

The Linguistic Insights and their Relevance to Language Teaching

DJAILEB, Farida

(University of Oran-USTO)

Résumé:

L'objectif de la linguistique est de nous fournir quelques explications sur la langue. Puisque l'étude de la langue est une science, les enseignants conçoivent le contenu des cours à partir des résultats de la linguistique. Dans ce contexte, j'ai essayé de démontrer l'importance de créer un lien entre l'étude de la langue et l'enseignement de cette langue.

Introduction

The aim of linguistics is to provide some explanations about Language. Chomsky (1975:4) indicates the following: 'One reason for studying language and for me, the most compelling reason is that it is tempting to regard language, in the traditional phrase as a mirror of mind. 'In fact, for Chomsky, linguistics is a science, since it provides us with explanations. This scientific theory is related to a model which is an idealized version of reality, in the words of Widdowson (1996:56). Teachers are applying linguistics since their main concern is the study of language (the study of words, verbs, nouns and how they are used to construct sentences.

The linguistic insights

Since linguistics is a systematic study of language, the teacher designs the content of his course from the findings of linguistics. Knowledge of the linguistic structures provides the learners with norms that enable them to produce correct grammatical sentences. They are called rules of use in the words of Widdowson (1990). Let's define some of the linguistic concepts first in order to understand how it contributes to language pedagogy.

Langue and Parole

The two notions are totally different since language is ability. It is homogenous and social; whereas, parole is an actual realization, and it is individual. Everyone who has read De Saussure understands this definition and shares this view. According to this scholar, langue is knowledge in the abstract, and it is a collective body of knowledge; however, parole is linked to acts of speech. This explains that parole is concerned with individual utterances. I shall take the term utterance to mean *‘a piece of speech produced by a particular speaker on a particular occasion.’* Trask (1999:331). Moreover, words are enough to mean. The use of isolated items such as ‘scalp’, ‘scissors’ in EMP carry meanings in themselves. In fact, the negotiation of meaning is an act which relates discourse to both the systemic knowledge and the schematic knowledge (previous knowledge). Therefore, an utterance takes place in context, and a sentence takes place in a text. When we refer to an utterance, we are no more concerned with a text, but with context, and the relation that lies between text and context is discourse. Today, we can speak about the domain of pragmatics and understand what we mean really by an utterance. It seems that De Saussure has made this distinction before. Moreover, a similar distinction is made, the distinction between competence and performance.

Competence and performance

‘Every speaker of a language has mastered and internalized a generative grammar that expresses his knowledge of his language’. Chomsky (1965:8).

This knowledge, Chomsky labeled competence; as opposed to ‘the actual use of language in concrete situations’ which he named performance. Competence is the language system, and performance is the actual behaviour. The term competence means that we possess knowledge, but does it imply that we possess language? For Chomsky, performance is the residual category of secondary phenomena. For Widdowson (1996), it is very important to rely on competence as opposed to performance because competence represents grammar, so it is a valid construct. Competence is a useful principle in the study of language. It is very important to know that knowing the form of

language is not enough. As teachers, we don't have to neglect the other important side which is use (How to use language in real situations). The notion of knowing and doing is my next discussion.

Language use

Learners need more than knowledge of the form of language. They need an ability to actualize language in context. In fact, to know a language implies knowledge of grammar and how this knowledge functions too. It is crucial to bear in mind that the underlying structures are much important than performance. Learners need to know what to do with language; that is to say, how to communicate in real situations. Furthermore, usage reflects our knowledge of linguistic rules through the use of correct grammatical sentences, but is these sentences appropriate in use? Consider the following example: 'this scalpel'. An English doctor may have no difficulty in understanding this sentence; however, a non-native speaker may understand it, but he may guess the meaning through demonstration. By presenting the instrument to the learners, the teacher is creating an act of communication.

Communicative Competence

I shall take communicative competence to mean the ability to form correct utterances. It was coined by Hymes in 1966, reacting against Chomsky's view. Canale and Swain (1980), defined communicative competence in terms of four components:

- 1-Grammatical competence: rules and words
- 2-Socio-linguistic competence: appropriateness
- 3-Discourse competence: cohesion and coherence
- 4-Strategic competence: appropriate use of communication strategies

Recently, Bachman (1990) divides into the broad headings of organizational competence, 'which includes both grammatical and discourse competence', and pragmatic competence 'which includes both socio-linguistic and illocutionary competence.' For Savignon

(1998), communicative competence should be the main objective of language teaching.

Pedagogical implications

Form and Meaning

It is crucial for teachers of the communicative approach to concentrate only on sentence patterns, forgetting the other aspect of language. In fact, we need to develop in the learners an ability to communicate. This ability requires more than speaking or writing. It requires knowledge of how sentences are used for effective communication. According to Widdowson (1978), usage reflects our knowledge of the linguistic rules through the use of correct grammatical sentences. However, a sentence has no value. A sentence means what a language means, and this is the domain of semantics since every lexical item has a denotative meaning, but every lexical item has a connotative meaning, better to say a pragmatic meaning. In this case, we are no more concerned with a sentence, but with an utterance. Chomsky in Pit Corder (1973:103) '*colourless green ideas sleep furiously*' is syntactically acceptable, but unacceptable as an utterance since it has not a meaning. Therefore, learners should learn the form of language and how it is used in context. This is the objective of effective teaching.

How to expose students to authentic material

Teachers adopted new techniques for teaching English based on the creation of new situations such as the use of the internet. Learning is effective when it takes place in an authentic context, but how to bring the real world into the classroom which is in fact an artificial setting? When the internet is used it allows opportunities for real communications. Moreover, grammar can be taught by exemplification. I mean to give the rules, and then present examples. The selections of genuine texts are crucial. Teachers must think about texts that reflect the real world such as text about new discoveries, social problems or articles from news papers. You can think as a teacher about translating political articles from French to English. Here i am referring to Algerian teachers. Of course dialogues based on interesting films or serials. Imagine that we are teaching English for medical purposes; it is motivating if we ask our students to perform the roles of the patients/doctors in the serial film emergency. All these

tasks are interesting. I use the word task as many others in the field of teaching because today and with the communicative approach to language teaching, task is synonymous to activity. I can cite the work of Prabhu (1987) with the Bangalore project in India. Therefore, I want just to emphasize that teachers have to authenticate the materials they are using for effective teaching and learning.

Conclusion

In this humble paper, I tried to show how it is important to create a strong link between linguistics and language teaching. We can succeed in this enterprise if we really start to analyze the language before teaching it. The understanding of the linguistic insights can help us really to shift from language study to language teaching.

References

- Bachman, L.F (1982) The Construct Validation of some Components of Communicative Proficiency. TESOL Quarterly, 16(4):449-65
- Bouhadiba, F.N.A (2004) Language Learning Strategies and Communicative Competence: some Reflections on EFL in Algeria. in Revue Laros n:1 Oran. Dar El Gharb, pp:107-11
- Chomsky, N. (1965) Aspects of Theory of Syntax. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press
- Chomsky, N. (1986) Knowledge of Language. New York: Praeger
- Trask, R.L (1999) Key Concepts in Language and Linguistics. London and New York: Routledge
- Widdowson (1990) Aspect of Language Teaching. Oxford: University Press
- Widdowson (1996) Linguistics. Oxford: University Press
- Widdowson, H.G. (1984) Explorations in Applied Linguistics. Oxford: University Press
- Widdowson, H.G. (2003) Defining Issues in Language Teaching. Oxford: University Press