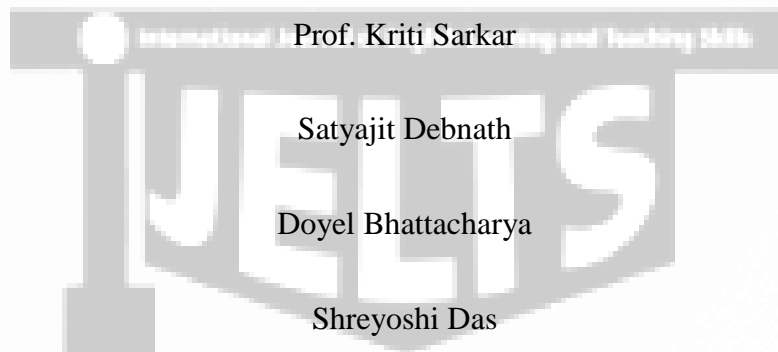


Communicative Competence and Various Factors Affecting Learning



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COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE AFFECTING LEARNING

2

Abstract

Language is a system which comprises of acquisition, development and communication. In order to comprehend language and to make sure that it is perceivable, the acquisition of language is used as a tool. James Cummins put forward the Cummin's Iceberg Theory which distinguishes between cognitive/academic language proficiency (CALP) and basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS). CALP is the language which is necessary to understand and discuss in the classroom. BICS, on the other hand is the language needed diurnally, including conversation with friends, informal interaction. Person's body language, eye contact, the physical distance is what determines the intentions of the person and his or her sincerity and altogether called the non-verbal communication. This paper highlights the various factors like social, linguistic, psychological factors that affects the learning competence of the learner.

Keywords: communicative competence, non-verbal communication, psychology and learning, operant conditioning and learning, proxemics, kinesics

Communicative Competence and Various Factors Affecting Learning

Introduction

Language is a system which comprises of acquisition, development and communication. In order to comprehend language and to make sure that it is perceivable, the acquisition of language is used as a tool. Unless one is able to perceive the meaning of language, it appears to be nothing but a concoction of words. The way by which the message or information is interchanged is communication whereas, language is just a tool of communication. We come across certain psychological factors which often disrupt the flow of an effective communication. The psychological factors are the preconceived notions that the person has about himself/herself regarding their self-worth and potential. This could either be due to lack of social support or the person's lack of knowledge in that particular field. However, language isn't only confined by the walls of something that is written or spoken. It also accounts for nonverbal communication.

Communicative Competence

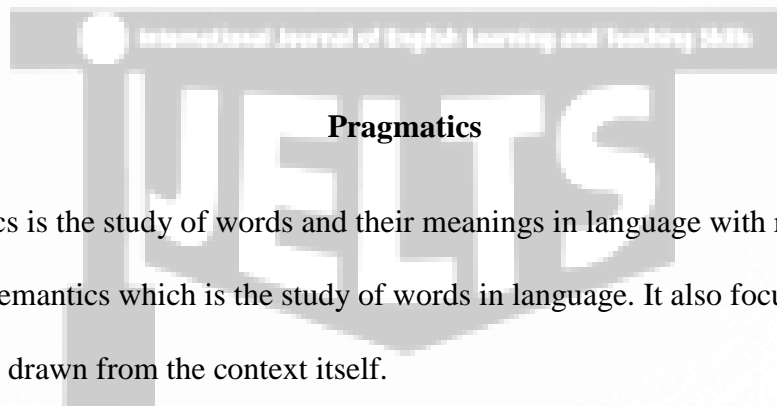
In the year 1980, James Cummins put forward the Cummin's Iceberg Theory which distinguishes between cognitive/academic language proficiency (CALP) and basic interpersonal communicative skills(BICS). CALP is the language which is necessary to understand and discuss in the classroom. BICS, on the other hand is the language needed diurnally, including conversation with friends, informal interaction.

COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE AFFECTING LEARNING

4

On further explanation of Communicative Competence was carried out by Michael Canale and Merrill Swain resulted in the formation of four different subcategories:

- Grammatical Competence of CC entails the linguistics.
- Discourse Competence, which lengthens the sentences, giving rise to inter-sentential meaning.
- Sociolinguistic Competence requires understanding of the social context.
- Strategic competence enhances the efficiency of communication



Pragmatics

Pragmatics is the study of words and their meanings in language with reference to their context, unlike Semantics which is the study of words in language. It also focuses on the overall inferred meaning drawn from the context itself.

