TEACHING COMMUNICATION OR TEACHING INTERACTION

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[Summary] This paper argues that interaction, rather than communication, should be the major concern of language teachers. However, while models exist for grammatical and sociolinguistic competence, little guidance is available to those who also wish to cover sociocultural competence. This paper sketches a processual model that may be valid for both sociolinguistic and sociocultural behaviour. It argues that three different types of interaction teaching (and learning) are necessary.

1. Three types of competence

In this paper my starting point is Japanese language teaching but I believe that the issues we face are basically the same whatever the target language or culture may be. The reader may be surprised that the word 'interaction' rather than 'culture' is used in the title of this paper. One problem with the word 'culture' is that it does not emphasize that active competence, rather than just understanding, is needed. However, 'culture' is also difficult to deal with because of the strict boundary placed by some social scientists between 'culture' and 'society'.

Interaction implies at least three different types of competence:
1. Grammatical competence – competence to use syntax, lexicon, phonology, graphemics
2. Sociolinguistic competence – competence to specify who speaks to whom, when, about what, etc.

3. Sociocultural competence - competence to apply rules of culture other than grammatical or sociolinguistic rules.

The application of grammatical and sociolinguistic competence leads to communication. The two can therefore also be called branches of communicative competence. The application of communicative and sociocultural competence results in interaction.

Language teaching started as the teaching of GRAMMATICAL competence (syntax, lexicon, phonology and graphemics). Language teachers under the audiolingual paradigm still adhered to the same pattern and even today the majority of language teachers have no doubts that grammar constitutes the sole and natural object of their endeavour.

However, in the 1960s many language teachers discovered that the aim of learners is not to form correct sentences. They wanted to teach their students how to COMMUNICATE. What resulted from this perception were various forms of so-called communicative language teaching, as portrayed in Richards and Rodgers 1986. The Communicative Approach is still the reigning paradigm.

At least some varieties of the Communicative Approach have included sociolinguistic competence. For example, various speech acts other than statements - requests, promises, thanks, confirmations and many others - have been covered. However, the term 'communicative' has mostly been taken to mean active use of grammatical competence in quasi-natural communicative situations. It does not comprise the whole sociolinguistic competence. Therefore, many feel that language teaching needs more than just the Communicative Approach.

Moreover, the standard Communicative Approach covers very little of sociocultural competence. True, the slogan of teaching culture has been with us since the 1950s. However, this was basically unanalysed culture, a concept in which both sociolinguistic and sociocultural rules were indiscriminately blended together. We were told on one page that students should be taught greetings, while the next page urged us to tell them that adult Americans drank milk - behaviour considered strange in many other Western cultures. Whereas greetings are purely communicative (and a part of sociolinguistic competence), drinking milk has nothing to do with communication. Rather it concerns what I have called sociocultural

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competence above. Of course, there are no sharp boundaries between the two types of competence. However, the failure to distinguish between them means that mapping of the whole area beyond grammar has not been carried out. As a result, no systematic ('controlled') incorporation of either sociolinguistic or sociocultural competence into language teaching programs was possible.

Still, the appearance of the slogan of culture-teaching connects with the realization that we do not learn languages in order to communicate. Communication is only a tool which enables us to achieve other goals: our aim in cross-cultural situations is to INTERACT economically, socially, or in daily life and other situations. Should learners only possess grammatical and sociolinguistic competence, they would be very strange creatures. Can anyone conduct business in Japan if he/she only knows how to communicate? Of course, a perfect mastery of grammatical competence is insufficient. But even perfect rules of sociolinguistic competence do not suffice. To be successful, foreign business people in Japan must know the rules of daily life, the rules of their area of business, the ways the Japanese think about matters related to them and many others. All this is sociocultural competence.

Effective language teaching (and learning) must cover all three types of competence. I propose to call the approach to language teaching that incorporates all these competences the INTERACTIVE APPROACH.

2. Sociolinguistic and sociocultural competence

Before proceeding further it is appropriate here to elaborate on the concept of sociolinguistic and sociocultural competence. Little needs to be said about grammatical competence that has been the object of language teaching for centuries. For most languages we possess reasonably detailed GRAMMARS which constitute lists of rules, in other words checklists for course design. Such checklists may be theoretically imperfect, but at least they present us with inventories of items that should be considered for inclusion in a course.

Sociolinguistic competence

However, do we possess 'grammars' of sociolinguistic competence? At least one such grammar exists, namely Dell Hymes' model of the 'ethnography of

speaking'. It is not sufficiently known outside sociolinguistics and even in sociolinguistics it is applied only exceptionally. There are actually at least two versions of the model (Hymes 1962 and Hymes 1972) but the adaptation I have normally used contains 8 types of rules (Neustupny 1987). Notice that the Hymesian models only concern sociolinguistic (and grammatical?) competence, not interaction as a whole.

