

COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE,
PRESUPPOSITIONS AND LANGUAGE TEACHING.

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The publication of Noam Chomsky's Syntactic Structures (1957) launched a theory of 'transformational grammar' (TG) based on certain radical proposals about language and language learning, the effects of which have justifiably been labelled "revolutionary." Chomsky's assertions as to the "creativity" of language, and its acquisition as a cognitive process to which the individual is inherently predisposed seriously weakened the behavioristic explanation of language learning in terms of the stimulus-response model. Up to that time, behavioristic theories (from Watson to Skinner) had fit in nicely with the structural linguists' description of language, and thus provided a unified basis for more than twenty years of language teaching. Now, linguists and psycholinguists were forced to reevaluate their thinking about language itself, how we acquire it, and how we use it. Subsequent developments in anthropology (ethnosemantics), sociology (sociolinguistics) and education (language teaching and testing, varieties of English) have given new insights centering around the idea of "communicative competence."

To understand "communicative competence" and the particular aspect of it called "presuppositions" which will be the focus of this paper, it's necessary to go back to Chomsky's definitions of linguistic competence and performance. Competence refers to a person's unconscious knowledge of the rules of his language. In Chomsky's own words,

A person who has learned a language has acquired a system of rules that relate sound and meaning in a certain specific way. He has, in other words, acquired a certain competence that he puts to use in producing and understanding speech. (Chomsky, 1969)

Performance, on the other hand, refers to the actual utterances made by the language user which, due to several kinds of limiting factors, may or may not reflect his linguistic competence. Performance, too, is part of encoding and decoding as we sometimes fail to understand perfectly clear grammatical sentences just as we fail to produce them. For Chomsky the primary aim of linguists is to describe competence, that is to make this abstract, unconscious, implicit set of rules formal and explicit. The difficulty arises in trying to formulate a scientifically rigorous theory without directly observable data against which to test it. Neither linguistic

intuitions as to the grammaticality of a sentence nor performance data provide any direct indication of competence. There is, as Chomsky himself says,

no known, mechanical, direct procedure for inferring the underlying competence from performance data, and even if the inferential process were successful, there would still be uncertainty as to the adequacy of the inferences. (i. e. the proposed grammar).
 (*Chomsky, 1965, Ch. 1)

In view of the empirical difficulties of getting at competence, the scientifically justifiable step of "idealizing" the data is taken so that:

Linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogeneous speech-community, who knows its 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 the language in actual performance. (Chomsky, 1965, p. 1)

Taking into consideration the above-mentioned limitations for the study of competence, the problem still remains as to the exact boundaries and nature of this "unconscious knowledge" and how it is reflected in the speaker's actual use of language. The answers to these questions are presently at the heart of the major dissention between theoretical linguists and those interested in the psychological and sociological aspects of language behavior.

Within TG theory, the controversy (between the "Extended Standard Theory" of Chomsky and his associates and "generative semantics" as set forth by Lakoff, McCawley, et al.) centers on the degree of independence of semantics and syntax at the deep structure level. Recent proposals in generative semantics, especially those concerned with "presuppositions", "topic", "focus", quantifiers and pronouns suggest a broadening of the concept of competence to elements previously considered with the domain of performance. By 1971 Chomsky, however, seemed to suggest that the arguments hinged on questions of theoretical formulation rather than fundamental principles:

The notions "focus", "presupposition", and "shared presupposition" (even in cases where the presupposition

*See Chomsky, 1965, on "explanatory adequacy", Ch. 1.

may not be expressible by a grammatical sentence) must be determinable from the semantic interpretation of sentences, if we are to be able to explain how discourse is constructed and, in general, how language is used. (Chomsky, 1971, p. 205)

The inclusion of such factors as awareness of presuppositions begins to approach a definition of "communicative competence" as proposed by Campbell and Wales, among others, as:

the ability to produce or understand utterances which are not so much grammatical but, more important, appropriate to the context in which they are made... and... By 'context', we mean both the situational and the verbal context. (Campbell and Wales, 1970, p. 247)

