

Sociopragmatic Competence in English as a Second Language (ESL)

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Abstract: Language use, just like every other formal behaviour, is interpreted by the actors involved in the realm of the social life. As a result of the ‘taken-for-granted’ interpretations of words and utterances to himself, the ESL learner creates more difficult problems and misunderstandings in his use of the second language. This, in turn, affects the social use of English and its appropriateness, as well as its mutual intelligibility and communicative competence. Research has shown that ESL students lack the basic knowledge of Sociopragmatics in the English Language. A Language cannot be separated from its culture. There are some aspects of every language which are culture-bound and thus, require adequate knowledge of the language to demystify them. English Language is not an exception and thus cannot be adequately learnt and used without the knowledge of its culture. ESL teachers are faced with the challenges of incorporating L2 socio-pragmatics into their teaching of the language since some of them are not knowledgeable in that aspect of the language and as such, cannot teach what they do not know. This total neglect of this aspect of the language has generated a continuous problem of accusations, misunderstandings, misconceptions and total disharmony which exist between speakers and their interlocutors: teachers and students, students and students and others. Even in the local language, the problem still exists.

Key words: English language • Behavior • Sociopragmatics and competence

INTRODUCTION

Cultural influences on communication are obvious. Different languages or customs can make communication between groups of people both interesting and challenging. Besnier asserts that problems may arise when people from different societies with different norms meet [1]. There are values and norms that shape the way the members of a culture communicate. On a closer look, users of a language are a part of the world of usage; they are never alone in their use of language but use their language as members of a speech community which reflects the conditions of the society at large. Among those conditions are the institutions that societies, that is, the social human have created for themselves. These legalizations have found their symbolic representation in language. Hence, in symbolizing human life, language standardizes and codifies it [2].

The range of verbal repertoire, an essential part of communicative competence, is determined by culture-bound parameters such as intelligibility, acceptability and appropriateness. In view of this, Cameron opines that social norms which reveal the way people use language is a confirmation that human behaviour requires explanation in terms of the existence of social meaning. Until language users or communicators are aware of these differences, they may see people from other cultures as unusual or even offensive and that their apparently odd behaviour comes from adhering to a different set of beliefs and unwritten rules about the ‘proper’ way of communicating. Sapir states:
The content of every culture is expressible in its language and there are no linguistic materials whether as to content or forms which are not felt to symbolize actual meaning whatever may be the attitude of those who belong to other cultures.

According to Adeyanju, language is an indispensable tool for cultural expression since it embodies the cultural content of those who own the language. Understanding a language involves not only the knowledge of grammar, phonology and lexis, but also the knowledge of certain features and characteristics of the culture, which is a system of values and attitudes, beliefs and norms that users of that language agree to. In language teaching and learning, Kramch states that culture is not an expendable fifth skill, tacked on, so to speak, to the teaching of speaking, listening, reading and writing. It is always in the background, right from day one, ready to unsettle the good language learners when they expect it least, making evident the limitation of their hard-won communicative competence, challenging their ability to make sense of the world around them. Supporting the above assertion, Widdowson opines that knowledge of the culture of the target language is crucial in successful communication and interactions with speakers of the language [3].

English Language and Culture: English is not indigenous to Nigeria. Its successful use suggests the presence of some aspects of the English culture. Hence, the L2 learner of English is usually faced with difficulties in acquiring the nuances in the language that have a different cultural background. These nuances include the idioms, proverbs, metaphors and the use of speech acts which differ from culture to culture. These form the socio-pragmatic aspect of the language since they depict cultural experience. For example, the speech-act verb, 'baptize' and its synonym, 'christen' express meanings which are bound very specifically to the Christian culture in which baptism plays a part. This may sound foreign to a Muslim. Hence, there is a correlation between language, culture and social meaning. Other examples include: the use of the word, ‘brother’ in British culture denotes a male sibling, but in the Nigerian context, it has a broad scope which includes: half-brother, step-brother, uncle, nephew, first cousin, etc. It can also be used as an expression of solidarity in trade unions and in Christian denominations such as the Catholic Charismatic Renewal Movement as brother in Christ. The word, ‘sorry’ is another example which Nigerians use frequently in the presence of, or in reference to another person who has suffered some injury or loss. A native speaker of English would say, ‘Be careful’, ‘Mind your step’, ‘Watch it’ and ‘What a pity’ [4].

In view of this, Sapir affirms that culture is the means by which members of the society express their thoughts and ideas to one another and this requires explanation in terms of social meaning.

