

Outlining Interactional Competence: Conceptualisation, Teaching, and Testing with Conversation Analysis and Concept-Based Instruction¹

Khilola Uralova Azamatovna², Uzbekistan State University of World Languages, Tashkent, Uzbekistan

Abstract

Widely recognized lately, interactional competence (IC) has been of growing research interest. However, there are still some questions and gaps in conceptualizing, operationalization, and assessment. The present article examines the evolution of the combination of concept-based instruction (CBI) elements and conversation analysis (CA) findings implemented in the teaching and testing of IC.

Resumen

Ampliamente reconocida últimamente, la competencia interaccional (CI) ha sido de creciente interés en la investigación. Sin embargo, todavía existen algunas preguntas y lagunas en su conceptualización, operacionalización y evaluación. El presente artículo examina la evolución de la combinación de elementos de instrucción basada en conceptos (CBI) y hallazgos de análisis de conversación (CA) implementados en la enseñanza y evaluación.

Introduction

It is fundamental to teach and improve EFL and ESL learners' speaking skills. In order to achieve this aim, educators and scholars attempt to rely on different theories, such as behaviourism, the acculturation model, the interaction hypothesis, the output hypothesis, and sociocultural theory. Moreover, they also implement various approaches, such as the direct approach, the audiolingual approach, community language learning, and the communicative approach as well as conversation analysis (CA). Initially, in the early 1970s, CA was developed by Harvey Sacks as an approach to the analysis of sociolinguistic interactions. Today CA is a method which can be used in sociology, anthropology, linguistics, psychology, and other fields by recording data in the form of video or audio recordings collected with or without researchers. From the recordings, the researchers construct detailed transcriptions, which involve information about any nonverbal communication.

CA has been a popular teaching method in the area of EFL and ESL for more than three decades, and practitioners have found it beneficial to improve interactional competence (IC) of second language learners. For instance, Lazaraton (1992) started using CA techniques to investigate the language in oral tests, although he did not underscore IC in his study. Later, a lot of work was done by researchers investigating the components of IC, such as turn taking (Cekaite, 2007), repairing conversational problems (Farina et al., 2012; Hellermann, 2009), developing second language (L2) IC with CA. Moreover, Skogmyr and Balaman (2018) synthesized empirical findings of L2 IC and claimed most studies on L2 IC helped understand "how L2 speakers develop their ability to manage some of the fundamental organizational principles of social interaction that have been much investigated in L1 talk by CA researchers" (p. 5). These studies help explain the significant benefit of implementing CA into L2 IC.

Unlike conversation analysis, concept-based instruction (CBI) may be considered a more recent addition to language teaching methods. According to Uralova (2020), CBI, mainly based on the work of Gal'perin (1967, 1989), was developed by several educators while teaching second or foreign languages. Prior to beginning CBI-based research, Gal'perin was influenced by Vygotsky's scholarly publications in the area of the concept of zone of proximal development (ZPD) and internalization. However, according to Uralova (2020), Gal'perin (1989), by basing his theories on his teacher Vygotsky's (1986) internalization theory and its core principles, offered the theory of stepwise formation of mental actions. Gal'perin "conceptualized internalization as altering of certain (material) forms of individual external activity into other (mental) forms of that same external activity" (Arievitch & Haenen, 2005, p. 158). Based on this theory, according to Arievitch & Haenen (2005), "actions are broadly conceptualized as conscious attempts to change objects according to some

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² u_hilola_01@mail.ru, 0000-0002-6448-3537

intended result"; these actions were classified into three basic levels: material, verbal and mental. Consequently, Gal'perin developed a teaching strategy that claims, "learning any kind of knowledge is, in essence, mastery of different kinds of actions (activities)" (Arievitch & Haenen, 2005, p 159). Uralova (2020) says, "hence, this stepwise teaching procedure is the core of concept-based approach/concept-based instruction"(p 62).

Interactional Competence

Chomsky (1965) coined the term *competence*, speakers' knowledge of their language. However, later Hymes (1972) criticized Chomsky's idea because he believed the notion of *competence* should be related to how a learner uses his/her language in a real situation, not only how well the individual knows the grammar rules or language structure. Hymes (1972) proposed four kinds of knowledge to define the communicative competence thoroughly: possibility, feasibility, appropriateness, and performance with the language. Canale & Swain (1980) used Hymes' idea as a core for a new theory of communicative competence in applied linguistics. Young (2014) found, "Interactional competence (IC) builds on the theories of communicative competence that preceded it, but it is a very different notion from communicative competence" (para. 8). According to Tarvin (2014), Kramsch was one of the first educators who noticed this difference and noted that "pragmatic failure, [...] the inability to understand what is meant by what is said," (p. 20) can cause communication breakdown. Therefore, IC should be enhanced with the aim of "intercultural understanding" (Kramsch, 1986). Several researchers attempted to define the concept of IC and clarify the difference. According to Jacoby and Ochs (1995), IC requires "co-construction" and it consolidates a scope of interactional processes, including mutual cooperation, effort and coordination. A strong claim evokes that IC is significant to interact socially and it is created because of interlocutors' ability to use resources (Masuda, 2011; May, 2009). Furthermore, in the words of Young (2014) IC "is not what a person knows, it is what a person does together with others in specific contexts" (para. 8).

