

## DEVELOPING ORAL AND WRITTEN INTERACTIONAL COMPETENCE

*Abstract:* Sociocultural theory suggests that competence development occurs first on the social and interpersonal level and then moves on the international and psychological level (Vigotsky, 1981). Thus social interaction is the primordial site for learning to take place and an investigation of the processes of learning should start from close examination of the novice's social interaction. Situated learning theory specifies further that learning is located in discursive practices specific to the target community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The idea that social interaction is organized into discursive practices –bound, recurrent and recognizable units –has been long established. First, situated learning theory asserts that development happens on multiple levels, in multiple forms, in “legitimate participation”, understanding of practice”, and “knowledgeable skill” over time. Wenger (1998) states that becoming a member of a community of practice involves developing the “discourses” that are shared by that community in practice.

*Key words:* competence, interaction, discursive practices, situated learning, expert

### 1. Oral interactional competence

The focus of interactional competence is on the structure of recurring episodes of face-to-face interaction in context, episodes that are of social and cultural significance to a community of speakers. Such episodes have been called interactive practices by Hall (1995), communicative practices by Hanks (1996), and share similarities with the speech events described by Hymes (1974). Linguistic anthropologists (e.g., University of Hawaii Department of Anthropology, No date) have referred to these episodes as *discursive practices*, and this is the term that will be used to refer to them. A discursive practice approach to language-in-interaction takes a view of social realities as interactionally constructed rather than existing independently of interaction, of meanings as negotiated through interaction rather than fixed in advance of interaction, of the context-bound nature of discourse, and of discourse as social action.

There are lots of projects investigating social practices of administrative staff and international students in their encounters with one another at an international university. Researchers utilize video data from administrative staff-student interactions within the multilingual and multicultural environment of an international university to investigate how co-participants invoke a range of semiotic resources to manage their talk-in-interaction. The international university affords a rich environment in which to observe these practices, as there is a large variety of interactions which necessitate satisfactory negotiations and which rely on talk, bodily conduct and material and graphic structures in the environment (Goodwin, 2003; Hindmarsh & Heath, 2003). Conversation Analysis (CA) has provided the main methodological orientation for the research, supplemented by ethnographic fieldwork carried out at an international university. Sometimes elements of Context Analysis (Kendon, 1990) and Interaction Analysis (Jordan & Henderson, 1995) are included.

Both these approaches share CA's commitments to how they treat the phenomena of human interaction. Situated cognition, or situated learning, has made a significant impact on educational thinking since it was first expounded by Brown, Collins and Duguid in their article: 'Situated cognition and the culture of learning' which appeared in the *Educational Researcher* in 1989. Based on the work of some of the great educational thinkers—credits include Vygotsky, Leontiev, and Dewey—the authors also expressed a deep indebtedness to Jean Lave, whose work has been instrumental in providing the research base for the theory. Resnick (1987) pre-empted situated learning by proposing that 'bridging apprenticeships' be designed to bridge the gap between the theoretical learning in the formal instruction of the classroom and the real-life application of the knowledge in the work environment. Lave and Wenger (1991) wrote about the halls of the Institute for Research on learning buzzing with the discussion of notions of apprenticeship in the late 80s. The ideas had captured the imaginations of many of the thinkers and researchers at the time. However, Brown, Collins and Duguid (1989) were the first to use the ideas to produce a proposal for a model of instruction that has implications for classroom practice. The model arose out of observation of successful learning situations by the researchers. They set out to find examples of learning in any context or culture which were effective, and to analyze the key features of such models. They found examples of traditional school subjects, such as mathematics, reading, and writing, which were being taught in innovative and effective ways (Collins, Brown, and Newman, 1989), and other areas of instruction such as snow skiing, where learning time had diminished from two years to two weeks as a result of instruction (Burton, Brown, and Fischer, 1984).

