



International Journal of Humanity Studies
<http://e-journal.usd.ac.id/index.php/IJHS>
Sanata Dharma University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

A DETAILED OVERVIEW ON SOCIOLINGUISTIC COMPETENCE IN PEDAGOGICAL APPLICATIONS

Dedy Subandowo

Pázmány Péter Catholic University

correspondence: subandowo.dedy@hallgato.ppke.hu

<https://doi.org/10.24071/ijhs.v5i2.4411>

received 24 February 2022; accepted 30 April 2022

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to develop a general understanding of sociolinguistic competence in the pedagogical field. The discussion starts with an examination of communicative competence, which highlights some key components of communicative competence, as well as theoretical debates from experts. Following the discussion, there is an overview of sociolinguistic competence. Some linguists have developed a detailed explanation in this section, as well as the critical importance of distinguishing characteristic distinctions from other competences. The final section discusses how sociolinguistic competence can be applied in language pedagogy, such as academic writing and the roles of functional language in classroom discourses.

Keywords: sociolinguistic competence, pedagogical application, research methods

Introduction

For decades, some applied linguists have focused on the study of sociolinguistic competence. The term "sociolinguistic competence" refers to three frameworks for analyzing communicative competence: Hymes' (1972), Canale and Swain's (1980), and Bachman's (1990). One of the most powerful lines of attack on Chomsky's competence-performance concept is Hymes' (1972) concept of communicative competence. According to Hymes, acquiring language competence entails more than just linguistic form (grammatically correct sentences), but also awareness of language use in various contexts, such as knowing when and where to use the sentences. According to Hymes, rather than simply rejecting Chomsky's concept, he attempts to develop and redefine it within his framework of communicative competence. He argues that equating children's knowledge of a language with linguistic competence ignores issues such as appropriacy. In this sense, Hymes contends that children acquire knowledge not only as grammatical but also as appropriate. It means that children learn when to speak and when not to speak, as well as what to talk about with whom, when, where, and how (Hymes, 1972). In response to Chomsky's theory, Hymes divides competence into two types: linguistic and communicative competences. Linguistic competence is concerned with the creation and comprehension of grammatically correct sentences. Conversely, communicative competence is concerned with the

appropriateness and acceptability of what a person says in a given situation. This idea has been so prevalent that Dell Hymes is regarded as one of the forefathers of sociolinguistic theory (Weidemann, 1988).

Hymes, according to Dittmar (1976), was the first linguist to coin the term "communicative competence" with his demand for qualitative extensions of linguistic theory that included aspects of functional communication. Furthermore, Hymes incorporate the social context dimension (Matola, 1993). This idea then supports the emphasis on communicative competence, which is primarily paid to native speakers' ability to produce and understand context-based sentences as well as communicate effectively in socially diverse settings. In other words, communicative competence cannot be excluded from environmental situations such as speaker-hearer relationships.

Canale and Swain created a comprehensive theoretical framework of communicative competence (1980). Their communicative competence is comprised of three major components. First, grammatical competence is concerned with mastery of language code, specifically phonetic, phonological, morphological, syntax, semantics, and orthographic rules (Furkó & Mónos, 2013). It focuses on learners' abilities to construct sentences or utterances based on appropriate rules. Second, sociolinguistic competence is concerned with two sets of rules: socio-cultural rules and discourse rules. This ability is required for interpreting utterances for social meaning within a specific sociocultural context, depending on contextual factors such as topics, participant roles, settings, and interaction norms. It could be argued that someone who lacks this competency will find it difficult to interact with others (Fikron, 2018). Third, strategic competence is concerned with both verbal and nonverbal communication. This strategy may be used to compensate for communication breakdowns caused by insufficient competence. It includes paraphrasing unfamiliar grammatical forms and addressing strangers when they are unsure of their social status. Furthermore, this competence appears to aid in communication issues and difficulties. In essence, it appears that solving problems within the interaction is not possible unless grammatical and sociolinguistic competence is applied (Schmitt & Rodgers, 2020).

