An Analysis of the Communicative Competence in the Education Talk "Do Schools Kill Creativity?" by Sir Ken Robinson

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ABSTRACT

Language and ideology embedded in language always play a certain role in communication. Thus, from the linguistic perspective, the current study was conducted to explore and analyze the relations between language and ideology in the education talk "Do schools kill creativity?" by Sir Ken Robinson through a five-component model of communicative competence: discourse, linguistic, actional, social and strategic competence. The results showed that Robinson conducted a very convincing talk and his audiences were somewhat affected by ideology embedded in his single words. As an implication, the analysis hopefully provided the readers with some language functions to convey their ideas, emotions, attitudes and ideologies more efficiently.

Keywords: communicative competence.

INTRODUCTION

In 1996, Carruthers claimed that "the function and purpose of natural language is to facilitate communication and not to facilitate thinking" (p.1). He also added that language is a tool to convey thoughts; and conversely, such thoughts necessarily involve a language to be expressed. Language is thus used not only to express inner thoughts, emotions, and attitudes, but also to make sense of the others'. However, communicators must make the appropriate use of language in order to transmit ideas and influence other people's mind through ideology embedded in each single word without causing undesirable social problems. Therefore, communicative language should be based on some models of communicative competence (Celce-Murcia, Durnyei & Thurrell, 1995). In hope of providing a deeply theoretical and practical understanding of this construct, I analyzed Mr. Robinson's (2006) speech in the education talk "*Do schools kill creativity?*". At the same time, it is possible to present comprehensive definitions and practical applications in every area with cited-from-talk illustrations. To reach this goal, the research questions are raised as follows:

1) What sub-components appear most frequently in each component?

2) What impacts do they have on expressing ideas, attitude and ideology?

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Communicative competence is importantly needed for social interaction and intercultural exchanges without individual and social problems (Rickheit & Strohner, 2008). Appreciation of the importance of this area has resulted in many studies investigating the component parts of this construct.

In the beginning, Hymes (1971), the father of communicative competence, defined it as "capabilities of a

person that are dependent upon (tacit) knowledge and (ability for) use" (p. 50). He referred to an individual's ability to use speech appropriately in a variety of social contexts. His definition was introduced to emphasize that the knowledge of the grammatical rules is not sufficient for speaking a language and for communicating. In other words, communication is social interaction which involves factors such as information, language, social context, and communicating rules (Rickheit & Strohner, 2008).

In the process of identifying and categorizing this construct's component parts, many researchers had presented their own different approaches. Canale and Swain (1980) presented communicative competence including *grammatical*, *strategic* and *sociocultural* competence. In another research, communicative competence was continuously divided into four components including *grammatical*, *strategic*, *sociocultural* and *discourse* competence (Canale, 1983). However, Celce-Murcia, Durnyei and Thurrell (1995) presented a model of communicative competence which is composed of *linguistic*, *strategic*, *sociocultural*, *actional* and *discourse* competence. Although there are differences among three models (see Figure 1), Celce-Murcia et al.'s model is possibly the most typical description of this construct.
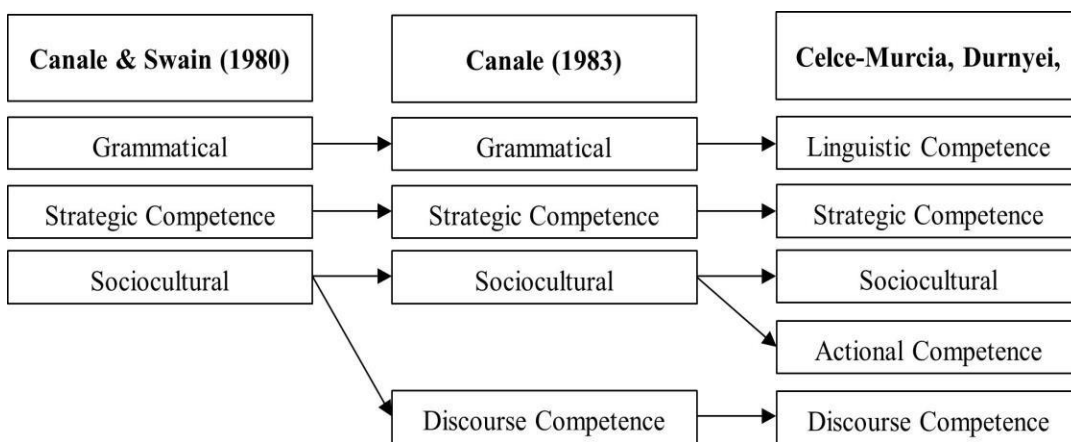

