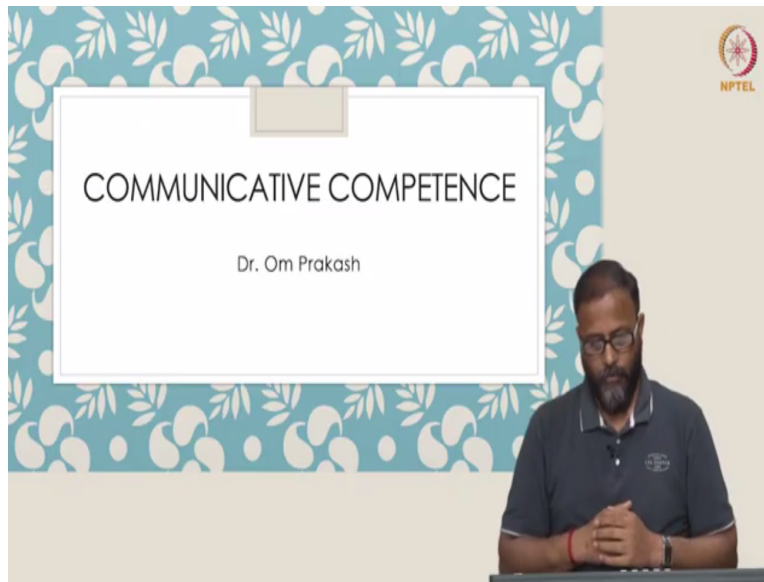


Fundamental Concepts in Sociolinguistics
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Lecture 11
Communicative Competence

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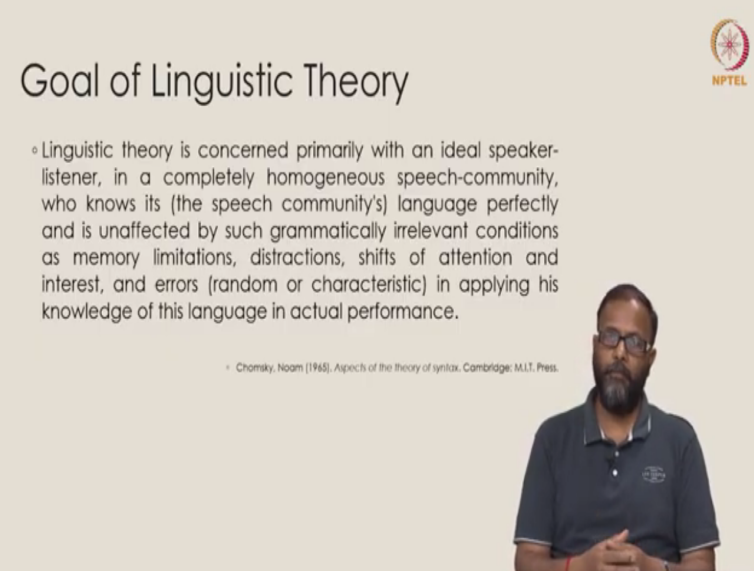
Welcome to class. Today we are going to talk about communicative competence. The term communicative competence coined by Dell Hymes in 1966 has very serious consequences in many ways. We are going to explore that today. But before going to communicative competence, we need to understand the background and the response of Dell Hymes in 1966 to the term and the concept given by Noam Chomsky, the generative linguist who talked about linguistic competence.

So linguistic competence and communicative competence, they both stand opposite each other as a response to each other. So communicative competence can be seen as a response to the Chomskyan idea of linguistic competence. And the response was so serious in the sense that Dell Hymes took the study of ethnography of communication and came up with a speaking model.

On one side is the Chomskyan idea of linguistic competence, which refers to the underlined and underlying mental representation of grammatical structures and language in the human mind. Communicative competence essentially refers to the actual use of it. So the ability of the individual speaker to actually use the knowledge of language in the real-world situation in a

socio-cultural context. And this is seen as a serious response to the Chomskyan idea of linguistic competence.

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The slide features a title 'Goal of Linguistic Theory' at the top left. To the right is the NPTEL logo. The main text is a quote from Chomsky (1965) defining linguistic theory. At the bottom right, there is a small video inset of a man with a beard and glasses, wearing a dark polo shirt, speaking.

Goal of Linguistic Theory

NPTEL

◦ Linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogeneous speech-community, who knows its (the speech community's) language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interest, and errors (random or characteristic) in applying his knowledge of this language in actual performance.

