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PRAGMATICS-FOCUSED PRACTICES OF PROFESSIONAL DISCOURSE IN THE ESP CLASSROOM

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Introduction*.* The practical aim of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) teaching and learning is to develop learners' professionally oriented communicative language competences, thus enabling them to communicate effectively in some academic and professional environments. In the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages communicative language competence is defined as the one that comprises linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic components. In this respect pragmatic component of the language competence is concerned with actual language use rather than language usage and implies the knowledge of the principles according to which utterances and discourses are organized, structured, and used to perform specific communicative functions (Council of Europe, 2018, p. 138).

To put it simply, pragmatic competence is the ability to use language appropriately depending on the context of interaction. This basically requires having the knowledge of pragmalinguistics, which allows using properly the linguistic resources to perform particular speech acts, for example, when asking for permission or making a request in the target language, and the knowledge of sociopragmatics, which deals with social and cultural conventions governing the language use, such as the rules of formal and informal greetings and introductions or business e-mail etiquette (Maslova, 2017, p. 110).

Objective*.* In terms of today's globalization, which makes English the language of workplace in different industries, it is pragmatic competence that is certain to be crucial for the development of professional language skills. However, even advanced ESP learners do not seem to be well-prepared for pragmatic challenges in the English-medium workplace, and pragmatic errors have often been reported to be a major cause of communication breakdown in various workplace environments.

The truth is that unlike grammatical or other mistakes in language accuracy, which are normally perceived as slips of tongue or minor speaker's linguistic deficiencies that may not affect the flow and outcomes of the interaction, failures in pragmatic appropriateness tend to be attributed to an unfriendly personality or rude manners, and could even result into subconscious negative impressions of the speaker. For this reason, the present research aims to review the relevant theories and teaching tools to promote the development of pragmatic competence in the ESP classroom.

Methods. Although research on the effect of instruction in pragmatics within a foreign language classroom is believed to be still in its infancy, and there seems to be

no single commonly adopted approach to teaching ESP pragmatics, everyone agrees upon the arguments for the importance of developing pragmatic competence and integrating pragmatics into the language course curricula, including those specifically designed for ESP needs (Al-Aghbari, 2016; Kasper, 1997; Martínez-Flor & Usó-Juan, 2006; Maslova, 2017; Taguchi, 2011).

The recent studies have shown that without instructions pragmatic competence tends to develop slowly as language classroom settings often fail to provide learners with many opportunities to be exposed to a variety of pragmatic input and discourse organization strategies. Indeed, the only way they can incidentally experience varied communicative situations is via typical teacher-student interaction as well as pair work and role-plays in the classroom, taking textbook conversations as direct models. The problem becomes even worse if we consider the limited contact hours of ESP courses, the restricted amount of real life communication covered in the textbooks, and sometimes the lack of teacher's knowledge of guiding the pragmatics-focused classroom practices.

Currently, there are three apparent statements about teaching pragmatics in the foreign language classroom, which include the following. First, the particular features of pragmatics of the target language can be taught. Second, instructions on the nature of pragmatic functions and strategies result into more effective learning outcomes. Third, the use of different approaches to giving instructions, both implicit and explicit, ensures a better progress in raising the awareness and acquiring the skills of pragmatic behaviour (Basturkmen & Nguyen, 2017, p. 565-566).

On the whole, most of the pragmatics teaching methods share two pedagogical practices: authentic foreign language samples should be used as examples or models, and comprehensible pragmatic language input must precede learners' interpretation or production of pragmatic meanings and functions (Al-Aghbari, 2016, p. 56; Maslova, 2017, p. 110).

In terms of ESP, the use of authentic content materials is quite natural since they expose the learners to the genuine professional communication contexts, introduce relevant language input as well as mediate as a motivating stimulus to further learning process. As such, any audiovisual media, reliable up-to-date web-resources and linguistic corpora employed as authentic materials for teaching ESP can be made use of to raise learners' awareness of different pragmatic routines, communicative intentions, discourse strategies, and registers. In fact, technology tools are said to offer new materials and formats for pragmatics teaching (Taguchi, 2011), and most researchers share the opinion that TV and film videos can effectively present pragmatic features in the classroom by visualizing different speech acts in authentic social and cultural contexts (Derakhshan & Eslami-Rasekh, 2015).

