Interlanguage Pragmatics and the Teaching of English in Nigeria's L2 Classrooms

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ABSTRACT

In Nigeria, much attention has been given to the teaching and learning of grammatical forms and sound sequences with emphasis on their accuracy and correctness (linguistic competence). This has reflected in the selection of course syllabi, curriculum, instructional materials and methods in our classrooms. A lot studies have been carried out by scholars on the non-native speakers' use and acquisition of linguistic action patterns in a second language. Though such studies, dubbed interlanguage pragmatics, have all been carried out in Europe and America with focus on speakers of English as a Foreign language (EFL). This area of enquiry has not been adequately explored in Africa in general or Nigerian L2 learners of English as the focus. Thus, little or seldom attention has been given to pragmatics and appropriateness in language use (Communicative competence). This study is therefore, a consciousness - raising effort to highlight the relevance and advantages of teaching pragmatics and the development of pragmatics awareness in our classrooms. This is against the backdrop of the fact that the linguistic competence of most learners of English as a second language is not usually at par with their pragmatic competence. This study foregrounds the need for L2 learners of English to develop a concomitant degree of pragmatic awareness in the use of the language. They must learn how to combine form, meaning, force and context. They need, for example, to learn how to say what they want to say with the required formality or politeness, directness or indirectness, e t c, as required by a given situation or sometimes, to even keep quiet and still communicate intention. The study, domesticating the findings of some current researches in instructed pragmatics, discussed and suggested some classroom activities that could be adopted as part of the methods of teaching pragmatics, and by so doing, highlighted the enormous advantages and usefulness of teaching pragmatics and acquiring pragmatic competence in Nigeria's L2 classrooms.

Key words: Interlanguage Pragmatics, Communicative Competence, Nigeria's L2 Classrooms

INTRODUCTION

In Nigeria, as in other English as a second language environments, the teaching of pragmatics, which is a communicative approach to learning, in which primacy of place is given to the functional abilities of learners in the target language, has not been properly integrated into our classroom practice and curricula. Instead, language learning is still viewed as consisting of little more than memorizing rules and facts in order to understand and manipulate the morphology and syntax of the target language. In the words of Bouton (1996:11)"language learning was accomplished by repeating strings of isolated sentences chorused- like often to the regular clapping of the teacher's hands or the tick-tock of a metronome enthroned prominently in the front of the classroom". The approach described by Bouton above involves drills which are teacher- fronted techniques aimed to train the learner to talk and master the basic structural patterns of the target language. Paultson (1980:40) posits "drills

were undertaken solely for the sake of practice in order that the performance might become habitual and automatic. The above amounts to explicit and implicit instructing that involves rules learning that are only capable to help the learners to develop linguistic competence.

Other prevalent approaches to second language teaching and learning in Nigeria are the deductive and inductive approaches. The deductive approach is an explicit instruction method that views language teaching, as an intellectual activity that consists of rule learning. According to Thornbury (1999:29) "a deductive approach is followed by examples in which the rules are applied". He goes on to explain that it involves presentation, description and explanations of rules through the provision of examples. The inductive approach on the other hand, is an implicit instruction technique that views language teaching to be generalizations through observation and experience. It involves presentation and analysis of examples, formation and generalization of rules that grow out of previous activities and written oral practices. While the

approaches described above can hardly be faulted in terms of their effectiveness in helping learners to develop linguistic and grammatical competence in the target language, they are still found to be lacking and deficient in the area of helping learners to develop pragmatic or communicative competence. This highlights the thesis of this paper that though linguistic competence is an integral part of language competence, it cannot be equated with pragmatic and communicative competence which focuses on the learners functional abilities in the school language. As Farachian et al (2012: 3) observes "this functional ability has the purpose of understanding and producing language that is appropriate to communicative situations in accordance with specific socio-cultural factors. Pragmatic competence is concerned with factors affecting the meaning of utterances produced by interlocutors.

