MohammedNAOUA

Département d'anglais

Université ChahidHammaLakhdhar – Eloued

mohamed.naoua@gmail.com

Axe 5 : La linguistique post-structurale

The Conceptualization of Language Analysis from the Perspective of Sociolinguistics:

The Shift from Langue to Parole

Université Alger 2

Faculté des Lettres et Langues Arabes et Orientales
Département des Lettres et Langue Arabes
La linguistique
100 ans après le *Cours* de Saussure:
Bilans et perspectives

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Abstract

Since the second half of the twentieth century, the conceptualization of language analysis has been revisited several times. Modern Structuralism, for instance, focused on the study of langue rather than parole. Their justification is that the former is a self-contained system or social product of the faculty of speech deposited in the brains of individuals as a result of numerous experiences of listening to other persons. However, parole is the manifestation of that faculty in speech. On its part, Mentalistic linguistics though viewing that individuals are predisposed with language, almost maintained the same dichotomy leading to competence and performance. Since all language irregularities occur in performance, this trend emphasizes that language study should focus on competence. However, since the early seventies the pendulum of language analysis has fallen in favor of parole. Criticizing the failure of structural and mentalistic linguistics to account for the social, physical and temporal situations that language activity is taking place in, the father of sociolinguistics, Dell Hymes (1972b) proposed a model of communicative competence comprising four sectors: possibility (langue/competence), feasibility (psycholinguistic aspect), appropriateness (context) and the frequency of occurrences of speech acts. This paper attempts to trace the conceptualization of language analysis from the perspective of sociolinguistics.

Keywords: langue/ parole/ competence/ performance/ communicative competence

Introduction

The focus of linguistic analysis has been revisited several times since the second half of the twentieth century. Modern Structuralism, for instance, hypothesizes that language consists two main components: langue and parole (De Saussure, 1959).The former refers to the homogenous social product of the ability of speech that underlies individuals' linguistic behavior; however, the latter refers to the individual manifestations of the former. Seeing that parole is heterogeneous, and usually represents the imperfect reflections of the underlying system of language, Saussurian linguistics settled on the study of langue. Noam Chomsky (1965) almost maintained the position of the founders of modern linguistics, distinguishing competence from performance. Competence delineates the knowledge of language on the part of an ideal speaker-listener, in a homogenous speech community that is not affected by ungrammatical or psycholinguistic features. As for performance, it accounts for the actual use of competence in concrete interactional situations. Since natural speech usually reflects irregularities caused by full of deviation from the rules, errors, false start, generative linguistics takes competence as its focus of study. The early seventies witnessed the emerge of new trend in linguistics, which sees that language behavior needs to be explained in terms of interaction between linguistic form and social contexts.

1. Language Analysis in the Pre-sociolinguistic Period
1.1.Saussure's Linguistics

According to Ferdinand de Saussure (1959), language comprises two parts: langue and parole. Langue refers to the conventional social product of the faculty of speech that after numerous listening experiences, it will be deposited in the brains of individuals of the speech community. De Saussure compares it to a « dictionary of which identical copies have been distributed to each individual» (p. 13). However, parole represents the observable manifestation of that faculty. Justifying the reason why langue should be given precedence over parole, Saussure accentuates that the former is social, homogenous, self-contained, and essential. On the contrary, the latter is individual, erroneous, and heterogeneous. In sum, according to modern structuralism, parole represents only « a partial and imperfect reflection of an underlying system »(Widdowson, 1973, p. 14).

