Evolution of the Concept of Communicative Competence

Dr.Sridhar Sharma

Department of English,

Government College, Hod ,Sikar.

Abstract

Generally, an approach to language teaching is derived form a view of language and theory of learning. Whenever a new perspective on language emerges, the applied linguists and language teacher begin to think afresh about the theory of learning. A particular approach gets label form the emphasis that it puts on a particular set of activities, claiming better results.

Thus the approaches are: (1) Traditional Approach (TAP) (2) Structural Approach (STAP) (3) Transformational-Generative Approach (TGAP) (4) Bilingual Approach (BLAP)
(5) Functional Approach (FAP)

Learning depends upon number of complex factors. The social and cultural rules play a significant role in learning a language. In teaching, therefore, certain phenomena of a universal nature have to be molded to suit the requirements of individual speech communities. In the Indian context, an approach has to be formulated, keeping in view three main factors, namely, social rules, cultural ethos, and linguistic diversity, It is, therefore, essential to identify the factors and ideas which would help us formulate an appropriate approach to suit the Indian situation. It is obvious that, whenever we borrow anything forms a foreign county and try to implant in the native land, the results obtained suffer from inherent flaws. Whatever emerges from the native soil and grows out of local experience is likely to prove more relevant and effective. Developments that we have identified to be of significance in this context are the evolution the concept of communicative competence and the designing of need - based syllabuses. First, we critically review these two developments and then move on to the factors that have played a key role in determining out proposal.

Keywords: Communicative Competence, Sociolinguistics, Kinesics, Proxemics, Bilingualism.

Introduction

The notions of competence and performance were initially appealing but soon led to problems in the wake of certain fresh developments in sociolinguistic studies. These developments transformed the entire view on language study and placed a new emphasis on the communicative aspect of language. This would become clearer as we proceed further and show the impact of sociolinguistic studies on ELT.

To begin with let us look at Chomsky himself who makes both a weaker or neutral, and a stronger claim to linguistic competence (Greene 1972). The neutral interpretation of linguistic competence refers to the knowledge of a system of rules and assigns structural description to sentences. This is purely descriptive, and it does not intend to say anything about the way in which the speaker-listener uses the system of rules in constructing well-formed sentences of his languages. But in 1970, he comes out with a stronger claim that the rules of grammar are internalized in the mind of the speaker-listener and provide a basis for understanding and producing sentences of his languages. In other words, he acquires competence which he puts to use in producing and understanding speech.

The issue here is that although some kind of competence is used in the actual performance, it does not consist of the rules of transformation grammar as formulated in the Standard Theory of Chomsky (Munby 1978),

Further, the interpretation of competence gives rise to the problem of how to draw the line of demarcation between competence and performance. Several sociolinguists found Chomsky's competence- performance distinction to be too restricted to account for language in use. The Chomsky's formulation neglects the social aspects of language is pointed out by cooper (1968); Habermas (1970); Campbell and Wales (1970); Lyons (1970); Jakobovits (1970); Widdowson (1971); Halliday (1971, 1972); and Hymes (1972).

Hymes (1972) criticizes the distinction of competence and performance because Chomsky omits almost everything of sociocultural significance, and is concerned only with psychological constraints, rather than with social interaction. It must be recognized that communicative ability is a complex and many-sided phenomenon. Language has to fulfill the communicative demands of a community. The learner has to acquire communicative skills to meet these demands. As we are aware, languages function in a context and words acquire significance from the context, and therefore, social rules which enable the speaker-listener to interpret the social meaning, must also be taken into consideration.

Jakobovits (1970) expresses more or less similar view when he says that along with rules of syntax, social context selection rules constitute an essential part of linguistic competence. Campbell and Wales (1970), and Fador and Garretts (1966) point out that Chomsky's notion of competence does not take into consideration one of the most important linguistic abilities, that is, to understand and produce utterances which are not only grammatical but also appropriate to the situational and verbal contexts in which they are made.

Cooper (1968) and Hymes (1971) also argue that there was a lot more to linguistic activity than the production of grammatical sentences. Cooper (1968) held the view that effective communicaton requires more than linguistic competence. It means, to communicate effectively, a speaker must know not only how to produce grammatical utterances of a language, but also how to use them appropriately. This comprises his contextual competence. Emphasizing this aspect Hymes (1971) observes:

"…a normal child acquires knowledge of sentence, not only as grammatical but also as appropriate. He or she acquires competence as to when to speak, when not, and as to what to talk about with whom, when, where, in what manner ….The competence moreover, its features and uses. (277-278)

Analysis:

It is clear that the speaker's linguistic and contextual competence is the two main components of communicative competence. It complements, if not counters Chomsky's notion of purely grammatical competence. Communicative competence is not simply what is done with language; it involves abstract knowledge not of a type that is much less systematized and mathematized than that proposed by Chomsky. It includes the cultural knowledge, the organization of verbal means for socially-defined purposes and the sensitivity of language for situations, relationships and intentions. Cooper (1968), and Widdowson (1971), too suggest that the notion of competence must be enlarged to include contextual appropriateness because "there are rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless" (Hymes 1971).

