

Pragmatics and Awareness – Raising Tasks in Language Learning

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Abstract

In this article, the author gives brief information on a branch of linguistics, pragmatics, and its importance in language learning using different authentic examples. Language acquisition is considered one of the most challenging educational processes since the learners sometimes mix the two language materials, vocabulary and grammar structure, etc. The notions ‘overgeneralization’ and ‘negative transfer’ are commonly used in language learning pragmatics about the relation of L1 and L2. Furthermore this paper indicates importance and the usage of awareness raising tasks on the basis of comparison of first and second language. In addition there exist possible solutions for the problems that have been suggested by the author.

Key words: overgeneralization, negative transfer, workbook, culture, second language acquisition, complain, grammatical order, word usage

Introduction

1. Pragmatics is “the study of acting by means of language of doing things with words” (e.g., refusing, persuading and apologizing) (Kasper, 1989: 39). Pragmatics is a branch of linguistic as semantics, but it is a little different form that one with its functions and aim. Learning pragmatics is so important that there is not any workbook or a language book which does not include culture of that language. We, each country, owe various cultures and it is crucial to be aware of pragmatics as a course. As Ishihara and Cohen (2010) mentioned, sometimes two people from two cultures find their communication difficult even if they follow pragmatic aspect of conversation. They count five causes of learners’ divergence and one of them is negative transfer of pragmatic norms. The notion of “pragmatic transfer” refers to the influence of the learners knowledge of other languages and

cultures. However, it might be of two types: positive and negative. When learners L1 background is similar to the L2, it is called positive transfer, however, once it is different and not applicable it cause negative pragmatic transfer. “Negative transfer” might not be a huge problem, yet, sometimes it arises difficulties and misunderstandings in the communication. Just as an example, we might see when a new learner of English addresses to the native speaker when having a dinner at a restaurant, like “Give me the salt” instead of saying “Can you pass me the salt, please?”. It is a variation of request in two cultures.

The next cause is the overgeneralization of perceived L2 pragmatic forms. It appears as a result of generalizing a rule of L1 into L2 because of several reasons. Sometimes one may forget the word to describe something, sometimes to keep fluency grammatical order might be changed and so on. For instance, most of the learners of English misuse verb forms, like tell-telled; speak-spoked; read-readed, etc. Or wrong word usage occurs when one does not know the special use of the word, but, most importantly, the way people speak and act differ in each culture. English people are more polite to express their feelings, asking questions; there are some restrictions in conversation such as asking about family or age. Similarly, in Asian countries asking about family issues and one’s wife and more are not considered politeness.

In language learning these can cause difficulties as culture is not learned in a short time. Furthermore, even the learner is excel at a certain language, having a real conversation is totally different from the class and sometimes, they cannot put what they have learnt into practice. What is more, in order to use the language properly one should learn its culture for sure.

2. Awareness-raising tasks, obviously, serve for guiding the learners into a correct way through critical and analytical thinking .

1. What is a complaint? When and about what do you usually complain? How do you complain about?

What is difference between the way of your complain and the way the English people say? And is there any difference for complaining to your friends, boss or family member?

Case: Your teacher is giving you a lot of tasks, projects. But you have a very short time. Complain your teacher. How would you address?

This task presented above is the example for socio-pragmatic competence of learners. It assists the learners to define the formality and politeness. A teach can change the question to focus on the other types of pragmatics.

2. Can you imagine if your learner calls you “hey, sweetie, how is your doing?” Is it correct? Is it appropriate for language norm? How would you solve this?

This task is related to the linguistic aspect of pragmatics.

3. As a mode of instruction, I would like to implement both types: deductive and inductive. Deductive method is much traditional, easy to use in a class and saves time since it does not require extra time and effort to get prepare for the class. While inductive method makes the learners work on themselves not receiving background information. In most cases, inductive method is preferred for adults, when deductive is for younger ones. However, on my mind, when the teacher is practical and skilled at teaching, s/he can use both methods in its own place. When it comes to me, to teach pragmatics, I would use inductive method, because through thinking independently, the learners can find solution to the problem and it will be much effective and memorable for them.

4. Activity:

Discourse Completion: you have been in a holiday and had some problems with the hotel service.
Complain about the case to the receptionist.

Receptionist: Good morning, can I help you?

You: _____

Receptionist: I'm sorry to hear that. What exactly was the problem?

You: _____

Receptionist: Oh dear, did you complain to the hotel staff?

You: _____

Receptionist: Oh, I see.

You: _____

Receptionist: I do apologize. I'd like to offer you a 20% discount on the price of one of our Autumn breaks as a gesture of goodwill.

You: _____

(www.justgoodenglish.com)

Instruction:

Your friend complains to his teacher about his grade. Consequently, the teacher gets upset with him. How would you change the things/content so that she will not get upset.

Student: I want to talk about my grade.

Teacher: Okay, what seems to be the problem?

Student: It is not fair. Everyone in the class got an A except me. It is not fair. You gave me a low grade. Is there something wrong with me? Why do you hate me?

Teacher: I am not treating you unfairly. You don't attend my classes regularly, and you did not do very well on the last test. That's why your grade is so low.

Student: I have an American friend, and he always helps me. So I'm 100 percent sure that my answers are correct. so don't tell me they are wrong or something, because I am sure.

Teacher: I am sorry. But we went over the answers to the test in class. Your answers were not correct. If you want, we can go over the answers again and I can explain them for you.

Student: No, I don't want to go over the test. I'm gonna go to the office and complain about you. I will wait till tomorrow. If nothing changes, I am gonna go to the office and complain. I do not want to do that, but ... (www.americanenglish.state.gov/english-teaching-forum)

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