RAISING STUDENTS' PRAGMATIC AWARENESS IN THE READING CLASSESUSING E-MAILS

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Abstract

This paper is aimed to discuss the importance of raising the students' pragmatic awareness in reading classes using emails. As emails are in written forms, it is sometimes difficult to communicate by avoiding misunderstanding. There are three reasons why it becomes the best example for the students to analyze the Speech Acts' elements in e-mails in their Reading class; (1) it is considered as an authentic material. The students are able to learn how the language is used in the daily life, (2) its language is a hybrid of speech and writing.Enhancing students' pragmatic awareness will lead to certain benefits. It helps students to be able to use appropriate utterances in particular situations to avoid pragmatic mistakes; it makes students feel more certain to behave in target language culture; ithelps them better understand the connotative messages in each situation, and make correct presuppositions and it gives them the chance to have better understanding and appreciation toward their own culture and the culture of others.

Keywords: pragmatic awareness, reading classes, emails

Introduction

Language is used as a means of communication; it is brought to human's life by functioning mind, to manipulate others, with all the possible meanings and interpretations. This is what is called language behavior, what is lied on the area of pragmatics, a study of language in relation to its users and their own purposes.

In accord with TEFL, English teachers should try to raise students' pragmatic awareness during the teaching-learning processes in order that students can understand the norms of behavior in the target language. Teachers could help learners to interpret language uses and usually they conduct it in conversational classes.

However, it is also common knowledge that the reading class is also a perfect place for raising students' pragmatic awareness; as TEFL nowadays is done in integrated way involving all or some of the language skills, and all activities in teaching-learning English always involves reading activities.Therefore, this paper is aimed to discuss successively the definitions of Pragmatics, the importance ofPragmatic study, some difficulties inPragmatic study in Non-Native Speakers' (NNS) Setting, the Pragmatic competence in FLT, the reasons

inhaving reading classes for teaching Pragmatics, and how to make students aware of Speech Acts (as one of the various areas of concern in Pragmatics) in reading classes.

The Definitions of Pragmatics

Pragmatics is defined as the study of the way in which language is used to express what somebody really means in particular situations, to be successful in communicating, especially when the actual words may appear to mean somethingdifferent.It means that pragmatics deals with what the speaker or the writer intends to say in particular situations. *(Kasper; Hornby's Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary)*.

Analyzing the pragmatics, indeed, encompasses speech act theory; conversational *implicature*, talk in interaction, and other approaches to language behavior in philosophy, sociology, and linguistics. It studies how the transmission of meaning depends not only on the linguistic knowledge (e.g. grammar, lexicon, etc.) of the speaker and listener, but also on the context of the utterance, knowledge about the status of those involved, the inferred intent of the speaker, and so on.In this respect, pragmatics explains how language users are able to overcome apparent ambiguity, since meaning relies on the manner, place, time etc.In line with these opinions, Yule (1996:3) states that "Pragmatics is concerned with the study of meaning as communicated by a speaker (or writer) and interpreted by a listener (or reader)". In short, pragmatics deals with understanding the speaker's utterances sentences to build a successful communication and to avoid misunderstanding.

The Importance of Pragmatic Study

The acquisition of competence in a foreign language involves more than the ability to produce grammatically correct language. It also involves an understanding of whether or not utterances are situational appropriate; it is known as pragmatic competence.Since Pragmatics is used as a "tool" to analyse someone's utterances; to get the messages from the utterances for building a successful communication, it conveys three importances in accord with TEFL.

Firstly, there is an urgent need for pragmatic knowledge. Pragmatics is used to help the learners to understand why native speakers use certain structures in different speech situations. Therefore, the teaching of pragmatics should aim at facilitating the learners' ability to find socially appropriate language for the situations they encounter.

Secondly, students can try new, unfamiliar forms of conversational address, openings, closings, speech acts, etc. in various classroom situations without feeling embarrassed. During feedback, students can interpret the speech of others and decide what is acceptable for adopting.

The last, the learners will enjoy greater insight into the target culture. They will be able to familiarize their own culture and other cultures in order to have better understanding and appreciation on cultural differences to avoid misunderstandings that may exist in communication.

The Difficulties of Pragmatic Study in NNS' Setting

As it has mentioned above, teaching Pragmatics can be assumed important. However, there are some difficulties in applying the Pragmatic study in non-native speakers' setting.

First,pragmatic knowledge cannot be obtained independently;it is usually interpreted on a social or personal level rather than as a result of the language learning. Therefore, foreign language learners should be introduced and trained in understanding the different uses of language in various contexts to avoidmaking pragmatic mistakes which may lead to various unpleasant consequences.

