



مجلة كامبريدج للبحوث العلمية



مجلة علمية محكمة تصدر عن مركز كامبريدج
للبحوث والمؤتمرات في مملكة البحرين

العدد - ٣٧

أيلول - ٢٠٢٤

CJSP
ISSN-2536-0027

صدر العدد بالتعاون مع

جامعة المشرق

العراق بغداد . طريق المطار الدولي

The Pragmatic Competence of the Iraqi EFL Learners

Attaa Qasim Tehamesh

Wasit University College of Basic Education

Abstract

The aim of the present study is to investigate how the pragmatic competence used by the students of Diyala University department of English. Essentially, when someone speaks, they are acting. It implies that individuals are capable of performing any action by the use of words like ask, order, assert, apologize, thank you, etc. People use their words to perform actions in addition to producing utterances with grammatical rules to convey ideas. The ٣٦ students in the English Education Department of Diyala University provided the data for the speeches. The findings demonstrate that when performing the speech actions of praising, apologizing, and refusing, university students used essentially the same pragmatic tactics. Due to their awareness of the targeting language's context, it is expected that the participants would be able to converse. Therefore, it's advised EFL learners to give learners more opportunity to experience English, particularly in terms of cultural variances in language usage.

Background

Language can be considered a medium for exploring concepts and human emotions. It's a type of thought, or notion in which people convey and share knowledge, feelings, experiences, and information in order to comprehend, influence, and convince individuals. As Sapir states, "Language is a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions, and desires by means of voluntarily produced symbols," it is possible to achieve a certain effect through language (Poole, ١٨٦٩:٤).

As a fundamental human activity, communication involves language in a significant way. Language is not only viewed as an item to be investigated, but it is also considered to play a crucial role in many facets of life, including social, military, economic, and even political. In a nutshell, language is the main form of human communication. Societal circumstances impact how language is used to achieve a variety of goals insofar as these restrictions determine the users' access

to and control over what the dialogue represents. It is a subject of pragmatics(Hamdani, ٢٠١٩: ٣١).

Some linguists think that because sentences may convey meaning on their own, language can be regarded as an abstract system outside of context. They contend that each of us has a mental model of the world. In other terms, as well as the language is used correctly grammatically, we already have an idea of the factors that will aid us in establishing its meaning. This assertion may be true to a certain extent. However, it still appears that relying solely on linguistic proficiency to negotiate meaning is insufficient for effective communication (McCarthy, ٢٠٠١).

The research on language use in environment, which integrates language's form and function in negotiating meaning, has elevated pragmatics as a method to more fully understand language, which is relevant to the problem raised above. Pragmatics bridges the divide between language usage in the classroom and language usage in daily life. Therefore, rather than depending exclusively on grammatical rules or semantic interpretations, it is proposed that English instructors teach Esl learners how to communicate by taking context into account. (FromkinBlair & Collins, ١٩٩٩).

The truth is that when traditional language-teaching methods have emphasized memory of grammar and vocabulary rules, these approaches have mainly been successful in achieving their aim of assisting language learners in becoming proficient language users. Even if the learners are linguistically proficient, their inability to utilize the target language effectively could somehow cause them to fail pragmatically as a result of issues with socio-cultural differences(Savignon, ١٩٩٧).

The skill that developing pragmatic competence comes naturally. It is directly related to pragmatic knowledge and cultural awareness among English language learners. It also has an impact on how well students use the language. Additionally, English language learners find it difficult to avoid making pragmatic mistakes in cross-cultural communication due to a lack of pragmatic expertise (Kasper & Rose, ٢٠٠١).

Therefore, it stands to reason to investigate how illocutionary acts are produced by EFL university students as a sign of their pragmatic proficiency. It would seem that acquiring pragmatic competence early on in language learning is essential because it is one of the key components of communicative competence (Kasper, ٢٠٠١).

Discourse Completion Task (DCT)

In linguistics and pragmatics, a “Discourse-Completion Task (DCT) is a method used to elicit specific speech activities. A DCT is a one-sided role play in which one player reads a scenario prompt to elicit the replies of the other participant. According to Levenston's research, Shoshana Blum(١٩٨٩: ١٣-١٤) originally created the instrument to compare how native and non-native Hebrew speakers realize speech acts”.

