



FEATURES OF SPEECH: POSSIBILITY, FEASIBILITY AND APPROPRIATENESS THROUGH COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

DR. KIRTI BALA

Trainer

Amity University Rajasthan

(RAJ) INDIA

ABSTRACT

In today's globalised world it is very important to convey our thoughts and ideas in an apt manner. Importance of speech is known to everyone but as teachers we should focus on making our students communicative competent. This paper discusses the important elements of communicative competence, areas on which this competence needs to be assessed, as well as various components and features of speech. The paper advocates the need for incorporating these aspects in ESL teaching curriculum so that we may work towards the improved communication skills of the learners.

INTRODUCTION

Speech is the nucleus of human life. It serves many functions; the primary among them is communication. Jones states that, 'Speaking is a form of communication.' Generally, speech is spontaneous, open-ended and evolving. It includes the collective experiences of the participants and its form and meaning are dependent on the context.

'It is through speech that children learn to organize their thinking and focus their ideas' (Lyle, 1993). Oral language development is the most important aspect in the process of a child's intellectual development. Infact it is the oral skills through which we acquire knowledge; reading and writing come later.

Speaking in relation to Communicative Competence

Bygate (1987) defines the skill of speaking as saying something clearly, conveniently and appropriately during the period of conversation. Hymes (1972;inCook2001) asserts that

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simply having the knowledge of any language is not sufficient unless the speaker is able to use it according to various situations. Chomsky (1965) made this distinction in his competence-performance issue. He asserts that language production level should always be headed by acquiring a certain amount of knowledge. Competence is a speakers' knowledge of the rules of his native language. It is the mechanism that helps a person understand and form new set of sentence structures. It is the overall language storage of any individual's lifetime. On the other hand performance is what a person actually produces by applying the rules he has learned. Generally performance is not the real reflection of competence. So it is very clear that if a person does not perform well during a spoken intercourse, it does not mean that he lacks spoken competence. But if the performance is well it implies that the speaker has 'well accumulated competence.'

Communicative competence enables one to use language appropriately in any kinds of situation. It is a very important term for second language learning and acquisition theory. It was first used by Dell Hymes in 1966.

Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics, defines 'communicative competence' as the ability to form grammatically correct sentences and simultaneously be aware about when and where to use these sentences.

Communicative competence primarily depends on the context in which the interaction takes place (Cody and McLaughlin, 1985; Applegate and Leichthy, 1984, Rubin, 1985). According to McCroskey (1982),

The domain of communicative competence includes learning what are the available means (available strategies), how they have been employed in various situations in the past, and being able to determine which ones have the highest probability of success in a given situation.

Assessing Communicative Competence

It is a complex phenomenon to assess communicative competence. Canary & Cody (2000) have described the following six criteria for assessing it:

Adaptability (Flexibility)

It is the ability which makes the speaker change his behavior and goals as per the needs of the interaction. It comprises various factors, which include social experience, composure and confirmation. It keeps the speaker calm through accurate observation during social

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interactions. Simultaneously its another component makes speaker sensitive towards the goal of other speakers. It makes speaker express ideas intelligibly, keeping in mind the amount and type of information to be disclosed. It also gives speaker the ability to use acceptable wit and humor according to the kind of interaction.

Conversational Involvement

It reflects speakers' thought process and behavioral activities which are reflected through interaction behavior. It is assessed according to three factors viz. responsiveness, perceptiveness and attentiveness. These factors make the speakers know what to say, help them know about their role during interaction, making them aware of how others perceive them. And the final factor lies in the fact that listening is also important. One must never be pre-occupied during the course of an interaction.

Conversational Management

It reflects in the way the communicators regulate their interactions and how they adapt and control the social situations. It also manages the smooth flow of communication and directs the way in which the topics proceed and change. Knowledge of the rules of interpersonal communication exchange helps acquiring a smooth flowing interaction. Wiemann J (1977) mentions the five most common communicative competencies, which help in managing interaction:

1. The speaker should not be interrupted by anyone.
2. Only one person must talk at a time.
3. There must be a balance maintained in turn-taking
4. One must try to get rid of frequent or long pauses.
5. Both parties should be assured that the other is devoting his or her undivided attention.

Empathy

It is the ability to show parallel emotions. It is considered a basic dimension of interpersonal and communicative competence. Empathy is the ability to demonstrate cognitive understanding and sharing emotional reactions to the situation. Some basic features of empathy are:

- Connecting people with one another on a meaningful level.



- Demonstrating a caring attitude toward others
- Leading conversation towards emotional issues.
- Building personal rapport with others
- Reducing prejudice or negative assumptions about others
- Fostering more meaningful, more helpful and closer friendships.

