

SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION: ANALYZE OF PRAGMATIC FAILURE

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Abstract

The paper is created based on the reality of communication in Indonesia that is done by language learner, as a foreign language. Not a public secret anymore if a failure occurs within communication of an Indonesian language learner with foreign people. Perhaps, the learners can communicate by using correct grammatical but he or she often does not understand the utterance that uttered by foreign people. In this case, pragmatic competence is needed by the learner in order to avoid a pragmatic failure. Giving an authentic material is also one of the ways to avoid a pragmatic failure and increase the learner's pragmatic competence.

Keywords: Language Acquisition, Second language Acquisition, Pragmatics, Pragmatics Failure

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, a child enables to master more than one language is not a new thing anymore. It becomes a common thing in our society today. It is caused by many factors; one of them is the ability to acquire a language is better than older. Actually, all children who are born in this world have a capacity to acquire more than one language. For instance, the children in Indonesia, especially in Java, can speak Javanese and Indonesian language. Not only those languages, they also can speak English although it is not like an adult's speaking English. Their ability in speaking more than one language is not by chance but there is a process in acquiring a language in the brain of children.

This phenomenon attracts the experts to do a research to gain an expectation result. In linguistic, this phenomenon belongs to language acquisition field. There are two terms of language acquisition, first language

acquisition and second language acquisition. Before discussing about second language acquisition, it is better if touch a little explanation about first language acquisition. Infact, L1 research did not pay much attention to L2 acquisition at all, and, surprisingly perhaps, this has not changed significantly since then. *The ideathat merely by contrasting different types of acquisition we can hope to gain adeeper understanding of the nature of the human language capacity began tospread only much later* (cf. Wode 1981; Meisel 2011).

“Children acquiring a first language develop it naturally, they do not need think about the necessary knowledge and the skills required using it. Toddlers quite obviously have this capacity” (Meisel,2011). Babies and very young children develop almost miraculously the ability of speech, without apparenteffort, without even being taught - as opposed to the teenager or the adultstruggling in foreign language classrooms without, it seems, ever being

able to reach the same level of proficiency as five-year-olds in their first language. Second language learners, on the other hand, apparently do need some guidance, although we do not know exactly how and to what extent these learners benefit from instruction. At any rate, to expect them to attain native or native-like competence after three, five or even eight years in the classroom appears to be an idea too unrealistic to be entertained seriously.

Discussion

a. What is SLA?

What is SLA? Second Language Acquisition (SLA) is a language that follows after first language that is learning by the children or a language that is gotten by the children after learning the first language. "*Second Language Acquisition (SLA) refers both to the study of individuals and groups who are learning a language subsequent to learning their first one as young children, and to the process of learning that language*" (Savielle and Troike, 2006). Second language is a term of additional language, although may it is not exactly the second to be acquired but the third, fourth, tenth to be acquired. It is also commonly called a target language (TL), which refers to any language that is the aim or goal of learning.

The scope of SLA includes informal L2 learning that takes place in naturalistic contexts, formal L2 learning that takes place in class rooms, and L2 learning that involves a mixture of these settings and circumstances. For example, "informal learning" happens when a child from Indonesia is brought to the Australia and "picks up" English in the course of playing and attending school with native English-

speaking children without any specialized language instruction, or when an adult Indonesian immigrant in Canada learns English as a result of interacting with native English speakers or with co-workers who speak English as a second language.

"Formal learning" occurs when a high school student in Indonesia takes a class in English, when a China's undergraduate student in Indonesia takes a course in Arabic, or when an attorney in Colombia takes a night class in English. "A combination of formal and informal learning takes place when a student from the USA takes Chinese language classes in Taipei or Beijing while also using Chinese outside of class for social interaction and daily living experiences, or when an adult immigrant from Ethiopia in Israel learns Hebrew both from attending special classes and from interacting with co-workers and other residents in Hebrew" (Savielle and Torike, 2006).

