

An Overview of Pragmatism and Pragmatism Assessment

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Abstract—From the time Stalnaker (1974) asked for the development of a pragmatic theory to take into account a detailed explanation of linguistic context, still there is not an agreed-upon theory to explain pragmatic knowledge (Roever, 2011). Due to the vital importance of reliability and validity in language assessment, it is imperative to develop a construct definition for the tests of pragmatic knowledge to be more valid, authentic, and generalizable. In this paper, a short review of pragmatism as well as some issues in the assessment of the pragmatic competence, such as reliability, validity, and practicality, is presented.

Index Terms—Pragmatism, pragmatic assessment, reliability, validity, practicality

I. INTRODUCTION

How do we make sense of a natural conversation? What capabilities and knowledge constitute our understanding and communication ability? Our language knowledge such as syntax and semantics is certainly at work. But the main story is something else as we communicate without saying things *directly*. Therefore, there exists another component of language knowledge that goes beyond the literal meaning of words to extract meanings from context; this aspect of language knowledge is called *pragmatic knowledge*.

Learning a new language entails far more than learning the grammar, vocabulary and phonological rules of the language. While communicating with other people in the second or foreign language, people need to comprehend the intended interlocuter's meaning as they make an expression and as well as make a linguistically appropriate response. However, sometimes problems occur in communication as speakers communicate their meanings implicitly. The problem gets worse when native speakers refer to cultural references unknown to non-native speakers. The ability to get the point, understand cultural allusions, and get ahead of the communication and manage the conversation in spite of sufficient cross-linguistic awareness subsume under pragmatics.

As stated in different modern language teaching models, efficient interaction in the target language involves more than just knowledge of grammar. In fact, pragmatics is the other essential aspect of knowledge of language knowledge that learners need to communicate successfully with native speakers. All recent language teaching and learning theories emphasize the critical importance of knowledge of pragmatics as the foundation of language ability in the globalized world of international communication.

Pragmatics

Pragmatics first appeared in a more philosophical sense and then later it came to be used in cognitive and sociocultural approaches. Morris (1938) was the first to use *Pragmatics* to define the main parts of *semiotics*, or the study of signs, their meaning and interpretation (Levinson, 1983). David Crystal (1985) defines pragmatics as the study of language from the perspective of the users, especially how they use language for social communication and how these choices influence participants in communication.

Supporting Crystal, Kasper (1997) defines pragmatic competence as awareness of the language use to accomplish language interaction objectives in a sociocultural **context**. Mey (2001), too, focused on the notion of *context* in his definition of pragmatics. Accordingly, pragmatics involves the study of the situations of the uses of language as required by the social environment. Context is central in defining pragmatics. It is language use as determined by a specific context or situation and encompasses both the literal and non-literal speaker meaning in communication. As Fasold (2006) argues, pragmatics involves the connection between the context language and sentence meaning. Pragmatics also involves the interplay among speaker meaning, sentence meaning, and context of use.

As context, in the above definitions, makes up the cornerstone of pragmatics, it is useful to provide a brief discussion on context. Context consists of all the linguistic and non-linguistic factors affecting communication. Context is categorized in the following parts (Celce-Marcia & Olshtain, 2000):

1. Physical context (the environment, time and place of the communication).
2. Linguistic context or co-text (what the interlocuters have already said in the talk).
3. Social context (social connection of those taking part in communication).
4. Epistemic context (shared knowledge of the speaker and hearer).

II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

A. *Communicative Competence*

Upon the advent of the modern language teaching theories, especially the *communicative method*, **communicative competence** widely gained recognition and significance. Unlike the past, the aim of language teaching and learning was no longer translation or to be able to read target literature, rather conveying the desired meaning and communicate effectively. The basics of *communicative method* are (Deda, 2013):

- Communicative competence is the goal of Language learning
- Language learning happens in communication
- Meaningful communication is defined in terms of fluency and accuracy.

Communicative competence, based on Canale and Swain (1980), has four modules: sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, grammatical competence, and strategic competence. Canale (1983) further argues that grammatical competence is grasping the linguistic code of the target language; sociolinguistic competence is the knowledge of the sociocultural rules in using the target language; discourse competence is the correct selection and arrangement of lexical items and syntactic structures to accomplish well-organized texts, and finally, strategic competence is the use of verbal and non-verbal strategies to recompense inadequate proficiency or to boost communication.

