



## TYPES OF COMPETENCE IN LINGUISTICS: A REVIEW OF PROCESSES AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS IN HUMAN PERCEPTION AND ACTION

*DİLBİLİMDE YETERLİK TÜRLERİ: SÜREÇLERİN GÖZDEN GEÇİRİLMESİ, İNSAN ALGISI VE EYLEMLERİ ÜZERİNDEKİ ETKİLERİ*

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### Abstract

Scientific research and studies concerning the definition and scope of the term 'competence' have been one of the major fields within linguistic studies since the 1960s. Research on this subject liberated linguistic studies from structural boundaries and helped linguistics to become a multidisciplinary field nourished especially by psychology, sociology and cultural studies. This paper argues that the study of the competence types in linguistics not only paved the way to a better understanding of how language is produced and perceived by language users, but also increased the language users' awareness to become more knowledgeable in cross-cultural interactions and their underlying theories. This research is particularly interested in pragmatic competence as the utmost point of related studies since the development of pragmatic competence embodies the skills and abilities to utilize the cognition and perception of the language user even in unforeseen discourses.

### Öz

'Yeterlik' kelimesinin tanım ve kapsamını belirlemeye yönelik bilimsel araştırma ve çalışmalar 1960'lı yıllardan bu yana dilbilim çalışmalarının temel konularından birisi olmuştur. Yeterlik üzerine yapılan bilimsel araştırmalar dilbilim çalışmalarını yapısal sınırlamaların dışına taşıması ve özellikle psikoloji, sosyoloji, ve kültürel çalışmalar ile desteklenen multidisipliner (çok disiplinli) bir alan haline getirmiştir. Bu araştırma dilbilime konu olan yeterlik türleri üzerine yapılan çalışmaların, dili kullananların dili nasıl üretip, algıladığını daha iyi anlamalarına olanak sağladığını tartışmakla kalmayıp aynı zamanda dili kullananların farkındalıklarını artırarak, kültürlerarası etkileşim ve bunun altındaki kuramsal bilgiyi çok daha iyi anlamaları gerektiğini ortaya koymuştur. Bu araştırma özellikle edimbilimsel yeterlik üzerinde durmuş ve bu konuyu ilgili çalışmaların geldiği son bir nokta olarak ele almıştır çünkü edimbilimsel yeterliğin gelişmesi, öngörülemeyen bağlamlarda (söylemlerde) bile dili kullanan kişinin biliş ve algısının gelişmesi için gerekli olan beceri ve kapasiteleri ele almaktadır.

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## I. Introduction

'Competence!' Perhaps one of the most debatable terms ever coined in the history of linguistics. Competence can be accepted as a kind of subconscious schemata that exists within the minds of individuals. It is a kind of underlying organizational pattern, a structure, a conceptual framework that enables the self to carry out her everyday actions. Competence in our minds acts in quite the same way as the operating system in a computer – for example, the intricate Windows operating system of Microsoft or Apple's IOS. It knows everything, performs actions systematically within frameworks, is mindful of its capabilities and skills, ready for the unexpected, and able to produce solutions that involve complex infrastructures.

Thus, today, the definition of competence cannot be limited by what Chomsky structured in his 1965 'Aspects of the theory of syntax' book. For him, "*linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-listener in a completely homogeneous speech community, who knows the language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and errors (random or characteristic) in applying his knowledge of language in actual performance*" (3). Here, indeed, Chomsky puts forward the concept of generative grammar as the theory of Linguistic Competence and distinguishes competence from linguistic performance, explaining linguistic performance as a way language system is used in communication (4-5). For him, competence is unaffected by grammatically formed irrelevant conditions and has to be studied independently of language use, i.e. performance. However, this theory was soon challenged by many other linguists, especially those studying the social aspects of language use; namely, the psycholinguists, sociolinguists and cognitive linguists. Wales and Marshall criticized Chomsky's views by saying, "*It is also a theory of the limitations of the mechanisms, which enable us to express our own linguistic competence*" (30). In addition, Fodor and Garrett strongly advocated the role of psycholinguists in structuring a model for linguistic performance. According to them, the role of the psycholinguist is to study on a model in which the speaker's – and not just the ideal one's - linguistic knowledge of language and performance interacts with various psychological mechanisms, as well as how this is reflected in human behavior (138). They suggest that "*both linguistic and psychological models are model of competence*" (138). Therefore, it can be inferred that Fodor and Garrett's vision about investigating a model of competence not only embodies linguistic views, but also psychological aspects of speech formation and interaction. Chomsky's distinction between linguistic competence and performance was considered mostly empirical by many others since it underestimates the significant aspects of language use, psychological data, discourse, sociocultural perspectives, non-verbal communication, and the speaker's intentions – all of which soon became research topics by pragmatists under the title "pragmatic competence".

