

Philosophical and Practical Significance of the Inclusion of the Speech Acts in English Language Teaching Curriculum

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Abstract—This study aims at not only describing speech acts but highlights the importance of the teaching of speech acts as well. Recent second language research on speech acts represents a focus on pragmatics, based on the theories of speech acts proposed by Austin and Searle. It has been widely believed and shared in linguistic quarters that there has been very little or no systematic comparison of languages from the point of view of speech acts and rules of speaking. As a result, intercultural miscommunication is often caused by foreign language learners' falling back on their native language sociocultural norms in realizing speech acts in a target language. To make language learners attain pragmatic use of any foreign language requires first theoretical and then practical study of "speech acts". The teaching of "structural, functional and affective" power of the language in actual use through student projects and classroom discussions of both on the structure, the function and the affect may well help learners to become effective communicators. Therefore, the inclusion of the functional and notional aspects of language being taught to the curriculum cannot be an issue to be ignored. The results of this study puts forward the possible sources of sociopragmatic failures of learners and describe the sociopragmatic development of foreign language learners. Therefore, as foreign language teaching and learning is considered to be a global issue throughout the world, the descriptions and teaching implications of this study may shed light over curriculum design and actual language teaching milieus.

Index Terms—Pragmatics, speech acts, affective competence, ELT curriculum, higher education.

I. INTRODUCTION

Major breakthroughs have been made in the field of sociolinguistics, conversational analysis, and the ethnography of communication since 1960s. Dell Hymes was one of the important figures who initiated and opened new visions to the first language acquisition. Communicative competence (CC), introduced by Dell Hymes in the mid-1960s, still has impact on learning and teaching languages. Hymes states that a normal child acquires knowledge of sentences, not only as grammatical, but also as appropriate [1]. He maintains that he or she acquires competence as to when to speak, when not, and as to what to talk about with whom, when, where, in what manner. Thus, a child becomes able to accomplish a repertoire of speech acts, to take part in speech events, and to evaluate their accomplishment by others. Competence, in Hymes' terms, is integral with attitudes, values, and

motivations concerning language, its features and uses.

Hymes believes that the acquisition of such competency is fed by social experience, needs and motives.

The importance of concern with the child is partly that it offers a favorable vantage point for discovering the adult system, and that it poses neatly one way in which the ethnography of communication is a distinctive enterprise, i.e., an enterprise concerned with the abilities the child must acquire beyond those of producing and interpreting grammatical sentences, in order to be a competent member of its community, not only what may possibly be said, but also what should and should not be said [1]. Wolfson interprets CC by drawing a parallelism between first language (L1) acquisition and second/foreign language (L2) learning. Wolfson states that whether the language learner is a small child acquiring his/her first language or anyone learning a new language, the fact remains that language acquisition involves not only linguistic competence alone but also what Hymes called CC [2].

It has been claimed that interlanguage is the central to second language learning for it provides the data for constructing and testing theories of SL acquisition in understanding and describing the characteristics of learner language. Despite the difficulties involved in describing sociolinguistic behavior, many language teaching specialists, linguists, and sociolinguists whose views are given above all agree that the aim of second language learning should be to facilitate learners' acquisition of CC. One of the most important contributions of CC theory to language learning is, then, knowing what to say, to whom, in what circumstances, and how to say it is as much as needed the grammatical rules of the target language. Otherwise, cultural interference may lead to misunderstandings cross-culturally.

Consequently, communicative language teaching has widely been accepted throughout the world. However, much of the information on sociopragmatic studies and other related fields have often been reported from certain countries of Western cultures and the sociocultural aspect of language learning has not received much attention in many countries. Therefore, there is raising need to teach pragmatics as one of the basic courses in educational quarters.

A. Philosophical Views on Speech Acts

Mentors of the speech act theory Austin and Searle claim that when somebody says something probably he or she does something. In Coulthard's terms "it is by saying the words that one performs the action". In their attempt to discuss how language functions in communication requires that there should be a clear distinction between form and function [3].

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Speech acts are one of the most significant functional classifications of speech; however, there are still many different classifications on speech functions. Basically linguistic form refers to the phonological, semantic and syntactic properties of language, however linguistic function, in Wardhough's term, refers to the uses speakers make of linguistic form in communication. Wardhough gathered many examples to make clear the distinction between forms and function [4]. Here are some of them; for instance, a sign saying "Dangerous Dog" is a warning, not just some kind of statement. "I like that one", may be a request for someone to buy that object. "Your room is a mess!" said by a mother to a child is usually taken not as a simple statement about the condition of the room but as a command to tidy up the room. "I can't find my glasses" may be an indirect request for instance. A teacher's comment that "It's warm here!" may lead to a student opening a window.