Interestingly, as early as 1965, Chomsky asserts that indeed part of this ability belongs properly to linguistic competence: "an essential property of language is that it provides the means for... reacting appropriately in an indefinite range of new situations." (Chomsky, 1965, p. 6) To date, however, TG theory has not been able to fully incorporate the notion of "appropriateness", although, as we shall see, important work is being done in that direction. In like manner, the concept of an ideal speaker-listener is often not illuminating when confronted with real speakers in a real environment. A good deal of research has shown that competence may vary greatly among individual speakers in a speech-community so that, as Hymes points out, while

a theoretical perspective is essential, and the perspective afforded by transformational grammar is particularly valuable because it gives us the concept of an idealized learner, with built-in propensities for language... (which) does away with the notion of genetic racial inferiority of any particular group or subgroup... the theoretical standpoint is... not sufficient on its own... (Hymes, 1972, p. 4)

It appears then, that while there are major points of criticism and disagreement both within the transformationalist camp, as well as among transformationalists, psycholinguists, and sociolinguists, the arguments proceed primarily from differences in focus, goals and the intrinsic nature of the disciplines. While the battles rage and the work goes on, however, valuable insights continue to come forth — insights which often may have an immediate and highly productive application to language teaching. As linguists slowly move towards a formal theory of language, the goal of the classroom teacher must be to give students the capacity to communicate meaningfully and appropriately, as well as grammatically, in whatever situations they may find themselves. We must, in other words, aim for "communicative competence."

Rather than try to discuss all aspects of communicative competence, we will look at various examples which illustrate how effective communication and even grammaticality can be determined by extra-linguistic factors.

Jakobovits makes the point that a speaker-hearer knows when the other is speaking seriously or in jest, and will use all the information he has about the other to interpret his utterances. Variables such as social class, political preferences, family life, as well as the relationship between the individuals will affect the inferences one draws from the other's utterances.

1. John: I'm sorry you failed the exam.
Tom: The hell you are.
2. John: I don't know why Mary didn't call you.
Tom: I'm sure you don't, you S.O.B. (Jakobovits, 1970, p. 12)

Now, assuming Tom interpreted John correctly, how would one give a semantic interpretation of Tom's utterance unless it were based on a contextual analysis which, would furthermore have to include inferences based totally outside the verbal context?

Christina Bratt Paulston describes how confusion between Swedish and American cultural codes results in a complete breakdown in communication. Paulston, as the hostess at a dinner party in Sweden, had politely and in impeccable Swedish asked a guest whom she had not been able to greet at the door, "Do you know everyone?", meaning, of course, would you like to be introduced? The sharp retort she received was, "I don't know everyone, but if you are asking me if I have greeted everyone, I have." After years of living outside Sweden, Paulston had forgotten part of the Swedish social code which says that one does not wait to be introduced at a party, but goes around to each guest, shaking hands and giving one's name. Not only was her perfectly grammatical question inappropriate, but the response indicated that a totally incorrect inference as to meaning had been made (i.e. She's reprimanding me for bad manners!). As Paulston observes, it's easier to keep our linguistic codes separate than our social codes, but for the language student learning the social code can be crucial to successful use of the new language. (Paulston, 1974, p. 351)

George and Robin Lakoff, in particular, have done some interesting work to illustrate how presuppositions, knowledge or beliefs about the world, can also influence the production of grammatically well-formed sentences. Of course, no one would deny that there are certain absolute constraints on grammaticality and that these must be learned through memorization. In some cases, one can learn a rule and then, through practice, make its application automatic. In English, for example, subjects precede their verbs

and prepositions precede the noun phrases they are associated with. These rules make the following sentences ungrammatical in any context.

3. *Gave John Bill the book.
4. *Peter climbed the tree up.

