A STUDY ON ENGLISH GRAMMAR AND PRAGMATICS COMPETENCE OF INDONESIAN SPEAKERS

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Abstract. The aim of the research were (1) to examine and explain the role of English Grammar Competence toward English Pragmatic competence, (2) to find evidence of the conjunction of pragmatic and Grammar competence of Indonesian English Speakers. Qualitative and quantitative methods were applied to analyze the result of the findings. English Grammar competence test (IELTS model test) was given to determine the subjects of the research Grammar competence. The English pragmatic test was given to determine the subject of the research on English pragmatic. The subjects of the research were grouped into 3 (three) categories; group A which consist of subjects whose English Grammar competence are at basic level (IELTS score 5 to 6), group B consists of subjects whose English Grammar competence are at intermediate level (IELTS score 6 – 7) and group C consists of subjects whose English Grammar competence are at Advance level (IELTS score above 7). Each group consists of 5 individuals, who have no prior information of the test model and the aims of the research. The English Grammar competence (IELTS model) is administered before the pragmatic competence test, to group the subjects of the research. The grouping can also be fulfilled by subjects’ official IELTS statement of result. There are 3 parts of the English Pragmatic Competence which researcher applied to determine the result of the research, (1) identifying formal, informal and neutral request utterances, (2) Expressing subjects willingness and unwillingness with reasons in using the utterances (3) Answering appropriately to multiple questions. The result of the research shows various result from the three levels examined of the English Grammar competence level. The research result also showed the strong conjunction between Grammar and pragmatic competence at higher level or at the third group where the students with higher competence at grammar has higher score on the pragmatics competence as well. The research result surprisingly shows low level of pragmatics competence at the second or those who has intermediate grammar competence and low levels of pragmatics competence to the first group, those who has basic Grammar competence.

Keywords: Pragmatic Competence, Grammar Competence, IELTS.

INTRODUCTION

Pragmatics has long been considered one of the acquired competences. This competence neither learnt nor taught in classroom mode. One mother tongue pragmatic might too different or difficult than L2 pragmatic. In this respect, Blum-Kulka (1991) states that the main obstacle to learners’exploiting their general knowledge base appears to be their restricted L2 linguistic knowledge or difficult in accessing it smoothly. Furthermore, to acquiring processing control over their already existing pragmatic foundations, adult L2 or FL learners need to develop new representation of pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic knowledge not existing in their L1 (Bialystok, 1993).

Indonesian education system of English pedagogic has put the linguistic knowledge components as the base of all curricula at almost all levels of teaching. The four skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking competence are designed for learners to recognise and operate the language communicatively among them, thus L1 pragmatic may either interfere or absorb in the L2 communication. The exclusion of the L2 pragmatic knowledge in Indonesian English education system will surely prone to communication breakdown at international level of communication.

Pragmatics is a subfield of linguistics taht has been defined as ‘the study of language from the point of view of users, especially of the
choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using the language in social interaction and the effects their use of language has on other participants in the act of communication’. (Crystal, 1997, p.301)

The terminology of Pragmatics competence was originally placed within the philosophy of language (Morris, 1983), but then has developed in use at other sub-disciplines such as sociolinguistics. The term then has excessively used in the field of second and foreign language pedagogic. As Chomsky (1980 p.224) described, “knowledge of condition and manner of appropriate use (of the language) in conformity with various purposes”. This concept as the opposition to ‘grammatical competence’, which is the “knowledge of form and meaning’

RESEARCH METHOD

In this research of pragmatics competence the researcher intends to provide proofs of the Indonesian perception of politeness in the area of requests. Are Indonesian learners of English sensitive enough to distinguish how the Politeness Principle (Lakoff, 1995) operates differently in the Bahasa Indonesia and English environment.

Indonesians tend to be more indirect than the English people. This indirectness is often apparent as a result of a negative transfer from Bahasa Indonesia in general. What an Indonesian learner of English regards as polite, a native speaker may view to have quite an opposite impact, being inappropriate and causing social disharmony.

All the participants in this research were adult and were grouped into 3 level of grammar competencies (based on their earlier-administered IELTS test) and were supposed to be at the level of appropriate grammar competence of English since they are in post graduate program of English with a university degree in English. Sex or age of the participants was not taken into consideration. No particular pragmatic instructions had been given to them before the test. It is difficult to say to what extent they had come across pragmatic training, since they had been taught by several teachers each of whom would have their own preferences in teaching methods and priorities. They had also been exposed to a number of course books.

