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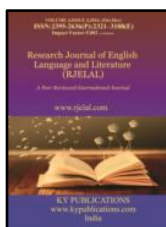
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DEVELOPING INTERLANGUAGE PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE (A Comparative Study)

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ABSTRACT

Naturally, second language learners feel nervous and less confident at acquiring interlanguage pragmatic. It is certainly a tiring and hard process which requires strenuous efforts. This difficulty arises from the tough and complex nature of the very process itself particularly with shy practitioners. What further toughens the process even more is that learners should develop along interlanguage pragmatic a sensitive sagacity of social awareness, with a full grasp of how language operates in social and cultural context (Kasper & Roever, 2005). Moreover, it may turn out to be hard for learners to grasp with a reasonable degree of precision of what is pragmatically acceptable in diverse cultural and sub-cultural setting (Barron, 2005). In view of the challenges presented by L2 pragmatic acquisition, greater understanding of the process and those factors that may contribute to pragmatic acquisition in additional languages is a worthwhile goal, and should help to illuminate further some aspects of the overall process of second language acquisition (SLA) as well.

Key Words: interlanguage pragmatic, complex nature, cultural and sub-cultural setting, social awareness.

Introduction

Pragmalinguistics, which is essentially a combination of pragmatics and linguistics, has actually resulted in generating quite a number of questions foremost of which is how the language faculty and the pragmatic system correspond. Ochs (1979) and Schieffelin (1979) discussed the contribution of ethnographic observation of child language use to the understanding of developmental first language pragmatics. Researchers exploring second language acquisition and their counterpart working on pragmatic competence have been considering the possibility of whether pragmatic competence can be acquired in ways similar to those used in a second language acquisition. Researchers investigating the field of

interlanguage pragmatics more specifically (e.g., Kasper & Schmidt, 1996) have become known as second language pragmatics research began to stand out independently as a research discipline in its own right with in the larger field of SLA research. The ultimate goal as far as second language pragmatics is concerned is to improve and advance research in the area of pragmatic competence as a distinct autonomous discipline to address questions largely linked with second language acquisition theory.

A great deal of current research in the field of L2 pragmatic development has concentrated on input, individual differences, and noticing (e.g., Kasper & Rose, 2002; Takahashi, 2005a) as well as pragmatic transfer from a learner's first language

(Al-Issa, 2003; Byon, 2004; Rose, 2000; Yoon, 1991) and classroom instructional practices (e.g., Davies, 2004; Rose, 2005; Rose & Kasper, 2001; Yates, 2004) as they affect the acquisition of pragmatic competence in L2. Another aspect of developmental pragmatics research that has received much attention recently is the type of data that are best suited for pragmatics studies. Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (2005) have pointed out the desirability of conducting research in interlanguage pragmatics that recognizes the tension between “highly controlled production tasks that yield comparable language samples and...the investigation of authentic discourse” (p. 1). Ohta (2001, 2005), among others, has charted a course in interlanguage and developing L2 pragmatics research that relies almost exclusively on naturally occurring classroom data and naturalistic observational research.

Some of the more frequently explored questions in the L2 developmental pragmatics literature are: (a) How does pragmatic competence relate to other aspects of language competence? (b) How does a second language learner’s first language and culture impact her acquisition of pragmatic competence in L2? (c) Is pragmatic competence in a second language teachable (i.e., is there an effect for instruction on L2 pragmatic competence acquisition)? (d) If so, are different methods of instruction more effective than others in terms of facilitating the acquisition of L2 pragmatic competence? Kasper and Rose (2002) have posited three basic types of questions that studies on the effect of instruction on pragmatics seek to answer:

1. Is the targeted pragmatic feature teachable at all?
2. Is instruction in the targeted feature more effective than no instruction?
3. Are different teaching approaches differentially effective? (p. 249).

