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Role of Awareness Raising Activities on the Enhancement of Speech Act amongst Trainees

English

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ABSTRACT

Every sphere of life calls for Communication Skills, so is knowledge of communication in any profession. Along with the professional degree, it's the ability of communication during ongoing discussion and/or during presentations that can complement ones career. To facilitate the various aspects of communication, Speech Act is one of the prime constituent. Therefore, along with the perusal of professional degree, it's important to pay attention and avail the opportunity of enhancing ones Speech Act competence. This paper discusses the role of Speech Act Awareness Activities in facilitating Communication Skills amongst trainees.

INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to elaborate the pragmatic features such as apology, complaint, compliments, politeness, refusal or requests and their responses, by taking a speech act that has not been examined to a great extend through awareness raising activities.

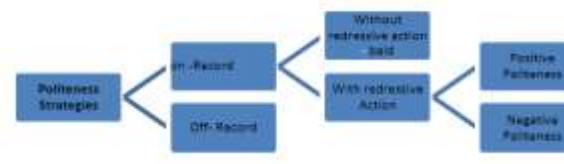
2. Speech Acts

Speech acts is a form of language usage ability in a contextual appropriate ` manner. It is the knowledge of the linguistic resources. In linguistics, speech act means an utterance defined in terms of a speaker's intention and the effect it has on a listener. Speech Acts are the actions performed in saying something which can be 'constative' or 'performative' (Austin 1962). Constatives are utterances in which something is said and its truthfulness can be evaluated. Performatives, on the other hand, are utterances in which something is done but that cannot be assumed as true or false but it can be evaluated along a dimension of 'felicity'. Thus, Austin's conclusion contains constative and performative elements; all said and done at the same time. Later on, Austin replaced constative-performative terminology by three different levels. The first level of analysis is the words themselves, locutionary act i.e., the act of saying something meaningfully, the actual utterance expressed by the speaker. In this level, the syntactic and semantic aspect of an utterance is taken care of. The second level is illocutionary act i.e., what the speaker is doing with the words- semantic, syntactic and the verbal aspects of the words and their functions are included in this act. The third level of a speech act, the prelocutionary act, is the actual intended effect as a result of the utterance. Speech act encompasses the concept of illocutionary act. It solves the real and intended purpose of using the speech acts. "In indirect speech acts, the speaker communicates to the hearer more than he actually says by way of relying on their mutually shared background information, both linguistic and non-linguistic, together with the general powers of rationality and inference on the part of the hearer" (Searle1976). Jiang had classified the suggestion strategies to nine categories depending upon their grammatical attribution.

Grice (1989) first introduced the term 'Implicature' to convey contextual information and differentiate it from its usual linguistic meaning. According to Grice, in a conversation both speaker and hearer share a co-operative principle. This principle is supported by Grice's maxims which are useful for analyzing and interpreting conversation. Maxim of Quantity makes the contribution as informative as is required. It should be neither more nor less informative than is required. The Maxim of Quality follows truth avoiding thoughts that are false or for which there are inadequate evidences. Maxim of Relation (relevance) means speaker's contribution should be relevant. And maxim of Manner means be brief and orderly. It avoids anything that is ambiguous and obscure. On many occasions, it has found that the maxims are 'flouted' or breached. The speakers are expected to be co-operative and they must be able to use language in accordance with the maxims. One of the speech acts is pragmatic politeness.

Pragmatic Politeness

Politeness is the expression of the speaker's intention to mitigate face threats carried by certain face threatening acts towards another. Politeness is a pragmatic phenomenon; it lies not only in the form and words but also in their function and intended meaning. Brown and Levinson defined face as "the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself". They divide face into two aspects- positive face and negative face. A Face threatening acts (FTA) is an act that runs contrary to the face wants of the addressee and/or the speaker. Most of these acts are verbal and can be conveyed in the characteristics of speech such as tone, modulation, inflection etc. or can also be in non-verbal forms of communication. Politeness strategies are developed for the main purpose of dealing with the FTAs. Following are the five politeness strategies:



Politeness strategies are used to save the hearer's face when face threatening acts are desired. Brown and Levinson outlined the above mentioned four types of politeness strategies: Bald on record, negative politeness, positive politeness, and off-record.

