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Title: From ESL to EAL: Social aspects and strategic competence of language

General objective: To present an activity worked with Modern Language *BPTLI72 Técnicas Comunicación II* students to work on meaning and understanding through social aspects, context and strategic competence, necessary to get a better comprehension of EAL.

Research question: - Does the communicative and linguistic competences to be reached depend greatly on context understanding; that is, social aspects and strategic competence of language, regardless if the English education programs are named ESL, EFL, ESOL and lately EAL?

Methodology:

1. Type: Interactive-Confirmatory research
2. Design:
 - a. Documental.
 - b. Qualitative.
 - c. Transectional.
3. Population: Students from Escuela de Idiomas Modernos 2010-2011.
4. Sample: BPTLI72 Técnicas Comunicación II students.

Conclusions:

- Regardless if the English language instruction is applied as English as a second language (ESL), English as a foreign language (EFL), English as a second and other languages (ESOL) and English as an additional language (EAL), to comprehend intended messages, learners should work communicative and strategic competences being aware of the social aspects of language that surround comprehension.
- To reach language competence in the first or second languages, learners should develop linguistic competence (forms) and communicative competence (functions).
- For learners fully understand what ones says in oral or written language (first, second or other languages) discourse analysis is required since it represents the analysis of the relationship between forms and functions of language that encompasses the notion that language is more than a sentence-level phenomenon.
- Activities that work on meaning and understanding through social aspects, context and strategic competence provide a better comprehension of ESL, EFL, ESOL, and EAL.

Proposal Description:

When describing English education programs around the world it is encountered different acronyms that impact on language instruction. It is found English as a second language (ESL) which is used to describe English instruction that takes place in a primarily English-speaking country, English as a foreign language (EFL) to describe the use of English in a non-English-speaking region, English to speakers of other languages (ESOL) to refer to English instruction to those learners who may speak several languages and recently English as an additional language (EAL) to describe the English instruction to those who speak another or other languages before the initiation of their English education (Frankel, 2012). However, whichever be the English instruction chosen, it seems the communicative competence to be reached depends greatly on context understanding; that is social aspects and strategic competence of language which shall start when first language acquisition.

English as an additional language (EAL) students are those who may speak, understand or be literate in more than one language, but they require support to access the curriculum or content (British Columbia Ministry of Education, Special Programs Branch, 2001). In other words, they have English skills necessary to operate effectively in spoken English, but may not be proficient in using academic language. Regarding the process of language acquisition, language development needs are often masked by competence in oral language. However, it may take longer to become proficient in using academic English, which is described as having Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). Hence, the importance of first language acquisition must be taken into account. Research evidence shows that bilingualism confers intellectual advantages. Pupils learning EAL are already proficient in one or more other languages. They are able to transfer their linguistic and cognitive skills from one language to another (Keynes, n.d)

Learning a first language is a complex process. People learn their first language, and other languages spoken in an incremental manner. The process starts with the interaction with others by reacting to sounds and voices. Then it comes the vocabulary acquisition, and as they grow and develop, the complex grammatical and conceptual aspects of the first language are mastered. Afterwards, they develop their communication skills in understanding different oral and written texts. The same way, the acquisition of an additional language takes place. That is, it occurs in developmental stages. The learner develops listening skills before reading ones, and before writing skills. This way, as the learner's language proficiency develops, opportunities to think and talk about the language used in oral, visual or written texts take place raising language awareness about cultural competence and social aspects of the language (Language acquisition, n.d.)

So, the issue is not whether it is called ESL, EFL, ESOL or now EAL. It seems the problem lies on the same thing: to actually be able to grasp every single detail regarding meaning and understanding in the first language, as well as, in the second, foreign, other or additional language.

When learning another language, in this case EAL, learners are encouraged to know about forms as well as communicative aspects of the language. Linguistic competence refers to the forms of the language and communicative competence to the functions of it. That is, how language is used to express intended messages. This is for to fully understand what ones says in oral or written form requires discourse analysis, which is the analysis of the relationship between forms and functions of language that encompasses the notion that language is more than a sentence-level phenomenon. Oral and written ideas contained presuppositions. Without the pragmatic contexts of discourse, communication would be extraordinarily ambiguous. A sentence like "It's 11:00 pm" could, depending on the context, be agreement, disagreement, argument, complain, concern, apology, insult, or simply a comment. Context is the key to giving meaning to both form and function. The

term pragmatics relates to the effect of context on strings of linguistic events (Brown, 2000). This include everything that even though has not been said is there, and requires to be understood. This for besides the presuppositions implied, the subtle cross-cultural contrasts are present, and variation and formality are particular touchy when reaching the EAL communicative competence.

