

The Importance of the Request Strategies in the Iraqi EFL Classroom

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history

Received: November 19, 2018

Accepted: January 07, 2019

Published: March 31, 2019

Volume: 8 Issue: 2

Advance access: February 2019

Conflicts of interest: None

Funding: None

ABSTRACT

This paper explained English students' pragmatics development, students' pragmatics competence in chosen speech acts, request strategies that they used in gaining pragmatic ability. The paper was presented by a public syllabus lead that prioritizes the need for English learners to improve their ability to utilize request strategies successfully in academic and social communications. The study aimed to explain the significance of request strategies on developing EFL learners' usage of the request in the classroom. Additionally, Many English learners fail to present pragmatic ability on how to understand request strategies by relating utterances to their meanings, knowing the intention of language users, and how request strategies are utilized in specific settings. There is growing material of researches on awareness-raising of the value of pragmatic competence and request strategies for EFL schoolroom teaching. However, researchers have pointed to concentrate on the traditional approaches rather than how English learners require or understand request strategies to develop the learners' production of the request in the EFL schoolroom. Therefore, depending on the successful findings of previous studies, the study focused on the importance of strategies on developing students' usage of the request. The request strategies and approaches of teaching English to these Iraqi students have been discussed in details of the current paper.

Key words: Pragmatics Development, Request Strategies, EFL Students

INTRODUCTION

Today, the mastering of a foreign language is a great challenge not only for an English learner but also for an English instructor in EFL environments. Learners need to be equipped with the fitting communicative ability to accomplish fruitful interaction among the learners to master a foreign language. As one of the elements of a language is to provide suitable meaning in process of learning, it is necessary for language learners to know how to use lexical units or grammatical structures for achieving efficient communication (Kurdghelashvili, 2015). Previous studies (Canale, 1983; Krasner, 1999; Kurdghelashvili, 2015) confirmed that understanding only vocabulary or grammar is insufficient to be a competent language learner. A learner considered as an excellent language learner may not be able to communicate with learners of the target language. Therefore, English learners need to have communicative competence which includes both language competence and pragmatic competence for achieving communication among learners in different contexts. Language competence involves pronunciation, vocabulary, spelling, word formation, and sentence rules while pragmatic competence concerns learners' use of language

and picking the suitable utterance in the given situation (Leung, 2005).

Additionally, pragmatic competence is regarded as one of the major components in the instruction of communicative language (Hymes, 1972), and it plays a vital role in acquiring different cultures of the foreign language. Through pragmatic competence, English students can obtain diverse cultures of language. EFL students show pragmatic competence when the written or spoken language produced is polite and culturally acceptable. Also, pragmatic competence is defined as the learners' use of language and utilizes appropriate rules and politeness dictated by the way it is understood by the learner and express speech acts such as request strategies (Koike, 1989). In order to achieve the objectives of learners' communication, and develop learners' pragmatic ability in the EFL classroom. Therefore, learners should recognize speech acts, namely request strategies, that learners employ in their utterances and discover strategies employed by the learners to achieve their communication objectives in different countries. This may help foreign students become more pragmatically and culturally aware of their own utterances, and provide insight into language teachers in order to develop EFL learners' pragmatic competence in EFL environment.

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

It was found that the main problem in the EFL environment, particular in Iraq. EFL students in a college, whose first language is Arabic, seem to sometimes lack pragmatic competence when trying to speak in English, which is their foreign language. As a result, Iraqi learners seem less request polite when communicating in the English language; more specifically when performing face-threatening acts (FTA) such as requesting. According to Cohen (1996), language students can have all of the syntactic context and lexical items and still not be able to communicate their message because they lack the necessary pragmatic to communicate their intent. Although some Iraqi students seem pragmatically competent when speaking in the Arabic language, this competence is not necessarily reflected in their foreign language. Consequently, they need to learn pragmatic aspects such as politeness, speech acts, and request strategies to permit them to make the request appropriately, and they also become more pragmatically and culturally aware of their own utterances.