The focus on pragmatic potential of verbal and non-verbal professional communication items can be achieved either explicitly or implicitly, but a number of studies suggest that explicit pragmatic instruction would be more effective, especially if some advanced foreign language points are concerned. Implicit instruction calls for enriched pragmatic input followed by extensive practice of pragmatic phenomena while explicit instruction additionally contains explanations, a kind of theory of how to behave in particular communication settings (House, 2008, p. 136). This "lecture

component" on metalanguage should accompany language development tasks so that to help ESP learners better comprehend pragmatic features and adapt their linguistic choices to a particular communicative situation at the final interaction stage, when they are to perform task-based activities, role-plays, simulations, etc (Maslova, 2017).

Results. Pragmatics-focused classroom activities may involve different types of learner's individual work, such as sharing personal stories about situations when a pragmatic error caused a misunderstanding and keeping a reflective journal, peer work, for example role-plays and interactive translation, and group work activities, including different forms of discussion, interviewing native speakers, etc.

According to J. House, translation activities focused on explicit comparison of cultural phenomena in the source and target language could sufficiently contribute to the development of pragmatic competence. One of the options is the translation of native language dialogues into a foreign language followed by the comparison with their original counterparts and analysis of any differences in the use of discourse markers, address forms and other pragmalinguistic resources of the two languages. Another translation activity suggests peer work when learners are to cooperate to translate texts, exchanging their ideas and thoughts on their word choice decisions in pairs, thus thinking aloud and evaluating their own and each other's translations.

In general, peer work activities such as role-plays are assumed to ensure a favourable learning environment for the development of pragmatic competence. However, one should point out that in a recent experimental study of how to enhance the knowledge of foreign language pragmatics most effectively three English learner groups are reported to perform either a discussion, role-play, or interactive translation activity, and it is the former that is found to outperform the other two, having gained a somewhat better awareness of the pragmatic issues in question. Hence, it follows that it is extremely important to apply group discussion techniques, giving learners more opportunities to analyse differences and similarities of communication routine patterns in various contexts, considering the relationships and social distance between the participants of the interaction (Derakhshan & Eslami-Rasekh, 2015, p. 6).

The range of pragmatics aspects to tackle certainly depends on the area of ESP, and typically covers but by no means is confined to the policy on expressing apology, request, offer, refuse, suggestions and advice in different professional contexts. To communicate effectively, one should allow for four factors:

- the language used a tool of communication (e.g. compare the expression of apology in English and in the native language);
- participants (e.g. compare the formal and informal apologies);
- the purpose of communication (e.g. compare the use of "Sorry" and "Excuse me");
- context (e.g. apologies in written and spoken communication).

It is worth mentioning here that a comparative study conducted across ESP disciplines revealed that learners of English for Social Sciences, namely Philology, Education, and Law, were somewhat more aware of different speech acts than learners of other disciplines, such as Business and Engineering (Martínez-Flor & Usó-Juan, 2006, p. 25), which can lead to a conclusion that business and engineering students require even a heavier input of pragmatically viable vocabulary, functional

language, and discipline- and job-related situations in their ESP classes in order to act as more confident and competent practitioners in the English-speaking workplace.

Conclusions. The insight into the pragmatics of professional discourse has revealed that some pragmatic features lend themselves well to instruction. Those features can be of sociopragmatic or pragmalinguistic nature, that is they either refer to the degree of directness, formality, as well as politeness of interaction strategies in certain communicative situations, represented by appropriate speech acts, or deal with the specific choice of vocabulary, grammar, rhetorical structure, discourse markers and other language repertoire. However, it is often the case that ESP course textbooks fail to provide adequate pragmatic input, which would draw learners' attention to linguistic forms, functional meanings, and context settings that influence whether the interlocutors will get their message across.

Thus, as the issues of pragmatics across ESP disciplines are extremely vast and diverse, it is essential to design teaching materials that could encourage social context comprehension, functional language use, and pragmatics-focused interaction. This will make the ESP classroom environment by far most beneficial for the learners to continuously raise their awareness of the various pragmatic aspects of professional communication, and receive the appropriate feedback on their pragmatic ability.

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