Importance of Pragmatics in The Usage of A Language for Communication

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Abstract

This article is an anchor for the understanding the importance of pragmatics in the forming process of communicative competence. The concept of pragmatics may possibly require some further explanation, although it has been researching by scholar and linguists for over 4 decades. Therefore, implementing teaching pragmatics has now been developing and ongoing process in language teaching pedagogy.

Keywords: CEFR, native-like proficiency, discourse competence, functional competence, design competence, Linguistic competences, Grice's "co-operative principle".

INTRODUCTION

The importance of pragmatic competence in language education are firmly embedded in CEFR (Common European Framework of reference for language: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (Council of Europe, 2001)). There, its aims are summerised as follows:

It describes in a comprehensive way what language learners have to learn to do in order to use a language for communication and what knowledge and skills they have to develop so as to be able to act effectively.

To fulfill this aim teachers and students face some principal challenges in shaping communicative competence in the target language. First of all, they challenge the conventional goal of language education as "native-like proficiency." However, there a lot of students who consider this goal is an unattainable goal. Some of them have an opinion that the usage of English as lingua franca is increasing, there is no need to acquire "native-like proficiency". But we consider that it is important to attain the language norms of native speaker in order to communicate successfully instead of just to 'murmur' in target language. Pragmatic competence is an important element to occupy this vacuum and to avoid misunderstandings between interlocutors who come from different cultures. For this reason we have to establish to integrate pragmatic knowledge in the way of our teaching English.

Importantly, pragmatic competence involves discovering this notion which includes **discource competence** (ability to control the ordering of sentence), **functional competence** (the use of discourse for different functional purposes) and **design competence** (sequencing interaction). Many of these activities in this book focus on shaping these three different competencies which lead the learners to acquire pragmatic competence. Various teaching materials, say, course books have hitherto been lack of explicit pragmatic knowledge. The students have to form pragmatic competence implicitly, if they can. But there are a lot of students who can't acquire knowledge inductively. This book gives suggestion to both teachers and students on how to integrate pragmatic knowledge in their learning and teaching English process.
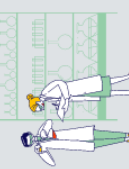
Nowadays the most wide used approach in teaching the English language is considered Communicative language teaching (CLT) which provides the lessons with various interactive activities. Though this approach was introduced in 1970s, it is continuing to renew due to demands of learners and teachers. The important dimension of this method is that teachers can be flexible in the way they use activities to create classroom climate conducive. Another peculiar feature of CLT is that it emphasizes on forming three main competencies–linguistic competence, sociolinguistic and pragmatic competencies. The description of each is clearly explained in the document CEFR as following:

Linguistic competences include lexical, phonological, syntactical knowledge and skills and other dimensions of language as system, independently of the sociolinguistic value of its variations and the pragmatic functions of its realisations. This component, considered here from the point of view of a given individual's communicative language competence, relates not only to the range and quality of knowledge (e.g. in terms of phonetic distinctions made or the extent and precision of vocabulary) but also to cognitive organisation and the way this knowledge is stored (e.g. the various associative networks in which the speaker places a lexical item) and to its accessibility (activation, recall and availability). Knowledge may be conscious and readily expressible or may not (e.g. once again in relation to mastery of a phonetic system). Its organisation and accessibility will vary from one individual to another and vary also within the same individual (e.g. for a plurilingual person depending on the varieties inherent in his or her plurilingual competence). It can also be held that the cognitive organisation of vocabulary and the storing of expressions, etc. depend, amongst other things, on the cultural features of the community or communities in which the individual has been socialised and where his or her learning has occurred.

Sociolinguistic competences refer to the sociocultural conditions of language use. Through its sensitivity to social conventions (rules of politeness, norms governing relations between generations, sexes, classes and social groups, linguistic codification of certain fundamental rituals in the functioning of a community), the sociolinguistic component strictly affects all language communication between representatives of different cultures, even though participants may often be unaware of its influence.

Pragmatic competences are concerned with the functional use of linguistic resources (production of language functions, speech acts), drawing on scenarios or scripts of interactional exchanges. It also concerns the mastery of discourse, cohesion and coherence, the identification of text types and forms, irony, and parody. For this component even more than the linguistic component, it is hardly necessary to stress the major impact of interactions and cultural environments in which such abilities are constructed[3,13].

The notion of pragmatic competence originates from pragmatics, a subfield in linguistics. Crystal defines pragmatics as "the study of language from the point of view of 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."[5] In relation to this, Chomsky defined pragmatic competence as the "knowledge of conditions and manner of appropriate use of the language, in conformity with various purposes. This
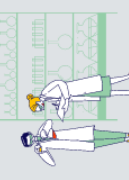
seems to be in opposition to grammatical competence, which he defined as "the knowledge of form and meaning."[7]

CLT is confirmed by many teachers because of its easy interpreting in many different ways. Thus, the teachers who use this method has a range of opportunities to design language materials for the lesson to transfer a new language for the students' development. Furthermore through this method the teacher can easily involves students in rel-life based situation which learners can 'survive' out of class.

