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Innovative Strategies in Teaching Pragmatic Competence: A Case of Teaching Request through Applications assisted Roleplay

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ABSTRACT
Pragmatic competence, i.e. the ability to express and interpret the intended meaning appropriately according to the context, undoubtedly vital in fostering harmony in verbal interaction. However, various studies have pessimistically revealed that this ability does not develop well in EFL students of university level. Hence, this article focused on seeking a possible effective way out of all kinds of hindrances hampering the efforts of developing this competence. The writer proposed an innovated strategy of roleplay, enhanced by the element applications like YouTube and Instagram to upgrade students learning resources of English expressions of the requesting act. Essentially, this strategy cover activating the students' pragmatic awareness and executing guided roleplay activities by utilizing Youtube channel and Instagram.

Keywords*: Pragmatic competence, Roleplay, innovative teaching*

INTRODUCTION

Pragmatic competence, the ability to use language effectively and appropriately in social interactions, is a crucial component of language proficiency, particularly for English as

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a Foreign Language (EFL) students in a university. These two communicative dimensions, i.e. being effective and being appropriate in accordance with context, are of the key points constituting pragmatic competence. The pragmatic aspect of language was initially coined by Hymes' (1972), who emphasized the notion of communicative competence. He suggests that successful communication not only require students to be provided with some knowledge of rules of language but also some knowledge regarding with principles of language use. Several other models of communicative competence, parallel to Hymes, subsequently voiced such as those of Bachman (1990); Bachman and Palmer (1996); Canale and Swain (1980), Canale (1983); Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei, and Thurrell (1995). Among these models, the one outlined by Bachman (1990) is the most comprehensive, subcategorizing communicative competence into (i) organizational competence and (ii) pragmatic competence, both of which are vital and supplementary to one another in conceptualizing the students' ideal ability in using the learned language for effective and appropriate communication. As to sum up, pragmatic competence is formally defined as "a variety of abilities concerned with the use and interpretation of language in contexts, or most prominently the ability to use and interpret non-literal forms, such as metaphorical uses of language and indirect speech . . ." (Bialystok, 1993); and all theoretical models basically underscore that pragmatic competence is a distinct and vital element within L2 proficiency (Taguchi, 2009).

As globalization intensifies and cross-cultural communications become more prevalent, the need for effective strategies in EFL teaching, as to build pragmatic competence on the part of the students, has become more pronounced. However, prominent issues regarding efforts of pragmatic competence development come up in EFL class. For one thing, most teachers, especially the NNS, do not tend to focus on the same characteristics of the EFL

contexts. They find it difficult to facilitate effective pragmatic instruction for the students due to the fact that they have few textbooks enriching their horizon on pragmatic aspects of language (Rose, 1997).

Secondly, evidence shows that a high level of language proficiency does not correlate positively with a high, level of students' pragmatic competence (Tajeddin & Pirhosseinloo, 2012). This challenge has been partly related to the characteristics of EFL contexts, including insufficient L2 exposure, non-native speaking English teachers, as well as the quality of L2 teaching resources. Therefore, innovative instructional materials and teaching strategies emphasizing pragmatic aspects of English in EFL classes are urgently needed.

This paper aims to propose an innovative teaching strategy for developing pragmatic competence, contextualized within the university setting for EFL students. It proposes a possible effective solution of obstacles complicating the efforts of developing pragmatic competence in EFL class. The writer outlines an innovated strategy of roleplay, enhanced by the element of IT applications like YouTube and Instagram to promote the students' learning resources of English expressions regarding the requesting act. The roleplay strategy first begun by activating the students' pragmatic awareness by utilizing YouTube channel and Instagram to record their speaking practice progress.

Pedagogical methods of Developing Pragmatic Competence

Historically, EFL teaching to enhance pragmatic competence in EFL contexts has relied heavily on traditional approaches, such as explicit instruction and rote memorization. These methods often involve teaching speech acts, politeness strategies, and conversational implicatures through direct explanations and examples. Role-plays, scripted dialogues, and pragmatic awareness exercises are of a few examples of classroom activities that aid

students in identifying and using appropriate language forms in a variety of social circumstances. Although these approaches give students a basic awareness of pragmatic principles and conventions, they frequently fail to develop the ability to use language effectively and spontaneously in real-life situations.