Secondly, the cultural differences between the culture of foreign language learners and the culture of the speakers of the language they study will result in such pragmatic mistakes; as the learners usually study the foreign language in their own cultural setting. The results are the existences of the incorrect interpretations on the language usesand if this happens, it may hamper good communication among them in social interactions. In this case, raising students' pragmatic awareness is crucial to be done in the classroom activities.

Why are Reading Classes suitable for teaching Pragmatics?

Reading is a communicative act that reflects the cognitive process of the reader. It means that when the reading process happens, the reader is trying to infer the underlying intentions of the writer through the text he or she reads. To interpret of what the writer means in a particular context, the reader requires a consideration of how the writer organizes what he or she want to say through the sentences, in accordance with who the writer shares the ideas, where, when, and under what circumstances. Therefore, aReading class is a perfect place for raising students' pragmatic awareness. Any reading passage/text could be discussed

pragmatically. Due to the fact that the notion of social acceptability and the correct use of language depend on how one understands the norms of behavior in the target language, teachers could try to highlight them in the process of reading.

Before the Reading class, teachers should thoroughly select the reading texts.Teachers should at least try to provide well-written, authentic reading materials that happen to have enough examples on the use of pragmatics in real situations. Through the text, students can identify the use of pragmatics concerning FL culture. Students have a chance to see the familiar culture from the outside looking in.

Finally, the teacher should help students understand why certain forms are preferred over others in a particular situation. Students can build their bridge of better understanding on their own culture and the culture of others.

To give an example on the implementation of raising students' pragmatic awareness in reading classes, this paper discusses Speech Acts in the Reading classes.

Speech Acts in the Reading Classes

The definition of Speech Acts

According to Yule (1996, p. 47): "Actions performed via utterances are generally called speech acts and, in English, are commonly given more specific labels, such as apology, complaint, compliment, invitation, promise, or request."

Speech actscan be divided into three related acts. The first is a general act (locutionary act); a meaningful linguistic expression that a speaker performs. The second is the illocutionary act; the speaker's intention in mind by producing such utterance. The third act is perlocutionary act; the effect the hearer will recognize from the utterance produced by the speaker.Of these three acts, the most discussed is illocutionary acts, and the term 'speech acts' is generally interpreted quite narrowly to mean only the illocutionary force of an utterance (Yule, 1996).

Speech Acts Classification

Searle (1969, 1979) divides the types of Speech Acts into five types. They are declarations, representatives, expressive, directives, and commissives.

Representativesare type of speech acts that commit a speaker to the truth of the expressed proposition, e.g. reciting a creed. Directivesarespeech acts that are to cause the hearer to take a particular action, e.g. requests, commands, orders, suggestions, and advices. Commissivesare type of speech acts that commit a speaker to some future action, e.g. promises, threats, refusals, and oaths. While expressivesare the typesof speech acts that express the speaker's attitudes and emotions towards the proposition, e.g. congratulations, excuses, likes, dislikes, sorrows, and thanks; and declarationsare the type of speech acts that change the reality in accord with the proposition of the declarations, e.g. baptisms, pronouncing someone guilty, or pronouncing someone husband and wife. In short, the types and aimsof speech acts can be seen in figure 1 below.

Speech Act Type	Direction of Fit	S = Speaker X = Situation
Declarations	words change the world	S causes X
Representatives	make words fit the world	S believes X
Expressives	make words fit the world	S feels X
Directives	make words fit the world	S wants X
Commissives	make words fit the world	S intends X

Figure 1: types of Speech Acts in Yule (1996, p. 55)

Introducing Speech Acts through Reading Classes

Based on the standard competences in the national curriculum for Senior High Schools, the students are expected to know the ways of expressing apologies and gratitude toward someone, to invite and reject an invitation, to give and accept advices and ideas. It seems that these competences are for developing the students' speaking and listening skills which are different form the competences for reading and writing. However, since the process of teaching and learning English in secondary schools isnot done separately based on each skill, therefore the teaching of English should involve some or all language skills in an integrated way.

Four-language processes worktogether to enhance the development of each of the others: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Listening and reading are thereceptive processes (taking in information), and speaking and writing arethe productive processes (giving out information).

Johnson (2008) highlights that the development of individual language processes enhance the development of others.Listening and hearing other people use language enhance children's ability tospeak. Young children first learn to speak by hearing others use language forreal purposes.They grow in their ability to speak as they experiment and haveothers respond to their initial attempts at language. As older children hearother people use words and grammar, they increase their vocabulary, and they hear different ways of expressing themselves.Words arethe tools people use for reading and writing.This auditory exposure to words andlanguage also enhances our ability to read and write.Further, Johnson (2008) states that reading helps students become better writers. Through reading, students have incidental contact with the rules of grammar. Studentsdevelop a sense for the structure of the language and grammar andincrease their vocabulary.Writing helps in developing phonic knowledge and enhances readingfluency. Young children listen for sounds as they attempt to use letters torecord their ideas on paper.Writing for older children and adults exposesus to more words and sentences and enhances the ability to quicklyperceive and process these when people are in a receptive mode.All of these processes affect people's ability to perform all of them.