Bachman and Palmer propose a constructive approach to communicative competence (1996). They refer to communicative competence as "communicative language ability." According to their definition, communicative language ability focuses on two broad areas: language knowledge and strategic competence. Organizational and pragmatic knowledge are the two main integrative components of language knowledge. Knowledge of organizational units corresponds to knowledge of linguistic units and the rules for connecting them at the sentence and text levels. Pragmatics knowledge is divided into two categories: illocutionary competencies and sociolinguistic competencies. Illocutionary competence is the understanding of communication and how to carry it out. In addition, sociolinguistic competence includes the ability to use language appropriately in a given social context.

Bachman and Palmer's (1996) model places a premium on strategic competence, in contrast to Canale and Swain's (1980) emphasis on sociolinguistic competence. They define it as a set of metacognitive components or strategies that can be viewed as higher-order executive processes that provide cognitive

management in language use. Canale and Swain's (1980) framework is relatively simple and accessible in comparison to Bachman and Palmer's (1996) model. As a result, in many places today's ESL/EFL classes, this simplicity serves as a central reference (Furkó & Mónos, 2013). In contrast, Bachman and Palmer's (1996) model places communication skills in the context of language tests rather than instructions.

Celce-Murcia and Thurrell developed another concept of communicative competence after being dissatisfied with both Bachman and Palmer's (1996) and Canale & Swain's (1980). (1995). They argue that because communicative competence is essentially theoretical, it cannot be used as the foundation of a communicative language teaching syllabus. In doing so, emphasis has been placed on discourse competence as a key component. This component interacts with other critical elements such as lexico-grammatical building blocks (linguistic competence), actional organizing skills of communicative intent (actional competence), and sociocultural context (sociocultural competence) to shape the discourse, which in turn shapes the other three elements.

Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei, and Thurrell's (1995) model proposes five major components that are conceptually similar to Bachman and Palmer's (1996) framework. Discourse, linguistic, actional, sociocultural, and strategic competences are among them. Discourse competence is concerned with the selection, sequencing, and arrangement of words, structures, sentences, and utterances in order to produce a coherent spoken or written text. Linguistic competence refers to the fundamental elements of communication, such as sentence patterns and types, constituent structures, morphological inflection, and lexical resources, as well as the phonological and orthographic systems required for communication. Action Competence is concerned with a speaker's understanding of how to express messages appropriately within the larger social and cultural contexts of communication, in accordance with pragmatic factors relating to variation in language use. Strategically competent people have a set of skills that help them negotiate messages and solve problems, or they can compensate for flaws in their other skills.

The viewpoint of Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei, and Thurrell (1995) has become a standard in applied linguistics research and language teaching in general. This concept is useful in that it emphasizes the dynamic and interconnected nature of communicative competence. Aside from its applicability, it is also chosen as an underlying theoretical framework for current research projects, particularly those focusing on pedagogical aspects.

Sociolinguistic competence

Sociolinguistics is defined broadly as the study of language in society. According to Trudgill (1983), sociolinguistics has a close relationship with the social sciences. Sociolinguistics, according to Coupland and Jaworski (1997), focuses on languages as social and cultural phenomena, such as societies, social groups, speech communication, language dialect varieties, and styles. Sociolinguistics, in particular, investigates linguistic indicators of culture and power (Llamas, 2007). Furthermore, the study emphasizes not only language but also the social force of language events around the world. It covers grammar, vocabulary, corpus linguistics, discourse analysis, pragmatics, and phonology, as

well as the impact of ethnicity, gender, ideology, and social rank on language events (Purba, 2016). The primary goal of sociolinguistics research is scientific objectivity, which includes the social complexity of language in the real world. This means that this branch of linguistics tries to connect language in three different ways (Stern, 1983). First, it investigates general theoretical linguistics in the context of a study of language in society. Second, sociolinguistics refers to the concept of linguistic competencies of native speakers within the context of communicative competence. Third, sociolinguistics places a premium on the study of speech communities.