The types of rules covered include:
(1) Switch-on rules
These rules specify under what conditions we switch on communication and when we remain silent.
(2) Variation rules
Variation rules specify sets of communication means that occur together, such as languages, dialects, styles, ways of speaking, etc. and how participants select among them.
(3) Setting rules
These rules decide when and where, in what situations communication will take place.
(4) Participant rules
Another category are participant rules which cover the types and properties of participants in communication.
(5) Content rules
Content rules are very varied. They decide what is communicated: themes, topics, functions, word meanings, politeness, humour and others.
(6) Frame rules
Content rules only specify types of content but they do not determine how this content is located in communicative acts. At the level of content rules, order and other location details are specified.
(7) Channel rules
Channel rules determine what channel (spoken, written, non-verbal, etc.) is used.
(8) Management rules
Management rules cover what Fishman (1971) has referred to as 'behavior toward language'. Such behaviour appears when there is a need for repair. It includes labelling of language, hesitation, various types of correction, etc.

These 8 types of rules constitute a simple system, but the system renders enormous help in language teaching research as well as in designing courses.

Sociocultural competence

The term sociocultural competence, rather than simply culture, is needed because culture includes all three types of competence. Sociocultural competence means culture minus sociolinguistic and grammatical competence.

As far as I understand there is no satisfactory 'grammar' (listing of rules) of sociocultural competence. In the absence of such a scheme I believe that we can employ, on a provisional basis, a system that works with at least two dimensions: a distinction between thought (including attitudes, beliefs, etc.) and overt behaviour, and a dimension constituted by at least seven (partly overlapping) domains of interaction (cf. Fishman 1972):

i. Daily life domain
ii. Family domain
iii. Friendship domain
iv. Education domain
v. Work domain
vi. Public domain
vii. Culture domain.

Within each of these domains it is possible to distinguish a number of situations.

3. A processual model of interactive competence

The models described in the previous section can be further improved. I wish to stress three points which are not totally absent from Hymes' scheme but which require more emphasis today. The first point is the requirement to deal with processes rather than with the classifications of rules. The second requirement covers the need to include generation as well as management of interaction ('Management' was formerly referred to as 'correction', cf. Neustupny 1978, and Neustupny 1983; for the term see Jernudd and Neustupny 1987) of interaction. The third point considers the need for a system that covers not only grammatical or sociolinguistic competence but sociocultural competence as well. In the following scheme the word 'rule' is used to refer to various kinds of regularities: principles, maxims, strategies, ordinary or particular rules (cf. Neustupny 1989).

The revised model consists of two parts: rules of generative processes and rules of management processes.

The first part deals with

(a) Input rules, which commence from the pre-interaction situation and specify which features of the input appear in the interaction situation

(b) Arrangement rules, which arrange the resulting interaction features into sequences

(c) Surfacing rules, which specify in what way the plans produced under (b) are realized.

(d) It is also essential to account for cases in which interactants proceed directly from input to a surface form without using individual rules.

The management component comprises 5 stages that are described below.

A. Rules of generative processes

(a) Input rules

There is a large number of facts in any situation but only some of them are used in any single interaction act. For example,

- only some personnel present will become participants,

- only some aspects of their relationships will be filtered in (for example, the relative physical weight of the personnel will normally be irrelevant), and

- only some of their thoughts will become themes of interaction, topics for conversation, or words within sentences.

It seems that three basic types of input rules must be posited: transcription, deletion and insertion. Transcription and deletion are self-explanatory. An example of insertion is where a topic is not in the input (participants do not really want to speak about anything in particular) but it is 'inserted' by the input rules. The classic example is the insertion of a weather topic.

It is important to realize that input rules are not only used at the beginning of each act but throughout the processes of generating and managing interaction. Additional aspects of input often become necessary as interaction proceeds.

The particular information that is provided by the input rules includes:

- Targets (aims, objectives, functions, needs, etc.) of the interactants

- Time and place of interaction

- Participants and

- Content of interaction.

All these are items familiar from the Hymesian model.

(b) Arrangement rules

After the application of the input rules the ordering of items is still undecided. This is the object of the arrangement rules. In the Hymesian model this kind of order has been called the 'form' or 'frame' of interaction.

At the level of grammatical behaviour this means arranging features in words and sentences. In the area of sociolinguistic behaviour the arrangement rules select, for example, the size of the frame (agreement can be expressed by an entire speech or a single word) or arrange participants in networks. In the case of sociocultural behaviour, for example in cooking, there is the right order of combining materials and processing them.