An analysis of common features found in all the successful models was a set of six critical factors: apprenticeship, collaboration, reflection, coaching, multiple practice and articulation (McLellan, 1991). In proposing their model of situated cognition, Brown, Collins and Duguid (1989) argued that meaningful learning will only take place if it is embedded in the social and physical context

within which it will be used. Formal learning is often quite distinct from authentic activity, or 'the ordinary practices of the culture' (p. 34). Many of the activities undertaken by students are unrelated to the kind performed by practitioners in their everyday work. A means of achieving authenticity, they proposed, was the model of cognitive apprenticeships, a method designed to 'enculturate students into authentic practices through activity and social interaction', and based on the successful and traditional apprenticeship model (Brown, Collins and Duguid, 1989, p. 37).

A critical aspect of the situated learning model is the notion of the apprentice observing the 'community of practice'. Lave and Wenger (1991) proposed that participation in a culture of practice can, in the first instance, be observation from the boundary or 'legitimate peripheral participation'. As learning and involvement in the culture increase, the participant moves from the role of observer to fully functioning agent. Legitimate peripheral participation enables the learner to progressively piece together the culture of the group and what it means to be a member. 'To be able to participate in a legitimately peripheral way entails that newcomers have broad access to arenas of mature practice' (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p.110).

While the theories that underpin the notion of situated learning are relatively easily explained, implementing these ideas in instructional settings can pose particular problems. There are many questions that are raised in terms of the nature and form of the instruction when one attempts to construct learning environments that employ the principles and elements described by the proponents of situated learning theories.

The current research offers a synthesis of the analytic orientations, specifically in foregrounding the reflexive, conjoint, and co-reliant nature of the multiple modalities, rather than emphasizing one modality over another. The research has investigated the integrated multimodal communication phenomena as potentially important interactional features of institutional discourse in the multilingual context of the international university. It is aimed to shed light on the following questions: How do co-participants in talk-in-interaction orient to embodied framing devices produced in conjunction with linguistic utterances by one another, and reflexively produce their turns within the sequential organization as multimodal semiotic fields of communicative resource? Can we explicate an order of embodied interaction that enacts-into-being the institution of the international university through multiple semiotic resources, including those non-verbals, and if so, how can we characterize what sort of institution it is from this perspective? In the multilingual and multicultural setting of the International University, what are the conditions in which participants can optimize their interactional competence, and how might this be characterized given the setting?

Through the micro-analysis of video data of naturally occurring interaction in an international university, the initial explication of verbal practices in the organization of talk-in-interaction has been supplemented with an additional

level of analysis of the concomitant embodied actions which are systematically employed, and oriented to by the participants. The resulting analysis has provided for a thicker, more holistic, description of interactional competence within such multicultural, multilingual settings, and provides insights into the possibilities for an expansion of the study of talk-in-interaction to include modalities other than the spoken. The research that has been written up to date has reported on practices involving such situated resources as objects and other situated structures in the local environment, postural orientation, gesture, gaze, convergent trajectories of movement and language choice. Other methodological articles have considered the technological tools for doing such research, and the impact these technologies also have on the research setting.

It is worth noting the differences between spoken and written interaction.

- The basic difference is in transmission of the message, speech is transmitted by means of voice and sounds, while writing is transmitted by graphic means - letters (spelling and grammar, of course, play a big role).
- Spoken language is sparse, written language is dense, yet both kinds of interaction are organized, but follow different rules.
- Spoken language is a process; speech is produced and received almost instantaneously and is an on-line process, the recipients can follow its production from the beginning to the end. With written language more time is needed to produce a message, needs to be polished, the receiver does not know how long it took for the message to be written, the speaker can forget parts of the message s/he wished to convey-written message can be revised.
- Speech is gone immediately after we have stopped speaking/listening, it is stored in short-term memory for a very short time (a few seconds), which is why we can tolerate false starts, pauses, gaps and the like - we forget them quickly. Only a very small portion of an instance of spoken interaction is stored into long-term memory. (We only become aware of the false starts, pause etc. when we transcribe speech for the purpose of analysis.)
- In speech we use everyday words, written language uses complex lexicon.
- The choice of some lexical items (synonyms, antonyms) is usually repeated in speech but they vary in writing.
- In speech sentences are longer.
- Speech includes verbal and non-verbal fillers, which are used to avoid silence, which in speech usually means that one has finished talking.
- Lexical density (the ratio between the words that carry message and words that carry no semantic meaning) is usually much higher in writing than in speech. Lexical density varies from language to language.
- In writing, punctuation is used to separate the message into units, in speech pauses and prosody performs this function (this also varies from

language to language - Slovene punctuation is governed by strict rules, English punctuation is governed by what we wish to say - the rules are more lax).

