

Development of Pragmatic Competence

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Abstract—It is beyond that that any discussion of language pedagogy without taking into consideration the field of pragmatism would be deficient. Pragmatics being defined as the rules governing the use of language, that is, where to say what and how to say what is deeply rooted in our communications in any social context without which our process of learning is inevitably confined to language usage. Pragmatic aspects of language, therefore, have taken center stage in constructivist approaches towards language pedagogy which unlike cognitive theories do not believe in the development of language in isolation and on the contrary emphatically stress the role of environment and interaction as necessary factors contributing to language proficiency. The present study has presented the readers with a good deal of literature to examine how bringing into limelight pragmatics will affect the process of second language learning.

Index Terms—pragmatic, competence, development, language knowledge, environment, instruction methods

I. INTRODUCTION

Pragmatic competence, in the scientific acceptance of the term, generally denotes the appropriate use of language in any given social matrix where both implicit and explicit meanings take center stage. A search of the pertinent literature yields a number of different, yet all very general, definitions of pragmatic language. Gallagher describes pragmatic language as "linguistic elements and contextual elements as forming a contextual whole" (1983, p. 2). A simpler definition comes from Bates (1976 a), who defines pragmatic language as "rules governing the use of language in context" (p. 420). Other researchers do not provide definitions that lend insight into the parameters of pragmatic language, although they acknowledge that pragmatic language skills are complex (Philofsky, Fidler, & Hepburn, 2007). These statements about pragmatic language give rise to questions about the more specific behaviors, skills and cognitive processes that might contribute to an operational definition of pragmatic language. The next section describes how three dominant theoretical frameworks interpret the key components of pragmatic language in different ways. When the pendulum of language teaching gradually swung from usage extreme to use extreme, pragmatism focused chiefly on communicative competence to enable students to become proficient in the target language. Pragmatic knowledge, accordingly, concerns language use with reference to language users and the setting where the language is applied. In other words, one who purports to be pragmatically competent is cognizant of creating and interpreting utterances by taking into consideration two factors, namely, language user's intentions and the setting in which the language is being used. The fact implies that pragmatic knowledge must necessarily bring two different realms of knowledge into its compass. This approach is supported by Bachman's (1990) language competence model, in which language competence is divided into organizational competence (knowledge of linguistic units at the sentence level and discourse) and pragmatic competence (knowledge of speech acts and speech functions and ability to use language appropriately according to context). This implies that a proficient speaker knows not only the linguistic forms to perform a language function (e.g., greetings or leave-takings), but also the contexts in which these forms are used. According to Crystal (1985, p. 240) pragmatics is "the study of language from the point of view of users, especially of the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using social interaction and the effects their use of language has on other participants in the act of communication."

Poor social skills are a predictor of school failure and negatively impact behavior, acceptance and psychological well-being (Agostin & Rain, 1997; Foulks & Morrow, 1989; Gresham, Elliott & Black, 1987; Landa, 2005; Wilson & Shulha, 1995). Researchers estimate that 10% of typical children have difficulties with social functioning; this number is likely higher in children with known disabilities (Asher, 1990). Hummel and Prizant (1993) report that between 50 and 70 percent of children with emotional, social or behavioral difficulties have concomitant language impairments. They attribute impaired communicative competence and persistent social failure as factors that interfere with building positive relationships. Given that pragmatic language skills are the cornerstone of communicative competence, it follows that the children with behavioral/emotional problems and co-occurring language impairments are at elevated risk for pragmatic language difficulties. These difficulties can create limitations in interactions and impact learning, since "engaging in practice... may well be a *condition* for the effectiveness of learning" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p.93, original emphasis). Several research studies also suggest that the development of social decision-making, stronger interpersonal skills and improved social cognition and conflict resolution should be part of any discussion about

violence prevention programs. Preschool is a critical period to begin to develop these skills (DuRant, Treiber, Getts, McCloud, Linder & Woods, 1996; Kellermann, Fuqua Whitley, Rivara & Mercy, 2000; Payton, Wardlaw, Graczyk, Bloodworth, Tompsett & Weissberg, 2000). With so much at stake when a child's pragmatic skills are poor, it seems apparent that adequate pragmatic language skills in children is an area that warrants attention as a factor in promoting school success, decreasing mental health issues and fostering a more peaceful society.

II. DISCUSSION

Pragmatics investigates how second language (L2) learners develop the ability to produce and comprehend linguistic action in an L2 (Kasper, 1998; Kasper & Rose, 2002). Following Crystal (1985), 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" (p. 240). 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 (Kasper, 1997).