Young (2011) listed seven components which are useful for a language learner to develop IC: participation framework, register, modes of meaning, speech acts, turn-taking, repair, and boundaries. Moreover, Kramsch (1986) noted that "a shared internal context" (p. 367), one of the important factors called "intersubjectivity", which is required in IC. Initially, the notion of intersubjectivity was derived from Trevarthen's experiments on newborn's growth and progress in 1979 (Young, 2012). Trevarthen (1979) used the term "intersubjectivity" in his work, in the sense of Habermas, as "the linking of subjects who are active in transmitting their understanding to each other" (p. 347). According to Young (2012), by including seeing through dialogist's eyes, intersubjectivity means the cognizant features of purposeful acts to other people. Hence, teaching IC can be considered as an "emic approach". However, Hall (2018) and Markee (2019) offered different interpretations of IC. According to Markee (2019), IC should be called just "competence" because of its construction, whereas Hall (2018) proposed a new term, the so-called "interactional repertoire". All in all, different scholars offered various interpretations of IC.

Researching and Teaching Interactional Competence

The introduction of the notion of IC dates to the 1990s when Young (1999) claimed that there were not many empirical studies. Later Young (2010) suggested using Gal'perin's theory of CBI to improve learners' IC. As an example, Young (2010) described Thorne et al.'s (2008) curriculum to help international teaching assistants (ITAs) at the university to enhance interactional skills during office hours. However, later Young (2011) cited the number of published studies describing the development of IC in an instructional context (Yagi, 2007; Young & Miller 2004), in study-abroad (Cekaite 2007; Dings, 2007; Ishida, 2009) and in professional contexts (Nguyen, 2006). Although interest in research on L2 IC has increased, as Young (2011) stated, the pedagogical implications of such research have not been discussed much. However, few attempts have been made to bridge the gap between the research, teaching, and testing of IC in the classrooms where English is a target language. For example, Barraja-Rohan (2011), by designing certain materials, proposed CA to teach IC to adults in the second language classroom. In her work on teaching spoken interaction norms and mechanisms, the positive results of CA implementation are given in relation to learners' understanding the concepts taught, improvement of their speaking and listening skills, and transferability of the CA concepts in real life interactions. Nicholas (2015) successfully applied a CBI approach to teach English as a foreign language, specifically speech acts. In his short course of speech acts and requesting, the elements of CBI and CA findings were combined. This study exemplified pedagogical implications of concept-based approach. Similarly, Van Compernelle and Henery's (2015) concept-based pragmatics instruction (CBPI), grounded in Vygotskian sociocultural psychology, promotes the artificial (i.e.,

intentional) development of L2 pragmatics through instruction. In his study, the author explores the development of one novice teacher's experience in terms of internalization and transformation of pedagogical content knowledge. This study was one of the first examining teacher development in the context of CBI. Recently, results of several research and experiments have been presented. For instance, Taleghani-Nikazm (2019) provides instructional materials for appropriate "next relevant action" – or next turn in a short conversation which includes only first, a question, second, the answer and third closing turn; Sert (2019) proves the importance of active listenership, and Waring (2019) designs instructional materials to develop IC of lower level learners. Overall, many publications have been written about the implementation of either CA in teaching IC or using CBI in improving learners' IC.

Testing IC

Testing IC is also one of the difficult areas. However, this fundamental issue has also been discussed in some publications. Roever and Kasper (2018) discussed IC testing perspectives by claiming "that inclusion of IC as a construct in testing speaking opens new perspectives on oral proficiency and enhances the validity of speaking assessments" (p. 347). In a similar vein, Kley (2019) created a rubric with criteria to assess IC of learners. Her rubric is based on findings from emic perspective of the data analysis and instructors' goals. Huth and Betz (2019) designed constructive written tasks to evaluate the IC of German second language learners. They claim that "written test tasks are currently rarely used in IC testing" (p 323), but they offer micro-context testing which is based on findings from empirical CA research for evaluating specific aspects of IC.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this article discussed a useful approach- the mixture of CA and CBI that has been suggested for use in teaching English as a foreign language. Hopefully, this literature review can be a guide for future studies and practice-oriented research as there is a need for empirical research on teaching and improving IC by using the combination of CA and CBI.

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