Enhancing Language Competence Through Pragmatic Approaches: An Investigation

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Abstract

English is clearly a worldwide language, and its importance is greater than ever due to its broad use. Students must communicate in English both academically and professionally. A range of teaching styles are observed and applied to fulfil the unique learning demands of Indian students from various age groups, socioeconomic backgrounds, and cultural backgrounds. Until the 1970s, the Grammar Translation technique was used to teach linguistic forms and structures with the purpose of improving grammatical competency through rule memorization in order to grasp the syntax of the second language.

KEYWORDS: Pragma linguistics, socio-cultural context, self-learning, communication and syntax

I. INTRODUCTION

English has evolved into a worldwide language that dominates all social and professional activities [1]. Because of its critical importance, one cannot imagine the world without it. English is spoken or written by 1.5 billion people, with 350 million speaking it as their mother tongue and the rest 1.2 billion speaking it as a foreign or second language [2]. In the picture below, Braj Kachru uses three circles to depict the classification of English dialects.

PRAGMATICS

"Pragmatics is the study of language from the point of view of users, particularly of the choices they make, the constraints they encounter while using language in social interaction, and the effects their use of language has on other participants in the act of communication [3]," according to Crystal (1997) (p.240). The instruments used to communicate relational or interpersonal meanings as well as communication behaviours are referred to as pragma-linguistics [4]. Routines, a wide range of language forms, pragmatic strategies such as directness and indirectness, and pragmatic procedures that can strengthen or soften communication actions are among these instruments [5]. The softness difference between the sentences "Pen, please!" and "Would you mind lending your pen?" for example, clearly indicates the difference in attitudes and social relations [6].

Without it, one's language looks to be nothing more than a verbal utterance. "'Organisational competence' and 'pragmatic competence' are two components of 'linguistic competence' in Bachman's paradigm [7]. Organisational competence is the ability to organise linguistic parts into sense groups at the sentence and discourse levels (also known as "grammatical competence" and "textual competence"). The subcategories of pragmatic competence include illocutionary competence and sociolinguistic competence [8]. Illocutionary competence is the ability to achieve communication goals using nonverbal or silent means. Sociolinguistic competence refers to the capacity to use language effectively in response to the circumstance [9].

There has been no study in this subject in India, and the comprehension of the practicality of the branch of linguistics must be addressed seriously [10]. When the receiver's purpose or culture do not match, the presence of a language structure is not appropriate. Much of the language instruction in India is centred solely on communication skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

ORIGIN OF THE PROBLEM

The researcher realised there was a need for this type of study after encountering several situations when the speaker believed the response was suitable but not pragmatically [11]. When a coworker was questioned about particular facts, he simply stated, "I don't know." Though it achieved the goal of a question and response, the answer is not linguistically adequate for the inquiry and falls short of the norms for courteous interactions [12]. In the speaker's mother tongue, the response is proper and courteous. Nonetheless, as shown in the researcher's undergrad courses, the speaker's pragmatic English proficiency must be emphasised. Nonetheless, students only read the needed materials, and in a classroom where the teacher talks the majority of the time [13].

Many students who have graduated from various professions are continuing their education or seeking for jobs [14] . As a result, graduation is critical to a person's career. As a result, being able to communicate effectively in both official and casual contexts is critical for success in today's competitive world. A excellent communicator simplifies the work. A sample of 250 students was recruited for the study. They are picked at random, and their participation is entirely voluntary[15].

Many engineering and undergrad universities provide soft skills training programmes to prepare students for on-campus jobs. Academicians clearly acknowledged the kids' lack of proficiency based on this. However, because only final examinations are used to test students' ability, teachers are limited to the permitted texts and must concentrate primarily on teaching grammar and vocabulary. Language study laboratories have been set up, as well as activity sessions with limited conversation practise and expressions, such as role plays or scenario dialogues, group discussions, debates, mock interviews and so on.

Even though substantial study has been conducted in this field, there is still plenty to learn and explore in our own country. Various locations are involved in potential research initiatives, but the majority of emphasis has been focused on literature and communication abilities. Even if teaching pragmatics is vital but underutilised, students nowadays require excellent communication skills.

IV. RESEARCH DESIGN

A questionnaire, a task requiring students to complete a discourse, discussions with students at various points, assessments of students' pragmatic competence in relation to specific speech acts, the strategies they use to learn language, and their identification of it are among the instruments used in the research methodology for designing the study. The goal of this descriptive research study was to investigate undergraduate students' pragmatic learning practises. For the study's evaluation, quantitative data was gathered and classified. This work opens up new research paths in the field of applied linguistics.

Data were collected at a range of engineering colleges, as well as arts and science degree institutions chosen at random, with the cooperation of professors on the condition that they not interfere with class work. They offered a detailed explanation of the questionnaire prior to the meeting. This study's sample students came from two autonomous engineering colleges and two non-autonomous engineering colleges that followed the curriculum and syllabus. The pupils were in their last year of the curriculum because they had previously finished their English lessons in previous years. This enabled them to acquire enough English to participate in the study and contribute to the examination of their English language proficiency levels.

Participants readily decided to take part in the study after learning about its objective. During this operation, no personal information about students was acquired. The questionnaire and discourse completion tasks were completed by 258 students. The study used 247 of the surveys, while the remaining 11 were eliminated due to inadequate data.

The quantitative data in the article comes from closed-ended Likert scale questions and replies, whereas the qualitative data came from Discourse Completion Tasks (DCTs), interactions the researcher had with other professors from various disciplines, and conversations with students in general. The research was conducted outside of usual business hours. To code the gathered data, assign numbers, and conduct analysis, the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 17 was utilised.