Discourse Styles

Martin Joos, in 1967, proposed the classification of various speech styles and the criterion of formality, being the facade of it. It determines the context of the matter, the audience and most importantly, the occasion. The five levels of formality being:

- **An oratorical style** which is commonly practiced in public speaking; utterance of the words is meticulously planned in advance; intonation is exaggerated in order to convey the thoughts and expressions of the speaker.

- **Deliberative style** is used in addressing the audience, in that way, it initiates the communication between the speaker and the listeners which avoids any possibility of any boring connotation. However, it isn't as formal as the oratorical style.
- **Consultative style** could be best defined as a dialogue exchange, however, words are chosen with care, like doctor-patient conversation.
- **Casual style** could be referred to as the conversations between friends or colleagues, where the social hindrance is relatively low.
- **An intimate style** is specifically characterized by the complete absence of any social hesitance. It could be a talk between family members, loved ones, very close friends, where one's true self hasn't been obscured.

Nonverbal Communication

We communicate so much nonverbally that often the verbal aspect of it is not really taken into account. If social contact is lost, then the essence of communication is itself lost. It isn't about what we say but how we say is what really makes the difference. Person's body language, eye contact, the physical distance is what determines the intentions of the person and his or her sincerity.

Kinesics

Kinesics is the use of body language, in clearly interpretable ways. “There was speech in dumbness, but language in gesture,” wrote Shakespeare in *The Winter’s Tale*. Kinesics has forever been indulged in to know the importance of the message that is being conveyed. The specific interpretations drawn from person’s gestures vary from culture to culture.

Eye Contact

When should it be appropriate to maintain eye contact? Again, it varies from culture to culture. According to the American culture, it is permissible; for instance, two participants of unequal status to maintain prolonged eye contact, in spite of the hierarchy. That, in no way would invoke a sense of being disrespectful, while in Japanese culture, eye contact is often considered being rude. Not only eye contact in particular but eye signals can also portray boredom, eulity, being ashamed, irritation, attraction, and understanding.

Proxemics

Physical Proximity is also a significant communicative category. Edward Hall (1966), noted for example, Americans feel that certain personal space “bubble” has been violated if stranger stands closer than 20 to 24 inches away unless the space is restricted, such s in subway or an elevator.

Artifacts

Artifacts is another nonverbal communicative category which deals with clothing and ornamentation. It reflects a person's self-esteem, socioeconomic class, the way they carry themselves. Both clothing and accessories could be a significant factor in lifting hurdles, as well as setting the connotations.

Kinesthetics

Touching, is referred to as Kinesthetics. How we touch others, or where we touch them can often be misunderstood. In some cultures, touch someone in an intimate way is often considered to be inappropriate. Setting limits can ensure in avoiding ambiguity.

Olfactory Dimensions

Our noses can receive nonverbal messages. In most technological societies, perfumes, lotions, powders, even natural human odors, specifically perspiration is thought to be undesirable.

Linguistic Factors

The way a person talks can give us a clear indication of the situation the person is in and the emotions the person feels at that point of time. Communication styles vary between cultures

and languages too. So, it's quite common to inculcate certain habits and words of a new language spoken frequently by our acquaintances, isn't it? With this, let's go over how communication styles affect the process of learning a new language.

Cross – Linguistic Influence (CLI) and learner language

When we consider learning a second language, we look for the possible similarities, or even dissimilarities, between the language we have existing knowledge of and the second language, in order to make learning a new language easier. The Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) introduces the idea of finding contrasting qualities between a pair of languages to give us at least an outline of the possible hurdles a learner would face, while learning a second language. The learning process should focus on conquering the contrasts between the native and new language, hence avoiding errors like speaking in the new language, with a native accent and grammatical errors.

According to Banathy, Trager and Waddle (1966), a learner's verbal application of a new language has a direct relation to the differences between the native and new language and culture. This was claimed to be determined by a hierarchical structure of difficulties faced by learners, which had been put forward by Prator (1967). The six-level hierarchy, from level zero to five, are namely:

- Transference
- Coalescence
- Under-Differentiation

- Reinterpretation
- Over-Differentiation
- Split

This was supposed to be efficient in predicting the potential difficulties of learners, but later on it did not prove to be of much help.