Widdowson's (1971) interpretation of communicative competence is essentially Hymesian's view of communicative competence, although it derives more from rhetoric and discourse analysis. He also attacks Chomsky's distinction of competence and performance. He points out that the speaker's competence includes knowledge of how to recognize and how to use sentences to perform rhetorical acts. According to him communicative competence is "the knowledge of the rules of use in particular social situations."

Loveday (1982) follows a slightly different route to determine the meaning of the notion of communicative competence. He looks upon language as network of interactions and manifestations of speaker- hearer roles. The learner needs to know how to make and understand utterances which express certain concepts, perform certain communicative acts, and in general enable the learner to participate in the international processes of normal language use. The learner has to be aware of the diverse ways of constructing messages. The paralinguistic, proxemics and language of generational patterns which are so essential for communicating are closely associated with our interactional process. They are also to be carefully studied in order to understand the meaning of communication. Certainly, in the process of communication of meaning we signal the grammar, the vocabulary, the topic, the setting the occasion and the variation in language.

Communicative competence entails knowing how to incorporate contextual determinants into linguistic constituents when producing meaning. Meaning emerges in relation to what the interactants try to demonstrate, what they are doing, what they have done before and what they are engaged in and derives from the context of on-going interaction. Loveday emphasizes that the speaker is someone who manipulates the communicative system for himself in accordance with social interaction practices and not one who acts as an automat responding to environmental stimuli.

The symbolizing Patterns include various mean like: linguistic forms (phonetic, grammar, and lexical) and non - linguistic forms such as kinesics and proxemics. Framing patterns refer to the principles and conventions which connect, compose and regulate communicative behavior but they are not intrinsically symbolic, although they convey meanings. Loveday (1982) rightly says,

"Both framing and symbolizing patterns function in accordance with the social, cultural beliefs, values and practices of the community which employ them. They function in unison, helping to clarify sense, modifying each other and accommodating to the context."(65)

As shown in the figure, their meaning comes into being only when they occur with and adapt to the contextual, determinants. Having thus discussed the factors determining communication, Loveday describes communicative competence as the knowledge and the ability to construct meaning in a way that it is socio-culturally appropriate in all contexts of situation. This view is not materially different from that of Hymens and other scholars discussed earlier.

It is thus clear that the notion of communicative competence needs to be widened to include four aspects, namely, the speaker- listener's grammatical (formally possible), psycholinguistic (implementation feasible) socio-cultural (contextually appropriate) and be facto (actually occurring) knowledge and ability for use.

From the foregoing discussion we can draw the following conclusions. First, the notion of communicative competence is a comprehensive concept drawing upon the constituent elements of the notions of both competence and performance. Second, the, use of language is conditioned by the communication needs engendered by the social pressure exerted on the learner. Third, language learning depends upon a complexity of factors, all of which are not linguistics. Fourth, the body of knowledge that has accumulated in a bid to understand, to criticize, to modify or to widen the Chomskyan notions of competence and performance provides a number of useful ideas for formation of our proposal.

DESIGNING OF NEEDS- BASED SYLLABUSES

The determination of needs of learners is significant in the formulation of an approach and crucial in designing syllabuses and preparation of teaching materials. The studies made for this purpose have been appropriately termed as studies in English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Though, the main focus of ESP is on the

designing of syllabus, in effect it suggests a whole strategy of second language teaching. A syllabus, as we know, is the base which generates teaching activities. Moreover, as we shall see presently, the needs based syllabuses do not merely present an inventory of teaching items; they go beyond it. A close look at the syllabus can make it clear to the discerning teacher what king of activities he should generate to impart competence in this area has been done by the Council of Europe, and in particular by Wilkins (1973, 1974, 1976) and Van EK (1975). These studies emphasize that in the actual use of language people do not just produce sentences but express concepts and fulfill communicative functions. They, therefore, propose that the content of language teaching courses should be defined in terms not of formal elements of concepts and functions for the realization of which these elements are used. Wilkins groups these concepts and functions under the general heading of notions and outlines a preliminary inventory (Wilkins, 1976) whereas Van E.K. (1975) provides more detailed specification of notions. The rationale behind this proposal has been clearly stated by Wilkins. According to him, "what people do through language is more important than mastery of the language as an unapplied system." (Wilkins 1976,42).