The present paper contributes expressly to the already conducted studies in the same field that investigates the effects of specific instructional approaches on developing L2 pragmatic competence, and thus is relevant for Kasper and Rose’s first and third questions. The research questions, discussed later in this chapter, do not directly contrast instruction with no instruction, but

certainly have implications for the overall teachability of the pragmatic speech acts considered.

Pragmatics

As many as quite a number of various definitions have been suggested by linguists to account for the term pragmatics. One such definition is that proposed by Crystal (in Kasper, 2001: 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 participants in the act of communication.” In other words, pragmatics is defined as the study of communicative action in its sociocultural context. Kasper (2001:2) 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.

Pragmatic competence is a type of cognitive performance which interfaces with other human cognitive systems such as knowledge of logical rules, mind-reading of others’ intentions or beliefs, interpreting of each other’s behavior, and other kinds of background knowledge, including knowledge of social conditions. Pragmatic competence can become manifest in instances of linguistic performance, namely the production and interpretation of verbal utterances. For the purposes of this work, data obtained from linguistic performance of communicators or addressees in the form of natural language output is used for assessing the development of pragmatic competence in L2.

It follows from the above that linguistic competence/performance and pragmatic competence are studied in this work as inter-related abilities. Pragmatic competence relies on linguistic competence for being the instrument of thought and public communication. For example, linguistic competence is required for pragmatic competence to become manifest in verbal communication. But linguistic performance relies not only on linguistic competence, but also on pragmatic competence for

invoking humans' inferential ability to process information, and utterances in particular.

Pragmatics has been divided into two categories by Leech and Thomas (in Kasper, 200, 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 pragmalinguistics resource of apologizing. Sociopragmatics has been described by Leech (1990: 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 communicative acts (Holmes, 2001). Sociopragmatics is about proper social behavior. Learners must be made aware of the consequences of making pragmatic choices.

Speech Acts

Simply they are an utterance considered as an action, particularly with regard to its intention, purpose, or effect. The current application of the term is attributable to J. L. Austin's development of performative utterances and his theory of locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts. *Speech acts* are commonly taken to include such acts as promising, ordering, greeting, warning, inviting and congratulating. Consequently, they are part and parcel or a subfield of the study of pragmatics.

Locutionary, Illocutionary, and Perlocutionary Acts

The type of the performed act is essentially an important element in determining the way speech act is viewed or interpreted. Austin (1975) categories all speech acts as belonging to one of

three categories: locutionary, illocutionary, or perlocutionary acts.

Locutionary acts are, according to Susana Nuccetelli and Gary Seay's "Philosophy of Language: The Central Topics," "the mere act of producing some linguistic sounds or marks with a certain meaning and reference." However, these are the least effective means of describing the acts, merely an umbrella term for illocutionary and perlocutionary acts, which can occur simultaneously.

Illocutionary acts, then, carry a directive for the audience. It might be a promise, an order, an apology, or an expression of thanks. These express a certain attitude and carry with their statements a certain illocutionary force, which can be broken into families.

Perlocutionary acts, on the other hand, bring about a consequence to the audience if something is not done. Unlike illocutionary acts, perlocutionary acts project a sense of fear into the audience.

Take for instance the perlocutionary act of saying, "I will not be your friend." Here, the impending loss of friendship is an illocutionary act while the effect of frightening the friend into compliance is a perlocutionary act.

Language and verbal communication

An eminent assumption in the relatively recent history of second language pragmatics has been the view that language and communication are two sides of a single coin. Language is primarily used to "... transmit information, to perform transactions, to establish and maintain social relations, to construct one's identity or to communicate one's intentions, attitudes or hypotheses" (Purpura 2004, 61). Influenced by speech-act theory, the communicative perspective to L2 research has been inspired by the widespread concern for what language can be used to achieve in terms of actions performed during interaction. To date, most research, assessment and teaching in L2 pragmatics has evolved from this central assumption. In this section, I would like to suggest an alternative direction into how language can be explored towards the development of pragmatic competence in the L2.

