

THE SIGNIFICANCE AND DEVELOPMENT OF PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE IN NON-NATIVE STUDENTS' SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING FOR EMPLOYABILITY

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This paper focuses on the significance of developing pragmatic competence in students' Second language learning for employability. In India, the city based learners learn English at an early age, whereas the rural based students learn English only from the sixth year onwards. This disparity in exposure to second language learning is pronounced more among the rural based students. These students normally prefer engineering courses as they promise a greater scope for placements. However, their competency in the core subject as well in English is negligible. They are unable to produce utterances to communicate their "specific intentions" in English. This shows that these students lack pragmatic competence. In the second language teaching, competence, whether communicative or pragmatic, is not teachable for it can be only possessed, developed, acquired, used or lost. This paper aims at facilitating the development of pragmatic competence in rural based students. The researcher used the learner- centric support materials to enhance the second language teaching. She used the strategy inventory for Language learning (SILL) (Rubin and stern -1975) survey to tailor suit her teaching. The results analysis, conclusion and directions for further research conclude this paper.

Keywords: pragmatic competence, Tertiary level, Second Language acquisition, pedagogical practice

What is Pragmatics?

It is possible for different speakers in different circumstances to mean different things using words. How is this possible? What's the relationship between the meaning of words and what the speakers mean while uttering those words, under 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 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. It helps to study the ways in which context contributes to meaning and involves speech act theory, conversational implications, and other approaches to language behavior in philosophy, sociology and linguistics. Michael swan says pragmatics in linguistic discourse refers to dictionary or grammar meaning of utterance in context while in language teaching;

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pragmatics refers to encoding of particular communicative function, especially those relevant to interpersonal exchanges. Pragmatics explores the ability of language users to match utterances with contexts in which they are appropriate; in Selinker's words, (1972) pragmatics is "the study of linguistic acts and the contexts in which they are performed".

Literature Review on Pragmatic Competence

Many researchers such as McDaniel, Cairns & Hsu (1990), Austin and Searle (1992) hold the view that even while learning the First Language (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 (2006). 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 recently, 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 (1996), Ellis, (2006) Doughty and Williams (1998). 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 (1998) say that concentrating on form, meaning and function will help learners to perform well at communicative level.

Why to Develop Pragmatics?

The developing of pragmatics aims to facilitate the learners' ability to find socially appropriate language for the situations that they encounter. There are many reasons why the students are not in a position to utter "specific intentions" appropriately to situations while conversing in second language. The following mentioned with illustration is one of the reasons.

The problem of getting to know the meaning and function of a linguistic form by the adult learner in Second language (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 *dumb* can be understood only through constant exposure, cognitive development and constant practice of the word in different contexts.

Dumb –Adjective

1. For example: He is a young deaf and **dumb** man.

2. I came up with this dumb idea.

Dumb-Adjective-(Verb-Link Adjective)

3. For example: we were all struck **dumb** for a minute due his actions.

Dumbly-Adverb (Adverb with verb)

4. I shook my head **dumbly**, not believing him.

Dumb down is as phrasal verb.

5. For example: No one favored the **dumbing down** the magazine.

In the above given examples given above, the function and meaning of the word **dumb** vary from the first sentence to the last sentence. In the first sentence, the word dumb functions as an adjective and the meaning of the sentence is that a person is young and completely unable to speak. Here, the physical disability of the person is talked about. In the second example also the word dumb functions as an adjective but the meaning of the sentence is that the person came up with silly and annoying idea. This is related to the person's thinking ability. In the third example also the word dumb functions as an adjective. For example, if someone is dumb on a particular occasion, they cannot speak because they are angry, shocked or surprised (Literary.) here the action is related to the situation. In the fourth example, the word dumb functions as an adverb. With the base verb dumb –ly suffix is added to form an adverb at the time of speaking. In the fifth example, the word *dumb* along with *down* forms a phrasal verb. For example, when we dumb down something it is easier to understand that this spoils it. 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 the word dumb should be known to the people of the society then only the meaning is conveyed to the people (Sapir Warf). Likewise, the word 'Green' when used as an adjective (denotes someone or something green) the meaning is that he/it harms the environment as little as possible. On the other hand, if it is used as a countable noun, the same word gives a different meaning as a smooth, flat area of grass around a hole on a golf course. And; the same word denotes the color green. 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. Hence, it becomes necessary for students to develop pragmatics

competence in English in order to produce meaningful utterances in any kind of situations or environment. Thus, constant practice helps students in internalizing the new word with a pragmatic approach.