The aim of this research was to test their pragmatic competence, which considering their level of proficiency, should already have developed to some extent. According to the common European referential framework, learners of English at intermediate level (B1) are expected to be able to understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. They should be able to deal with most situations likely to arise while travelling in an area where the language is spoken. They should manage to produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. They can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Part 1

In the first part of the research, participants were provided with a number of requests:

a. I’d be grateful if you could…

b. Could you…

c. I wonder if you could…

d. Is it alright if we…

e. I wonder if it might be possible to…

f. Please could you…

g. Do you mind…

h. Would you mind…

i. Can I have…

j. Do you think I could…

k. Could you possibly…

l. Thank you in advance for your help in this matter…

m. I’d appreciate your help on this.

n. Would you…

They were supposed to mark the phrases F (formal), I (informal), N (neutral).
The table below illustrates the students’ perception of different formality levels of the requesting phrases. Neither the successful identification of the phrases nor performance of particular participants is commented on as these were not the objectives of the research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Finding of the study</th>
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<tr>
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<td>12.5</td>
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<td>37.5</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>12.5</td>
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</table>

There was substantial variation across the participants. The participants were not particularly consistent in their perception of different formality levels. Despite the low number of participants 8 (eight), the research reflects a rather low pragmatic ability of students. The results demonstrate the findings that a relatively high level of proficiency does not guarantee a high level of pragmatic competence.

**Part 2**

In the second part of my pragmatic research, students were to decide which of the phrases they would never use in a conversation and, on the contrary, which do they use most often.

**Question 1:** Which of the phrases would you personally never use? Why not?

**Students’ comments:**

…………………………………………………

S1: I would never use phrases a, c, e, k, l, m, - I never use that because it is formal sentences, usually we use that for old people or teacher, but I never talk with old people use English language.

S2: I would never use phrases a, c, e, h, j, l, m, - because I only like the simple phrases besides, it is easier than the others

S3: I would never use phrases i, - it is too long. It takes time to say it

S4: I would never use phrases a, c, e, k, l, - those phrases are to formal formal for me

S5: I would never use phrases a, e, l, m– those expression seems too much formal while it rare to use English in formal situation

S6: I would never use phrases a, – I don’t use formal language too often.

S7: I would never use phrases i, – it’s too long

S8: I would never use phrases l, – because it’s too long

There was a unifyi ng tendency not to select the long phrases for being complicated and too polite. Some participants were not able to identify any phrases they would not probably be willing to use.

**Question 2:** Which ones do you use the most often?

**Students’ choice:**

7 students chose b. (87.5%),
5 students chose i. (62.5%)
4 students chose n. (50%)
3 students chose g. (37.5%)
2 students chose f. (25%)                  
2 students chose h. (25%)
1 student chose j. (12.5%)

Students follow their strong inclination to use short phrases with modals can and could, which they probably learnt at the beginning of their studies. This might have not been in the context of requests but as means of expressing ability.

**Part 3**

The third part of the research was conducted in the form of a multiple choice test. Participants were supposed to read five requests and choose a response which is not appropriate. No grammatical errors were included. Students
were to recognize errors related to an inappropriate formality or politeness level and some typical errors caused by a negative transfer from Bahasa Indonesia were also included.

1. Do you mind opening the door for me?
   a. Not at all.  
   b. OK.  
   c. Yes, of course.

2. May I come in?
   a. Of course.  
   b. Please, do.  
   c. You are welcome.

3. Can you switch off the TV?(mother to her son)
   a. Yes, of course.  
   b. Sorry, but…

4. Could I borrow your dictionary? (two classmates)
   a. OK. Here it is.  
   b. Yes, sure.  
   c. By all means.

5. Would you be kind enough to let me know?
   a. Yeah, sure.  
   b. Yes, certainly.  
   c. I’d be glad to.

Negative transfer was apparent in request 1 and 2. 50% of participants identified option c (Yes, of course) as an inappropriate response to Do you mind opening the door for me? And 50% of participants considered the phrase You are welcome as not appropriate in request 2. Requests 3, 4 and 5 were much better evaluated. Only 37.5% of participants chose the correct option in requests 3 and there are 50% in request 4, and 62.5 % as for request 5. The results of this sub-test show that the participants in general (since some participants failed to read the instructions) were relatively capable of identifying the inappropriate level of formality and politeness. On the other hand, they were rather misled by the temptation to rely on the rules of Indonesian social responses.

CONCLUSION

The research proved that the participants’ pragmatic knowledge of requesting strategies is not very profound. They would obviously benefit from the teachers’ pragmatic instruction if it was given on a regular basis. Another factor has to be taken into consideration, and it is the students’ motivation. Learners often use English primarily as a means of communication. Their ambition is to become capable of making complete sentences without inspecting their pragmatic functions. In an English as a Foreign Language environment the motivation to understand the social meaning of utterances is rather low.

REFERENCES