Numerous pedagogical methods have been developed and employed to enhance the EFL teaching aiming at pragmatic competence. These methods, with their own advantages and disadvantages, range from task-based language teaching (TBLT) to the use of technologically enhanced learning resources. For instance, task-based language learning promotes accuracy and fluency in pragmatic use by emphasizing the use of language in meaningful tasks. Students can practice language in context and interact with real-life settings, which can greatly enhance their pragmatic skills. But TBLT can be resource-intensive, and it might not always meet each learner's unique pragmatic demands.

Innovative approaches to teaching pragmatic competence are provided by technologically enhanced learning resources such as interactive platforms, online simulations, and language learning applications. With the help of these engaging and immersive experiences that can imitate in-person interactions, students can practice in a low-stakes setting and receive feedback. Even while these tools have a lot of potential, problems including accessibility, technological literacy, and the requirement for instructors to provide consistent and insightful feedback might limit their effectiveness.

Although current approaches have helped EFL students gain pragmatic competence, they frequently have issues with implementation, student engagement, and flexibility to various learning environments. In order to overcome these issues, this paper suggests creative solutions that balance the advantages of both modern and ancient methods while

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minimizing their limitations. Through a comprehensive discussion, this paper aims to provide educators with practical insights and tools to enhance pragmatic competence teaching in university settings, ultimately preparing EFL students for effective communication in a globalized world.

Utilizing Information Technology to enhance Students' Pragmatic Competence

The information technology (IT) can potentially be used to enhance the development of pragmatic competence in EFL classroom. As what have been revealed by several pragmatic studies focusing on this topic, IT can be implemented in dealing with both the aspects of pragmatic language assessment and pragmatic language instruction (Abraham and Williams, (2009a/2009b).

The use of IT in the EFL teaching to enhance pragmatic competence can potentially cope with the afore-mentioned hindrances in the efforts of developing pragmatic competence in EFL class. By IT, teachers have access to ample authentic materials in different formats which are enriched by the pragmatic aspects of language. Hence, teachers will have a lot of options in selecting the most suitable teaching material as to suit with the needs of the students and their pedagogical objectives.

In addition, the facilitating characteristics of IT must potentially alleviate the insufficiency of L2 exposure to EFL learners as a major problem in the development of pragmatics. The prominent advantage of using IT is that it provides students with a lot of authentic learning materials in various forms such as a song, a story, a report, discussions on wide range topics, scientific materials from a book or a journal, or any of the huge number of sources available to students. The authentic materials generally contain linguistic elements carrying certain functions which undoubtedly so helpful to promote pragma linguistic ability

of students. Many technological applications like chat rooms, blogs, discussion forums, mostly conducted in English, are of valuable learning sources for students to observe and acquire knowledge on the social rules of the English language. Hence, the students are likely to be benefited and, in turn, can better their socio-pragmatic competence.

Several other benefits of using technology are proposed as follow. Both teachers and students are provided with an easy access to many information-technology applications through internet. Thus, an abundant portion of English can be learned and absorbed by the students. Also, technology provides a wide range of choices for the students as the users so that it will potentially uptake their motivation in learning English. It is very possible due to the fact that they are able to select which tool and content as they prefer to use and tune in. Next, the students can be flexible to use information technology along with its various forms at the time as they wish. Last but not least, technology is of an effective tool to build students' autonomy in learning English. Despite an early need of teacher's guidance in the process, they will be more and more autonomous as they get used with the technology in their learning process.

There have been a lot of technological tools that can facilitate teaching and learning L2 pragmatics, ranging from online authorship social networking up to mobile learning and digital game. For instance, the Web 2.0, the second generation of the World Wide Web, is the most commonly used and discussed technology in education. It alters the linking of information to the linking of people (Warschauer & Grimes, 2007), and also from accessing information to participation (Negueruela-Azarola, 2009).