◦ Chomsky, Noam (1965). *Aspects of the theory of syntax*. Cambridge, M.I.T. Press.

So before we talk about communicative competence, let us talk about linguistic competence, to which this came as a response. I quote from the 1965 Chomskyan work *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*, and in its introduction Chomsky writes, “linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogeneous speech community, who knows, it is that means the speech community's language perfectly fine and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interest and errors, whether they are random or characteristics, characteristic in applying his knowledge of language, in actual performance.”

And this is a very profound statement, if you look at it. So clearly Chomsky delinks two things here; the ability or the capability of the language user and the actual act of performance. So he is talking about the abstract level of that mental representation of language which deals with the grammatical computation in human mind and makes it possible for the language speaker to have intuitions about grammaticality, non-grammaticality, ungrammatical sentence, grammatical sentence, acceptable sentence, non-acceptable sentence, and the predictions a speaker can make vis-a-vis the actual use of it.

So he is delinking competence from performance. He calls it the *I-language* or internalized language which is implicitly there in a speaker of that language. So language is being interpreted and represented here at that abstract mental grammar, mental level, where he focuses more on the computational aspect of it. Whereas he says that, look at the phrase he uses, he says, ‘unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shift of attention, interest and errors.’

So these are the characteristics that he attributes to performance. So performance is restricted, controlled, and influenced by these grammatically irrelevant factors. So he is not concerned about that. So simply he is not focusing on performance, but instead he is focusing on the underlying mental representation of language and grammatical computational ability of the human mind that he calls competence or linguistic competence. He says that the ultimate goal or the primary goal of linguistic theory should be concerned with understanding language in this perspective.

So he rules out the performance not explicitly, but this is what implicitly it means. So he calls this knowledge of language as *I-language* which is shared by all speakers of that language in that particular speech community without variation. So whatever variability is there, you find it in terms of performance and the performance of an individual cannot be related and it cannot reflect the actual competence of the speaker.

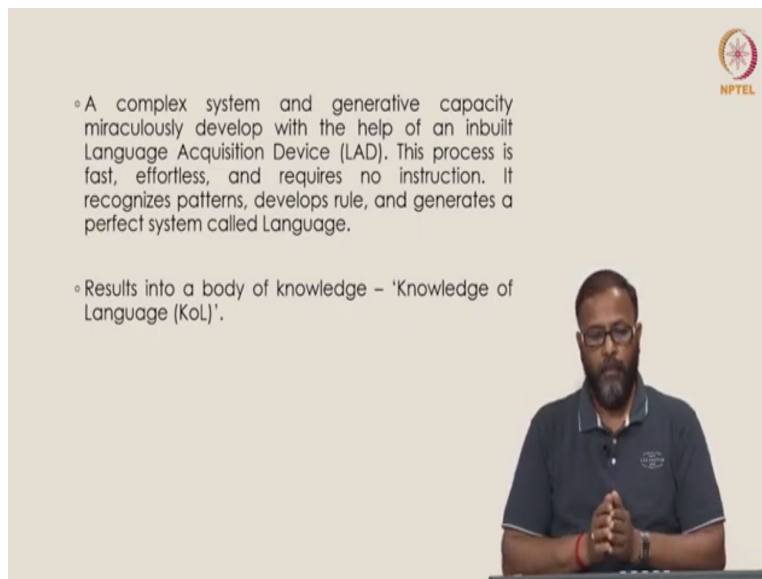
So here we find a very clear difference between competence and performance. They are delinked and have an asymmetrical relationship, this was Chomskyan position in 1965. So he does not see language. Let me rephrase my sentence. He does not focus on language as a social reality, which is used actually in a socio-cultural context. So he is not referring to the ability of the speaker to use that language in performance.

He is talking about an abstract idea and the knowledge that the speaker has which he or she can, at his or her disposal, will be in performance. But in no way, actual performance reflects the actual capability or the competence of this user. So we need to understand this asymmetry and contrast that he underlines, and he calls competence or linguistic competence or *I-language*, and the actual performance as *E-language*. *E-language* is governed by external factors.

But there are a few phrases that he mentions here; ideal speaker and listener. That was the bone of contention, then a completely homogeneous speech community. Again, this is another bone of contention. And lots of debates have taken place defining these concepts and the idea that they are unaffected by grammatically irrelevant conditions.

So clearly Chomsky places a lot of thrust and importance on linguistic theory. The goal of linguistic theory is to understand, explain and predict this computational aspect of language represented in the human mind. So this is what Chomsky talks about. So he takes this to an abstract level.

