

ردم الفجوة: الحواجز الاجتماعية-التداولية واللغوية-التداولية في تواصل متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية
العراقيين مع المتحدثين الأصليين من منظور التداولية النفسية
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**Bridging the Gap: Socio-pragmatic and Pragma-linguistic Barriers in Iraqi English
Learners' Communication with Native Speakers from Psychopragmatic Perspective**

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Abstract:

The aim of this paper is to shed the light on the psychopragmatic reasons behind the breakdown when Iraqi English learners (EL) fail to understand American people although both of them use English language. It has been investigated that the most prominent reason of misunderstanding other people is not due to inability to parse their sentences or to understand their words, a far more important source of difficulty in communication is due to different psychological and contextual factors of both interlocutors who belong to two different societies having different cultural backgrounds. Misalignments in these fields lead to misunderstandings or perceived rudeness.

This study provides some aspects of language concerned with improving the methods of communication and it helps solving the problems EL might face in chats with American native speakers (NS).

Keywords: Psychopragmatic, Interlocutors, Cultural Background, Contextual Factors.

Introduction

Generally, Communication is the main purpose behind second language learning, nevertheless, learners find it difficult to establish a conversation with NSs at interpersonal level. In spite of being fully acquainted with second language grammar rules. It is commonly known that pragmatics is the study of communicative action in its sociocultural context. Communicative action implies not only speech acts - requesting, greeting, which are examples of speech act, but also participation in conversation, engaging in different types of discourse, and keeps interaction in complex speech events. (Morain, 1986).

As Morain (ibid) explained the case as having the ability to write and read the other language words and sentences is not enough, learners must have the knowledge and experience to use the correct sociocultural norms of the second language due to the variety of these norms from one culture to another. Many scholars and linguists have tackled this case, among them was Thomas who describes it as a 'pragmatic failure' (ibid).

Thomas insists that learners of second language must acquire pragmatic competence to understand the intended meaning in a specific context.

Theoretical Review

Pragmatic competence can be defined as“ the ability to communicate the intended meaning of the message with all its nuances in any socio-cultural context and to interpret the message of the interlocutor as it is intended” (Fraser, 2010, p.1). Learners might produce well-formed grammatical sentences, but they fail to achieve the communicative aims. They fail to carry out a desired communicative effect (ibid).

American native speaker: ‘don’t count your chickens before they hatch’.

English second language learner :’ I don’t have chickens !’

English second language learner fails to understand the intended meaning of the message due to psychpragmatic principles like pragmatic competence knowledge, native speaker tries to give him a piece of advice by suggesting that getting excited for something might not turn out the way you desire will be disappointed for him. However, the EL misunderstands the intended meaning due to the lack of pragmatic competence (PC) knowledge.

PC has been described in terms of the knowledge of forms and strategies to convey particular illocutions (pragmalinguistic competence) and the appropriate use of these forms and strategies in a certain context (sociopragmatic competence), (Leech, 1983). In order to be a proficient, learners of a second language should control social use of language and the linguistic forms, hence the researchers insist on the importance of psychopragmatic skill. (Paulston 1977, cited in Mey, 2001: 26).

Acquisition of Pragmatic Competence

Researchers and linguists have distinguished two types of pragmatic competence, which are pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic competence. The former refers to linguistic units which are used in

different languages to perform speech acts, pragmalinguistic knowledge necessitates mappings or chartings of form, meaning, force and context. Greeting can be expressed in various ways in specific languages. However, it is not possible to have a literal translation, For instance,

NS : could you write the final draft tonight ?

NNS: yes, of course.

NS: great , then we 're all set.

NNS: set ! we set what ! (confused)

'we are all set' is an idiomatic expression means 'everything is done'

NNS translates it literally though, this is the problem of meaning in context,

which is one of pragmalinguistic factors. Psychopragmatically, NNS try to

focus on literal meaning due to social anxiety and fear of misunderstanding.

The study of the way in which ESL comprehends, acquires and use linguistic patterns or speech act in a second language is called interlanguage pragmatic (ILP). Horn & Ward (2004) adopt a method of study focusing on pragmatic development of second language, cross-cultural pragmatics has adopted a sociolinguistic and psychopragmatic perspective focusing on the comparison of speech acts by speakers with different cultural backgrounds. Each speech community has some values and beliefs which they consider as the basis of culture. The speech acts they produce reflect their culture. Therefore, different cultures do not produce or understand speech acts in the same way the other cultures do. Studies in cross cultural pragmatics show the different strategies that are used in the formation of speech act. (Kasper and Schmidt, 1996, p.38).

