CORPUS-BASED STUDIES AND PRAGMATIC INSIGHTS INTO PROFESSIONAL DISCOURSE

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Over the recent decades the concept of pragmatic competence and the approaches to teaching pragmatics in the EFL classroom have become an issue of explicit concern and a large number of studies have been conducted to examine what instructions, activities, and means of assessment could help develop pragmatic competence, which is typically defined as the ability of recognizing and producing socially appropriate language, depending on the context of interaction. It is particularly relevant to the scope of ESP methodology, as in a workplace we often enter a specific language environment made up of not only professional lexis, sometimes technical jargon, but also of job- or industry-specific rules and norms that underlie the communication in the field, which may require different levels of formality, power, face, and solidarity [1; 2]. In fact, pragmatic errors are reported to be a major cause of communication breakdown in various workplace environments, so it is essential to expose ESP learners to a variety of communicative situations and professional contexts of interaction so that to get to grips with pragmatic features, such as speech acts, politeness formulae, interactional markers, etc. In this respect, the use of authentic language samples obtainable from audiovisual media, reliable web-resources, and linguistic corpora can raise ESP learners' awareness of pragmatic routines, communicative intentions, discourse strategies, and registers.

Corpus linguistics is concerned with collections of language in an electronic format known as corpora. Large-size corpora were initially compiled for lexicographical purposes; with time, however, corpora began to help with conducting some linguistic research, namely conversation analysis, spoken discourse analysis, and pragmatics studies, which, in turn, resulted into building smaller, more domain-specific corpora that are able to demonstrate the relations between specialized texts and the contexts in which they are produced. Today, corpus linguistics offers real-life data sources that are accompanied by extensive contextual and sociolinguistic information, such as gender, age, and social role of language user(s), place and specific circumstances of communicative situation, text types and registers, date of text publication, interaction time period, etc. Blended with pragmatics, which relies on qualitative methodology, it

will add a more quantitative perspective, and, as a result, the focus of the linguistic research will be not only on frequency, form, and function, but also on patterns of variation at social, cultural and/or regional levels. A typical representation of this combined horizontal-vertical methodological approach of corpus pragmatics is the KWIC (key word in context) or concordance line format, where a search item, for example pragmatic markers, deixis, speech act verbs etc, is presented visually in the centre of the line(s) surrounded by a number of words on either side. The resulting data on the frequency and syntagmatic patterning (i.e. collocation, colligation) of the item can be used for interpreting the patterns of form and function according to their interactional and situational context of occurrence and yield insights on both pragmatic and linguistic choices made by the language speakers [3]. For instance, a recent study on the frequency of metadiscourse markers used by EFL learners in academic essays and personal emails, that is in two different registers, has revealed that the range of authorial stance markers, especially hedges, was rather limited, while some organizational markers (e.g. furthermore, accordingly, in contrast, on the contrary, etc.), considered to be more characteristic of academic English, were frequently found in colloquial writing. This might be explained by the fact that the EFL learners must have lacked multiple exposures to a variety of metadiscourse forms and thus the awareness of their functions in diverse authentic communicative contexts [4]. It follows, therefore, that corpora can provide valuable data on pragmatic features of particular contexts, such as register patterns, and produce explicit instructions that would help us understand when and how we should use the language resources to express ourselves appropriately.

References

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