## **II. Communicative Competence and Human Interaction**

After Chomsky put forth the notion of competence vs. performance, in about five years Savignon, in her book 'Communicative Competence: An experiment in foreign languages', expressed her disapproval of Chomsky's "ideal listener-speaker in a homogeneous speech community" environment since, for Savignon, linguistic

competence forms the theoretical basis for language learning, teaching and testing, and the context for such activities cannot be limited to either the ideal language users or homogeneous speech communities. For her, there is more that meets the eye when speaking of competence and its functions in human interaction. Challengers of this idea, such as Hymes, found more room to debate this issue regarding the notion of 'Communicative Competence'. In his book 'On communicative competence', Hymes states that, native speakers in particular, not only use grammatically correct and appropriate structures, but also are aware of how and when to use these forms. For him, communicative competence studies both the referential and social meaning of a language. In fact, before this view was proposed and as Gumperz and Hymes mentioned in their book 'The ethnography of communication', the sociocultural aspects of human interaction and communication should be one of the major fields to be further studied by sociolinguists. In that work, their primary focus was on the rules of speech that shape utterances and their social meanings in various contexts (2). As an anthropologist and linguist, Hymes believed that communicative competence melts together and in the same pot linguistic competence and the knowledge of sociolinguistic codes. For him, "*the most general term for speaking and hearing capabilities of a person –competence is understood to be dependent on two things: (tacit) knowledge and (ability for) use*" (16). According to Yano:

Hymes considered Chomsky's monolithic, idealized notion of linguistic competence inadequate and he introduced the broader, more elaborated and extensive concept of communicative competence, which includes both linguistic competence or implicit and explicit knowledge of the rules of grammar, and contextual or sociolinguistic knowledge of the rules of language use in context. Hymes viewed communicative competence as having the following four types: what is formally feasible, what is the social meaning or value of a given utterance and what actually occurs (76).

As one can observe here, Hymes went beyond the speaker-hearer's knowledge of language and concentrated on human perceptions and actions in which speech and interaction take place in uncountable, unforeseen, unidentified discourses that operate within numerous sociocultural forms and frames. Hymes' studies on the interrelation between what is known, performed and perceived paved the way for further studies in psychology, sociology, anthropology, computer sciences in communication and design (mainly operating systems, software algorithms, artificial intelligence in mechatronics, etc.), and many more. The systematic potential of the

occurrence of utterances and actions to be performed by language users, the appropriacy of the prompt in relation to the context in which it is created, the feasibility in implementation, and the degree of occurrence frame the basis of the nature of communication.

Many other linguists followed Hymes' debate on the distinction between linguistic and communicative competences. According to Lyons, "... ultimately they must be reconciled. The ability to use one's language correctly in a variety of socially determined situations is as much and as central part of linguistic 'competence' as the ability to produce grammatically well-formed sentences" (287). In addition, Ammon agrees that linguistic competence is a "purely structural characterization of linguistic knowledge in terms of abstract rules...not seen as the direct cause of the subject's performance" (16). Following Hymes' work, Canale and Swain considered communicative competence as a system of both knowledge and skills decisive for communication. Their article published in 1980 addressed communicative competence from the second language learning/teaching (instructional) and testing/assessment perspectives (1-47). Their model was detailed by Canale in another study in 1983 which divided the notion of communicative competence into four parts as follows (2-26):

1. *Grammatical Competence*: It embodies the theoretical aspects of language, in other words, the knowledge of language coined by Chomsky in 1965. As can be remembered, the term grammatical competence was also premeditated with the 'Language Acquisition Device' (L.A.D.), a black box, an instinctive mental capacity which enables the infant to acquire and produce language in a rule governed fashion, the grammatical competence.
2. *Sociolinguistic Competence*: This competence is concerned with human interaction in natural contexts; the utterances, as they are produced and meant in various sociocultural contexts. The sociolinguistic competence is quite important since it is genuine for real communication.
3. *Discourse Competence*: The discourse competence embodies the skills and capabilities to produce language at sentence and text level by meeting the standards of cohesion and coherence.
4. *Strategic Competence*: The strategic competence incorporates the strategies of non-verbal and verbal communication in order to avoid communication breakdowns. In other words, the strategic competence

sustains communication through strategies to provide efficiency, effectiveness and fluency.

