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

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Abstract

A large number of English language learners in Indonesia tend to be recognised as 'fluent fools' learners. They can make all correct sentences following the grammar rules but cannot communicate in appropriate 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 activies 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 Expeprience). Hopefully, this strategy will enable learners gradually to gain how language works and how to use language appropriate to a variety of communicative settings.

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

Introduction

There are a number of language competencies which English learners must develop, in tandem, in order to communicate successfully in English. Yet, as we recognize, correct and accurate sentences grammatically and phonologically sometimes fail because learners' language pragmatic competence—his or her ability to express or interpret communicative functions in particular context—is undeveloped or faulty. In other words, a feel of inadequacy comes when they can make all the correct sentences following the grammar rule but cannot communicate in appropriate manners—not knowing the message conveyed by or embedded in the words they have learnt, not sure how to carry on a topic, not understanding the humour, and thus not effectively involved in the everyday talking with native speakers. EFL classroom tend to produce "fluent fools" learners which refers to someone who can speak a language fluently yet knows nothing about the culture. The phenomenon of 'incompetent learners' is by writer's observation a result of the absensence 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 Indonesia aims 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 the language aside. Most of English teachers overweighed emphasize their teaching on language forms rather than imaginative play of it and on meanings of words in dictionary rather than on the communicative value in real-life exchanges.

From the course material, teachers sometimes choose materials which remain organized around grammar elements with an 'unrelenting format' (Harmer in Lin (2006), and sometimes 'full of speech acts and functions based on situations which most foreign-language students will never encounter', (Altan in Lin, 2006). An often quoted case is the whole sentence utterance in textbook like '*How old are you*' or '*How much do you earn for a year?*' which focus on grammatical correctness and factual information but adds up nothing but appallingly impoliteness putting in a real situation. Moreover, learners fail to pick up special uses of standard structure which are important for daily communication. For example, '*Do that again*

and I'm going home' as a threat; or '*Come on, it's not going to happen in a million years*' as statement of remote possibility.

From the teaching method, a large number of English teachers in Indonesia still lecture in a fast-food feeding way—like instant noodles, just feed them, and then have the response and do some evaluation. Learners are taught to, and are actually good at labelling, defining and explaining the language forms, especially in their mother tongue. It is a plaguing practice that teachers tend to explain each and everything, as explicit and exhaustive as possible, in the classroom. Too detailed focus on grammar and lexical features than language in use lead to misapplication of learners' knowledge and skills.

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 reaction to the established prescriptive approach which focuses on form and atomistic analysis of language. In accordance to its emergence, numerous of definition of LA come out from several experts. In general, these experts bestow two distinctive features of LA—a person's psychological trait and an pedagogic approach. As the first feature, Donmall (2005) in Ellis (2012) affirms that LA as a person's sensitivity to and concious awareness of language and its role in human life. Tomlinson (2003) considers LA is as a mental attribute which develops through paying motivated attention to language in use, and which enables language learners to gradually insights into how language work. In harmony with the previous ideas, Carter (2003) cited in Lin (2006) avows that LA refers to the development in learners of an enhanced consiousness of and sensitivity to the forms and functions of language.Current definition of LA come from Association for Language Awareness (ALA) which is cited in Ellis (2012) which states that LA can be defined as "explicit knowledge of language, and concious perception and sensitivity in language learning, language teaching and language use.

As an approach, LA is viewed as a pedagogic approach that aims to help learners to gain such insight", (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 willingly invest energy and attention in the learning process; and (ii) paying deliberately attention to the features of language in use can help learners to notice the gap between their own performance in the target language, and the performance of proficient users of the language.

The main objectives can be segregated into three targets , i.e. (i) to help learners to notice themselves how language is typically used so that they will note the gaps and achieve learning readiness; (ii) to help learners to develop cognitive skills as connecting, generalizing, and hypothesizing, and (iii) to help learners to become independent, with positive attitudes towards the language, and to learning the language beyond the classroom.

The main traits of LA procedures are characterized by subsequent practices, as follows, (i) emphasizing on experiential rather than analytical, and aim to involve the learners in affective interaction with potentially engaging text, so as to be able to achieve their own mental representation of the text, and to articulate their personal response to it; (ii) asking students to focus on a particular features of the text, to work with others to identify instances of this feature, and to make discoveries and articulate generalizations about its use; (iii) facilitating the students to test their generalizations by searching for other instances in other texts. On going research is then encouraged which involves seeking further instances and reconsidering the generalizations

which has been made. Consequently, throughout the process procedures are used, can maximize the potential of interactive collaboration between the learner and other learners, between the learners with the teacher, and between the learners and proficient users of language. In short, what the teachers do in taking a language awareness approach is to challenge learners to ask questions, sparkle their interest and involve them in exploring themselves of how language works.