Fig: 1. Saussure's Language Dichotomy
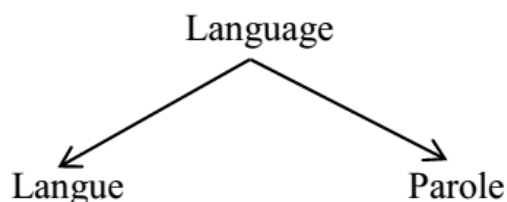
Source: organized from De Saussure, 1959, p. 9

1.2.Chomsky's Linguistics

From the perspective of transformational generative grammar, the concern of linguistic analysis should, first and foremost, focus on «an ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogeneous speech-community» (Chomsky, 1965, p.3). This individual is supposed to have known his/her «language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions such as memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interest, and errors …in applying his knowledge of the language in actual performance» (p. 3). However a «record of natural speech will show numerous false starts, deviations from rules, changes of plan in midcourse, and so on» (p. 4). Therefore, the difficulty that linguists as well as children learning a language may encounter is to determine from real speech «the underlying system of rules that has been mastered by the speaker-hearer and that he puts to use in actual performance» (p.4).To achieve this goal, Chomsky divides language into competence and performance (see fig. 2). Competence refers to the members of the speech community's knowledge of their language. This is consistent with what Hymes (1972b) labels as «the tacit knowledge…that is not commonly not conscious or available for spontaneous report, but necessarily implicit in what the (ideal) speaker-listener can say» (p.4). As for performance, it can be understood as the actual use of language in real interactional situations.

Fig: 2. Chomsky's Language Dichotomy
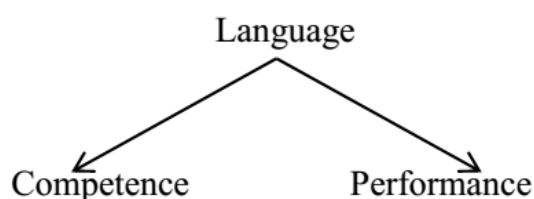
Source: Chomsky, 1965, p. 4

1.3.Idealization of Language

Lyons (1972) delineates three levels of language idealization, which include regularization, standardization, and de-contextualization (Widdowson, 1973, 1979). Regularization involves the discount of psycholinguistic features that are not of interest to the linguist, such as slips of the tongue miscommunications, hesitation pauses, repetitions, self-editings, stammering, stuttering (Lyons (1972; Widdowson, 1973).These aspects are all prominent features of parole and performance (De Saussure 1959; Chomsky, 1965). The second level of language idealization is called 'standardization', which attempts to discount language variation from linguistic analysis. This level is much more related to Saussure's synchrony/diachrony distinction, which associates langue to synchronic analysis alone. Since«linguistic change over time is a function of linguistic variation existing at any one time, the acceptance of a synchronic perspective commits the linguist to a consideration of language as a static system, a homogeneous norm» (Widdowson, 1973, p. 21).The third level of idealization concerns de-contextualization. The latter attempts to separate sentences from the social or temporal context that they occur in. Widdowson explains that «de-contextualization separates sentences from utterances, which are naturally only parts of a larger communicative whole, and treats

them as self-contained and isolated units» (p. 25). In short, regularization is said to discount from the linguistic data features of psycholinguistic interest; meanwhile standardization and de-contextualization focus on separating out aspects of sociolinguistic concern (Widdowson, 1979).

2. Language Study in Sociolinguistics
2.1.Hymes views On Chomsky's Linguistics

Hymes (1964, 1972a, 1972b, 1996) underlines that linguistic analysis is, primarily, a theory of language, not of de Saussure's parole, or Chomsky's competence alone (Fig 3). According to him, this theory is built upon two main components: competence for grammar and competence for use. What is worth mentioning here is that Hymes does not conceptualize the notion of competence in the same way as generative grammarians do. From the sociolinguistic perspective, competence can be understood to refer to «the actual abilities of definite persons in a definite social life» (Hymes, 1996, p. 102), or as a «term for actual abilities assessed in relation to context of use» (p.34). Attempting to distinguish his competence from Chomsky's notion, he stresses that «if competence is to mean anything useful (we do not really need a synonym for grammar), it must refer to the abilities actually held by persons» (Hymes, 1972a,p. 323. [Parentheses in original]). As for performance, or speaking, sociolinguistic theory considers it as the actual representation of one's actual abilities.

