
THE CONCEPT OF COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN INTERACTIVE DISCUSSION AND DEBATE

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Summary: The focus of this article is on the concept of the communicative competence in interactive discussion and debate which is analysed and studied from different aspects: linguistics, pragmatics and sociolinguistics. Some techniques are suggested as the most efficient ones for teaching discussion and debate to ESL students.

Keywords: discussion; debate; communicative competence; pragmatic; psycholinguistic; persuasive claims; exchange of rationales; thoughtwave technique.

The problem of teaching students how to converse in certain social context — a suitable topic, let's say, for businessmen clinching important deals, for scholars participating at different scientific gatherings and even for advanced students of English is one of the most important and it needs studying and research as the participation in the discussion and debate requires certain communicative strategies.

Psychologically, social interaction is interlocutor's activity directed at regulation and coordination of their joint actions. Thus, the function of communication in social interaction of people is organization of this interaction, i.e. mutual regulation of the partner's activity that corresponds to their personal and joint plans. Speech in this case serves as a mediator (side by side with other means) of efforts in regulating the partner's activity. So speech influence is the most important and integral part of the social interaction and, therefore, of communication especially in cases when the divergence of opinion occurs, i.e. in discussions and debates.

Persuasion involves reasoning, credibility and motivational appeals. Moreover, the effect of speech influence or the character of the pragmatic effect of a speech utterance in a certain speech act depends on the perception, understanding and interpretation of the given utterance of the speaker. One and the same utterance can produce different pragmatic effect on different speakers and on one and the same speaker in different situations, depending on the life experience of the speaker, his/her intellect, esthetic social and emotional development, psychic condition at a given moment and even aims. When people from different social cultural background come into contact with one another, it can lead to communicative difficulties.

The speaker's pragmatic intention affects the socio-cultural context of interactive discussion and debate that comprises such speech acts as objection, negation, denial, rejection, disproof, refutation, protest, insistence, counteraction, advice, comparison, etc. and all of them convey the pragmatic situation of persuasion. These speech acts are determined by the motives of the speakers, their social positions, the aspect of relations in speech communication; the latter is correlated in its turn to the logical modality. The logical modality is determined by pragmatic meaning of speech interaction and it is conveyed by explicit pragmatic utterances (emotionally-coloured words, imperative constructions, etc.) and implicit pragmatic utterances: both verbal (lexical and grammatical means, categories of definiteness and indefiniteness, speech acts of the so-called argumentative type) and non-verbal actions of the speakers.

The complicated character of the interactional socio-cultural context of the discussion and debate

determines the concept and the main components of the communicative competence. They are the following:

- Pragmatic implying competence of the interaction and discourse, appropriateness and paralinguistics (i.e. distance between speakers, intonation, volume and pitch of speech, gestures, facial expressions and other body language that helps to understand the verbal behavior as well as the structure of the linguistic code underlying the behavior).

- Interactional sociolinguistic competence that includes not only the knowledge of the language, society, culture and speaking ethics but also the sense of culturally stipulated behavior, the interaction of language and social variables, conventional behavior in common situation, cultural connotations of words and phrases and the demonstration empathy.

- Psycholinguistic competence defined as skills that help to interpret, evaluate the information received and predict verbal and non-verbal reaction and behavior of the partner and to change and/or rearrange the communicative strategy.

To develop the communicative competence of interactive discussion and debate, the following techniques and activities are suggested as the most efficient ones.

a) *Persuasive claims* is what the persuader wants, tries and hopes will be believed or done. The goal of this technique is

- to object or reject the given statement;
- to prove something providing some evidence or facts;
- to choose the most persuasive statement or argument from the given ones or to choose the fact /statement confirming this argument and commenting on the choice;

b) *The exchange of rationales* is the activity when each of the speakers tries to persuade each other by analyzing and comparing the similar things for the audience to accept a certain conclusion. Here the students should

- analyze and explain /or comment on a given fact /statement;
- give an example from their own or some other people's life experience.

c) *Mime* is the activity when the speaker uses non-verbal tactics instead of verbal one, or accompany his/her communication strategy and the goal of this activity is

- to watch and interpret this or that gesture or body movement (what is implied by them);
- to react to the given statement and to show agreement /disagreement, doubt, surprise, etc., to indicate understanding using body language.

d) *Thoughtwave* technique, the goal of which is to predict the reaction of the partner to the given statement /argument. The students should

- fill in the statement /argument with appropriate words or phrases or those of denial, objection, contradiction, etc;
- give a hint of information to the partner;
- comment on implicit or indirect statements and questions.

In sum, all these techniques contribute to the development of communicative competence in interactive discussion and debate in general but some of them are directed to the purpose of developing of pragmatic competence (e.g. persuasive claims, the exchange of rationales, etc.), others — of interactional socio-cultural and psycholinguistic (such as mimes, communication breakdown,

thoughtwave).