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Role Play as Innovative Strategy in Developing Pragmatic Competence-A Case of Teaching Request

The forms of language are unique as they are used from one context to another. It depends on such factors as, situation, setting, the participants, other sociolinguistic aspect. Ability to use language forms differently and appropriately in different contexts is called sociolinguistic competence. Canale (1983) in Baleghizadeh (2007) states that appropriateness of utterances refers to both appropriateness of meaning and forms.

This means that a teacher who wants to develop pragmatic competence of the students should ensure that students can sense the different contexts affecting their choices of appropriate language forms. In short, certain pragmatic situation determines the formal realizations of a certain speech act. The ability to choose appropriate forms according to the context can be best taught through a roleplay strategy, in which the students can act as participants whose different social variables in different situations. Hence, the teacher can conduct simulations that vary social variables regarding the context.

The Benefits of Using Roleplay as Teaching Strategy

Several education practitioners have conducted studies and discovered that roleplay provides several benefits both for students and for teachers as well. Some benefits of using roleplay in teaching a particular speech act aiming at pragmatic competence can be discussed as follow.

First, roleplay is considered to be an effective strategy for teaching a speech considering that a teacher can design different roles for the students based on prescribed situations. This is possible due to the fact that “Roleplay minimally involves (i) giving a role to one or more members of a group, and (ii) assigning a purpose or objective that

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participants must accomplish" (H. D. Brown (2001). Thus, by roleplay, a teacher is able to direct the students to perform a certain dialogue on a particular topic in pre-determined or planned situations, in which they can practice using a speech act, so that the teacher can assess the appropriateness of language forms used by the students in different engineered contexts.

Secondly, it has been common phenomenon that EFL students in Indonesia suffer from anxiety because lack of confidence in speaking practice. Concerning with such hindrance, roleplay can be a means of enhancing their confidence. According to Stern (1983), roleplay can raise students' self-esteem of L2 language learners since they feel indeed capable of expressing themselves in simulated communicative situations, a pre-performance phase of speaking, prior to the real conversation-involvement.

Assigning students to perform dialogue through roleplay enables teacher to analyze directly of the quality of students' language. In turn, the teacher can give some feedback so that students can learn from their mistakes that can be directly or indirectly corrected by the teacher. A compliment can also be given to promote students' positive feelings during the practice. Hence, it increases their self-confidence. As the students gain their self-confidence through a roleplay, they will gradually move from passive learner to the active one. This idea is in line with what Poorman (2002) who underscored that "true learning cannot take place when students are passive observers of the teaching process".

In term of language aspect, Celce-Murcia (1988) explicated several points concerning the benefits of using roleplay. Roleplay facilitates a match between structure and social functions and can be used for both communicative and focused grammar practice. In addition, roleplay is a good technique to enhance students' fluency. As they are practicing

dialogues using realistic scenarios, role playing can help them become more fluent with the language. Role playing enables the students to practice words, phrases, and sentences in a realistic setting by using appropriate expressions and responses. Not only fluency, students' spontaneity in using English is also claimed to be enhanced through roleplay. Meanwhile, teachers are benefited from using roleplay in terms of language assessment. It is of an efficient tool for assessing students' competence in the aspects of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and the content presented in the dialogue.

2. Using Roleplay to Teach Requesting Act

Teachers committed to teaching pragmatic competence must realize that "the chief goal of instruction in pragmatics is to raise learners' pragmatic awareness and give them choices about their interactions in the target language" (Bardovi-Harlig and Mahan-Taylor, 2003:38). Thus, the key success of teaching pragmatic competence departs from the teachers' creativity in generating the students' pragmatic awareness. As underscored by Bialystok (1993), pragmatic competence encompasses a variety of abilities in producing and interpreting language used in various contexts, including speaker's abilities both in using language for different purposes like greeting, requesting, informing, criticizing, etc., and adapting or modifying language forms according to situations of the speech events. In other words, teachers aiming at developing pragmatic competence should facilitate students with several options of linguistic forms of expressions along with various contexts to enable students to acquire a great deal of potentially useful options of a set of language forms corresponding to a speech act.