Communicative competence (Canale & Swain, 1980), in a given social context, has been the objective of all modern language learning theories, and *pragmatics* has been accepted as a crucial aspect of communicative competence. Therefore, pragmatics has grown in importance and recognition as worthy of research and assessment to discover implied meaning by means of contextual, sociolinguistic, sociocultural, psychological, and rhetorical factors (Purpura, 2004).

In his influential conceptualization of language knowledge, Bachman (1990) divided it into two categories:

a) Organizational knowledge, including grammatical and textual knowledge, is an awareness of the grammatical structure of the target code with the aim of producing right sentences and organizing these in texts.

b) Pragmatic knowledge, is an awareness of assigned specific meanings to the words and utterances in context, as well as their function according to the aims of the user. Pragmatic knowledge encompasses lexical knowledge, functional knowledge and sociolinguistic knowledge.

As it is seen in the above-mentioned principles of communicative method, communicative competence is cornerstone and benchmark of language teaching. Of course communicative competence is one of the many aspects of language competence. Other language competencies, in addition to *communicative competence*, can include:

a. Sociolinguistic Competence: It is the awareness of the social meaning of a linguistic item and the appropriacy of language use in a given social context for communication. To Savignon (1983), it is the knowledge of socio-cultural rules of discourse requiring understanding of the social context of language use.

b. Interactional Competence: Kramersch (1986) argues that interaction is the negotiation of the intended meanings, that is to say, interaction is adjusting speech to the intended effects on the listener. Kramersch (1986) maintain that interaction involves anticipating the response and possible misunderstanding, clarifying one's own and the other intentions.

c. Strategic Competence: To Canale and Swain (1980) strategic competence as the ability to use language knowledge effectively and appropriately for the sake of communicative interaction.

d. Discourse Competence: Discourse competence is the ability to arrange sentences into cohesive structures (Erton, 2007). Thus, it discourse competence helps gain insight by experiencing different interactional patterns in varying socio-cultural and physical contexts (Deda, 2013).

e. Pragmatic Competence: Deda (2013) argues that pragmatic is the ability to comprehend, construct, and convey accurate and appropriate meanings in the social and cultural context of communication.

f. Cultural Competence: Culture is the socially acquired knowledge by a given member of a society (Lyons, 1990). Cultural competence, to quote Le Page (1978), is that knowledge which an individual needs to know, in order to operate as a member of this society.

The connection between language and **culture** has attracted much interest. With the rapid growth of foreign language teaching in recent years, this issue of language and culture has been of utmost prominence in Second Language Acquisition and intercultural communication being at the front position of learning a second language (Byram *et al.* 2002). Since then, there has been a growing recognition of the insufficiency of grammatical knowledge in communication. This outgrowth of importance was chiefly inspired by empirical studies that revealed the effects of native culture and language on the development of learners' L2 language proficiency proposing that for L2 learners to achieve a full competence in the target language, it is greatly important to take into account the sociocultural and pragmatic aspects of the target language (Ishihara & Cohen, 2010).

It is generally believed that language is not just a cognitive process, rather, a social construct that is used and acquired in social interaction. Research findings show that grammatical knowledge alone does not guarantee successful communication. According to Hymes (1972), the rules of grammar without the rules of use are useless. The implication is that sociocultural rules of appropriate language use are also part of language knowledge. Thus the incorporation of

the socio-cultural rules of the second language is of utmost significance as language knowledge includes knowledge of both use and usage with knowledge pragmatics being at forefront of socio-cultural knowledge.

Knowledge of pragmatics, based on appropriacy and acceptability in the given social context in communicating intended meaning, to Leech (1983) is, in turn, divided into pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic Knowledge. Thomas (1983) holds that pragmalinguistics concerns the linguistic means needed for communicative acts and sociopragmatics involves the social dimension of pragmatics and refers to appropriate social behavior in the target culture. Thus, pragmalinguistic failure implies conveying the intended meaning using inappropriate linguistic forms, and sociopragmatic failure is the lack of awareness of the social appropriacy. This failure, either sociopragmatic or pragmalinguistic, can have severe impacts on international politics, interpersonal relationship, and cause misunderstanding between the interlocutors (Takahashi & Beebe, 1987). Needless to say that the optimal level of pragmatic knowledge is not accessible in EFL contexts due to lack of similarity and proximity between the native culture and the target culture as research indicates the pragmatic awareness is greater in ESL students than EFL students suggesting that the target language context exerts a helpful effect on the sociopragmatic knowledge acquisition (Schauer, 2006; Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998).