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- A complex system and generative capacity miraculously develop with the help of an inbuilt Language Acquisition Device (LAD). This process is fast, effortless, and requires no instruction. It recognizes patterns, develops rule, and generates a perfect system called Language.
- Results into a body of knowledge - 'Knowledge of Language (KoL)'.


Dell Hymes coined communicative competence. Again, the historical reference can be found in the source idea of *La Langue* and *La Parole*. So *La Parole* is the actual use of it. So if you look at the Chomskyan position, language is a complex system and generative capacity miraculously develops with the help of an input language acquisition device, that is LAD. This process is fast, effortless and requires no instruction. This is what he talks about this acquisition process and how we acquire this language.

It recognizes patterns, develops rules and generates a perfectly fine system called a body of language or knowledge of language. So this is what he is talking about. Knowledge of language which is acquired by human children effortlessly without instruction with limited available input,


but the learning is perfectly fine. Why? Because there are certain underlying factors. He attributes it to LAD or Language Acquisition Device and UG or Universal Grammar.

Universal Grammar is a set of universal principles of human language across all languages and parameters are the superficial surface level differences that you find in a language. So if you look at the Chomskyan perspective, he talks about the abstract mental representation of language in the human mind, and he refers to that knowledge as knowledge of language, which is universal in nature, shared by all speakers of language in that particular speech community. And the speaker or the user of language has intuition in filtering out or in ruling out any ungrammatical sentence or any ambiguity. So this is the Chomskyan position in explaining competence. He calls it linguistic competence and the delinks linguistic performance.

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- Dell Hymes coined the term Communicative Competence in 1966 as a response to the perceived inadequacy of Noam Chomsky's (1965) distinction between Linguistic Competence and Linguistic Performance.
- To counter Chomsky's abstract notion of competence, Hymes explained Ethnographic Details of communicative competence that included "communicative form and function in integral relation to each other".
- Communicative competence is the intuitive functional knowledge and control of the principles of language usage.



As a response to this abstract explanation of language, Dell Hymes looks at language from a sociolinguistic perspective. Social perspective is a social reality, a concrete entity available to humans. Human beings use them in a socio-cultural context. So competence to him refers to the ability of that individual to understand the rules and use them in the actual socio-cultural context.

So Dell Hymes coined the term communicative competence in 1966 as a response to the “perceived inadequacy” in Noam Chomsky’s distinction between linguistic competence and


linguistic performance. It was clearly a response to Chomskyan abstract idea and was perceived by people like Halliday, Dell Hymes, and other people as inadequate explanation.

To counter Chomskyan abstract notion of competence, Hymes explained ethnographic details of communicative competence which included communicative form and function. They have an integral relation to each other. He says that structure, form and the meaning are associated; they are integral, they cannot be delinked, which is Dell Hymes' position. And communicative competence is intuitive functional knowledge.

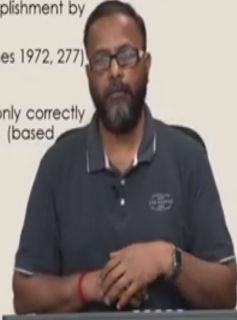
I will come to this phrase of functional knowledge, and control of the principles of language use. So what is he talking about? He is not talking about grammatical structural representation in the human mind, unaffected by the factors that Chomsky refers to. He says that the intuitive functional knowledge about the structures, which are formed and the meaning that you actually use in the real-world situation, are integral and cannot be separated.

So he merges these two distinctions into one. Chomsky delinked and Dell Hymes merged it. The intensity of response was so high that he undertook the entire project of developing the ethnography of communication. We will talk about Dell Hymes' ethnography of communication in some other video, in another class. But right now, we are focusing on communicative competence and his responses to Chomskyan "inadequate explanation of competence and performance."

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- As Hymes observes:
- "...a normal child acquires knowledge of sentences not only as grammatical, but also as appropriate. He or she acquires competence as to when to speak, when not, and as to what to talk about with whom, when, where, in what manner. In short, a child becomes able to accomplish a repertoire of speech acts, to take part in speech events, and to evaluate their accomplishment by others."
- (Hymes 1972, 277)
- In other words, a language user needs to use the language not only correctly (based on linguistic competence), but also appropriately (based on communicative competence).