Kasper (1997:2) defines pragmatic competence as "knowledge of communicative action: how to carry it out and the ability to use language appropriately according to contextual factors". Communicative competence refers to the intuitive mastery that native speakers possess and use to interpret language appropriately in relation to social contexts and the interaction between people. It focuses on developing the ability about who says what to whom, when, where, with what effect, in which manner, and so forth. Furthering our thesis statement in this paper, we will state that Nigerians and other non-native speakers of English do not often and proficiently demonstrate these capabilities of using such competences. This includes adult second language learners who have gained a satisfactory mastery and command of the grammar and lexical knowledge of the English language yet, they are often not able to produce pragmatically appropriate utterances. This is because the teachers and the learners pay more attention to accuracy of the language than the appropriateness of it. As a result of this, there are frequent occurrences of pragmatic failures and lack of cultural, sociolinguistic and pragmatic knowledge among the learners.

Statement of Problem

In Nigeria' L2 classrooms, primacy is given to the teaching of grammar and vocabulary and the acquisition of linguistic or grammatical competence with little attention to the teaching of pragmatics which provides the students with the knowledge and communicative competence to perform specific communicative acts in real social communication. Consequently, Nigeria' L2 learners, learn and master linguistic knowledge without the concomitant pragmatic knowledge which will enable them to effectively perform such communicative acts as requesting, refusing, offering, complaining, apologising, offering, etc. This results to pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic failures. According to Thomas (1983), pragmalinguistic failure or error occurs when a speaker of a language (in our case here, the English language) falls short of the native speaker standard or norm while sociopragmatic failure or error occurs when a speaker, especially, an L2 speaker, chooses a wrong form as a result of his/her ignorance of the cultural and social background of English.

It is the occurrence of these various types of failures in the teaching of English as a second language in Nigeria and

the perceived positive effects that pedagogical intervention of pragmatics in our L2 classrooms in Nigeria will have, that inspire and justify this paper (Kasper and Schmidt 1996, Bardovi-Harlig,1999, Bouton,1996). Studies have also shown that pragmatic ability can be systematically taught through well- planned and well- developed classroom activities. Kasper and Rose (2001) also report current studies which are aimed at investigating learners' use and development of L2 ability all of which point to the fact that pragmatic ability can be taught (Yoshimi,2001; Farahian et al:2012).

Objectives of Study

This paper therefore makes a case for a paradigm shift in Nigeria's classroom practice. It is a consciousness-raising effort to foreground the relevance and usefulness of a pragmatic approach to language study which not only caters for learners' linguistic competence (awareness of grammatical correctness or errors) but also interactive/pragmatic competence (awareness of pragmatic failures or errors). To achieve this, speech acts such as invitation, complimenting, apologies, requests, refusals and so forth, that often take place between individuals, need to be the focus of instruction in Nigeria's L2 classrooms and learners are made to observe such acts through being directly involved in performing them in concrete situations. This will be a departure from our grammar-oriented instructional method/material to a pragmatics- oriented one. This has been the missing link in our curriculum development and the overall instructional practice in Nigeria.

THEORETICAL/CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Language Teaching, Linguistic and Communicative Competence

Chomsky (1965) makes a distinction between linguistic 'competence'- the ideal native speaker-hearer's knowledge about his language- and 'performance'-the actual use of language in real situations. He defines linguistic competence as:

> An ideal speaker-hearer in a completely homogenous speech community, who knows his language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interests in applying his knowledge of the language in actual performance (p.4).

This perfect knowledge of the language is made possible through an internalized system of language rules which enables the ideal speaker -listener to have a perfect capacity in the use of his language. An actual language user is not perfect in speech although he may have a perfect linguistic competence. This is because language performance is inferior to language knowledge because it is mediated by memory limitations, distractions and other psychological mechanisms which are extraneous to language. Relating this theory to the domain of language teaching and learning, Ficher, (1984:35) defines linguistic competence as "the learners knowledge of the structures and vocabulary of the language and his ability to produce and comprehend well- formed sentences

in the language". In this sense, he describes the student's participation in the classroom as rule-governed behaviour in which his attention is focused on the application of rules to derive correct grammatical forms. Chomsky's conceptualization of linguistic competence has been faulted on the ground that language is conceived as an idealized abstraction and for disregarding language behaviour and other psychological and socio-cultural factors that affect and accompany language.