Equally important, sociolinguists do not restrict the scope of speech communities to one language solely. In their point of view, communities need to be characterized in terms of a verbal repertoire. The latter encompasses «a set of ways of speaking. Ways of speaking, in turn, comprise *speech styles,* on the one hand, and *contexts of discourse,* on the other, together with *relations of appropriateness* obtaining between styles and contexts» (Hymes, 1996, p. 33.[italics in original]). Ways of speaking suggest that the realization of persons' actual competencies in the form of speech acts (parole/performance) is of great significance in sociolinguistics.

Fig: 3. Language Dichotomy in Sociolinguistics

Linguistic theory

Language

Actual competence   Actual performance

Communicative purpose
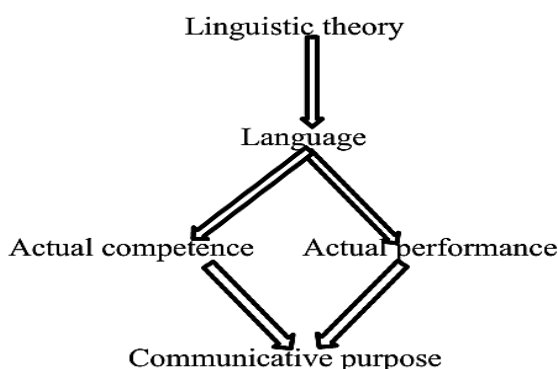
Organized from Hymes, 1972a, 1972b

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2.1.1. Hymes' Model

Echoing Hymes' (1964,1972a, 1972b, 1996) standpoint vis-à-vis modern structuralism and transformational generative grammar, Widdowson (1979) emphasizes that when children acquire their mother tongue or learn a target language, they «do not only learn how to compose and comprehend correct sentences as isolated linguistic units of random occurrence.[But they] also learn how to use sentences appropriately to achieve a communicative purpose» (p.2). In Hymes' (1972b) words, coping «with the realities of children as communicating beings requires a theory within which sociocultural factors have an explicit and constitutive role» (p. 54). In real life, children's acquisition of language is not restricted to the production of correct grammatical sentences. On the contrary, we should recognize that there are two competences, which underlie their ability of speaking: competence for grammar (Chomsky's competence) and competence for use. The combination of the two enables us to produce and interpret the rules of grammar in relation to the context they are used in. This is, of course what Hymes (1972b) means when he underlines that «there are rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless» (p.60). Explaining his conception of linguistic analysis Hymes adds that:

> We have then to account for the fact that a normal child acquires knowledge of sentences, not only as grammatical, but also as appropriate. He or she acquires competence as to when to speak, when not, and as to what to talk about with whom, when, where, in what manner. In short, a child becomes able to accomplish a repertoire of speech acts, to take part in speech events, and to evaluate their accomplishment by others. This competence, moreover, is integral with attitudes, values, and motivations concerning language, its features and uses, and integral with competence for, and attitudes toward, the interrelation of language with the other codes of communicative conduct (Goffman, 1956, p. 477; 1963, p. 335; 1964)….The acquisition of such competency is of course fed by social experience, needs, and motives, and issues in action that is itself a renewed source of motives, needs, experience (p. 60)

Dell Hymes (1972b) organizes his model of communicative competence into four sectors: possibility, feasibility, appropriateness, and occurrence.According to him, the theory of language communication should take in to account: (1) what is formally possible with respect to the rules of grammar (phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics); (2) what is psycholinguistically feasible in terms of human mental processing; (3) what is socially acceptable or appropriate with the context that language interaction is used in; and (4) what really occurs in terms of speech acts.

Fig 4: Hymes' Model of Communicative Competence
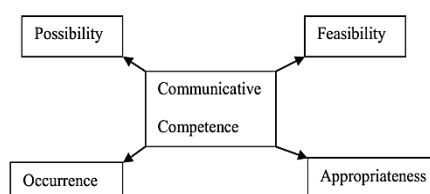
Source: Naoua, 2016, p. 63

