PRAGMATIC DEVELOPMENT IN A SECOND OR FOREIGN LANGUAGE: SOME CLASSROOM TECHNIQUES[1]

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Pragmatics has been regarded as one of the grounding linguistic theories for developing the notion of communicative competence, which has been implemented in a series of second language acquisition models (Bachman, 1990; Celce-Murcia et al., 1995; Usó-Juan and Martínez-Flor, 2006). Within these models, the component of pragmatic competence has been highlighted, since in order to make learners communicatively competent in a second or foreign language, not only their grammatical knowledge needs to be fostered, but also their pragmatic competence. To achieve that end, scholars in the field of interlanguage pragmatics have emphasised the need to integrate pragmatics in language teaching (Rose and Kasper, 2001; Martínez-Flor et al., 2003; Alcón and Martínez-Flor, 2005; Tatsuki, 2005). Taking this assumption into account, the goal of this paper is to contribute to this area of research by presenting different classroom techniques designed to teach learners pragmatic competence in English as the target language at university level.

INTRODUCTION

Pragmatics, the branch of linguistics devoted to examining language use in communication including speakers' intentions when saying utterances in particular contexts, has aroused the interest of a number of scholars over the last three decades (Stalnaker, 1972; Leech, 1983; Crystal, 1985; Mey, 1993; Yule, 1996; Verschueren, 1999; LoCastro, 2003; among many others). Such an interest in this particular discipline appeared as a reaction to Chomsky's (1965) use of language as an abstract construct based on a *competence* theory in which grammar was paramount and should be mastered independently from the actual functions of language use. For this reason, Leech (1983) encouraged a shift of direction within linguistics by creating this new area of research (i.e. pragmatics) that paid attention to meaning in use rather than meaning in the abstract. In other words, language should be used as a means of communication and, consequently, *performance* rather than competence should be the main target goal for acquiring a particular target language. To this respect,

pragmatics has also been regarded as one of the grounding linguistic theories for developing the notion of communicative competence (Hymes, 1972), and a key concept in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) which has been implemented in a series of SLA models (Bachman, 1990; Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei and Thurrell, 1995; Usó-Juan and Martínez-Flor, 2006).

The different models of communicative competence proposed by these authors have showed that, in order to make learners communicatively competent in a second or foreign language (L2), not only their grammatical knowledge needs to be fostered, but also their pragmatic competence. Specifically, this competence has been defined as the speaker's ability to employ different linguistic resources in an appropriate way for a given context (Kasper, 2001). Put briefly, both pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics, that is, the two areas of pragmatics that refer to specific local conditions of language use (Leech, 1983; Thomas, 1983), need to be mastered by learners in their process of achieving full communicative competence in a target language. To that end, scholars in the research field of interlanguage pragmatics have emphasised the need to integrate pragmatics in both second and foreign language teaching (Rose and Kasper, 2001; Bardovi-Harlig and Mahan-Taylor, 2003; Martínez-Flor et al., 2003; Alcón and Martínez-Flor, 2005; Tatsuki, 2005). Taking this assumption into account, the goal of this paper is to contribute to this area of research by presenting a variety of classroom techniques designed to foster learners' pragmatic competence in English as an L2 in instructed language settings at the university level.

CLASSROOM TECHNIQUES TO DEVELOP PRAGMATICS IN A SECOND OR FOREIGN LANGUAGE

According to Kasper (2001), second language contexts offer more advantages than foreign language settings, since in a second language context learners have rich exposure to the target language outside the classroom and a lot of opportunities to use it for real-life purposes. This fact allows them to develop their pragmatic ability, since they may become involved in situations where they are required to interpret utterances in context or interact with a variety of participants in different environments. In contrast, learners in a foreign language setting lack all these opportunities to engage in communicative situations in which they need to use the target language. Moreover, the chances they have to directly observe native speakers' interactions are also very scarce or even non-existent in this particular setting, so they do not have access to appropriate models to imitate.

For these reasons, it seems that creating the necessary conditions to foster learners' pragmatic competence would only be necessary in foreign language contexts, although it has also been highly recommended in second language settings. Indeed, in spite of all the advantages that these particular settings may offer for pragmatic development, it has been claimed that, even after a long period of contact with the target language, some pragmatic aspects still continue to be incomplete (Bardovi-Harlig, 1996, 2001). In this sense, integrating pragmatics in both second and foreign language classrooms has been regarded as advisable and necessary, since, through instruction, learners can understand language use and be provided with knowledge of the different choices that may be employed depending on the situation in which they are involved and to whom they are talking (Kasper and Rose, 2002; Kasper and Roever, 2005).

Researchers in the field of interlanguage pragmatics have suggested different activities and approaches to foster learners' pragmatic competence (Olshtain and Cohen, 1991; Rose, 1994, 1999; Bardovi-Harlig, 1996; Judd, 1999; Koester, 2002; Bardovi-Harlig and Mahan-Taylor, 2003; Eslami-Rasekh, 2005; among others). Based on these proposals, we have devised some practical classroom techniques with the aim of helping language teachers to tackle pragmatics in the English as an L2 classroom. In particular, they have been elaborated to raise learners' awareness of two directive speech acts (i.e. requests and suggestions), and of how to produce these speech acts depending on contextual variables. We have dealt with these two speech acts, as the focus of instruction, since they are directive speech acts which intrinsically threaten the

hearer's face and, therefore, they call for considerable cultural and linguistic expertise on the part of the learners (Brown and Levinson, 1987). Next, we present the six techniques we have elaborated, which should be implemented sequentially in order to exploit them to the full.

First Technique: Learners' understanding of the importance of pragmatics

In order to develop learners' understanding of pragmatics, teachers should provide them with an explanation about what pragmatic competence is by presenting the key elements of pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics (Rose, 1999). Whereas the former refers to the grammatical side of pragmatics and addresses the strategies for conveying particular communicative acts, the latter refers to those social factors that qualify a linguistic act as being appropriate. According to Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, there are three social parameters that identify a linguistic form as being appropriate, namely those of i) social distance (i.e. the degree of familiarity between interlocutors); ii) power (i.e. the relative power of the speaker with reference to the speaker); and iii) degree of imposition (i.e. the type of imposition the speaker is forcing upon someone). Learners should be explicitly taught the importance of these two sides of pragmatics, and how the sociopragmatic factors determine the appropriateness of the pragmalinguistic forms selected by the speakers.

After introducing these concepts in class, learners are told they are going to focus on two directive speech acts, namely, those of requests and suggestions, since the theory of speech acts has been one of the most widely studied areas within pragmatics (Searle, 1976). Then, they are told what the selected speech acts imply. On the one hand, a request is an impositive speech act which constitutes an attempt to get someone to perform an action for the benefit of the speaker. On the other hand, a suggestion is a non-impositive speech act, in which the action to be done is for the benefit of the hearer.

Once they have been given this explanation, learners are asked to collect naturally occurring requests and suggestions in their mother tongue (L1), and to write down sociopragmatic information about these speech acts in different situations. This activity can substantially deepen learners' understanding of the topic to be taught.

Second Technique: Learners' awareness of the appropriate use of L1 requests and suggestions

In an attempt to develop learners' awareness of the speech acts of requesting and suggesting that they carry out naturally in their normal daily life, learners are asked to work on the data they have collected in the previous activity (i.e. their own samples of requests and suggestions). Here, learners can be asked to answer a variety of awareness-raising questions that focus on both pragmalinguistic issues (i.e. questions regarding the form or head act they found for each speech act) and sociopragmatic ones (i.e. questions regarding the social context in which the speech acts appeared).

After this individual analysis, they are encouraged to compare their data with their partners in order to gain access to a wider sample of pragmalinguistic formulations for both speech acts. Additionally, they are asked to think about how the sociopragmatic factors that surround the forms they have collected affect the appropriate selection of strategies for the two speech acts being analysed. This discussion can lead to learners' discovery that there is no direct correspondence between a linguistic form and a particular function, since in many cases an utterance that appears to be a suggestion is a request or vice-versa, and so context is vital to be able to interpret the speaker's intention.

Third Technique: Learners' knowledge of the pragmalinguistic forms of L2 requests and suggestions

Having worked on learners' L1 data, the teacher should provide learners with explicit instruction on the pragmalinguistic forms employed for making requests and suggestions in English as an L2, by following Trosborg's (1995) proposed taxonomy for requests and Martínez-Flor's (2005) taxonomy for suggestions. The selection of these two taxonomies has been made on the basis that both have been elaborated on previous research in the field of interlanguage

pragmatics, and both consist of the three main categories of direct, conventionally indirect, and indirect linguistic realisations.

After learners receive instruction in all possible forms, they are encouraged to compare them with the ones they found in their L1. Moreover, they are asked to discuss whether they had already organised these forms for both requests and suggestions in a similar way. This comparison is essential to make learners notice the similarities and differences between both languages. Regarding similarities, learners may come to realise that strategies can be distributed along an increasing scale of directness in both languages, whereas some differences learners may find involve the fact that the strategies in their L1 may not always be exactly transferable to those employed in a target language.

Fourth Technique: Learners' awareness of the appropriate use of L2 requests and suggestions

Here, learners are involved in three different types of awareness-raising activities that deepen their understanding of how the form that a speech act takes may depend on the three sociopragmatic factors of social distance-power-imposition discussed previously. Additionally, they are also made aware of the importance of considering the speaker's intention and the setting for the selection of the most appropriate pragmalinguistic form in a given situation.

The first awareness-raising task is devoted to widening the scope of request/suggestion strategies offered to the learners in textbooks. To that end, learners are first asked to read a language situation, together with several pragmalinguistic forms for each speech act –presented according to a scale of increasing directness -, and then they are asked to rank the suggested answers from most to least appropriate in each situation.

The second awareness-raising task aims at eliciting learners' metapragmatic discourse. To achieve that aim, learners are provided with a language situation in which a possible request or a suggestion have already been given, and are asked to rate which they believe is the level of suitability of the request/suggestion. Once they have thought about the degree of appropriateness of each form, they have to write the reason why they provided that particular rating.

Finally, the third awareness-raising task makes learners pay conscious attention to the importance of context when choosing an appropriate request/suggestion form and when deciding the function of a given utterance. For that purpose, the teacher provides learners with a list of mixed requests and suggestions collected from naturally-occurring interactions among English native speakers. They are then asked to elicit the most appropriate context for a particular utterance, as well as to state the function of the utterance by taking that context into account. Once the context has been provided and the function of the utterance has been decided, the teacher should explain the actual context in which all utterances were found and discuss whether learners' answers are likely to be appropriate or not and why (see Martínez-Flor and Usó-Juan, 2006 for sample activities to be used when implementing this particular technique).

Fifth Technique: Learners' production of L2 requests and suggestions

After learners have been engaged in tasks that aim at eliciting their pragmatic awareness about the different linguistic forms that can be employed to convey requests and suggestions, as well as the sociopragmatic factors that affect their appropriate use, they are ready to put all that knowledge into practice (Kasper, 1997; Bardovi-Harlig and Mahan-Taylor, 2003). Here, learners are provided with two different types of production activities, namely, controlled and free (Judd, 1999). We believe it is a good idea to start off with controlled activities to first guide learners in the completion of the task and then let them experience free activities. Moreover, we would like to highlight the importance of dealing with two different modes of production activities, that is, oral and written.

Focusing on the *oral mode,* an example of a controlled oral production task involves the use of video or digital video. The teacher selects two different scenes from a film in which characters are interacting in two situations, either depicting a

suitable context for a request or a suggestion. When the speech acts are about to be elicited, the video scene is paused and learners are required to complete a variety of questions to help them in thinking about the request/suggestion realisation form that is likely to take place between the interlocutors. These questions have to do with social aspects (i.e. Brown and Levinson's (1987) distance-power-imposition parameters) and aspects related to the characters' non-verbal behaviour (i.e. tone of voice, body language, facial expressions, and so on).

Once learners have reflected on the two particular situations watched in the video scenes, they are asked to work in pairs and act out as a role-play how they think the two conversations are likely to continue. For the purposes of engaging learners in an observation task, the whole class is divided into two groups: group 1 and group 2. Learners in group 1 are instructed to continue the scene in which a request is required and those in group 2, to continue the scene in which a suggestion is required. After that, a volunteer pair from each group performs their dialogue in front of the class. During this performance, the rest of the learners are asked to complete a variety of questions to judge the appropriateness of the speech acts elicited. These questions focus on i) pragmalinguistic features (i.e. the linguistic form employed by the learners), ii) sociopragmatic features (i.e. whether the forms employed by the learners are appropriate for the situations), and iii) the goals of both speech acts (i.e. possible differences between making each speech act in terms of who receives the benefits of the action). Having reflected on these questions individually, the two video scenes are played again from beginning to end. Thus, learners can watch the whole scene paying attention to which speech act, either a request or a suggestion, has been employed in the film and compare it with the one they have produced. This comparison is followed by a general class discussion.

Focusing now on the *written mode,* an example of a controlled production task involves sending emails. In this activity, learners are asked to read the contextual information of two contrasting settings that vary in terms of the sociopragmatic factors involved in them. Thus, whereas the first setting implies sending an email to a friend (close social distance and equal power), and the speech act to be made implies a low degree of imposition, the second setting presents the opposite sociopragmatic factors; that is, it implies sending an email to a person of higher social distance and power, and the speech act to be made involves a high degree of imposition. In addition to this, for each setting, learners are presented with two different situations that elicit either a request or a suggestion, although they are not given this information. Consequently, they are first asked to think about which speech act they should provide in each situation and then send the email (see Martínez-Flor and Usó-Juan, 2006, for examples of the sort of emails that can be used).

After learners are engaged in these oral and written controlled activities, whose aim is to present a series of contrasting situations to make learners realise that different situational variables may affect the appropriate choice of the request and suggestion realisation forms, they are ready to engage in free activities. These types of tasks, according to Judd (1999), serve to observe whether learners have, in fact, acquired the pragmatic knowledge to appropriately use the speech act under study. For this to happen, it is important to take into account the context in which the language learning class takes places; that is, whether it is a second or a foreign language context.

In a second language context, the target language is used for at least some of the students' day-to day activities and, therefore, opportunities for language practice are greater. In this sense, students are able to perform face-to-face communicative activities, in which they can interact with native speakers of English and notice the real use of the speech acts in specific situations. Therefore, in this context, learners can be requested to interview native speakers to obtain information about a particular topic and, if permission is given, record the conversations for class work.

In contrast, similar opportunities for engaging in real communicative situations are scarce in a foreign language environment where the target

language is not commonly spoken and, for this reason, it is necessary to create the possibility of engaging learners in situations that are as real as possible. A suitable option nowadays is the use of new technologies or what is known as Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC), since it can be regarded as a type of activity close to real life. Therefore, in order to implement the use of synchronous (i.e. real time) CMC communication in the foreign language classroom, teachers have to first establish a contact with other teachers from English-speaking countries who are also interested in developing a CMC project with their learners. Having established the contact, learners are then taught how to contact the native-speaking learners and they are assigned the tasks to be done. In this way, learners can be engaged in real communicative situations in which the natural use of the speech acts being examined can take place. Additionally, given the fact that learners have the opportunity to interact with learners from other cultural communities, an added purpose in this phase is to help learners develop their intercultural competence as an important element that will foster their full communicative competence (Usó-Juan and Martínez-Flor, 2006).

Sixth technique: Learners' provision of feedback on their production of L2 requests and suggestions

In this final technique, learners receive the teacher's feedback regarding their performance when using requests and suggestions in the free activities assigned in the previous technique. This feedback is related to their participation in either the face-to-face learners' conversations with native speakers (in a second language environment) or the learners' participations in CMC with native learners of the target language (in the foreign language environment). In second language settings, the teacher's feedback is based on the transcriptions of the recorded conversations, whereas learners' hard copies of their synchronous conversations with the other learners participating in the project are the basis for teacher's revision in the foreign language context. Such a feedback on learners' engagement in the free activities, as well as the further discussion regarding the implementation of the different techniques, is necessary to help learners gain a full mastery of the use and appropriate pragmatic behaviour of the speech acts of requesting and suggesting.

CONCLUSION

The main premise of the present paper has been to emphasise the need to develop pragmatics in both a second and a foreign language setting. To this end, we have worked out six classroom techniques that may facilitate language teachers' task of incorporating pragmatics as part of their current syllabi. These techniques, which should be applied to teaching in a sequential order, involve both awareness-raising and production tasks in order to provide learners with the three necessary conditions for the acquisition of their pragmatic ability in the target language, namely, i) exposure to input – both in their L1 and L2; ii) opportunities for communicative practice – both in an oral and a written mode; and iii) teachers' feedback. It is hoped that this paper has helped to contribute to a better understanding of pragmatics and its importance in second and foreign instructed language settings.

NOTES

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