The Chomskian notion of competence (linguistic) was also earlier challenged for being concerned with the ideal speaker-listener in a homogenous speech community thereby providing no place for language use. Dell Hymes, an anthropologist and a linguistic, was the first to point out that the Chomskian notion of competence has failed to account for the socio-cultural dimension to language. Hymes, (1972) frowns at Chomsky's insistence on "competence" over "performance", ideal native speaker-listeners, over speakers-listeners who are far from the ideal, and homogeneous speech community over the heterogeneous. He argues that given the socio-cultural dimension of language, "performance" - the actual use of language in social situations- should be the major concern of linguists, that ideal speakers-hearer of a language in homogeneous speech communities are rare and hardly found that what is more realistic and more usual are speakers and listeners who use language in highly heterogeneous speech communities and in diverse socio-cultural situations and contexts. This perceived shortfall of Chomsky's linguistic competence led Hymes to come up with the notion of communicative competence. As explicated by Hymes (1966) and redefined by many scholars, communicative competence has to do with the notion that a speaker of a language has to have more than grammatical competence in order to be able to communicate effectively in a language; he also needs to know how language is used in the speech community. In other words, communicative competence includes, not only linguistic knowledge but also sociolinguistic knowledge of codes, rules and conventions for using the language. Hymes (1971:16) claims that communicative competence is the most general term for the speaking and hearing capabilities of a person-competence is understood to be dependent on two things (tacit) knowledge and ability for use. Hymes (1972:12) lists four types of knowledge and abilities that are involved in the theory of communicative competence thus:

1. Whether (and to what degree) something is formally possible.
2. Whether (and to what degree) something is feasible in virtue of the means of implementation available.
3. Whether (and to what degree) something is appropriate (adequate, happy, successful) in relation to a context in which it is used and evaluated.
4. Whether (and to what degree) something is in fact done, actually performed, and what its doing entails.

Backlund (1977:16) gives a wider definition of the term thus: "the ability of an interactant to choose among available communicative behaviour in order that he may successfully accomplish his own interpersonal goals during an encounter while maintaining the face value and line of his fellow interactant within the constraints of the situation".

Some scholars have made a distinction between communicative competence and communicative performance (Carroll, 1961, Briere 1971, Canale and Swain 1980) for example point out that "communicative competence should be distinguished with communicative performance which is the realization of these competences and their interaction in the actual production and comprehension of utterances. They emphasized that this distinction is necessary especially for second language teaching and testing. They suggest that teaching methodology and assessment instruments must be designed so as to address not only communicative competence but also communicative performance which is the actual demonstration of knowledge in real second language situations and for authentic communicative purposes.

Again, opinions also differ as to whether communicative competence should include grammatical competence, as one of its components. In answer to this, Widdowson (1971), and Palmer (1978), among others, consider that communicative competence should be distinguished from linguistic competences. In this context, communicative competence is used to refer exclusively to knowledge or capacity relating to the rules of language use and linguistic competence used to refer to the rules of grammar. Widdowson (1971) expatiates: 'usage' is the language user's knowledge of linguistic rules for effective communicative 'use' the language user's ability to use his knowledge of linguistic rules for effective communication.

This paper subscribes to the suggestion that linguistic competence should be regarded as an integral part of one's overall communicative competence in the language. This will be a departure from the predominant practice in Nigeria's pedagogical practice where the focus has been on linguistic competence. This has resulted in the present situation where even in learners of high grammatical proficiency, there is often a marked imbalance between their grammatical competence and their pragmatic knowledge.

Pragmatics and Pragmatic Competence

Pragmatics perspective in the language classroom carries the implication of a recognition that learning a language extends beyond grammar. Grammar relates to accuracy of structure (morphology and syntax) including phonology, whereas pragmatics addresses language use and is concerned with the appropriateness of utterances in specific situations, speakers and contexts (Levinson, 1983). In Nigeria, much attention has been given to the teaching of grammar in terms of course syllabi, curriculums and instructional material with little or seldom focus on pragmatics. It is this lack of systematic attention to pragmatics and pragmatic competence, along with limited range of communicative situations and functions in Nigerian classroom practice and textbooks that has inspired the present study.

