

THE SELECTION AND USE OF CONTEXTUALIZED DIALOGUES FROM PULP FICTION TO ENHANCE SOCIOLINGUISTIC COMPETENCE OF L2 LEARNERS

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Abstract

Hymes (1962) has given the concept of communicative competence which comprises grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence and strategic competence. Since of all the four competence areas, grammatical competence has been much emphasized, discourse and sociolinguistic competences have been forced in the backdrop. Consequently, the level of appropriacy has not developed. In short the utterances might be accurate but not appropriate in the given situation. It is quite normal for any Indian to ask a question like "What is your good name?" which does not make sense to an English man. I propose to study in this research paper the importance of reading pulp fiction in enhancing the sociolinguistic competence of L2 learners. Pulp fiction makes us familiar with the language in use. As the goal of ESP (English for Specific Purposes) is to enable the learner to use functional English proficiently, pulp fiction provides him with different expressions and usages used in different contexts. I also propose to study what way pulp fiction can help the learner use the language appropriately with the help of the tasks like fill in the gaps, matching exercise and free writing.



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While defining the goal of language teaching, J. C. Richards and Richard W. Schmidt say, ...
the goal of language teaching is to enable learners to use language in ways which are communicatively effective and appropriate... Richards J. C. and Schmidt R. W. (1984: XI)

The goal of language teaching is to enable learners to communicate satisfactorily while using the target language. It is generally believed that language is automatically taught as communication by the simple expedient of concentrating on 'notions' or 'functions' rather than on sentences. But it is not so. We do not communicate by expressing isolated notions or fulfilling isolated functions. Most of people believe that knowing language means having knowledge of correct usage (the citation of words and sentences as manifestations of the language system). It is true that the ability to produce sentences is a crucial one in the

learning of a language. However, it must be kept in mind that it is not the only ability that learners need to acquire because,

Someone knowing a language knows more than how to understand, speak, read and write sentences. He also knows how sentences are used to communicative effect.

Widdowson, H. G. (1984: 01)

Language is a social phenomenon and a child learning language learns not just the rules of its linguistic structures, but learns them with reference to the social contexts. The child also learns how to use language, where and when. Actually, people can and do get away with 'linguistic mistakes', but mistakes of a communicative kind are seldom overlooked. The claim here is that 'linguistic competence' is only a subset of the larger and overarching ability that can be called 'communicative competence.' Interest in the communicative competence of second and foreign language learners has contributed a lot to the development of research into the pragmatic rules determining speech act components. It has also contributed to the research into the sociolinguistic rules which affect the choices open to a speaker when producing these speech acts in different social contexts.

Linguistic Competence and Communicative Competence

Linguists are aware of the interrelationship between language and society, because it is in society that language has its existence. **But they have not succeeded in describing such a relationship. Phonology, Lexis and Syntax, which are objects of linguistic description constitute only a part of the elements in the code used for communication. The meaning(s) of an utterance (a sentence, a clause, a phrase, a word, etc) do(es) not depend entirely on its form; a lot depends on who says what, to whom, where, why, in what manner and in what effect. In other words, the context of the situation in which an utterance is said, who said it, and to whom are very important. For instance, "Can I have the salt, please?" is interrogative in form but expresses a polite request in a dining room. Knowledge of grammar is not enough to help us participate effectively in communicative situations. In addition to acquainting oneself with the forms of language, one must know the following in order to communicate appropriately:**

- 1) The socio-cultural relation including the attitude, values, conventions, prejudices and preferences of the people who use the language.**
- 2) The nature of the participants which shows the relationship between the speaker and the listener, their occupation, interest, socio-economic status, etc.**

- 3) **The rule of the participant, such as the relationship in social network, father – son, teacher – student, boss – subordinate, landlord – tenant, doctor – patient etc.**
- 4) **The nature and function of the speech deals with whether it is a face to face talk persuasion, confrontation, or a casual conversation, or a request informal situation, or a telephonic conversation, etc.**
- 5) **The mode (medium) of communication, whether spoken or written form or reading from a written script, or unprepared speech.**

Communicative competence, indeed, includes the whole of linguistic competence plus the whole of the amorphous (indefinite shape or form range of facts included under sociolinguistic pragmatic competence (the rules and conventions for using language items in context and other factors like attitudes, values and motivation). Dell Hymes says that one who studies language should be able: “to account for this fact that a normal child acquires knowledge of sentence not only as grammatical but also appropriate. One acquires competence as to when to speak, when not and as to what to talk about, with whom, when, where, in what manner”.

