Increasing Sociolinguistic Competence in the Language Classroom
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R. Conway

Format
My essay has a title. yes
The title is centered. yes
The first line of every paragraph is indented at least five spaces. yes
There are margins on all sides of the page. yes
The text is double-spaced. yes

Mechanics
I ended every sentence with a period, question mark or exclamation mark. yes
I began every sentence and every proper noun with a capital letter. yes
I checked my spelling. yes

Content and Organization
My essay has an introduction, body and conclusion. yes
Introduction: I introduced my essay yes
The introduction ends with my thesis. yes
Body: There are 4 body paragraphs. The main ideas of my body paragraphs are:
1-
2-
3-
4-
Unity: Every sentence in each body paragraph is on-topic. yes
Coherence and cohesion: Each paragraph is smooth and logical. yes
Conclusion: I conclude my essay yes

Grammar and Sentence Structure
I checked my essay for article errors. 5
I checked my essay for preposition errors. 3
I checked my essay for sentence fragments errors. 4
I checked my essay for ______________ errors. _______
I checked my essay for ______________ errors. _______
It is now widely recognised that learning a language involves much more than memorizing linguistic rules and structures. Becoming an effective communicator also involves accounting for contextual factors such as formality, politeness and aspects of identity which are reflected in the way we use language. It is imperative then, that pedagogical approaches aim to develop knowledge and awareness of these contextual factors and improve sociolinguistic competence.

Sociolinguistic competence, as described in Holmes (2008), involves an awareness and understanding of the rules for interaction within a community, across different contexts, and for different functions (Holmes, 2008). Educators should aim to improve sociolinguistic competence in order to help learners of a second language use language more appropriately in the target speech community. As Crandall and Basturkmen (2004) express, the consequences of errors in appropriacy are often much more serious than the consequences of grammatical errors.

A number of researchers have suggested that engaging in critical analysis of the contexts and socio-cultural factors surrounding authentic discourse samples may help to raise sociolinguistic awareness and competence. To provide empirical support for these recommendations, Crandall and Basturkmen (2004) showed that learners were not only capable of doing and enjoying discourse analysis, but that these tasks helped to improve learners’ socio-pragmatic judgements about the appropriacy of asking for requests in an academic context.

Lyster (1997) has also demonstrated that functional-analytic teaching, entailing highlighting of sociolinguistic variation, context, participant roles, and speech acts, helped learners to recognize appropriate use of formal “vous” in French, and use it in spoken and written discourse. These improvements were apparent even in delayed post-tests 4 weeks after the initial post test.

Kleigen (as cited in Saville-Troike, 1996) has advocated analysis of language situations by using playback where learners and teachers collectively interpret their own communicative behaviour. This idea is echoed by Schiffrin (1996), who also advocates the analysis of recorded playback to raise awareness of the interpretation of contextualization.
cues in social interactions. Schiffrin (p. 323) argues for interactional sociolinguistics as a means to “analyze social context and to incorporate participants’ own understanding of context into the inferencing of meaning”. She explains how an interactional sociolinguistic approach to analysis of language can easily be incorporated into language lessons by encouraging learners to consider information about whom, when, where, and why particular forms of language are considered appropriate or inappropriate, and the potential consequences of inappropriate language choices.

In sum, given that language use reflects contextual factors, I believe that educators should aim to increase sociolinguistic awareness and competence through thoughtful and critical reflection and analysis of language situations. This analysis should take into account the purpose and function of the interaction, the context, and the social relationship of the participants.
References