A second language is an official language or a dominant language in society that is needed for education, job, and other purposes. "*A second language is typically an official or societally dominant language needed for education, employment, and other basic purposes*" (Savielle and Torike, 2006). It is often acquired by minority group members or immigrants who speak another language natively. In this more restricted sense, the term is contrasted with other terms in this list. Other restricted or highly specialized functions for 'second' languages are designated language for specific purposes (such as *French for Hotel Management, English for Aviation Technology, Spanish for Agriculture*, and a host of others), and the learning of these typically focuses only on a

narrow set of occupation-specific uses and functions. One such prominent area is *English for Academic Purposes (EAP)*.

For purposes of SLA concerns, the important features that all shades of L1s share are that they are assumed to be languages which are acquired during early childhood normally beginning before the age of about three years - and that they are learned as part of growing up among people who speak them. There are corresponding differences in what is emphasized by researchers who come from each of these fields:

- Linguists emphasize the characteristics of the differences and similarities in the languages that are being learned, and the **linguistic competence** (underlying knowledge) and **linguistic performance** (actual production) of learners at various stages of acquisition.
- Psychologists and psycholinguists emphasize the mental or cognitive processes involved in acquisition, and the representation of language(s) in the brain.
- Socio linguists emphasize variability in learner linguistic performance, and extend the scope of study to **communicative competence** (underlying knowledge that additionally accounts for language use, or **pragmatic competence**).
- Social psychologists emphasize group-related phenomena, such as identity and social motivation, and the interactional and larger social contexts of learning (Saville and Torike, 2006).

b. Pragmatics

As Saville and Torike's explanation above about the branches of second language acquisition, pragmatic also belongs to this area. As their explanation, pragmatic is the account of language used by people. Logically, somebody who gets a language may be the first or second language, unconsciously he or she involves in using pragmatics to get a good communication with others. According to Liu (2007), Charles Morris introduced the first modern definition of pragmatics, and since then many other specialists have continued to conceptualize this branch of linguistics.

Morris originally defined pragmatics as "the discipline that studies the relations of signs to interpreters, while semantics studies the relations of signs to the objects to which the signs are applicable" (as cited in Liu, 2007, para. 6). More recently, Kasper (1993) defined the term as "the study of people's comprehension and production of linguistic action in context" (p. 3). This brief definition states the elements of context and production as relevant elements of pragmatics that are fundamentals of any speech act in a language. Context, as Kasper viewed it, consists of the social and cultural circumstances in which communication occurs. These circumstances play a critical role in how messages are constructed, conveyed, and how they are received. Kasper also uses a broad term, "linguistic action," (p. 3) which is a somewhat general term used to describe the capacity of producing of utterances.

"Pragmatics is the relation of signs to their users" (Morris, 1938). Horn and Gregory (2004) states, "pragmatics is the

study of those context-dependent aspects of meaning which are systematically abstracted away from in the construction of content or logical form." Pragmatics is one of linguistics branches which concern on the intended meaning of the speaker to the hearer. In simple words, the speaker has another expectation should be understood by the hearer within his or her speaking.

It can be more understandable through the conversation between Cindy and Linnea below:

Cindy: there is a bookstore over there.

Linnea: no.

Cindy: why not?

Linnea: I'm so tired.

Based on the conversation above, it can be concluded that the hearer (Linnea) understands the speaker's goal, ask her to go inside to the bookstore although she doesn't say it. Linnea's replies will normally that she does not want to go to the bookstore because she is very tired and does not go anywhere else. The hearer's reply is expected answer by the speaker because the hearer can gain the goal of her words. It is also shows that the hearer understands the intended meaning of her words. It is shown from the hearer's reply is appropriate with the speaker asking. Understanding the speaker's meaning without saying the words refers to the pragmatic area.

In practice, however, work in pragmatics has principally be carried out on human language, "or natural language" as logicians are accustomed to call it. Modern linguists have been referred to as the study of language as a system of human communication. In this tradition, pragmatics has come to be applied to the study of language from the point of view of

its users, especially of the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction, and the effects their use of language may have on other participants in an act of communication.

