THE IMPACTS OF PRAGMATIC KNOWLEDGE ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF ORAL COMMUNICATION: ENGLISH TEACHERS OF ADAMA SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY UNIVERSITY IN FOCUS

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Abstract

The main purpose of this study was to explore the impacts of pragmatic knowledge on the effectiveness of oral communication. Both quantitative and qualitative methodology were employed in this study. The study was conducted in Adama Science and Technology University and the data were collected from 33 English language teachers. Purposive sampling was used to select the study sample. The data collection instruments used during the study were Multiple Choice Questionnaire, Discourse Completion Test, Interview and Communication Quiz. All the data collection instruments were developed after the necessary literature were reviewed. The data gathered through the Multiple Choices Questionnaire and Communication Quiz were analyzed based on percentages while the data collected through Discourse Completion Test and the Interviews were analyzed descriptively. The findings of the study revealed that, the majority of the English language teachers in Adama Science and Technology University have lower pragmatic competence. It was learned that the majority of the teachers have problems of communication. The collected data revealed that poor pragmatic competence has greatly affected the effectiveness of oral communication. Finally

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recommendations such as including pragmatics skills in language classes and giving short term training about application of pragmatics were forwarded based on the findings of the study.

Key words: Pragmatic Knowledge, Effectiveness of Oral communication, English Language Teachers' Pragmatic Competence.

Introduction

Communication requires the understanding of the intended meaning. Pragmatics studies how context contributes to the understanding of an intended meaning. 'Understanding how successful communication works is actually a process of interpreting not just what speakers say, but what they 'intend to mean''(Yule,2006). One can understand here that, not only interpreting what the speaker said is very important in communication but also the ability to understand what the speaker wants to say beyond the words uttered.

Knowing a language does not just mean being linguistically competent in that particular language (Hymes, 1972). A linguistically well-formed sentence can be appropriate in one context but completely inappropriate in another situation. When something is said inappropriately in one context or when language is used wrongly, it could lead to misunderstanding or it could even result in hurting someone's feelings. So, to know a language, one must be pragmatically competent rather than just being linguistically competent.

The aspect of understanding the purposes behind the sentence is a part of the field of pragmatics which is the study of language use in context and it is said to be the most difficult and challenging aspect of language teaching to be dealt with (Ishihara, 2003). Here Ishihara is saying that the field of pragmatics studies not only sentence meaning but the purpose behind the sentence or the intended meaning of the sentence.

Wolfsan,(1989) claims that a grammatical or pronunciation error may be easily forgiven by the native speakers of a language, but not a pragmatic. It is possible to understand how much the knowledge of pragmatics plays a paramount role in communication besides knowing grammar or other linguistic aspects of a certain language. In order to smooth the communication process, it requires understanding pragmatics. According to Akram (2008), modern linguistics is said to be the study of language as a system of human communication and that 'to speak is to act'.

Clear communication depends not only on recognizing the meaning of words in an utterance, but also recognizing what speakers mean by their utterances. The study of what speakers mean, or 'speaker meaning', is called pragmatics (Yule, 2006). As can be seen from the definition given to pragmatics by Yule, knowing meaning alone cannot guarantee successful communication. One should understand the intended meaning of the speaker. In order to have a common understanding, the listener should have the competence of predicting the speaker's intended meaning. Pragmatic failure is the inability to understand the meaning of an utterance (Thomas, 1983). This occurs when two speakers of the same speech community misunderstand one another. Wolfsan (1989) suggests that native speakers of a language are easy to forgive an error in grammar or pronunciation; however, a pragmatic one can cause offense. Perhaps a more accurate depiction of the current situation is that grammatical or pronunciation errors are more recognizable as "nonnative" to native speakers, while many people are not consciously aware of their language's social rules of speaking. Thus, a pragmatic error can sometimes cause offense. Traditionally, language teaching materials have focused on lexical, syntactic, and phonetic development. However, this is only a portion of the complete picture. Especially in an EFL context, it is difficult to have access to authentic input of the target speech community. As Bublitz (2001) discussed, even living in the speech community does not guarantee increased pragmatic development. Here in order to have pragmatic development, the knowledge of socio cultural values is very important. Trosborg (1995) states that "proficient foreign language learners may fail to communicate effectively because they lack social appropriateness rules for conveying their intended communicative acts." What is very important here is not only knowledge of grammar but social appropriateness. What is appropriate in the society is given emphasis in pragmatics study.

