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NEW TRENDS IN FOREIGN LINGUISTIC COMPETENCE IN HIGHER EDUCATIONAL ESTABLISHMENTS

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Abstract: The article is devoted to the growing role of teaching foreign languages in institutions of higher education. An important task is training competitive professionals and competent specialists who know one or several foreign languages. The concepts ‘linguistic competence’ and ‘linguistic performance’ that should ensure the mastery of the system of information about the language, its levels, knowledge of the basic concepts of linguistics are considered. Close connection and interaction of linguistic and intercultural competences has been revealed. It is emphasized that the student’s ability and willingness to communicate in a foreign language is linguistic competence which is based on a complex of foreign language-specific grammatical, lexical, orthographic, and speaking knowledge, abilities and skills of mastering language means of communicative interaction.

Key words: linguistics, linguistic competence, linguist performance, communicative competence, competence approach, native language, second language

The main goal of the Ukrainian education system in the 21st century is to create conditions for a person’s development and self-realization, to ensure

high-quality education for graduates of higher educational establishments. Training specialists in any field should be carried out on a new conceptual basis within the framework of the competence approach. “The aims of the of the language teaching courses are very often defined with reference to the four language skills: understanding, speech, speaking, reading, and writing” [1, p. 1].

Linguistics is a scientific study of language and its structure, the study of grammar, syntax, and phonetics. Specific branches of linguistics include sociolinguistics, dialectology, psycholinguistics, computational linguistics, comparative linguistics, and structural linguistics.

An American Professor of Linguistics at Massachusetts Institute of Technology Noam Chomsky first introduced the concept ‘linguist competence’ and ‘linguist performance’ as part of the foundations for his Generative grammar. Chomsky defines ‘competence’ as the “ability of the idealised speaker-hearer to associate sounds and meanings strictly following the rules of his language” [2, p. 103].

The term ‘competence’ has been interpreted by linguists differently. Chomsky’s original term of the concept has been changed by various researchers creating a deeper state of confusion.

The concept ‘communicative competence’ is commonly recognized as the foundation for assessing both oral and written communication proficiency [3, p. 13].

According to Chomsky the term ‘competence’ is person’s knowledge of his language, the set of grammatical rules that are internalized and a language user has mastered the system rules. Competence is the ideal language system that enables speakers to produce and understand an infinite number of sentences in their language, and to distinguish grammatical sentences from ungrammatical sentences. This is unaffected by ‘grammatically irrelevant conditions’ such as speech errors.

Linguistic competence means student’s ability and readiness to communicate in a foreign language. It is based on foreign language knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, writing skills, speaking abilities, and mastering language means of communicative interaction. Linguistic competence is the system of unconscious knowledge that a person knows a language.

The term 'performance' is used in the linguistic theory of transformational generative grammar. It is the production of utterances. "The speaker's utterances are small, finite and fortuitous from the linguistic point of view and therefore a theory of the corpus would be arbitrarily related to a theory of the language" [4, p. 1].

Linguistic performance includes the factors that allow a person to use his/her language in practice. "In normal circumstances, linguistic performance involves the simultaneous manifestation of the language system as usage and its realisation as use" [3, p. 4].

Competence and performance are usually studied independently. It is not used in other approaches including functional linguistics and cognitive linguistics, and it has been criticized in particular for turning performance into a wastebasket for hard-to-handle phenomena. 'Competence' is an idealized capacity while 'performance' is actual utterance. "Communicative competence implies an underlying knowledge and a potential to communicate well, its definition is usually associated with actual performance in a social situation" [4, p. 4].

Communicative competence is the ability to communicate truly to the people in a society. "The idea 'communicative competence' suggests that people not only need linguistic repertoires, but also specific cultural knowledge to communicate effectively" [5, p. 14].

How do we know that students have learned a language? We can assess students using formative and summative assessments but how do we know that students will be able to use their language in real-life, authentic situations?

How do we know that the students are competent in the target language? One way to judge this competence is through students' performance but how do we know that this performance is an accurate measure of what students know?

What is the difference between competence and performance? Chomsky separates competence and performance. He describes 'competence' as an idealized capacity that is located as a psychological or mental property or function and 'performance' as the production of actual utterances. Competence involves 'knowing' the language and performance involves 'doing' something with the language. It is

very difficult to assess competence without assessing performance.

Why is it important to make a distinction between competence and performance?

To note the distinction between competence and performance is useful because it allows those who study a language to differentiate between a speech error and not to know something about the language. If a native speaker of English says: “We swam in the ocean this weekend”, is it an error due to competence or performance? It is most likely that as a native speaker is aware how to conjugate irregular verbs in the past, but his performance has let him down this time.

Linguists use the distinction between competence and performance to illustrate the intuitive difference between accidentally saying ‘swam’ and the fact that a child or non-proficient speaker of English may not know that the past tense of ‘swim’ is ‘swam’ and say ‘swam’ consistently.

Competence and performance involve ‘knowing’ and ‘doing’. In the recent past, many language instruction programs have focused more on ‘knowing’ (‘competence’) as part of learning a language where words and sentences are presented and practiced in a way to best help learners internalize the forms.

How do competence and performance apply to the language classroom? The assumption here is that once the learners have learned the information, they will be able to use it through reading, writing, listening, and speaking. The disadvantage of this approach is that the learners are unable to use the language in a natural way.

Having been trained to learn the language through ‘knowing’, learners have difficulty reversing this training and ‘doing’ something with the language. It is difficult to assess whether the learners’ insufficient proficiency is due to limitations of competency or a lack of performance.

To focus learners more on the ‘doing’ part of learning, which allows a more accurate measure of learners’ language proficiency, a more communicative approach to teaching can be used. This type of approach concentrates on getting learners to do things with the language.

Some teachers might understand the nature of some mistakes in terms of

interference from the native language (L1). Others might interpret mistakes as the lack of cultural and social knowledge of the target language. The important point is that teachers might be able to understand better the nature of the learning process and apply certain orientations towards the syllabus design which is concerned with the selection and grading of content, and classroom activities.

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