Its Significance in Indian Students' Employability

In India, the language English enjoys the status of the second language and as well the status of an official language next to Hindi. It is used in small shops to big malls, hospitals, schools, colleges, high courts and even in the places of worship. It is the most commonly spoken language in south India and probably the most read and written language in India throughout. India is a multi lingual country and communication in all these languages is not possible practically northern states prefer Hindi as common language, but the southern states prefer English. Indians from various strata of the society will always try to show that they know English and mix it with Indian languages in their conversations. However, not all sections of the society enjoy the privilege of getting the right exposure to acquire this language. There is always the divide between the urban and rural dwellers in getting this language learnt well.

English symbolizes in Indian minds, better education, better culture and higher intellect. Parents in India prefer to send their wards to schools and colleges where English is the medium of instruction. In recent times in India, the expectations and dreams of the parents to educate their wards professionally have intensified. In order to fulfill their dreams, their wards are admitted in professional institutions away from their native places. So, engineering aspirants from remote villages come to study in urban professional institutions where the requisite for getting the degree is colossal. To impart technical knowledge, English language is used as medium of instructions in all these institutions. Therefore, these students have to strive first to get into the basics of English language and then to apply this knowledge to acquire technical knowledge. This is the greatest challenge not only to such students but also to the teachers who teach in these institutions.

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 second language (L2) to the learners therefore; the focus is not only on the communicative 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 Multi National Companies (MNC's) and in IT sectors after finishing their graduation at college. Only a few students, who are academically inclined or academically very bright, financially sound and well groomed in English language, could pursue higher studies abroad. Rest of them prefers to go for jobs in companies. Many a student is deprived of this opportunity due to his/her non performance in campus interview for want of better communicative competence. From all these facts, it is evident that students in

order to communicate successfully in a target language, along with communicative competence, their pragmatic competence in L2 must be reasonably well developed.

A survey report by wall street journal- Asia (2000) says that Engineering colleges in India now have seats for 1.5 million students, nearly four times the 390,000 available in 2000, according to the National Association of Software and Services Companies, a trade group. But 75% of technical graduates and more than 85% of general graduates are unemployable by India's high-growth global industries, including information technology and call centers. A common scene in all recruiting houses these days is that out of every 100 students interviewed only three could successfully come out of the interview. The reason given by the heads of the recruiting houses is that the average graduates' ability to comprehend and converse is very low and this is the challenge they face while recruiting engineering students.

Even after selection, the students at work place have to show significant differences 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. Then, 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(2003) points out; Berry (2003) 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 insults to interlocutors (Mach & Ridder, 2003) and denial of requests (Weaseniortii, 2003) 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, 2003), or make the speaker appear abrupt or brusque in social interactions (Lee, 2003), or rude or uncaring (Yates, 2003).

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 tirades from the blogs clearly exemplify that the failure in proper use of words and phrases leads to misunderstanding in communication and thereby the non native speakers are not motivated to use the language properly in fear of losing the confidence in them. However, the study and development of pragmatics may help the non native speakers to face challenges in workplace in terms of execution and delivery of their work.

Research Design and Procedure

In order to facilitate the development of pragmatic competence, the researcher decided to use the creative and student-centric support materials to enhance the second language teaching. The rationale in selecting the materials is that they are central to language learning as well pivotal in language curricula. But, designing materials is a challenging task. Perhaps, the greatest challenge of materials preparation is that the materials get outdated even as they emerge as hot in print. Traditionally, text books were regarded as teaching materials now the trends have changed. What material apart from text book will be suitable for the students and how to deliver them to the students? So, it becomes inevitable for the researcher to use the strategy inventory for Language learning (SILL) (Rubin and Stern, 1975) survey to tailor suit her teaching according to their best language learning strategy. The following SILL (Rubin and Stern, 1975) questionnaire with 15 questions was administered to randomly selected 30 students. The selection was based on the researcher's decision for better result and students' socio economic background. (15 rural tamil medium(vernacular) and 15 urban English medium).An overview of the questionnaire administered to the students for better result to select teaching material is given below.

