

THE ROLE OF SOCIOLINGUISTIC COMPETENCE IN TEACHING SPEAKING

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Abstract: This paper aims at clarifying the concept of sociolinguistic competence and at investigating its representation in the English language textbooks most commonly used in high schools and teaching speaking skill.

Keywords: Sociolinguistic competence EFL textbooks oral activities

Introduction

Successful oral communication cannot be achieved only by learning grammar and vocabulary. The students' awareness of the sociolinguistic dimension of the oral activities in the EFL classroom has been recognized as essential for their ability to express themselves in different cross-cultural contexts (Canale & Swain, 1980; Larsen-Freeman, 1986; Richards & Rogers, 1986). In his article "Incorporating Sociolinguistic Norms into an EFL Program", Rodolfo (1976), doctor in bicultural studies at the University of Texas at San Antonio, USA, defined the term sociolinguistics as; European Proceedings Logo activities offered by the chosen textbooks fail to introduce a variety of cultural settings, where learners need to appropriate their use of lexis, grammar and register to various social and cultural codes. In addition, these textbooks do not suggest any didactic strategies meant to implement the learners' sociolinguistic competence. They do not raise the learners' awareness to the way they are supposed to appropriate their language in terms of formality, register, relationships between the participants in the communication performed in various social settings. European Proceedings Logo A foreign language learner must develop the language speaking potential to be able

to talk about any topic appropriately in a wide variety of settings with very few errors. However, after many years of studying a foreign language, learners often fail to achieve the level of speaking proficiency at which they can express themselves like native speakers, as they may lack knowledge of actual speech acts, of idiomatic expressions and slang, or they lack the motivation to produce native-like speech. Another important contributing factor may be their ignorance of the utterances that are appropriate in the social situation in which they are speaking. Developing

communicative skills is emphasized as the target of English teaching pedagogy in the Israeli Revised English Curriculum (2018) (The Israeli English curriculum provides the standards and the principles for learning and teaching English as an international language in Israel.) , whose core objective is to enable speakers of both Hebrew and Arabic in Israel "to use both spoken and written English in order to progress in their professional, business, or academic careers, as well as in order to travel, enjoy international entertainment, or to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the internet." (7) It also states the goal that by the end of the twelfth grade, the learners should be able to "interact effectively in a variety of situations; access and make use of information from a variety of sources and media; present information in an organized manner; appreciate literature and other cultures, and develop linguistic awareness." (8) In other words, the Israeli Curriculum emphasizes the significance of teaching for interaction and oral communication. However, the main objectives of the Israeli curriculum do not seem to be achieved by the end of high school. According to a previous research that I have conducted, a large number of high school students are not able to communicate with proficient users of English This study aims at clarifying the concept of sociolinguistic competence and at investigating its representation in the English language textbooks most commonly used in Arab Israeli high schools. It provides an analysis of the oral activities aimed to find out whether they encourage the development of the sociolinguistic competence through meaningful negotiation and authentic communication.

The results of the research described above indicate that the Israeli textbooks used in the EFL classroom do not illustrate the sociolinguistic competence principles. In contrast, they focus mainly on the implementation of the linguistic

competence. The speaking activities offered by the chosen textbooks fail to introduce a variety of cultural settings, where learners need to appropriate their use of lexis, grammar and register to various social and cultural codes. In addition, these textbooks do not suggest any didactic strategies meant to implement the learners' sociolinguistic competence. They do not raise the learners' awareness to the way they are supposed to appropriate their language in terms of formality, register, relationships between the participants in the communication perform opportunities for meaning negotiation, interaction through introducing tasks of information sharing, problem solving, and role-play. These should create coherent links between reading, listening, writing and speaking, and grammar learning. Besides, Richards stressed the significance of an authentic learning atmosphere and that of the manner in which language is used in a particular context in order to fulfill social purposes. Therefore, the materials and tasks used in the EFL classroom should serve social situations and everyday life purposes (Razmjoo, 2007).

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