Rules for forming verb tenses, pluralization, comparisons, use of restrictive vs. non-restrictive relative pronouns, etc., as well as vocabulary items, all have to be learned in a similar fashion. Then too, every language has certain idiosyncratic exceptions which must be memorized separately. There is no rule to tell a student why 5 is good but 6 is not.

5. It's likely to rain.
6. *It's probable to rain.

Now, let's examine some other cases of so-called "rules" to see whether, as the Lakoffs propose, grammaticality may be only a relative proposition.

Traditional grammars claim that who is used to refer to humans and which and what to non-humans.

7. a) The boy who I kicked scratched me.
b) *The boy which I kicked scratched me.
8. a) *The cat who I kicked scratched me.
b) The cat which I kicked scratched me.
9. a) Who scratched you? The boy next door.
b) *What scratched you? The boy next door.
10. a) *Who scratched you? The cat next door.
b) What scratched you? The cat next door.

Looking at 9b and 10a would suggest that when the antecedent is unknown, usage of either who or what will depend solely on the presuppositions of the speaker and subsequently may or may not be determined grammatically.

* Note that an asterisk before a sentence is used to symbolize that the sentence is unacceptable in some way. Such sentences are marked according to this writer's judgements and may not be the same for all speakers.

But the case becomes more complicated with the following:

11. a) * The dead man, who I came across in the alley,
was covered with blood.
b) The dead man, who I had once come across at
a party in Vienna, now looked a mess.

11 b is all right because of the chronology of events, assuming the man was alive when I came across him in Vienna, but what does one do with 11 a? Which seems to be no better. Perhaps there is no very satisfying answer to account for the distribution of the relative who and yet, as Lakoff suggests, it cannot depend on the single feature human, but rather that the person referred to either be presupposed to be alive at the time indicated by the relative clause or thought of as human. This would explain the oddness of 12a compared to 12b.

12. a) * We've just found a good name for our child,
who we hope will be conceived tonight.
b) We've just found a good name for our child,
who we hope will grow up to be a good citizen
after he is born. (Lakoff, 1971, p. 331)

Would the feature human-alive account for all the instances of who?
At least it covers

13. a) * What)
b) Who) realizes I'm a lousy cook.
c) * The desk) believes I'm a fool.
d) The boy) enjoys tormenting me.

but which of the following are grammatical?

14. a) My uncle)
b) My cat)
c) My goldfish) realizes I'm a lousy cook.
d) My pet amoeba) believes I'm a fool.
e) My frying pan) enjoys tormenting me.
f) My sincerity)
g) My birth)

a) is obviously good, but b-g would not be, according to the above proposal. A great many people including Lakoff, however, feel that b is also quite acceptable, c and d less so depending on what mental powers you attribute to goldfish and amoebae or how you feel about the ones that belong to you, and e-f probably not, at least in Western culture, but it would be necessary to check with the anthropologists as to their validity in other cultures. (Lakoff, 1971, p. 332)

Kenneth Hale, for one, says that among the Papagos, events are assumed to have minds so that *g* would be perfectly normal. It seems logical to assume that implements and qualities, too, may be believed to have minds in other cultures, just as, by analogy or metaphor, we might say, "My ego/conscience enjoys tormenting me." Apparently verbs like realize, believe, enjoy, etc. may take subjects which are not necessarily human but only assumed by the speaker to have the necessary human capacities.

15. a) My cat, who believes I'm a fool, enjoys tormenting me.
 b) * My cat, which believes I'm a fool, enjoys tormenting me.

If 15a sounds right and not 15b, then not the semantic feature human-alive, but rather a presupposition of that feature would decide the choice of who over which. (Lakoff, 1971, p. 332)

STRESS

R. M. W. Dixon and Georgia Green have done work showing the role of stress in certain kinds of constructions involving contrasts and comparisons. In a sentence like,

16. John insulted Mary and then shé insulted hím.

If the two individuals are being contrasted and the two verbs are the same, then both pronouns must be stressed, unlike the normal anaphoric pronouns. Equally where the verbs have opposite meanings, both pronouns cannot be stressed.