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR STRATEGY INVENTORY FOR SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING. (Rubin and Stern, 1975)

NAME

ETHNICITY

DEGREE/DIVISION

INSTRUCTIONS: Please read each statement and fill in the responses (1,2,3,4,5.)

1. Never or almost never true of me.
2. Usually not true of me.
3. Somewhat true of me.
4. Usually true of me
5. Always or almost true of me.

From 1 to 5 are options given in the questionnaire for every question. Of which the first three options are considered as option 'No', and the fourth and fifth options are considered as option 'YES'.

*1. I use new second language grammar chunks in a sentence so I can remember them.	1	2	3	4	5
*2. I connect the grammar chunks with an image or picture to help me remember them.	1	2	3	4	5
*3. I use rhymes to remember the newly learnt grammar concept.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I practice the sounds of SL	1	2	3	4	5
5. I start conversations in the SL	1	2	3	4	5
6. I read for pleasure in the SL	1	2	3	4	5
*7. I use flashcards to remember any grammar terms in SL	1	2	3	4	5
8. I write notes, messages, letters or reports in SL.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I first skim an SL passage then go back and read.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I try to find patterns in the SL.	1	2	3	4	5
11. I notice my SL mistakes and use that information to Help me do better.	1	2	3	4	5
12. I pay attention when someone is speaking in SL.	1	2	3	4	5
13. I try to find out how to be a better learner of SL.	1	2	3	4	5
14. I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in SL.	1	2	3	4	5
*15. I have clear goals for improving my SL skills.	1	2	3	4	5

Out of the 15 questions, questions 1, 2, 3, 7 and 15 have been selected and their responses have been calculated using a chi square calculation to find the best suitable learning strategy for developing pragmatics in students. The reason behind selecting these five questions was that they are very close to developing the pragmatics skills. The following tables (table 1 to 5) give the details about the variables N, (number of students) the results of their responses in chi square calculation.

Based on the results from the SILL (Rubin and Stern, 1975) selected questions, it is conceivable that the students are interested in creative, innovative way of learning, and are ready for improving their SL learning skills. Thus, in a short span of time, the main aim of investigating to tailor suit and select the support material to develop pragmatic competence in students has been made very clear from the

TABLE 1

Q1. I use new second language grammar chunks in a sentence so I can remember them.

VARIABLES-CSE Students N=30	Yes	No	Marginal Row Totals
Rural Tamil med N=15	7 (7.5) [0.03]	8 (7.5) [0.03]	15
Urban English med N=15	8 (7.5) [0.03]	7 (7.5) [0.03]	15
Marginal Column Totals	15	15	30 (Grand Total)

The Chi-square statistic is 0.1333. The P value is 0.715001. This result is *not* significant at $p < 0.05$

TABLE 2

Q2. I connect the grammar chunks with an image or picture to help me remember them.

VARIABLES	Yes	No	Marginal Row Totals
Rural Tamil med N=15	10 (9.5) [0.03]	5 (5.5) [0.05]	15
Urban English med N=15	9 (9.5) [0.03]	6 (5.5) [0.05]	15
Marginal Column Totals	19	11	30 (Grand Total)

The Chi-square statistic is 0.1333. The P value is 0.715001. This result is *not* significant at $p < 0.05$

TABLE 3

Q3. I use rhymes to remember the newly learnt grammar concept.

VARIABLES	Yes	No	Marginal Row Totals
Rural Tamil med N=15	6 (8.5) [0.74]	9 (6.5) [0.96]	15
Urban English med N=15	11 (8.5) [0.74]	4 (6.5) [0.96]	15
Marginal Column Totals	17	13	30 (Grand Total)

The Chi-square statistic is 0.1333. The P value is 0.715001. This result is *not* significant at $p < 0.05$

TABLE 4

Q7. I use flashcards to remember any grammar terms in SL

VARIABLES	Yes	No	Marginal Row Totals
Rural Tamil med N=15	8 (9) [0.11]	7 (6) [0.17]	15
Urban English med N=15	10 (9) [0.11]	5 (6) [0.17]	15
Marginal Column Totals	18	12	30 (Grand Total)

The Chi-square statistic is 0.5556. The P value is 0.456057. This result is *not* significant at $p < 0.05$.