All above various functions indicate that most utterances have a purpose; they are spoken with intent to communicate something. As Wardhough suggests, intention is part of meaning and use. And speaking may be regarded as a series of acts rather than events, because people do not inquire about the intentions of the natural events. For instance, Austin's sentence "Snow is white" (in Hudson) is a bald statement, thus, study of meaning should not concentrate on such statements. In contrast, if one says, "Simon is in the kitchen" she asserts to hearer that in the real world a situation exists in which a person named Simon is in a room identified by the referring expression "the kitchen" [5]. However, the speaker has one or two different purposes in mind when uttering it. It may be an invitation or warning or complaining. Hence, it can be said that assertive utterances-against bald ones -do not merely describe some state of affairs but also carry out acts. In linguistic philosophers' term, assertive or declarative utterances are "performative" others "constative". In other words, a performative utterance is one that actually describes the act that it performs and simultaneously describes the act.

II. FUNCTIONS OF SPEECH

Hymes (in Wolfson) puts forward that there are sets of categories and components for analyzing and describing the patterns of speaking and provides a comprehensive framework for the study of sociolinguistic rules [2]. The following 16 items, set by Dell Hymes, can be labeled as the components of speech. According to Wolfson's revision: 1. Setting: This refers to the time, place, and physical circumstances in which speech takes place. 2. Scene: Here Hymes refers to the psychological setting of speech or to what may be seen as the cultural definition of an occasion. 3. Speaker or sender of a message. 4. Addresser: Since in some societies, the speaker is not the same person who actually gives the message, this component is included. 5. Hearer or receiver or audience. 6. Addressee: In some instances the addressee is not a person. People in English-speaking societies speak to animals, for example, and may even address such inanimate objects as walls. 7. Purposes or outcomes. 8. Goals. 9. Message form: This component is fundamental to all rules of speaking since it involves the description of how something is said. 10. Message content:

This refers to the topic or what is being talked about. 11. Keys: This has to do with manner or spirit in which something is said (e.g. serious, joking, sarcastic, and playful) 12. Channels: This refers to the whether the medium of communication is spoken or written. 13. Forms of speech have to do with the language or codes, varieties, and registers which may be used. 14. Norms of interaction refers to the specific behaviors that are considered appropriate for different kinds of speaking in different societies. 15. Norm of interpretation involve the way different kinds of speech where norms of interpretation are different, they often lead to miscommunication across cultures. 16. Genres: These refer to the categories of communication, such as poems, curses, prayers, jokes, proverbs, myths, commercials, or form letters, and often coincide with speech events [4].

As Wardhough states linguistic forms refers to the phonological, semantic, and syntactic properties of language: linguistic function refers to the user speakers make of linguistic form in communication. Wardhough argues that certain forms are often related to certain functions. For instance, forms like "Let's go" and "Please sit down" generally function as requests; forms like "What would you like?" and "Are you ready?" function as questions; and forms like "He scored a touchdown." and "He didn't come." function as statements. But as Wardhough claims in actual language use, linguistic forms do not correlate exactly with linguistic functions on every occasion. In both Wardhough and Hudson's attempt to display the functions of speech, it is obvious that to reach the end is rather difficult [4]. Additionally, both figures mention that they miss the fact that listeners know that they treat particular forms used in certain context in different ways from the same forms used in other contexts [4], [5].

A. Sociopragmatic and Pragma-Linguistic Failure

Sociopragmatic failure stems from cross-culturally different perceptions of what constitutes appropriate linguistic behavior. Leech defines sociopragmatic failure as "social conditions placed on language in use" [6]. According to Takahashi, sociolinguistic failure is a kind of intercultural miscommunication caused by learners' falling back on their L1 sociocultural norms and conventions in realizing speech acts in the target language [7].

Pragmalinguistic failure, according to Thomas, occurs when the pragmatic force of a linguistic structure is different from that normally assigned to it by a native speaker [6]. A chief source of this type of error is pragmalinguistic transfer, where speech act strategies are inappropriately transferred from first language to the second. For example, the highly conventionalized utterance, "Would you like to read?" is an appropriate polite request in a British or American classroom, with an expected response: "Of course"; "Sure". Rules of appropriate use require the consideration and sensitivity of sociopragmatic norms of and knowledge of linguistic system of the target language. Thus, inappropriate use of L2 sociocultural norms and failure in perceiving different language system would create misunderstandings cross culturally.

