

Teaching Cross-Cultural Socio-Pragmatics to Curb Cross-Cultural Pragmatic Failure

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Abstract

There is an interactive relationship between language and culture. On one hand, language is the primary instrument of culture and a necessary prerequisite for its development. On the other hand, it is regarded as a vital component of culture and a cultural product. Based on this rationale, it becomes important to not only teach lexical semantics, rules, and grammar, but also socio-pragmatics across cultures. The purpose of this study is to explore: First, whether teaching cross-cultural socio-pragmatics can help curb cross-cultural pragmatic failure. Second, since the teaching of socio-pragmatics across cultures is not formalized, this study explores to what extent its formalization can help solve the cross-cultural pragmatic failure. Third, the research will determine which components of cross-cultural socio-pragmatics, when formalized and taught, are most helpful in preventing pragmatic failure across cultures. The Research method is a qualitative research approach. The data are collected from secondary sources by using document analysis; in which scholarly articles and journals related to the subject are reviewed for the data needed. Results indicate that language is classified as socially acquired knowledge together with other components of culture. Culture plays an important role in language learning, and the survival of a large number of linguistic species is dependent on the existence of cultures. Recommendations highlight the importance of formalization in the teaching of pragmatics to curb pragmatic failure by evoking pragmatic consciousness into the learning environment that constitutes the landscape of applied education.

Keywords: Socio-Pragmatics, L2 Teaching, Cross-cultural Pragmatic Failure, Foreign language acquisition.

Introduction

Cross-cultural pragmatic failure occurs when communication parties cannot appropriately apprehend the social context within which the communication is taking place. Non-native speakers experience this phenomenon frequently. According to (Kim, 2020), language is classified as socially acquired knowledge together with other aspects of culture. Yet, culture plays an important role in language learning, and the survival of a large number of linguistic species is dependent on the existence of cultures. Hence, there is an interactive relationship between language and culture where on one hand, language is the primary instrument of culture and a necessary prerequisite for its development, and, on the other, it is regarded as a component of culture and a cultural product. As a result, mastering socio pragmatics, or how to modify speech act techniques based on the scenario or social variables present in the communication context, is critical. Based on this rationale, it becomes important to not only teach lexical semantics, rules, and grammar but also socio-pragmatics across cultures.

In view of the close relationship between culture and language, for a non-native learner, teaching cross-cultural socio-pragmatics may look as an attempt to force a foreign culture on him or her. Due to this, formalizing its teaching as with other aspects of language; such as lexical proficiency can prove difficult (Ishihara & Cohen, 2014). Hence, the purpose of this study is to examine whether teaching cross-cultural socio-pragmatics can help curb cross-cultural pragmatic failure. Moreover, this study explores to what extent its formalization can help solve the cross-cultural pragmatic failure. The research discusses which components of cross-cultural socio-pragmatics, when formalized and taught accordingly, are most helpful in preventing pragmatic failure across cultures.

Literature Review

Pragmatic failure occurs when a person does not comprehend what is intended by what is said, which often leads to misunderstanding or confusion in cross cultural communication. Conversation analysis is an ideal way for teaching sociocultural norms that could control Pragmatic failure; (Barraja-Rohan,2000). On the other hand, it is essential that teachers become sufficiently familiar with L2 pragmatic practices so

they can draw on those practices as part of their communicative and cultural repertoire, and to support students learning of L2 pragmatics through their metapragmatic awareness. Considering the fact that much of our pragmatic knowledge is implicit, it requires conscious attention and practices to distinguish between expressed and implied meaning; (Kasper, 2001: 511).

Planning the systematic teaching of cross-cultural pragmatics is a challenging task due to the complexities involved. Limberg (2015) claims that teachers follow certain principles in designing tasks and activities that incorporate pragmatics in language learning. In relation to this, Toprak and Aksoyalp (2015) suggested the inclusion of pragmatic awareness-raising activities as an option for explicit teaching of pragmatics. Hence, instead of including socio-pragmatics as a topic in Course textbooks and materials, specific sections dedicated to pragmatic awareness within the course materials should be considered. To be effective, these sections should be made authentic and contextually relevant. The authors argued that pragmatic awareness-raising activities would help the learner to experience the language at a deeper level, thereby developing his or her communication tactics, as opposed to learning words only. An example of pragmatics awareness-raising activities is natural conversation models.