The typical EFL classroom commonly provide limited set of examples of linguistic forms for the students. Ignoring this vital learning part might hinder the process of

developing effective and appropriate communication abilities of the students. As a remedy, thus teachers should pay attention to this significant learning phase. They should dedicate themselves to analyzing the types of situations, in which a particular speech act is performed, and then give the students a variety of examples of linguistic expressions realizing the speech act. Moreover, the teacher should vary the contexts, in which to speech act is used.

Successful use of roleplay as strategy to teach request as one of the speech acts can be organized as (i) pre-role activities and (ii) roleplay implementation. The former aims at activating the students' pragmatic awareness while the latter dealing with how to execute effective roleplay activities.

Pre-Roleplay Activities

Prior to students' roleplay performance, the students are provided with an instruction beginning with a set of tasks generating pragmatic awareness. The teacher can initiate the class session by asking general questions about request: (i) whom the people you make request on a typical occasion?; (ii)What expressions do you use when you make a request to these people?; (iii) Do you use the same or different forms of expressions as you make request to a person with different age, status, or degree of social closeness/ intimacy? Why? Such questions can encourage students to realize the nature and ways of requesting they have done so far with their social circles, either with speakers of their own language or with speakers of English.

Subsequently, the students are required to (i) recall their experiences dealing with many differences in the way they make a request in an authentic exchange and (ii) Focus their attention on the faces the phrases and verbal routines they have learned from their English learning sources while considering how to apply this comparison to experiences they

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might encounter. They are geared to thinking of wide range of situations in which they would use requests. By so doing, they must be assisted to gain awareness on available patterns of social variables of the situation in which a request is communicated by their users. In the instructions for this activity, students are asked to observe and analyze the social attributes of the speech participants, namely power (P), distance (D), and ranking of imposition (R), as to follow ideas of Brown and Levinson (1987).

Observing and Noting down Request Expressions from Youtube

Since the very essence of pragmatic awareness is how to make the right choice of an expression realizing a speech and use it in an appropriate context, knowledge on variety of expressions realizing a speech act is vital. In this regard, the students are guided to make discoveries on the various expressions of request and how they are actually used in various situations in many Youtube channels, specifically airing western movies.

The students are asked to identify and record this the verbal expressions conveying a request as well as the accompanying facial expressions and gestures of the speech participants. Also, they are required to observe and jot down the elements of the contexts (setting, communication purpose, activities of the participants) in which a request act occur. Regarding the social variables of the participants, the students are required to make detailed descriptions, based on Brown and Levinson's theory (1987) as outlined below:

1) The “role” of two speakers involved in requesting if one of them in a position of higher, lower, or equal power. The students might necessarily be given examples of different powers versus equality in status in order to imagine their roles concretely;
2) The relationship of the two participants involved in request, whether they are intimate or distant;

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3) The imposition of the requesting act including where it takes place and if there is any temporal limits or spatial constraints (e.g., busy hallway, open sidewalk, subway) when the requesting event occurs.

Over the period of one week, under teacher's guidance, the students are asked to present and discuss the results of their observations (a list of request expressions plus their detailed elements of contexts) during class sessions. Such a class activity insightfully discusses the pragmatics of request act along with its various linguistic realizations.

Acquiring some knowledge of the most useful sets of request verbal routines and the variety of situations the students might encounter, they can begin to make their own choices and create their own request routines, and thus they are eventually moving closer toward communicative competence in the target language. As the discussion is effectively completed, the sessions of student-roleplay are readily administered.

Implementing Role Play

At the beginning of role play, the students were paired up and given a chance to take notes or to write up a simple script according to the provided situations in about 5 minutes. Afterwards, there would be a reflective session, in which a group discussion on (i) grammatical and lexical aspects and (ii) the appropriateness/ politeness of the students' notes took place. The students are ordered to perform two or more roleplay activities according to the given situations. In order that the students get more self-reflective in doing the activity, they are asked to perform roleplay both in their native language and then in English. The purpose of so-doing is to provide perspective by revealing differences between the conversations done in both versions. Afterward, a discussion on these differences is held

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to draw attention to phrases or actions that need attention to the appropriate performance of the act.

