

WHY DO WE TEACH DIFFERENT REGISTERS IN THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM?

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When we say that someone knows a language, first of all, we mean that he has a knowledge of the rules which control the formation of sentences and which regulate the way in which units of language combine together. He can produce an infinite number of sentences using the knowledge of rules. However, while knowledge of grammatical rules will help him in creating sentences, it doesn't mean that they are appropriate for communication.

Widdowson and Cripser (Corder; 1975 : 155) point out that “ to know language as a formal system we need to know the rules which generate well formed sentences but to know language as a means of communication we need to know those conventions of use which control the selection of well formed sentences appropriate to a particular situation.” To know a language, then means to know something about how language is used as a means of communication.

The main complaint we teachers hear from students is that although they have studied for several years, they cannot speak English well. When students study a new language they expect to be able to communicate in that language. A variety of teaching methods have been developed to help students reach that goal. Unfortunately, in traditional foreign language classes, the goal of instruction is to develop grammatical competence. Although the aim of language teaching is to teach students to communicate

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in the foreign language, activities in those classes are generally based on learning and teaching only language forms. In a typical lesson, the teacher presents some grammatical structure, the students then drill on that structure because he believes that students must master the grammar before they can really communicate. As a result, they cannot use the language appropriately since they don't know what variety to use in what situation, how to vary the style according to whom they are addressing, when to speak or remain silent, when and what kind of gestures are required to go with what speech.

Language is a social activity and varies not only according to the social characteristics of the speaker such as his social class, ethnic group, age and sex but also according to the social context in which he finds himself. The same speaker may use different varieties in different situations for different purposes. In order to avoid miscommunication one must be so sensitive to such differences. For instance, if a person is giving evidence in a court or writing to the bank or choosing make up or playing darts in a pub, he certainly makes different linguistic choices. Similarly, when a speaker is talking to the people he works with about their work, his language is likely to be rather different from that he will use at home with his family.

When two people speak with one another, there is always more going on than just conveying a message. The language used by the participants is always influenced by a number of factors which define the relationship between the participants. When choosing an appropriate utterance for the situation, there are factors that you must consider in order to effectively convey the message to the participant and affect the use of linguistic choices in different situations. On any situation, linguistic choices will generally reflect the influence of one or more of the following important factors.

- 1- Who is speaking and who are they speaking to ? (participants)
- 2- Where are they speaking? (setting)
- 3- What is being talked about ? (topic)
- 4- Why are they speaking ? (function)

5-What is the relationship between the participants ? (social distance, formality)

The questions above are basic components in sociolinguistic explanations of why all people don't speak the same way, and why they don't all speak in the same way all of the time.

Sociolinguistics is generally defined as the study of language in relation to society for the social situation is the most powerful determinant of verbal behavior. It deals with several aspects of linguistics and aims to investigate how conventions of language use relate to other aspects of social behaviour. Language is a social phenomenon and thus it is important to understand the relationship between language and society. Especially for language educators, it is essential to understand and teach language in social contexts. One of the study areas of sociolinguistics is explaining why people use different varieties in different social contexts. Examining the way people use language in different social contexts provides us a wealth of information about the way language works as well as the social relations in a community. Addressing a person as "Mrs.", "Ms.", or by a first name is not really about simple vocabulary choice but about the relationship and addressee. Similarly, the use of sentence alternatives such as "Pass the salt", "Would you mind passing the salt", or "I think this food could use a little salt" is not a matter of simple sentence structure; the choice involves cultural values and norms of politeness and status. Different situations, interests, occupations, or social roles demand different uses of languages.

The term "register" is widely used in sociolinguistics to refer to the varieties "according to use", in contrast with dialect, defined as varieties "according to user". It refers to varieties of a language according to differences in uses demanded by specific social situations, such as advertising, political journalism, shopping, or academic discussion. A register is not a social or regional dialect, but a variety of language used for specific purposes.

The distinction between dialect and register is needed because the same person may use very different linguistic items to express more or less the same meaning on different occasions. In many cases, an individual's

speech is occasioned by the situation of use. There is a gradation of style of speech from very formal to informal. It can be said that the concept of register is typically concerned with variation in language conditioned by uses rather than only users and involves consideration of the situation or context of use, the purpose, subject matter and content of the message and the relationship between the participants and the like.

As languages and dialects differ from one another at every grammatical level, so registers can differ in several aspects such as vocabulary choice, phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics, which are verbal features of them in addition to non-verbal features such as gestures, eye-contact, body language and the like. Furthermore, they also differ according to the field of discourse (technical and non-technical purposes), mode of discourse (spoken and written texts) and style of discourse (the relation between speaker and hearer).