Theoretical and Research Model

ILP research has been carried out within two views of pragmatic learning, a cognitive perspective and a socioculturalist perspective, the cognitive perspective considers pragmatic learning as a mental process while the socioculturalist approach emphasizes the role of social interaction. In contrast to the cognitive approach which sees

pragmatic learning as an individualistic process, sociocultural and socialization theories place the importance on the social and cultural context of learning and examine the language learning process as a mediation process.(Soler & Jorda, 2007: 24).

The participants that have been chosen for this study are two groups: bilingual Iraqi students ESL chat with American people from different ages, apart from their gender and social status. chats are not restricted to a certain topic. Also, they are free to choose the time of chat since there is a difference in the time zone between two countries.

The chat between two participants is treated as a written discourse, and more obviously written conversation because it shares most of the features of conversation, so we are going to use some features of CA when analyzing the chat since the number of participants is small, turns are quite short, and the talk is for the participants not for an outside audience.

Thomas (1981) argues that pragmalinguistic breakdown is easy to overcome because, in his point of view, it is a conventionalized usage which can be taught as a part of grammar. However, sociopragmatic breakdown is much more difficult because it engaged with learners' beliefs of his/her knowledge about language. Pragmalinguistic breakdown occurs when the pragmatic force specified by speaker on a specific utterance is systematically different from the force that is commonly known from the listener of the target language, or because of the transfer of different speech act strategies from first language to second language.(Amaya, 2003, p.3) If we look closely we will find out that both of pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic may not be applied or retrieved because of psychopragmatic constraints.

Another source has been investigated by many linguist for this type of breakdown which is ' pragmatic overgeneralization ' stems from 'teaching-induced error'. (Schmidt and Richards, 1996) Pragmatic overgeneralization particularly occurs "**where a narrow range of structures in the mother tongue has a wider range of possible 'translations' in the target language**" (Thomas, 1981, p. 4). e.g. it might be acceptable to say to a student '*Perhaps you could read*

through this for Friday’, but it is considered as impolite to say to a supervisor ‘*Could you possibly read through this by Friday?*’ because NS would interpret ‘*could you ...*’ as a rudeness rather than a request (ibid).

It is unfair to attribute failure to a particular source, some linguists like Beniak and Mougeon, suggest that where errors reflect first language interference and second language overgeneralization they reinforce each other which is difficult to overcome (Thomas,1981).
pragmalinguistic failure can be summarized as follow:

1- Inappropriate transfer of some expressions.

Utterance from L2 may be translated literally by learners without taking into consideration the cultural differences, e.g.

ENS: waiter: do you need a sleeve for your coffee? (a part of garment to cover the cup)

ESL: excuse me! Thanks I already have! (a part of garment that covers the arm).

2- Inappropriate transfer of speech act strategies (pragmatic overgeneralization) ESL might not use English expressively; they mechanically apply conventionalized L1 communicative strategy to the TL, e.g.

ENS: would you like tea or coffee?

ESLL: no, no trouble please. (he/she means do not bother yourself you can serve anything, this is Iraqi culture) However, the host didn’t serve him/her anything.

3- Inappropriate use of target language expressions.

ESLLs do not know the exact meaning of certain words or expressions, they might regard the literal meaning and its connotation inappropriately;

ESLL : I am boring (he/she means he/she is bored).

Moreover, sociopragmatic failure can be summed up as:

1- Size of imposition.

It is obviously about the notion of ‘free and non-free’ information, the free information anyone can use without taking permission, for instance, asking about the time. What is considered free by

individuals vary depending on the relationship and the situation, within the family or home, while in stranger's house they are non-free (Amaya, 2008:13). For instance, in some cultures the cigarettes are free, whereas it would be wrong to use such a strategy in Russia.

2- Taboo Topic

The notion is closely related to the notion of free and non-free information (Thomas, 1983:94). It is usually sexual or religious, taboo topics are universal, when L2 makes reference to something taboo in that culture. However, it can be widely used in L1.

3- Social distance

Misjudgment by NNSs of the power and the social distance, for instance, in student's belief, teacher have a rather higher social position than him/her, thus he/she exaggerates, flatters the teacher and this is sociopragmatic failure. (Goffman, 1967:82)

4- Value judgment

It happens when someone misjudges the social cues or norm leading to failure in communication, value judgement are personal evaluations that reflect one's ethical, moral, cultural belief (ibid).

5- Different pragmatic ground rules

When speaker says 'have you heard the one about' the hearer knows that what follows should be interpreted as a joke. But it will be interpreted according to different 'ground rules'. Thus people have to be taught that pragmatic ground rules don't operate in another language in the same way (Goffman, 1967: 87).