B. Pragmatic Competence

In broad terms, pragmatics investigates and explores how people are able to accomplish matching their utterances with

the always changing context. We human beings have the ability to use the language appropriately in rapidly changing situations in every minute of our social life. For instance, when you say to your daughter “You may not find a ticket for that concert.” you are not just speaking but performing the speech act of ‘warning’. The form itself may not be adequate to send the desired message, thus, the “functional competence”, in other words the “function” attached to forms are of great significance in different contexts. But most importantly, speakers of foreign language learners also have to be conscious of the “affect” that their utterance creates some kind of influence in the cognition of hearers, called “affective competence”. One may intentionally say something to somebody, though the influence of what is uttered may not be observable by the hearer and others, it is the “affective competence” of the speaker that makes the hearer react in the mental level. This reaction may result in convincing, deterring, encouraging, inciting, comforting, inspiring and many others in the hearer’s inner world and both physically and verbally feel triggered to do something. Within this frame, speech acts are social actions that are in the very center of Hymes’ ‘communicative competence’ that shed light over the description other competences. Pragmatic competence, thus, is the condition through which people and language learners are able to perceive what really happens in communication, how people gain ways of effective communication by applying three dimensional speech acts. As Austin and Searle proposed, someone does three things at a time; a) a grammatically and contextually acceptable utterance – locutionary act/ grammatical or structural competence, b) any function attached to the utterance is the result of the speaker’s ability to achieve – illocutionary act/functional competence, c) and the influence created in the hearer’s thought through the achievement of former competences is the perlocutionary act/affective competence.

III. FUNCTIONAL CLASSIFICATION OF SPEECH ACTS

One of the most influential classifications of functions of speech was made by Austin. His theory is based on providing a formulation of different functions of speech. Jannedy *et al.* state that “Just as people can perform physical acts, such as hitting a baseball, they can also perform mental acts, such as imagining hitting a baseball. People can also perform another kind of act simply by using language; these are called speech acts [8]. Language philosopher Austin (in Hudson) there are three different kinds of speech acts: locutionary acts, illocutionary acts and perlocutionary acts [5]. According to speech acts theory and as Wardhough explains “A locutionary act is an utterance with a certain sense and reference, that is, the utterance is meaningful, accordingly, all meaningful utterances are locutionary act.” At the same time “a speech act may also be an illocutionary act in that it may do one of a number of different things such as announce, state, assert, describe, admit, warn, command, congratulate, comment, request, reprove, apologize, criticize, approve, welcome, thank, promise, regret and so on.” As for perlocutionary act, there should be an effect over someone by saying something that achieves an act of convincing, amusing, deceiving, boring,

and persuading and so on[4].

To exemplify above acts, Hudson gives some examples which would be beneficial. Hudson argues that an utterance “He’ll soon be leaving” can be classified as a promise if one believed that the speaker would be pleased with the news that “he” actually leaving soon [5]. Thus the pleasing effect of the utterance is the perlocutionary act of the utterance while the illocutionary force of the utterance itself is a promise without having the perlocutionary act. In the same vein, Wardhough gives a two-word utterance example to make the distinction crystal clear: “Stop that!” is a properly formed utterance, so it is a locutionary act. “Stop that!” in a context when a person says to another that something is being done should not be done and the speaker has the right to say so and the hearer under obligation to desist, the illocutionary act occurs [4]. As Wardhough explains; if the illocutionary act is successful in bringing about an end to the activity, then that act together its consequences constitute a perlocutionary act. In other words, the above utterance “Stop that!” includes a verb that states the speech act. Therefore, the usual name for such verbs is performative verbs, which may be defined as verbs that can be used to perform the acts they name. Another distinction on forms of speech acts within illocutionary force is made by Wardhough that while constative utterances are propositions stating “fact”, sometimes the subject of agreement and other times the subject of the dispute, performatives are: verdictives, exercitives, commissives, behavities expositives. The following are the examples of constatives and performatives gathered by Wardhough respectively: “The sun will rise at seven tomorrow morning.” is a fact, “I don’t like cabbage.” is the subject of agreement, and “John denied the story.” is an example for subject of dispute. Referring Austin, Wardhough collected following utterances to explain performative verbs: a. verdictives, gives verdicts, findings or judgements: the umpire’s “Out” or “Safe; the jury’s “Guilty” or “Not guilty.” Exertives, such as the lawyer’s “I advise you to say nothing.” or the judge’s “I sentence you to five years” or the policeman’s “stop” show exercise of powers, rights, or influence. Commissives that indicate commitments or promises or taking on of an obligation or states an intention are formed through anyone’s “I promise.....”, “I agree.....”, “I swear.....”, “I plan.....”, “I bet.....” and so on. Behavities are formed through the expressions of attitudes and social behaviour verbs of congratulate, compliment, welcome and apologize and statements like “I’m sorry”, expressions of approval like “Thank you”. Finally, expositives provide a different type of classification to the ongoing discussion that verbs like in utterances “I assume.....”, “I concede.....” or “I hypothesize.....” are considered within performatives [9].

