

Non-native Student's Communication is Affected Due to the Lack of Pragmatic Competence

Latha V. G. (Corresponding author)

M.A.M.Phil, (Ph.D)

Asst. Professor, English Division, Department of Science and Humanities

Jerusalem College of Engineering, Narayanapuram, Chennai-6000100 (Tamil Nadu), India

E-mail: latavasu09@gmail.com, devanradha@yahoo.com

Dr. Premalatha Rajan

M.A.M.Phil, Ph.D (London)

Professor, Department of English, Anna University, Sardar Patel Road, Chennai -25, India

E-mail: dr_premarajan@yahoo.com

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Abstract

This paper aims at focusing how the lack of pragmatic competence affects student's communication in L2 (Second language) at tertiary level. The city based Indian students learn English which is their second language from 3 years onwards whereas the rural based students learn English only from 6 years onwards. This exposure of the L2 shows the greatest disparity among technical students who opt for Engineering Studies here in the Medium of English. They join the Engineering courses with a hope of getting placement in good companies but some of them end up in jobs that are not worth their expectations. This leads to severe frustrations. The students at tertiary level lack in communication skills because they learn English but don't acquire it. Most of the times, students aren't able to produce utterances to communicate their "specific intentions" in a second language neither read between the lines. It's because in the pedagogical practice of second language teachers don't focus on this ability. Competence, whether linguistic or pragmatic, is not teachable. Competence is a type of knowledge that learners possess, develop, acquire, use or lose. The challenge for foreign or second language teaching is whether the teacher can arrange learning opportunities in such a way that it benefits the development of pragmatic competence in them. This paper focuses on how the lack of competence in pragmatics deprives the students of good placement for bright future and how this may be trounced.

Keywords: Pragmatic competence, Linguistic competence, Tertiary level, Communicative competence, L2 acquisition-(Second Language acquisition), Communication skills, Pedagogical practice, Specific intentions

1. Introduction

"Language is the most massive and inclusive art we know, a mountainous and anonymous work of unconscious generations." -Edward Sapir

Language may refer either to the specifically human capacity for acquiring and using complex systems of communication, or to a specific instance of such a system of complex communication.

Modern English sometimes described as the first global lingua franca is the dominant language or in some instances evens the required International language of communications, science, information technology, business, seafaring, aviation, entertainment, radio and diplomacy. Its spread beyond the British Isles began with the growth of the British Empire and by the late 19th century its reach was truly global. In India, nearly 125,344,736 people know English that is 12% of the total population.

Officially English has a status of assistant language, but in fact it is the most important language of India. After Hindi, it is the most commonly spoken language in India and probably the most read and written language in India. India is a multi lingual country and communication in all these languages is not possible practically. Northern states prefer Hindi and the Southern States prefer a common language which is English. Indians who know English will

always try to show that they know English and mingle it with Indian languages in their conversations. English symbolizes in Indian minds, better education, better culture and higher intellect.

As a result in Indian schools and colleges, a plethora of methods and techniques have been followed to teach English as the second language to the Indian students. Among them Communicative Language teaching (CLT) has proved to be more effective to a very large extent. CLT learning is promoted by activities which involve real communication and the learning process is supported by language that is meaningful to the learners. This leads to using the language appropriately in social context and which in turn helps in attaining communicative competence. The role of the teacher in this method is as that of the facilitator and he/she acts as an advisor and monitors the performance of the students. This method in fact holds responsible for student's learning. Thus, without any interference they are motivated and feel secure to use the target language in any of the activities like the role play, drama, skit, games and other enjoyable activities.

Secondly, in India after the globalization, the demand for the spoken English has given rise to the teaching of communicative language teaching. In this aspect, there is a change in the approach of teaching of L2 to the learners therefore; the focus is not only on the linguistic competence but also on the pragmatic competence of the L2 learners. The rationale behind the principle is that most of the students would like to go for jobs in MNC's and in IT companies after finishing their graduation at college. Many a student is deprived of this opportunity due to his/her non performance in campus interview for want of better communicative competence. So, in order to communicate successfully in a target language, pragmatic competence in L2 must be reasonably well developed.

Only a few students would like to pursue higher studies abroad (students who are academically inclined or academically very bright, financially sound and well groomed in English language).