In short, a child becomes able to acquire a repertoire (all the skill, etc that a person has and is able to use) of speech act to take part **in a speech act, and to evaluate their accomplishment by others.** Chomsky believes that linguistic competence can be separated from the rest of communicative competence and studied in isolation but the sociolinguist, like Dell Hymes believes that the notion of linguistic competence is unreal and that no significant progress in linguistics is possible without studying forms along with the ways in which they are used. In addition to this, basically the linguistic competence falls under the domain of communicative competence because communicative competence is made up of four competence areas including linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic. Social interaction is actually a skilled work and requires effort. It is not innate. It has to be learnt from others. Dell Hymes maintains that competence is dependent upon the features listed below:

- 1) Whether (and to what degree) something is possible.
- 2) Whether (and to what degree) something is feasible (relation to the means available).
- 3) Whether (and to what degree) something is appropriate (adequate, effective, 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).

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 knowledge of grammar, communicative competence is an abstraction of social behaviour. The notion of communicative competence does not include in its purview the actual procedure, which language users adopt in order to participate in language based on activity. So, along with linguistic competence and communicative competence, pragmatic competence should also be brought into focus. Pragmatic competence is the one that underlies the ability to use the language along with a conceptual system to achieve certain aims of purpose.

Sociolinguistic Competence

Sociolinguistic competence is the ability to interpret the social meaning of the choice of linguistic varieties and to use language with the appropriate social meaning for the communication situation. Sociolinguistics is a very broad discipline and the term sociolinguistic competence could be used much more broadly than it is here, where the investigator has restricted its use to refer to the recognition and use of appropriate varieties of language. For instance, when greeting someone in a very formal situation an American might say Hello! How are you? or Nice to see you again, but if he were meeting a friend in an informal situation it would be much more appropriate to say Hi, or Hey, whatcha been doing?

Sociolinguistic competence 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 the interaction, and norms or conventions of interaction.

Appropriateness of meaning concerns the extent to which particular communicative functions, attitudes and ideas are judged to be proper in a given situation. Appropriateness of form concerns the extent to which a given meaning is represented in a verbal or non-verbal form that is proper in a given sociolinguistic context. This notion of appropriateness of form includes what Richards (1981) and others have called '*interactional competence*'.

Many second language programmes treat sociolinguistic competence as less important than grammatical competence. Thus they ignore the fact that sociolinguistic competence is important in interpreting utterances for their 'social meaning'.

Blum-Kulka (1980) discriminates three types of rules that explain how effectively a given communicative function is conveyed and interpreted.

- ❖ Pragmatic rules refer to the situational preconditions that must be satisfied to carry out a given communicative function.
- ❖ Social-appropriateness rules deal with whether or not a given function would normally be conveyed at all and, if so, with how much directness.
- ❖ Linguistic-realization rules involve a number of considerations, such as the frequency with which a given 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. While talking about the importance of sociolinguistic competence, Nessa Wolfson writes, *It follows from this that the understanding and knowledge of appropriate speech behaviour is crucial if learners are to communicate effectively with native speakers of the language they are learning. Communicative competence thus includes not only the mastery of grammar and lexicon, but also the rules of speaking; for example, knowing when it is appropriate to open a conversation and how, what topics are appropriate to particular speech events, which forms of address are to be used to whom and in which situations, and how such speech acts as greetings, compliments, apologies, invitations and complaints are to be given, interpreted and responded to.*

Wolfson, N. (1984: 61)

Importance of Sociolinguistic Competence

It is now a well-known fact that, in intercultural communication, foreign language speakers, in addition to acquiring grammatical rules to achieve linguistic accuracy, need also to internalize sociolinguistic rules that can assist them in the choice of appropriate forms. Perhaps the fascination that researchers hold for cross-cultural encounters originates from the serious trouble which foreign language speakers may encounter due to lack of sociolinguistic awareness. Oftentimes mastery of linguistic forms combined with sociolinguistic confusion can make these speakers seem so improper or incompetent as to cause cross-cultural misunderstandings and even offence when they can understand only the literal meaning of the words but do not know the sociolinguistic rules of use for interpreting those words. Such rules can never be treated lightly if foreign language speakers aim not only to employ grammatically correct forms but also to know when to use these forms and under what circumstances. Within the movement to focus on sociolinguistic competence in cross-cultural communication, empirical studies on speech acts play a vital role by serving as a means to

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define to what the competence actually refers. Regarding the importance of sociolinguistic importance it can be said that in cross-cultural communication, foreign language speakers have to pay close attention to sociolinguistic rules of the target language in addition to structure and discourse rules to meet the needs of linguistic accuracy and fluency.