In the preceding statements, the concept of sociolinguistics as communicative competence appears to include a component of language proficiency (Newell, Caccamise, Boardman, & Holcomb, 1983). Language proficiency invariably implies the processing of linguistic elements as well as social and cultural knowledge. This means that when we communicate with a particular community, we must be aware of some sociolinguistic rules and social factors that may influence communication. This knowledge is essential for appropriately supporting our language use in the community. Sociolinguistic competence is the understanding of people's ability to use language appropriately (Janet Holmes, 2008). According to Canal (1983), sociolinguistic competence is influenced by contextual and socio-cultural factors. Setting, participants, goals and outcomes, forms and contents, manners and spirits, norms of interaction and interpretation, and genres are all examples of these characteristics (Saville-Troike, 1982). The time and location of the event, as well as the physical circumstances, are referred to as the setting. Participants range in age, gender, ethnicity, social status, and relationship status. The purposes of interaction are addressed by goal and outcome. Form and content in speech include options such as oral versus written forms. Manner and spirit highlight which speech act is performed. Interaction and interpretation norms refer to specific speaking behaviors as well as common knowledge or shared understandings. Genre refers to different types of events, such as a conversation, a lecture, a greeting, and so on.

Sociolinguistic competence can be found in a variety of contexts, including multilingual, monolingual, and migrant communities (Soler & Jordà, 2008). People in multilingual communities may use codes and language styles from a distinct language within their own language. Children in these communities, for example, tend to learn their first language while also continuing to learn another language for purposes such as education and communication in a broader range of contexts. It is worth noting that children appear to gradually develop and learn linguistic codes and varieties based on domains in their speech communities. Acquiring sociolinguistic competence in a monolingual community is concerned with learning to use the community language in a way that signals one's membership in various overlapping social groups and enacts a variety of social identities (Holmes, 2008). It has been demonstrated that linguistic features can appear in monolingual speech. Pronunciations, vocabulary, and grammar are all part of the feature. Another example of sociolinguistic competence can be found in immigrant generations who change their language while developing a broader range of context. When children move to a new community and only have a small domain, such as their family, they lose their heritage language. As a result,

acquiring sociolinguistic competence in this context appears to be recognized as a part of being a community member (Stone, 2002).

One important aspect of sociolinguistic competence is appropriateness. According to Canal (1983), there are two types of appropriateness: meaning and form categories. Appropriateness of meaning is concerned with the extent to which specific communicative functions, such as apologizing, commanding, refusing, attitudes (including politeness and formality), and ideas are deemed appropriate in a given context. Appropriateness of forms, on the other hand, refers to how well a given meaning fits into a given form. It consists of communicative functions, attitudes, and ideas. This is true in both verbal and nonverbal forms, as well as within a specific sociolinguistic context.

Developing sociolinguistic competence entails learning how to use language for various functions, such as getting things done in various contexts. In this sense, the ability to use language effectively and politely is regarded as crucial. When people from different communities come together, they appear to apply their own set of rules. According to Holmes (2008), this situation creates some challenges and even problems for them. As a result, embarrassment or misunderstandings are unavoidable. For example, how do we know when to respond to complex meanings expressed through indirect speech, such as "I am a little tired," with a direct question, such as "Do you want to come to a music concert?" How do we know when and how many small talkers to use at work, as well as what topics are appropriate? Thus, the concept of sociolinguistic competence sensitizes a broader range than linguistic structures. Constructing gender and identity, on the other hand, is allegedly considered part of sociolinguistic competence (Holmes & Meyerhoff, 2003). Recognizing the distinctive features of women's and men's interaction in a community, according to this viewpoint, has been one of the characteristics of sociolinguistic competence.

Sociolinguistic Competence in Pedagogical Applications

The use of sociolinguistic competence can be divided into two major categories: written and spoken forms. This competence is frequently applied in written forms of scientific writing. Conversely, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in the classroom has focused on spoken forms, including how sociolinguistic competence is acquired.

Written forms

"Writing is an activity that involves the expansion of ideas." Writing, according to Hyland (2008), is an important aspect of social realities, institutions, and personal identities. It pervades all aspects of life, including professional and academic sciences. Writing in the academic sciences is synonymous with academic writing. This is regarded as an active, tumultuous engagement with the facts and principles of disciplines (Rose, 1985). Furthermore, Kaur and Singh (2015) contend that academic writing appears to present difficulties and challenges when it comes to organizing ideas, defending claims, and addressing readers. Some academic writers use technical vocabulary to distinguish themselves from other writers. Some people, on the other hand, may struggle to understand the meaning of a register related to a specific discipline, such as

health, nutrition, energy, communication, biology, sociology, and restricted fields such as robotics, radiology, physics, and so on. It is clear that English is the language of choice for writing publications in those fields, and people who use English as a first or second language may face some difficulties in finding the meanings. In this regard, sociolinguistic competence may aid them in comprehending the context's technical vocabulary (Matola, 1993).