IV. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF TEACHING SPEECH ACTS

The main objective of the teaching of pragmatics is to raise the pragmatic awareness of language learners and to make them conscious on using various structures by attaching functions and notions to them in differing circumstances. The teaching of speech acts, one of the basic areas in pragmatics, assist learners to progress in finding and using appropriate linguistic structures through which

they can communicate effectively. Without ignoring the theoretical basis of speech acts, the practical and hands-on teaching of speech acts help learners apprehend the effective oral or written communication for the situations they would come across. For example, at the university level, teaching learners how to design and collect data through discourse completion tests or interviews from the real society is one of the ways of bringing pragmatic aspects of language use to the classroom which becomes a safe place to present and study their own works with the help of instructors. Furthermore, learners may well become aware of perceiving how language works outside the classroom. Especially, students studying in English Language Teaching (ELT) departments can benefit from learning the speech acts that are inevitably found in almost all situations. That is to say, people apologize, request, complain and so on, in their actual communications, but how people achieve to attach such functions and create influence on the thoughts of others cannot be easily perceived. Thus, teacher candidates, being aware of the communicative power of speech acts, may benefit from such a pragmatic value of language at every level of language teaching. From primary school to high school speech acts can be taught, that is, there is no strict time to place teaching and learning of speech acts to the curriculum. Teachers can teach variety of structures to foreign/second language learners; however, the teaching of so-called “invisible meaning” that is attached to forms may remain unknown or secret to learners who are not aware of the “speech acts”. In other words, when anyone says something he or she does three things at a time; philosophically they realize “locutionary”, “illocutionary” and “perlocutionary” acts; in practical terms, learners consciously or unconsciously put forward their “structural”, “functional” and “affective” competences successively.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study reveal the fact that the sociopragmatic competence of foreign language learners vary considerably with regard to their verbal behaviors in contexts where cross-cultural differences play a great role. Speech acts which are considered highly patterned necessitate sociopragmatic knowledge. Thus, language learners should be aware of the sociopragmatic norms which were considered by Hymes under the term CC. Knowing when to speak, what to say to whom and in what circumstances is the core of the underlying idea argued by Hymes [10]. Otherwise, what Hymes called communicative interference, defined as relying on one’s native culture, is inevitable. Bearing in mind Hymes’s view, language specific realizations of speech acts of thanking, apologizing, requesting, greeting, complimenting, complaining, interrupting, rejecting and abundance of others deserve interest in language teaching.

It seems logical to us that the L2 sociocultural norms can be learned through a program which was designed in sensitizing learners to cultural differences in speech act realizations across languages. For example, in designing an EFL syllabus, discussion based “language awareness”-like courses could be beneficial in comparing and contrasting different sociocultural norms of the mother tongue and the

target language. Sociopragmatic competence which is in the framework of this study refers to EFL learners’ ability to determine the appropriateness of speech acts in variety of contexts. For this reason, communicative competence of learners will have to be increased by sensitizing them in their speech act preferences according to the sociopragmatic norms determined by researchers in the field. Communicative interference which causes misunderstandings in cross-cultural communication is the result of the interlanguage development of language learners.

To make language learners attain pragmatic use of any foreign language requires first theoretical and then practical study of “speech acts”. Pragmatics courses in foreign language teaching departments have recently been getting gravity. Most of them, however, carried out either theoretically in linguistic courses as a small part among other linguistic issues or as a selective course. The teaching of “structural, functional and affective” power of the language in actual use through student projects and classroom discussions of both on the structure, the function and the affect may well help learners communicate effectively. Learners should be aware of the fact that the appropriate use of language can only be achieved by selecting true forms called “structural competence”. Nevertheless, the form itself may not adequate to send the desired message, thus, the “functional competence”, in other words the “function” attached to forms are of great significance in different contexts. Additionally, speakers of foreign language learners also have to be conscious of the “affect” that their utterance creates some kind of influence in the cognition of hearers, called “affective competence”.

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