From the point of view of language learning and of intercultural communication, it is important to recognize that the individual who wishes to learn a new language must, in addition to acquiring a new vocabulary and a new set of phonological and syntactic rules, learn what Hymes (1972a) calls the rules of speaking: the patterns of sociolinguistic behaviour of the target language.

Wolfson, N. (1984: 61)

Examples

- Fat - It is a very direct word. You might use it about yourself but it will usually cause offence if you use it about someone else. Overweight is more polite way to say that someone is fatter than they should be. Obese is a word used especially by doctors to describe people who are very fat, in a way that is bad for their health. Chubby is a more informal word and is used especially of children or of rounded body parts such as cheeks or knees. Plump means fat and rounded in a pleasant way. Big and well-built are fairly polite ways to describe someone with a large, strong, or fat body.
- Translation – Through translation, the speaker translates his socio-cultural rules which might be misinterpreted. A person, after committing a minor mistake, goes to an American lady to apologize. He says, “Ma’am, I’m new. I’m inexperienced. Please cooperate with me.” Of course he gets a slap.
- What is your GOOD name? A sentence which is appropriate in India does not make sense to an American or a British.
- Dear and Hon - In America, the women whose names are not known are addressed with dear or hon. It is advisable for an outsider not to take offence when addressed with dear or hon. And it would be better for an outsider to address women with ma’am.
- How do you do? - Generally people treat this sentence as a question and reply with Fine, Great and Cool. Actually it is a very formal greeting. The correct reply to it is How do you do?
- Basically (spoken) - It is used to emphasize the most important reason or fact about something, or a simple explanation of something. Still this word is used in research writing where it is inappropriate.

- Invitation-like forms – Non-native speakers often get angry when Americans promise to invite them and suggest social arrangements which they never fulfill. The expressions like “Let’s get together sometime.” belong to the category of polite formulas.
- You’re telling me! An expression which is used to show strong agreement. But non-native speakers generally misinterpret this sentence and takes offence.
- Disagreeing - Just saying ‘no’ or ‘that’s not true’ can sound very direct, especially when speaking to people you do not know well. If you say “I’m not sure.” or “Are you quite sure?” you avoid contradicting what the other person is saying and you sound more polite.
- Who are you? - In India, many callers are asked this question which is appropriate in its context but can create problems if asked in English speaking countries.

Suggestions

- Use a good dictionary (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English).
- Learners need to take individual responsibility for seeing that this dimension of the language learning process is included in their programme of the study from the beginning. When an individual takes responsibility for this part of the language learning process, he or she is in a good position to develop meaningful relationships with the members of the target culture. These relationships can lay a foundation for meaningful language learning for years to come. By taking language learning into their own hands, language learners are assured that their learning will not end when their formal instruction comes to a close (often long before learners are fluent in their target languages).
- When learning new grammatical structures, the learner should immediately try to practise the new structures with the goal of testing sociolinguistic appropriateness. By doing this, they will learn what is socially appropriate.
- As language learners become proficient in a second language, they also need to be increasingly committed to becoming observers of the interactions of native speakers around them. They should watch how people stand when talking to each other. They should watch for the kinds of physical touching people do (handshaking, kissing, gentle punches on the shoulder, etc.). Are such things influenced by the gender of the speakers? How does language change when someone important enters a room? By knowing what to look for, learners can discover a great deal through observation.