Effectiveness

It is reflected in achieving the objectives of the conversation and personal goals as well. It refers to the degree to which communicators achieve mutually shared meaning, which lead to intercultural understanding. Intercultural clashes and mismatched content or relational meaning brings in ineffectiveness in the interaction. Attending multiple meaning with accuracy and achieving desired interaction goals helps enhancing effectiveness in communication which later helps in improving task productivity.

Appropriateness

It reflects the fundamental criteria for determining competence, which upholds the expectations for a given situation. There are certain underlying values, norms, social roles, expectations, and scripts that govern the interaction episode. These aspects of language help to assess the appropriateness of communication. Self-perception and other- perception data, which reflect the competence evaluation from the standpoint of both communicators and interested observers, also helps to understand the appropriateness of communication.

Components of Communicative Competence

Communicative competence comprises social, pragmatic and contextual factors. It is necessary to understand all the components of communicative competence to understand it in a better way. According to Canale and Swain (1980) its four main components are:

- Grammatical competence
- Sociolinguistic competence
- Discourse competence
- Strategic competence

Here is a brief description of all these components:



Grammatical Competence

It includes knowledge of lexical, morphological, syntactical and phonological features of language. All the above-mentioned features govern the choice of words and their forms and arrangements in any utterance. Grammatical competence is the knowledge of rules rather than knowledge of items or relations. It is generally innate in native speakers as one does not have to be trained to acquire it. Alptekin (2002) argues that grammatical competence is essential for every speaker in order to create structures in a language.

Sociolinguistic Competence

According to Bachman (1994), sociolinguistic competence takes consideration of the social rules of language. It is the ability to produce utterances which are appropriate to the social situation in which they are spoken. It uses language with regards to sensitivity towards dialect, register, cultural references and other such factors. These factors determine the roles of participants in a given interaction, their social status, the information type they share and the function of the interaction. As social conditions govern the interaction process, they may both hinder or enhance the communication, which depends on the way the speaker is interacting.

Discourse Competence

Discourse competence can be defined as the ability to use coherent and cohesive texts. (Bachman 1990) Cohesion refers to how we link ideas linguistically whereas coherence refers to how we link the meanings of sentences or utterances. It lies in constructing longer stretches of language to make a coherent whole. It links ideas on the basis of the knowledge of the world. Without this kind of competence it is hard to maintain deep and long conversation.

Strategic Competence

Strategic competence is often associated with language competence since it is used to compensate for low proficiency in the early stages of learning. To compensate for the gap in one's knowledge of the language, one should know the appropriate strategies. It helps to recognize and repair communication breakdown. Speaker uses repetition, volume, or many such ways to get one's message across. It is also helpful in case of misunderstandings caused during interaction.

Features of Speech



While speaking, certain words carry more importance or information than others. This is reflected through a combination of supra-segmental features like stress, rhythm, intonation, pitch and voice quality which affect the meaning of speech and control the structure and meaning of information.

Loroy (1995) asserts, 'It is impossible to speak without rhythm and intonation, and these deeply affect the quality of speech sounds.' For a better communicative discourse it is important to teach and learn intonational features of speech. Cruttenden (1986) has described three important features of intonation:\

- *Division of a stream of speech into intonation units,*
- *Selection of a syllable which is assigned the 'tonic' status,*
- *Selection of a tone for the intonation unit*

Brazil *et al* (1986) have added one more feature to this list, which is pitch range, or key. Here is a brief introduction of all these features of speech:

Intonation Units

An 'Intonation Unit' is a stream of utterance, which is bound by pauses. Pauses pack the information in such a way that the intonation unit form specific psychological and lexicogrammatical realities. Almost all intonation units consist of stress, rise and fall of tone and pitch.

'Intonation unit' is closely related to pauses, which may even bring change in the message. Here is an example of this given by Roach (1983), in which slashes correspond to pauses. The meaning is given in brackets.

- Those who sold quickly/ made a profit.
(A profit was made by those who sold quickly)
- Those who sold/ quickly made a profit.
(A profit was quickly made by those who sold)

Stress

Stress is an important prosodic feature which involves loudness, length and pitch applied to individual syllables. It is generally observed that the word which contains the highest information content gets more stress as compared to others. Generally it is content words



such as verbs, nouns, adjectives, and adverbs that are stressed as compared to function words like articles, prepositions, conjunctions and modal auxiliaries. Furthermore, it is content words that are polysyllabic, not function words. There are four major type of stress:

Tonic Stress

Tonic stress is the peak stress received by a syllable in intonation unit. Generally it is found in a content word at the final position of any utterance. This term is usually used in referring, proclaiming and reporting utterances. For example:

- I'm going.
- I'm going to London.
- I'm going to London for a holiday.