2. What is Pragmatics?

Wikipedia, the webpage defines Pragmatics as the linguistics which studies the ways in which context contributes to meaning and it involves speech act theory, conversational implications, and other approaches to language behavior in philosophy, sociology and linguistics. Pragmatics is defined how language is used to convey meaning says, Adams (2002). Michael swan says pragmatics in linguistic discourse refers to dictionary or grammar meaning of utterance in context while in language teaching; pragmatics refers to encoding of particular communicative function, especially those relevant to interpersonal exchanges.

The pragmatics explores the ability of language users to match utterances with contexts in which they are appropriate; in Selinker's words, pragmatics is "the study of linguistic acts and the contexts in which they are performed" (1972). The teaching of pragmatics aims to facilitate the learners' sense of being able to find socially appropriate language for the situations that they encounter. Within second language studies and teaching, pragmatics encompasses speech acts, conversational structure, conversational implicature, conversational management, discourse organization, and sociolinguistic aspects of language use such as choice of address forms.

As such the non-native learners should learn to show significant differences from native speakers in the area of language use, in the execution and comprehension of certain speech acts, in conversational functions such as greetings and leave takings, and in conversational management such as back channeling and short responses. Even maintaining a conversation in English requires a certain amount of knowledge underlying responses that prompt a speaker to continue, show understanding, give support, indicate agreement, show strong emotional response, add or correct speaker's information, or ask for more information, as Gallow points out; Berry also discusses the importance of learning how to take turns, and demonstrates that listening behaviors that are polite in one language, may not be polite (or recognizable) in another. Unintentional insult to interlocutors (Mach & Ridder) and denial of requests (Weasenforth) have also been identified as other potential pragmatic hazards.

According to Meshthrie and Bhatt (2008) "Compliments, generally, and 'thanking', in the Indian context, are rare and are used to index formality and distance" (p.143). Similarly, Kachru (2008) also holds a view, "...Indian languages have various devices to make imperatives polite and respectful. Some such devices are the use of kinship terms to address the interlocutor, using honorific endings on verbs, the use of special particles that transform the direct imperative into a respectful request, and the use of expressions such as 'a little' (p. 355).

In such instances, being outside the range of language use allowed in a language, committing a type of pragmatic mistake, may have various consequences. It may hinder good communication between speakers (Takenoya), or make the speaker appear abrupt or brusque in social interactions (Lee), or rude or uncaring (Yates).

For example the blogger's tirade below about the use of "Sir" and "Madam" by call center representatives from India says:

"I do not like the word ma'am. I am the manager of a customer service operation and I think it is rude to say Ma'am

or Sir. Try to get the person's first name and call them by that. I find it works most of the time. I am 30 years old and am called ma'am a lot on the telephone and at stores. I hate it does have an age related connotations and I think it is disgusting to use" – "use of Sir and Madam", blog posted in 2002,

And another blogger says,

"In our training programs, we always recommend that associates use the customer's name rather than "sir" or Ma'am.....since we consider the representatives to be professionals, we do not want to encourage any practice that would hurt their positioning in any way. So we position themselves as the helpful, knowledgeable professionals they are!-Diane Berenbaum, Communico Ltd- "use of "sir" or "Madam", blog posted in 2002.

The above examples clearly exemplify that the very crucial factors in this computer age are the cross cultural language use in pragmatics and L2 competence. The failure in proper use of words and phrases leads to misunderstanding in communication and thereby the learners are not motivated to use the language properly in fear of losing the confidence in them.

2.1 Literature Review on Pragmatic Competence

Many researchers such as McDaniel, Cairns & Hsu 1990, Austin and Searle 1992 hold the view that even while learning L1 grammar a child may know the rules of grammar but may fail to operate them in various situations properly. Harrington says that an adult comes to know the linguistic competence once he/she learns the rules of the grammar perfectly but it takes time for him/her to attain the linguistic performance. While acquiring the L2, there is a stage known as inter language stage (Rod Ellis). In this stage, the learner actually comes to know the nuances in using the language. Knowing the nuances of the L2 can in other words be known as pragmatic competence.