Afterall, as the students have realized request intrinsically containing FTA, we can start role-playing activities that challenge the students' ability to consider how they would mitigate the FTA in response to the situation by using verbal expressions as identified in the previous stage. The students are asked to follow the scenario provided by the teacher and expectedly produce an appropriate requesting act as organized into the steps below:

- *Greet your addressee.*
- *Give relevant opening speech before requesting.*
- *Make your request based on the given situation.*
- *The addressee's response of request will be prescribed as follow:*
- *Answer the greeting.*
- *Show concern (relevant verbal or nonverbal responses)*
- *Give your response to the request:*
- *you may accept the request,*
- *You may decline the request.*

Following up the practice, the teacher provide feedback to the students in terms of (i) pronunciation and (ii) intonation of the students' speech. The practice was conducted overtime to build spontaneity and the students were encouraged to make considerations and decisions more quickly in the next repeated practice activities. Moreover, they were assigned to make their own reflections on the appropriateness their requesting speech act.

As the last assignment, the students were asked to create a video recording their best roleplay at home and upload it into their Instagram or YouTube channel. This assignment is

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aimed at generating students' motivation to do the best performance of their practices as well as journaling their own speaking progress. Assigning the students to journal their practice activities on the target language can make them aware of the nature of a particular speech act as it is used in certain context. Journaling is an effective method for self-reflection in language acquisition (DuFon, 1999).

Assessment

Assessment is of an important part of teaching the request speech act using roleplay, even though evaluating an understanding of language functions is not an easy task for any teacher. Since the purpose of explicit pragmatic instruction is to prepare students for the variability of discourse, the assessment tool with the objective of the awareness-raising tasks can be paired up. It is well-known that there is no single type of assessment can be constructed to meet all the needs.

To know to what extent the students' ability to produce appropriateness in their verbal request performance, a scaled assessment was used. In evaluating a spoken example of a request exchange, the teacher might use a scale from "most appropriate" to "least appropriate" below a recorded request expression used by the students. The other students can also be asked to rate the example on that scale when their responses are assessed. Also, a rubric is provided to assist both the students and teachers to break down functions involved in requesting, which can be focused on four key functions as follow:

1. *The speed of the target structures that can be produced by the speaker.*
2. *The target structure accuracy of grammar and vocabulary.*
3. *The prosody, or stress, intonation, and tone of the exchange.*

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4. The listener's understanding of the purpose of the exchange.

The rubric is also provided a commenting space in which the teacher can offer general reflections on the quality of request performed by the students.

CONCLUSION

Performing a speech act in English in real life situation could be a difficult, which might lead to an inappropriate behavior, for an L2 learner. However, such an expected behavior is derived from pragmatic in-competence, i.e. insufficient knowledge on how to choose appropriate expressions that are acceptable in social contexts. Such an ability to make a consideration in choosing appropriate language forms according to the social context is called pragmatic competence, which is necessarily built on EFL students in order to be socially acceptable as they get along with others, either locally or internationally.

Success in acquiring pragmatic competence, for instance performing a speech act of request, can be achieved in a classroom setting by an innovated strategy of roleplay. The innovating element suggests the use of information technology applications like YouTube and Instagram utilized to promote students learning resources of English expressions of the requesting act. Procedurally, to strategy include (i) pre-role activities aiming at activating the students' pragmatic awareness and (ii) roleplay implementation, dealing with how to execute effective roleplay activities by utilizing YouTube channel and Instagram to promote acquiring process of request expressions and making portfolio of student progress in English speaking practices.

EFL class providing the students with explicit instructions through the pragmatic awareness-raising tasks, as outlined in this article will likely develop an enhanced ability to perform a speech act appropriately according to the contexts.

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