As mentioned earlier Speech Act is the ability to use language in a contextual appropriate manner. Therefore, it is necessary to raise speech act of suggesting and its awareness in the classroom in order to yield speech competence, when talking to a classmate, or to a teacher or parents, we are using suggestions every now and then. It is used professionally as well as personally. Learners should be aware of cooperative principles while interacting. Speech Acts needs to be understood as the knowledge of the Linguistic resources available in a given language for realizing particular illocutions, knowledge of its sequential aspects, and finally, knowledge of the appropriate contextual use of the particular language's linguistic resources. A suggestion is a directive utterance for the speaker to do something. This competence can be enhanced when opportunity is provided by means of Awareness Raising Activities. The instructional effects of explicit and implicit types of teaching conditions on learners' pragmatic awareness of suggestions. The participants in this study consisted of learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) distributed into three intact classes: One group worked on awareness-raising and production tasks receiving explicit meta pragmatic explanations on suggestions; another group was taught the use of suggestions by means input enhancement and recast techniques; and third group

was a control group that didn't receive any instruction on suggestions and found that the participant of group A and B have more pragmatic awareness of suggestion as compare group C.(Martinez-Flor & Alcon Soler: 2007)

Within the last few years, great deal of studies have been observed in which researchers have used different speech acts, such as: apology (Eslami –Rasekh & Mardani, 2010), request (Taguchi, 2006), suggestions (Martinez-Flor, A., & Alcon Soler, E., 2007), politeness (Shibamoto, J.S. ,2011), advice (Hinkel, 1994; Mandala, 1999 & Matsumura, 2001) but not much emphasis is shown on suggestions in engineering.

Proposed Speech Act Activities

The purpose of this section is to facilitate pragmatic competence while making suggestions in the classroom. It consists of three phases based on the activities suggested by Kasper (1997) in his research for pragmatic competence.

Phase 1

This phase comprises of speech act of suggesting in natural settings. Learners of communication are often taught through teacher oriented patterns which does not allow them to have quality interaction among them in English (Kasper), even the teaching material used does not have authentic and relevant content (Bardovi- Hartfort, Morgan, Reynolds 1991; Alcon and Safont, 2001). For this reason video clips, tapes and all can be considered to be better for acquiring pragmatic competence. Even excerpts from a video clip or a film can be used for improving pragmatic competence amongst trainees. A conversation between a teacher and a student has been recorded for this where a teacher is suggesting her student about the ways through which communication skills can be improved. Power and social distance are the two variables taken care of in this conversation. So, the first step is to show learners a video recording of this situation (which was made by the investigator only) and later on engaging them in a series of awareness raising activities that are introducing various linguistic forms which are required to make suggestions. Such awareness raising activities are explained in the phase 2 and the phase 3stated below.

Phase 2

Learners can then be acquainted with the socio-pragmatic aspect through a series of awareness raising activities. The purpose of these activities would be to make the professional trainees know about deference, social distance and power through real life situations. Learners' awareness can be raised through a series of multiple choice questions, a few examples have been stated below:

After seeing the video of conversation between the two participants, tick the right answer:

1. What is the relationship between the participants?
- Friend-friend
- mother-son
- Professor-student
- Aunt- nephew

2. What is the social status between the participants?
- Both have equal status
- Lady in the video has higher status.
- Boy has higher status
- No status is found

3. Are they taking care of deference and power?
- They are taking care of deference and power.
- They are not taking care of deference and power.
- There is no deference and power.
- Deference and power are partially seen in the conversation

4. What is the lady doing in this video clip?
- She is casually talking.
- She is giving suggestions.
- She is requesting.
- She is admiring.

By means of more such activities, professional trainees' awareness could be raised. Sociopragmatic factors help in the selection of appropriate speech act of suggesting.

Phase 3: Meta pragmatic explanations on the use of suggestions

Following suggestions can be employed by the teacher (in the video) to the learners. So that learners learn how to choose appropriate linguistic form depending upon the social distance between the two interlocutors and the contextual situation. All the above stated politeness strategies should be taken care of while making suggestions. They must learn how to enfeeble the face-threatening nature of the speech act.

Suggestions made by the teacher in the video that would be shown to the trainees:

- "You have to stand in a right posture…"
- "You should have faith in the speaker…"
- "You should have taken care of oral demeanor…"
- "You should practice about synonyms…"
- "Why don't you try it in front of a mirror?"
- "Take an exercise and practice..."

A series of production giving activities would be assigned to the students to practice these linguistic forms while making suggestions in different contextual situations. Through these activities students can implement all the knowledge acquired by them. An example of this type of activity is presented below:

Situation 1

You meet your teacher in a library. She is looking for a book. However, you have seen that book in another section of the library. What would you suggest your teacher?

You:.....
.....

4. Conclusion

Thereby, proposed series of awareness raising activities can enhance trainees' ability to make suggestions. Many opportunities can be provided for facilitating their communicative practice. Professional students can be made aware of the fact that several factors should be taken care of like, social distance, power, situation where suggestion is raised, the contextual features. Our suggested teaching pedagogy has been designed especially for trainees, although such series of awareness raising activities could be adopted in other professional expertise.

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