Pragmatics: Its definition and classification

Pragmatics is a subfield of linguistics. There are copious definitions of pragmatics proposed by several linguists. Levinson (1983:21) points out that pragmatics is the studyof the relations between language and context that are basic to an account of language understanding.Crystal (1985) states that pragmatics refers to "the study of language from the point of view of language users, especially of the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction and the effects their use of language has on other participants in the act of communication."Yule (1996:4) labels pragmatics as "the study of the relationship between linguistic forms and the users of those forms. Huang (2007:2) defines pragmatics as "the systematic study of meaning by virtue of, or dependent on, the use of language."In short, pragmatics is defined as the study of how to undertand the linguistics forms by connecting it to the language users and its contexts (linguistic, physical, social and epistemic) in a communicative action. The central topics of inquiry of pragmatics include implicature, presupposition, speech acts, deixis, maxim and cooperative principles and politeness.

Kasper (1997) divides pragmatics into two facets, namely pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics. Pragmalinguistics refers to the resources for conveying communicative acts and relational on interpersonal meanings. Such resources include pragmatic strategies such as directness and indirectness, routines, and other range of lingusitic forms which can be soften or intensify communicative acts. An example provided by Kasper (1997) as in *Sorry* and *I'm absolutely devastated—could you possibly find it in your heart to forgive me?* Both utterances are expressions of apology, but definitely are uttered in different contexts. Here the speaker who utters the latter apology has chosen some pragmalinguistics resourcing of apologizing. Sociopragmatics has been described by Leech (1993) as sociological interface of pragmatics, referring to the social perceptions underlying participants interpretation and performance of communicative action. Speech communities differ in their assessment of speaker's and hearer's social distance and social power, their rights and obligations, and the degree of imposition involved in particular communicative acts, (Holmes in Krisnawati, 2011). Sociopragmatics is about proper social behavior. Learners must be made aware of consequences of making pragmatic choices.

Pragmatic Competence: its models and merits?

Pragmatic competence is recognised as one of vital components of communicative competence. Although the notion of communicative competence goes back to Hymes (1972), Canale and Swain (1980) and Canale (1983) in Kasper (1997) have proposed the most influential model. It comprises four competencies: grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence. More recently, there have been several reformulations of the components. One of them was proposed by Bachman (1990), who adds pragmatic competence.

In Bachman' models of communicative competence (cited in Rasekh, 2005), language competence is dividedinto two areas consisting of 'organizational competence' and 'pragmatic competence'. Organizational competence comprises knowledge of linguistic units and the rules of joining them together at the levels of sentence ('grammatical competence') and discourse ('textual competence'). Pragmatic competence consists of 'illocutionary competence', that is, knowledge of speech acts and speech functions, and 'sociolinguistic competence'. 'Sociolinguistic competence' entails the ability to use language appropriately according to context. It thus includes the ability to select communicative acts and appropriate strategies to implement them depending on the contextual features of the situation. To sum up, pragmatic

competence encompasses a variety abilities in the use and interpretation of language in context. These include a speaker's ability to use language for different purposes (suc as greeting, requesting, informing, demanding, and so on), the speaker's ability to adapt or to change language according to the needs of expectations of the listener or situation, and the speaker's ability to follow accepted rules; the maxims.

Pragmatic incompetence in the target language, resulting in the use of inappropriate expressions or inaccurate interpretations resulting in unsuccessful communicative events, can lead to misundertstanding and miscommunication and can even leave the native-speaking interlocutor with the perception that the speaker of the target language speaker is either ignorant or impolite. Nelson in Hasbun (2004) summarizes some of the negative consequences of lacking pragmatic competence as follows:

The importance of pragmatic competence has been demonstrated by numerous researchers (...) whose work reveals that while native speakers often forgive the phonological, syntactic, and lexical errors made by L2 speakers, they are less likely to forgive pragmatic errors. Native speakers typically interpret pragmatic errors negatively as arrogance, impatience, rudeness, and so forth. Furthermore, pragmatic errors can lead to a listener's being unable to assign a confident interpretation to a learner's utterance.

To sum up, pragmatic competence has been recognised as one of vital components of communicative competence.