THE AIM OF RESEARCH

Until lately, there has been little empirical research into explaining the importance of strategies in teaching on learners' EFL usage of the request in academic settings within the Iraqi context. A part of a Ph.D. dissertation, the current study aims to explain the significance of request strategies on developing EFL learners' usage of the request in the classroom. The request is one of the main speech acts that are popular in the area of pragmatics as it is more generally found in everyday learners' utterances in different settings. It is the most produced utterance in the foreign language classroom context. Therefore, identifying the request strategies made in the class may help Iraqi EFL learners to be aware of their politeness level and appropriate request in the EFL textbook. Additionally, request strategies put forward by Iraqi EFL students are also essential to EFL trainers as it can help them comprehend utterances produced by learners and respond correctly. Therefore, results of different studies (Ellis, 1992; Hill, 1997; Jalilifar, 2009) that focused on the importance of request strategies on developing English students' ability to use request in diverse cultures.

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

Study on Pragmatics in EFL Learning and Teaching

Before of all, the researcher tries to explain the definitions of pragmatics. Then, the literature review of pragmatics and its role in EFL learning and teaching. Pragmatics is defined as "a general cognitive, cultural, and social perspective on language phenomena in relation to their usage in forms of behavior in various contexts" (Verschueren 1999: p.7). He also described pragmatics as a part of linguistics, presents a diverse viewpoint, which comprises a radical departure from the identified component view that tries to assign to pragmatics its own set of linguistic characteristics in contradiction with morphology and semantics. Of particular interest to this research is the idea of the request as a part of pragmatics

studies in the English language. Additionally, request means that "by each utterance a speaker not only says something but also does certain things: giving information, expressions, stating a fact or hinting an attitude" (Byram, 2000, p.477).

In recent researches (Vellenga, 2004; Alcón-Soler, 2005; Rueda, 2006) on pragmatics in EFL learning and teaching has stated that it is necessary to help language students to increase both usage of the speech act of request, and ability to communicate successfully in different situations. Additionally, a study by Hussein and Elttayef (2018) stated that EFL learners' pragmatic which is an aspect of communicative competence in the classroom. Such pragmatic should be effectively and purposefully selected in such a way that they should be more testable, interesting, motivating in FL classroom. As well as, empirical research by Bataineh and Hussein (2015) indicated that pragmatic doesn't focus on grammatical knowledge, but it focuses on the meaning of learners' language use in the acts of communication in EFL classroom. Results of those studies provided rich evidence to support the necessity for EFL students' pragmatic aspects to develop speech acts and improve the act of communication in the FL classroom, yet further researches need to be conducted in diverse contexts, with numerous models to gain a deeper understanding of how students can cultivate such competency successfully in their classroom.

Many studies have shown the role of pragmatic instruction on developing English students' usage of the request in the EFL classroom (Bachman, 1990; Schmidt 1993; Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1997). According to (Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1997) syntactic development does not confirm an equivalent level of pragmatic growth, and even excellent students may not be able to understand or convey their intended aims and contents (Eslami-Rasekh, 2005). For instance, a language student may pass an exam, but they are not able to convey the same language suitably in real-life situations because of the lack of pragmatic competence. Kasper (1989) discovered that excellent students' communicative acts usually had pragmatic failures and proposed that there was a need for pragmatic instruction to include the application of pragmatic aspects, namely, request strategies (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1997). Therefore, results discovered that pragmatic instruction has been identified as one of the important instructions that help language learners become effectively competent in the application of request.

Regarding pragmatic developing in the instruction of language, a number of activities are beneficial for pragmatic growth and can be classified into two main kinds: activities to increase learners' pragmatic awareness, and activities providing opportunities for communicative exercises (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1997). With regard to awareness-raising activities are those that have been intended to grow recognition of how students' language forms are utilized suitably in setting (Eslami-Rasekh, 2005). For instance, Schmidt' work (1993) states a consciousness-raising method that includes paying conscious attention to related forms, their pragmalinguistic purposes and the sociopragmatic constraints these specific forms include. On the other hand, other activities that provide opportunities for communicative

exercise may contain group work, in-class consultations and cultural communications outside the lesson. Consequently, findings discovered those two activities help to develop EFL students' pragmatic aspects such as request.