A discourse-completion “task consists of scripted dialogue representing various scenarios, preceded by a short prompt describing the setting and situation. The prompt usually includes information on social distance between participants and pre-event background to help the participant construct the scenarios”(Blum, ١٩٨٩: ١٣-١٤).

Discourse Completion Task (DCT), “which was developed by Beebe et al. (١٩٩٠), employed for collecting the data related to the use of refusal strategies by the students in the English Education Department of Diyala University. The data collected from DCT was analyzed by using a loading scheme adapted from Beebe et al”. (١٩٩٠).

Presentation of Data

After the gathering of important information from ٣٦ participants, this component includes the responses in English of the chosen individuals to situations that are comparable (refusals). SPSS statistical methods were used to analyze the data that had been collected. To address the study's initial question, "To what extent does pragmatic competence influence student conversations in higher education?" and "How might pragmatic methods be applied among students in higher education?" To analyze the gathered data, a loading approach developed from Beebe et al. (١٩٩٠) was utilized.

Research Questions

١. To what extent pragmatic competence effect the conversation between student in university?
٢. How can pragmatic strategies be used among students in university?
٣. How can these strategies be used to develop students' competence in communication?

Method

- Participants

This article's methodology is descriptive research. ٣٦ college students from Diyala University's English Education Department provided the data on utterances.

- Instruments

To collect “the data for this study the researcher used the tool Discourse Completion Task in which is developed by Beebe et al. (١٩٩٠), about the speech. In recent years DCT has become the standard method of pragmatic knowledge evaluation for assessing knowledge of speech acts Kasper (٢٠٠٠)”. The participants “were instructed to finish the task by writing down their answers to each case in DCT. Finally, the information gathered was coded according to the taxonomy of speech act amplified by Beebe et al. (١٩٩٠). The interview is also used as a tool of data collection”.

Data Collection Procedures

This study included ٣٦ participants, “college students from Diyala University's English Education Department. Participants were instructed to carefully read the introduction information supplied before each situation in order to recognize the type of every statement”. “The statements were an invitation, a request, an offer or a suggestion and the social status of interlocutors were higher, equal or lower. They were also instructed that the only way to provide an answer to any question by refusal. The participants were given half an hour to complete the DCT in English”.

Data Analysis Procedures

Following the “collection of pertinent data from ٣٦ participants, this component responses to similar situations (refusals) by the selected participants in English language. The data obtained was analyzed using statistical techniques SPSS. To answer the study's first question, To what extend pragmatic competence effect the conversation between student in university?”, “how can pragmatic strategies be used among students in university?, How can these strategies be used to develop students' competence in communication? A loading strategy adapted from Beebe et al. (١٩٩٠), was used to examine the obtained data”.

The classification of the refusal methods “employed by the two groups of respondents according to the type of the refusal strategy contained in this study was performed using data content analysis; direct, indirect refusal strategies or adjuncts to refusals, based on a distribution system proposed by Beebe et al. (١٩٩٠). Furthermore, the data acquired through the DCT was examined using an individualistic analysis of each response using the semantic formulas developed by Beebe et al”. (١٩٩٠).

Using Pragmatic Proficiency When Teaching Languages

The objectives of language education in EFL scenarios should be established to fulfill the demands of the language learners and aid in the growth and enhancement of their spoken and written communicative ability. In other words, learning a foreign language should be done primarily for the purpose of improving communication fluency and accuracy in both spoken and written forms. The pragmatic meaning that can be inferred from grammatical structures and the semantic meaning of words and structures that can be found in dictionaries and grammars are the two forms of meaning that language teachers should impart to their students (Hamdani, ٢٠١٩:٣٢).

Pragmatics provides a chance to comprehend what is being stated more fully. Therefore, it is necessary for language learners to be able to comprehend and utilize language effectively depending on the communication environment (Yule, ١٩٩٦).

The Elements That Determine L² Pragmatic Competence

Given significance of pragmatic competence, it is thought that the following variables directly affect the development of pragmatic competence: input availability, the impact of training, level of proficiency, duration of exposure, and transfer.

١. when we talk about input availability, we mostly mean the practical input found in textbooks and in classroom discussions. Here, teachers should offer a variety of tasks to the students.

٢. The provision of pragmatic input is believed to be significantly influenced by instruction. Education should place a heavy emphasis on the similarities and differences between the L¹ and L² languages in order to give students the confidence to speak the target language in light of their understanding of cultural differences.

