Pragmatics in EFL

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Abstract:

Pragmatic competence has become, especially in the last few decades, one of the issues that attracted attention in the field as an essential part of language competence. The realization that having a good command of linguistic knowledge in target language would not be enough to master the language has created the need to investigate the value and effect of pragmatic competence in language education. This article is intended to provide a brief overview of pragmatics and pragmatic competence, the pedagogic significance of pragmatic competence highlighting the relevant theoretical components of pragmatics. For the purposes of my work, relevant literature covering definitions of pragmatics and pragmatic competence and research carried out on pragmatic competence is presented.

Key words: *pragmatics, speech acts, communication, pragmalinguistics, competence, register, greetings, addressing.*

INTRODUCTION

Communication is an indispensable part of any community life in which people feel the need to interact with each other for certain reasons. It is through the concept of language that people can communicate with a number of interlocutors in a variety of settings. The significance of pragmatic competence in L2 learning has been articulated in theory, pedagogy, and assessment. Theoretical models of communicative competence born in the 1980s and 1990s situated pragmatic competence as an indispensable component of L2 proficiency, apart from grammatical, discourse, and strategic competencies[1]. Pragmatic competence has

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[1] Canale, M., & Swain, M.. Theoretical aspects of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing. Applied Linguistics, 1980. 1–47p.

thus been operationalized as a measurable construct, and tasks and instruments have been developed to elicit and examine it in *pedagogy* and *assessment*. These trends have fortified the claim that pragmatic competence should be taught and assessed.

METHOD

The formation of pragmatic competence is one of the most important tasks in the process of teaching a foreign language. Pragmatic competence refers to the ability to expediently use a foreign language in a variety of communicative contexts, unmistakably differentiate styles and registers of communication, and choose appropriate linguistic means.

Pragmatics, a subject within linguistics, focuses on how people perform, interpret, and respond to language functions in a social context. Learning a language involves more than learning grammar and lexis. The rules of proper communication, such as how to speak appropriately in a situation or understand another person's intention, are critical skills to master in order to become a fully competent speaker in another language. These objectives of pragmatics learning are represented in the connection between pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics[2]. Pragmalinguistics refers to the linguistic forms available to perform language functions, while sociopragmatics refers to the appropriateness of the linguistic forms in a given social context. Pragmatic competence requires both types of knowledge, as well as processing skills that mobilize this knowledge in real time communication. Learners need to have a range of linguistic forms at their disposal in order to perform language functions (e.g., greetings), but at the same time, they need to understand the sociocultural norms and rules that govern the usage of these forms (e.g., what to say to greet a certain person). Hence, in second language learning, grammar, and pragmatics (rules of communication) deserve distinct attention but should be learned conjointly, because the object of pragmatics

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[2] Leech, G. Principles of pragmatics. Harlow, England: Longman. 1983.

learning is form-function–context mappings— knowledge of forms and their functional possibilities, as well as contextual requirements that determine the form-function mappings

DISCUSSION

Pragmatics investigates how second language (L2) learners develop the ability to produce and comprehend linguistic action in an L2[3]. Following Crystal, pragmatics can be understood as "the study of language from the point of view of the users, especially of the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction and the effects their use of language has on other participants in the act of communication"[4]. Learning to be a competent user of the target language involves learning the pragmatic norms of the L2 to successfully engage in speech acts (e.g., apologizing, greeting, requesting), participate in conversations and different types of discourse, and maintain interaction in complex speech events[5]. English researchers Kasper and Schmidt[6] in line with many well-known pragmatic scholars of the field concur that instruction plays a crucial role in rendering the learners cognizant of the pragmatic principles governing the use of the second language. Another researcher on pragmatic competence Bardovi-Harlig[7] further states that "language learners have difficulty in the area of pragmatics, regardless of their level of grammatical competence". This means that one cannot take for granted that the more developed the four skill areas (reading, writing, speaking, and listening) are, fewer errors will be made concerning language use. Students will not know how to act appropriately just by learning the linguistic forms and functions of a language. Researchers contend that

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[3] Kasper, G. Interlanguage pragmatics. In H. Byrnes (Ed.), Learning foreign and second languages (pp. 183-208). New York: Modern Language Association. 1998.

[4] Crystal, D. A dictionary of linguistics and phonetics. 1985. 2nd edition. Oxford: Blackwell

[5] Kasper, G. Can pragmatic competence be taught?. Honolulu: 1997. University of Hawai'i, Second Language Teaching & Curriculum Center. Retrieved July 1, 2012 from the World Wide Web: http://www.nflrc.hawaii.edu/NetWorks/NW06/.