**Maxims of spoken discourse:**

Quantity: make your contribution as informative as required.

Quality: do not say what you believe is false

Relation: be relevant

Manner: Be, brief and to the point; avoid obscurity.

**Analysis of spoken interaction**

- Interaction presupposes at least two participants
- The participants take turns (one of them talks while the other listens), although they can speak at the same time as well.
- Sometimes we wait for pauses (either silent pauses or fillers – “Umm, Mmmm”) or we interrupt the speaker with signals and signs or wait for certain prosodic features (decreased volume, slowing down the rhythm). Real linguistic clues are grammatical clues (e.g. a question requires an answer; a command may require an action such clues are transparent).
- Turn-taking (change of speakers) can take place in two ways: the speaker finishes and lets other people speak, or the speaker selects the next speaker.
- Interruption in the middle of speech may require high tones, so that the current speaker can hear us. In some cases the speaker might not let us take the turn.
- We must be aware of cross-cultural differences e.g. Brits like their space, they shake hands by touching just the tips of the fingers etc.). According to Hymes, the father of ethnography of speaking, the speakers who behave the same way during speech interaction belong into the same linguistic group.

Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson recorded several hours of spoken interaction and came up with a few rules in how the speaker and the listener interact:

- Turn-taking (speaker shifts):
  - o in the idealized conversation the listener (B) always lets the speaker (A) finish and vice versa. This is a smooth shift.
  - o (B) does not let (A) finish before taking the turn and vice versa. This is an unsmooth shift
  - o A stops short when B starts to speak and vice versa. This is a cut-off
- Turn is everything that the speakers say, before someone else takes over. It can be a short answer (Yes) or a long monologue.
- The listener can and sometimes must acknowledge that he understands the speaker or is paying attention. This is usually done using short words / (Yes) or non-verbal acknowledgements (M, Mhm). These acknowledgements are called backchannels. They are important in e.g.

phone conversations. A backchannel does not constitute as a separate turn.

- Sometimes more than one speaker may speak (overlapping sequence). In that case if something important is said, it may need to be repeated. For a conversation, at least two people are needed, each producing two turns.

Some turns are more closely related than others – production of the first turn presupposes the second one. These closely related turns are called adjacency pairs:

- Apology  $\leftrightarrow$  Smoother
- Greeting  $\leftrightarrow$  Greeting
- Invitation  $\leftrightarrow$  Accept/Decline
- Question  $\leftrightarrow$  Answer
- Request  $\leftrightarrow$  Accept/Decline

## 2. Communicative competence, written discourse, genres and interaction

Hasan (1999: 253ff) discusses at great length the problem of identifying the boundaries of stages within any text, and relates this to the interface between register and context as it is conceptualized in SFL. If register is the textual realization of Context of Situation, then any change in register, whether it be of field, tenor or mode, also signals a shift of context, and hence engenders an internal text boundary. For Hasan, one of the problems attending the notion of genre concerns the identification of boundaries or stages in text structure, and relates to the location of what SFL refers to as rhetorical mode, and whether it is related to a specific register variable—field, tenor, or mode.

While the definition of core-genre adopted by Martin and others within SFL, incorporates the notion of social purpose—for example, to persuade, to report, to explain — traditionally within Systemics, this aspect of a text's functionality has been subsumed under rhetorical mode, or 'the part language is playing' along a continuum of ancillary constitutive. Thus, rhetorical mode has lately been considered as helping to construe mode due to its reference to the material activity which accompanies the ancillary, whereas Hasan (1999) argues that the feature 'social purpose' attending rhetorical mode reinforces her contention that it remains a matter of field. Martin and others regard 'social purpose' as helping define a level of discourse realized by register at a different level of abstraction. For Hasan, this provides for problematic contradiction within SFL. At the same time, if genre—whether core or macro—is conceived of as a level of abstraction realized by a variety of layers or tracks interrelated to signal shifts rather than strictly demarcated boundaries—as

between stages in a text—then such contradiction might be seen instead as part of the normal flexibility of language.