Figure 1. Comparison of three models

2.1. Linguistic Competence

Linguistic competence is ability of a person to deal with aspects of language. They include *words* (spelling, pronunciation), *phrases* (parts of speech, collocation, etc.), *sentences* (types, clauses, structures, agreement, etc.), as well as *paragraphs* that facilitate communication in form of speech and writing (Celce-Murcia et al., 1995).

2.2. Strategic Competence

Strategic competence was defined as "knowledge of communication strategies and how to use them" (Celce-Murcia et al., 1995, p.26). They indicate how to deal with/manage communication problems and difficulties such as linguistic deficiencies, non/mis-understanding, lack of attention, etc. Based on specific situations, the communicators employ at least one of five strategies: *avoidance or reduction, achievement or compensatory, stalling or time-gaining, self-monitoring (self-correcting),* and *interaction (cooperation)* to reach/enhance the effectiveness of the communication.

2.3. Sociocultural Competence

Sociocultural competence refers to the speaker's awareness of the social and cultural context which leads to the appropriate use of language (Celce-Murcia et al., 1995). It has been divided into four main factors: *social context* (age, gender, social distance, etc.); *stylistic appropriateness* (politeness, formality, informality); *culture* (living condition, regional differences, cross-cultural awareness, etc.); *non-verbal communication*

(facial expression, eye contact, gestures, etc.). Being well aware of these helps speakers avoid making a "culture-free", "out-of-context", and even "meaning-free" communication (Damen, 1987, p.xvii).

2.4. Actional Competence

Actional competence was defined as ability to convey and understand communicative information. It entails knowledge of *language functions* (categorized into seven key areas: interpersonal exchange, information, opinions, feelings, suasion, problems and future scenarios), and that of *speech act sets* (Celce-Murcia et al., 1995). Actional intents before expressed through particularly contextual speech act sets will be translated into linguistic forms. For example, if you made mistake, you would apologize for that. So the actional intent is "apologize" and you need to translate it into linguistic form e.g "I'm terribly sorry about this." along with apology speech act set: expressing apology and responsibility, offering an explanation and repair and promising nonrecurrence.

2.5. Discourse Competence

Discourse competence is a process of selecting, sequencing, and arranging words, structures, sentences and utterances to achieve a unified spoken or written text. It is predicated on five main components: *cohesion* (logic connections of ideas), *deixis system* (links between contexts and expressions e.g. If there are a speaker and hearer, they use pronouns "I" and "you" to address each other.), *coherence* (natural and smooth transitions of ideas, sentences or even paragraphs), *generic structure* (parts of a written or spoken text), and *conversational structure* (interactive procedures e.g. how to open conversation, how to interrupt, etc.) (Celce-Murcia et al., 1995).

METHOD

I analyzed the communicative competence (Celce-Murcia et al., 1995) through a case study in which I first watched and analyzed Mr. Robinson's actions and speeches in the talk "*Do schools kill creativity?*". The second source of data was a transcript of the talk which provides a basis for more detailed data collection. Prior to my analysis, I sought responses to the following questions:

1. What sub-components appear most frequently in each component?
2. What impacts do they have on expressing ideas, attitude and ideology?

Once I had obtained all data for each question, I employed both quantitative and qualitative methods through five components. Quantitative method will be used to analyze the frequency of appearance. Qualitative method will be used to assess the effects of communicative competence on the expression of idea, emotion, attitude and ideology and on the persuasiveness of the talk.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the results, gained by watching, listening, synthesizing and analyzing the talk "*Do schools kill creativity?*", are presented individually according to Celce-Murcia et al.'s (1995) five-component model of communicative competence.