٣. The learners' degree of proficiency may also have an impact on pragmatic competence. It speaks to a learner's capacity for understanding things in a variety of ways. It is assumed that more accomplished learners have adequate pragmatic control over the L². The sequence and frequency of the semantic formulas used by low proficiency and high proficiency learners vary. According to certain studies, those with lower competence levels performed their acts more directly than people with greater proficiency levels (Takahashi and Bebe, ١٩٩٣).

Pragmatic Failure

Lack of thorough and appropriate reference to the social rules may result in a pragmatic failure due to the inability to understand what is meant by what is

spoken that has linguistically correct words . Ineffective cross-cultural communication can be hampered by errors influence that could have been avoided by using pragmatic discernment (Thomas, ١٩٨٣).

Interlanguage Pragmatic

Interlanguage pragmatics, a field of study that looks at how nonnative speakers interpret and create action in a target language, is also introduced as a language use study. Interlanguage pragmatics, then, seeks to explain how L₂ learners acquire the capacity to comprehend and engage in action in a target linguistic (Kasper & Rose, ٢٠٠٢).

Interlanguage pragmatics understanding is necessary for L₂ learners because they frequently find it difficult to understand the nonliteral meaning of statements that have a strong cultural influence. While production in interlanguage pragmatics explains how L₂ students employ the strategies to carry out various speech acts, like requests, apologies, and refusals.

Speech Acts

An aspect of pragmatics is the study of speech acts. Speech acts encompass the entire communicative situation, including the utterance's context, which may add to the interaction's meaning. They don't just refer to the act of speaking. Speech acts are statements that are intended to carry out an action rather than discuss a situation. Speech behaviors are a component of language. Speech acts are actions that speakers carry out through their words. According to Searle (١٩٦٩:١٦), "to consider the token as a message is to take it as a produced or issued token. [S]peech acts.....are the basic or simplest components of linguistic communication."

Speech Acts: Thankfulness

A speaker's "thanking" "is an illocutionary act based on an action the hearer took in the past. When the speaker expresses thanks or appreciation, it is considered an expression of gratitude. Thanksgiving is regarded as one of the most significant social activities because it fosters a sense of warmth and unity among those who are being thanked. Gratitude is a spoken act that can be expressed in a variety of ways".

Speech Acts Set: Apology

When a social standard is violated, an apology is the appropriate verbal act to use. Apologies are examples of expressive speech acts, in which speakers make an effort to convey their attitude or state of mind. An apology is required when someone's action or statement offends another person.

The university students used the following examples of apologizing techniques:

١. "I'm really sorry"

(Reply to situation: You enter the university gate hastily while in a hurry. You accidentally hit some girls, knocking one of their watches on the ground. You break it yourself. The watch appears to be her favorite.)

٢. "Sorry, I think we have to cancel our plan today".

(Reply to scenario: You and a friend have plans to see the movies. Your motorcycle runs out of gas on the way there and is unable to operate. The gas station is some distance away. You make the decision to postpone your plans to see the movie until tomorrow.

٣. "Sorry sir, I forget to do my homework."

(An answer to the situation: Your assignment is due today and you forgot to finish it. You've never forgotten to do your homework before.

Demand Speech Act Set

A request is an expression of the speaker's anticipation for the hearer to carry out a task for which the speaker has faith in the capability of the listener. The primary utterance that fulfills the request function may be used on its own, without any modifiers, to express the request.

Speech Acts Set: Refusal

When a speaker expresses a refusal to an invitation or request directly or indirectly, it is known as a speech act. Because it defies the listener's expectations and is frequently accomplished by subterfuge, refusing is a face-threatening act. As a result, it necessitates a high degree of pragmatic proficiency.

Discussion of the Results

The spoken act of "thanking" is the subject of this study's initial attention. Thanking is an expressive speaking act because it lets the recipient know how the speaker feels. In expressing thankfulness, the speaker acknowledges the hearer's assistance in an earlier action that benefited the speaker. The straightforward approach helped people appreciate the value of saying "thank you" in order to foster a sense of community and camaraderie and to express gratitude for a favor or gift. Direct thanking encouraged students to use native-like production that was also impacted by Iraqi culture to express their gratitude in both student-student and student-teacher interactions. In order to maintain excellent connections with their interlocutors, the speaker made an effort to establish a warm and polite atmosphere.

Apologies are the next topic under inquiry in this case. Apologies are within the genre of expressive speech acts, in which speakers attempt to indicate their mood or status when a behavioral norm is broken.