Almost all languages have different registers representing different classes of speakers and audiences, as well as different types of circumstances in which languages are used. Martin Joos (in Brown; 1987:208) classifies speech registers using the criterion of formality which tends to subsume subject matter, audience and occasion. He describes five levels of formality and calls them styles. These are as follows:

1-Oratorical or frozen style: It is used in public speaking before a large audience; wording is carefully planned in advance, intonation is somewhat exaggerated and numerous rhetorical devices are appropriate.

e.g. Chairperson : Ladies and gentlemen, we take great great pleasure in presenting for today's discussion of the ranges of appropriateness in American English two distinguished scholars in the field. First, Professor Roger W Shuy, the eminent sociolinguist, Director of the Sociolinguistics Program at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. and Associate Director of..... (Young Cho ;1996: 2)

2-Deliberative style: It is also used in addressing audiences, usually audiences are too large to permit effective interchange between speaker and hearers, though the forms are normally not as polished as those in an

orotical style. A typical university classroom lecture is often carried out in a deliberative style.

eg. Chairperson : Ladies and gentlemen, the company cannot ascertain why this has happened. We're unable to explain the drop in prices, but we do not feel that the trend will continue. (Young Cho ;1996: 3)

3-Consultative style: It is typically a dialogue and words are chosen with some care. Business transactions, doctor-patient conversations and the like are usually consultative in nature.

eg. At a Filling Station

Filling Station Attendant : Hi. Run out of gas ?

Driver : Sure did. Must not have been paying attention.

Attendant : Regular or unleaded ?

Driver : Regular, please.

Attendant : Need a ride back to your car ?

Driver : Thanks a lot. That's really nice of you.

Attendant : Sure is hot today, isn't it ?

Driver : Sure is. Seems like we can't get a break from this heat.

(Young Cho ;1996: 4)

4-Causal style: It refers to conversations between friends or colleagues or sometimes members of a family; in this context words need to be guarded and social barriers are moderately low.

e.g. On Campus

Sarah : Can you beat that! I read my eyes out last night and couldn't pass that Bio exam.

Mary : Oh, yeah. I'll bet Davidson gets his tests from old Ph.D. exams.

Sarah : Wouldn't put it past him. (Well,) Got to go. Catch you later.

Mary: Right. See you at the dorm. So long.

(Young Cho ;1996: 6)

5- Intimate style: It is characterized by complete absence of social inhibitions. Talk with family, loved ones and very close friends where you tend to reveal your innerself, is usually in an intimate style.

e.g. At Home

Wife : That you ?

Husband :Uh-huh.

Wife: How'd it go ?

Husband : Couldn't get him to look at it until next week. Covered up.

Wife : (Well,) It's going to get so bad we may have to get somebody else do it.

Husband : Hmmmm. Check with Fred ?

Wife: Mmm-hmm.

Husband : Try next door ?

(Young Cho ;1996: 7)

Many native speakers spontaneously use language for the purpose of communication and have the ability to use a number of different styles, ranging between the two extremes of formal and informal. They regularly shift from one register or style to another according to the social situation and can speak very formally or very informally, their choices being governed by circumstances. However, persons who are not native speakers of a language can easily cause offence and give wrong impressions by mixing elements from several registers in speech and writing. Thus, the students in foreign language classrooms should be made conscious of this problem of registers and taught to recognize differences so that they may not choose only the right register for a particular purpose but be able to keep a section of discourse within one register. (Rivers :1972 : 69)

The importance of communicative competence in using language appropriately in different situations for different purposes cannot be denied. The development of communicative competence in a foreign language involves much more than the mastery of a surface linguistic code.

The term is generally used to refer to a speaker's underlying knowledge of rules of grammar and rules that enables a person to communicate functionally and interactively. Among different views on the nature of communicative competence, that of Canale and Swain proposed is frequently quoted in the literature of language teaching methodology. According to this view, communicative competence consists of four types of competence. These are as follows : (Brown; 1987 :200)

Grammatical Competence : It is the knowledge of lexical items and rules of morphology, syntax, semantics and phonology.

Discourse Competence : It is the ability people have to connect sentences in stretches of discourse and to form a meaningful whole out of a series of utterances. Discourse means everything from simple spoken conversation to lengthy written texts.

Sociolinguistics Competence : It is the knowledge of the socio-cultural rules of language and of discourse. It requires an understanding of the social context, in which language is used : the roles of participants, the information they share, and the function of the interaction. Only in a full context of this kind can judgements be made on the appropriateness of a particular utterance.

Strategic Competence : Verbal and non-verbal communication strategies that may be called into action to compensate for breakdown in communication due to performance variables or to insufficient competence. It occupies a special place in an understanding of communication.

Communicative Language Teaching aims at helping learners gain all four kinds of competence mentioned above not just the knowledge of the rules of the language because concentration on grammatical competence will not provide the learner with the ability to interpret and produce language.

In conclusion, it can be said that learning a language means learning the rules of use as well as the rules of the formal system. Until a learner knows how to use the resources of a grammar to send meaningful messages in real life situations, he cannot be said to know that language. Most of the errors a learner can make in a foreign language arise from the lack of

awareness of the appropriacy of items. Thus, we, as language teachers, must provide the learner with means to select language which is suitable for the contexts in which it is used and which is appropriate to express his personal states and ideas. Exercises will certainly help students understand how social situations and degrees of formality affect language use. If we want to help our students in using the language as a means of communication and make them communicatively competent, then we should teach them different registers since it is not sufficient to teach the rules of grammar in order to communicate appropriately.

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