In addition to introducing pragmatics in the earliest stages of learning, the method used to teach is important. Glaser (2016) argues that different methods produce different results. Typically, pragmatics can be taught in a variety of ways, including deductive and inductive methods. The former method introduces students to pragmatics after language use while the latter method introduces students to explicit pragmatic rules at the beginning. Analyses show that students exposed to pragmatics features at the start of the course are more pragmatically competent than those who have been introduced to the subject afterward.

Most scholars believe that pragmatic competence can be improved through a formal teaching system. In her work, Tulgar (2016) agrees with this position adding that the necessity of cross-cultural pragmatic capability must be emphasized. Furthermore, perspectives should be altered to provide learners with the finest opportunities to be exposed to pragmatic features and practice them in a variety of contexts.

Teachers who understand effective communication in various circumstances and have the necessary teaching skills are closer to the success of the formalization of socio-pragmatics. Aspects of pragmatics that need to be formalized should be context-based or represent specific speech acts, such as greetings, apologies, requests, complaints, and communicating thoughts.

In a study conducted by Hilliard (2017) among international students who were speaking English as a second language (L2) in the context of native English speakers, it was found that pragmatic failure was common because L2 students often translated their communication from their native language. The findings showed that this often resulted in socially unacceptable communication, which was repetitively deemed inappropriate by native speakers. In an attempt to solve negative pragmatic transfer, the L2 students were involved in several activities. By the end of these activities, the students showed significant improvement in pragmatic competence. However, these activities were not incorporated into the textbooks, and hence had to be developed by the instructor. Ultimately, Hilliard (2017) proved that if students learning a second language for communication are provided with explicit instructions in the area of socio-pragmatics as well as tools for the same in the learning environment, it will result in more effective communication. Further, the study proposed aspects of cross-cultural pragmatics to be formalized as specific speech acts that focus on certain aspects of the culture in which the language is used.

Currently, there is no agreed-upon specific way of teaching pragmatics. Bardovi-Harlig (2018) emphasizes this position in her study claiming that it causes complexities of including it in a formal system. However, she suggests authentic language samples to be used by learners; as examples of models and input preceded by interpretation or production as two of the most important pedagogical practices. The study also suggests that in a formal setting, pragmatics can be taught in the first language (L1) or the language being learned presently commonly referred to as L2. For example, for learners to understand pragmatics, it could be introduced to them using their native language as they possess a greater understanding of the same.

In practice, the L1 and L2 can be compared to build a better understanding of pragmatic awareness activities by emphasizing that,

similar to the original language, the language being learned has socio-cultural rules. Due to the involvement in such activities, the learners' resistance towards exploring cross-cultural pragmatics is reduced as it is not insistent on conformity to the culture involved. On the contrary, this method focuses on gaining pragmatic devices and practices to communicate more effectively using L2 (Bardovi-Harlig, 2018). The main benefit of such formal education is that learners can keep their cultural identities while participating more actively in target language conversation and gaining control over the force and outcome of their contributions. Additionally, the study suggested the inclusion of pragmatic awareness activities in the early stages of learning to help ameliorate the gap between grammatical proficiency and pragmatic development.

Based on these arguments, the research questions are developed as follows:

- 1 - Will a Formal System for Teaching Pragmatic Competence Can Help Correct Cross-Cultural Pragmatic Failure?
- 2 - To what extent the teaching of socio-pragmatics across cultures formalization can help solve the cross-cultural pragmatic failure.
- 3 - What are the most helpful Aspects of cross-cultural socio-pragmatics, when formalized and taught, in preventing pragmatic failure across cultures.