According to Levinson (1983: 24), pragmatic is the study of "ability of language users to pair sentences in the contexts in which they would be appropriate." A wide explanation about pragmatic is delivered by Cruse (2006:136). *Pragmatics deals with aspects of meaning that are not 'looked up' but which are 'worked out' on particular occasions of use. Pragmatics deals with the uses made of those meanings. This is sometimes expressed by saying that semantics takes a formal approach and pragmatics a functional approach.* According to those explanations above, in simple words, pragmatic is the study deals with the language user's ability to find an implicit meaning of sentences within conversation.

The focus of pragmatics has been on area between semantics, sociolinguistics, and extra linguistics context. The boundaries between pragmatics and other areas have not been determined precisely (cf. Leech, 1983: 5-7; and Wierzbicka, 1991: 15-19). Pragmatics, however, has not been without its own differences. To determine some of its peculiarities, several imitative terms have been proposed for the classification of the wide range of subject matters involved in pragmatics.

Leech (1983:11) draws on the term "pragma-linguistics" refers to the study of "the more linguistic end of pragmatics - where we consider the particular resources which a given language provides for conveying particular illocutions (namely,

the speech act performed by an utterance)." He (1983: 10) uses term "sociopragmatics" refers to the "sociological interface of pragmatics." In other words, sociopragmatics is the study of the way in which conditions on language use derive from the social condition.

In brief, pragmatics is the study of language from the point of view of the users, especially of the choice they make, the constraints they encounter in using language has on the other participants in the act of communication. In other words, pragmatics includes the study of: (1) how the interpretation and use of utterances depends on knowledge of real world; (2) how the relationship between the speaker and the hearer influences the structure of sentences; (3) how speech acts are used and understood by speakers.

Beside grammatical, a language learner should learn pragmatic in order have a good pragmatic competence. Given these definitions of pragmatics, another important aspect must be addressed: pragmatic competence. Pragmatic competence refers to the ability to comprehend, construct, and convey meanings that are both accurate and appropriate for the social and cultural circumstances in which communication occurs. This is the goal for second language learner that is described before.

Blackman (cited in Barron, 2003, p. 173) identified pragmatic competence as one element of communicative competence, placing pragmatic competence as part of illocutionary competence, which is a combination of speech acts and speech functions along

with the appropriate use of language in context.

c. Pragmatics Failure

Pragmatic failure refers to the speaker's production of wrong communicative effects through the faulty use of speech acts or one of the rules of speaking. Thomas (1983) defines pragmatic failures in *cross cultural pragmatic failures* as "the inability what is meant by what is said." Particularly interesting about Thomas's description of pragmatic failure is the dichotomy between two types of pragmatic failure. She makes this distinction on the basis of difficulty of analysis and possible remedies in terms of both the responsibility of language teachers and the responses of language learners. She calls two categories of failure "pragmalinguistic" and "sociopragmatic" failure.

Ziran (1988) in Lihui and Huang (2010) mentions that pragmatic failure refers to "*failure to achieve the desired communicative effect in communication.*" He further points out, "*pragmatic failures are not the errors in diction, but those mistakes failing to fulfill communication because of infelicitous style, incompatible expressions, and improper habit*" (Ziran, 1997). According to Ziran, pragmatic failures are not errors in choosing words, but it is caused by inappropriate style, mismatched expression and unacceptable custom in communication so fail get the expectation communication between the speaker and the hearer.

Qing Guanlian (2002) describe in details about pragmatics failures, "*pragmatic failure is committed when the speaker uses grammatically correct sentences,*

but unconsciously violates the interpersonal relationship rules, social conventions, or take little notice of time, space and addressee” (Qing Guanlian, 2002, in Lihui and Huang, 2010). Qing Guanlian has a different understanding about pragmatic failure; he agreed that pragmatic failure is not caused by the mistakes in using grammatical, but he or she unconsciously broke the principle of interpersonal relationship, social rules and so on.

The understanding of pragmatic failure will be drawn by the example below:

Mrs. G: I'm sorry. (in Hebrew)

Mr. Y: Lady, you could at least apologize.