For Jung (2002) pragmatic competence has several components and aspects. Accordingly, these aspects include: being able to perform speech acts, the ability to express and understand non-literal implication, to perform discourse and politeness functions as well as the ability to use cultural knowledge. These aspects of pragmatics are closely interrelated. In fact, in a given interpersonal communication act, they interact with each other to help get the message through.

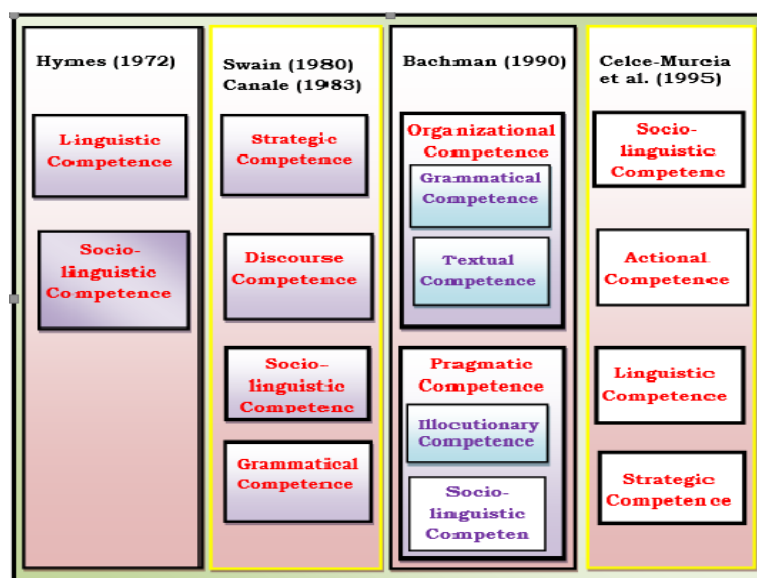


Figure 1. Models of Communicative Competence

B. Pragmatics and Speech Act Theory

Pragmatics entails the way people produce and receive a speech act in a social context. The notion of speech act was introduced by Austin (1962) suggesting that language is both saying and doing. Speech act is the performing of an activity using words or speech. A speech act, for Cohen (1996), is a functional unit of communication, and, to Searl (1969), is the basic unit of communication.

In speech act theory, the emphasis is on what the speakers intend by the utterances. The successful fulfillment of the utterance relies on two necessary conditions called felicity conditions. A felicity condition, according to Brown and Levinson (1987), is one of the real-world circumstances that are to be realized so that a specific speech act can function as planned.

In his conceptualization of speech acts, Austin (1962) categorizes three types of speech act. Accordingly, the three types of speech act are as follows:

1. **Locutionary act:** or the basic act of saying something which is meaningful and can be understood by the receiver.
2. **Illocutionary act:** the speaker's purpose or the performance of the act in saying it.
3. **Perlocutionary act:** the result or the influence of what was stated.

Speech act actually lies in the second or illocutionary act best as the intended meaning of the speaker in uttering the particular utterance. Likewise, Levinson (1983) links speech act to illocutionary act. Searl (1969) takes the Austinian concept of illocutionary act and further classifies it into five types: representatives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations.

C. *Pragmatics and Politeness*

Politeness causes confusion for the term can have different interpretations (Thomas, 1995). The reason for this confusion is that people define politeness in terms of pragmatics and not with the tendency to be nice to interlocutors. Politeness and speech acts are culturally loaded. To Barron (2003), the sociolinguistic politeness is the signals of respect and familiarity relevant to age, sex, and social position, while the lay notion of politeness is concerned with appropriate social behavior. In pragmatics sense, Thomas argues that politeness is concerned with strategies used to promote and maintain interpersonal relations.