So he observes, I quote from Dell Hymes, 1972, page 277. He says, "a normal child acquires knowledge of sentences not only as grammatical, but also as appropriate." So he is talking about social appropriation, contextual appropriation, and cultural appropriation. So form alone, a child is not alone acquires form, that is grammatical structure, but also the function of it. So form and function cannot be delinked, a child acquires them as a composite thing. Do we need to understand this distinction that he makes in his explanation?

So I quote again, "he or she acquires competence as to when to speak, when not, and as to what to speak, about whom to talk about, with whom, when, where, in what manner. In short, a child becomes able to accomplish a repertoire of speech, a speech act, to take part in speech events, and to evaluate their accomplishment by others." Dell Hymes, 1972, page 277. This is what he says.

So he says that a child not only learns the form, or the grammatical structure, but also the functional aspect of it. And these forms and functions are composite and integrally related. So a child learns when to speak, when not, and as to what to talk about, with whom, when, where, in what manner. So it is a total package that he is talking about. It is not like Chomsky, where he delinks the underlying computational aspect of language and actual use of it. Dell Hymes says it is composite and integral.


In other words, a language user needs to use the language not only correctly based on linguistic competence, but also appropriately based on communicative competence. Here is the actual reaction to the Chomskyan idea. He says that a child not only acquires this structure correctly, that means he is referring to Chomskyan linguistic competence, but also the appropriateness of use. So how to use it appropriately, the performance, and combining the two as an integral part, as a composite entity, he refers to it as communicative competence.

And communicative competence includes both the ability of the child to acquire the form and the ability of the child to acquire the appropriateness of these forms of use. So both these labels are merged into one, and he refers to it as communicative competence. So now you can see the distinction in theoretical position, the difference in two theoretical positions, one is a genetic position by Chomsky and this is an ethnographic communication position.

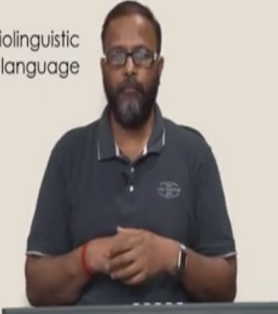
So the Chomskyan linguistic competence and Dell Hymes communicative competence, they both stand opposite each other. In the Chomskyan position, what you see is the abstract underlying representation of language, in terms of the grammatical computational ability of the human mind that constitutes the knowledge of language acquired by a child effortlessly without instructions.

Here, in Dell Hymes position, what do you see? You see that the form of the language, that is structure and the function, that is that ability to use it appropriately, they are integral and the child acquires both together. And this is what he means when he says that he or she acquires competence as to when to speak, when not, and as to what to talk about, with whom, when, where, in what manner. So in short, a child becomes able to accomplish a repertoire of speech, to take part in these speech events and to evaluate their accomplishment by others. This is what it means.

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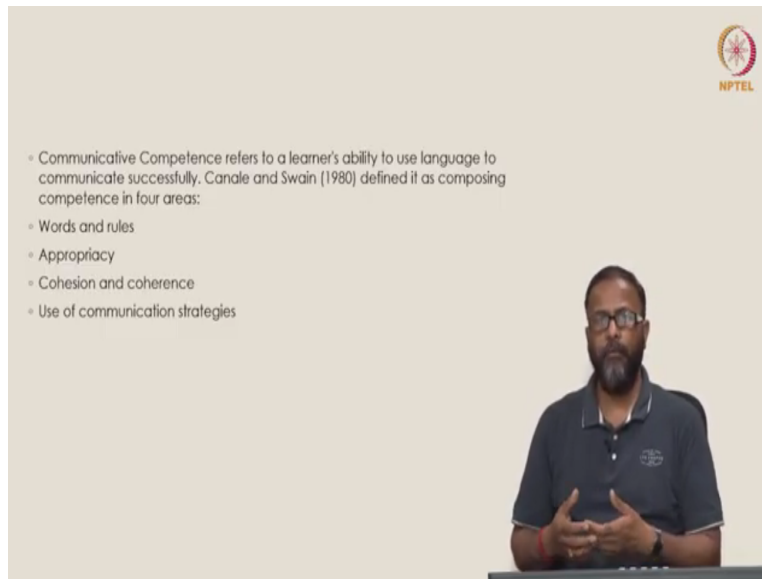
- Both Chomsky (1965) and Hymes (1972) use the notion of competence however, where Chomsky's notion of linguistic competence refers to the tacit knowledge of language (that subsumes formal linguistic subsystems such as phonological, morphological, syntactic and semantic); and
- Hymes' position extends beyond and includes in it sociolinguistic competence, the actual knowledge and ability of the language user that govern successful communication.