17. a) * John praised Mary and then shé insulted hím.
 b) John praised Mary and then she insulted him.

To decide if these sentences are well-formed requires only knowledge of the rules of stress placement in such cases and knowledge of the meanings of praise and insult. Likewise, if the meaning of one of the verbs is semantically paraphrased, the stress remains the same.

18. a) John told Mary she was ugly and then shé insulted hím.
 b) * John told Mary she was beautiful and then shé insulted hím.

a) is well-formed because, at least in our culture, telling a person he or she is ugly can constitute an insult, whereas b) sounds strange for the opposite reason. (Green, 1968). Lakoff then provides us with:

19. John called Mary (a whore)
 (a Republican) and then she insulted him.
 (a virgin)
 (a lexicalist)

and says he finds all of them equally well-formed. Whereas this writer would object to some of the above, she would judge all of the following perfectly grammatical:

20. Mary called John (a pimp)
 (a liberal) and then he insulted her.
 (a chauvinist)
 (a behavioralist)

Obviously the conditions for well-formedness will vary with the beliefs of the individual.

TOO AND EITHER

Georgia Green has demonstrated how presuppositions can influence the use of too and either, such that in

21. a) Jane is a sloppy housekeeper and she doesn't take baths either.
 b) * Jane is a neat housekeeper and she doesn't take baths either.

American cultural values operate to make b sound odd to a native-speaker, although it might not to one from another cultural background. (Green, 1968) Personal values can operate in the same way. There are people who might agree that 22b is as good as 22a and others who might not.

22. a) Mary is an intelligent student and she doesn't cheat either.
 b) Mary is an intelligent woman and she doesn't read "women's"
 magazines either.

CO-REFERENTIALITY

There are certain idiomatic expressions in English which require that the two noun phrases in the expression refer to the same person, i. e. are co-referential. Let's look at just one to see how a speaker's factual knowledge or information may determine judgements of grammaticality and / or understanding of the sentence.

23. Mary lost her cool, but
- | | | |
|-----------|---|-------------------|
| a) she |) | |
| b) Mary |) | soon regained it. |
| c) * John |) | |
| d) * I |) | |

a) and b) are both acceptable as pronominalization is optional if co-referentiality is maintained. 24 and 25, however, would be judged grammatical depending on the speaker / listener's knowledge of the world: (Lakoff, 1971, p. 334)

24. a) * Jimmy Carter lost his cool, but the former president soon regained it.
 b) Jimmy Carter lost his cool, but the new president soon regained it.
25. a) Vida Blue lost his cool, but the pitcher for the Oakland Athletics soon regained it.
 b) * Vida Blue lost his cool, but the first baseman for the Yankees soon regained it.

In all of the above cases, the presuppositions involved have been attributed to the speaker, but in some cases the presuppositions may be attributed to some other person mentioned in the sentence.

26. a) Cathy claimed that her doll was pregnant.
 b) Cathy heard that her doll was pregnant.
 c) Cathy wished that her doll were pregnant.
27. a) Cathy expected her doll to be pregnant.
 b) Cathy hoped her doll was pregnant.
 c) Cathy anticipated her doll would be pregnant.

In 26, it is not assumed that Cathy believes her doll can become pregnant, whereas 27 does imply such a belief. The verbs expect, hope, and anticipate have the property that the object complement, although not true now, is thought of as possible relative to the beliefs of the subject of the verb. As Lakoff further points out, these verbs, unlike regular stative verbs, can optionally be expressed in the present progressive tense. Here, then, is an overt syntactic correlate of the semantic property. (Lakoff, 1971, p. 335)

DELETION OF WILL

Kim Burt has observed that the auxiliary will can be deleted in a rather strange set of environments.

28. a) The Yankees play the Red Sox tomorrow.
 b) *The Yankees play well tomorrow.
29. a) I get my paycheck tomorrow.
 b) * I get a cold tomorrow.
30. a) The astronauts return to earth tomorrow.
 b) * The astronauts return safely tomorrow.
31. a) Sam gets a day off tomorrow.
 b) * Sam enjoys his day off tomorrow.