According to Nida's (1992) comparison of language and anthropologist journals, authors impose several technical requirements on their writing, such as difficulties in vocabulary, attributive phrases, series of prepositional phrases, highly generic expressions, adverbial redundancy, parenthetical expressions, and sentence length, in which readers must understand the meaning based on sociolinguistic competence. Nida then examines those technical vocabularies using features such as right-hand versus left-hand extension. A right-hand extension of a related series of words or phrases, such as in a key dimension of the human mind in its natural habits, in the middle of social life, for example, appears to be easier to understand the meaning than a left-hand extension, such as in culturally orchestrated experimental schemata. Other aspects of acquiring sociolinguistic competence in the study include the use of footnotes, summaries, appendices, and mathematical formulas. These characteristics indicate that authors attempt to develop specialized and professional dialects through technical language and content, which for some journal editors can improve the publication's reputation. Nida (1992) stated that specialization in technical languages can make people feel superior to others.

Spoken forms

The rise of sociolinguistics has influenced a shift in language learning interest from linguistic competence to communicative competence (Savignon, 2017). As a result, this shift has resulted in a new situation in which learners who learn a new language must acquire a new vocabulary as well as a new set of phonological and syntactic rules, as well as speaking rules. Thus, the growth of sociolinguistic interest has made a significant contribution to the teaching of second language (L2) (Yu, 2005). As the desired goal of language teaching, this teaching emphasizes communicative competence (Matola, 1993).

L2 teachers have focused on the development of language learning through Communicative Language Teaching. This means that this method is solely intended to engage students in pragmatics, or the functional, authentic use of the target language for meaning purposes (Wolfson, 1989). As a result, students may achieve greater fluency and communicative confidence in the L2 (Lightbown and Spada, 1990). As previously explained in relation to sociolinguistic competence and cultural contexts, L2 learners must acquire this competence in order to integrate their studies. According to Yu (2005), sociolinguistic competence assists L2 learners in becoming successful in causing offense or misunderstanding in cross-cultural understandings. Furthermore, acquiring this competence may result in less negative first language (L1) transfer as a result of a large divergence between L1 and L2 sociocultural norms.

Some foreign language courses have included instructions on sociolinguistic competence for non-native speakers in order to avoid embarrassment and misunderstandings in cross-cultural communications (Kasper and Blum-Kulka,

1993). However, incorporating sociolinguistic competence into a pedagogical curriculum may be more difficult than it appears. It appears that teaching sociocultural rules to L2 learners will be a difficult task. Yu (2005) found that the instructor paid little attention to teaching sociolinguistic competence in four intermediate-level college freshman English classes in Taipei, Taiwan. After a four-month session of class meetings, the students show no significant improvement in acquiring sociolinguistic competence. The study found that, despite the fact that culture teaching has been advocated for many years by foreign language experts, it is still insignificant and sporadic in most L2 classrooms.

Conclusion

The concepts of sociolinguistic competence and communicative competence are inextricably linked. Linguists add a functional language to linguistic competence as a result of the development of theoretical frameworks relating to linguistic or grammatical competence. Language learning, according to this viewpoint, is not only the process by which learners successfully acquire a new language with standard grammar, but also understand meanings and use the language appropriately and effectively. As a result, the concept of sociolinguistic competence is proposed. The implementation of sociolinguistic competence is reflected in written and spoken forms, both of which have made a significant contribution. Some aspects of understanding technical vocabularies are dependent on contextual interpretation. Sociolinguistic competence in spoken forms, on the other hand, enables functional communication. It tries to emphasize that foreign language courses can be used to impose sociolinguistic competence. As a result, individuals learning a new language may benefit from this competence in order to avoid offense or misunderstanding in cross-cultural communication. It is worth noting that the incorporation of sociolinguistic competence into language pedagogy has ushered in a new era of Communicative Language Teaching, particularly for L2 teachers.