Methodology

The qualitative research approach is adopted in this study. The model concentrates on the components of the research topic. The researcher collected data from secondary sources by using document analysis in which scholarly articles and journals related to the subject are reviewed for the data needed. Document analysis is a systematic technique for assessing or evaluating different materials. Document analysis, like other qualitative research methodologies, necessitates the examination and interpretation of data in order to extract meaning, acquire insight, and build empirical knowledge (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; see also Rapley, 2007). Previous studies were the source of data, necessitating the researcher's reliance on data description and interpretation rather than raw data as a basis for analysis. Document analysis

produces data extracts, quotes, or complete sections, which are then organized into primary topics, classifications, and case examples using content analysis (Labuschagne, 2003). The sample aims at establishing pragmatic competence in EFL classrooms through explicit instructions combined with on-the-ground interaction with the relevant culture.

Analyses and Findings

In Iran, a study was conducted among students learning English as a second language to find whether incorporating pragmatics in the normal learning could improve pragmatic competence (Amaya, 2008). Two groups of students were used: one included student to whom the language was taught in the normal way. In the other group, students were given pragmatics instructions as part of the normal learning. Similar tests were administered before and after the classes. The results show that students who received explicit socio-pragmatic instructions improved significantly in pragmatic competence after the course. The scores of the students who did not receive pragmatic instructions improved at a lesser degree.

Yue et al. (2020) conducted a study among Chinese students who take English as a major to identify what aspects of pragmatics are most misunderstood. The test given to both students and teachers revealed that cultural differences and language negative transfer are the main causes of pragmatic failure. For example, in the Chinese culture, accepting a compliment is viewed as a sign of pride; hence, students tend to incorporate this in their interactions with their native English-speaking counterparts. In addition, L2 students were found to have native language interference in their thinking and perspectives when studying English. As a result of the cultural differences, a pragmatic failure ensued. In regard to teachers, they appeared to have a good understanding of the pragmatic failure among students.

In a study focusing on the development of cross-cultural pragmatic competence, foreign students participated in interactive book reading sessions intended to improve their communication skills in the target language. It was found that by the end of the study period, which was four months, those who participated in the sessions had gained notable

improvement in their pragmatic competence (Kim & Hall, 2002). The students were more conversant in the choice of words in different contexts, pronunciation, and appropriate presentation.

In another study, EFL Greek students were exposed to socio-pragmatic instructions in a class setting for about 6 hours. A pre- and post-class test was conducted to analyze the effectiveness of the class. Economidou-Kogetsidis and associates (2018) found no substantial improvement in pragmatic competence in this scenario. Further, the same students were exposed to the culture where the language being learned was used for the same duration. In this case, pre- and post-tests were also provided. At the end of the culture exposure period, it was found that the pragmatic competence of the students improved to a certain extent.

Socio-pragmatic instructions in teaching setup were found to be effective. A study conducted by Al-Suhaibani (2020) confirmed this by examining a setting where instructions were given through consciousness-raising and corpus-based methods. Both methods recorded an increase in the main scores of the tests given after as compared to those given before. Chinese EFL students showed an improvement in the development of apologetic pragmatics through class-based instructions (Chang, 2009). As compared to the results in the control group, the post class results of those under instructions were significantly higher. In a research carried out on foreign students learning Spanish, Mir (2020) managed to establish that pragmatic competence improved through explicit instructions combined with on-the-ground interaction with the relevant culture. Thus, the combination of instructions and practical exposure is necessary for pragmatic competence to be achieved.

Results and Discussion

As for the first question, students' socio-pragmatic competence improved dramatically in the majority of situations where explicit pragmatic instructions were offered in a class context compared to situations where students received no lessons at all. It is also clear that proficiency in speaking a language does not necessarily mean that the speaker observes acceptable socio-pragmatic practices (Xiao, 2015). The focus on linguistic lexical proficiency is important, but if the teaching of

a second language aims at efficient communication, then focus on cross-cultural socio-pragmatic competence is equally important. Usually, if a language speaker makes a grammatical error, the hearers will forgive it as poor mastery of the language while the inability to be sensitive to the context and culture is perceived as rudeness or unmannerly conduct (Ghazzoul, 2019). Therefore, instruction is beneficial for effective communication across cultures.