There are four different components, or subcategories, that make up the construct of communicative competence in ESL, EFL, ESOL or EAL. The first two subcategories reflect the use of the linguistic system itself; the last two define the functional aspects of communication. The first one corresponds to grammar. That is, the aspect of the language that refers to rules of syntax, semantics, morphology and phonology (Canale & Swain, 1980). Also, it may include techniques o devices such as rhetorical questions, emphasis, highlighting, word order, repetition, tripling and machine gunning among others.

The second subcategory, talks about connecting sentences in stretches of discourse, and to form a meaningful whole out of a series of utterances. The third component mentions the social aspect of the language or social rules of language and discourse (Canale & Swain, 1980). That is, the understanding of the social context in which language is used that any EAL learner must developed (the roles of participants, the information they share, and the function of the interaction). Here the acrostic of Hymes (1972) is a useful tool to be used to help EAL learner to understand the discourse of any oral or written text. The author proposed the following *speaking* acrostic (Communication and metacommunication in human development, n.d., chapter 2, p. 43.)

S= situation (setting & scene)

P= participants (speakers & audience)

E= ends (purposes, goals & outcomes)

A= act sequence (form & order of events)

K= keys (tone, manner or spirit)

I= instrumentality (forms & styles of speech)

N= norms (social rules: interruptions, collaboration)

G= genre (kind of speech/event: anecdote or moral instruction)

The fourth subcategory which is called strategic competence underlies the ability to make repairs, to cope with imperfect knowledge. That is, to sustain communication through “paraphrase, circumlocution, repetition, hesitation, avoidance, and guessing” (Savignon, 1983, pp. 40-41). Strategic competence occupies a special place in an understanding of communication since it is the way language is manipulated in order to meet communicative goals.

Thus, communication may be regarded as a combination of acts, a series of elements with purpose and intend. Communication is not merely an event, something that happens; it is functional, purposive, and designed to bring about some effect. In other words, communication is a series of communicative acts or speech acts (Austin (1962), in Brown, 2000). Austin proposed the following acts: Elocutionary (what is said), Illocutionary (how it is said), and Perlocutionary (the effect of what was said). The author stressed the importance of consequences, the perlocutionary force, of linguistic communication, developing awareness of what the purpose of a communicative act is, and how to achieve that purpose through linguistic forms.

Another important issue in describing EAL communicative competence is the way language is used in different styles depending on the context of a communicative act in terms of subject matter, audience, occasion, shared experience, and purpose of communication. A style is not a social or regional dialect, but a variety of language used for a specific purpose. Styles vary considerably within a single language user's idiolect. When you converse informally with a friend, you use a different style than you use in an interview for a job with a prospective employer. Martin Joos (1967, in Brown, 2000, pp. 260-261) provided one of the most common classifications of speech styles using the criterion of formality, which tends to subsume subject matter, audience, and occasion. He describes five levels of formality:

1. An oratorical style 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.
2. A deliberative style is also used in addressing audiences, usually audiences too large to permit effective interchange between speaker and hearers, although the forms are normally not as polished as those in an oratorical style. A typical university classroom lecture is often carried out in a deliberative style.
3. A consultative style is typically a dialogue, though formal enough that words are chosen with some care. Business transactions, doctor-patient conversations and the like are usually consultative in nature.
4. Casual conversations are between friends or colleagues or sometimes members of a family; in this context words need not be guarded and social barriers are moderately low.
5. An intimate style is one characterized by complete absence of social inhibitions. Talk with family, loved ones, and very close friends, where the inner self is revealed, is usually in an intimate style.

Categories of style apply to written discourse as well. Written style is therefore usually more deliberative with the exception of friendly letters, notes, or literature intended to capture a more personal style. Even the latter, however, often carry with them reasonably carefully chosen wording with relatively few performance variables.

Communicative competence is such an intricate web of psychological, sociocultural, physical, and linguistic features that it is easy to become entangled in just one part of that web. But some of the distinctive features of human discourse are becoming clearer, and language teaching methodology has demonstrated the steadily improving capacity to teach communication in the classroom. This way EAL student improve may develop the communicative competence expected to access the curricula content.