References

- Bachman, L. F., Bachman, P. A. L. L. F., Palmer, A. S., & of Oxford, U. (1996). *Language testing in practice: Designing and developing useful language tests*. OUP Oxford. Retrieved from <https://books.google.hu/books?id=E0yH0NdySrQC>
- Canale, M., & Swain, M. (1980). Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing. *Applied Linguistics*, (May). <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/I.1.1>
- Celce-murcia, M., & Thurrell, S. (1995). A Pedagogical framework for communicative competence: Content specifications and guidelines for communicative language teaching a pedagogical framework for communicative competence. *Content Specifications and Guidelines for Communicative Language Teaching*, 19(1).
- Coupland, N., & Jaworski, A. (1997). *Sociolinguistics a reader* (MODERN LIN). New York: Macmillan Education. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-25582-5>

- Fikron, M. R. (2018). Grammatical competence within L2 communication. *Language Production, Monitor Hypothesis, and Focus on Forms Instruction*, 7(1), 101–112. <https://doi.org/10.25037/pancaran.v7i1.140>
- Furkó, B. P., & Mónos, K. (2013). Bálint Péter Furkó & Katalin Mónos The teachability of communicative competence and the acquisition of pragmatic markers – A case study of some widely- used. *Business English coursebooks*, 9, 132–148.
- Holmes, J. (2008). *An introduction to sociolinguistics*. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited.
- Holmes, J. (2008). *An introduction to sociolinguistics*. (G. Leech & M. Short, Eds.), *The Modern Language Journal* (Fourth Edi, Vol. 77). New York: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.2307/329116>
- Holmes, J., & Meyerhoff, M. (2003). *The handbook of language and gender. the handbook of second language acquisition*. Berlin: Blackwell Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470756492.ch13>
- Hyland, K. (2008). Scientific writing. *Annual Review of Information and Technology*, 42(4), 283–284. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wem.2017.09.007>
- Hymes, D. (1972). *Communicative competence*. In: J.B. Pride and J. Holmes (eds) *Sociolinguistics. Selected Readings*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Kaur, M., & Singh, M. (2015). International graduate students ' academic writing practices in Malaysia. *Challenges and Solutions*, 5(1), 12–22.
- Llamas, C., Mullany, L., & Stockwell, P. (2007). *The Routledge companion to sociolinguistics. Pierre bourdieu: Key concepts*. New York: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.1017/UPO9781844654031.009>
- Matola, M. M. (1993). *The sociolinguistic competence in English of first-year students at Vista University (SOWETO)*. The Potchefstroomse Universiteit vir Christelike Hoer Onderwys. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107415324.004>
- Newell, W., Caccamise, F., Boardman, K., & Holcomb, B. R. (1983). Adaptation of the language proficiency interview (LPI) for assessing sign communicative competence. *Sign Language Studies*, (41), 311–331. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26203550>
- Nida, E. A. (1992). Sociolinguistic implications of academic writing. *Language in Society*, 21(3), 477–485.
- Purba, R. (2016). Lexical variation on students' daily conversation at campus by first-year students of English department FKIP HKBP Nommensen University. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 21(09), 28–39. <https://doi.org/10.9790/0837-2109032839>
- Savignon, S. J. (2017). Communicative competence. *The TESOL Encyclopedia of English Language Teaching*, 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118784235.eelt0047>
- Schmitt, N., & Rodgers, M. P. H. (2020). *An introduction to applied linguistics. An Introduction to Applied Linguistics* (3rd Ed.). New York: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/cci013>
- Soler, E. A., & Jordà, M. P. S. (2008). Intercultural language use and language learning. *Minerva Ginecologica*, 66. Castellon: Springer.

- Stone, G. L. (2002). The lexicon and sociolinguistic codes of the working-class Afrikaans-speaking Cape Peninsula coloured community. In R. Mesthrie (Ed.), *Language in South Africa* (pp. 379–397). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/DOI: 10.1017/CBO9780511486692.020>
- Wolfson, N. (1989). The social dynamics of native and nonnative variation in complimenting behavior. *The Dynamic Interlanguage*, 219–236. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4899-0900-8_14
- Yu, M. (2005). Sociolinguistic competence: An often neglected and de-emphasized aspect of foreign language teaching. *Hong Kong Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 10(2), 71–76.