Dascal's (2003) in his fundamental work insists on the fact that, sociopragmatics and pragmalinguistics are commonly considered as component of pragmatic competence. However, their realization in conversation is mediated by psychopragmatic factors which are :

- 1- Cognitive load : how the speaker thinks in a second language which make it hard to interpret speech acts, idioms, and the meaning behind the word. It refers to mental effort.
- 2- L2 proficiency : due to limited exposure to idioms, sociocultural norms, collocations NNS find it difficult to interpret pragmatic inference even if he NNS is well aware of the rules of grammar and words.

- 3- Anxiety: is an emotional state which refers to nervousness, hesitation, and fear of making mistakes through conversation with NS. Anxiety has a great impact on pragmatic interpretation and production.
- 4- Attention : when NNS is distracted then context cues required for pragmatic (tone, body language) will be lost which in turn can cause literal interpretation.
- 5- Working memory capacity : memorizing multiple pieces of information that is matter in pragmatic inference, e,g: literal meaning, context cues, cultural norms and social relationship. Otherwise, it will lead to literal translation.
- 6- Pragmatic confidence: NNS ought to be confident when he/she is dealing with implied meanings.
- 7- Prior Experience: NNS must be exposed to an interaction with NS as much as possible to be well aware with idioms and cultural norms.

Statistical Analysis :

The following table shows the percentage of Pragmalinguistic failure:

The Causes of Pragmalinguistic failure	NNS failure	NS failure	Total No.
Inappropriate transfer of some expressions due to low L2 proficiency	13	15	28
Inappropriate transfer of speech act strategies due to lack of exposure	4	12	16
Inappropriate transfer of TL expressions due to limited working memory	11	4	15

As well as the Sociopragmatic failure :

The Causes of Sociopragmatic failure	NNS failure	NS failure	Total No.
Size of imposition due to lack of exposure	12	14	26
Taboo topic due to anxiety	2	15	17
Social distance is not adequately attended due to cognitive load	2	3	5

Value judgement norms are insufficiently attended to due to distraction, high cognitive, low pragmatic confidence, anxiety, in addition to limited working memory	26	4	30
Different pragmatic ground rules due to distraction, low pragmatic confidence, and working memory limitation	5	8	13

From psychopragmatic point of view, concerning pragmalinguistic breakdown, it is crystal clear that the percentage of failure of NS is bigger than of NNSs, whereas Sociopragmatic failure occurs more frequently by NSs except the fourth reason ‘ value Judgement’ when NSs use abbreviations.

Conclusions

In the light of the finding of this study, the following results have been found out :

- 1- It is difficult to specify the main factor that causes failure in communication. but, the most prominent factor is the cultural diversity since cultures are different from each other in their traditions and every participant tends to apply his/her socio-cultural traditions when s/he chats.
- 2- The interference of L1 with L2 causes a communication breakdown.
- 3- teachers must develop a metapragmatic capacity (the capacity to analyse the language in a conscious way) in their students.
- 4- The non-native speakers have limited pragmatic knowledge in the TL, thus, they fail to understand and interpret the pragmatic meaning of the utterance by the native speakers of English. This point validates what Thomas declares ‘The cause of communication’s breakdown is due to pragmatic factors rather than linguistic ones.’
- 5- In all of the examples, it has been noticed that the Iraqi English learners translate the NS’s utterance literally without paying any attention to the implied meaning.

- 6- when the Iraqi English learners speak with the NSs of English, they are likely to apply their socio-cultural norms to the foreign language and the vice versa. This matter is considered the main factor that causes PF or communication breakdown.
- 7- English native speakers fail to understand the non-natives when the non-natives use speech act, pragmatic overgeneralization, taboo topics,...etc. while the non-natives fail to understand the natives when the natives use the abbreviations. This point proves the validity of the second hypothesis which indicates 'This type of breakdown occurs particularly when the natives use abbreviations, and the non-natives pragmatic overgeneralization, speech acts.
- 8- There is an important fact that has been ignored by the language teacher which is that it is impossible to learn a language without knowing what is the appropriate way to use it, to whom and in what situation.
- 9- The English NSs write the words according to its pronunciation, they abbreviated the words in order to make it easy to be written. They even abbreviate the utterances 'Idk' 'I would like' to a shortest form and this makes their writing easier, but when writing to non-native S this would be a problem, because the non-native S don't understand the abbreviated form that they cause a PF.
- 10-this study may have some pedagogical implications which can be fruitful to enrich the possibilities for pragmatic development in Iraqi English learners' materials. This entails incorporating teaching materials curriculums with some instructions that enhance students psychopragmatic ability while communicating with native speakers of English. In class, students are to be engaged in different roles to practice pragmatic abilities which enable them to use language in an appropriate way with the native speaker of English.

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