For many years, the second language researchers focused their attention on the linguistic competence of the L2 learners because the teaching approach was based on the grammar rules alone. But some years now, their focus is on the communicative approach to second language teaching so the grammar based teaching has been side lined and the use of pragmatics has been encouraged by them. This view has been supported by the researchers such as Hymes, Ellis, Doughty and Williams. Hymes claims that 'rules of use without which rules of grammar would be useless'. Ellis says focusing only on forms without meaning and vice versa will lead to 'pidgin like breeding'. Doughty and Williams say that concentrating on form, meaning and function will help learners to perform well at communicative level.

3. Pragmatic Competence and Communication Competence

When a diplomat says yes, he means 'perhaps'

When he says perhaps, he means 'no'

When he says no, he is not a diplomat.

-Voltaire

These lines may or may not be fair to diplomats, but are surely correct in reminding us that more is involved in what one communicates than what one literally says; more is involved in what one means than the standard, conventional meaning of the words one uses. The words 'yes,' 'perhaps,' and 'no' each has a perfectly identifiable meaning, known by every speaker of English (including not very competent ones). However, as those lines illustrate, it is possible for different speakers in different circumstances to mean different things using those words. How is this possible? What's the relationship among the meaning of words, what speakers mean when uttering those words, the particular circumstances of their utterance, their intentions, their actions, and what they manage to communicate? These are some of the questions that pragmatics tries to answer; the sort of questions that, roughly speaking, serve to characterize the field of pragmatics.

Pragmatics deals with **utterances**, by which we will mean specific events, the intentional acts of speakers at times and places, typically involving language. Logic and semantics traditionally deal with properties of **types** of expressions, and not with properties that differ from token to token, or use to use, or, as we shall say, from utterance to utterance, and vary with the particular properties that differentiate them.

Pragmatics is sometimes characterized as dealing with the effects of **context**. This is equivalent to saying it deals with utterances, if one collectively refers to all the facts that can vary from utterance to utterance as 'context.' One must be careful, however, for the term is often used with more limited meanings. Herbert Paul Grice emphasized the distinction Voltaire makes, in our opening quotation, between what words mean, what the speaker literally says when using them, and what the speaker means or intends to communicate by using those words

Among conversational implicatures, Grice distinguished between ‘particularized’ and ‘generalized.’ The former are the implicatures that are generated by saying something in virtue of some particular features of the context, A generalized conversational implicature occurs where “the use of a certain forms of words in an utterance would normally (in the absence of special circumstances) be absent.

Particularized conversational implicatures have a wide range of applications that Grice himself illustrates: the informative use of tautologies, irony, metaphor, hyperbole, meiosis and, in principle, any kind of non-literal use that relies in special circumstances of the utterance can be explained in terms of them. But generalized conversational implicatures apply to philosophically more important issues, in particular, to what, according to the introduction to *Logic and Conversation*, was Grice's most important motivation: the issue of the difference of meaning between logical constants of formal languages and their counterparts in natural languages, or the alleged meanings of verbs like ‘to look like,’ ‘to believe’ or ‘to know.’

The problem of getting to know the meaning and function of a linguistic form by the adult learner in L2 is difficult at the initial stage of learning, but this becomes normal at the stage when practice and experience play their role in shaping their L2 acquisition. Hence, Pragmatics is the result of cognitive changes or developmental stages from the childhood to the adult. For instance, in the following examples, the meaning and function of the word **watering** can be understood only through constant exposure, cognitive development and constant practice.

- He is watering the plants now.
- Watering the plants is a good exercise.
- His mouth starts watering when he thinks of sweets.

The three sentences fulfill the rules of present tense. The Function and meaning of the word **watering** vary from the first sentence to the last sentence. In the first sentence, the word ‘**watering**’ functions as the present participle and the meaning of the sentence is a person is watering the plant at the time of speaking. In the second sentence, the word **watering** is a gerund and the sentence conveys a general meaning stating that **watering plant** helps one to do exercise and the implied meaning here is it also helps one to gain physical fitness. In the third sentence, the word **watering** functions as a gerund and it is the object of the verb starts and also it conveys the meaning of static senses.

Hence, the function and the meaning of the word is not the same and one has to get the differences only through constant practice and through cognitive knowledge. The use of water to plants should be known to the people of the society then only the meaning is conveyed to the people (Sapir Warf). Thus, the pragmatic knowledge depends upon the real-world knowledge of a ‘doer’ that he/ she bring into the use of a language. Nevertheless, the grammar rules help to find out the structure form, word order, and use of rules so on. To put it in a nutshell, the learner may build up the linguistic abilities to interpret the meanings of the sentences through cognitive development by learning rules of the grammar on the other hand, he or she needs pragmatics to pick up the language in order to converse.