Negative language transfer and cultural differences are the most important contributors to pragmatic failure, especially between the eastern and western cultures. These considerations must be kept in mind while developing a language curriculum. However, negative language transmission and cultural variations should be used to demonstrate the importance and relevance of pragmatics. Students may develop a negative attitude toward the instructions if this strategy is ignored since it may be interpreted as forced compliance to foreign cultures. García-Gómez (2020) claims that formalized teaching of socio-pragmatics can help eliminate negative language transfer and familiarize learners with the cultures where the language is used.

Providing instruction aiming at improving pragmatic competence requires not only materials, but also teachers who understand the problem and are appropriately skilled. In reference to the results, teachers of foreign languages were found to be aware of the pragmatic failure among students. Formalization of instruction-based pragmatics learning necessitates the availability of teachers who not only teach the language but are also aware of and familiar with the culture involved. Along from being trained in teaching skills, practical experience is vital. By providing teachers who have the requisite skills, pragmatic awareness and sensitivity is instilled in learners as they learn other aspects of the language, which is vital in developing pragmatic competence.

The development of pragmatic competence is dependent on not only explicit instruction in classroom setting, but also the ground exposure to the culture involved. Explicit instructions combined with exposure to the culture recorded better results as compared to class instructions only. As early stated, culture and language are highly interactive and both contribute to one another in many aspects. Therefore, practical culture exposure is one of the ways in which formalization of pragmatics may contribute to improved pragmatic competence.

In addition, the time of instruction and exposure had a significant effect on the pragmatic competence of students. The longer time the students were given instructions and exposure to the culture, the higher level of the pragmatic competence was acquired. As Bardovi-Harlig (2018) argued, the introduction of socio-pragmatic instruction into the earliest level of learning yields better results in the development of pragmatic competence. A formalized system offers the best environment to achieve this. With wholesome instructions for a long period, the learner benefits not only in terms of lexical proficiency, but also in socio-pragmatic expertise.

Selected scholars have found that better results were achieved through exposure to the relevant culture rather than by class-based instructions. Economidou-Kogetsidis and associates (2018) found that the reason for this were the difficulties experienced in incorporating socio-pragmatics in the formal learning curriculum. This supports the argument of Limberg (2015) who recommends the use of situation-specific activities instead of giving plain instructions. The argument calls for teachers to be creative as different aspects of pragmatics demand varied activities. Some suggested activities include discussions and interactive book reading sessions, among others.

For the formalization of socio-pragmatic competence to be effective, certain aspects of pragmatics to be taught must be identified. These aspects include choosing and performing speech acts; components of language such as polite, apologetic, request, refusal, and compliment expressions; recognition and use of discursive function, and the ability to use cultural knowledge (Taguchi, 2012). In teaching these aspects of socio pragmatics, several techniques may be applied. This category includes productive skills that are usually acquired through role-playing, pragmatic awareness-raising activities, such as discussion and presentation, and using material generated by teachers (McConachy & Spencer-Oatey, 2021). Using case studies is another technique that could be effective in teaching pragmatics.

More specifically, when and how to use selected aspects of language is of vital importance in the formalization of socio-pragmatic teaching. Different cultures and social settings have different views of aspects of language such as compliments, apologies, and gratitude. For example, while a compliment may be gladly received in one culture, in another

culture, it might be unimportant or even offensive. In sum, aspects of language that contribute to socio-pragmatics and hence should be formalized in the teaching curriculum are what, how, and when to say or not to say something. In addition to this, formalizing rules of conversation, the implication of certain words and expressions, non-verbal communication cues and social cognition can help curb pragmatic failure across cultures.

Conclusion

The development of the international community has made it necessary for people to learn new languages along with their native languages. As the result, foreign language courses are taught all over the world. However, in the past, the learning of these languages was focused on lexical and grammatical proficiency, which, however, was not enough for effective communication across cultures. Failure to pay attention to socio-pragmatics, which implies communicating with regard to the context and culture where the language is used has led to widespread pragmatic failure.