The six-level hierarchy had ended up making difficulty prediction too simple. The problem faced by learners with a new language is not easy to solve and cannot be generalized as the most effective system. Ronald Wardhaugh called this process ‘unrealistic and impracticable’, correctly pointing out the importance of phonology and utilization of past experiences with the native language. The CAH was questioned by Whitman and Jackson (1972) and their test helped narrow down the CAH as ‘inadequate, theoretically and practically’ for predicting language learner difficulties. However, CLI gives us an important perspective on errors within and between languages. Therefore, the CAH may not be as strong a theory to implement, but neither is CLI insignificant enough to overlook from the learning process. CLI sheds light on the way the native and new language influence each other.

Markedness Theory

Fred Eckman’s (2004, 1981, 1977) ‘Markedness Theory’ stresses on the existence of at least one different feature between a pair of similar words (here, marked and un-marked word) which highlights the differences between the native and new languages for learners to be more receptive to the new language. This theory gave way to the concept of ‘Interlanguage’, which

COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE AFFECTING LEARNING

10

depicts the significance of higher precedence of words for a learner's system. In a learning process, it is obvious to commit a mistake or make an error, therefore Error Analysis became the necessary checkpoint for learners to improve their learning process. The main category for finding errors, i.e. overt and covert errors, was described by Corder's Model (1971). But every situation has its pros and cons, and Error Analysis made pointing out errors more important than appreciating the correct usages in the learning process.

A teacher should show a positive perspective of a new language to enable learners to absorb and apply it better. The stages of a learner's language development (pre-systematic, emergent, systematic, stabilization) are very intricate, therefore the onus lies on the mentor to provide the necessary encouragement to a learner. Even though language development varies among learners (as suggested by models of Tarone, 1988 and Ellis, 1994, 1986), the basic focus should be on the best learning environment. Panova and Lyster (2002) correctly pointed out the need for feedback in the system of language learning; therefore, the learning environment should always be interactive, hence keeping the best interest of learners in mind.

Human Learning

In outlining a theory of second language acquisition, we have discovered that the cognitive domain of human behavior is of key importance in the acquisition of both a first and a second language. Finally, some current thoughts about aptitude and intelligence are presented.

Pavlov's Classical Behaviorism

Certainly the best-known classical behaviorist is the Russian psychologist Ivan Pavlov, who at the turn of the century conducted a series of experiments in which he trained a dog to salivate to the tone of a bell through a procedure that has come to be labeled classical conditioning. In the empirical tradition of John Locke Watson contended that human behavior should be studied objectively, rejecting mentalist notions of innateness and instinct. He adopted the classical conditioning theory as the explanation for all learning: by the process of conditioning. Later, E L Thorndike expanded on classical conditioning models by showing that stimuli that occurred after a behavior had an influence on future behaviors. Thorndike's Law of Effect paved the way for another psychologist, B. F Skinner, to modify our understanding of human learning—to be discussed in the next section, Pavlov's, Watson's, and Thorndike's emphasis on the study of overt behavior and rigorous adherence to the scientific method had a tremendous influence on learning theories for decades. Language teaching practices likewise for many years were influenced by a behaviorist tradition.

Skinner's Operant Conditioning

In 1938, B. E Skinner published his *Behavior of Organisms* and in so doing established himself as one of the leading behaviorists in the United States. He followed the tradition of Watson and Thorndike, but other psychologists (see Anderson and Ausubel, 1965) have called Skinner a neo-behaviorist because he added a unique dimension to behaviorist psychology. Skinner called Pavlovian conditioning respondent conditioning since it was concerned with

COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE AFFECTING LEARNING

12

respondent behavior—that is, behavior that is elicited by a preceding stimulus. Skinner's operant conditioning attempted to account for most of human learning and behavior. According to Skinner, the events or stimuli—the reinforcers—that follows a response and that tend to strengthen behavior or increase the probability of a recurrence of that response constitute a powerful force in the control of human behavior, Reinforcers are far stronger aspects of learning than is mere association of a prior stimulus with a following response, as in the classical conditioning model. We are governed by the consequences of our behavior, and therefore Skinner felt we ought, in studying human behavior, to study the effect of those consequences. And if we wish to control behavior, say, to teach someone something, we ought to attend carefully to reinforcers.