Pragmatics, according to Crystal (1997), is 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 several interactions and the effects their

use of language has on the other participants in the act of communication (p.147). On the micro-level of pragmatics is the study of deixes, conversational implicature, presupposition, speech acts and conversational structure (Levinson, 1983).Pragmatics basically, studies how language is used in communication "how more gets communicated than is actually said (Yule, 1996:3). From the foregoing, one can logically argue that in the pragmatics perspective, linguistic choices are influenced by the system of values, beliefs, shared by the members of a speech community. As Lenchuk and Ahmed (2013) observe, awareness of the socio-linguistic and socio-cultural variables underlying a communicative event is an important prerequisite for the successful acquisition of pragmatics of English as a second language (ESL). They go on to list socio-cultural variables to include: gender, age, social class and values; beliefs and norms all of which define a speech community. Therefore the interpretation of a speech act: complimenting, apologizing, greeting, inviting, requesting etc depends on the context which comprises the immediate physical world of the interlocutors as well as the social cultural and historical knowledge they possess and share. Pragmatic competence also received the attention of Chomsky. Chomsky (1981:225) defines it as the ability to place "language in the institutional setting of its use, relating intentions and purposes to the linguistic means at hand" Chomsky goes ahead to make a distinction between pragmatic competence and grammatical competence. Grammatical competence, according to him is limited to the knowledge of form and meaning, whereas pragmatic competence is concerned with knowledge of conditions and manner of appropriate use. His final submission is that pragmatic competence is a wider term which includes communicative competence as one of its competence. The above view contradicts the view of Fraser and Rintell (1980), who view communicative competence as:

> The more general level which incorporates not only pragmatic competence but also the areas of discourse analysis, conversational interaction, and ethnomethedological studies. They contend that any serious study of language use must go beyond the utterance level - what we have called pragmatic competence- to a more general level of communicative competence which embodies the areas mentioned above (p.78).

Oller, (1970:507)'s concern is strictly on the pragmatic goals of teaching language, which he says is "to induce the students, not merely to manipulate form and sound sequences, but also to send and receive messages in the language". This coincides with the view of Fisher (1984:30) which points out that communicative competence has to do with the learners' use of language to send and receive messages in concrete situations and for specific purposes. For Fraser et al, (1980:78) "pragmatic competence is only seen as a sub-component to the more general level of communicative competence". According to him "it is concerned with the ability of the second language learner to use the language in a social context to perform the various speech acts of requesting, apologizing and the like".

The present study subscribes to the above view of pragmatics and pragmatic competence as it is of the view that for L2 learners to be pragmatically competent, they must learn how to combine form, meaning, force, and context. They need for example, to learn how to say what they want to say with the required level of formality or politeness, and directness or indirectness required in a given situation or sometimes even to keep quiet and still communicate intention non-verbally. Bardovi-Harlig, citing Nagasaki (2005) states that pragmatic competence is not just synonymous with appropriate use of language, but also encompasses:

1. A variety of abilities in the use and interpretation of language in context. These include the speaker's ability to use the language for different purposes such as: greeting, making requests, responding to requests, giving and returning compliments, complaints, making of demand and so forth.
2. The speaker's ability to adopt or change language according to the needs or expectations of the listener or situation and the speakers' ability to follow acceptable rules, maxims if you will, for conversation or narrative (p.9).

MODES/METHODS OF APPLICATION

There have been growing interests by applied linguists, sociolinguists and anthropologists on the relation between pragmatics and language learning. Studies in interlanguage pragmatics have raised the awareness that pragmatic competence and ability can be systematically taught through planned classroom activities (Kasper and Rose, 2001; Bouton 1996,Bardovi- Harlig, 1996, Farachian et al 2012). These interests have gradually started to change how languages are taught and learned. Savignon (1971:1) demonstration that if students were given practice in "truly communicative acts in addition to work with structure and vocabulary of the language, communicative competence could be developed in the language classroom from the very first day".