TABLE 5

Q15. I have clear goals for improving my SL skills

VARIABLES	Yes	No	Marginal Row Totals
Rural Tamil med N=15	9 (10.5) [0.21]	6 (4.5) [0.5]	15
Urban English med N=15	12 (10.5) [0.21]	3 (4.5) [0.5]	15
Marginal Column Totals	21	9	30 (Grand Total)

The Chi-square statistic is 1.4286. The P value is 0.231998. This result is *not* significant at $p < 0.05$.

results. Also, the support materials selected should be learner centered, inclined towards creativity and innovative ideas. They should facilitate learning, motivate and equip students for day-to-day communication. Consequently, materials designed for the teaching should solve the pedagogic problem rather than linguistic or psychological one. They should facilitate quick learning and at the same time make a teacher's work enjoyable and profitable. Therefore, the approach to learning is translated into a method, and implemented through a set of teaching techniques which determine the nature of the materials. While considering the nature of learners, their age, motivation, aptitude and previous learning experience, cartoons have been selected in this research as support material to develop pragmatic competence in students.

Cartoon as Support Material-pedagogical Implications

The cartoon is defined as a pictorial parody using caricature, satire, humor and ludicrous juxtaposition frequently highlighted by written dialogue or commentary. One of the most important pedagogical uses of cartoons is that they motivate learners. Learners perceive cartoons as realistic and meaningful. They engage students meaningfully as they are very absorbing. Moreover, they are suitable for pair or group work in the classroom. So, students can work together and relate cartoons to what is happening around them. Students love to discuss the semantic, pragmatic and sociolinguistic meanings and messages and report their interpretations to the class. Hence, teachers use them to test students' ability to read between the lines. Therefore, cartoons have been used in this research to create a context, to clarify the meaning of a vocabulary item or a grammatical point and to draw students' attention to the precise form of the language involved. The following is an example for how cartoon has been used as a support material to develop pragmatic competence.

CARTOON 1



**Due to space constraints,
we trained him to wag
his tail vertically!**

The students should work in pairs or groups. After having a discussion among themselves they should answer the following questions.

1. Can you guess the place of action?
2. Why does the caption have an exclamatory mark?
3. Name the things that you see in the picture.
4. Look at the TV. What does ODI means?
5. Prepare a list of words that collocate with train. For example: train well, train people.
6. Which word in the cartoon is responsible for humor?
7. Give the meaning of the word constraints. Can the same word be used as a verb? If so write at least one sentence for noun and verb form of the word.
8. Replace the word vertically with straight. Does the meaning of the caption change?
9. Suffix-ly is added to adjectives to form adverbs. For example, Vertical +ly =vertically, critical+ly=critically. Write 5 adverbs using the suffix-ly
10. Now attempt a cartoon on any subject of your choice.

Discussion, Observation and Further Research.

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 this research using the cartoon as teaching material, the teacher's (research) interaction with the students in the classroom revealed that how their utterances should be based on social and pragmatic norms of the target language. When students discussed and interpreted, they listened to other students' ideas and made use of them in their answers. This is how the cartoon has been used to develop discussion and information sharing activities leading to collective speaking and writing. Thus, in guiding them how to write a caption for the cartoon, or to select the subject for it or to converse with them to proceed with the learning, the teacher's contribution became very satisfying. Further, cartoons can be used to integrate the four skills (LSRW) of communication and help the teacher to drive away the monotonous and uninteresting from the classroom teaching.

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 linguistic features including syntax, phonetics

and semantic. 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 in spoken or written form or reading from a written script, or unprepared speech. Hence, pragmatic competence is the one that underlines the ability to use the language along with a conceptual system to achieve certain aims or purpose. Hence, the following recommendations are given to help students to acquire the communicative competence by applying pragmatic competence which can be acquired through constant exposure to second language through conversational technique and collaborative learning.

Recommendations

1. When slow learners find it 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 their pronunciation skills and also develop their word power by using online dictionary.
4. Opportunities should be provided to do role play as a classroom activity; 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 teachers - centered

If constant practice has been given and are allowed 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 competence like the native speakers.

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