This paper promotes the teaching of reading to support students' speaking abilityby providing them with appropriate texts that can help the students to obtain the competences mentioned above. In this case, the texts used in the reading class are some e-mails that contain the examples of speech acts*(see attachment 3)*.

Through reading and understanding the e-mail texts, students are asked to identify the sentences that have certain functions of speech acts, thenthey are asked toperform the same functions of speech acts found in the text using the expressions in their own cultural setting*(see attachments 1 and 2)*. By having these practices, it is hoped that the students are able to apply the expression of the target language in a proper way and they can have better awareness on any cultural differences in order to avoid misunderstanding and inappropriateness in communication using English.

Electronic Mail (E-mail)

Electronic mail (email) has become one of the fastest and most widely usedmeans of communication. It is a relatively new way of exchangingmessages via computer. The criterion for writing email remains thesame as for all other forms of written communication; that is, to keep the messagebrief but clear.

E-mail language is a hybrid of speech and writing. Therefore, most of e-mails are typically informal. It is the strength of e-mail. It helps to build relationships Because of its speech elements, people tend to use conversational openings and closings from conversations into their writing in e-mails. It also allows people to use the system quickly and without worrying too much about types, imperfect sentences, and so on. There is, however, one situation where this informality can be very problematic. When a student sends a request to a faculty member or an administrator, informal language may be too direct and thus insufficiently polite. Studies of politeness suggest three elements for polite requests:

1. Do not impose.
2. Give options.
3. Make the receiver feel good.

Consequently, to avoid the feeling of being impolite, Blicq&Moretto (2004) suggest that the sender of an e-mail should consider the people they are going to write. In addition, the choice of words can be as the alternative for this reason.

Since its language is a hybrid of speaking and writing, and it is used as a means for communication among people, an e-mail usually has many of the characteristics ofspeech. In speech, we can use voice inflection and gesture to communicate what we are feeling. Some E-mail users adopt special symbolsto communicate their state of mind, such as ::-) for expressing the happiness or " 0' for expressing the feeling of worried. Alternatively, they may choose from a small set of special words placed inbrackets, and often followed by an exclamation mark. Here is anexample:

> *Here is an update on my project. I have spent three days runningthe analysis*
> *(phew!), but will need another two days to get it done(sigh). Then I plan to*
> *have a break and visit a friend in Chicagofor three days (smile!).*

These devices are fine to use in E-mail for friends, but not in "business" messages.

Conclusions

The Reading class is a perfect place to introduce students with pragmatic knowledge. The success in the Reading class could be provided by appropriate texts, containing different

pragmatic information. To raise students' pragmatic awareness, students will be expected to have completed the reading assignments for each Reading class, special attention being paid to language similarities and differences from the pragmatic point of view.The readings given to students will serve as hints for discussions in the classroom.

As one types of personal letters, e-mail can be considered as the best example for the students to learn pragmatics, especially Speech Acts. There are threereasons why it becomes the best example for the students to analyze the Speech Acts' elements in e-mails in their Reading class; (1) it is considered as an authentic material. The students are able to learn how the language is used in the daily life, (2) its language is a hybrid of speech and writing. It contains the language used in daily conversation, (3) its form is usually short and brief. Therefore, the students are able to analyze the Speech Acts' elements easier.

Enhancing students' pragmatic awareness will lead to certain benefits.It helps students to be able to use appropriate utterances in particular situations to avoid pragmatic mistakes, thus reducing the number of embarrassing situations; it makes students feel more certain to behave in target language culture; ithelps them better understand the connotative messages in each situation, and make correct presuppositions. Finally, it gives them the chance to have better understanding and appreciation toward their own culture and the culture of others.

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Attachment 1

Lesson Plan

Subject   : Reading Comprehension

Topic   : The expressions used for **apology, gratitude, suggestion, agreeing and disagreeing, and surprise.**

Instructional Objectives

1. Students are able to identify the expressions used for **apology, gratitude, suggestion, agreeing, disagreeing, and surprise** from the text they read.

2. Students are able to performthe expressions used for **apology, gratitude, suggestion, agreeing, disagreeing, and surprise** in their own cultural setting.

Materials

Six e-mails taken from "Test Your Reading" textbook.