(Taken from Olhstain and Cohen (1989: 53) in Amaya, 2008: 18)

The example above represents a situation in which Mrs. G, native speaker of English living in Israel, is buying in a supermarket. When pushing her shopping trolley, she unintentionally bumps into an Israeli man. The woman tries to express an apology, but the linguistics codification chosen to carry out this speech act is not adequate, so that Mr. Y does not recognize it and pragmatic failure takes place.

A Hebrew speaker of English has forgotten a meeting with a friend and apologizes for this:

“I really very sorry. I just forgot. I fell asleep. Understand?”

(Taken from Olhstain and Cohen (1989: 64) in Amaya, 2008: 18)

In this case, ‘understand’ is a direct translation from Hebrew, used by the speaker with question intonation looking for the listener’s cooperation and creating a feeling of solidarity between both.

Nevertheless, the effect in English is indeed the opposite, since this ‘understand’ sound impertinent in this language. This is due to the fact that, whereas Hebrew is a language oriented towards positive politeness, English is oriented towards negative politeness, as we have already seen.

In simple words, pragmatic failure is the inability of the hearer to get the goal of the speaker within conversation or misunderstanding between the speaker and the hearer. It is not caused by the errors in choosing words but it’s happened by the broken of interpersonal relationship, social rules that is done by one of the participants (the speaker or hearer) unconsciously.

d. Relation between SLA and Pragmatics Failure

Pragmatics, as the above discussion shows, is all about communicating appropriately in context. Communication involves language, verbal or written, but it involves many other aspects that go beyond the words in specific speech acts. I refer to all aspects of appropriate communication as “pragmatic elements.” Second language learners need to acquire knowledge of and fluency in these pragmatic elements in order to acquire pragmatic competence.

Many sociolinguists have addressed these elements. Hymes (1974) proposed a model using the mnemonic device S-P-E-A-K-I-N-G to illustrate the key elements. S represents “setting” and “scene,” the social and physical situation where the communication occurs, including time of day. P stands for “participants,” the people involved in the communication and their

roles and relationships. E describes “ends,” the purpose or intended outcome of the communication. A represents “act sequence,” the order of exchanges or pieces of the overall communication. K stands for “key,” the tone or manner of the exchange. It describes “instrumentalities,” forms and styles of speech, including register. N represents “norms,” the social expectations or rules that underlie or in form the communication, namely, what is acceptable. G stands for “genre,” the kind of speech act or communication involved.

When we look the definition between pragmatic failure and second language acquisition is different, but when both of them are linked, it belongs to logical job. Let analyze it, second language acquisition is the second language that is gotten by somebody after getting the first language or the second language that follows the first language. Pragmatics failure is an inability of somebody to get the goal of the speaker’s utterance within communication. Those two definitions will be related one to each other. Simply, when pragmatic failure is occur in communication, it can be concluded that there is unperfected process in acquiring a language.

Most of people think that the most important thing that should be mastered in learning a language is mastering the grammatical. Somebody who can speak English or other language with correct grammatical will be called a smart person, but sometimes the assumption like that is not truly correct. In our country, most of

the language learners could do a grammatical test but when they must communicate and interact with foreign people, they often go far away or silent. It is caused by they do not understand what the speaker’s want in his or her utterances in speaking.

CONCLUSION

Pragmatics, in simple terms, is about culture, communication, and in the case of second languages, about intercultural communication. In order for second language learners to acquire pragmatic competence, they need to acquire cultural understanding and communication skills. According to Watzlawick, on Novinger (2001) “We cannot not communicate. All behavior is communication, and we cannot not behave.” (p. 19) Every behavior or action can be considered communication, and each of our actions reflect our cultural background including our opinions towards gender, religion, sexual orientation, lifestyle, politics and even personal space.

It is important to raise the awareness of students in order for them to construct their own learning upon a piece of information about pragmatics. To do so, teachers need to include the pragmatics component in their lesson. I believe that meaningful material will capture the students’ attention and is crucial for the achievement of this goal. According to the reality, teaching pragmatics in English class is important to avoid pragmatics failure.

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