2.2. Canale and Swain's Conceptualization of Linguistic Analysis

Canale and swain (1980) distinguish between communicative competence (CC) and communicative performance (CP). According to them, the first encompasses «the relationship and interaction between grammatical competence, or knowledge of the rules of grammar, and sociolinguistic competence, or knowledge of the rules of language use» (p. 3); while the latter describes « the realization of these competencies and their interaction in the actual production and comprehension of utterances (under general psychological constraints that are unique to performance)» (p. 3,[parentheses in original]).
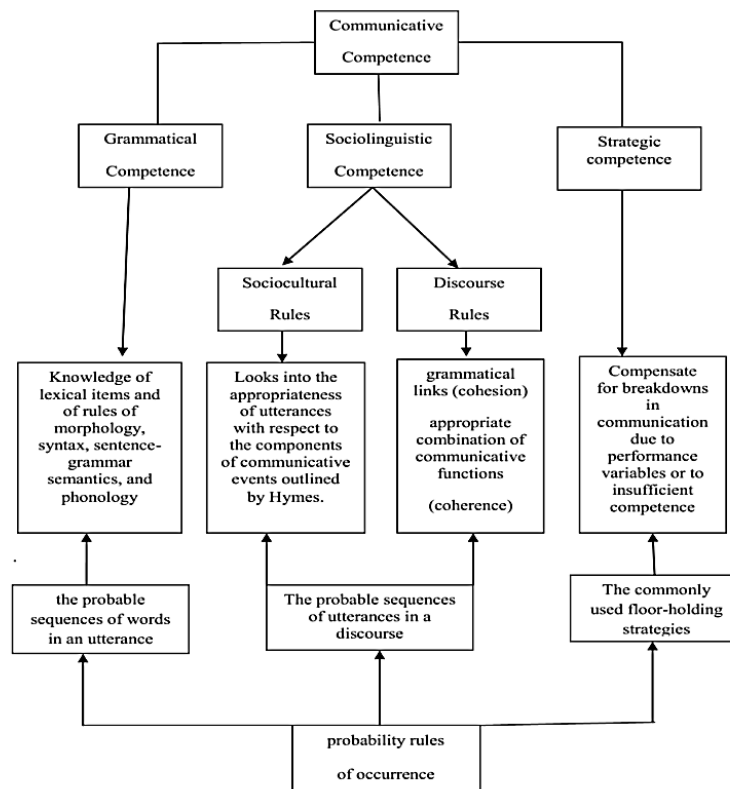
Fig 5: Canale and Swain's (1980) language Dichotomy

Language

Communicative Competence   Communicative Performance
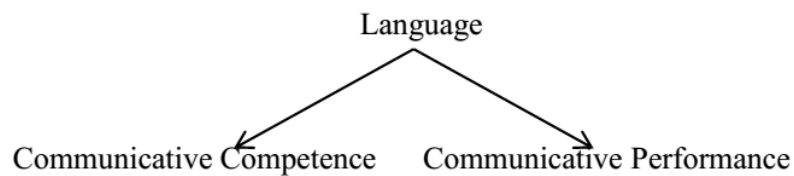
Organized from Canale and Swain, 1980, p. 3

Canale and Swain's model of 'CC' includes three constituents: grammatical competence (GC), sociolinguistic competence (SC), and strategic competence (Str C) (see fig. 6). GC examines the extent of utterances' conformity to the grammatical rules. SC relates utterances to the features of the social context. (StrC) provides compensatory roles in case of deficiency in competence or performance.

Fig6: Canale and Swains' Framework of Communicative Competence

Communicative Competence

| Grammatical Competence | Sociolinguistic Competence | Strategic competence |

Sociocultural Rules   Discourse Rules

Knowledge of lexical items and of rules of morphology, syntax, sentence-grammar semantics, and phonology

Looks into the appropriateness of utterances with respect to the components of communicative events outlined by Hymes.

grammatical links (cohesion)

appropriate combination of communicative functions

(coherence)

Compensate for breakdowns in communication due to performance variables or to insufficient competence

the probable sequences of words in an utterance

The probable sequences of utterances in a discourse

The commonly used floor-holding strategies

probability rules of occurrence

Source: Naoua, 2016, p. 48.