In their seminal publication of *Relevance*, Sperber and Wilson (1986/1995) argued against a necessary link between language and communication, on two grounds. Firstly, communication can take place in the absence of a language or code, as in ostensive-inferential communication. If Mary smiles ostensively in response to Peter asking about her job interview, there is a range of interpretations he can assign to her behaviour, from pleasure or amusement, to sarcasm or contempt. Similarly, in Sperber and Wilson's example (Sperber and Wilson 1986/1995, 59–60), there is a wide range of closely related interpretations Peter can assign to Mary's sniffing ostensively at the seaside smells when he asks her if she has paid the rent: from indifference to mundane errands to a negative (or teasingly affirmative) reply, with further fine-grained implicatures possibly conveyed. Secondly, languages exist which are not used for communication, or were not originally conceived of for communication. Obsolete languages, such as ancient Greek, are nowadays studied primarily for valuable insights into civilizations of antiquity, rather than used for online communication (even though used so in the past). Since the beginning of time, music is used for expression of individual and cultural identity, but can be a means of communication when used for entertainment, and other social functions (Arom 1994, 139–140). The genetic code (ACGT, Adenine, Cytosine, Guanine, Thymine) is used to describe the form in which information is carried by DNA, but can be used to communicate information, too (Alberts et al. 2003, 210). Formal mathematics is an extension of our mathematical intuitions observed in newborns and in first civilizations' recording product surpluses and trading. Mathematical tools were invented recently to "serve as a medium of computation that surmounted the limitations of short-term memory, just as silicon chips do today" (Pinker 1997, 40). Finally, natural languages too have many social and cultural uses in addition to their communicative function, such as indexing group identity, social stratification, entertainment and recreation. Neither everyday activities such as talking to yourself, practicing lines for a play, or baptizing babies are instances of communication, as Blakemore observes (Blakemore 1992, 33). Clearly,

natural or artificial languages were not designed for communication, but in several cases, evolved as such.

Viewed from a biological perspective, the question is whether language evolved under selective pressure for a communication system among humans, or evolved as a symbolic system of thought, with communication as a secondary application of that ability. Chomsky has argued for the latter (Chomsky 1966; Chomsky 2010) using the systematic structural incompleteness of sentences as a central argument. Structural ambiguities such as *Mary said he was leaving on Tuesday* do not exist in the communicator's thoughts, but in a parsing system not as well-designed to avoid ambiguities in its own right. The conflict between conditions of computational efficiency and ease of comprehension illustrated by the example above mirrors the pervasive under-determinacy of language. For communication to succeed via a language not so well-designed, humans must have an internal language which is rich enough to represent intentions and to license inferential processes which are complex enough to resolve the conflict between computational efficiency and ease of communication. This work argues that this disparity is significant for communication to succeed in L2 too, and hence is – or should be – explicitly taught.

Instruction and Developing L2 Pragmatic Competence

Multiple studies have focused only recently on the effects of various aspects of L2 instruction on learners' developing pragmatic competence (e.g., Liddicoat & Crozet, 2001; Rose & Ng, 2001; Tateyama, 2001). Following Rose (2005), one of the chief issues that were addressed in many of the instruction and pragmatic development studies have been: (a) to what extent are pragmatic awareness and production teachable skills? (Kasper & Roever, 2005; Ohta, 2001); (b) how do (explicit and implicit) instruction and exposure to the L2 alone (e.g., in naturalistic language learning) compare in terms of effectiveness in facilitating the acquisition of L2 pragmatic norms? (Liddicoat & Crozet, 2001; Rose, 2005); and (c) do different instructional approaches (e.g., implicit vs. explicit instruction) affect the

acquisition of L2 pragmatic competence differentially? (Rose & Ng, 2001; Tateyama, 2001).

In addressing the key questions posed above, researchers in the area of developing L2 pragmatics have focused on many different aspects of the acquisition process. Several productive studies have been carried out in the context of child immersion education programs. Lyster (1994), for example, investigated the effects of a particular teaching method (functional-analytic teaching) on the sociolinguistic competence of French Grade 8 immersion students. In other studies, the focus has been on the discourse strategies that learners use in developing L2 pragmatic competence in the context of immersion instruction. For example, Kanagy (1999) investigated the acquisition of interactional classroom routines among English-speaking kindergarten-level immersion students learning Japanese.