Request Strategies in EFL Learning and Teaching

Request strategies played an essential role in developing learners' knowledge of the requests in different contexts. Also, they are described as actions and procedures utilized in learning English language (Oxford, 1993). Oxford & Nyikos (1989) stated that strategies are often referred to as actions or practices that students utilize to remember what they have learned in the classroom, and they also help students promote their own achievement in language production (Bremner, 1998). Consequently, learning strategies put forward by English learners are also crucial to English teachers as it can help them comprehend request produced by learners and respond suitably.

Previous studies have been conducted to discover the importance of request strategies on language learning and teaching. Green and Oxford (1995: p.285) maintained that "more proficient language students use more learning strategies and more types of strategies than less proficient language learners". Thus, language learning request strategies not only help students become competent in learning and utilizing a language, but they also develop students' proficiency of the request (Hong-Nam & Leavell, 2006). Therefore, results revealed the importance of request strategies on developing learners' production of the request in different situations.

Many studies had provided that the learners were aware that learning request strategies were a portion of their language learning and pragmatic competence (Yang, 1999; Hong-Nam and Leavell, 2006; Tuncer, 2009; Li, 2010). Request strategies were the most prioritized actions that helped in directing, organizing language, and learning pragmatic aspects in the EFL classes. Learners at the intermediate level applied more request strategies than beginning or advanced level learners regarding instructor interference in the learning procedure. In the same vein, many studies explained the main role of request strategies on developing students' production of the request in EFL contexts (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1997; Bremner, 1998; Tuncer, 2009). More request strategies learners progressed along the production continuum quicker than less strategic ones. Therefore, the findings discovered the role of strategies on increasing learners' production of the request in diverse locations.

It was noted that practical request strategies helped language learners develop their communicative actions and pragmatic aspects in EFL environments (Shridhar & Shridhar, 1986, 1994; Sheorey, 1999). In the same vein, it was noticed that request strategies helped EFL learners become more effective in their communicative contexts particularly in-class discussions. Additionally, the learners' social and cultural backgrounds influenced some of the request strategies they utilized. Yang (1999) stated quantitative proof to explore English learners' learning request strategy in the context of an indigenized form of English.

The results uncovered that the essential role of request strategies relevant to cultural and educational backgrounds used in learning the English language and pragmatic aspects such as request. Additionally, the many studies focused on learning request strategies in language learning have shown that language learning strategies are essential to learners in developing their language production, especially in EFL environment (Griffiths, 2003; Ersözülü, 2010; Li, 2010; Purdie & Oliver 1999; Yılmaz, 2010). Therefore, the findings of those studies discovered the essential role of request strategies for developing English learners' communicative language in the classroom.

CONCLUSION

This study has addressed the importance of request strategies in a new field of EFL, as well as its explanations and characteristics. It has shown researches on students' usage of request strategies in EFL learning. The studies display a consensus that pragmatic knowledge can be taught request with assist strategies in EFL learning and teaching helps language students in their progress of pragmatic aspects. Additionally, it has been mentioned that students' different language request strategies may have served them to obtain fruitful language learning results. However, this summary also reveals that more investigation needs to be conducted in diverse situations to identify elements that may affect the way students go about pragmatic development as well as the request strategies they utilize to obtain pragmatic competence. Finally, depending on the successful results, the study tends to concentrate on the importance of request strategies in teaching language, to resolve the problem of Iraqi students' usage of the request, and develop the art of communication in EFL classroom.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to express our sincere thanks to the respected anonymous reviewers for their useful suggestions and comments on the earlier versions of this paper.

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