What would otherwise be impossible to state as a grammatical rule, can be given or at least approximated easily in presuppositional terms: will can be deleted if it is presupposed that the event is one that the speaker can be sure of. (Lakoff, 1971, p. 339)

SOME / ANY

The general rule given for the use of some and any is that some occurs in a positive sentence, while any occurs in the corresponding negative, interrogative, or conditional. Robin Lakoff has demonstrated that such a presupposition-free generalization does not work. Among her examples are:

32. a) Does someone want these beans?
 b) Does anyone want these beans?
33. a) Who wants some beans?
 b) Who wants any beans?
34. a) If he eats some candy, let me know.
 b) If he eats any candy, let me know.

All of these sentences are perfectly grammatical and, except in the case of some and any, have identical surface structure, but it is obvious that the choice of one member of each pair would vary according to the situation. For example, either 32a or 33a might be used if the speaker expected someone to want beans or if he wished to encourage someone to eat the beans. The speaker would probably use 32b or 33b if, on the other hand, he really didn't think anyone wanted the beans or hoped no one wanted them. 34a would probably be used if the speaker wanted the other to eat the candy and 34b if he didn't. The presuppositions involved become more obvious when combined with overt statements which directly contradict them:

35. a) *? If he eats some candy, I'll spank him.
 b) *? If he eats any candy, I'll give him a reward.

(Note in 32-35 the any is unstressed, not the stressed any, any at all.)

Lakoff concludes that the choice of some or any cannot be ascribed either to anything present in the surface structure of the sentence, nor even to the speaker's knowledge of the world, but rather only to what is in the mind of the speaker at the moment. When some is used, the presupposition is necessarily positive and when any appears, it may be negative or neutral. (Lakoff, 1972, p. 69)

This conclusion corresponds nicely to observations of other linguists concerning the tendency of expressions of "positive/negative polarity" e.g. always/never, some/any, either/neither, to occur in pairs with certain verbs like expect or doubt.

36. a) I expect that you'll find some gold.
 b) * I expect that you'll find any gold.
37. a) * I doubt that you'll find some gold.
 b) I doubt that you'll find any gold.
38. a) I'm surprised that anyone could sleep.
 b) * I'm surprised that someone could sleep.
39. a) * I'm relieved that anyone found the money.
 b) I'm relieved that someone found the money.
40. a) * It's lucky that anyone came to the party.
 b) It's lucky that someone came to the party.

Notice that in 38 - 40, while there is no overt negation, the semantic properties of the verbs or expressions themselves imply the condition of an unfulfilled presupposition on the part of the speaker. As Baker puts it,

speaking intuitively, we can say that each of these predicates expressed a relation of 'contrariness' between a certain fact and some mental or emotional state. (Baker, 1969)

In the case of 38 and 40, where either a) or b) would be acceptable to some speakers, this writer speculates that the choice of some or any may depend on the force of the presupposition held and whether the speaker wished to give greater emphasis to that presupposition or to its negation in the real world.

THE OR A ?

Charles Osgood has done extensive experimentation on "perceptual pre-suppositions." His objective was to see if he could predict both the content and the form of the sentences speakers would use to describe simple situations (e.g. a man holding a black ball, a black ball is on the table, a black ball rolls and hits a blue ball, etc.) to an imaginary listener. The idea was that by manipulating the sequence of events, one could influence the probability that the individuals would describe the situations in a certain way, using certain language. With reference to the use of articles, Osgood found that:

1. The presupposes an already existing referent in the mind of the listener, or
2. The will reflect a perceived uniqueness on the part of the speaker, whereas
3. A is an instruction to the listener to add a new referent or
4. A is used if the object is a member of a set, as opposed to being unique. (Osgood, 1971, p. 508-09)

The above can easily be illustrated by the following:

41. a) John: I'm looking for a book on TG grammar.
It's a big, blue one.
 - b) Mary: Haven't seen it.
(a half hour later)
 - c) Mary: By the way, the book is on my desk.
It was there all the time.
42. a) Mr. Jones is a lawyer in town.
 - b) Mr. Jones is the lawyer in town.