Kasper and Schmidt (1996), 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. Their theory of pragmatic teachability advocates the idea of helping learners acquire pragmatic fluency. This theory, nonetheless, neither suggests that acquiring second language pragmatics is possible without any type of intervention nor implies that all second language pragmatic knowledge could be instructed in any learning context. As a matter of fact, the implication is that some pragmatic knowledge is universal and other pragmatic facets could be readily transferred from the learners' first language. Bardovi-Harlig (1996) further states that "language learners have difficulty in the area of pragmatics, regardless of their level of grammatical competence" (p. 21). 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 (for example, just telling them that one modal verb entails more politeness than the other). Learners might also use the target language based on the norms of behaving (and interpreting social behavior) of their first language. As with linguistic forms, interference from the native language can occur with pragmatic knowledge as well.

This nature of transferability exerts both negative and positive impacts on the learners' gradual advance towards proficiency and gaining a more extended awareness of language use and usage. To put in another way, learners during learning process bring into limelight the social means of interpretation as well as their linguistic knowledge. Many such facets, such as using indirectness to express pragmatic intent and using diverse linguistic forms based on contextual limitations, are universally shared among various linguistic communities and therefore, facilitate the interpretation of second language acts for learners.

The nature of transferability is best delineated in the study conducted by Takahashi (1993) who examined the production of indirect speech in thirty seven female Japanese speakers of English in beginning, intermediate and highly advanced levels. In this regard, examinees were assigned an acceptability judgment task for five indirect request expressions in Japanese and English in four distinct situations. The results indicated that the language neutral "want statement" and "willing statement" could be almost transferable to the corresponding English request context. However, "mitigated ability statement" and the "mitigated expectation statement" failed to be transferred to the corresponding context in English. Contextual factors were contended to influence the transferability ratio of the indirect strategies. In this particular case, interaction between the politeness and conventionality encoded in each strategy determined the transferability of indirect strategy. In a previous study (1987) they proved the higher proficiency learners were more likely to transfer first language socio-cultural norms as compared to lower proficiency learners due to their relative mastery over the linguistic forms of the second language to convey how they felt.

Learning environment is an important variable which has attracted a lot of attention in the field of second language acquisition thus far. Whether learning and acquisition takes place better in an EFL or ESL environment has been a matter of controversy for long. The common assumption is that learners in the ESL setting due to enjoying more interactive opportunities (both inputs and outputs) both inside and outside the classroom can in all likelihood use language more authentically. Nevertheless, some recent studies have demonstrated that learners in ESL setting do not always benefit from these interactive edges to promote faster in comparison to their EFL counterparts. Accordingly, many learners in ESL setting do not get a full grasp of pragmatic function in the target language as these functions need to be learned rather than acquired. Researchers contend that 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 (e.g., Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989), the majority of IL pragmatics research has focused on L2 use, comparing differences between native speakers (NSs) and advanced learners (Bardovi-Harlig, 1999a; Kasper, 1992). 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 (Bardovi-Harlig, 1999a; Kasper, 1992, 1998; Kasper & Rose, 2002; Kasper &

Schmidt, 1996). These studies have focused on factors that might influence development, such as level of proficiency (e.g., Salsbury & Bardovi-Harlig, 2000, 2001), the influence of instruction (e.g., Rose & Kasper, 2001), individual differences (e.g., Kuriscak, 2010), study abroad (e.g., Cohen & Shively, 2007), and transfer (e.g., Beebe, Takahashi, & Uliss-Weltz, 1990).

Most of the work that has sought to outline developmental stages has been based on the acquisition of requests. Kasper and Rose (2002) suggest five stages of pragmatic development based on Achiba (2003), Ellis (1992), and Schmidt (1983): 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 (p. 140). Investigations in the field of IL pragmatic development have used these stages as the basis for analysis, with some providing further support (e.g., Chang, 2010; Félix-Brasdefer, 2007; Omar, 2006; Rose, 2009) while others have found that their learners do not seem representative of any stage (Shively, 2008) and suggest that learners are idiosyncratic and non-linear in terms of their development (Barron, 2003; Vyatkina & Belz, 2006).

Among various instruction methods proposed for developing interlanguage pragmatics, two types of research studies have as their primary goal the development of classroom techniques in order for enhancing pragmatic fluency, namely, observational and interventional studies. In a literature review conducted by Kasper, he truly came to the conclusion that early studies in the realm of second and foreign language classroom have taken pragmatic ability for granted at the expense of accentuating merely the language use. However, between 1992 and 1999 scholars' attention shifted to the sociocultural contexts in which language use manifests itself.

Inspired by an early study conducted by Kasper who had compared and contrasted seventeen interventional studies in the realm of pragmatics with regard to their approaches towards teaching pragmatics, House (1996) aimed to find out which type of instruction (implicit vs. explicit) suits advanced adult EFL learners. In the conclusion, we can clearly come to know that he took side with explicit instruction as conspicuously more beneficial in improving pragmatic fluency. Weaving explicit-raising techniques with appropriate contexts for learners to practice was considered crucial in instructing second language pragmatics.