No one would seriously quarrel with this contention of Wilkins. However, the question is whether the notional syllabus really accounts for what people want to do through language.

The British applied linguists hold the view that the notional syllabus is merely replacing one kind of list with another. it specifies products, rather than communicative process. Widdowson (1977) saw in Wilkin's proposal only a partial and vague definition of certain semantic motions. He argues that notional-functional categories provides.

"only a very partial and imprecise definition of certain semantic and pragmatic rules which are used for reference when people interact. They tell us nothing about the procedures people employ in the application of these rules when they are actually engaged in communicative activity." (Widdowson 1977, 31).

He draws attention to the limitations of notional syllabus by observing that:

".. It does not deal with language in context but only in concepts and functions in idealized isolation, informally described and exemplified by citation forms whose very explicitness signals their ideal character." (Widdowson 1977, 31).

Thus, if we are to develop, "the ability to do things with language, then it is discourse which must be at the center of our attention" (Widdowson, 1977,31). Brumfit (1980) also criticizes the notional syllabus but on a different ground. He points out that the notional model fails to take any cognizance of the fact that whenever "….languages have adopted to new circumstances, new needs and new speakers, they have reflected and contributed to cultural change… by constantly renegotiating their values in functional terms….".(103)

Whatever be the criticism, it is clear that the main concern behind the proposal for the notional syllabus was the imparting of communicative competence. One can safely say that this proposal went a long way in changing our attitude towards language teaching by focusing the attention on the actual needs of learners. The proposal also underlined the concern for paying greater It would perhaps be appropriate to draw attention to several other proposals and models which have emerged as a result of this concern. Here, we would only like to list a modified version of Yalden's (1983) classification of communicative syllabus types with reference source to each model given by Richards and Rodgers (1986).

Table

Communicative Syllabus Types

S.No.	Syllabus Type	Name associated with it
1.	Functional	Jupp and Holdin (1975)
2.	Structure plus Functions	Wilkins (1976)
3.	Notional	Wilkins (1976)
4.	Learner-generated	Candlin (1976)
5.	Interactional	Widdowson (1979)
6.	Functional Spiral around Structural core	Brumfit (1980)
7.	Structural Functional Instrumental	Allen (1980)
8.	Task - based	Prabhu (1983)

The designing of ELT program depends upon a number of complex factors. Merely specification of learner needs and determining the specific purposes cannot yield satisfactory results. In formulating a language teaching policy decisions have to be based on the social role of language in a particular society and therefore information on the use of language in that society has to be scientifically collected. For this, language surveys have been made in a number of countries:, for example, the survey of language use and language teaching in East Africa (Prator 1975, Polome 1975):, the survey of language use and attitudes in the Philippines (Sibayan, 1975) and the survey of English use and English-language policy in Jordon (Harrison et al. 1975, Tucker, 1976).

Here, it is relevant to refer to two studies that have been made in Indian to identify the learner needs and to propose needs- based syllabuses. The first is that by Banerji (1984). She proposes a needs - based syllabus to teach English at the undergraduate level in India. She carried out a survey of the language tasks that the professional perform in real-life situations. After analyzing the data received, she has suggested a list of tasks and sub - tasks which can be used as basis for designing the syllabus. She argues that the syllabus so designed would meet the academic requirements and also serve the general educational Purpose. Her survey also confirms that one of the important needs of learners is the ability to read effectively. The Curriculum Development Cell, I.I.T Kanpur (1993) which conducted the survey for identifying the English language needs for technical education does not come out with a well- defined syllabus. However, it does confirm the necessity for revamping of ELT in technical institutions. It also shows the importance of reading as one of the needs essential for the acquisition of competence in English. It is universally acknowledged that reading is one of the important language skills that equip the learner with a master key that will open many doors that lead to the road of learning and enlightenment (Gurrey 1956, Mohan 1981).

In the Indian context, where English serves as a window on the world, the development of this skill deserves, special attention. This need was recognized by the Education Commission (1964-66) which made a strong plea for teaching English as a library language. therefore, any approach to ELT, to be comprehensive and relevant in the Indian context, should advocate the acquisition of reading competence as an essential equipment a learner for achieving communicative proficiency in second language.

As we said in the beginning of this discussion, syllabus is one of the key factors in ELT activity. In the intense concern for formulating more relevant syllabuses a number of new ideas or old ideas with new emphasis have come to the fore. These provide substance for identifying more specific and relevant factors. We shall now briefly look at these factors.