The choice of article in "the book is on my desk" is the signal to John that she is referring to the book he wants. Of course, if she isn't sure it's the same book, then use of a is dictated. In 42 the choice of article depends on whether the speaker believes every town should have a lawyer and Mr. Jones is it, or whether Mr. Jones is simply a lawyer (one or one of several) who lives in town. The simple rule "use the when the referent is known and a when it is unknown will evidently not account for all uses of the article unless one adds something about the perceptions of the speaker.

TENSE CHOICE

Learning to use the past and present perfect tenses is one of the most difficult aspects of learning English for many foreign students, particularly if there is no equivalent tense distinction in their native language. The problem is largely due to the fact that the speaker must have certain knowledge of what is true

at the moment of speaking or make certain suppositions as to what is true. Lakoff cites an example from Jespersen:

43. a) The patient has gradually grown weaker.
b) The patient gradually grew weaker.

In 43 a the assumption is that the patient is still alive, but in b), either the patient is dead, or at the last moment was saved by an emergency measure and is now well or growing stronger as in "the patient gradually grew weaker. Finally we had to give him a transfusion and then he began to recover."

Use of the wrong tense in context will, of course, give the listener a false impression. (Lakoff, 1972, p. 68) The same may be said of the following:

44. a) I've drunk a bottle of gin every day for ten years.
b) I drank a bottle of gin every day for ten years.

One may either be speaking to a reformed drinker or a chronic alcoholic:

45. a) I've been to New York many times.
b) I went to New York many times.

In the first sentence, the speaker assumes (whether optimistically or not) that he may go again in the future, whereas the second implies a presupposition that more trips to New York are highly improbable or the possibility of such trips is simply irrelevant to the present.

Robin Lakoff, in particular, has demonstrated that choice of verb tense in English is often more closely related to "the point of view of the speaker," than to the time of event or its relation to the moment of speaking. She gives the example of,

46. Those will be three for a dollar.

in which the future tense is used for a present situation. The social context is crucial in this case, as the meaning is not at all that of "Those are going to be three for a dollar." Again, in the example

47. The animal you saw was a chipmunk: see, there he is running up a tree.

she points out that the chipmunk is still alive and is still a chipmunk in the real world (and there is no dominating verb which would call for sequence-of-tense rules), but somehow that fact is no longer of interest or importance to the speaker. As Lakoff says,

... in some cases, at least, the realness or vividness of the subject matter of the sentence in the speaker's mind is of greater importance in determining the superficial tense to be assigned to the verb than are such factors as relative (real) time of occurrence. It is, therefore, possible for the past tense to coincide with a present-time statement if, in the mind of the speaker, the present time state ceases to be subjectively real.
(Lakoff, 1970)

In recent articles in "The English Teaching Forum" and "Tesol Quarterly," Selinker and Trimble have indicated that Lakoff's conclusions correlate well with their own findings on the relationship between rhetorical techniques and grammatical choices in technical material. To date their research indicates that certain grammatical items (such as choice of articles or verb tense) appear in scientific and technical texts based on certain "built-in presuppositions" of shared knowledge on the part of the author, and that this

assumed shared knowledge... affects surface syntax... so drastically that language and subject matter cannot be discussed separately when the focus is on discourse.

In reference to tense choice, for example, they find that if the rhetorical function is "reporting past research," the past tense is used to describe research which seems to be less importantly related to the present work, while the present perfect is employed to indicate research immediately relevant to the experiment at hand. If the rhetorical function is "describing an apparatus," the past tense will be used if the apparatus was devised solely for the given experiment, whereas the present tense is used "if the apparatus is a facility which exists and is used for purposes other than the given experiment." (Selinker and Trimble, 1976, pp 24-6)

Naturally foreign students studying science or technology in the States will be unable to understand the underlying implications or make the correct inferences from written material, nor will they be able to report their findings in a way that sounds logical and professional to the native speaker, unless they first understand the rhetorical-grammatical devices used in scientific English.