(c) Surfacing rules

Arrangement rules produce plans, that may or may not be implemented. The implementation process is governed by the surfacing rules that select the right channels and within the channels the right shapes, and perform the act.

(d) Set rules

The number of input, arrangement and surfacing rules is enormous. It would be impossible to perform interaction acts should we wish to apply them all. Some rules are therefore applied in blocks, as sets. We could also say that the processuality of interaction is neutralized here. The set rules are:
- Variation rules, where rules of a certain variety are selected as a set at certain points of generation. For example, the formal style is selected once and after this it is not necessary to consider the degree of formality each time there is a choice.
- Situation rules. For example, at a petrol station, we used to say 'five dollars of super please' which was a formula that was ready for use. Such formulas, routines, etc. are not generated by individual rules.

B. Rules of management processes

Rules of generation cannot always produce satisfactory outputs and such outputs must be corrected by management rules. Behaviour in intercultural contact situations is characterized by a particularly high percentage of outputs that break norms imposed on such situations. For example, input rules do not produce the desired content, arrangement rules generate wrong

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sequences, and surfacing rules may fail to implement plans.

The general form of the management process is

(a) Deviations from norms occur

(b) Such deviations are noted

(c) Noted deviations are evaluated

(e) Plans are set for removing the deviations, and

(f) These plans are implemented (Neustupny 1985).

Management applies in processes of simple adjustment or through complex management. Negotiation is a special case of such complex management.

My discussion in this section can be summarized in the following way. Interaction acts are generated through processes of coding, arrangement, surfacing, or as formulaic routines. These processes apply to grammatical, sociolinguistic as well as sociocultural behaviour. However, these generative processes are not always successful and, in such instances, management rules apply.

4. The relationship between the three types of competence

In this paper I have emphasized the importance of sociolinguistic and sociocultural behaviour for grammatical processes. Sentences only occur within sociolinguistic (discourse) contexts, and these in sociocultural contexts. Therefore, grammatical behaviour can only be understood within these contexts.

However, the reverse is not true. Much sociocultural behaviour occurs without sociolinguistic or grammatical behaviour. Examples are cooking, driving, or factory work, which all represent considerably complicated behaviour. Such behaviour may occasionally be accompanied by communication (orientation signs, etc.) but in principle occurs independently. Sociolinguistic behaviour can occur without grammatical processes, as in the case of non-verbal behaviour.

5. The generation/management processes and language teaching

This relationship carries important implications for language teaching and learning. On one hand, there can be no language teaching without concurrent study of sociolinguistic and sociocultural contexts in which grammatical behaviour occurs. On the other hand, it is possible to acquire sociocultural competence on its own. Sociolinguistic behaviour cannot occur

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without sociocultural behaviour. However, it can occur without grammatical behaviour (language in the narrow sense of the word) when communication is achieved through non-verbal channels. Also, there are cases of the use of an international language (English) with communication patterns from the speaker's native tongue.

All this means that we can distinguish three types of interaction in intercultural contact situations:

(1) Sociocultural behaviour only. This is the case, for example, when news about overseas societies is transmitted to Japan, or when two societies exchange goods. The competence needed here to correctly interpret these events and to react in an appropriate way is sociocultural competence. There is a need to generate such competence very widely. I call this case 'acquisition-of interaction type 1'.

(2) Sociocultural + sociolinguistic behaviour. In this case there is direct communicative contact between personnel belonging to two different cultures. Undoubtedly, participants need sociocultural competence. However, they also need sociolinguistic competence. Foreigners who communicate with the Japanese in English, need an introduction to how the. Japanese communicate when they speak English: for example, how they handle networks, topics, nonverbal behaviour, etc. Here participants need what I call 'acquisition-of-interaction type 2'. In this case language teaching performs a quite subsidiary role.

(3) Sociocultural + sociolinguistic + grammatical behaviour. This combination occurs when all three types of behaviour belong to the same category, for example, when a foreigner communicates with a Japanese interlocutor in Japanese. In this case competence of all three types is needed. This case is closest to traditional language teaching. It can be called 'acquisition-of-interaction type 3'.

Conclusion

I believe that in the future language teaching will be replaced not by communication teaching but by interaction teaching. While working on this task we should realize that learning grammatical competence (language in the narrow sense of the word) is not the almighty recipe. It is necessary to also consider acquisition-of-interaction 2 and 1. However, whereas type

3 is to a certain extent looked after by language teaching, types 2 and 1 do not receive much attention at present. In a world that undergoes more and more globalization this is a situation that increasingly requires attention.

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