PEDAGOGICAL CLUSTER
JOURNAL OF PEDAGOGICAL DEVELOPMENTS

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Developing pragmatic competence in language teaching

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Abstract

Successful language learning involves more than just grammar rules and vocabulary; understanding the pragmatic norms of a target language is also crucial. Lack of pragmatic competence in a target language can lead to misunderstandings and breakdowns in communication. It may result in speakers being perceived as impolite. Therefore, it is important for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners to focus on developing pragmatic competence to avoid such pitfalls. With the help of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method EFL learners can be acquainted with pragmatic competence on different speech act of using some effective strategies that will assist them to overcome their difficulties in successful communication. Accordingly, the main purpose of this research is to get EFL learners acquainted with pragmatic competence on the speech act of complaining using some effective strategies that will assist them to interact in real life settings.

Keywords

Pragmatic competence, speech acts, target language, pragmatic failure, communication breakdown, contextual factors.

Since the focus in language teaching is on communication, we assume that grammar explanations and exercises should be well contextualized and discourse based (Celce-Murcia and Olshtain 2000). This means we need to analyze how native speakers actually use the language, not just guess how it works. To do this, we need to examine real conversations and see how grammar is used within the context of the whole interaction. This is much different from simply studying isolated sentences and trying to understand the rules. Language teachers as well as scholars and researchers in the field of applied linguistics have been appealing the necessity to incorporate cultural knowledge into second and foreign language teaching. When someone is learning a new language, the focus is often on teaching grammar and vocabulary. Learners

study how words and sentences are put together and learn common phrases. They are taught how to use language in everyday situations. Often times the crucial focus of second and foreign language teaching has been directed towards dispensing the rules of grammar and increasing the knowledge of vocabulary in the target language so that one can produce correct utterances in order to communicate. However, competency in linguistic knowledge does not guarantee successful use of the language and it isn't always used the same way. It depends on the situation. Things like who you are talking to, where you are, and even the culture of the place can change how you speak. If a learner doesn't understand these cultural aspects of the language, they can make mistakes or misunderstandings leading pragmatic failure. Here, we have another factor that while teaching a language to students, we as a teacher draw our attention to students' errors and mistakes while they trying communicating or doing tasks in the target language. However, we should change this approach to let them feel free to use the language. A skillful teacher draws attention to learners' language skills, such as speaking, reading, writing, and listening ones, but also their communicative competence so as to make them proficient users of their target language.

Language isn't just a tool for communication, but also reflects, shapes, and represents cultural values. When EFL learners develop pragmatic competence, they learn how to communicate effectively and appropriately in different cultural contexts. They will be aware the rules of conversation and how to use language in a way that is culturally sensitive. On the other hand, if they lack this competence, it can lead to misunderstandings and unexpected consequences in their interactions. According to Ishihara and Cohen (2010,p.201) "If there is no formal instruction of pragmatics, learners may take an extended period of time—typically over 10 years—to acquire native-like pragmatic ability, even in second language setting where learners are exposed to the target language on a daily basis".

Pragmatics, just like other areas of linguistics taught in language classrooms, deserves equal attention and focus. Therefore, formal instruction should be given and taken in its curriculum. Then, it is the teachers' responsibility to prepare the learners to communicate successfully in real life settings. Félix-Brasdefer and Cohen (2012: 650) describe: "Like phonology, morphology, and syntax, which are necessary for learning a L2, pragmatics should be integrated into the language curriculum from the beginning levels of language instruction".

In order to implement this effectively the learners need to understand norms of social interaction and cultural appropriateness. Appropriateness is widely discussed topic in many fields. This concept is affected by linguistic and sociocultural aspects and means knowing what and when to say and in what manner to lead the conversation to someone.

To become truly fluent and comfortable using a new language, learners need to consider a number of factors. The questions posed by Jones and von Baeyer (1997: 1) highlight these essential elements that contribute to accurate and effective communication.

1. What are you trying to do with your English sentences? Are you describing something, persuading someone, giving your opinion, or what?

2. What is your role in this situation? Are you a friend, stranger, employee or customer?

3. Where are you talking? Is the setting on a plane, at a party, at a meeting?

4. What are you talking about? Is the topic business, travel, sport?

If we look at speech act of complaining in pragmatics there are contextual factors and several strategies that need to be followed to achieve appropriate complaint behavior. Complaining and responding are two different speech acts of pragmatics and it should be developed during English classrooms as learners will have to perform in different real life setting like hotels, restaurants, hospitals and etc. The way EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners complain shows that how close or distant people are, and their social status influences how politely or impolitely they express themselves. Most of the cases learners often use impolite ways of complaining, which was influence by several factors. These include their understanding of how to use language in different situations, their perceptions of social distance and status, the intensity of the situation, their overall language skills. Complaints are particularly interesting to study because they can be seen as a face-threatening to someone's social image. When someone complains, they are essentially breaking a social rule about how people should interact. Different cultures have different beliefs and values about how people should behave, and this influences how they communicate and how others perceive them. People often follow these unspoken social rules, whether consciously or not, because they help us understand the meaning behind what people say and do. Non-native speakers often find it very difficult to complain in a way that feels natural to native speakers. This is because complaining is a complex speech act that can be tricky to get right, even for

native speakers. Therefore, to learn the best ways to express complaints in a new language, it's important to study how native speakers do it and understand the social factors that influence their choices.

Teaching context.

Learning a new language is a process where developing language skills and understanding how to use those skills in social situations doesn't always happen at the same pace. Language and culture are inseparable parts of how people interact. This interaction is influenced by different contextual factors like distance, social status and intensity which can shift and change impacting the way things are said. To really speak a language well, thus learners need to pay attention to this factors to avoid communication breakdown. Teachers can use either an inductive or deductive approach to help students become aware of pragmatic features. Both methods are valuable and should be used in a balanced way. For instance, teacher distributes two different types of dialogue of complaint which is made directly and indirectly. Then, contextual factors like SDI (social status, distance and intensity), sociolinguistic and socio-cultural norms of complaint can be highly emphasized through noticing activity by addressing the questions:
1. What problem is raised in each introduced dialog?
2. Identify who are a complainer and a listener there?
3. Define the level of SDI for per dialogue and point it in a form you are provided.
4. Discuss the level of formality, politeness or rudeness, directness or indirectness, calmness or aggressiveness and other features can be expressed verbally (in words) and non-verbally (by manner).
Deductive method can also be implemented to explain the types of speech act of complaint with its strategies like Initiation and explanation of a purpose, a Complaint, Justification and Request.
Kasper (1997) suggests a range of activities for improving pragmatic skills. She divides them into two categories:
1. Activities that raise awareness of pragmatics: These include things like observation tasks and using real-world examples from media like movies and TV shows.
2. Activities that offer practice: This group includes activities like role-playing, simulations, and drama.

Role-plays are a popular technique in the classroom where participants are assigned roles and scenarios to act out a conversation as if they were those characters. Let's take a closer look at how role-playing activities work in pragmatic competence of complaint:

Communicative Activity

Objectives

• to compare the target language with their native language by considering cultural and pragmatic diversity of complaints

• to produce pragmatically appropriate complaint in the target language by using different strategies and focusing the contextual factors (SDI).

Procedure

Teacher divides students into groups of three and allowes to pick up three different scenarios on the theme "Complaining":

 Scenario 1: You are in a restaurant. The meal you have ordered is not provided on time and some ingredients which should be are not added as you are eating cheese omelette without cheese. . Make a complaining discussion among customers, a waitress and a chef.

 Scenario 2: You are complaining to ABC Internet Customer Service by phone. The reason is that the internet connection is too slow and it is dropping out.

 Scenario 3: You ask your best friend if he/she went to "Rock 'n' Roll" previous night. It seems that he/she is lying and this situation hurts you. Make a complaint to him/her about that. Students in groups make a complaint according to the given scenarios in their first language and then translate it directly to the target language, English through following a complaint strategy.

 Each group turn by turn performs different role play cards in front of the class. After the dialogues are role-played, students will watch the same different situations on the video clips step by step which they played with the groups. While watching all students should make some notes for special expressions and new vocabulary related to the situations. Namely, they should pay attention

Pedagogical Cluster- Journal of Pedagogical Developments
PCJPD: Volume 2 Issue 6, June 2024, online: ISSN 2956-896X

PEDAGOGICAL CLUSTER
JOURNAL OF PEDAGOGICAL DEVELOPMENTS

Euro Asian Journals

Website: https://euroasianjournals.org/index.php/pc/index

how pragmatic tone: verbal and nonverbal cues expressed a complaint directly or indirectly, discourse makers and fillers like so, right, okay, well, umm, etc.

Discuss: Is there a complaint strategy made directly or indirectly and formally or informally?

Now, they should act again changing some parts or moments using those special expressions and new vocabulary related to the situations. Turn by turn, per group gives feedback about how well they could act out using recently acquired knowledge and what was easy and challenging from this activity. All students will be provided with the rubric checklist as a peer assessment.

Rubric 1- CHECKLIST

Was the dialogue well organized ?	V	-
Was vocabulary used appropriately?		
Were the modal verbs used to make a polite complaint?		
Were the discourse fillers used?		
Were the epistemic stance markers used		
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When they watch situational video clips and pictures through making role plays, there is also authentic opportunity to enlarge the knowledge of metaphragmatic ability as they realize the importance of contextual factors: SDI in complaining.

In conclusion, the ability to use language appropriately in different situations (pragmatic competence) is crucial for effective communication. This is especially true in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classrooms. To improve ESP instruction, we need to understand how well students are currently using language pragmatically. This will help us identify areas where they need more support and develop strategies to integrate pragmatic skills into the curriculum. Teachers are supposed to apply more authentic opportunities to practice in the classroom to prepare them for real interactions. Tasks can provide context and

consequence that allow learners to produce and demonstrate how they would use pragmatic strategies in the real world.

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