KEY FACTORS IN FORMULATING THE PROPOSAL

There has been an increasing concern to the negotiation meaning through a judicious manipulation of discourse elements and performance of rhetorical acts, keeping in mind the process of communication in a slightly different way. Generally this process in described in terms of what the sender desires to convey and what is actually received by the receiver. In fact, the situations are more complex as several other factors enter into the circuit which processes meaning.

The Process of Sociolinguistic Communication

The intended message is what the sender desires to convey in a given situation. There are two main constraints in the realization of his intention. These have been termed as linguistic constraints and situational constraints. The former refers to the sender's command over the language and his ability to exploit the linguistic potential and the latter refers to the restrictions imposed by socio-cultural factors and sometimes even by political expediency. With these constraints the actual message is constructed and transmitted. On reception, the receiver exercises his interpretative ability to comprehend it. In this process again linguistic and situational constraints play a role in shaping the final message.

An outflow of bilingualism in India is the use of a number of sub- codes, code - switching and code - mixing which characterize the use of English by Indians. But a more significant aspect of this is the fact that the learner of English is exposed to bilingual education and so far as language is concerned he is already a master of his mother - tongue. Unfortunately, in the past there have been suggestions for a complete obliteration of what has already been imbibed by the L2 learner in his L1 verbal behavior. This long - standing belief has been attacked successfully by Gulia (1992). He has forcefully argued that L1 is not interference to the learning of L2. In fact, if exploited effectively, it can accelerate the process of L2 learning. He shows how the competence acquired in L1 in highly relevant in teaching English at all the main levels, namely, phonological, grammatical, lexical, and semantic.

The time has come to muster enough courage to defy the strong currents of changes that we have been importing for a long time. We need to "modify, expand and even replace the model of models on the basis of our needs, our problems and limitations and the socio-cultural settings in which we are learning and teaching English" (Verma (1933), 115-116). We have to liberate ourselves from narrow, pedantic, academic shackles and a complete surrender to external domination, mainly by the British and American scholars. However, the movement on a new path has to be guided by a judicious selection of ideas and the light that is emanated by our aspirations as society. We have examined in some detail how the process of Indianisation of English has been going on at all level of language and a new variety called "Indian English is" is emerging and gaining international acceptance.

In formulating a new approach, we must therefore, ensure that the ability to use language is marked both by internal consistency and external appropriateness, The internal consistency within the text of communication event includes grammatical correctness, accepted usage and the use of conventional rules of speaking and writing. The external appropriateness relates to the habits of thought and patterns of behaviour of the users. In the Indian context we must take into account the process of Indianisation of English which, as we know, is based on strong socio- cultural currents that characterize our society. In fact, we may go to the extent of saying that in India English is more than second language apart from being an instrument of communication in the professional world. it is a means of cultural expression, social interaction, creative writings, academic advancement, and political activity. The fact is that English performs several L1 functions in our country. This process has to some extent led to the emergence of certain typically Indian uses of English which mark a departure from the accepted British usage. To what extent the deviations should be accepted depends upon an overall consideration of their acceptability in India and in broad terms their international acceptance also. Obviously, those that satisfy these two requirements would be the ones arrived at by stretching the rules and practice of the standard British usage.

BASIC CONSTITUENTS OF THE APPROACH

We believe the stage is now set to move on the list the basic concepts and ideas that constitute SAP. Before we do so it would be appropriate to look at how this approach views language:

i)   Language is system for the expression of meaning in a socio-cultural context.

ii)   Language is vehicle for the realization of interpersonal relations.

iii)   Language is tool for the performance of social transactions.

iv)   Language is an instrument for acquiring knowledge.

v)   Language is best learnt not exclusively as a tool but as a complete educational experience.

Conclusion

In the discussion so far we have paid attention to certain basic thoughts which have gone into the shaping of SAP as we view it. We may now list the various notions derived from our critical review of significant developments in the areas of sociolinguistics, bilingualism, Indianisation of English and the exiting approaches to ELT. These notions together with the suggestions made earlier in this Chapter constitutes the staple substance of the SAP. We have divided the notions into two categories which we may call Category A: contents - oriented factors; and Category B: procedures - oriented ideas. As the names themselves indicate, Category A contains those notions that are likely to generate and determine the kind of syllabus and material which would be required in realizing this approach. Category B consists of such ideas as are likely to suggest methods and procedures of attaining the goal of this approach, namely, the imparting of sociolinguistic competence.