He explains that communicative competence involves a "person's ability to function in a truly communicative setting to do things like getting directions to the nearest pharmacy, giving an accurate account of an accident to which the person has been a witness or making introductions at a dinner party and so forth "(p. 1). This submission foregrounds the idea that the development of communicative competence should be an immediate and central goal of language pedagogy. The goal of pragmatics in the classroom is to offer learners tools to interpret and to respond to a variety of speech acts when they are addressed, and to help learners to listen to interactions, watch for reactions and to consider what may result from one choice of words over another (Bouton 1995, Bardovi- Harlig, 1996). As Bardovi- Harlig specifically points out,

> Addressing pragmatics as part of language pedagogy empowers students to experience and experiment with the language, using the language class as an opportunity for learners to expand their communication across cultural boundaries and thereby participate in the very purpose of language which is communication (p.30).

There have been studies that have actually provided concrete examples of activities which were designed to teach pragmatic awareness and development. These activities which

consist of natural language samples are important because of the paucity of good materials. Some of these activities could also be modified and adopted and applied in different class-room contexts to teach diverse speech acts. A few of those activities have been highlighted here to uphold our thesis.

In recent times, the language classrooms are becoming increasingly learner-centered with learners viewed as 'knowers' and discoverers'. With the era of teacher-fronted classrooms gradually phasing out, learners are being asked to take responsibility for their learning and teachers are made to function both as facilitators and co-learners with their students. The basic method of teaching pragmatics in ESL classrooms is through exposing the learners to the linguistic choices of the target community. This is usually done through exposing the learners to conversational formulas and encouraging them to internalize them. Similarly ESL learners can also be taught the cultural values that underlie a communicative event through exposing them to cultural facts. Trappe and Tullis, (2002:65) give the example of a lesson that focuses on the skill of negotiating where learners are taught how to make and respond to an offer. They gave several expressions that can be used as examples of refusing an offer thus "that's out of the question", "No way", "I'll have to think that over".

Following the example of Bordovi- Harlig (1995:33) the first step in teaching pragmatics is by introducing a particular speech act and encouraging the students to think about how it functions in their own language and culture. Through guided discussion, students can become aware of the` pragmatic rules governing their native language and the ramifications of enacting such rules appropriately or inappropriately. This activity can generate communicative goals that can then be applied to the target language. Bordovi- Harlig et al (1991) applied this on teaching 'closing' and found out that the students in a class in which the activity was conducted, agreed that in their languages, like in English, speakers are required to announce their intention to close, and abrupt closings are often frowned upon and are regarded as impolite as well as ignoring other speaker's attempts at shutting down a conversation.

Another classroom activity is known as the "Classroom Guest" which helps students develop listening –speaking and pragmatic skills. In the Classroom Guest, the teacher arranges for someone to interrupt the class to deliver a massage, ask a question, or make any other brief and believable exchange. Before the pre-planned interruption, the teacher turns on a tape and records the entire exchange. When the visitor leaves, the teacher asks the students what was said and make the class to discuss the exchanges. After the class discussion, two students will be asked to recreate the scene through "role play" with the teacher acting as a felicitator. The re-enactment is also recorded. The two exchanges: the real exchanges and the students' re-enactment are then played to the entire class and the outcome will be discussed.

Another activity, which was originally developed for teaching closing, involves the students reconstructing the closing of a conversation, from a series of turns presented on individual strips of paper. The class is divided in pairs or small groups of 3-4 learners. Each group is assigned a set of paper strips, with one sentence from a closing, written on

each strip. Each group is assigned a different situation and uses the strips to reconstruct a "goodbye". Typically induced are: a topic shut down, a pre-closing, and the terminal pair as in the following example:

Shut down A: Well! That was how the whole thing went.
                 B: Yeah! That is travels for you.
Pre-closing   A: well, I am fatigued.
                 B: All right.
Arrangements A: I'll call you when the thing arrives
                 B: Okay, till then.
Terminal Pair A: Goodbye
                 B: Bye.

Different closings could be written to reflect different situations. For instance, for a group, writing a closing between a superior and a subordinate, would use strips with more formal expressions than would a group writing a closing between two friends. Two members of the group are made to act out their closing after they finished writing. The appropriateness or otherwise of each exchange is discussed after the presentations. This activity is not specific to closing as it can be adopted and applied for other speech acts or conversational exchanges.