Both Chomsky and Dell Hymes use the notion of competence. However, where Chomsky's notion of linguistic competence refers to the tacit knowledge of language that subsumes formal linguistic subsystems such as phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic. So he is talking about the form, whereas Hymes position extends beyond and includes in it sociolinguistic competence or communicative competence. The actual knowledge and ability of the language user that governs successful communication.

So the ultimate goal of languages is to communicate, and Dell Hymes takes the position from this point of communicability. And when you say communicability, that represents the users or the speaker's ability to have perfect command on the form and the function of it. So the form and function cannot be delinked and this is what Dell Hymes reacts to.

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Now this Dell Hymes' idea of communicative competence has got a far-fetched consequence and what is that? It gave a lot of explanation and theoretical grounding for language teaching. And that method is called Communicative Language Teaching. Communicative Language Teaching draws heavily from this idea of Dell Hymes' communicative competence is specifically in second language learning and teaching.

Communicative competence refers to learners ability to use language to communicate successfully. Canale and Swain in 1980 defined it as a composing competence in four areas; words and rules, appropriacy, cohesion and coherence, and use of communication strategies. So you can see these two distinct theoretical positions. One is the Chomskyan position of linguistic competence and linguistic performance.

In opposition to that, you have another theoretical position of communicative competence. Dell Hymes opposes this abstract idea of competence that Chomsky talks about. So Chomskyan Enterprise is more concerned with a structural aspect of language, a computational aspect of language which has a deeper mental representation shared by all the speakers of the speech community without any variation.

And he says that the goal of linguistic theory should be to explain, understand, and predict this aspect of language. And he is unfazed by and unaffected by grammatically irrelevant factors

which are the constraining elements for him in performance. So it is focusing on that abstract representation, whereas Dell Hymes takes a different position. He considers language as a social reality and the actual use of language determines the command of the user or language.

So he combines the grammatical structure and appropriacy of it. So he says that a child acquires not only the form of a language in his repertoire, but also the function of it. So the form and the function cannot be separated and delinked. This is what Dell Hymes position is. And he goes so far, to the extent that he develops a complete model of ethnography of communication. That model is called the Speaking Model. We will talk about that model in some other video. So this is the distinction and difference between these two very sound and profound linguistic notions.

One is linguistic competence and the other is communicative competence. At one level, linguistic competence is internalized language or mental representation of grammatical structures at an abstract level, and which is accessible to every speaker of the community of that speech community without any variation and unaffected by external factors like shifting attention, memory loss, limited memory occupied mind and lots of other factors, which limit the performance.

On one hand Chomsky says that linguistic performance cannot reflect the linguistic competence of a speaker. On the other hand, Dell Hymes' position, which merges form and function, says that a position takes place in a composite way. So a child not only acquires a structural adequacy and capability or the form of language, but simultaneously a child acquires the function of it, actual use of it, accurate use of it. And these forms and functions cannot combine together to give a composite unit, composite entity and the child acquires language in these terms.

So at one end Chomsky delinks competence from performance, and at the other end Dell Hymes merges the two into a single category and he calls it communicative competence. So this is the difference between linguistic competence and communicative competence. Communicative competence came as a response to Chomskyan position and as a response to a perceived inadequacy. So these people believed that Chomskyan explanation of the linguistic theory or language is inadequate if he does not include the actual performance or the or the ability of the speaker to understand the overall competence in using those forms or structures that Chomsky refers to as an underlying structure.

So we need to understand these two theoretical positions which stand in opposition to each other almost like a mirror image. They contrast each other. And this abstractness and perceived inadequacies are answered in terms of the theory or the concept of communicative competence. And this had a far-fetched consequence. So if you recall, the audiolingual method of teaching a second language or foreign language is a result of the Behaviorist theory and American structuralism.

Then the communicative competence has consequences in understanding another method called Communicative Language Teaching or CLT. And Communicative Language Teaching talks about the adequacy and ability of the learner, not only to learn that form of the language or the structure, but also the function, the ability to use it accurately.

So I hope that now you are able to distinguish between these two terms; linguistic competence and communicative competence. And also the two theoretical positions taken by Chomsky and Dell Hymes. In our next video we will talk about the speaking model.

We will also talk about the functions of language rigorous. MAK Halliday is also seen as responding with his theories of language, use functions of language, and other functional grammar theories as a response to the perceived inadequacies of Chomskyan linguistic theory. So with this, we are completed now, and we will meet in another class with all these new ideas. So thank you very much for now.