

Dubrovskaya, Olga

University of Tyumen, Russia

Language use in context: assessing sociocognitive relevance.

There are many different approaches as to what skills to assess when a speaker is engaged in speaking. Some of them focus on 'exterior' dimensions, such as how the speaker gets a message across; how fluent and accurate the speaker is; how the speaker keeps the conversation going, etc. Others check 'interior' achievements: how anxious or self-restricted the speaker is; what strategic competences the speaker demonstrates, how correctly he or she decodes and encodes statements, etc. Among these 'interior' dimensions, sociocognitive relevance is of much importance. I argue that to create a useful assessment scale we need to consider how the speaker structures and interprets the world with the help of language and through it. I believe that the fundamental principle that underlies verbal communication as well as accommodation and collaboration among speakers / participants is *Sociocognitive Interaction Principle* which involves conceptual cooperation, interpretation and negotiation of meanings. The research question is to identify sociocognitive variables that affect language use and discourse construction, accommodation and collaboration in the process of speaking.

Empirical evidence is mainly drawn from speaking practice tests of speakers of English and Russian. The methodology is based on the Vygotskian theory of language as both a cultural and a psychological phenomenon. The results show that the *Sociocognitive Interaction Principle* is constitutive of the knowledge participants acquire as representatives of societies and cultures. A leading idea advanced in the talk is that there are two types of contexts activated by the *Sociocognitive Interaction Principle (SIP)*: 1) *contexts of collective knowledge* comprise the knowledge of languages the speaker possesses. These contexts represent the so-called "universal" world view activated via language by its speakers; 2) *contexts of sociocultural knowledge*, on the other hand, reflect the so-called "individual" modification of the knowledge of language that is influenced by sociocultural parameters, such as the education the speaker possesses, the speaker's age, occupation.

To be sociocognitively relevant means to be able to activate these contexts the way native speakers activate them; to represent cognitive schemas that native speakers consider appropriate. By way of illustration, consider the data in English and Russian. In English, for instance, such speaking task as *picture description* activates *sensory orientation schemas* (as in, *What a lovely, spacious and bright living-room*) and *active personified structures* (as in, *The floor-to-ceiling window offers a wonderful panoramic view of the city*). In Russian, the same task engages *movement orientation schemas* and *nominating structures*. Language instructors, in their turn, should facilitate learners of a non-native language with basic cognitive orientations that specify native discourse.

In the talk, these theoretical issues and related empirical evidence will be reviewed, while also addressing the implementation of the *Sociocognitive Interaction Principle* that specifies the structure of contexts as well as the implications that the study may have for future research.