Thus, pragmatic competence lies within the term of communicative competence, which has been the main approach in language teaching for the several decades. However, the notion of pragmatics still require some explanation. "Pragmatics is the study of language use in interpersonal communication. It is concerned with the choices made by speakers and the options and constraints which apply in social interaction."[10,47]

Communicative competence is generally considered to be the target for second language (L2) pedagogy, particularly for speaking. As a critical component of communicative competence, pragmatic competence is concerned with the relationships between utterances and the functions that speakers intend to perform through these utterances [10,49]. Pragmatics should not be regarded as 'an optional extra in a textbook syllabus' [6]. The meta-analyses conducted to date have also suggested that instruction on pragmatics is effective and that explicit teaching seems more beneficial than implicit teaching[10,48]. So in this book we try to organize lessons and teaching materials to focus on pragmatic competence deductively.

Even though the studies in pragmatics began in the middle of last century which was mostly focused on the theory, the interlanguage pragmatics has been in discussion for nearly three decades. These discussions are mostly devoted to the difference of NNS (non-native speakers) from NS (native speakers) "in the range and contextual distribution of strategies and linguistic forms used to convey illocutionary meaning and politeness precisely the kinds of issues raised in comparative studies of different NS communities"[8,225].

In fact, most students only concerns about arranging grammatically correct sentences and they are prevalently unaware about their pragmatic failure. According to Kathleen Bardovi-Harlig "pragmatic failure differs from other types of failure because it is not easily recognizable by interlocutors who may judge the speaker as being impolite or uncooperative or attribute the pragmatic errors to the speaker's personality. Moreover, pragmatic failure is common not only among students with low proficiency in the target language but also among advanced language learners presenting a good command of grammatical and lexical elements."[2,14]

The importance of Grice's "co-operative principle" in forming pragmatic competence

The **'co-operative principle'** (Grice 1975): 'make your contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged, by observing the following maxims:

• quality (try to make your contribution one that is true);

• quantity (make your contribution as informative as necessary, but not more);

• relevance (do not say what is not relevant);
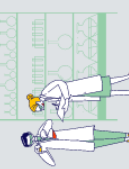
• manner (be brief and orderly, avoid obscurity and ambiguity)' [3].

Departure from these criteria for straightforward and efficient communication should be for a specific purpose rather than because of inability to meet them. The action-oriented approach, recommended by the CEFR, fulfills the current needs of modern language teaching. It "views users and learners of a language primarily as 'social agents', i.e. members of society who have tasks (not exclusively language-related) to accomplish in a given set of circumstances" [3,9]. The task is defined as "any purposeful action considered by an individual as necessary in order to achieve a given result in the context of a problem to be solved, an obligation to fulfill or an objective to be achieved"[3,10]. The nature of the task can vary in creativity, complexity, and level of language difficulty. The notion of task is similar to activity[9,39].

Kathleen Bardovi-Harlig stated that "although it may be possible to introspect on one's own grammatical competence, it is not possible to do the same for language use. The bottom line is that we need to observe language use in order to provide reasonably authentic and representative models of language use"[2,14]. In other words the learners can examine carefully about the grammar, but it is difficult with the usage of language. In fact if the teachers and learners are aware of the norms and the principles of functional usage of language, they can introspect on their pragmatic competence, too.

Most teachers only take into consideration the linguistic competence of learners and their input consists of only the knowledge of grammar, vocabulary and other linguistic elements. That's why most learners in real life encounter pragmatic failure which is the result of no elements of communicative competence in teachers' input. "Regarding the issue of language acquisition, one question that comes to the mind of both researchers and teachers is whether learners are exposed to appropriate and sufficient input. In our work on learnability in pragmatics, we have hypothesized that at least in part, learners either don't receive the relevant input or don't receive it from sources they consider relevant, or they may not notice the relevant input due to either lack of pragmatic awareness or possibly even grammatical competence."[2,25]

Thus, L2 teachers and learners can benefit from knowing more about the norms for pragmatic performance in particular contexts. However, investigations of textbook representations of pragmatics, particularly of speech acts, have revealed a number of problematic issues. For example, as Cohen and Ishihara note, most of the materials appear to under-represent pragmatic use of the target language[2,18]. Learners are often presented with insufficient context when the target linguistic resources are introduced . Many ELT textbooks include stereotypical characterizations of pragmatic norms and a limited range of speech acts[11,7].

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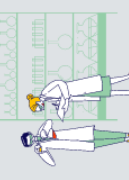
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