Oral communication comprises the participation of speakers in social interaction and the understanding of different forms of discourse. When people communicate with each other, they communicate meanings, information, thoughts, ideas, beliefs, attitudes, emotions, among others (Sperber & Wilson, 1986). In order to achieve their communicative aims, learners not only need linguistic knowledge, coined by Chomsky (1957) as linguistic competence, but also pragmatic knowledge. Here one can deduce how both linguistic and pragmatic dimensions influence learners' linguistic performance noticeably.

Pragmatic competence plays a key role in the era of globalization where communication across cultural boundaries is an everyday phenomenon. The ability to use language in a socially appropriate manner is critical, as lack of it may lead to cross-cultural miscommunication or cultural stereotyping. Research in to pragmatic competence has repeatedly proven that even proficient speakers of English often lack necessary pragmatic competence; that is, they are not aware of social, cultural, and discourse conventions that have to be followed in various situations(Akram, 2008).

Communication is the creation or exchange of thoughts, ideas, emotions, and understanding between sender(s) and receiver(s) (Kong, 2009). It is essential to build and maintain relationships in the workplace. Although managers spend most of their time communicating (e.g., sending or receiving information), one cannot assume that meaningful communication occurs in all exchanges (Green, 2002). Once a memorandum, letter, fax, or e-mail has been sent, many are inclined to believe that communication has taken place. However, communication does not occur until information and understanding have passed between sender and the intended receiver.

As many authors explained, to make oneself understood as intended is an important part of communication. A receiver may hear a sender but still not understand what the sender's message means. Being constantly engaged in encoding and decoding messages does not ensure that an interlocutor is an expert in communication.

Based on the above explanations given by scholars, it is possible to deduce that workplace success and teacher-student interaction depends on the ability to communicate appropriately with others. From developing targeted messages to motivating workers, students and creating messages that keep us safe with increasing productivity, better academic achievement and better work environment, and leading to career success. Effective workplace communication skills are among the skills we assume every worker picked up along the way. The problem is that not all the communication skills and habits that we picked up at home, school or social circles are appropriate for the workplace or classroom situation. Understanding how to speak, write and manage your nonverbal messages is critical to your success.

Objectives of the Study

➢ **General Objective**: The general objective of this study was to investigate the impacts of pragmatic knowledge on the effectiveness of oral communication in Adama Science and Technology University (ASTU).

➢ **Specific Objectives :**

➢ To investigate to what extent ASTU's English teachers are pragmatically competent.

➢ Cross-checking the relationships between pragmatic knowledge and effectiveness of oral communication.

Research Questions

In order to achieve the objective set, the researcher formulated the following research questions:

1. Are English teachers of Adama Science and Technology University pragmatically competent?

2. What are the impacts of pragmatic knowledge on the effectiveness of oral communication?

Significance of the Study

Introducing the importance of pragmatics in communication and identifying the gap of pragmatic competence of English language teachers at Adama Science and Technology University is one of the significance of this study. Knowing English teachers' pragmatic competence will help the university to work on the skill gaps of those academic staff members. Since pragmatics deals with meaning of words in relation to context, this study can aware teachers in general and English language teachers in particular to develop their own pragmatic knowledge so that they can help their students develop pragmatic knowledge.

This piece of work can also be used by Adama Science and Technology University English teachers or teachers all over the world as a reference that may show teachers' gap on pragmatics knowledge so that they can work on their skill gaps. Besides that, the findings and the recommendations of this study can be used by the department of language in general and English language in particular as an input for the improvement of pragmatics knowledge. Top academic heads of the university can also use the study as a guide to run teachings related to pragmatics

and effective oral communication among the university community by training their staff members gain better knowledge of work place language. Organizations can be aware from this study, the fact that besides other factors which play a vital role for the success of the organization pragmatics knowledge can play a key role since the findings of the research showed significant relationships between pragmatic knowledge and effectiveness of oral communication. The findings and the recommendations of this study can be used for the betterment of effective communication, language learning and teaching and for smooth running of social life. The Ministry of Education can also use this research as a valuable input in language syllabus designing. It can also be helpful for many organizations to give trainings on appropriate use of language in context; furthermore, this study can pave way for other researchers to conduct extra studies on this area.

Scope of the Study

Due to time and cost, the spatial coverage of this paper was limited to Adama Science and Technology University.

Limitations of the Study

All the academic staff members of the university were not taken as the subject of the study. Not only this but also, the fact that the study was only conducted in one university limited the generalizability of the research findings. Lack of related studies and lack of well-organized and recent sources in the university due to the fact that, the graduate program in the department of English is on its infant stage made the study more exhausting.