As much as language is important to a culture, the culture also contributes to the way the language is used. Hence, cultural differences are one of the major reasons of pragmatic failure. Another reason is negative language transfer where learners fail to recognize that the rules of words used in one language do not necessarily apply to other languages. For these reasons, the teaching of socio-pragmatics is vital if effective communication across cultures is to be achieved. From this study, it is clear that teaching socio-pragmatics in a classroom setting improves the pragmatic competence of learners notably. Therefore, formalization of the teaching of pragmatics can help curb pragmatic failure by bringing pragmatic consciousness into the learning environment. If students understand the meaning and importance of pragmatics, receiving instructions on it becomes beneficial for a better result. Aspects of language which are vital and differ in various cultures should be specifically formalized in the language's curriculum. Particularly, the formalization of teaching of speech acts such as making requests, apologizing, complaining, refusals, greetings, and compliments would be useful in curbing cross cultural pragmatic failure. In addition, the correct way of performing these speech acts in regard to social

cognition, the implications, and their relevance should also be included in the teaching curriculum. Whenever possible, culture exposure should also be incorporated in the learning process as it has been proven to have a major impact on pragmatic competence when combined with class-based instructions. Along with verbal instructions, several activities such as role-playing, interactive book reading, among others are useful in teaching pragmatics.

أساليب تدريس العلاقات الاجتماعية-البراغماتية عبر الثقافات للحد من الفشل البراغماتي عبر الثقافات المختلفة

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كلية الكويت التقنية

دولة الكويت

الملخص

هناك علاقة تفاعلية بين اللغة والثقافة؛ حيث تعد اللغة الأداة الأساسية للثقافة وشرطا مسبقا لازما لتطويرها. وعليه، فإن إتقان البراجماتية الاجتماعية، أو كيفية تعديل أساليب الفعل الخطابية؛ استنادا إلى المتغيرات الاجتماعية الموجودة في سياق الاتصال، شرط أساسي لتعزيز دورها التواصل. وفي ضوء العلاقة الوثيقة بين الثقافة واللغة، فإن تعليم المتعلم من غير الناطقين الأصليين للبراغماتية الاجتماعية عبر الثقافات قد يبدو كمحاولة لفرض ثقافة أجنبية عليه. ولهذا السبب، فإن إضفاء الطابع الرسمي على تدريسها كما هو الحال بالنسبة لجوانب أخرى من اللغة مثل الكفاءة اللغوية قد يكون أمرا صعبا. وتهدف الدراسة الحالية استقصاء ما إذا كان تدريس البراجماتية الاجتماعية يمكن أن يساعد في كبح الفشل البراغماتي عبر الثقافات. كما تبحث هذه الدراسة إلى أي مدى يمكن أن يساعد إضفاء الطابع الرسمي على حل الفشل البراجماتي عبر الثقافات. وكذلك يحدد البحث مكونات البراجماتية الاجتماعية عبر الثقافات عند إضفاء الطابع الرسمي عليها وتدريسها كمادة دراسية. اعتمد البحث المقاربة النوعية؛ حيث تم جمع البيانات من مصادر ثانوية باستخدام تحليل المستندات، وتم مراجعة المقالات العلمية والمجلات للحصول على البيانات المطلوبة. أبانت النتائج أن اللغة مصنفة على أنها معرفة مكتسبة اجتماعيًا جنبًا إلى جنب مع جوانب أخرى من الثقافة؛ حيث تلعب الثقافة دورًا مهمًا في تعلم اللغة، ويعتمد بقاء عدد كبير من الأنماط اللغوية على وجود الثقافات الحاضنة لها. وانتهت الدراسة إلى تسليط الضوء على أهمية إضفاء الطابع الرسمي على تدريس البراجماتية؛ من خلال جلب الوعي العملي (البراغماتي) في بيئة التعلم؛ للحد من الخلل التواصل.

الكلمات المفتاحية: البراجماتية، العلاقات الاجتماعية، الثقافات، التدريس، التواصل، اللغة الأجنبية

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