- Another suggestion for developing sociolinguistic competence is to keep a language journal which records questions, problems, and discoveries. If there is some feature of the target language which is troubling or frustrating to a language learner, it may be the key to an insight about the communication process. For example, what led to Berry's (1994) study of backchannel behavior and turn-taking was an unsettling feeling that all Spanish speakers were rude to her, never letting her complete a sentence or express a thought without interruption. Her initial reaction was a judgment that Spanish speakers were rude, but because that was an unacceptable conclusion for her, she pursued the topic until she realized that Spanish speakers expect co-speakers to begin speaking before they pushy finish as a means of demonstrating interest. Far from being rude and, the listeners were trying to show their engagement in the conversation.
- The process of building sociolinguistic competence will not go far without the language learners establishing relationships with a few people who are native speakers of the target language and have lived most if not all of their lives in the target culture. These people will be essential to discovery of the sociolinguistic dimensions of language. When language learners acquire new lexical items and grammatical forms, it is vital that they examine with their language helpers the kinds of changes which would be made to the new language data as a result of changes in the context. If they have learned something new, they can ask a language helper, "Could I say this to a man? to a woman? Would I say this to a teacher? to a neighbor?" etc. Or, if the language helper is also sensitive to the kinds of restrictions which might apply to a given utterance, a more general question might be sufficient: "Should I avoid saying this with any particular group of people or in any context?" Also, if language learners are able to find more than one helper, and if they are fairly confident in the appropriateness of an utterance, they might try out the utterance on a number of different individuals to see if there is any adverse reaction.
- The importance of language helpers as a resource for building sociolinguistic competence cannot be over stressed. In many cases, the only way to understand what is happening sociolinguistically will be through the insights of language helpers. However, one should try to avoid being frustrated when it seems that language helpers offer contradictory advice on sociolinguistic issues. It is essential to test the language one is learning in different contexts with different kinds of people, and it is very helpful to get feedback from language helpers who can offer differing insights and interpretations, but it should not be surprising that in an enterprise as dynamic and human as using language, generalizations may be more complicated than they initially appear.

- If contradictory explanations of appropriate behavior seem to be emerging, one explanation for it may be that the language learner has not recognized some higher-level generalization or framework which encompasses both contradictory statements. For example, if one helper says that an utterance is acceptable without qualifications and another finds what is said to be highly offensive, then there must be a variable at work which explains the apparent contradiction. Perhaps the two helpers come from different regions of the same country, and in one region the utterance is acceptable, while in the other it is not. The helper who comes from the area in which the utterance is acceptable may be completely unaware that the utterance in question is offensive elsewhere.
- Along similar lines, it is also important to recognize that within any society, even a society which shares only one language, there is always variation in the speech produced by individual speakers. This variation, in itself, can account for differences in the advice language helpers might give.
- Another explanation for contradictory explanations may be found in the imaginations of different helpers. When a person is asked for a comment about the appropriateness of a given utterance, he or she usually tries to form a scenario in his or her mind in which the utterance would be used. If two (or more) helpers imagine a scenario for the same utterance, they will almost certainly come up with scenarios which are different, and the differences in their imagined scenarios will influence their perception of the appropriateness of the utterance. For example, if one takes a sentence like, "You're getting so skinny!", it is possible for one helper to imagine a case in which this sentence is spoken in an American context to a friend who is trying to lose weight, in which case it might be viewed as an appropriate comment. On the other hand, if a helper imagined the sentence being spoken to someone in an American context who had a serious problem with trying to gain weight (i.e., he or she was too thin already), this expression could be viewed as an insult. Because decisions of appropriateness are so contextually constrained, it is very easy to get contradictory advice from different language helpers.
- A fourth consideration in this vein is the possibility that the language helper may be lacking in sociolinguistic competence in his or her own first language. Native speakers of any language have different levels of sensitivity to sociolinguistic considerations. If it seems as though one language helper consistently gives different answers from the rest of a language learner's contacts, it is possible that the different language helper is either not as competent as the others or is simply not able to perceive such issues as accurately. Of course, it is possible that the one who differs is the only one with insight, but if one finds

that the advice of one particular helper consistently results in awkward or painful situations, it is probably best to seek for help in other quarters.

- As one way to bring together the suggestions made above, language learners should make a focused effort to learn the speech acts they need in order to function in the target language. (Speech acts are the things people do with language such as apologize, invite, accept and refuse invitations, compliment, sympathize, and complain.) They should then assess the kinds of variables which will influence the performance of specific speech acts, and discuss the speech acts with their language helpers. Finally, working with their helpers, they can practice the language and skills they are learning.

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