Examples of where communicative competence might be manifested in a text are always used to teach students not only to be able to communicate general but also specific domain language matters. One such instructional manual is given just to give a glimpse of the wealth of competences needed to survive in real life and the discourse community one strives to belong to. The following excerpt is Adapted for academic / scientific written discourse from the model for communicative competence in oral communication presented in Celce-Murcia M. 2007. Rethinking the Role of Communicative Competence in Language Teaching.

### **SOCIO-CULTURAL COMPONENT**

Sociocultural competence refers to the writer's understanding of and ability to express her/him in accordance with academic/scientific culture in general and her/his disciplinary culture in particular. This includes knowledge of the roles of writers and readers, the typical genres and their structures and stylistic formulation.

### **SOCIAL CONTEXTUAL FACTORS**

- appropriate types of research reporting (for example, new theory or continuation of a tradition) as a function of seniority in the academic community
- appropriate research paradigm
- appropriate discourse types (for example, academic essay, research paper, review article)
- use of reference (choice of references, aligning with / distancing from certain schools within the community, author or information prominence)
- style sheets and format conventions
- use/amount of illustrative devices.

### **STYLISTIC APPROPRIATENESS**

- knowledge of the structure and formats of texts from the genres of the discipline as dependent on the research paradigm (quantitative / qualitative / mixed method study)
- register: formal and academic lexical and grammatical choice
  - o dynamic verb use (overuse of "be" and "have")
  - o avoidance of end prepositions, verbs and pronouns
  - o Avoidance of "not" and "any" (negative forms: "we do not have any evidence of...")
- Prevalence of hedging and boosting as determined by disciplinary culture and language variant.

### **CULTURAL FACTORS**

Cultural factors involve background knowledge of discipline-specific readership and community customs election of language variant (US or UK).

- disciplinary/journal-specific conventions/ requirements for structural and content organisation (e.g. structured abstract, extent of literature review) cf. knowledge-demonstrating and knowledge-generating cultures
- numerical data (appropriate expression of values and statistics in scientific context)
- appropriate use of referencing to avoid plagiarism.

### DISCOURSE

Here we adopt the definition presented by Celce-Murcia (2007), with minor revision to apply the definition to written discourse, where some aspects of this competence assume greater importance than in spoken communication: *“Discourse competence refers to the selection, sequencing, and arrangement of words, structures, and utterances to achieve a unified **written** message. This is where the top-down communicative intent and sociocultural knowledge intersect with the lexical and grammatical resources to express messages and attitudes and to create coherent texts”.*

### COHESION

- signposts (headings, numbering systems)
- sentence connectors
- conjunctions
- topicalising phrases
- references within text (anaphoric, cataphoric, exophoric)
- repetition and substitution (including lexical chains)
- ellipsis
- punctuation (main use above sentence level)
  - o comma
  - o Separate ‘sentence connectors’ from the main clause
  - o Separate ‘introductory phrases’ from the subject.

### DEIXIS

- articles and determiners (new/first mention, previously mentioned, shared knowledge)
- textual reference to location of discourse elements within the structure (e.g. pointing to data, preview, other metatextual signposting)
- sequencing (temporal terms: *now/then, before/after*; logical progression markers: *next, subsequently*).

### COHERENCE

- systematicity of argumentation (ordering of evidence presented)
- supporting arguments through reasoning and examples
- summarising and synthesising evidence from other sources
- paragraphing
- thesis statement / topic sentences
- topical progression (theme and rheme, thematic variety, keeping topic in focus)



- given and new ordering
- light before heavy ordering
- discrepancy by comparison of unlike concepts / word-forms (comparing apples and pears / faulty ellipsis...).

### **GENERIC STRUCTURE**

formal schemata that allow the user to identify a written discourse segment as an academic /scientific journal article, review, academic essay, grand proposal, laboratory report, case study, etc.

- control of content schemata, organisational patterns, appropriate content (moves, steps)
- title type
- control of linguistic schemata (tense choice, generality).