Grice (1975) conceptualizes politeness in what he termed **cooperative principle**. Grice (1975) holds that the conversational involvement is as needed, at the stage it happens, by the established aims of the talk in which you are engaged. He summarizes his cooperative principle in four conversation maxims:

1. Quality: make your contribution as informative as needed
2. Quantity: make your contribution one that is true
3. Relation: be related to the point
4. Manner: be clear

Grice (1989) here introduces *implicature*. Accordingly, when there is failure in a maxim, the hearer tries to understand the message by deciding from the utterance. Thus, implicature is the additional implied information in the utterance to which the listener attends can successfully build speaker meaning. Grice aims at setting the ground for effective communication.

Leech (1983), in turn, invented *politeness principles* focusing on minimizing the expression of impolite beliefs and maximizing the expression of polite expressions. Leech's maxims of conversation include: tact, generosity, approbation, agreement, and sympathy.

Face is another notion which is taken to account in politeness. Goffman (1967) defines face as the positive social value a person claims for himself. Goffman also states that face can be scared, saved or lost. Brown and Levinson (1987), too, pay attention to face and emphasize that face can be lost, or enhanced and must be attended to in conversation. Brown and Levinson (1987) further differentiate between negative face and positive face. Negative face is the person's want to be free from imposition, and positive face is the desire to belong and be approved.

Politeness is heavily culturally bound and the context, or overall culture, plays a major role here. For a better understanding of message and a successful interaction, culture of the interlocutors is a determining factor. Supporting this view of the interplay between politeness and culture, Thomas (1995) states that politeness cannot be assessed out of context. The linguistic form alone is not accountable for politeness, rather, the context, the relationship between the speaker and hearer and the linguistic form, together, determine the politeness of a certain speech act.

D. *The Importance of Pragmatics*

The importance of pragmatic competence is greatly highlighted in the literature. Those speakers who are not pragmatically competent may seem uncooperative, or sometimes, worse, rude and insulting. Pragmatic competence does not necessarily develop with linguistic competence. Leech (1983) argues in favor of pragmatic competence when he splits linguistics into pragmatics, language use in different conditions, and grammar, decontextualized language system.

According to Locastro (2012) improving the learners' pragmatic knowledge is as important as developing IT and technology skills. Pragmatic knowledge is so important today. ESL/EFL teachers are the forefronts of pragmatics teaching. They are also highly held accountable for learners who intend to pursue their study or work abroad. So the EFL/ESL teachers need to continue to think critically about language use and prepare themselves. Locastro (2012) further argues that learners benefit from explicit pragmatics teaching and ideally become autonomous learners, in using pragmatics to solve communication problems and pushing their competence level. Thus, pragmatics attempts to offer students linguistic means and helps to learn and comprehend appropriate action (Yined Tello Rueda, 2006). It may imply the teaching of target language culture in the process of pragmatics acquisition. This issue of teaching culture is shared by several authors, such as Fantini (1997) and Kramsch (1998) suggesting that language expresses, embodies, and symbolizes cultural reality.

E. *The Importance of Teaching Pragmatics*

Teaching pragmatics is of great significance in language teaching especially in EFL contexts where the learners have no chance of exposure to the target language. Rose and Kasper (2001) argue that teaching pragmatics eases the learning of different facets of language. They hold that many features cannot be acquired without instruction, whether explicit or implicit. Accordingly, the teaching of pragmatics is not only facilitative, but also sometimes necessary for the acquisition of L2 pragmatic ability (Rose and Kasper, 2001).

Various tasks and activities can be utilized to instruct knowledge of pragmatics. Pragmatics teaching can be included in the language classroom in the form of authentic input in terms of examples and providing models and interpretations. Kasper (1997) maintains that activities are of two types: observation activities, to raise student's awareness, and practice activities to offer opportunity for practice such as role play. According to Rueda (2006), in EFL classrooms, pragmatics should be incorporated in the curricula to expose learners to appropriate target language input, raise students' awareness of pragmatics, and create authentic conditions to practice knowledge of pragmatics. To

Bardovi-Harling and Mahan Taylor (2003), the goal of teaching pragmatics is to facilitate learners' ability to find socially appropriate language for the communicative situation.