Category A

i)   The social setting in which the language is used;

ii)   The role the learner plays in the given setting;

iii)   The communicative events in which the learner participates;

iv)   The communicative key which the learner uses;

v)   The social pressures that demand communication;

vi)   The topics and concepts that the learner needs to communicate about;

vii)   The extent of mastery over the language systems of the target language; that the learner has;

viii)   The extent of the learner's command over the lexis of the target languages;

ix)   The degree of bilingual proficiency that the learner has;

x)   The purposes for which the language is to be learnt/

xi)   The sociocultural group to which the learner belongs; and

xii)   The varieties of the target language that the learner would   be required to use.

Category B

i)   The language is interactional in nature.

ii)   The negotiation of meaning in the learning process depends upon the specific language skills, the mode of expression and the learner groups' social knowledge.

iii)   The acquisition of proficiency in one language skills fortifies the other skills.

vi)   Peer work builds motivation and confidence in using the acquired skills and increases the student's participation in the learning process.

v)   The imparting of efficiency in reading is both cumulative and spiral and deserves special attention.

vi)   The exposure to language usage in a diversity of situations relevant to the socio-cultural setting quickens the pace of learning.

vii)   Original writings provide more useful samples of communication than artificially produced materials for pedagogic purposes.

viii)   The use of first language in the teaching/learning process for clearly specified purposes has a good potential for exploitation.

ix)   The phenomena of code-mixing and code-switching need to be kept in view for determining the strategies of teaching.

x)   The choice of language varies according to social function   and personal intention.

xi)   A proper use of paralinguistic communicative features is an essential part of second language learning.

xii)   It is necessary to take into account the heterogeneous communicative competence and the linguistic diversity of the target group.

xiii)   The learner has to make spontaneous transactions in communication situations.

It would be observed that our categorization does not put factors and ideas into water-tight compartments and the reason for this is very simple. The notions we have listed are capable of doing more than what can be narrowly interpreted at the first glance. At the implementation stage they are likely to have multiple ramifications and diverse interpretations. In fact, one can even quarrel with the relevance of putting a particular idea in a particular category. This, however, does not distort the model of this approach, which has to be viewed in totality.

As we have suggested earlier, our concept of sociolinguistic competencies more comprehensive than those mentioned earlier in this chapter. It includes the following abilities. The first is an ability to generate grammatically correct sentences and refers to what Chomsky calls linguistic competence and what Hymes intends by what is formally possible. The second is an ability to use language is terms of its rhetorical functions. The third is an ability to understand the socio-social context in which communication takes place, including role-relationships, the shared information of participants, and the purpose for interaction. The fourth is an ability to construct and comprehend discourse which means interpretation of individual messages and elements in terms of their interconnectedness and representation of meaning relationship in the entire text. The fifth is an ability to cope with the verbal and non-verbal strategies that communicators employ to initiate, to terminate, to maintain, to repair and to redirect communication.

All the abilities mentioned above have been taken into consideration in our proposal. As we perceive it, SAP would ensure the achievements of the three main goals of ELT, namely, correctness, appropriateness and fluency. The correctness is conceived in terms of grammatical accuracy and adherence to the rules of usage acceptable to the concerned speech community. The notion of appropriateness refers to the extent of relevance of the material chosen. The notion of fluency refers to the use of language spontaneously in a given situation. Of course, the fluency required in second language would differ from community to community. This implies that the application of SAP in a particular community would have strategies of operation unique to that community.

An analysis of the views and recommendations of different educational bodies clearly shows the concern for improving the standard of teaching English in Indian, so that the educated class of our country can use it efficiently a language of communication and intellection for national and international purpose. There is no quarreling with the fact that there is a strong and urgent need for examining the current practices in ELT and to look for more efficient and viable alternatives.

Works cited:

Brumfit,C.J. and Carter R.A. eds.(1986).Literature and Language Teaching, Oxford.

       Oxford University Press.

Hymes, Dell. 1962. "The Ethnography of speaking." Fishman, J.A 1968 (ed). Readings in the
       Sociology of Language, Paris. Mouton.

Loveday, Leo. 1982. The Sociolinguistics of Learning and Using a Non-native language.
       Oxford. Pergamon Press.

Saussure, F. de. (1916). Course de linguistique generale, Bally, C. Sechehaye, A and Rudlinger,   A. (eds.)
       Paris: Payol. Third Edition: 1965.

Widdowson,H.G.(1976).Styllistics and Teaching of Literature,Oxfordshire.Routlege.

Wilkins, D.A. 1976. Notional Syllabuses. London. Oxford University press.

Verma, S.K. 1982. Swadeshi English" Form and Function". In Pride, J.B. (ed). New Englishes.   Rowley, Massachusetts: Newbury House Publishers Inc.