the right direction if we steer our teaching toward such activities that serve to teach not only language, but also the social use of language.

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