

The Concept Of “Competence” In The System Of Notions Of Anthropocentric Paradigm In Linguistics

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Abstract: The article deals with the problems of determining the role of the notion “competence” which appeared in linguistics and it was later used in Psycholinguistics, Teaching Technologies, etc. A special attention is paid to the fact that being once a term used in linguistics it has become one of the essential notions in the Document named as “Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)”.

Keywords: Competence, usage, anthropocentric paradigm, context, plane of expression, sociolinguistics, linguistic reductionism, empirical level, theoretical level, extralinguistic factors.

Introduction: In modern linguistics, there is a persistent tendency to view language in a broader context than was done in the recent past. This tendency manifests itself in a wide variety of ways. The constant striving of linguistics to study the substantive, semantic side of language, somewhat restrained in the 1960s by the intensive study of the formal side, the “plan of expression”, has been revived in recent years in discussions about deep and surface structures in language put forward by one of the outstanding linguists of the XXth century – Noam Chomsky.

In modern sociolinguistics, both domestic and international, this trend is realized in a new understanding of the place of language in human social life, in examining the empirical basis, and in creating speech process models that reflect the social factors that, to varying degrees, influence verbal communication. Perhaps most fully, this trend toward constructing more adequate models that reflect the verbal communication of communicants and take into account both the internal (psychological and psychophysiological) and external (social and socio-psychological) coordinates of verbal communication is expressed in psycholinguistics. [6]

Naturally, attributing the tendency to study language in a broad, non-linguistic context solely to modern linguistics would be, at the very least, unjustified. This tendency can be traced throughout all stages of scientific linguistics, but at least beginning with W. Humboldt, G. Steinthal, and A.A.Potebnya. One can even point to periods of its intensification, coinciding with the work of A. Meillet and N.Ya. Marr, as well as in the 1920s and 1930s with the work of M.V. Sergievsky, K.N. Derzhavin, L.P. Yakubinsky, B.A. Larin, V.V.Vinogradov, and V.M. Zhirmunsky.

One of the “peaks” of this development occurred in the 1960s and 1970s and was characterized by a rapid increase in the number of works appearing under the banner of sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, pragmalinguistics, text linguistics, etc. All of these works are characterized by a desire to get rid of a kind of linguistic reductionism, when the object of research was limited, reduced to speech texts, isolated from the conditions of their generation, from the human activity in which and for the purposes of which they were produced. [5, 385-386]

The isolation of individual aspects of the object under study, the cessation of the process in which the object

is accessible to observation, and the static study of the object, its isolation from influences whose results are not the goal of the study - all this is a common research procedure, which assumes that at subsequent stages, for example, at the stage of verification and extrapolation of the patterns discovered in individual objects to wider populations, the isolation of the object under study is removed, broken connections are restored, etc.

Modern epistemology distinguishes two levels within the structure of knowledge: the empirical level, where experiments and observations are conducted and the results are recorded, and the theoretical level, where theoretical ideas about the observed object are formed. The development of modern science, including the development of modern linguistics, is characterized by the rapid advancement of theoretical research methods.

Recent advances in linguistics in the study of language systems are linked precisely to the development of theoretical research methods. In structuralists' works, the exaggeration of the theoretical level at the expense of the empirical, where the researcher often limits themselves to an intuitive understanding (at the level of their own linguistic consciousness) of the distinctiveness of the object under study, is entirely natural and justified. But when this tendency to underestimate the problems of the empirical level is transferred to other areas of research, such as speech studies, where the empirical level, the level of adequately recording verbal communication, plays a fundamental role, works appear in which the language of fiction is the sole empirical basis. It is no coincidence that literary texts (and this can be seen as a reflection of the state of the relationship between the empirical and theoretical levels in the study of speech) became, for a long time, the sole empirical basis for the linguistic disciplines studying speech. [8, 364–366]

Everything stated about the relationship between the empirical and theoretical levels in linguistic research, especially in speech studies, should not be understood to mean that abstract objects formed at the theoretical level must necessarily have correlates at the empirical level. The relationship between abstract and real objects is more complex and indirect. Idealization as an epistemological procedure carried out at the theoretical level—for example, the concept of functional style as an unchanging object over even a relatively short period of time—may not have any empirical confirmation, but it makes sense within the conceptual framework of the theoretical level.