Another strategy is to have learners observe native speakers role- play certain situations. This can be done through the learners observing live conversations which could be recorded or written down from memory. In this way, students could observe and compare different ways of saying goodbye, making a request, complaints, refusals and so forth and in different contexts.

This could also be through native speaker models in films, video clips, T V-Dramas, radio, that direct everyday social interactions and reflect contextual information such as the speaker, setting, social distance and activity and prior communication which are visually accessible without much explanation. Sub-titles could help learners extract language and other non-verbal cues (e.g. facial expressions, gazes and gestures used to convey intentions.

Computer moderated communication (CMC) occurring in social networking sites provides an invaluable context for learning pragmatics especially for adult learners because learners gain opportunities to engage in meaningful interaction and to experience inter-cultural communication. E-mail, blogs, written and voice chat, online gaming, discussion forms, and video-conferencing (Skype) provide a context where learners can practice pragmatic aspects of language with target language speakers.

Pragmatics can also be integrated through practicing the various skills: request interaction, invitations, compliments etc. For instance, the students can practice mitigating and softening requests. Here the students are made to study in pairs as they study some grammatical forms that can be useful to soften requests. The examples below were culled from Dantas-Whitney (2010:74):

Most softened   I am wondering if I could…
                     Would it be possible to …
                     I was thinking I might …
                     May be I could …
                     Can I …
                     I'd like to;
Least softened   I want to …

Rationale for the Application of Pragmatic Intervention in our Classroom Practice in Nigeria

The gains accruable in the teaching of pragmatics in our classrooms are legion and only a few of them have been highlighted here:

1. Instructional Pragmatics will address the problem posed by the fact that most L2 learners show significant differences from native speakers in the area of language use, in the execution of and comprehension of certain speech acts, and conversational functions such as: greetings and leave-taking, conversational management skills: back-chanelling, short responses, mitigation, deference etc.

2. Instruction in pragmatics will address the situation whereby pragmatic difference show up in the English usage of learners, regardless of their English language proficiency. Such learners of high grammatical proficiency often fall short of the concomitant pragmatic development which make them to commit pragmatic errors.

These pragmatic errors, unlike grammatical errors, are often interpreted on a social or personal level rather than as a result of the language learning process. Committing pragmatic errors/mistakes may have various consequences such as hindering good communication between speakers, making the speaker appear abrupt or brusque or rude in social interactions, as well as other pragmatic hazards like unintentional insult, denial of request etc.

1. There are aspects of language use that seem so self-evident that they may not be taught, but which in fact, require explicit instruction both to raise students' awareness, and give them the skills to produce the speech acts on their own.

2. Intuition of L2 speakers about language use are miserably poor when compared with their intuitions about language form and grammar. The same cannot be said about intuitions of L1 speakers/learners about grammatical rules in relation to pragmatic focused instruction and material development.

CONCLUSION

This study, which is one of our consciousness-raising series for the need for a more communicative instructional strategies in Nigerian L2 classrooms, is aimed at raising the consciousness of all concerned with teaching and learning English in the Nigerian education system, on the gains of teaching pragmatics in the language classroom and the accompanying development of pragmatic competence in the target language by L2 learners of the language. The teaching of pragmatics aims at facilitating the learners' sense of being able to find socially appropriate language for the situations that they find themselves in. Within second language teaching, pragmatics encompasses speech acts, conversational structure/implicature/management, discourse organization and sociolinguistic aspects of language such as address forms and so forth. These areas of language teaching/and learning have not traditionally been integrated in our language curricula in Nigeria. This failure to include pragmatics and pragmatic competence within the scope of our ESL courses has left a yawning gap in our students' communicative competence and development.

Finally, pragmatics should be integrated in our English language curriculum from the early stage and as soon as possible. There is no need to wait to introduce learners to the pragmatics of English as a second language. In fact the imbalance between grammatical development and pragmatic development will be ameliorated by immediate paradigm shift to pragmatics-focused instructional materials and method.

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