Studies such as Kanagy's (1999) and Lyster's (1994) shed light on the general effects of formal instruction (immersion in particular) on child L2 pragmatic competence development, and have the added benefit of being analogous in terms of participants and the context of instruction to Swain (e.g., 1998) and Swain and Lapkin's (e.g., 1995) research into the role of Output in the SLA processes of French immersion students. The present study is essentially a simultaneous examination of instructional effects on L2 pragmatic acquisition and the effects of Output on the acquisitional process, albeit with several key differences from Lyster, Kanagy, and Swain's research efforts (e.g., a focus on adult ESL learners).

Languages and Communication

On the assumption that "Languages are indispensable not for communication, but for information processing; this is their essential function" (Sperber and Wilson 1986/1995, 172), this work shifts concern to genuinely inferential abilities which L2 learners draw on to process implicatures (such as metaphor and irony) in contexts they create during interpretation.¹ In the relevance-theoretic framework, human natural language is a unique manifestation of a grammar-governed representational system which serves, albeit not systematically linked to, communication in the same

way that prehensile organs may serve, albeit not systematically linked in nature to, social interaction, except for the exceptional case of elephants' trunks. It is the interesting coincidence of language used to communicate that is unique to humans, rather than the privilege of humans as the only species to possess it. As Sperber and Wilson point out:

The activities which necessarily involve the use of a language (i.e. a grammar-governed representational system) are not communicative but cognitive. Language is an essential tool for the processing and memorizing of information. As such it must exist not only in humans but also in a wide variety of animals and machines with information-processing abilities. Any organism or device with the ability to draw inferences must have a representational system whose formulas stand in both syntactic and semantic relations to each other. Clearly, these abilities are not confined in humans. (Sperber and Wilson 1986/1995, 173)

Following Sperber and Wilson who rejected the assumption that there is a necessary link between language and communication, it is worth considering the incidental case whereby they do become linked, as in verbal communication. Having rejected the assumption that language is a necessary medium for communication, and the assumption that language is necessarily a medium for communication, language will be examined as a necessary *attribute* of communicating entities. For communication to take place, communicating entities must be able to internally represent information and, to do so, they must have an internal language sophisticated enough to attribute intentions to other organisms and engage in complex inferential processes. Notwithstanding their ability to communicate by ostension and inference, humans communicate by external languages such as Greek, and English. In doing so, humans rely partly on coding and decoding, contrary to cognitively simple organisms who can engage in coded communication only, as bees, for example. Verbal communication is never a matter of simply

coding and decoding since external languages do not encode (i.e. do not exhaust by encoding) the information humans are interested in communicating. Linguistic encodings are incomplete semantic representations of our thoughts which must be inferentially enriched before they can be understood as representing meanings which addressees are able to relate to.

Handling Oral Production

Certain issues are believed to be of great use in teaching and improving oral skills at classroom settings, Brown (2001), including accuracy and fluency, conversational discourse, pronunciation, affective factors and the interaction effect. According to Brown that the demonstration of an ability to accomplish pragmatic goals through interactive discourse with other speakers of the language is essentially required for effective communication. In order for the success of handling effective classroom interaction, the following three components should be viewed in an interconnected manner: the learner, the teacher and the classroom context or environment.

Another crucial factor to be considered in relation to conversation classroom is the question of pronunciation. Pronunciation is best taught through practice and imitation. Though a number of theories and approaches have been suggested in this respect for the improvement of pronunciation, very little achievement has realized. Pronunciation is an area which is very difficult to improve on. Brown (2001) stresses the importance of teaching pronunciation in a discourse for intelligible pronunciation.