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 indispensable in face-to-face interactions in a foreign language. Children acquire pragmatic competence in their native language through interaction with their caretakers or older children, in other words, engagement in contextualized communicative activities. They receive continuous feedback from parents and peers who model appropriate routines, establish rules, and "correct" children's inappropriate behavior. This feedback contributes to the acquisition of the pragmatic skills required to function in their community. In contrast, most adult foreign language learners lack that type of input like children do. Consequently, the classroom becomes the most important, and perhaps the only, source of relevant input for the development of their pragmatic competence. Research into pragmatic competence of adult foreign language learners has demonstrated that grammatical development does not guarantee a corresponding level of pragmatic development, and that even advanced learners may fail to comprehend or to convey the intended intentions 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. Classroom interaction does not provide learners with adequate input to produce linguistic action for authentic communication in the target language. Some research result have notified that learners can successfully learn grammar and literacy in second and foreign language learning contexts, but the same results have not been observed in these environments for the development of pragmatic discourse and sociolinguistic ability, (Rueda, 2006). Foreign language learners normally do not have direct contact with native speakers. Though learners may interact with native speakers of English in the virtual world (via internet), this opportunity is accessible only to those with information and communication technology. The role of pragmatic instruction becomes important because opportunities for full of range of human interactions are limited, and consequently learners have more difficulties in appropriate language use pattern.

Considering this circumstances, the responsibility for teaching pragmatic aspects of language use falls mainly on teacher. Teachers should provide 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 aims to facilitate the learners' sense of being able to find socially appropriate language for situationsthat they encounter. For

that reason, according to Rueda (2006), pragmatic instruction in a foreign language classroom need to fulfill three functions; (1) exposing learners to appropriate target language input, (2) raising learners' pragmatic awareness, and (3) arranging authentic opportunities to practice pragmatic knowledge. The responsibility for teaching the pragmatic aspects for language use falls on teachers, (Rasekh, 2005). Therefore, to meet the demands, the teachers need to provide learners with a number of strategies that useful for pragmatic development.

SURE:Developing Learners' Language Awareness through Pragmatic Instruction in EFL Classroom
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 simple acronym 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 physically, emotionally, socially and intellectually in learning new language. On this occassion, I am attracted to give 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 help their students see the language in context, raise consciousness of the role of pragmatics, and explain the function pragmatics plays in specific communicative events.*

In this activity, teacher first ask learners what common and frequent speech acts such as apology they make 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 obtain intended speech function from the students. The form contain situations in which students are respond in their L1 and then translate it into L2. For example:

> Please write in the provided spaces whatever you would say in the following conversational situation
>
> You forgot a meeting with a friend; this is the second time that the same things has happened with the same person. 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 the beginning has benefit of validating the learners' L1 as a useful resource and also shows that the emphasis is first on pragmatics, rather than on English. Using translation as an activity for pragmatic awareness raising can be intriguing for the students. Students realize how culture and language are interrelated and that some of linguistic strategies used to realize specific speech acts in their L1 cannot be easily translated into L2.

Use

> Principle: *Teachers can develop activities through which students use English in contexts (simulated and real) where they choose how they interact based on their understanding of the situation suggested by the activity*

To achieve the primary goal of ELT, learners must have opportunity to use the target language (L2). One important opportunity for that, of course, is through small group and pair activities in the classroom. As Olshtain and Cohen in Brock and Nagasaka (2005) points out that using role plays, mini-drama, and mini-dialogs in which students have some choice of what they say provide students with opportunities to practice and develop a wide range of pragmatic abilities. To accomplish the activity, teacher ask studens to work in group which assigned based on situation/context.

Review

> Principle: *teachers should review, reinforce, and recycle the areas of pragmatic competence previously 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 complete common communicative functions in the classroom, so that the learners' pragmatic competence will be reinforced through the common communicative events that take place daily in every EFL classroom.

Experience

> Principle: *teacher can arrange for their students to experience and observe the role of pragmatics in communication.*

At the last step, teacher helps students to experience and observe pragmatic work. Film, television shows, and other video programs can provide us excellent resources for experiencing and analyzing language use in specific contexts, (Rasekh, 2005). This activity invites students to become researcher themselves and observe and record native speaker data. The learners-researchers strategy is useful tool to offer learners enough clues to use new language in ways that are contextually appropriate. Depending on the student population and available time, such observations may be open or sructures. Open observation allow students to detect what the important contextual factors may be. For structured observation, students are provided with an observation sheet which specifies the categories to observe. An example form of structured data collection is given 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:			
Intensify of offence:	Minimum	moderate	
Maximum			
	1	2	3
Apology:			

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

Conclusion

An EFL classroom can provide the context and explicit instruction for learners to begin developing pragmatic competence in English. Pragmatic instruction in EFL classroom should create opportunities for students to see, use, review and experience for English language in communicative context. Of course, it will gradually enable learners to gain how language works and how to use language appropriate to a variety of communicative settings.

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