Research Tools

For the proper attainment of the objectives of the study; the researcher used primary data sources. Kwon (2003) indicates that discourse completion test (DCT) is an effective data collection instrument when the objective of the investigation is "to inform the speakers' pragmalinguistic knowledge of the strategies and linguistic forms by which communicative acts can be implemented, and about their socio pragmatic knowledge of context factors under which particular strategies and linguistic choices are appropriate.

Nelson, Carson, Al Batal and El Bakarry (2002) also state that DCT is an appropriate instrument for pragmatics research.

Another instrument that has been used in pragmatic research is the Multiple Choice Questionnaire (MCQ) which was, for example, employed by Green (2004), Hall (1976) and Kong (2009). MCQ typically contains a number of scenarios which are followed by several sentences that are either interpretations of an utterance that is contained in the scenario's description, or possible responses to the scenario. In order to elicit more information about English teachers' understanding of pragmatic elements and to see if there are some relationships with effectiveness of communication, the researcher used interviews. The interview section contains 10 items each designed to address various elements of pragmatics.

In order to examine the communicative effectiveness of the participants', communication quiz that has been designed by Witt, founder and President of Witt Communication was used.

Population and Sample Size

The population of this study consisted of all English teachers in ASTU. The sample size was selected by considering it as representative of English teachers and also could allow for precision and generalizibility of the research findings in ASTU's context.

Accordingly, 42 respondents were the target group of this study. Those 42 respondents were selected purposively from the academic staff of the University. The rationale of selecting English teachers is that the researcher believes that the study is going to be conducted in English language and it is expected that English teachers have better exposures to language as compared to other academic staff members of the university. The lists of 42 English teachers were collected from English Department of ASTU via the Department Head. The researcher was informed that some of the English teachers are on the study leave. Due to this fact, only 33 English teachers were addressed.

Sampling Technique

 The sampling technique employed in this study was non probability sampling technique. From this, purposive sampling was used to select the target groups.

Data Processing

 The method of data processing in this study was manual system. In the data processing procedure editing, coding, classification, and tabulation of the collected data was done. Data having the common characteristics were placed together and in this way the data were entered

and divided into a number of groups. Finally, tabulation was used to summarize the raw data and displayed in the compact form (in the form of statistical table) for further analysis.

Data Analysis

This is the further transformation of the processed data to look for patterns and relationship between and/or among data groups by using descriptive analysis.

Descriptive Analysis

The researcher used descriptive analysis to reduce the data in to a summary format by: Tabulation - the data arranged in a table format.

Summary of Findings

The study was conducted with the chief objective of exploring the impacts of pragmatic knowledge on effectiveness of oral communication. Different literatures have been reviewed in order to investigate what has been said or what studies have been made on the topic of the study. The commonly used data collection instruments have been developed and used based on the reviewed literature. Accordingly, the research tools used during the study were: multiple choice questionnaires where different scenarios have been given in order to solicit the pragmatics knowledge of English teachers and an interview was used. Besides this, discourse completion tests have been given with the objective of evaluating teachers' usage of pragmatics during their communication. A communication quiz that was centrally developed was adapted and used to check teacher's level of effectiveness of oral communication.

More specifically, the study was conducted with the objective of answering the following major research questions and the summary of the findings have been made based on each research questions.

1. **Are English teachers of Adama Science and Technology University pragmatically competent?**

Based on the various research tools used to collect the necessary data that helped the researcher obtain the necessary information to make the necessary generalizations, it was learnt that

majority of the English language teachers in Adama Science and Technology University are lower in understanding pragmatics or they are not pragmatically competent.

2. What are the impacts of pragmatics knowledge on the effectiveness of oral communication?

According to the communication quiz distributed to 33 English language teachers at Adama Science and Technology University, it was found out that 63% are lower in effective communication. Based on the summary of the first research question and the summary of the findings of research question 2, it is possible to say there is a direct relationship between knowledge of pragmatics and effectiveness of oral communication.

Conclusions

Based on the summary of the findings made above, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- The findings of the present study indicated that English teachers' knowledge of pragmatics is found out to be lower.

- Most teachers have difficulty to understand implied meanings and they did not guess the possibility of having intended meanings during communication situations.

- Most teachers are new or unfamiliar to use of pragmatics. As the findings of the research have depicted, most teachers are not familiar with the elements of pragmatics and its applications.

- Based on the data obtained to evaluate teachers' pragmatic competence and communication quiz, it is possible to conclude that pragmatic failure can lead to poor communication.