Martinez-flor and Soler's (2007) study too, gave evidence to positive effects of instruction though they had taken a different approach as their study had the analysis of the role instruction in developing learners' pragmatic awareness as its main objective. Subsequently, eighty one EFL learners in Spain with an intermediate level of English undertook the test. They were divided into three groups, the first receiving explicit teaching, the second receiving implicit teaching and the third group was the control group. Though their studies testified to the significance of explicit learning, they were taken aback to see that the group receiving implicit teaching developed higher pragmatic awareness.

Thomas (1983) emphasizes the social and pragmatic aspect of communicative competence, terming it as pragmatic competence. She compares this pragmatic competence with grammatical communicative competence. Pragmatic competence, as one of several levels of knowledge, includes grammatical, psycholinguistic, and social competence (Thomas 1983: 92). This competence determines correct, appropriate, and effective language behavior, besides the grammatical knowledge of phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics, in relation to the particular communication goal in context (Thomas 1983: 92). For example, if an EFL speaker understands 'sentence meaning' of a sentence spoken by a native speaker, "Would you like to come in and sit down?", and is ready to come in and sit down, he or she has linguistic competence (Leech 1983). However, in order to understand whether the utterance is an invitation, a request, or a directive, or whether it stands on the uncertain boundary between all three, he or she needs knowledge about 'speaker meaning' in relation to pragmatic context and this knowledge is from pragmatic competence (Leech 1983; Thomas 1983: 92). The latter knowledge, which parallels sociopragmatic competence suggested by Thomas (1983) completes effective language behavior in relation to a 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. She defines the term pragmatic failure as the inability to understand 'what is meant by what is said' (Thomas 1983: 91). She suggests two types of pragmatic failure on a cross-cultural basis. One is pragmlinguistic failure, which is defined as a matter of grammar and can be taught, and the other is sociopragmatic failure which involves the learner's system of beliefs as much as his or her knowledge of the language and is therefore much more difficult to deal with (Thomas 1983: 91). 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 (Thomas 1983). 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 (Thomas 1983: 97).

Pragmatic failure can cause more serious communication problems than grammatical failure does, and in cross-cultural situations, pragmatic failure may cause serious "communication breakdown" (Thomas 1983: 97). Pragmlinguistic failure "occurs when the pragmatic force mapped by a speaker onto a given utterance is systematically different from the force most frequently assigned to it by native speakers of the target language or when speech act strategies are inappropriately transferred from LI to L2" (Thomas 1983: 99). Sociopragmatic failure is related to "sociopragmatic judgment concerning the size of imposition, cost/benefit, social distance, and relative rights and obligations" in language use (Thomas 1983: 104-5). This categorization and definition of pragmatic failure may carry a heavier weight on the language of North Koreans in discourse because North Koreans are second language speakers of

English and they are expected to show both types of learning problems: a lack of linguistic and cultural 'comprehensible input' (Krashen 1981) and output (Swain 1997). Since pragmalinguistic failure, as a linguistic problem, is caused by differences in the linguistic encoding of pragmatic force, and since sociopragmatic failure stems from cross-culturally different perceptions of what constitutes appropriate linguistic behavior (Thomas 1983: 99), North Koreans, who have been isolated both geographically and politically from English speaking society, may experience these types of pragmatic failure more seriously and frequently than native speakers of English and more than other second language speakers of English. In addition, the hearers and readers of the discourse of North Koreans might be required to be more careful in decoding and interpreting the discourse because the speakers/writers of the text make culturally different assessments of the relative importance of pragmatic principles (Thomas 1983) or they may be operating on different pragmatic principles (Smith 2011). This different assessment or different operation is reflected in the speakers/writers' language. Interestingly, this view about language speakers with different cultures is in line with the suggestion by Green (1990) that people in different cultures, as rational agents, prioritize cooperative principles of communication differently.

III. CONCLUSION

The present study aimed to present us with various studies in the realm of pragmatism to supply empirical evidence to advocate the reasoning behind the fact that by concentrating solely on grammatical, lexical, phonological and semantic aspects of language we will by no means be successful in paving the way for attaining communicative goals of language as pragmatic knowledge plays a pivotal role in the accomplishment of this goal. As Locastro (2003, p.313) remarks "even in our first language, to present ourselves as we wish requires comprehending and producing pragmatic meanings in a variety of contexts, ranging from a simple speech act requesting the salt to processing irony and comprehending joking". Recent studies in interlanguage pragmatics indicate the need of teaching second language learners the pragmatic conditions governing the use of grammatical structures, mainly because they might not perceive the mismatch between the pragmatic rules of their native language and those of the second language. As LoCastro (2003) emphasizes, "teachers now have to teach how to speak the second language and to train learners to use it in situationally appropriate ways" (p. 73).

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