When these four types of competences are inspected, it appears that Canale and Swain have improved Hymes' model of communicative competence by referring to dimensions of communication which could take place in endless sociocultural contexts. By incorporating the term 'skill' into their model of competence, they drew the attention of other scientists to the combination of contextual-probable realities and personal skills & capabilities. The efforts of Canale and Swain were highly appreciated by most scientists since they moved towards analysing the dynamics of communicative language. It was well-understood that no matter to what extent language users are aware of its structural aspects, unless that language is scrutinized skillfully and strategically in sociocultural contexts, it is not possible to discuss authentic communication and its communicative value. *"...research on communicative competence have reached an agreement that a competent language user should possess not only knowledge about language but also the ability and skill to activate that knowledge in a communicative event"* (Bagaric and Djigunovic 100).

On the other hand, in 1983 Widdowson, in his work 'Learning purpose and language use' criticized Canale and Swain's broad definition of competence. For him, the ability to perform and act should not be considered within the subject of competence. Indeed, he suggested a new term, 'schemata'. For Fulcher, Widdowson described schemata as:

...cognitive constructs which allow for the organization of information in long term memory and which provide the basis for prediction. They are kinds of stereotypic images which we map onto actuality in order to make sense of it, and to provide it with a coherent pattern (283).

In relation, Widdowson, in a later article 'Knowledge of language and ability for use' described communicative competence as:

...communicative competence is not a matter of knowing the rules for the composition of sentences and being able to employ such rules to assemble expressions from scratch as and when occasion requires. It is much more knowing a stock of partially pre-assembled patterns, formulaic frameworks, and kit of rules, so as to speak, and being able to apply the rules to make whatever adjustments necessary according to contextual demands (135).

According to Lesenciuc and Nagy:

For Widdowson, knowledge may be characterized in terms of degree of analyzability, while the ability of using language is measured in terms of accessibility. Whereas, analyzability refers to the manner in which the mental representation of knowledge are built, structured and made explicit, accessibility regards the ease and rapidity with which knowledge may be accessed for using the language... It is obvious that both the knowledge and the ability of using language are inseparable and become a prerequisite for each other (40).

When these views are considered, it is possible to make a distinction between 'schemata' and 'competence'- the competence which Widdowson explained from a social perspective. With these in mind, it can be stated that competence is a skillfully built knowledge based on the communicative capacity of the individual to create meaning in utterances to facilitate communication. Yet, schemata is a cognitive process, a systematic organization which helps the language user to also produce language where and as required. In 1990, Bachman, in his book 'Fundamental Considerations in language testing', and in 1996 Bachman and Palmer in their book 'Language testing in practice: designing and developing useful language tests' elaborated Canale and Swain's model of communicative competence and addressed communicative language ability. For her, "*Communicative language ability can be described as consisting of both knowledge, or competence, and the capacity of implementing and executing that competence in appropriate contextualized communicative language use*" (84). In detail, Bachman introduced communicative language ability in three components (107):

1. Language competence
  - 1.1. Organizational competence
    - 1.1.1. Grammatical competence
    - 1.1.2. Textual competence
  - 1.2. Pragmatic competence
    - 1.2.1. Illocutionary competence
    - 1.2.2. Sociolinguistic competence
2. Strategic competence
  - 2.1. Assessment
  - 2.2. Planning
  - 2.3. Execution
3. Psycho-physiological mechanisms
  - 3.1. Auditory skills
  - 3.2. Visual & neuromuscular skills

Bachman's notion of grammatical competence is similar to Canale and Swain's in that textual competence includes the knowledge of conventions in order to provide coherence and cohesion at the textual level. It can be noted that Bachman's model has roots not only in Canale and Swain's discourse competence, but also in their strategic competence. It is useful to remember that the term 'pragmatic competence' was first introduced to the literature by Bachman, for whom this issue appears to seek out a relationship between utterances and their functions. The inclusion of psycho-physiological mechanisms in the notion of communicative language ability paved the way for the understanding of neuro-psychological processes as a physical action, one that helps the language user at the mental production level of utterances before they are performed. Briefly, following the previous conventions, Bachman brought about discussions on competence and demonstrated the psycho-physiological mechanisms involved in the course of language production, their functions in specific contexts by pragmatic competence and their correlation within the frame of communicative language ability. According to Dijk, "*... study of pragmatics requires an analysis of its foundations. This basis of pragmatics theories is on the one hand conceptual, e.g. in the analysis of action and interaction, and on the other hand empirical, viz. in the investigation of psychological and social properties of language processing in communicative interaction*" (121). With these words, Dijk once more emphasized the significance of studying communicative interaction within a conceptual and empirical frame, in which verbal and non-verbal human interaction is also affected by social and psychological conventions. For Rose, both the native and non-native users of a language should be equipped with intercultural knowledge so that language users can become aware of diversities in the course of interaction. In this respect, raising pragmatic competence plays a key role for both language learners and users (168-175).