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2.2.1. Grammatical Competence

Grammatical competence is largely built upon Hymes' possibility; that is, what is formally possible.This competency covers the knowledge of lexis, morphology, phonology, syntax, and semantics.

2.2.2. Sociolinguistic Competence

Sociolinguistic competence, which accounts for regularities of speech with respect to the physical and temporal context, is split into two sets of rules: sociocultural rules and rules of discourse. The first set of rules identifies the extent to which utterances and registers are appropriate with the factors of speech events spelled out by Hymes (1964, 1972a, 1972b).Rules of discourse can be thought in terms of cohesion and coherence.

2.2.3. Strategic Competence

Strategic competence refers to the verbal and nonverbal compensatory communication strategies that «may be called into action to compensate for breakdowns in communication due to performance variables or to insufficient competence» (Canale& Swain, 1980, p 30). The authors distinguish two types of strategies: on type is related to grammatical competence, and the other type is related sociolinguistic competence. The first set of strategies refers to people's ability of paraphrasing, mainly, when they feel that they do not master, or cannot 'recall momentarily' a given grammatical form. The second type of strategies is called into action when we want to address people whom we are not sure of their social strata.

2.2.4. The Probability of Occurrences

Unlike Dell Hymes who considers the probability of occurrences as a separate component of CC, Canale and Swain (1980) consider it a subcomponent that exists in GC, SC, and StrC «Within each of the three components of communicative competence that we have identified, we assume there will be a subcomponent of probability rules of occurrence» (p. 31).This subcomponent seeks to characterize «the 'redundancy aspect of language' (Spolsky 1968), i.e .the knowledge of relative frequencies of occurrence that a native speaker has with respect» (31) to the other three competencies. In other words, the probability of occurrence specifies 'the probable sequences of words in an utterance' (grammatical competence), the probable sequences of utterances in a discourse (sociolinguistic competence), commonly used floor-holding strategies (strategic competence).

To summarize, Canale and Swain (1980) propose a model of communicative competence comprising three main competencies: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence. GC specifies language regularities with respect to the rules of grammar. SC describes regularities with respect to appropriateness with the social context. Strategic competence accounts for the verbal and nonverbal compensatory communication strategies due to deficiencies in competence or performance. In Canale and Swain's model, the probability of rules examines the extent of word sequences in an utterance, of utterances in a discourse and the commonly used strategies. However, the main difference that we have noticed between Hymes' and Canale and swain's model is related to the psycholinguistic factors. Canale and Swain see that these factors are nonspecific to

communicative competence but should be examined as aspects of communicative performance.

2.3.Bachman and Palmer's Model

Built upon Hymes, 1964, 1972b; Savignon; 1972, 1983; Canale and Swain, 1980; Tarone, 1980; Canale 1983; Bachman, 1990, Bachman and Palmer (1996) proposed a model of communicative language ability consisting two broad components: language knowledge or competence and metacognitive strategies (Alderson, 2000). The interaction between these constituents enables language users to produce and comprehend discourse.