The debate then moves on to the spoken act of asking. When a speaker asks their audience to do something, that is a request. Without making the right demands, the speakers may not get the results they want, the listeners may feel humiliated, and the interlocutors' rapport may weaken. To put it another way, it is believed that using the right strategies when making a request would help you get the results you want.

The speaking act of refuse would be the next area of focus. In other words, a speaker engages in a speech act of denial when they explicitly or implicitly decline an invitation or request. The university students commonly used combination tactics, particularly after they realized they had been rejected. They did this by combining their direct and indirect rejections, regret, and reason. The university students in this study tended to say "sorry" first, followed by an explanation of their justifications, and occasionally by an explicit assertion of denial. The tactic was thought to make the refusal realization stronger and more authentic in relationships between students and students as well as between students and teachers.

The ways that different civilizations carry out speech actions vary. When students from various cultures interact with one another, those discrepancies could cause miscommunication or pragmatic failure. Therefore, it is essential for EFL teachers to increase their students' knowledge or ability of acceptable language use in implementing the target language speech acts in order to prevent cross-cultural misunderstandings. In other words, teaching a foreign language also entails educating a foreign culture.

Conclusions

The fact that the students fundamentally understood thanking, requesting, and denying in the same pragmatic manner revealed that their competency levels were comparable. The paper also stated that the students responded to the speech acts of thanking and asking in a way that was consistent with native speakers by using appropriate pragmatic strategies. They used the appropriate pragmatic competence techniques to respond to the speech acts of apologies and denial in a native-like manner. It was hypothesized that the participants' responses to the activities were influenced by the Iraqi culture. On both the sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic levels, the students' native language and culture typically had a

negative pragmatic transfer on them, which led to pragmatic failure in cross-cultural communication.

Because their native language and culture had an effect on the tactics they favored using when enacting their speech acts, it can be assumed that the students prioritized intimacy, informality, closeness, solidarity, and the need for politeness in order to maintain the relationship with their interlocutors. Therefore, it is advised that EFL professors and lecturers who facilitate the teaching and learning process give the students more opportunity to experience English, particularly in terms of cultural diversity. It attempts to increase the students' awareness of cultural variance.

Bibliography

- Austin, J. L. ١٩٧٥. How to Do Things with Words. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Blum-Kulka, S., House, J., & G. Kasper. (١٩٨٩). Investigating cross-cultural pragmatics: An introductory overview. In Blum-Kulka, S., House, J., & G. Kasper (Eds.), Cross-cultural pragmatics: Requests and apologies (pp. ١-٣٤). Norwood, NJ: Ablex, p. ١٣-١٤
- Fromki, V., Blair, D., & Collins, P. ١٩٩٩. An introduction to Linguistics, ٤th edition. NSW : Harcourt Australia Pty Ltd.
- Golato, A. (٢٠٠٣). Studying compliment responses: A comparison of DCTs and recordings of naturally occurring talk. Applied Linguistics, ٢٤(١), ٩٠-١٢١.
- Hamdani, B. (٢٠١٩). PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE AMONG EFL LEARNERS.
- Kasper, G & Rose, K.R. ٢٠٠٢. Pragmatic Development in a second language. Oxford : Blackwell.
- Kasper, G., & Schmidt, R. ١٩٩٦. Development issues in interlanguage pragmatics. Studies in second language Acquisition. ١٨, ١٤٩-١٦٩.
- Levinson, Stephen C. ١٩٨٣. Pragmatics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- McCarthy, M. ٢٠٠١. Issues in Applied Linguistics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Poole, Stuart.C. ١٨٦٩. An introduction to Linguistics. Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press: Macmillan Publishers Ltd
- Savignon, S. ١٩٩٧. Communicative competence: Theory and classroom practice texts and contexts in second language learning. New York : McGraw-Hill.
- Searle, J. R. ١٩٦٩. Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Takahashi,T and Beebe,L.M. ١٩٨٦. Transfer and pragmatic Competence in Second Language Acquisition. Paper presented in the international TESOL convention Anaheim, California, March٦.

Taghizadeh, R. (٢٠١٧). Pragmatic competence in the target language: a study of Iranian learners of English (Doctoral dissertation). University of Salford, Greater Manchester, England.

Yule, G. ١٩٩٦. Pragmatics. London: Oxford University Press.