Shea (1990) finds that conversational participation is the way to develop the second language proficiency. Young 1998 found out “on any interview, the interviewer style is imposed on the interviewer”. In the same manner, at schools, colleges and in workplaces there is a possibility of picking up languages by conversing, and also a possibility of picking up other’s errors in any collaborative functions. In classrooms, teachers’ interaction with the students shows how their utterances should be based on social and pragmatic norms of the target language.

In guiding them how to write a dialogue or a conversation or how to proceed with the role play the teachers’ contribution is inevitable. The use of **please** in a request, the use of Modal verbs **may** and **might** in permission give the students the ability to converse with groups with more politeness and comfort. So conceived communicative intentions have these characteristic properties:

- They are always oriented towards some other agent — the addressee.
- They are overt, that is, they are intended to be recognized by the addressee.
- Their satisfaction consists precisely in being recognized by the addressee.

3.1 Literature review on Communicative Competence

Communicative competence is a term in linguistics which refers to a language user's grammatical knowledge of syntax, morphology, phonology and the like, as well as social knowledge about how and when to use utterances appropriately.

The term was coined by Dell Hymes in 1966, reacting against the perceived inadequacy of Noam Chomsky's (1965) distinction between competence and performance. To address Chomsky's abstract notion of competence, Hymes undertook ethnographic exploration of communicative competence that included "communicative form and function

in integral relation to each other" (Leung, 2005). The approach pioneered by Hymes is now known as the ethnography of communication.

As much as there has already been much debate about linguistic competence and communicative competence in the second and foreign language teaching literature, the outcome has always been the consideration of communicative competence as a superior model of language following Hymes' opposition to Chomsky's linguistic competence. This opposition has been adopted by those who seek new directions toward a communicative era by taking for granted the basic motives of this opposition behind the development of communicative competence.

A more recent survey of communicative competence by Bachman (1990) divides it into the broad headings of "organizational competence," which includes both grammatical and discourse (or textual) competence, and "pragmatic competence," which includes both sociolinguistic and "illocutionary" competence. Strategic Competence is associated with the interlocutors' ability in using communication strategies (Faerch & Kasper, 1983; Lin, 2009).

Through the influence of communicative language teaching, it has become widely accepted that communicative competence should be the goal of language education, central to good classroom practice. This is in contrast to previous views in which grammatical competence was commonly given top priority. The understanding of communicative competence has been influenced by the field of pragmatics and the philosophy of language concerning speech acts as described in large part by John Searle and J.L. Austin.

"Linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogeneous speech-community, who know its (the speech community's) language perfectly and that it is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interest, and errors (random or characteristic) in applying his knowledge of this language in actual performance." (Chomsky, 1965)

Chomsky differentiates competence, which is an idealized capacity, from performance being the production of actual utterances. According to him, competence is the ideal speaker-hearer's knowledge of his or her language and it is the 'mental reality' which is responsible for all those aspects of language use which can be characterized as 'linguistic'. Chomsky argues that only under an idealized situation whereby the speaker-hearer is unaffected by grammatically irrelevant conditions such as memory limitations and distractions will performance be a direct reflection of competence. A sample of natural speech consisting of numerous false starts and other deviations will not provide such data. Therefore, he claims that a fundamental distinction has to be made between the competence and performance.

Chomsky dismissed criticisms of delimiting the study of performance in favor of the study of underlying competence, as unwarranted and completely misdirected. He claims that the descriptivist limitation-in-principle to classification and organization of data, the "extracting patterns" from a corpus of observed speech and the describing "speech habits" etc. are the core factors that preclude the development of a theory of actual performance.

The notion of communicative competence is one of the theories that underlie the communicative approach to foreign language teaching. Canale and Swain (1980) defined communicative competence in terms of three components:

1. grammatical competence: words and rules
2. sociolinguistic competence: appropriateness
3. strategic competence: appropriate use of communication strategies

Canale (1983) refined the above model, adding discourse competence: cohesion and coherence.

Another functionalist theory advances the notion of communicative competence, which focuses on socially-situated performance, was developed by Dell Hymes in response to the abstract nature of linguistic competence. Communicative competence is also sometimes referred to as pragmatic or sociolinguistic competence, especially when the emphasis is on how to interpret the speaker's intended meaning in a particular utterance, apart from the literal meaning.