Fig 7: Bachman and Palmer's Framework of Communicative Language Ability
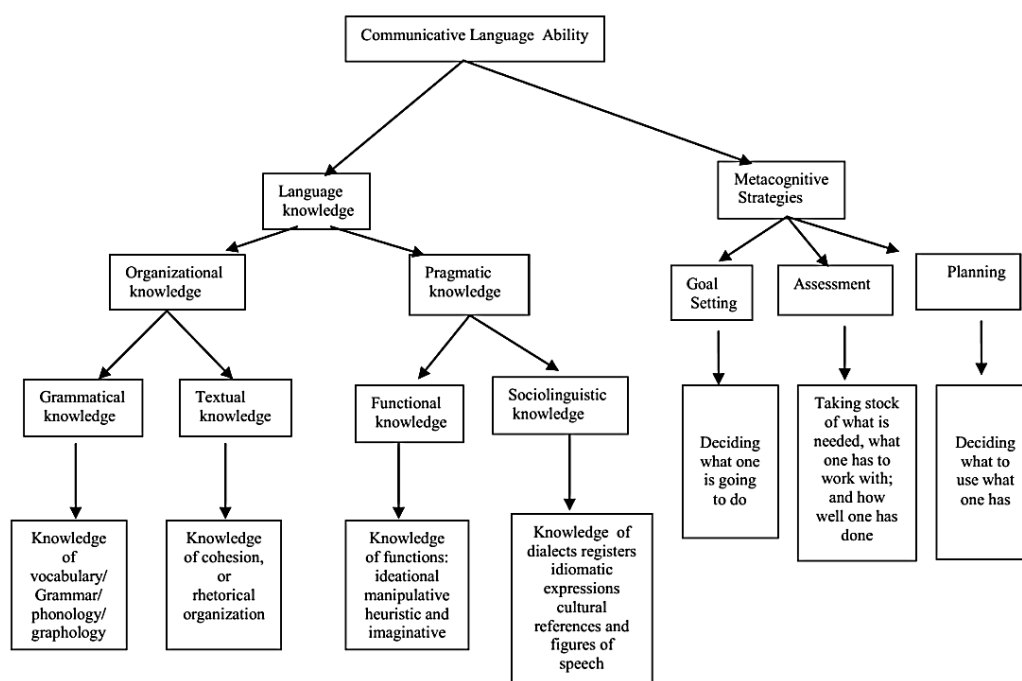
Organized from Bachman and Palmer, 1996, pp.66-8, 71; Naoua, 2016, p. 50

2.3.1. Language Competence

Language competence can be understood as the «domain of information in memory that is available for use by the metacognitive strategies in creating and interpreting discourse in language use» (Bachman & Palmer, 1966, p. 67). The authors organize this competence into organizational knowledge and pragmatic knowledge. The former includes the abilities, which control the formal structural aspect «of language for producing or recognizing grammatically correct sentences, comprehending their propositional content, and ordering them toform texts» (Bachman, 1990, p 78). The latter is involved in producing and comprehending discourse «by relating utterances or sentences and texts to their meanings, to

the intentions of language users, and to relevant characteristics of the language use setting»
(Bachman & palmer, 1996, p. 69).

2.3.1.1. Organizational Competence

Bachman and Palmer (1996) break organizational knowledge, or competence into two
other constituents: grammatical knowledge and textual knowledge. Grammatical competence
covers knowledge of vocabulary, syntax, phonology, and graphology. Textual knowledge is
concerned with the combination of utterances or written words to form a comprehensive text
(Savignon, 1972, 1983, 2002). Textual knowledge includes knowledge of cohesion and
knowledge of rhetorical or conversational organization.

2.3.1.2. Pragmatic Knowledge

Fulcher and Davidson (2007) define pragmatic Knowledge as «the acceptability of
utterances within specific contexts of language use, and rules determining the successful use
of language within specified contexts» (p. 44). Bachman and Palmer (1996) split pragmatic
knowledge into functional and sociolinguistic knowledge.Functional knowledge seeks to
explain the connection between «utterances or sentences and texts and the intentions of
language users» (Bachman and Palmer, p. 69). However, sociocultural competence helps us
create and interpret discourse in relation to the social and cultural context.

2.3.1.2.1. Functional Competence

Functional Competence covers four types of knowledge: ideational, manipulative,
Heuristic and imaginative (Bachman, 1990, 1991; Bachman and Palmer; 1996). Ideational
functions enable us to interpret language in terms of our experience of the real world. These
functions involve the exchange of ideas and feelings. Manipulative functions, which enable us
to affect the world around us can be classified into instrumental, regulatory and interpersonal
(Bachman, 1990; Bachman and Palmer, 1996). Instrumental functions are organized into two
categories: one category is used to get people do things for us, such as commands, requests,
suggests, and warnings, and the other category is used when people volunteer to do things,
such as offers or promises. Concerning regulatory functions, which include prohibitions and
obligations, these are used «to control the behavior of others» (Halliday, 1973, p. 18)
according to regulations, the force of the law, or the social norms (Naoua, 2016).
Interpersonal or interactional functions, which involve giving permission, leave taking,
greetings, apologies or complements «enable us to establish, maintain, change, or break
interpersonal relationships when we meet other people» (Naoua, 2016, p. 53). The third type
'heuristic functions' is used to extend our knowledge of the world around us through using
language to know about other topics, or to retain more information. Finally, imaginative
functions «enable us to use language to create an imaginary world or extend the world around
us for humorous or esthetic purposes» (Bachman & palmer, 1996, p. 69).

