

SURE: Developing Learners' Language Awareness through Pragmatic Instruction in the EFL Classroom

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SURE: Developing Learners' Language Awareness through Pragmatics Instruction in the EFL Classroom

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Abstract

A great number of English language learners in Indonesia tend to be recognised as 'fluent fools' learners. They can produce all correct sentences following the grammar rules but cannot communicate in proper manner. The phenomenon of this 'incompetent learners' has been observed as a result of the absence of learners' language awareness. Activities aimed at raising learners' pragmatic competence and activities offering opportunities for communicative practice can be used as a way out of this faulty. The goal of this paper is to discuss activities utilized in pragmatic instruction. It has acronym name—SURE (See, Use, Review and Experience). Hopefully, this strategy will enable learners gradually to gain how language works and how to use language appropriately to various communicative settings.

Keywords: *pragmatics instruction, pragmatic competence, language awareness*

Introduction

There are a amount of language skills which English learners must build, , so as to to communicate fruitfully in English. Yet, as we recognize, correct and accurate sentences grammatically and phonologically sometimes are unsuccessful because learners' language pragmatic ability—his or her capability to communicate or interpret communicati functions in certain context—is immature orimperfect . In other words, a feel of insufficiency appears when students can produce all the correct sentences use proper grammar forms but they cannot communicate in appropriate manners—not knowing the message expressed by or embedded in the words they have learnt, not confident how to keep on a topic, not comprehending the joking , and thus not successfully participated in the everyday conversation with native speakers. EFL classroom tend to produce "fluent fools" learners which refers to someone who can articulate a language smoothly yet understand nothing about the culture. The occurrence of 'unskilled learners' is a result of the lack of language awareness.

At least there are three aspects play a part significantly why this phenomenon happens, that is (i) learning orientation, (ii) teaching material and (iii) teaching methods, (Lin, 2006). Principally, as what cite in curriculum, ELT in Indonesiaaims to enable the sudents to communicate in English fruitfully. Yet, in fact, learning process especially for English at secondary schools focus on how the students pass national exam succesfully. As a matter of fact, English test in the national exam concentrate on grammar proficiency. Teachers tend to put social and cultural context behind th language aside. Most of English teachersoverweighed emphasize their teaching on language forms rather than imaginary play of it and

on meanings of words in dictionary instead of the communicative merit in real-life communication.

From the course material, teachers sometimes choose materials which keep on organized around grammar aspects with an 'inexorable format' (Harmer in Lin (2006), and sometimes 'full of speech acts and functions based on contexts which most foreign-language learners will never meet' (Altan in Lin, 2006). A frequent examples of utterances used in textbook like 'How much do you earn for a year?' or 'How old are you' which focus on grammatical precision and true-life information but do not make any sense and terribly in politeness practicing in a real context. Moreover, learners fail to learn specific uses of standard structure which are principal for daily communication. For instance, 'Come on, it's not going to happen in a million years' as statement of distant possibility or 'Do that again and I'm going home' as a threat.

From the teaching method, a great amount of English teachers in Indonesia still teach in a fast-food supplying strategy—like instant noodles, just give food to them, and then have the reaction and do some assessment. Learners are instructed to, and are really good at identifying, describe and explicating the language forms, particularly in their native language. It is a pestilence practice that teachers tend to give explanation each and everything, as overt and meticulous as possible, in the classroom. Too exhaustive focus on grammar and lexical elements than language usage guide to misappliance of learners' knowledge and competences.

This paper endeavours to discuss the possible means how to develop learners' language awareness through pragmatic instruction in EFL classroom. The descriptions will be about the concept of language awareness, concept of pragmatic and pragmatic competence, pragmatic instruction in EFL classroom and how to apply SURE technique, one of beneficial pragmatic instruction which will promote learners' pragmatic competence. Hopefully, it can be employed to raise learners' language awareness.

What is language awareness?

The term "Language Awareness (LA)" has been increasingly used in the language teaching field since 1980s. This concept emerged as a response to the rigid method which concentrates on structure and atomistic analysis of language. In accordance to its emergence, numerous of definitions of LA come out from several experts. In general, these experts bestow two distinctive features of LA—a person's psychological trait and a pedagogical approach. As the first feature, Donmall (2005) in Ellis (2012) affirms that LA as a person's compassion to and intentional awareness of language and its function in human life. Tomlinson (2003) considers LA is as a mental trait which builds through giving encouraged attention to language in use, and which make language learners be able to step by step approaching into how language perform. In harmony with the previous ideas, Carter (2003) cited in Lin (2006) avows that LA refers to the development in learners of an improved consciousness of and compassion to the structures and language functions. Current definition of LA come from Association for Language Awareness (ALA) which is cited in Ellis (2012) which claims that LA

refers to “overt knowledge of language, and conscious perception and sensitivity in language learning, language teaching and language use.

As an approach, LA is viewed as a pedagogical approach that intends to facilitate learners to achieve such approach (Tomlinson, 2003). LA has certain principles, objective and procedures which give apparent guidance in language learning process (Tomlinson, 2003). The main principles focuses on two facets, namely (i) most language learners learn best while affectively engaged, and when they want to provide energy and attention in the teaching process; and (ii) paying deliberately interest to the features of language in use can help learners to pay attention to the disparity between their own accomplishment in the target language, and the performance of competent speakers of the language.

The main objectives can be segregated into three targets , i.e. (i) to facilitate learners to become aware of themselves how language is naturally used so that they will notice the mismatch and gain learning willingness; (ii) to assist learners to build thinking skills as connecting, generalizing, and hypothesizing, and (iii) to aid learners to become autonomous, with positive manner towards the language, and to the language learning outside the classroom.

The main traits of LA procedures are characterized by subsequent practices, as follows, (i) emphasizing on empirical rather than logical, and intend to involve the learners in affective communication with potentially encouraging text, so as to be able to attain their own mental description of the text, and to communicate their personal response to it; (ii) asking students to converge on a certain characteristics of the text, to collaborate with others to recognize examples of this attribute , and to make findings and convey generalizations about its use; (iii) facilitating the students to test their generalizations by searching for other instances in other texts. In progress research is then motivated which involves looking for further instances and reviewing the overview which has been formulated. Consequently, throughout the procedures are used, can augment the possibility of interactive collaboration between a learner and other learners, between learners and the teacher, and between the learners and competent speakers of language. In short, what the teachers do in practicing a language awareness approach is to defy learners to ask questions, gladden their interest and engage them in opening up themselves of how language works.

Pragmatics: Its definition and classification

Pragmatics is one branch of linguistics. There are copious concepts of pragmatics proposed by several linguists. Levinson (1983:21) points out that pragmatics is the study of the connections between language and context as basis to an account of language understanding. Crystal (1985) states that pragmatics refers to the study of language from language users’ view point of, specially of the option they make, the constrictions they meet in using language in social relations and the influences of their use of language has on other interlocutors in the act of exchange of ideas. Yule (1996:4) labels pragmatics as the study of the relations between linguistic structures and the users of language. Huang (2007:2) claims that pragmatics as the organized study of meaning related to the use of language itself. In short, pragmatics can be defined as the study of how to

understand the linguistic forms by connecting it to the language users and its contexts (linguistic, physical, social and epistemic) in a communicative action. The main topics of pragmatics like deixis, presupposition, implicature, speech acts, maxim and cooperative principle and politeness.

Kasper (1997) divides pragmatics into two facets—namely pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics. Pragmalinguistics can be defined as the resources for expressing communicative acts and relate to interpersonal meanings which contain several aspects such as pragmatic strategies like directness and indirectness, routines, and other types of linguistic forms which can be mitigated or exaggerate communicative acts. An example given by Kasper (1997) as in *Sorry* and *I'm absolutely devastated—could you possibly find it in your heart to forgive me?* Both expressions are statements of apology, but definitely are stated in different situation. In this context, the speaker who express the latter apology has selected some pragmalinguistics resources of apologizing. Sociopragmatics has been illustrated by Leech (1993) as sociological crossing point of pragmatics, meant as the social insights lying beneath participants interpretation and accomplishment of communicative action. Speech communities diverge in their judgment of speaker's and hearer's social gap and social authority, their rights and duties, and the degree of nuisance occurred in certain communicative acts. (Holmes in Krisnawati, 2011). Sociopragmatics is about appropriate social manners. Learners must be revealed to end result of creating pragmatic choices.

Pragmatic Competence: its models and merits?

Pragmatic competence is recognised as one of the vital elements of communicative competence which formerly introduced by Hymes (1972), Canale and Swain (1980) and Canale (1983) who have proposed the most prominent model. It consists of four types of competencies: grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence. More lately, there have been many new formulations of the elements. One of them was introduced by Bachman (1990), who adds up components of pragmatic competence.

In Bachman's models of communicative competence (cited in Rasekh, 2005), language competence is classified into two facets: 'organizational and 'pragmatic competences'. Organizational competence includes knowledge of linguistic forms and the rules of combining them together at the sentence levels ('grammatical competence') and discourse ('textual competence'). Pragmatic competence contains 'illocutionary competence', which is, knowledge of speech acts and speech functions, and 'sociolinguistic competence'. 'Sociolinguistic competence' involves the capability to use language properly based on context. It thus contains the ability to choose communicative acts and proper strategies to apply them depending on the context. To sum up, pragmatic competence includes a variety of abilities of the language use and its interpretation in appropriate context. These encompass a speaker's competence to use language for various purposes (such as greeting, demanding, informing, requesting, and so on), the speaker's ability to adjust or to modify language based on the needs of the listener expectations or situation, and the speaker's skill to go along acceptable rules; the maxims.

Pragmatic incompetent speakers in the target language happens when they use of unsuitable expressions or imprecise interpretations. It is caused by fruitless communicative events which can guide participants to misapprehension and miscommunication and can even make the native speakers involved in the conversation perceive that the speaker of the target language is either bad-mannered or impolite. Nelson in Hasbun (2004) encapsulates some of the negative effects of deficient of pragmatic competence as follows:

... Native speakers in general interpret pragmatic errors negatively as arrogance, impatience, rudeness, and so forth. Furthermore, pragmatic errors can guide to a listener's being unable to assign a confident interpretation to a learner's utterance.

To sum up, pragmatic competence has been regarded as one of essential of communicative competence components.

Pragmatic Instruction in EFL Classroom

Pragmatic instruction refers to developing pragmatic competence through pedagogic setting. The main target in pragmatic instruction in EFL classroom is raising learners' pragmatic competence because it is crucial in doing face-to-face interactions in a foreign language. Children attain pragmatic competence in their mother tongue through communication with their babysitters or older kids, in other words, encouragement in situational communicative activities. They receive nonstop feedback from parents and friends who show suitable routines, establish norms, and rectify children's unsuitable behavior. This feedback gives much contribution to the attainment of the pragmatic ability needed to perform in their community. In contrast, most adult learners of foreign language need that kind of input as offspring do. Therefore, the classroom will be the most principal because it is the only one place where the learners get the language input as development of their pragmatic competence. Research into adult foreign language learners pragmatic competence has indicated that grammatical improvement does not assure a proof of pragmatic development level, and that even highly developed learners may be unsuccessful to comprehend or to deliver the intended meanings and politeness values, (Rasekh, 2005).

How difficult foreign language learners grasp pragmatic competence can be seen effortlessly in a large number of EFL classrooms around us. The interaction in classroom may not afford learners with sufficient input to make linguistic action for real-life communication in the target language. Some research findings have mentioned that learners can fruitfully learn grammar and competence in second and foreign language learning contexts, but the same outcome have not been measured in these situation for the improvement of pragmatic discourse and sociolinguistic ability, (Rueda, 2006). Foreign language learners typically do not have direct contact with native speakers. Although learners may communicate with native speakers of English in the virtual world (via internet), this chance can be accessed only to those with good capability with information and communication technology. The role of pragmatic lesson becomes essential because opportunities for doing interaction fully of human interactions are restricted, and so that learners face difficulties in using appropriate language pattern.

Considering this circumstances, the liability for teaching pragmatic aspects of language use go down primarily on teacher. Teachers should supply learners with both an immediate need for pragmatic competence, as well as a speech community in which to acquire and use that competence (Rose, 1994). Therefore, the pragmatics instruction has purpose to help the learners' sense to be able to recognize socially appropriate language for situations that they meet. For that reason, according to Rueda (2006), pragmatic instruction in a foreign language classroom need to complete three roles; (1) revealing learners to proper target language input, (2) augmenting learners' pragmatic awareness, and (3) organizing real-life chances to use pragmatic knowledge. These three aims of teaching pragmatic aspect will become responsible for teachers (Rasekh, 2005). Therefore, to meet the demands, the teachers need to provide learners with a number of useful strategies for pragmatic development.

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In order to communicate successfully in the target language, in EFL setting, teachers have to provide opportunities for the learners to use language in a communicative contexts. Teacher can consider to adopt the simpleacronym **SURE** strategy to promote learners' pragmatic competence to develop learners' language awareness, (Brock and Nagasaka, 2005).Match with the acronym, this strategy consists of four steps, that is **See**, **Use**, **Review** and **Experience**.Optimistically, this strategy will engage and involve the learners intellectually, emotionally, physically, and socially in learning new language. In the following there is an exemplar how to make learners acquainted with the use of apology expression when they involve in a communicative events in their daily exchanges.

See

Principle: *Teachers can facilitate their learners observe the language in real-life situation, improve awareness of the pragmatic roles, and describing pragmatic function plays in specific communicative events.*

In this activity, teacher first ask learners what common and frequent speech acts such as apology they practice in the classroom (of classmates and of their teachers). To carry out this phase, Rasekh (2005) suggests teacher to use Discourse Completion Task (DCT) to find intended speech function from the learners. The form contains situations in which learners are respond in their L1 and then translate it into L2. For instance:

3
Please write in the given spaces whatever you would articulate in the following interactional situation

You forgot a meeting with a friend; this is not for the first time that the similar experience has occurred with the same friend. At the end of the day, your friend phones you says "I waited for you more than one hour! What happened?"

You: _____

Next step is teacher elicits the language of apology from students. Finally teacher present natural data how to express apology to friend.

Using L1 at opening part has advantages of confirming the learners' L1 as a effective resource and also provides that the highlighting is first on pragmatics, instead of English. By means of translation, students' pragmatic awareness will raise and this activity can be fascinating for the students. Students apprehend how culture and language are closely related and sometime it is uneasy to realize parallel words for L1 translation.

Use

Principle: *Teachers can use activities by means of students practice English contextually (simulated and real) where they select how they communicate based on their comprehending of the context insinuated by the activity*

To achieve the foremost purpose of ELT, learners must have chance to practice the target language (L2). One essential chance for that, of course, is by means of small group work and twosome activities in the classroom. Olshtain and Cohen in Brock and Nagasaka (2005) states that using mini-dialogs, mini-drama, and role plays, in which students have some options of what they utter offer students with chances to use and build a great variety of pragmatic competence. To accomplish the activity, teacher ask students to work in group which assigned based on situation/context.

Review

Principle: *teachers should reconsider, emphasize, and reuse the sphere of pragmatic ability formerly taught*

To accomplish the activity, teacher give comments on students' apology expressions as speech act focus of their mini-drama performance. As an alternative way, teacher may invite class members to give comment on their friends' performance. In addition, teachers should keep using English to accomplish ordinary communicative functions in the classroom, so that the pragmatic competence of the learners will be emphasized through the familiar communicative events that occur daily EFL classroom activities.

Experience

Principle: *teacher can organize the learners to undergo and scrutinize the pragmatics role's in interaction.*

At the last step, teacher helps students to undergo and scrutinize pragmatic work. Television shows, movie, and other video programs can give us best resources for experiencing and analyzing language use in certain contexts (Rasekh, 2005). This activity invites students to become researcher themselves and see and make documents of native speaker data. The students-researchers strategy is meaningful instrument to provide learners sufficient clues to practice new language in ways that are contextually correct. Depending on the numbers of student and available duration, such observations may be open or structured. Open observation let students to find out what the principal contextual aspects may be. For structured observation, students are given an observation sheet which contains the categories to examine. An example form of structured data collection is drawn below:

Participants:

Speakers: M/F Age

Hearer: M/F Age

Dominance: S>H S=H S<H

Distance: intimates/family members friends/acquaintances strangers

1 2 3

Situation:

Place:

Time:

Offense committed:

Intensity of offence: Minimum moderate Maximum

1 2 3

Apology:

M = male; F = female; S = speaker; H = hearer

Conclusion

An EFL classroom can supply the context and overt instruction for learners to start building pragmatic ability in English. Pragmatic lesson in EFL classroom should provide opportunities for students to see, use, review and experience for English language in interactive context. Of course, it will step-by-step enable learners to attain how language works and how to use language appropriately to a numbers of communicative situations.

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