Emphatic Stress

If an intensifier or an adverb is required to be given more emphasis than the tonic stress syllable, it is named as emphatic stress. Stress position in it changes from the principal noun to another content word. It brings attention to the extraordinary nature of the emphasized word e.g.,

- It was very BOring. (tonic stress) It was VEry boring.(Emphatic)
- That was a difficult test. - (tonic stress)

That was a difficult test. – (Emphasizes how difficult the test was)

Contrastive Stress

In it the stressed item can be contrasted with some other notion in the utterance. There is no distinction between content words and function words in this kind of stress. For example:

- I think I prefer this color.
- Do you want these or those curtains?

This type of stress also brings out change in the meaning of the sentence as reflected in the examples below:

- She played the piano yesterday. (It was she who played...)



- She played the piano yesterday. (She only played (not harmed)...))
- She played the piano yesterday. (It was the piano that...)
- She played the piano yesterday. (It was yesterday.....)

New Information Stress

The information provided in response to a question is generally stressed. It is clearer in the case of wh - questions.

- a) What's your NAME?
- b) My name's JOAN.
- a) Where are you FROM?
- b) I'm from LONDON.

The lexical item that carries the information regarding the communicative purpose is generally given the 'New Information Stress.' It is the core of the message in the utterance.

Tone

While speaking, the variation in the pitch of voice is called tone. By using tones, speakers signal whether to refer, declare, agree, disagree, question or hesitate.

It is the direction of the pitch movement at the last stressed syllable which makes a tone rise or fall. O'Connor and Arnold (1973) have distinguished two kinds of tones: rising and falling. Whereas Brazil *et al* (1980) and Roach (1983) have classified five tones viz. fall, rise, rise fall, fall rise, and level. Here is a brief description of the different types of tones:

Fall (A Falling Tone)

Falling tone indicates finality or completion of the speaker in the content of the utterance. It indicates the addressee's chance to comment something to carry forward the conversation. It moves from a higher to a lower pitch. It has two subtypes: a *low fall* is used to end statements, give orders, and the *high fall* is used in contrastive stress.

The Rising Tone

A rising tone moves from a lower to a higher pitch. It indicates the promptness to say more. It is further divided in two subtypes: The low rise and the high rise. The low rise is used for



incomplete statements, requests, and in expressions of politeness and interest. The high rise occurs in asking non-emphatic *yes-no* questions, echo questions, and emphatic *wh*-questions.

The Rise–Fall

It indicates a strong feeling of approval, disapproval or surprise. It moves from a lower to a higher pitch and then back. It is like the fall, but is more emphatic or exclamatory.

The Fall-Rise

This type of tone signals dependency, continuity, and non finality (Cruttenden, 1986). It moves from a higher to a lower pitch and then back. It may also express assertion and contradiction.

The Level Tone

It reflects boredom. In it the ‘slope’ of the pitch movement is not enough to be classed as a rise or a fall.

Pitch

Pitch primarily depends on the rate of vibration of vocal cords. Ladefoged (1982) submits that pitch variations occur by the alteration of the tension of vocal cords. It is an acoustic element of tone. As pitch depends on frequency, which is a characteristic of tone, it ascends and descends with frequency.

Conclusion:

Along with these language features there are certain other factors also which affect the intended meaning of the speaker. These are: using appropriate grammatical structures and vocabulary, using gestures and body language, knowing the characteristics of the target audience, including shared knowledge or shared points of reference, status and power relations of participants, their interest levels, or differences in perspectives. Amalgamation of all these factors collectively improves the speakers’ skill and makes him an efficient learner. Generally, while teaching English, preference is given to improve the writing skills of the students, emphasizing mainly on grammar and vocabulary. Language development process requires the integration of all the language skills in the teaching methods in a planned and structured way. Therefore, in the concluding lines it can be said that the features of speech are possible, feasible, flexible and adaptable only by using language in the most competent way.

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PUNE RESEARCH

ISSN 2454-3454

AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL IN ENGLISH

VOL 4, ISSUE 1

UGC Approved Journal No 48520 (Arts & Humanities) ENGLISH

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UGC Approved Journal No 48520 (Arts & Humanities) ENGLISH

VOL 4, ISSUE 1

www.puneresearch.com/english

JAN – FEB 2018

(IMPACT FACTOR 3.02) INDEXED, PEER-REVIEWED / REFEREED INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL