

## **PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE IN THE SPOKEN ENGLISH CLASSROOM**

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**Abstract:** Learners' ability in carrying out communicative activities is highly demanded in the spoken English classroom. This paper discusses some aspects that should be taken into account when conducting a spoken English class in relation to raising pragmatic awareness through the inclusion of pragmatic instruction in the classroom. Some theoretical reviews for the inclusion of pragmatic instruction are also discussed. Through the inclusion of instruction in pragmatics in the spoken English classroom, learners are expected to develop their pragmatic competence and, therefore, are able to communicate naturally despite the fact that the full range of interactions with native speakers is limited.

**Key words:** communicative activity, pragmatic instruction, pragmatic competence

Language teaching for many years had devoted to the grammar accuracy, hence the communicative function of language seemed to be put aside. However, in the 1970s a new approach was introduced. This is a result from what teachers found out that learners lacked the ability to carry out natural exchanges in the second or foreign language

Research on second language has been trying to reveal how learners master certain linguistic and extra linguistic elements. This has shed some light that learners finally acquire (learn) competence in a second language. Further research on learners' speech acts performance in a second/foreign language has revealed differences of learners' performance from those of the native speakers'. Bardovi-Harlig (2001) in Rueda (2006) has mentioned several realizations missed such as availability of input, length of exposure, and transfer. The recommendation is to integrate the teaching of interlanguage pragmatics in the classroom (Kasper & Schmidt, 1996; Bardovi-Harlig, 1997).

In the spoken English classroom, the ability to communicate effectively is strongly demanded. The demand definitely imposes huge responsibility for teachers to give appropriate pragmatic instruction in the classroom. On the part of textbook writers, materials for pragmatic awareness yielding in pragmatic competence are to be explicitly explored and greatly enhanced.

### **PRAGMATICS**

There are numerous definitions of pragmatics, and one of interest in second language pedagogy has been proposed by Crystal (in Kasper, 2001, p. 2) 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

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participants in the act of communication.” In other words, pragmatics is defined as the study of communicative action in its sociocultural context. Kasper (2001, p.2) indicates that communicative actions includes not only using speech acts (such as apologizing, complaining, complimenting, and requesting) but also engaging in different types of discourse and participating in speech events of varying length and complexity.

Leech and Thomas (in Kasper, 2001) divided pragmatics into two components, namely pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics. Pragmalinguistics refers to the resources for conveying communicative acts and relational on interpersonal meanings. Such resources include pragmatic strategies such as directness and indirectness, routines, and other range of linguistic forms which can soften or intensify communicative acts. An example is given by Kasper in which two forms of apology are proposed as in *Sorry* and *I'm absolutely devastated—could you possibly find it in your heart to forgive me?* Both utterances are expressions of an apology, but definitely are uttered in different contexts. Here the speaker uttering the latter apology has chosen some pragmalinguistic resource of apologizing. Sociopragmatics has been described by Leech (1990, p. 10) as the sociological interface of pragmatics, referring to the social perceptions underlying participant's interpretation and performance of communicative action. Speech communities differ in their assessment of speaker's and hearer's social distance and social power, their rights and obligations, and the degree of imposition involved in particular communicative acts (Holmes, 2001). Sociopragmatics is about proper social behavior. Learners must be made aware of the consequences of making pragmatic choices.

## **SPEECH ACTS**

Speech acts (Searle in Mey, 2001) are the basic or minimal units of linguistic communication. The language we use, particularly the speech acts we utter, are entirely dependent upon the context in which the acts are performed. Speech acts are verbal actions. In uttering a speech act, a speaker does something with words; there is a performance of an activity that brings about a change in the existing state of affairs.

The different aspects of speech acts are due to Austin's categorizations (1962): locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary aspects. According to Levinson (1983, p. 236):

- (i) locutionary act: the utterance of a sentence with determinate sense and reference
- (ii) illocutionary act: the making of a statement, offer, promise, etc. in uttering a sentence, by virtue of the conventional force associated with it (or with its explicit performative paraphrase)
- (iii) perlocutionary act: the bringing about the effects on the audience by means of uttering the sentence, such effects being special to the circumstances of utterance.

Austin further states that locutionary act and illocutionary act are detachable, and therefore that the study of meaning may proceed independently, but supplemented by a theory of illocutionary acts.

Mey (2003) states that by locutionary aspects we mean the activity we engage in when we say something. For example when we say: *It's cold in here*, we say that the weather is cold and there is nothing more implicated. The speaker merely states that the weather is cold. Illocutionary aspect contains force in which there is an act performed via words. Hence, in

uttering *It's cold in here* there is an act of stating of the weather. Perlocutionary aspect relates to the effect(s) resulting from the utterance. The utterance *It's cold in here* may produce the effects on the hearer to close the door.

Searle (in Levinson, 1983, p. 240) mentions five basic kinds of action that one can perform in speaking, by means of the following five types of utterance:

- (i) representatives, which commit the speaker to the truth of expressed proposition (paradigm cases: asserting, concluding, etc.)
- (ii) directives, which are attempts by the speaker to get the addressee to do something (paradigm cases: requesting, questioning, etc.)
- (iii) commissives, which commit the speaker to some future course of action (paradigm cases: promising, threatening, offering)
- (iv) expressives, which express a psychological state (paradigm cases: thanking, apologizing, welcoming, congratulating)
- (v) declarations, which effect immediate changes in the institutional state of affairs and which tend to rely on elaborate extra-linguistic institutions (paradigm cases: excommunicating, declaring war, christening, firing from employment)

### **THE SPOKEN ENGLISH CLASSROOM**

Brown (2001) states that there are some issues in teaching oral communication skills that may help to provide some perspective, namely conversational discourse, pronunciation, accuracy and fluency, affective factors, and the interaction effect. Conversational discourse in Brown's view requires the demonstration of an ability to accomplish pragmatic goals through interactive discourse with other speakers of the language. The goals and the techniques for teaching conversation depend upon the learner, the teacher, and the context of the class. The topics for a conversation class are therefore may vary from drilling to free and open discussions.

Pronunciation still invites a question whether the role of pronunciation would work in a communicative, interactive class. Teaching pronunciation has changed over the last half of the twentieth century. A current approach to pronunciation is a top-down approach in which the most relevant features of pronunciation—stress, rhythm, and intonation—become the priority (Brown, 2001). This approach emphasizes the importance of teaching pronunciation in a discourse, the goal of which is to produce clear, comprehensible pronunciation.

Accuracy and fluency are also primary in language teaching. Fluency may serve as the initial goal in language teaching, and accuracy will be accomplished to some extent by allowing learners to focus on the elements of phonetics and phonology, grammar, and discourse.

The fourth issue, affective factor, is related to the language ego. This consequently results in learners' reluctance to be judged by hearers. Hence, the teachers should motivate the learner to speak. The last issue is the interaction effect. In this term, the learners are encouraged to be actively engaged in conversations. As a participant in a conversation, the learner will negotiate meaning.

### **Types of Classroom Speaking Performance**

There are six categories of oral production that are expected from learners in the classroom. They are imitative, intensive, responsive, transactional, interpersonal, and extensive (Brown, 2001, p. 273). The explanation for each of the categories is given below.

1. Imitative

A limited speaking practice may be spent on generating tape recorder speech. For example, learners practice an intonation contour or try to pronounce particular speech sounds. An activity of this kind is carried out to focus on some particular language elements.

2. Intensive

Intensive speaking includes any speaking activity to practice some phonological or grammatical aspect of language. This activity can be self-initiated, or a form of pair-work activity in which learners go over certain forms of language. The forms of language learned can be of passive voice or causative.

3. Responsive

Responsive requires replies; replies to teacher or to fellow learners. This may take the form of comments to other learners' explanation. These replies are usually sufficient and do not extend into dialogs. Examples below are taken from Brown (2001, p. 273).

T: How are you today?

S: Pretty good, thanks, and you?

T: What is the main idea in this essay?

S: The United Nations should have more authority.

T: So, what did you write for question number one?

S: Well, I wasn't sure, so I left it blank.

4. Transactional (dialogs)

Transactional is an extension of responsive. In this activity, learners make dialogs in which they communicate their feelings or opinions or specific information. The following is an example how a responsive is extended into transactional.

T: What is the main idea in this essay?

S: The United Nations should have more authority.

T: More authority than what?

S: Than it does right now.

T: What do you mean?

S: Well, for example, the United Nations should have the power to force a country like Iraq to destroy its nuclear weapons.

T: You don't think the UN has that power now?

S: Obviously not. Iraq is still manufacturing nuclear bombs.

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#### 5. Interpersonal (dialogs)

Interpersonal dialogs are carried out to maintain social relationships among the participants/interlocutors. In this activity, the dialogs do not merely ask for information. There are factors that should be taken into account such as what register will be used, whether colloquial language is used rather than formal one, if sarcasm is involved and so forth. The following example is taken from Brown (2001, p. 274).

- Amy : Hi Bob, how's it going?  
Bob : Oh, so so.  
Amy : Not a great weekend, huh?  
Bob : Well, far be it from me to criticize, but I'm pretty miffed about last week.  
Amy : What are you talking about?  
Bob : I think you know perfectly well what I'm talking about.  
Amy : Oh, that... How come you get so bent out of shape over something like that?  
Bob : Well, whose fault was it, huh?  
Amy : Oh, wow, this is great. Wonderful. Back to square one. For crying out loud, Bob. I thought we'd settled this before. Well, what more can I say?

Learners need to learn how such features such as the relationship between interlocutors, casual style, and sarcasm are coded linguistically.

#### 6. Extensive (monologues)

An extended monologue is carried out by intermediate and advanced learners. The forms may take in oral reports, summaries, short speeches, or presentation. In an extensive monologue, learners can either prepare this earlier or not.

## **PRINCIPLES FOR DESIGNING SPEAKING TECHNIQUES**

In line with Brown's theory (2001, p. 275), there are seven principles that need to be addressed in teaching speaking. The explanation for each of the techniques is given as follows.

1. Use techniques that cover the spectrum of learner needs, from language-based focus on accuracy to message-based focus on interaction, meaning, and fluency.  
In an interactive language teaching, the focus of teaching is placed upon interactive activities that do not directly highlight grammatical points or pronunciation. The activities done can take the form of playing a game, discussing solutions to the environmental crisis. The tasks are intended to help learners to perceive and use the building blocks of language.
2. Provide motivating techniques.  
Motivation is one of the teaching principles needs consideration. Learners are encouraged to fulfill their needs through activities designed by the teacher. It is in the hand of the teachers, therefore, that this can be accomplished.
3. Encourage the use of authentic language in meaningful contexts.  
Authentic materials should be given in a speaking class in which authentic language is exposed to learners. If grammar exercises are integrated in the activity, teachers should be sure that it is still in the need of the use of authentic language.
4. Provide appropriate feedback and correction.  
Corrective feedback is expected from teacher in the classroom. Learners would undoubtedly rely on the teacher for this.

5. Capitalize on the natural link between speaking and listening.  
Even though speaking goals are the foci in a spoken English class, listening goals may naturally coincide and the two skills can reinforce each other.
6. Give learners opportunities to initiate oral communication.  
Part of oral communication competence is the ability to initiate conversation, to nominate topics, to ask questions, to control conversations, and to change the subject.
7. Encourage the development of speaking strategies.  
Speaking strategies relate how learners communicate, and the strategies covers:
  - asking for clarification (What)
  - asking someone to repeat something (Huh? Excuse me?)
  - using fillers (Uh, I mean, Well)
  - using conversation maintenance cues (Uh huh, Right, Yeah, Okay, Hm)
  - getting someone's attention (Hey, Say, So)
  - using paraphrase for structures one can't produce.
  - appealing for assistance from the interlocutor (for example to get a word or phrase)
  - using formulaic expressions (at the survival stage) (How much does ....cost? How do you get to the ...?)
  - using mime and nonverbal expressions to convey meaning.

Among the issues mentioned earlier, conversational discourse and the interaction effect requires competencies that learners have to develop throughout the course. The competency required is pragmatic competence.

### **COMMUNICATIVE AND PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE**

Canale and Swain in Rose and Kasper (2001, p. 64) put forward three subcompetencies, which are extended by Canale into four subcompetencies. The subcompetencies are grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence.

- Grammatical competence refers to the knowledge of linguistic code features such as phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics
- Sociolinguistic competence refers to the knowledge of contextually appropriate language use.
- Discourse competence is the knowledge of achieving coherence and cohesion in spoken or written communication.
- Strategic competence refers to the knowledge of how to use communication strategies to handle breakdowns in communication and make communication effective.

In this model, pragmatic competence is represented as sociolinguistic competence, which Canale (1983, p. 7) described as encompassing both appropriateness of meaning and appropriateness of form. This meaning appropriateness is in parallel with Leech's (1990) sociopragmatic component, which includes an interlocutor's knowledge of pragmatic conventions and the ability to assess situational context and speech intentions.

Bachman's (1990) model and Bachman and Palmer's (1996) consider communicative competence a dynamic system in which world knowledge (knowledge structures) and language competence feed into strategic competence which describes the degree to which linguistic intentions are efficiently executed (Niezgoda and Rover, 2001, p. 64). Grammatical

and pragmatic competence is part of Bachman's language competence, which he subdivides into organizational competence and pragmatic competence. Organizational competence concerns a speaker's control of the formal aspects of language and is further subdivided in grammatical competence (vocabulary, syntax, morphology, phonology) and textual competence (cohesion/coherence, rhetorical organization). Pragmatic competence consists of sociolinguistic and illocutionary competence. Sociolinguistic competence in this model is in parallel with Leech's sociopragmatic component, and illocutionary competence is similar to Leech's pragmalinguistic component.

The notion of pragmatic competence originates from pragmatics, a subfield in linguistics. Crystal (in Kasper, 1997) 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." 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." Canale & Swain (in Kasper, 1997) included pragmatic competence as one important component in communicative competence. Pragmatic competence was identified as sociolinguistic competence and was defined as the knowledge of contextually appropriate language use. Canale in Kasper (1997) stated that pragmatic competence includes "illocutionary competence or the knowledge of the sociolinguistic conventions for performing language functions appropriately in a given context." Pragmatic competence refers to the communication activities in the language people use. Communication activities require the mastery—or the knowledge of the language itself—and social function of language.

In Bachman's model (in Kasper, 1997), language competence is subdivided into two components, organizational competence and pragmatic competence. Organizational competence comprises knowledge of linguistic units and the rules of joining them together at the levels of sentence (grammatical competence) and discourse (textual competence). Pragmatic competence subdivides into 'illocutionary competence' and 'sociolinguistic competence'. Illocutionary competence can be glossed as knowledge of communicative action and how to carry it out.

From what Leech (1990) has proposed, pragmatic competence includes the following basic features: 1) the language level of compliance with the pragmatic language rules; 2) the level of focus on pragmatic social and cultural differences; 3) the level of attachment mechanism of cognitive constraints; 4) time and space situational context of the level of stress constraints. A pragmatic capacity to act is the learners' ability to perform speech acts. Having this capability, learners can—under specific circumstances—use language for different purposes, and fully fulfill the function of language in a communicative activity.

In a communicative activity, aspects of speech situation should be taken into account. Leech (1990, p. 13) mentions the aspects of speech situation as follows.

1. Addressers or addressees

Addressers are the other term used to refer to speakers or writers, whereas addressees refer to hearers or readers.

2. The context of an utterance

Context is any background knowledge assumed to be shared by speaker and hearer and which contributes to hearer's interpretation of what speaker means by a given utterance.

3. The goal(s) of an utterance

In Leech's view, the goal of an utterance is to talk about the intended meaning of the utterance, or speaker's intention in uttering it. The term goal is more neutral than intention because it does not commit its user to dealing with motivation, but can be used generally of goal-oriented activities.

4. The utterance as a form of act or activity: a speech act

5. The utterance as a product of a verbal act.

### **PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE AND PRAGMATIC INSTRUCTION IN THE SPOKEN ENGLISH CLASSROOM**

Pragmatic instruction should seek to furnish students with linguistic tools that allow them to realize and comprehend linguistic action in a contextually appropriate way (Rueda, 2006: 171). This task is related to the teaching of the target language culture, in this case, the culture of native speakers of English. Byram & Morgan (1994), Cortazzi & Jin (1999), Fantini (1997), and Kramsch (1998), who highlight that language expresses, embodies, and symbolizes cultural reality. Bardovi-Harlig (2001), Jordan (1992), and Saville-Troike (1992) point out that second and foreign language curricula should provide students with information on the socio-cultural rules of the target language.

According to Kasper & Schmidt (1996) in Rueda (2006), the role of pragmatic instruction becomes important because opportunities for the full range of human interactions are limited, and consequently learners have more difficulties in acquiring appropriate language use patterns. Literature has reported that learners can successfully learn grammar and literacy in second or foreign language learning contexts, but the same results have not been observed in these environments for the development of pragmatic discourse and sociolinguistic ability (Rueda, 2006).