2.3.1.2.2. Sociolinguistic Competence

Sociolinguistic knowledge enables us to produce and comprehend language with respect to the features of the social context. This involves «knowledge of the conventions that determine the appropriate use of dialects or varieties, registers, natural or idiomatic, expression, cultural references, and figures of speech» (Bachman and Palmer, 1996, p. 70). According to Bachman (1990) the features, which enable us to use functional knowledge in appropriateness with the social context include «sensitivity to differences in dialect or variety, to differences in register and to naturalness, and the ability to interpret cultural references and figures of speech» (p. 95). 'Sensitivity to differences in dialect or variety informs us of the features' govern social or regional differences' (Bachman, 1990). 'Sensitivity to differences in register' informs us of variation within the same dialect (Halliday, McIntosh, and Strevens, 1964). 'Sensitivity to naturalness' requires us to produce and interpret discourse in a native-like way. The ability to interpret cultural references and figures of speech enables us to create and comprehend language with reference to the culture of the speech community, and beyond the linguistic bound constraints.

2.3.2. Metacognitive Strategies

The second component of Bachman and Palmer's model of communicative language ability refers to the metacognitive strategies (Douglas, 2000;Dörnyei, 1995, 2005; Purpura, 2004). Unlike the role of Canale and Swain's (1980) strategic competence, which is restricted to compensation for language users' deficiencies in grammatical or sociolinguistic competencies, Bachman and Palmer's metacognitive strategies have two main roles. The first enables the components of language competence to interact to create discourse. The second serves as a mediator between language competencies and the external context.

In summary, Bachman and Palmer's (1996) communicative language ability is made up of two main components: language competence and metacognitive strategies. The former is consisted of two main constituents: organizational competence and discourse competence. Organizational competence is in its turn split into grammatical competence and textual competence. The former is concerned with the individual organization of utterances and sentences, as well as the knowledge of vocabulary, syntax, phonology, and graphology. The latter focuses on the organization of utterances to form texts. On its part, pragmatic competence is made up of two competencies: functional competence and sociolinguistic competence. Functional competence is concerned with the functional knowledge of language use; while sociolinguistic competence investigates the appropriateness of these functions to the features of the social context. It also enables us to interpret utterances in relation to cultural and aesthetic features.

Conclusion

The concept of linguistic analysis has been reexamined many times since the second halfof the twentieth century. Modern structuralism, for instance, assumed that linguistic study should focus on langue, which refers to the self-contained faculty of speech deposited in the brains of the speech community's members as a result of countless experiences of listening to other individuals. In almost the same way, generative grammar maintained that what needs to be considered in linguistics is competence, which delineates the ideal speaker/hearer's knowledge of his language. In a seminal article, entitled 'On Communicative Competence' Hymes (1972) challenged the findings of the two previous theories assuming that linguistics should be concerned not only on competence for grammar (correctness) but on competence for use (appropriateness) as well. As a result, Hymes introduced a model of communicative competence covering four sectors: possibility (correctness), feasibility, appropriateness, and occurrence. During the early eighties Canale and Swain (1980) proposed a framework containing three constituents: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competenceand strategic competence. In 1996, Bachman and Palmer introduced their most comprehensive model (McNamara & Rover, 2006) having two main parts: language knowledge and metacognitive strategies. Language knowledge encompasses Chomsky's competence for grammar, Hymes' competence for use, and Halliday's (1973, 2004) functional grammar. Metacognitive strategies include the mental processes, which provide a 'cognitive management in language use' (Bachman & Palmer (1996).

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