The vast variation of language functions and speech acts causes problems in teaching pragmatics (Williams, 1988), and, therefore, the teacher is advised to make the learners aware of pragmatics in language. Brock (2005) devises a teaching strategy in teaching pragmatics; that is, the use of SURE. S stands for *See*, U for *Use*, R for *Review*, and E for *Experience*. In the see part, the teacher help the learner see the language in context, and raises the awareness. In the use section, activities are developed to use the function in context. The review part, is intended for the reinforcement of the formerly taught functions, and in the experience phase, teachers arrange for the learners to experience and observe pragmatics in communication.

F. Pragmatic Assessment

Language assessment aims at gathering data about students' linguistic competence and makes reasonable judgments. Therefore, it is essential to choose the assessment instruments that are proper for the specific interpretation and intentions, particularly using a range of assessment instruments accessible for assessment. Generally, the quality of assessment is evaluated based on three vital principles: validity, reliability, and practicality. The basic concept of each criterion is discussed, and how these concerns are considered in a pragmatic assessment.

Even though the assessment of the pragmatic knowledge in the second language is a less studied area of pragmatics, few language teachers and testers approach this significant topic in language teaching and testing. Therefore, there exists a few tests of pragmatic knowledge and it is a field in need of more research. Attempts made so far to assess pragmatic knowledge have usually focused on speech-act framework and are frequently criticized for pragmatic construct underrepresentation (Yamashita, 2008; Roever, 2011). To test pragmatic knowledge, test designers select interactive discourse completion test (IDCT) as their target language use (TLU) task as it is significant and practical for the classroom learning as well as social cooperation (Roever, 2011). Since the learners may live in the target language location, they will confront situations where they need to use linguistically appropriate language and can function socially to apologize, make request, refuse, or ask for permission. Bardovi-Harlig (1996, cited in Crandall & Basturkmen, 2004) correctly argues that pragmatic competence is more important than linguistic competence as if a learner makes a pragmatic mistake, it is considered as more serious than a grammatical mistake.

In Purpura's (2004) theoretical model of pragmatic knowledge, pragmatic knowledge is divided into several categories namely contextual, sociolinguistic, sociocultural, psychological, and rhetorical meanings. The construct definition of a pragmatics test is based on Purpura's (2004) model. In this model, it is supposed that learners are familiar with contextual, sociolinguistic, and rhetorical pragmatic meanings, thus, this specific test only tests sociocultural and psychological meaning (Purpura, 2004).

The construct definition of pragmatics that is assumed for a testing project will certainly have an influence on the test. In Levinson's view (1983), pragmatics has traditionally involved in five chief parts: presupposition, conversational implicature, deixis, speech acts, and conversational structure. Pragmatics studies, in applied linguistics, have concentrated on the exploration of speech acts and conversational structure and conversational implicature.

Kasper (1996) suggested the following subjects which to consider in interlanguage pragmatics, with an eye on the assessment of any of them: nonnative speakers' understanding of illocutionary force and politeness; how they produce linguistic action, the influence of contextual factors on choices made in means and forms, how speakers sequence discourse and manage conversation, success and failure in pragmatics, and the shared communication of conversational objectives in personal meetings.

1. Pragmatic assessment; Reliability

Reliability concerns the stability of scores in different testing occasions. Thus, when a learner takes a test over time, and the score does not change meaningfully, it can be concluded that it is a reliable instrument indicating the consistency of the construct being measured. As this type of reliability necessitates the learners to take the same test repeatedly, this is not practical and cannot be determined easily. To eliminate the problem of multiple administration of a test in several occasions, internal consistency is often employed. Internal reliability, to Brown (2005), is measured by examining the relationship of different parts to the whole based on classical test theory methods. Brown (2008) states that the estimates of reliability in written discourse completion tasks (WDCTs), oral discourse completion tasks (ODCTs), self-assessment, and role-plays is relatively acceptable and high; but the multiple-choice discourse completion tests (MDCTs) are an exception. However, Brown (2008) and Yamashita (1996) reported contradictory results for internal reliability of the multiple-choice DCTs.

To come up with a solution for the issues of intra-rater reliability and bias, the Multifaceted Rasch model has been applied in many studies in the literature (Roever, 2008; Tajeddin & Alemi, 2014; Youn, 2007). It was revealed that different scorers showed different degrees of variation of scoring across different task but rater training can be effective in minimizing rater bias and augment reliability in their rating.