Proper English language teaching can eventually lead to fluency and accuracy. The initial goal of language teaching and learning is the realization of fluency which will then be followed by accuracy on basis of long and steady practice.

Face-saving or apprehension can stop many learners from effective practice which has the effect of keeping them to their old standards of learning. Hence, teachers should do their level best as to encourage students to drop their apprehension and start conversing.

Generating Oral Production

There are multiple categories which can help the learner involve in oral production.

However, for the sake of space in the present study only six ones will be dealt with here. These are namely, imitative, intensive, responsive, transactional, interpersonal and extensive. The imitative phase focuses mainly on practicing a certain sound which might be thought of as a trouble causing sound or English intonation for semantic purposes. One sound which causes a pronunciation problem for Arab students is the sound /p/ which is not part of Arabic language phonemic system. Consequently, an intensive imitative drilling is of paramount importance to be mastered.

Responsive step is mainly associated with quick answers either to the teacher or their peers. Such kind of short responses are hardly extended into longer stretches of speech as dialogues. Examples:

e.g. 1. T. Where have you been this morning?

S: To the airport.

e.g. 2. S1: Have you read this book, by Tayeb Salih?

S2: Yes, it is interesting

e.g.3 T: Why haven't you answered question four?

S: It is a bit difficult for me to attempt it.

Unlike responsive, transactional is essentially an extended dialogue which is imposed by the context and the very nature of the conversation which actually calls for extended answers. In this kind of activity learners get involved into dialogues where they express their feelings, likes and dislikes. The following is a text which is intended to be extended into a discussion or dialogue:

"There are many social problems in your daily life. Sometimes you do not know why and how the problems occur. You are curious about them, you wonder why the problems are there, and you think of whether it is possible to solve the problems. Do you know how to express your curiosity and say whether something possible or impossible?"

Based on your knowledge, discuss the following questions in small groups of three.

1. What are the main social problems of our country?
2. Is unemployment one of the social problems?
3. What is unemployment?

4. Why are many people unemployed?
5. What are the effects of unemployment?
6. What should the government do to minimize unemployment?

Students may be asked to by heart certain expression to use in specific situations, such as the following:

In the conversation between Ali and Ahmed, you find the following expression:

I wonder why the government is slow in solving this problem.

The expression is used to show CURIOSITY. Here are some other expressions to show your curiosity.

- *I wonder what causes poverty.*
- *I wish I knew more about unemployment problems.*
- *How on earth ...?*
- *I'd be very interested to know ...*

Then the tutor may compose a task based on the previous models: The extension serves a number of purposes: pronunciation of the new lexical items, learning new modes of expressions:

In pairs, express your curiosity in the situations below.

1. You have just come back to your hometown. There are many villagers who live in poverty.
You want to know why.
2. You are watching a TV news program and you learn that many people are fired. You want to know if they get their rights.
3. You try to offer a beggar a job but he refuses. You wonder why.
4. You see some invalid beggars at traffic lights. You wonder how they get there.
5. You read an article in a newspaper reporting that unemployment is getting worse. You are eager to know the government plans to solve the problem.

Now, the above points have been changed into the following conversation:

Situation: A and B have a talk before the class begins.

A: Do you think there is a possibility to solve the unemployment problem totally soon?

B: I'm sure there is. As a matter of fact, the government has planned some strategies to do that.

A: Is it possible that the government can eradicate poverty?

B: Well, I don't think it is possible. Poverty is a complex matter. It is not only about jobless people but also people who live with little work. It is hardly possible to eliminate poverty. And, to tell you the truth, the government simply cannot create jobs for all people.

A: So, I think people must create their own jobs.

B: Well, you're right. It is what we call as entrepreneurship.

A: Yes, people do not need to wait for the job provided by the government.

B: Yes, absolutely.

Conclusion

In this paper a number of issues have been handled or touched upon all in connection with interlanguage pragmatics or pragmatic competence which is essential for effective communication. The main issue is whether interlanguage can be taught effectively or not. The researcher drew on a number of theories in this respect including the previous related works.

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