The major criticism towards Chomsky's notion of linguistic competence by Hymes is the inadequate distinction of competence and performance. Furthermore, he commented that it is unreal and that no significant progress in linguistics is possible without studying forms along with the ways in which they are used. As such, linguistic competence should fall under the domain of communicative competence since it comprises four competence areas, namely, linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic.

4. Conclusion

Language acquisition is the process by which humans acquire the capacity to perceive, produce and use words to understand and communicate. This capacity involves the picking up of diverse capacities including syntax,

phonetics and an extensive vocabulary. This language might be vocal as with speech or manual as in sign. Language acquisition usually refers to first language acquisition, which studies infants' acquisition of their native language, rather than second language acquisition, which deals with acquisition (in both children and adults) of additional languages. Grammatical knowledge alone is not enough to help us participate effectively in communicative situation. In addition to acquainting oneself with the forms of language, one must know the following in order to communicate appropriately:

- a) The socio-cultural relation including the attitude, values, conventions, prejudices and preferences of the people who use the language.
- b) The nature of the participants which shows the relationship between the speaker and the listener, their occupation, interest, socio-economic status, etc.
- c) The role of the participant, such as the relationship in social network, father – son, teacher – student, boss – subordinate, landlord – tenant, doctor – patient, etc.
- d) The nature and function of the speech deals with whether it is a face to face talk persuasion, confrontation, or a casual conversation, or a request informal situation, or a telephonic conversation, etc.
- e) The mode (medium) of communication, whether spoken or written form or reading from a written script, or unprepared speech.

Pragmatic competence is the one that underlines the ability to use the language along with a conceptual system to achieve certain aims or purpose. And it determines how the tool can be effectively put to use: It is user-oriented. We can sum up and say that the following are essentially the components of communication that go into the building up of the communicative competence:

A. Linguistic Knowledge and the Para-linguistic Cues:

- (i) Verbal elements (sentences, clauses, phrases, etc.)
- (ii) Non-verbal elements (aspects of communicative behavior, such as: facial expression, body movement, eye gaze, gesture, proximity, etc.)
- (iii) Elements of discourse and their organization in connective speech and writing.
- (iv) Range of possible variants (possible variations and their organizations).
- (v) Meaning of variants to a particular situation.

B. Interaction Skills:

- (i) Norms of interaction and interpretation.
- (ii) Strategies for achieving desire goals.
- (iii) Perception or features (verbal as well as non-verbal) in communication situation (situation of communication).
- (iv) Understanding appropriateness in any given situation.

C. Cultural Knowledge:

- (i) Socials structure.
- (ii) Values and attitudes.
- (iii) Cognitive scheme (verbal as well as non verbal) and the cultural transmission processes.

The capacity to acquire and use language is a key aspect that distinguishes humans from other organisms. While many forms of animal communication exist, they have a limited range of non syntactically structured vocabulary tokens that lack cross cultural variation between groups.

A major concern in understanding language acquisition is how these capacities is picked up by infants from what appears to be very little input. A range of theories of language acquisition has been created in order to explain this apparent problem including in which a child is born prepared in some manner with these capacities, as opposed to the other theories in which language is simply learned.

Hence the following Recommendations are suggested to help students pick the communication competence by applying pragmatics competence which can be acquired through constant exposure to second language through conversational technique and collaborative learning.

5. Recommendations

1. When some students find hard to mingle with the students whose language flow is quite fast, the teacher has to be with the group and try to encourage the slow learners in mixing with the other students.
2. The teacher should give them training in conversation techniques and help them produce sentences according to the situation.
3. The language laboratory can be used for helping the students correct the pronunciation of the words and also develop their word power by using online dictionary.
4. They should be allowed to do role play; skit and the teacher should record the events.
5. The recorded conversations and dialogue can be played in the class and overt corrections can be done at the time of speaking.
6. Grammar teaching in the second language should be integrated with composition.
7. Grammar teaching in the second language should be students' specific not teacher's specific.

If proper practice has been given and allowed them to have their own experience in L2 language acquisition with proper guidance from the teacher the days are not far away for the non-native speakers to acquire the L2 language like the native speakers.

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