In a foreign language classroom, such as in Indonesia, learners normally do not have direct contacts with English native speakers. Though learners may interact with native speakers of English in the virtual world (internet), this opportunity is accessible only to those with information and communication technology. This limitation imposes huge demands on instruction in the classroom. According to Kasper (in Rueda, 2006) classroom interaction does not provide learners with adequate input to produce linguistic action required for authentic communication in target language. Consequently, pragmatic instruction in a foreign language classroom, particularly in spoken English class, needs to fulfill three functions: (1) exposing learners to appropriate target language input, (2) raising learner's pragmatic awareness, and (3) arranging authentic opportunities to practice pragmatic knowledge (Rueda, 2006). There are some ways to meet the demands. Rose (1994) introduces active video-viewing activities. Through this activity learners will directly notice how certain acts are performed via utterances. A study by Silva (2003) proposes strategies to raise learner's pragmatic awareness in refusing invitations by native speakers of American English, among which are listening for fragments of refusal realizations, modifying discourse to make it more comprehensible, and encouraging peer-feedback.

Some aforementioned activities require specific devices for classroom use. Thus, with limited resources in the class, huge responsibility to design and plan classroom activities in order to accomplish the goals are on the teacher. It is high time that teachers are aware of instruction in raising learners' pragmatic awareness. Textbooks available for classroom use so far have included communicative activities in which some expressions on certain speech acts are given. Still teachers are to explore and enhance the materials presented in the textbook.

With regard to speech act theory, teachers need to familiarize themselves with the notions of illocutionary force and how this is conveyed in exchanges. The five types of illocutionary utterances namely representatives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives are to be borne in mind even though only some speech acts are performed or practiced in the classroom. The commonest illocutionary functions found in textbooks for classroom use are directives and expressives. It implies that learners are more exposed to transactional and some of interpersonal dialogs. Other interpersonal dialogs, such as promising or warning, should be of more attention to teach and practice as in communication activities, as exchanges do not merely ask for information or to get things done. The successful interlocutor can lead communication activities to the goal intended. Review on some textbooks has also revealed that certain expressions on particular speech acts are listed without further explanation when to use them. The following is a list of expressions of certainty, taken from an English book for grade 9, 2008:

1. I'm sure about it.
2. I'm quite sure that he told the truth.
3. I'm absolutely sure about the news.
4. I'm no doubt about it.
5. I'm absolutely certain that he told the truth.
6. I'm sure/certain about .....
7. I've no doubt about .....
8. I'm sure/certain about .....

In the book there is no explanation about the difference of, for example *I'm absolutely sure*, *I'm sure* and *I'm quite sure*. Here, the teacher's comprehension of the use of the expressions is required. To raise pragmatic awareness which later yields in pragmatic competence, the context of situation or the aspect of speech situation needs elaborating, among which is the interlocutors in the dialogs; whether there is a difference between talking to a classmate or to a teacher or parents.

With regard to the principles of teaching speaking, one of the crucial elements worth teaching in the classroom is the use of authentic language in meaningful contexts. Therefore, teachers need to enhance materials presented. An expression of *I'm absolutely certain that he told the truth* requires more explanation in a way that the speaker here is *absolutely certain*, not just *certain*. Here, it is noted that there is an emphasis on the degree of certainty.

In a spoken English class for higher degree (possibly for tertiary levels or adults) the emphasis on language use is strongly demanded. The following example, taken from *New English Course Book 3B*, demonstrates how different requests are carried out for different contexts of situation between the same interlocutors.

[*At the Quinn's house...*]

Mr. Quinn: Tell the children to be quiet, will you?

Mrs. Quinn: Timmy! Johnny!

Would you lower your voices a little, please? You're making too much noise.

Your father's making a phone call.

[*But the noise continues...*]

Mr. Quinn: Tell those kids to quiet down!

Mrs. Quinn: I'll tell them, dear. Children! Children! Stop that yelling! Your father's on the telephone.

From the dialog above, we can notice the different requests performed by a husband to his wife. Different forms are used, and the aspects of situation are clearly illustrated so readers will notice this difference and find out by themselves how requests are performed, particularly between participants with close relationship.

## **CONCLUSION**

In order to communicate effectively in the target language, learners of English need to develop pragmatic competence, which can be accomplished through pragmatic instruction in the classroom, particularly in the spoken English class. With the raise of pragmatic awareness, it is expected that learners will acquire the competence and their target language performance will improve. Besides the teachers who are to explore and enhance materials from the textbook, material developers and curriculum designers should also include pragmatic awareness in the books and curricula.

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