The following activity is used to work on understanding of content through social aspects, context and strategic competence necessary to get a better comprehension of subject.

Place: Metropolitana University, Caracas-Venezuela

Career: Modern Languages

Subject: BPTLI72 Communicative techniques II (**preparatory subject to FPTLI02 Linguistic I & FPTLI11 Discourse analysis**)

Skill: Reading

Focus: Comprehension

1. Read Lou Gehrig's "Farewell to Yankee Fans" speech
 - a. Identify the communicative strategies (use & purpose)
 - i. Rhetorical questions (lines:)
 - ii. Emphasis/highlighting (lines:)
 - iii. Word order / Repetition (lines:)
 - iv. Tripling (lines:)
 - v. Machine gunning (lines:)
 - vi. Others: (paraphrase, hesitation, avoidance, guessing) (lines:)
 - b. Study sociolinguistic aspects
 - i. Understanding of the social context (participants' role), information shared, interaction function
→ Acrostic of Hymes
 - c. Speech Acts
 - i. Elocutionary (what is said)
 - ii. Illocutionary (how it is said)
 - iii. Perlocutionary (the effect of what is said)

Lou Gehrig – “Farewell to Yankee Fans”

As a first baseman for the New York Yankees baseball team, Lou Gehrig played in 2,130 consecutive games from 1925 to 1939, setting a major league record and had a career batting average of .340. He once hit four home runs in a game.

On July 4, 1939, he stood before 60,000 fans at Yankee Stadium and confirmed what everyone seemed to know, that the "Pride of the Yankees" had been dealt a terrible blow, diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (now often called Lou Gehrig's disease), a rare disease that causes spinal paralysis.

Less than two years later, on June 2, 1941, he died in Riverdale, N.Y.

Fans, for the past two weeks you have been reading about a bad break I got. Yet today I consider myself the luckiest man on the face of the earth. I have been in ballparks for seventeen years and have never received anything but kindness and encouragement from you fans.

Look at these grand men. Which of you wouldn't consider it the highlight of his career to associate with them for even one day?

Sure, I'm lucky. Who wouldn't consider it an honor to have known Jacob Ruppert - also the builder of baseball's greatest empire, Ed Barrow - to have spent the next nine years with that wonderful little fellow Miller Huggins - then to have spent the next nine years with that outstanding leader, that smart student of psychology - the best manager in baseball today, Joe McCarthy!

Sure, I'm lucky. When the New York Giants, a team you would give your right arm to beat, and vice versa, sends you a gift, that's something! When everybody down to the groundskeepers and those boys in white coats remember you with trophies, that's something.

When you have a wonderful mother-in-law who takes sides with you in squabbles against her own daughter, that's something. When you have a father and mother who work all their lives so that you can have an education and build your body, it's a blessing! When you have a wife who has been a tower of strength and shown more courage than you dreamed existed, that's the finest I know.

So I close in saying that I might have had a tough break - but I have an awful lot to live for!

Lou Gehrig - July 4, 1939

Taken from: <http://www.historyplace.com/speeches/gehrig.htm>

Extra or homework:

1. Grice's cooperation theory
2. Halliday's functions of language
3. Joos's speech styles

Abstract:

When describing English education programs it is encountered different acronyms that impact on language instruction; for example, English as a second language (ESL), English as a foreign language (EFL), English to speakers of other languages (ESOL), and lately English as an additional language (EAL) to describe the English instruction to those who speak another or other languages before the initiation of their English education. However, whichever be the English instruction chosen, it seems the communicative competence to be reached depends greatly on context understanding; that is social aspects and strategic competence of language which shall start when first language acquisition. Learning a first language and an additional one are both complex processes, taking place in developmental stages. As the learner's language proficiency develops, opportunities to think and talk about the language used occur raising language awareness about cultural competence and social aspects of the language. Learners are encouraged to know about forms and aspects of the language. That is, how language is used to express intended messages. So, the issue is not whether it is called ESL, EFL, ESOL or now EAL. It seems the problem underlies on the same thing: to actually be able to grasp every single detail regarding meaning and understanding in the first language, as well as, in the second, foreign, other or additional language. An activity is presented to show how to work on understanding of content through social aspects, context and strategic competence necessary to get a better comprehension of subject.

Key words: English instructions, language awareness, social aspects, strategic competence

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