

Pragmatic Competence in Foreign Language Learning

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Abstract

The author discusses how pragmatic rules for language use are often subconscious. In a similar way with cultural training, to teach pragmatic rules is depended on the teacher's perspective, the observation of how speakers do things with words has analyzed the pragmatic process at least to the point where we can provide responsible, concrete lessons and activities to our learners. If we really want our students to be fluent communicators even in the heterogeneous communication, we must be in the position to give assurance that they can learn pragmatics in their second foreign language.

Key words: *pragmatic failure, communication breakdown, language use, language proficiency*

Introduction

Pragmatic competence, an essential aspect of communicative competence, is also recognized as a crucial component. When communication is hindered due to a lack of understanding the speaker's intention, it results in pragmatic failure. This failure arises from a language's diverse set of acts that convey specific meanings, known as intentions. Pragmatic failures can also be referred to as pragmatic misunderstandings or pragmatic unawareness. Through the use of speech acts, such as requests, apologies, irony, astonishment, wonder, and abhorrence, we express our intentions. The occurrence of pragmatic failure is attributed to the fact that these intentions can be expressed explicitly or sometimes implicitly.

Methodology

Irrefutably, classroom is the best environment for EFL speakers to comprehend their background knowledge. We would like to propose some extracts from the communication breakdown based on pragmatic failure:

Native speaker: Look! I have got a gift for you.

ESL speaker: Oh! I am sorry.

Native speaker: Why sorry?

Here, in the conversation the ELF speaker is Uzbek and you know according to our conversational style we may say: "Sorry for making you worry" to the person who gifts something as a good riddance. But this pragmatic peculiar of Uzbek learner caused the misinterpretation of the native English speaker and the respond seemed strange and a bit negative in his own perspective.

Another miscommunication is also salient to the matter:

Native speaker: Will you be coming to my party on Saturday?

ESL speaker: Well.

Native speaker: Well what?

Not understanding the language use of the communication partner, they both may be disappointed.

Native speaker: We must have lunch together some time.

ESL speaker: Let's do lunch.

Native speaker: See you.

ESL speaker: Take care.

In this conversation, something similar happens to non-native speakers who draw the conclusion considering own native perspectives and have difficulty in correctly interpreting this type of routines, because they think that they are a real invitation. Consequently, it makes them feel saddened by the lack of sincerity of American or British people, who, in fact, never invited them.

What can lead EFL speakers to make pragmatic mistakes? To make clear We will state some more examples:

Speaker 1: If it is not too much bother, could you please make a video cassette of this lesson?

Speaker 2: When have I ever refused to prepare a cassette for you?

Results and discussion

In this case, non-native speaker's request is too elaborated and the interlocutor interprets it as a complaint or criticism to his work. As we informed above, pragmatics covers the conversational functions such as offering, requesting and the like.

Also, an EFL speaker may say: "I really very sorry. I just forgot. Understand? In this situation, "understand" is a direct translation from Uzbek language, used by the first speaker with question intonation looking for the listener's cooperation. Nevertheless, the effect in English is indeed opposite, since this "understand" sounds rough in English. This is due to the fact that, whereas the Uzbek learner is a language oriented towards positive politeness, but you see, there is also linguistic difference in language use which blocked the conversation on the first turn.

Importantly, second language learners show significant differences from native speakers in language use, in particular, the execution and comprehension of certain speech acts: conversational functions, such as greetings and leave takings. And also, conversational management, such as back channeling and short responses. Without instruction, difference in pragmatics show up in the English of learners regardless of their first language background or language proficiency.

The consequences of pragmatic differences, unlike the case of grammatical errors, are often interpreted on a social or personal level rather than as a result of the language learning process. Making pragmatic mistake may have various consequences and one of them is communication breakdown. We know, such mistakes are unintentional errors of interlocutors, so on the other hand it is our professional duty to inform them about such features of learning a foreign language. They might want to know the conventions for talking to a hair stylist in a second language, something equally difficult to observe. Because, choosing the right variety also belongs to pragmatic issues. Some necessary features of language and language use are quite subtle and not immediately noticeable by learners, such as the turns that occur before speakers actually say “goodbye” and the noises they make when encouraging other speakers to continue their turns. Differences in making requests, such as by saying “Can I?” instead of “Can you?” might not be immediately salient to learners. By highlighting features of language and language use, instruction can inform the learner.

Finally, the classroom is the ideal place in which to help learners interpret language use. Instruction can help learners understand when and why certain linguistic practices take place. It can help learners to better comprehend what they hear and to better interpret it.

A classroom discussion of pragmatics is also a good place to explore prior impressions of speakers. For example, Americans are often thought of as being very direct. Instruction provides the opportunity to discuss the absence of some types of politeness markers in English and the presence and function of others that may not be immediately recognizable to learners.

The major objective of such instruction in pragmatics is to raise learners’ pragmatic awareness and give them choices about their interactions in the target language in order avoid communicative problems based on pragmatic failure. What is the goal here? That is to help learners become familiar with a range of pragmatic devices and practices in the target language. With the help of such kind of lessons mingled with pragmatics teaching our students can maintain their own cultural identities, particularly more fully in target language communication, and gain control of the force and outcome of their contributions. By learning four primary communicative skills, EFL speakers understand of the root of conversation. By learning pragmatic rules, they can expand their perception of the language and those who speak. In pursuit of this goal, the classroom provides a safe place within which learners can try out new forms and patterns of communication in an accepting environment. They can experiment with unfamiliar forms of addressing. This kind of lesson is not traditional and at the end achieves own goal and let your students know some secrets of pragmatics which they may come across someday interacting with native English speakers. We would like to suggest that pragmatics can be integrated into the English language curriculum at the earliest levels.

It is fruitful to utilize some useful activities which have a constitutive role in development of EFL speaker’s pragmatic competence. Significantly, it is crucial for every EFL teacher to have creativity and high proficiency in pedagogical psychology.

Activity 1 This activity can be altered according to the intelligence of your students as well. Before the lesson a teacher selects some role-play activities from different books that involved two people in a formal or informal encounter. Having investigated the salient materials, a teacher prepares some “problem cards” as well, each of them must contain of a pragmatic error.

In the class the topic is introduced and two students are asked to volunteer to perform a role play. They receive role cards and one or both of them are given problem cards, according to the situation.

While they are reading their cards, you may ask the rest of the class to observe the role plays carefully because there would be something wrong that they should define and declare others.

Problem cards can be written in this manner:

- Student 1: You may just move to England for a study trip. You do not know too much about the town, public transportation, health spots and the like. You meet the neighbor in front of your house. Ask him or her questions to find out where you can find the post office, how you can buy tickets for public transport, and what kind of entertainment facilities there are in town.
- Student 2: You have lived in the same town for 10 years. You have found out that a foreign university student has just moved in next to you. You meet him or her on the street. Give information about public transport, entertainment facilities and the like.

After introducing the rules of activities to the whole classroom, you can tell these tips as a further instruction:

- Be very direct in your questions. When asking for information, avoid question forms such as “Could you please tell me...?” Instead use more direct ways to ask for information, such as “Please tell me where...”
- Try to maintain the conversation as long as you can;
- Ignore your partner’s intention to leave away the conversation.

Conclusion

After the dialogues are performed, students share their observations with the class. The discussion involved issues such as formal and informal forms, and opening and closing the conversation politely. By seeing the students’ uneasiness or embarrassment when their communication partner committed pragmatic error, they know and experience more by themselves. Any problems created by differences between the students’ native language and English can be discussed. If time allows, more pairs can be asked to perform other role plays.

In conclusion, it is crucial to state that, by the means of such activities EFL learners and even teachers begin to digest the serious impacts of pragmatic mistakes as grammatical errors and draw their attention to learning it.

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