OTHER LANGUAGES

So far, we have looked at a few cases of how presuppositions operate in the use of English, but this phenomena is also present in many, if not most, other languages.

In Japanese, use of honorifics requires a student of that language to match-up presuppositions with superficial form to produce utterances which are both grammatical and meaningful. An honorific such as o or san when attached to a word carries with it the notion that the person or thing being named is in some way important to the speaker, i.e. necessary for his comfort or existence. If a person is considered important or essential to someone else, he is held in honor or exalted, whereas a thing is considered important if it is in some sense essential for life. Thus basic necessities like rice, tea, soy sauce and even toilets would receive the honorific, while other less essential items would not. If the learner whose native language does not include such distinctions tries to find a rule or formulate a generalization based on information within the sentence, he will obviously fail and may just decide the whole system is ludicrous, as are indeed such English translations as "honorable soy sauce" or "honorable toilet." One must understand the feelings of the speaker toward the person or thing if the utterance produced is to be both appropriate and intelligible. (Lakoff, 1972, p. 67)

In Spanish tense choice often requires that the speaker assume a certain mental attitude towards what he wishes to convey. This mental attitude or understanding will then dictate the form he uses.

48. a) Busco una secretaria que sabe inglés.
 b) Busco una secretaria que sepa inglés.
 (I'm looking for a secretary who knows English.)

In a) the person in question is known to exist by the speaker and thus the indicative is used. In b), however, the speaker has no particular secretary in mind and is not sure whether she exists or he could find her.

49. a) Me dijo que lo hice.
 b) Me dijo que lo hiciera.
50. a) Salgo de mi trabajo cuando suena el timbre.
 b) Salgo de mi trabajo cuando suene el timbre.

In 49a (He told me that I did it but I denied it.), the indicative is used because the speaker is only conveying information, where 49b is reporting an order (He told me to do it.) Again the indicative is used in 50a (I leave my work when the bell rings.) to indicate a habit or daily occurrence, but in b) the subjunctive signals a move into the future as in "I'll leave my work today when the bell rings."

51. a) Ojalá que llueva. (I hope it rains.)
 b) Ojalá que lloviera. (I wish it would rain.)

In both a) and b) the subjunctive is used, but the difference in tense implies a difference in the strength of the speaker's belief in the possibility / probability that it will rain.

Of course, if one were speaking during the dry season, only b) would be either logical or appropriate. Other tense choices, too, may be affected by mental attitude:

52. a) Si me sacara la lotería, me compraba una casa.
 b) Si me sacara la lotería, me compraría una casa.
 (If I won the lottery, I'd buy a house.)

52 a) suggests that the person has wanted to buy a house for some time and has only lacked the money to do so, whereas b) is more hypothetical -he is only speculating on what he might do if he won the lottery.

In addition to verb tenses, other grammatical items depend on what is in the mind of the speaker:

53. a) Compré los dulces por los niños.
 b) Compré los dulces para los niños.
 (I bought the candy because of /for the children.)

The use of "por" implies that the children either wanted or needed the candy, i.e. they were the "cause" of the action. "Para" conveys the idea that the speaker decided on his own to make them a present of the candy.

Many more examples could be given, but by now it should be obvious that learning a language involves more than rote memorization of certain grammatical forms and model sentences. If cognition, as well as conditioning, plays a part in learning behavior, the teacher must help the student to make the correct generalization about language by giving him the presuppositions that underlie usage. Whether it be knowledge of social-cultural codes, rhetorical devices, or personal or collective assumptions, only when the student is given access to this information and shown how to use it will he be able to approach the communicative competence that should be the goal of classroom teaching.

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