Our discussion of the relationship between the empirical and theoretical levels should be understood

in the sense that the deliberate narrowing of the empirical base, the separation of speech from its social context, inevitably leads to the impoverishment of the theoretical level, to the construction of an impoverished, inadequate picture of the functioning of speech in society.

Let's return to the consideration of the reasons behind the current increased attention to the study of discourse. From a linguistic perspective, these can be divided into internal and external. The most obvious internal reason is the unfulfilled, unfounded, and excessive hopes associated with various formalized methods of language study.

The presence or absence of this problem in the subject of research was posited by F. de Saussure as a criterion for dividing external and internal linguistics. The ignoring of the problem of extralinguistic factors influencing speech, or assigning it the status of a central problem, is shared by linguistic schools: American and Copenhagen structuralism, on the one hand, and the Prague Linguistic Circle, on the other. Various aspects of this problem become the subject of separate disciplines: functional stylistics, sociolinguistics, and psycholinguistics. Therefore, the problem of social determination of the psycholinguistic model of the production of speech utterance should not be considered purely psycholinguistic; it is one of the central problems of linguistics, solved in this case by the specific means of the theory of speech activity. [2, 139]

Ignoring the problem of extralinguistic speech determination in linguistic analysis does not go unnoticed for the final results of the study, even if the researcher abstracts from the actual conditions of speech production and likens the communicant to an automaton producing deep structures, as N. Chomsky does. The researcher can abstract from many factors that determine the actual development of speech activity as long as their models, no matter how abstract, fulfill their function—representing the phenomenon being modeled. But even the most abstract model must be meaningfully interpreted. [1, 48]

To study actual language use, we must consider the interaction of many factors, of which the underlying competence of the speaker and listener is only one. In this regard, language study is no different from the empirical study of other complex phenomena.

Thus, we make a fundamental distinction between competence (the speaker/listener's knowledge of their language) and usage (the actual use of language in specific situations). Only in an idealized case does usage directly reflect competence. In reality, however, it cannot directly reflect competence.

This assumption, which Chomsky uses to model the linguistic competence of the speaker and listener, is, according to his critics, too strong. As one linguist has noted, the real communicator in Chomsky's theory appears as a bearer of "linguistic incompetence," since, according to Chomsky, the actual processes of speech production, accompanied by memory limitations, absentmindedness, distraction, and the like, are a deviation from the normal functioning of linguistic competence.

But the exclusion of speech from the subject area of linguistics proved a true tragedy for I. Chomsky. By refusing to consider the actual processes (functioning of speech) and ignoring the actual development of linguistic competence in the child's verbal and non-verbal activities, N. Chomsky was forced to postulate the innate nature of linguistic competence. Ignoring the actual conditions of speech functioning prevented N. Chomsky from concluding "that 'competence' in language itself is the result of the development of its application."

When analyzing linguistic competence, one should proceed from verbal communication to linguistic competence, and not vice versa. Therefore, we agree with those psycholinguists who believe that the primary task of psycholinguistics—investigating how the mental state of the sender and recipient influences the information transmitted, as well as how other factors of the communicative act influence it—disappears from the transformational concept of psycholinguistics, and this important task cannot be resolved by simply referring to the "ideal speaker-listener." [3, 7] From the point of view of the problem of social determination of the process of generating a statement that we are considering, the tasks of discourse theory are of interest; to study discourse, it is necessary to create:

1. theories of (speech) cognition (the authors insist on introducing into the subject of linguistics problems concerning the role of speech in cognitive processes);
2. theories of (speech) actions (we are talking about the creation of a conceptual apparatus that adequately describes speech in non-speech activity, in the structure of which speech only really exists);
3. Theories of (communicative) social relations, respectively, the theory of social connections and social situations (in this way, linguistic pragmatics claims to create a communicative-theoretical equivalent of grammatical theory). Let us draw an intermediate conclusion.

Starting with purely psycholinguistic problems, with an analysis of the problem of social determination of mental processes of speech generation, we attempted

to show the general linguistic aspects of the problem of discourse. While from a psychological perspective, the need to analyze the social determination of the internal processes of generating a speech utterance is unquestionable, from a general linguistic perspective, the need to consider extralinguistic factors in studying verbal communication processes is also evident. The challenge lies in constructing an adequate model that reflects the extralinguistic factors influencing the type of discourse. In psycholinguistics, this problem takes on a specific form. It requires consideration not only of extralinguistic factors—some of which psycholinguistics has always taken into account—but also of the social existence of these factors, as well as the forms of their representation in discourse.

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