[6] Kasper, G. Classroom research on interlanguage pragmatics. In K. R. Rose, and G. Kasper (Eds.), Pragmatics in language teaching. (pp. 33-60). 2001. New York: Cambridge University Press

[7] Bardovi-Harlig, K., & Dörnyei, Z. Do language learners recognize pragmatic violations? Pragmatic versus grammatical awareness in instructed L2 learning. 1998. TESOL Quarterly, 32, 233-262

they maintain to adhere to their first language pragmatic rules to govern their language use and their familiarity with second language usage makes them indifferent to learning pragmatic facets as communication takes center stage. Because of the strong influence cross-cultural pragmatics research has had on the field [8], the majority of IL pragmatics research has focused on L2 use, comparing differences between native speakers and advanced learners. Since the 1990's, however, there has been an increase in investigations on IL pragmatic development, encouraged by calls for research on how learners progress from beginning to advanced stages[9]. These studies have focused on factors that might influence development, such as level of proficiency[10], the influence of instruction[11], individual differences[12], study abroad, and transfer[13]. Most of the work that has sought to outline developmental stages has been based on the acquisition of requests. The researchers Kasper and Rose suggest five stages of pragmatic development based on Achiba, Ellis, and Schmidt: 1) pre-basic (context dependent); 2) formulaic (unanalyzed formulas and imperatives); 3) unpacking (formulas incorporated into productive language use); 4) pragmatic expansion; and 5) fine-tuning. Investigations in the field of IL pragmatic development have used these stages as the basis for analysis, with some providing further support[14] while others have found that their learners do not seem representative of any stage and suggest that learners are idiosyncratic and non-linear in terms of their development. The latter knowledge, which parallels sociopragmatic competence suggested by English researcher Thomas completes effective language behavior in relation to a

[8] Blum-Kulka, S., House, J., & Kasper, G. Cross-cultural pragmatics: Requests and apologies.1989. Norwood, NJ: Ablex
[9] Bardovi- Harlig, 1999a; Kasper, 1992, 1998; Kasper & Rose, 2002; Kasper & Journal of language teaching and research 153 © 2016 academy publication Schmidt, 1996.
[10] Salsbury, T. & Bardovi-Harlig, K. "I know your mean, but I don't think so": Disagreements in L2 English. In L. F. Bouton (Ed.), Pragmatics and Language Learning (Vol. 10, pp. 131-151). 2001. Urbana-Champaign, IL: Division of English as an International Language
[11] Rose, K. R. Interlanguage development in Hong Kong, phase 2. 2009. Journal of Pragmatics, 41, 2345-2364.
[12] Kuriscak, L. M. The effect of individual-level variables on speech act performance. In A. Martínez-Flor & E. Usó-Juan (Eds.), Speech act performance: 2010. Theoretical, empirical and methodological issues (pp. 23-39). Amsterdam: John Benjamins
[13] Beebe, L. M., Takahashi, T., & Uliss-Weltz, R. (1990). Pragmatic transfer in ESL refusals. In R. Scarcella, E. S. Andersen, & S. D. Krashen (Eds.), Developing communicative competence in a second language (pp. 55-73). New York: Newbury House.
[14] Chang, Y.-F. 'I no say you say is boring': The development of pragmatic competence in L2 apology. Language Sciences, 2010: 32, 408-424.

particular communication goal. Thomas emphasizes the importance of pragmatic competence by suggesting types of communicative failure which arise when this competence is not fully developed. A speaker's linguistic competence would consist of grammatical competence, more abstract and "decontextualized" knowledge about language such as phonology, syntax and semantics, on one side and pragmatic competence, the ability to use language for a specific purpose in context, on the other. While the range of possible senses and references of an utterance is provided by syntactic and semantic rules, assigning force and value with senses and references to the speaker's words requires pragmatic principles. Pragmatic failure can cause more serious communication problems than grammatical failure does, and in crosscultural situations, pragmatic failure may cause serious "communication breakdown".

A speech act is the basic unit of communication, and each speech act carries out a certain communicative function. function, whether it be a greeting, a request, an apology, a farewell, etc. Speech acts act as a certain set of speech options or strategies used by the speaker for the implementation of this communication functions. Teaching a set of strategies as part of a speech act can be successfully used by teachers seeking to introduce an element of pragmatics into the lesson, as useful models. Strategies as part of a speech act, about which discussed above are implemented using such standard models.

To conclude, pragmatic competence implies the ability of students a foreign language to communicate at the proper level with communication participants of different social status, adapting to a variety of communicative situations and showing flexibility in the choice of pragmalinguistic resources. The formation of pragmatic competence should be given the necessary attention in the classroom in a foreign language, introducing students to the structure of various speech acts, strategies in their composition and possible language models that they are implemented. A well-thought-out set of communicative exercises will allow

forming the pragmatic competence of students as an essential component of their language education.

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