### **LINGUISTIC COMPONENT**

As in Celce-Murcia (2007), we consider here four types of linguistic competence. While Celce-Murcia talks about phonological knowledge, we replace this for written communication with "orthography and the writing system".

#### **ORTHOGRAPHY AND WRITING SYSTEM**

- spelling
- numbers (numeral or word)
- punctuation
  - o use of hyphen
  - o use of apostrophe
- use of decimal point
- American/British inconsistency of spelling.

#### **LEXIS**

- adequate range of vocabulary
- appropriate use of (technical) terms
- correct use of prepositions
- correct use of particles in phrasal verbs
- correct use of other function words such as verbal auxiliaries and pronouns.

#### **MORPHOLOGY**

- correct formation and appropriate use of parts of speech, for example
  - o adverbs
  - o affixes
  - o gerund vs. nominalised form
  - o verb forms
  - o tenses (formation)
  - o agreement of type (kind, sort) with headword
  - o amounts used as adjectives in singular (for example, a five-kilometre road)
  - o possessives for non-human subject.

## SYNTAX

- correct use of articles and determiners (although certain uses have been placed in cohesion above, since this helps to target teacher support at the relevant phase)
  1. countable / uncountable
  2. Generic [a(n) or Ø + plural]
  3. Post-modification [the]
  4. Generic Plural [Ø]
  5. Generic Noncount [Ø]
  6. Restrictive adjective [the]
  7. proper names [the]
  8. Implied Uniqueness [the]
  9. Human generic [a(n), the, or Ø + plural]
  10. Partitive of [a(n)]
  11. Time period [the]
  12. Plural/Collective nouns [Ø]
  13. Superlative Adjective [the]
  14. Ordinal Adjective [the]
  15. Generic device [the]
  16. Physical features [the]
  17. Class + Term [the]
- countable / uncountable noun
  - o punctuation
  - o comma
- 1. separate non-essential relative clauses from main clause
- 2. above
- 3. separate 'attitudinal adjuncts' from the main clause
- 4. separate subordinate clauses from the subject
- 5. separate non-finite -ing clauses
- 6. resultative ing-clause
- 7. coordinating conjunctions combining two complete sentences
- 8. additional, non-essential info
- 9. appositives
- 10. separate items in a list
- 11. other
  - o use of semicolon
  - o use of colon
- word order
- adequate structural variety
- over-complex sentences
- sentence structural issues, such as
  - o subject-verb agreement
  - o unnecessary or missing words

- o sentences without a subject (headless horsemen)
- o sentence fragments.

### FORMULAIC

Formulaic competence is represented in a writer's use of fixed and prefabricated chunks of language or modification of prefabricated structures with context-specific lexis.

- routine, fixed phrases
- collocations, (for example, noun verb, phrasal verbs)
- idioms, including special phrases used by the discourse community
- lexical frames: prefabricated structures in various sections of a text relexified with context-specific lexis (calquing) (*\*to sum up, demonstrated in Table ..., etc.*)

### INTERACTIONAL

Interactional competence incorporates the writer's awareness of how interaction functions in the written medium between members of the discourse community, and the application of this awareness in her/his written communication.

### POSITIONING IN RELATION TO BODY OF KNOWLEDGE

- declaring one's stance
  - o taking a position on evidence from other sources (conceding, questioning, refuting, supporting or agreeing with other authors)
  - o indicating author attitude (Not surprisingly...)
  - o boosting (It is clear that...)
  - o emphasising (It must be stressed that...)
  - o hedging (To the best of the authors' knowledge,)
  - o aligning with & developing a tradition (referring to authors).

### ENGAGING the READER

- inclusive "we"
- addressing reader as "you"
- reference to "reader"
- questions
- directives (for example, imperatives, modals of obligation, *it is X to Y that...*)
- references to shared knowledge or givens (*of course, obviously, etc.*)
- asides addressed to reader.