Ausubel's Subsumption Theory

David Ausubel contended that learning takes place in the human organism through a meaningful process of relating new events or items to already existing cognitive concepts or propositions— hanging new items on existing cognitive pegs. Meaning is not an implicit response, but a "clearly articulated and precisely differentiated conscious experience that emerges when potentially meaningful signs, symbols, concepts, or propositions are related to and incorporated within a given individual's cognitive structure on a no arbitrary and substantive basis" (Anderson & Ausubel, 1965, p. 8). It is this relatibility that, according to Ausubel, accounts for a number of phenomena: the acquisition of new meanings (knowledge), retention,

the psychological organization of knowledge as a hierarchical structure, and his eventual occurrence of forgetting.

Rote vs. Meaningful Learning

The cognitive theory of learning as put forth by Ausubel is perhaps best understood by contrasting rote learning and meaningful learning. In the perspective of rote learning, the concept of meaningful learning takes on new significance. Ausubel described rote learning as the process of acquiring material as "discrete and relatively isolated entities that are relatable to cognitive structure only in an arbitrary and verbatim fashion, not permitting the establishment of [meaningful] relationships" (1968, p, 108). As new material enters the cognitive field, it interacts with, and is appropriately subsumed under, a more inclusive conceptual system. The very fact that material is subsumable, that is, relatable to stable elements in cognitive structure, accounts for its usefulness. Meaningful learning is the process whereby blocks become an integral part of already established categories or systematic clusters of blocks. Any learning situation can be meaningful if learners have a meaningful learning set—that is, a disposition to relate the new learning task to what they already know—and the learning task itself is potentially meaningful to the learners— that is, relatable to the learners' structure of knowledge. Frank Smith (1975) also noted that strategies such as mnemonics can be used in parlor games. More than a century ago William James (1890, p. 662) described meaningful learning; In mental terms, the more other facts a fact is associated with in the mind, the better possession of it our memory retains. We are often tempted to examine learning from the perspective of input alone, failing to consider the uselessness of a learned item that is not retained. Human beings are capable of learning almost any process continues in retention Systematic "forgetting": subsumed items are "pruned" in favor

COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE AFFECTING LEARNING

14

of a larger, more global conception, which is, in lump. We can remember an unfamiliar phone number, for example, long enough to dial the number, after which point it is usually extinguished by interfering factors. But a meaningfully learned, subsumed item has far greater potential for retention. Systematic Forgetting Ausubel provided a plausible explanation for the universal nature of forgetting. Since rote learned materials do not interact with cognitive structure in a substantive fashion, they are learned in conformity with the laws of association, and their retention is influenced primarily by the interfering effects of similar rote materials learned immediately before or after the learning task (commonly referred to as proactive and retroactive inhibition). Hence, addresses are retained as part of a meaningful set, while phone numbers, being self-contained, isolated entities, are easily forgotten. Forgetting is really a second or "obliterate" stage of subsumption, characterized as "memorial reduction to the least common denominator" (Ausubel, 1963, p. 218), because it is more economical and less burdensome to retain a single inclusive concept than to remember a large number of more specific items, the importance of a specific item tends to be incorporated into the generalized meaning of the larger item. In this obliterate stage of subsumption, the specific items become progressively less identifiable as entities in their own right until they are finally no longer available and are said to be forgotten.

Conclusion

Communication is such a vital aspect of day-to-day interaction with other people. The very aura a person gives off can distinguish an amiable person from an irritable one. At a first glance though, you may never know the psychological mindset of the person which could justify their behavior and habits. However, the more we spend time with anyone, the more likely it is to pick up at least some of their mannerisms. Hence, if we come across a person who speaks a new language, naturally it intrigues us to the extent that we try to imitate them in order to learn that new language.

Everything boils down to the need for proper communication. Any kind of barrier created within our minds can discourage us from putting forward our ideas in front of other people. A certain body language we project may send the wrong message to a person. Only a positive and interactive approach to teaching a new language will ultimately resonate with the learner and therefore the learner will be able to communicate in the new language, most effectively. Hence, let us put the utmost importance on the way we communicate, so that we can express ourselves in the best way possible.

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