Teaching-Learning Activities
Pre-reading Activities

1. Teacher provides students with some pictures of different situations describing different expressions (see attachment 4).

2. Teacher asks students' opinions about the pictures.

3. Teacher explains the materials of how to express apology, gratitude, suggestion, agreeing, disagreeing, and surprised in the target language.

4. Teacher distributes the e-mails texts to the students and asks the students to read the texts and answer the questions related to the texts (attachment 3).

   - *Are these e-mails related to each other?*
   - *How many people are involved in these e-mails?*
   - *What are their relationships?*

5. Teacherdivides the class into groups of four students.

Whilst-reading Activities

1. Teacher distributes the students' worksheet (attachment 2).

2. Teacher asks the students to discuss in their group and to find the sentences in the e-mails which express **apology, gratitude, suggestion, agreeing, disagreeing,** and **surprise.**

3. Students must write the sentences they have found in the texts on the worksheets and identify the types of expression based on their language functions.

4. Teacher goes around the class and checks whether students find any difficulties in classifying the sentences; teacher may ask some questions to know the students' reasons in classifying certain expressions into their language functions.

5. Teacher discusses with the students to check the students' work.

Post-reading Activities

1. Teacher asks students to make their own sentences to express apology, gratitude, suggestion, agreeing, disagreeing, and surprised in their cultural setting.

2. Teacher asks students to identify the similarities and differences of the ways of expressing apology, gratitude, suggestion, agreeing, disagreeing, and surprised between the target language culture and their own culture.

3. Teacher gives students homework to find a text that has the examples of some language functions from magazines or newspapers.

Students' Worksheet

Subject   : Reading e-mails
Date   : …………………………………..
Class   : ……………………………………
Group members:
    1. …………………………………………………………
    2. …………………………………………………………
    3. …………………………………………………………
    4. …………………………………………………………

Instructions:
1. Find the sentences in the texts which express **apology, gratitude, suggestion, agreeing, disagreeing, and surprise** and write them down in the table provided!
2. Write the expressions you found in the texts using the similar ways in your own language (bahasa Indonesia)!

The Sentences found in the texts	The function of the expression	The equivalent expression in *Bahasa Indonesia*

Attachment 3
Emails

Inbox

!	0	Subject:	From:	Sent:
!		Wedding	Gavin	24 July

Hey Babe!

Luv ya Luv ya Luv ya. I hear the olds are planning a wedding. Oh Dear! I think we'd better tell them, don't you? Before they go ahead and book a hall and all that. Everything we wanted to avoid!!!! Just two more weeks then Uni finishes. The flat is almost ready. Then you can come up here and we can live together at last. Can't wait!! Counting the seconds!!! Yours4ever.

Gavin

Inbox

!	0	Subject:	From:	Sent:
!		Wedding	Mel	24 July

Hey Hunk!

What's with the mobile? Is it switched off? Can't text – this is too long and too funny. Guess what?? No, don't, you'll never guess. The olds met up!!! It was a disaster. They had a huge row. I'm e-mailing them now with the news.

Luvyaloads

Mel

Inbox

!	0	Subject:	From:	Sent:
!		Wedding	Mel	24 July

Dear mum and dad and Mr and Mrs Weller,

There's no easy way of saying this but Gavin and I got married six months ago. We were going to tell you, honest. But we never seemed to have time... Sorry!

Mel

Inbox

!	0	Subject:	From:	Sent:
!		Wedding	Clive Higginbotham	23 July

Dear Christine and David,

Maureen and I think that all of us should put the children first and we should forget some of the things that were said when we met at your house. I think the best answer to our problems is that we make all the arrangements. I have therefore booked the assembly rooms here in our city for Saturday 24 October and I have cancelled the booking you made at St Jude's Church Hall. The Assembly Rooms holds 500 people. I think we will all enjoy the wedding.

Clive Higginbotham

Inbox

!	0	Subject:	From:	Sent:
!		Wedding	Maureen Higginbotham	18 July

Dear Christine,

Thanks for your e-mail but I wish you had asked us before booking the hall. Clive wants to invite a lot of his business friends and then there are Gavin's friends from University and my friends... Can we meet and discuss this?

Maureen

Inbox

!	0	Subject:	From:	Sent:
!		Wedding	Christine Weller	17 July

Dear Maureen and Clive,

David and I are so pleased to welcome Gavin into our family. I can only say that he is the son-in-law we have always wanted for our daughter, Melanie. Just to let you know about the arrangements – we have booked the wedding for Saturday 17 October, with the reception at St Jude's Church Hall, here in the village. We are inviting about a hundred people from our side and we expect you will want to invite about the same number.

With best wishes Christine (Christine Weller)