### STRATEGIC COMPONENT

Strategic competence refers to the writer's ability to make use of **learning and communication strategies** to overcome problems in reaching a particular communicative goal in writing (see definition of communicative strategies by Faerch & Kasper 1983 as described in Dörnyei & Scott: p177) or enhance the effectiveness of communication (see definition by Canale 1983 as described in Dörnyei & Scott: p179). Effective use of learning communication strategies entails

self-awareness in the writer. Learning and communication strategies are mental activities, and therefore their incidence may not be evident to a reader of a written document or language problems related to strategic language choices may be attributed to shortcomings in other aspects of competence. As a consequence, our taxonomy for strategic competence may be of more use for teaching than in analysing students' texts.

**LEARNING STRATEGIES** (derived from the taxonomy on Dörnyei & Scott 1997)

These are strategies which are used to overcome shortcomings in the writer's resources for communicating her/his intentions effectively, including

- sentence fragments, bullets, key ideas
- code-switching
- borrowings from other languages
- leaving a piece of text unfinished
- reducing the message by avoiding certain structures or topics
- paraphrasing rather than using a precise formulation
- approximating with a less apt lexical item
- using a general lexical item to replace a specific term (for example, *stuff*, *thing*)
- coining a non-existing word.

**COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES** (derived from the taxonomy in Dörnyei & Scott 1997)

These are strategies which are used by the writers to enhance the communication of her/his message, including clarification (for example, *that is to say*, *in other words*) and intertextual commitment (for example, abstract, promise of content, application for funding).

One can see from the extended list of the segments of communicative competence that it is not easy at all to acquire it and that interaction whether it is academic or lay one is hard to acquire, develop and improve over the course of one's whole life. Situated learning means that the nurturing component must prevail over the nature and genetics.

## Conclusion

Ample body of research shows that one cannot neglect neither oral nor written modes of discourse as acquiring them in school settings provides for better labour market competitiveness, easier access to specific domain knowledge discourse communities and more complete realization of one's potentials both as a professional and plain communicator. Investments to determine practically applicable knowledge about text production would be worthwhile in two ways: for practical purposes – but especially for linguistics itself. In trans-disciplinary contact with non-academic subjects, linguistics can recognize which parts of texts language users identify as problematic, how they handle language, and how

they reflect on their cognitive and social practices of language use.

Language awareness becomes tangible, a linguistic research field of topical interest. Applied linguistics can ultimately profit from text consulting and text production trainings not only at the level of the knowledge they generate within the discipline itself but also at a meta-level. In academic-political terms, it is of importance what linguistic lay people want to know about language and consequently where opportunities exist for knowledge transfer. Since applied research is increasingly justified by its broad acceptance, authors should not be the only ones to read their own texts.

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## RAZVIJANJE USMENE I PISANE INTERAKCIJSKE KOMPETENCIJE

*Rezime:* Sociokulturna teorija Vygotskog kao deo konstruktivističke teorije učenja insistira na razvoju kompetencija, pre svega na društvenom a onda na interpersonalnom nivou, kako bi se kasnije taj razvoj preneo na psihološki nivo (Vygotski, 1981). Razvoj se ne može odvojiti od socijalnog i kulturnog konteksta tako da istraživanje procesa učenja započinje zapravo od početne socijalne interakcije. Konstruktivističke teorije učenja kažu da učenje počinje kroz razvoj diskursnih kompetencija koje su specifične za datu diskursnu zajednicu (Lav i Wenger,

1991). Kakvi su tipovi diskursnih radnji i da li će se koristiti obavezni, ponovljivi ili svima prepoznatljivi obrasci odavno je predmet naučnih rasprava. Kao prvo, konstruktivističke teorije učenja insistiraju na međuzavisnosti učenja i razvoja, na najmanje dvosmernoj povezanosti (i učenje može dovesti do razvoja, koncepcija razvoja je istovremeno i teorija obrazovanja), pa tako učesnik u društvenoj zajednici razvija legitimno učešće, razvija praktične obrasce komuniciranja u datoj zajednici, i tokom vremena, usavršava svoje diskursne veštine. Wenger (1998) tako kaže da postati član određene zajednice podrazumeva pravilan razvoj diskursnih veština specifičnih za datu zajednicu.

*Ključne reči:* kompetencija, interakcija, diskursne veštine, organizaciono učenje, ekspert