- Since the finding of the study showed poor pragmatic knowledge can lead to poor communication, pragmatic failure has a great impact on the effectiveness of oral communication. This fact can support the belief of Bardovi-Harlig and Mahan-Taylor (2003) who say pragmatic error may hinder good communication between speakers.

Recommendations

The purpose of the application of different teaching and learning activities is to help students become more effective, fluent and successful communicators in the target language. This is only possible if there are competent language teachers both grammatically and pragmatically. As Harlow (1990) states, ". . . most importantly, both teachers and textbooks alike need to emphasize to the learner that language is composed of not just linguistic and lexical elements; rather, language reflects also the social context, taking into account situational and social factors in the act of communication." Since pragmatic competence is a combination of these factors, the development of the pragmatic ability should be accepted as one of the primary teaching goals. If considered carefully, the teachers find the opportunity to experience language in different social contexts, they practice functions of language in a variety of interactional patterns, by using the right utterance at the right time, they learn how to be socially responsible language learners.

Moreover, the study of different communicative patterns not only helps teachers to be the active participants in the social interactions but they can help their students become active classroom participants and they can also encourage their students to think critically and creatively in foreign language. In sum, language learning is a socio-cultural process which requires the application of linguistic rules in a variety of contexts, audiences and purposes. The development of the pragmatic competence with all its aspects, help the language learners to broaden their education and shape their world views. If the language learner does not achieve most of these goals through the language learning process, the result will absolutely be a 'pragmatic failure'. To say, it is the misunderstanding or the lack of the ability to understand the message uttered by the speaker. As White (1993) in his article mentioned, ". . . although an utterance is grammatically well formed it may be functionally confusing or contextually inappropriate." Therefore, the message conveyed by the speaker can be grammatically accurate, but because of the contextual factors the message might sound inappropriate. The reason of this inappropriacy can result from social factors (traditions, customs, values), the lack of interpersonal and intrapersonal skills, cultural differentiations, lack of critical and creative thinking, etc.. Therefore, it should be noted that the development of the pragmatic competence in language learning and teaching today is very indispensable, because pragmatic competence not only shapes the world view of the individual through language but also provides teachers the opportunity to better understand their students

by keeping in mind the necessary interactional, psychological, social and cultural factors in language teaching pedagogy as it has been commented by many scholars on this area.

More specifically the following recommendations can be made:

- Pragmatics as a sub-field of linguistics should be thought explicitly at all levels of Ethiopian schools and the Ministry of Education should include in language curriculums.

- Poor pragmatic knowledge may create some gaps between teachers and students during conducting language classes. In order to solve this kind of problems language teachers should be given short term training on this area before they start teaching language besides other pedagogic skills.

- If teachers are not pragmatically competent, they cannot create pragmatically competent students. Therefore, department of English should use this study and find some possible solutions such as mentioned here.

- We also should inform others in the community and workplaces about cross-cultural differences in pragmatics to improve the potential for communicative success.

- A course in language teaching should be designed to help learners develop their pragmatic competence by making use of four language skills in a communicative way. Listening, writing and reading do not occur in isolation in communicative contexts. Thus, competence is the type of knowledge which the learners acquire, develop, learn, use and forget. The purpose of the language teacher should be to provide learners a range of opportunities to experience the use of language in different socio-cultural contexts by creatively and critically using language in different interactional patterns which would make them successful communicators in the target language.

Implications for Future Research

This findings illustrate that English teachers have difficulty of understanding pragmatics during communication. There is a fertile ground for English language teachers to develop pragmatic skills by observing authentic discourse; becoming aware, with the help of explicit instruction, of what is and what is not considered appropriate in the given context. English teachers who were

participants in the current research were also very positive about the research being conducted and they said it will be a good opportunity for them to improve their pragmatic competence and conduct similar researches in depth to aware others about pragmatic appropriateness during effective oral communication.

Akram(2008) explains that awareness-raising involves gaining cultural knowledge and background information. To facilitate pragmatic competence in others, instructors need to learn about their own appropriate use of the language – so much of which is spontaneous. This can be an intimidating task given the broad range of the language, contexts and purposes used in communication. However, by introducing a wide range of realistic situations and providing authentic samples of discourse, instructors can enable learners to raise their pragmatic understanding after they have improved their own pragmatic competence and try to avoid pragmatic failures.

To keep the research manageable in the short timeframe of this study, a small number of participants were interviewed. Fortunately they each presented different cases, resulting in useful data. The respondents presented differences in using various elements related to pragmatics. They were from the same profession and were given one type of interview. Research needs to be replicated with other participants of other disciplines and if it includes native English speakers it would be very interesting.

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