Table 1. Summary of findings

Components	Frequency of appearance	Impacts on communication
Linguistic components	– Tag question: 10 times – Conditionals: 25 times	– To check the truth and ask for agreement – To make assumption

Strategic components	– Comprehension check: 5 times	– To check whether the audience can follow
Sociocultural components	– Facial expressions, gestures, eye contacts, and silences: during the talk	– To support the verbal language to be more understood.
Actional components	– Making introduction: at the beginning	– To help the audience know what his presentation is about
Discourse components	– Personal pronouns "*I, We, You*": 219 times	– To show relationships between the speaker and the audience
	– Narrative: 5 times	– To provide clear information which proves the argument

4.1. Linguistic Competence

Many aspects of language were employed for facilitating the interaction between Robinson (performer) and his audience. The statistical result (see Table 1) showed that he used the tag questions with 10 times of appearance to check the truth and ask for the agreement. The former is typically illustrated by a tag question "*It's been great, hasn't it?*". Also, another tag question "*Because you don't think of Shakespeare being a child, do you?*" was used to ask for the agreement that Shakespeare used to be a child. Additionally, Robinson used 25 conditionals in the talk to make assumption of what he wanted the audience to figure out. For example, he addressed "*if you're not prepared to be wrong, you'll never come up with anything original*". Thus, this result suggested that linguistic aspects serve as an effectively supportive instrument to convey information, emotions, and even inner thoughts.

4.2. Strategic Competence

One of the important stages in delivering a presentation is that the presenter needs to check whether his/her audience can follow what (s)he is conveying. According to Table 1, Robinson used 5 comprehension checks, for instance, "*Am I right?*", "*Isn't that true?*" to find out to what extent the audience understands and compares what he said with the circumstances. In other words, using comprehension checks was to give the audience a whole picture of social status, education system and demand for education. As follows: "*The most useful subjects for work are at the top. So you were probably steered benignly away from things at school when you were a kid, things you liked, on the grounds that you would never get a job doing that. Is that right?*".

4.3. Sociocultural Competence

When I was watching the video, I saw Ken Robinson presenting the information to the audience along with facial expressions, gestures, eye contacts and pauses. The purpose of using these is to create a good condition for the verbal language to be more understood and to draw a lot of attention to his presentation. More particularly, winning the audiences' attention will become more successful with pauses. This is because the audiences concentrate on what you are talking about at the beginning, they then gradually turn to the discussion of what you have said before, and they finally get lost of the presentation.

4.4. Actional Competence

In the beginning of the talk, Robinson started his talk with a clear introduction of what was going to be presented. For example, "*There have been three themes running ... One is... The second is ... The third part of this is ...*". This is a clear structure of the presentation which makes the presentations more interesting, attentive, and memorable. Because 25% of the success of a presentation depends on a powerful beginning and the presenter has no more than 90 seconds to gain the audiences' attention (McRae & Brooks, 2004).

Otherwise, Robinson started capturing attention from the audiences by using humors that are supportive of a long talk's pressure reduction.

4.5. Discourse Competence

According to Table 1, Robinson employed three main deictic personal pronouns (*I, We*, and *You*) to position himself in the interaction with the audience. The pronoun "*I*" appeared 52 times in the talk with two main aims: of highlighting Robinson's personal experiences, and of strengthening his standpoint. More importantly, the pronoun "*We*" was used with 86 times of appearance to show that Robinson and his audience are on the same side. In other words, he put himself in his listeners' situations to evaluate the social status. Thus, what Robinson does and believes is transmitted as what his audiences do and believe. Besides, the use of the first personal pronouns (*I* and *We*) together with the second personal pronoun (you) is to create an ambiance of conversation and a close relationship between the speaker and the audience.

Notably, with regard to an argumentative presentation, Robinson basically persuaded his audience of the social status "schools kill creativity." by narrating the stories which were originated from education industry. Robinson used five narratives to prove his argument "schools kill creativity.". For example, " *I heard a great story recently …. They will in a minute*." He used this example to demonstrate that children have their own creativity.

CONCLUSION

Basically, the results of the analysis showed that communicative competence has considerable influences on communication effectiveness. More particularly, Robinson conducted a very convincing talk and his audiences were somewhat affected by ideology embedded in his words. Although the analysis failed to cover all perspectives in communicative competence existing in the talk "Do schools kill creativity?", it presented some typical findings that the readers could apply to real life communication with high effectiveness. In addition, for relations between language and ideology to be presented more clearly, the analysis should be carried out on the basis of discourse analysis theories.

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