To meet the study's aims, the collected data was coded according to two themes, from which two emerged:

1. The role of curriculum and teachers in assisting students in understanding pragmatics

2. Understanding of the strategies employed in English language instruction.

The first component of the questionnaire contained demographic information about the pupils. The raw data were organised into groups and statistically processed into a table that reported frequency and percentages. The Likert rating scale was utilised for 14 closed-ended items in the second half. The final segment includes six objective-type questions designed to assess students' pragmatic skills. The questions were developed in response to real-world scenarios. The responses were chosen based on the students' level of appropriateness for the given question. A mean score equal or greater than 3.50 indicates a significant degree of influence (3.50 M 5.00 = strong); a mean score equal or greater than 2.50 but less than 3.50 was read as having a moderate impact (2.50 M 3.50 = moderate); and a mean score less than 2.50 was understood as having no impact.

In the fourth segment, written Discourse Completion Tasks (DCTs) were used to collect data on students' pragmatic knowledge and degree of pragmatic skill, as well as their practises. They do not involve interaction, which discloses a participant's cumulative experience in a specific circumstance indirectly (WDCTs are thus very limited data gathering tools). The eight circumstances were adapted from real-life occurrences that served as templates for later works. In DCTs, the three designated speech actions of denial, complement response, and apologies were used.

5. EVALUATION OF THE DATA

The information acquired from 247 students from various institutions in the form of questionnaires was properly coded and evaluated using SPSS version 17. The pupils were chosen using a random selection procedure. Two topics were identified in the questionnaire and explained in the study methodology. The questionnaire was separated into sections based on the questions. Table 1 shows the demographic information acquired from numerous colleges for the first section. The questions were chosen with the goals of the research in mind. Items such as the student's gender, preferred teaching technique, amount of English courses taken before graduation, home internet connection, and frequency of watching English programmes on television.

TABLE 1

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Items	*Frequency*	*Percentage*
Gender		
Male	111	44.9%
Female	136	55.1%
Medium of Instruction		
English	226	91.5%

Telugu	21	8.5%
Course in Graduation		
Engineering	160	64.8%
Arts and Sciences	87	35.2%
Number of Completed English Courses		
One	24	9.7%
Two	153	61.9%
Three	26	10.5%
More than 3	44	17.8%
Availability of Internet at home		
Yes	207	83.8%
No	40	16.2%
English Channels or Programmes		
Yes	219	88.7%
No	28	11.3%

Male participants (N=111) and female participants (N=136), representing 44.9% and 55.1% of the student population, respectively, provided personal demographic information. The majority of participants (91.5%) have English as their primary language of instruction since childhood. Engineering, arts, and sciences graduates engaged at rates of 160 and 87, respectively. The next question addresses the amount of English courses taken as part of the graduation degree, with 61.9% of students taking two courses and 17.8% taking three or more. There are advantages to having more resources and information on the World Wide Web at home, and more students (N=207) watch English-language programmes or channels than ever before. 88.7%, while the remainder do not.

Students' responses to Closed-Ended Questions

The survey's next component consists of 14 questions utilising a Likert-Scale style to assess students' judgements of language usage and pragmatic abilities. The study's topics were utilised to organise the questions.

The questions in this table seek to elicit information about how students see language learning both within and outside of the classroom, as well as the role of instructors in it. This table's subject is "Role of Courses and Teachers in Learning Pragmatics."

Conversations with instructors and students both within and outside of the classroom helped the researcher prepare broad and clear questions.

The aforementioned topic addresses these concerns.

• What precisely happens in an English class?

• What do you want to know the most about English?

• What methods do you use to study languages outside of the classroom?

TABLE 2

ROLE OF COURSES AND TEACHERS IN LEARNING PRAGMATICS

Question	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	Standard Deviation
Q11 Frequency	8	6	13	106	114	4.2632	.91486
Percentage	3.2%	2.4%	5.3%	42.9%	46.2%		
Q13 Frequency	2	6	47	110	82	4.0688	.83088
Percentage	0.8%	2.4%	19.0%	44.5%	33.2%		
Q14 Frequency	_	10	47	115	75	4.0324	.81085
Percentage	0%	4%	19%	46.6%	30.4%		
Q15 Frequency	4	7	58	106	71	4.0526	1.87876
Percentage	1.6%	2.8%	23.5%	42.9%	28.7%		
Q16 Frequency	3	7	47	123	67	3.9879	.82876
Percentage	1.2%	2.8%	19.0%	49.8%	27.1%		
Q18 Frequency	17	31	68	87	44	3.4453	1.12801
Percentage	6.9%	12.6%	27.5%	35.2%	17.8%		
Q20 Frequency	73	48	34	46	46	2.7733	1.50515
Percentage	29.6%	19.4%	13.8%	18.6%	18.6%		

VI. CONCLUSION

The study's findings highlight the significance of classrooms in the development of pragmatic competence. Students understand their role in fostering pragmatic behaviours, but they lack the requisite expertise. The majority of students believe that teachers play an important role in introducing them to the opportunities that await them, and that language classes should aim to help students identify their

language weaknesses and lead them in their exploration of the resources that are available, rather than just improving students' test scores, which only test their memorization.

Furthermore, overcrowded Indian classrooms are unable to deliver personalised teaching for each individual student due to tight academic timelines and a high priority put on grades. The outside world, on the other hand, expects its employees to be well-equipped to meet the expectations of both their profession and society as a whole.

A teacher's role should involve facilitation as well as knowledge transmission. Their instinct should be activated by leaving a gap in the information. Teachers may broaden their duties, become more objective, and make the most of their abilities by evaluating the topic. Students must be taught on the socio-cultural uniqueness of each language and made aware of their lack of pragmatic understanding.

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