2. Pragmatic assessment; Validity

In comparison to reliability, there is little research on validity in the pragmatic assessment literature. Validity concerns the appropriateness of interpretation and use of test scores and the decisions made on the test results. Bachman (1990) divided validity into construct, content, and criterion-related validity based on the type of evidence needed to corroborate intended test score interpretations. Construct validity is the cornerstone of assessment and

Bachman & Palmer defines it as the meaningfulness and appropriacy of interpretations made based on the test scores (1996). Roever (2006), for example, used both comparison and correlation approaches to show that his test of implicature, routine, and speech acts reflect the construct of pragmalinguistic knowledge.

Discourse Completion Task or test is another instrument in measuring learner's pragmatic knowledge. But in using this types of tests, we should be cautious of cross-cultural differences among test takers. According to Rose (1994), a DCT can not be a valid instrument to evaluate pragmatic knowledge cross-culturally. Accordingly, the supposition that the same DCT to be utilized in both Western and non-Western environments to stimulate similar speech acts did not hold (Rose, 1994). The standard DCT format make learners perform speech acts that they would not perform in such contexts. To Rose, multiple choice DCTs which contain the element of choice could be more revealing. In line with Rose, Brown (2001), too, stated that discourse completion tasks and other pragmatic measurement instruments were unsuccessful to prompt constant behavior from different tasks tackling the same facets of competence.

Content validity to Bachman & Palmer (1996) is the degree of correspondence of the features of a given language test task to the characteristics of a TLU (target language use) task. We can prove content validity by referring experts' subjective judgment about the degree of correspondence of the content of a given test in comparison to the features target language use (TLU) domain. As for the content validity of pragmatic test, there has been little research to settle the content validity of a pragmatic measurement. The reason for the deficit is that pragmatic measurement is a research tool, not as an instrument, and it by no means necessitates test givers to show that the test content fits the content of the non-testing condition.

3. Pragmatic assessments; Practicality

Practicality is an issue that needs to be considered in assessing the quality of a given test. Practicality concerns the availability of human and material resources for the administration and use of a certain test. Bachman & Palmer (1996) define practicality as the relationship between the resources required in the design, development, and use of the test, and the resources which are available. Thus, if the resources that are required for a given test are more than available resources, it is impractical and, as a result, would be unlikely to be administered, no matter how reliable and valid it is. Thus, when designing and developing a test, at the initial phase, it is necessary to evaluate the human and material resources, time, and cost that are needed for the test.

The practicality of a test, to a great extent, relies on the purpose and use of a given test. Some researchers (for example Brown, 2001; Liu, 2007; Roever, 2006) have discussed pragmatic assessment in terms of test development, administration, and scoring. In this regard, in terms of scoring, multiple-choice Discourse Completion Task, DCT, are time-efficient as well as cost-effective. But, to Liu (2007) and Roever (2006), in multiple DCT it is problematic to write reliable and valid options and distractors for every item. The alternatives to multiple-choice DCT tasks are written and oral DCT tasks. Compared with the multiple-choice DCT tasks, written and oral DCTs are relatively easy to develop and can stimulate actual reactions from language learners, but are more expensive to administer and score.

III. CONCLUSION

Measuring second language pragmatic knowledge has been done since 1992, but the validity, reliability, and practicality of the instruments used to measure this competence were under question as it was discovered, in the literature, that these instruments were limited, less valid, and less reliable. Thus, we needed to revise the traditional measurement tools and settle the problem or continue to encounter the persisting problems of L2 pragmatic competence measurement. So far, researchers have used new item forms for L2 pragmatics research which have the potential to heighten task validity and practicality, and to yield more valid measurements of pragmatic competence. However, when it comes to making decisions about test takers, we have to take into account reliability, validity, and practicality of these task types based on their intended use. In case of production tasks, such as conversation simulations and written exchanges, we should carefully plan the scoring scheme as well as scorer reliability should be examined. For recognition tasks, for example pragmaticity judgments, appropriate speech acts prediction, tests of conversational implicature, and speech act interpretation, it is important and necessary to check for internal consistency and validate these test tasks through comparison or correlational approaches.

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