### **III. Pragmatic Competence Defined**

Over the last century, defining pragmatics has been one of the hot debates. As Levinson states, "*the term pragmatics covers both context-dependent aspects of language structure and principles of language usage and understanding that have nothing or little to do with linguistic structure. It is difficult to forge a definition that will happily cover both aspects*" (9). Thus, pragmatics should not only be considered within linguistic boundaries, but also with the structure and principles of language usage, the non-linguistic parameters which influence the context of utterance and the nature of utterances. In addition, Carston discussed Chomsky's approach to

pragmatics. For Carston, pragmatic competence is “... *knowledge of the conditions for appropriate use, of how to use grammatical and conceptual resources to achieve certain ends and purposes*” (quoted in Chomsky 1980: 224-225), adding that Chomsky “...*seems to follow the logic of this position that there must be some sorts of pragmatic competence mechanisms which put this pragmatic knowledge system to use*” (10). Perhaps, Oller’s definition of pragmatics summarizes all the views above. For him, it is, “*the relationship between linguistic contexts and extralinguistic contexts. It embraces the traditional subject matter of psycholinguistics and also that of sociolinguistics*” (19). Crystal’s definition of pragmatics completes Oller’s description. “... *the study of language from the point of view of the users, especially of the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction, and the effects of their use of language has on the other participants in an act of communication*” (240). When the definitions of pragmatics are taken into account, it is possible to say that all linguists agree on studying pragmatics from the perspective of the language users in the course of a communicative event in various sociocultural contexts. In other words, the extralinguistic factors that directly or indirectly influence the formation of speech are also viewed within the frame of pragmatics. In this respect, pragmatic competence functions like a pot in which the ingredients of linguistic and communicative competences are melted. That is to say, pragmatic competence considers language users’ perception of his environment from a multi-dimensional perspective, in which the essentials of sociocultural communication are connected to linguistic knowledge and conventions, and thus are turned into communicative performance; namely, a linguistic behavior. As Mey claims, “*Linguistic behavior is social behavior. People talk because they want to socialize, in the widest possible sense of the word: either for fun, or to express themselves to other humans, or for some ‘serious’ purposes such as building a house, closing a deal, solving a problem and so on*” (185-186). Mey adds that the communicative context in which a linguistic interaction takes place has its roots in a particular society which accommodates social, political, and economical rules and regulations, norms and perspectives (186-187).



#### **IV. Implications of Pragmatic Competence on Human Perception and Action**

Pragmatic competence, referred to in this paper as the pragmatic ability of the language user, uses linguistic competence as a spark to start the functions of communicative language capacity of the person to exhibit a form of cross-dimensional perceptual selectivity in the course of language interaction regulated by sociocultural and psychological conventions. According to Chin Lin, by achieving pragmatic awareness, *“learners can understand the meanings of language from a broader intercultural feature. After the students have a basic concept of pragmatic organization, they will be more responsive to people’s intended meanings implanted in worldwide communication”* (56). The development of pragmatic competence in this respect sets a world view for the individual, enabling him to consider his environment from a broader perspective. Chin Lin adds that, *“the purpose of pragmatic education ...is that native speakers and language learners as well as non-native speakers must be familiar with diverse appropriate structures based on intercultural knowledge”* (57). As can be noted, almost all linguists associated the terms ‘familiarity’ and ‘awareness’ with intercultural knowledge and framed pragmatic competence. Therefore, building a sociocultural awareness and acquainting language users with related linguistic structures (i.e. syntax, semantics, discourse analysis, semiotics, etc.) need to be regarded as a major goal for language teachers, families and by language users themselves. There are still numerous countries in the world whose native and foreign language teaching policies are only limited to structural and partly-functional aspects of language. Kramsch criticizes this view and adds that *“...the teaching of language draws on some descriptive nomenclature based on a theory of language, the teaching of culture is left with its anecdotal experiential base, or is forced into the theoretical framework of other disciplines like history, sociology, anthropology, semiotics, etc.”* (234).

The use of language in today’s modern world should depend on a global understanding tackling language from a variety of psychological, neurological, and socio-cultural perspectives, with the former two examined considering sociocultural features. Sperber & Deirdre claim that *“... pragmatic interpretation is ultimately an exercise in mind-reading involving the inferential attribution of intentions”* (1). Davies bedecks Sperber & Deirdre’s ideas, stating:

The learner needs to be aware that there may be significant differences concerning, for example, the culturally defined purposes of conversation, the relative responsibilities of the speaker and hearer,

the focuses that are possible in interaction (e.g., social bonding versus information content) and the boundaries of acceptable self-disclosure in particular contexts (220).

Gumperz, in his book 'Discourse strategies' acknowledges that in order to build a cross-cultural interactional competence, the development of cultural awareness plays a significant role. Though the extent to which such an awareness is built does not assure a pleasant communication, it grants the interlocutors the opportunity to build their own principles and strategies in a critical and creative manner to be ready for a communicative act so that there are no communication breakdowns, inappropriacies, cutoffs, etc... Therefore, the instruction of pragmatics which entails a wide range of academic disciplines should seek to furnish language users with tools that encourage them to communicate in contextually appropriate and efficient ways. These ideas are backed up by Bardovi-Harlig, who states, "*the role of instruction may be to help the learner encode her values (which again may be culturally determined) into a clear, unambiguous message*" (31). In this respect, the language learner/user not only increases the awareness of cross-cultural contexts and structurally-functionally interpretation of linguistic occurrences, but also discovers how to encode his own beliefs and perspectives in the target language. This way, the learner becomes competent both linguistically and intellectually and, examining the world from a broader perspective, the individual's own sociocultural habitat and interpreting his mindset through linguistically appropriate structures help him to become even more well-rounded and intellectually mature. Thus, knowing a language in this respect goes beyond reporting facts and statistics. It is and should be about what an individual knows about language, how he performs functionally, the way he perceives his reality and intelligently ties it with the outer world, and makes inferences and responds upon the interlocutor's utterances and actions. Recanati states:

Pragmatic interpretation is a totally different process. It is not concerned with language per se, but with human action. When someone acts, whether linguistically or otherwise, there is no reason why she does what she does. To provide an interpretation for the action is to find that reason, that is, to ascribe the agent a particular intention in terms of which we can make sense of the action (106).

From this viewpoint, both the communicative actions and intentions of the addressee should be inspected together to realize meaningful communication for both parties.

## V. Conclusion

The three types of competence studied in linguistics to this day complete each other in many respects and it is not possible to study any one of them in isolation from the rest. However, the development of pragmatic competence in language users is now certain to be a priority, whose achievement has to be considered by both linguists and language teachers alike. In Western Europe and in the United States, this issue does not seem to be a major one so far as both linguists and teachers work collaboratively to help language users consider the world from a multidimensional perspective. Modern linguistic studies mostly concentrate on pragmatic interpretations and related case studies in global languages. This attitude not only helps modern global languages to be learned in shorter periods of time and more efficiently and appropriately, but also narrows the gaps among the societies worldwide. For Küçükbezirci:

Pragmatics reveals the invisible meaning. Consider a sign in a shopping center 'baby sale', we can understand that what it is for sale is baby wares, there are no babies for sale. Another example to emphasize the importance of the place that the text exist is 'big earthquake' or 'bankrupt', when such kind of terms are written on the shop windows, the aim is to take attention of the customers that there is a big discount (140).

The task of pragmatics in this sense is not easy. For the language user, pragmatics has to incorporate and mirror the personal, sociocultural, psychological and even geographical aspects of language. That is why Rueda claims, "*... learners can be instructed on the strategies and linguistic forms by which specific pragmatic features are performed and how these strategies are used in different contexts*" (178). She adds that "*the aim of instruction in pragmatics is not to force the learners to adapt native speaker pragmatic choices, but to expose learners to positive evidence, making them aware of a verity of linguistic resources that are used in combination with specific contextual factors*" (178). Danesi states that non-native speakers of a language find it difficult to recognize the metaphorical figures in language use and misinterpret them relying on the literal meaning of utterance (495). Therefore, the ability to relate to people coming from other cultures is possible only with expanding the learners' pragmatic schemata and shifting their attention from local to global perspectives. Davies concludes that "*...awareness of cross-cultural pragmatics and the development of interactional competence should be reordered as a high priority from the beginning of language study, as the basic framework within all aspects of communicative competence are developed*" (227).

Briefly put, humans' perceptions of their immediate environment and the outer world is based on multiple parameters, those that also define 'who the person is'. In this respect, the language development of the individual have to be studied not just from a structural point of view, but also from sociocultural, psychological, geographical and extra-linguistic ones. The development of pragmatic competence which also entails linguistic and communicative competences frames the cognition and perception of the language user (even in unforeseen discourse) and enables him to interact with the addressee in a more appropriate, and intelligent manner, such that both parties can enjoy and benefit from the essence of communication.

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