Another example is the following statement below which requires an understanding of the Nigerian world view and socio-cultural background of the speaker to interpret, “My brother ate a lot of government money and here we are suffering lack.” Many Nigerians would easily identify with this statement because of the social meaning of embezzlement of funds as an act of eating money, which is exactly the way many Nigerian languages would put it. Furthermore, another example, one of the (British) authors would frequently say to her Nigerian colleague, ‘Maybe you could do this by next week’. The next week, she would be surprised to find that her Nigerian colleague had not done the work and was unaware that she was expected to do it by then. To the (British) author, her ‘request’ had seemed very clear, because in the British English, the use of ‘maybe’ is conventionally interpreted as a politeness mitigator that is not to be taken literally, however, to the Nigerian colleague, ‘maybe’ had a much more literal meaning. When asked, both individuals claimed to attach great importance to clarity and directness in giving instructions, yet their ways of putting their principles into words were noticeably different. In other words, their pragmalinguistic and socio-pragmatic conventions for realizing directive speech acts were different.

Sociopragmatics: The concept of ‘Sociopragmatics’ refers to the social use of language. It is the way conditions of language use derive from the social norms and situations. In other words, it involves the study of both the forms and
functions of language in the given social setting. As an aspect of sociolinguistic competence, socio-pragmatic competence borders on the ability to use language appropriately and politely to convey messages while observing the social and cultural conventions guiding such use in a particular speech community.

The beginning of Pragmatic Studies brought a controversy as regards its overlap with such areas as Sociolinguistics, Psycholinguistics, Pragmalinguistics and others. Pragmatics, therefore, cannot be easily distinguished from societal factors. It goes hand in hand with Sociolinguistics. Socio-pragmatics becomes, therefore, the common label for the study of sociolinguistics and pragmatics which is aimed at helping the learner of a language to understand how language use is realized in the social life of a speech community and presents learners with what variety of language is and how usage differences are realized in different contexts. Leech describes this as the competence of using appropriate terms by following the social rules [5]. For instance, in the Nigerian social setting, Adetugbo points out:

It would be considered rude for me to address my father’s peer as ‘Dear Mr. Oni, by letter. In native English usage, this is appropriate. The best I can do in the Nigerian situation is to write, ‘Dear Sir’, considered inappropriate in native English use, or better still, ‘Dear Father’ which gives to a native reader a completely different picture of my relationship with the person being addressed. Native English users studiously avoid the use of imperatives when making requests and resort to the indirect statements because the use of the imperative has come to be regarded as either impolite or condescending. In the Nigerian situation, however, this is the form used with politeness shown by the adjuncts please and kindly (171).

Purpose of Socio-pragmatics: According to Thomas, “sociopragmatics encapsulates the knowledge of the conventions of communication in a society, the linguistic structures and the sociolinguistic factors that account for that structuring and the abilities that enable learners to communicate successfully in L2”. As an aspect of sociolinguistic competence, it also addresses the issue of appropriateness, which is how utterances are produced and understood appropriately in different sociolinguistic contexts.

According to Canale, “appropriateness of utterances refers to both appropriateness of meaning and appropriateness of form”. Appropriateness of meaning deals with the extent to which particular communicative functions (e.g. commanding, apologizing, etc.) are judged to be proper in a given situation. For instance, a waiter in a restaurant is not expected to command a customer to order a certain item on the menu even if he uses well-formed sentences.

Appropriateness of form concerns the extent to which a given meaning is represented in a verbal or non-verbal form that is proper in a given sociolinguistic context. For example, again, a waiter in a luxurious restaurant is not expected to say, “Ok, chum, what are you gonna eat?” Seen in another light, the sociolinguistic component of Canale’s model refers to the rules of speaking which depend on social, pragmatic and cultural elements. This means that certain pragmatic situations might call for the performance of certain speech acts. Socio-pragmatics, therefore, looks at the appropriate use and performance of speech acts which is investigated in this study. The absence of socio-pragmatics in ESL textbooks, school curriculum and the literature of TESOL has made this study more imperative and relevant since there is need for materials to pedagogically implement the implications of this study to enhance communicative competence in English as a Second Language. Below are different request expressions used by L2 learners of English and the native speakers respectively. While the first sample sounds impolite and unconventional, the second is polite and conventional.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(L2 speaker)</th>
<th>(Native Speaker)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Please lend me a pen.</td>
<td>Could you please lend me your pen?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I’m asking you to lend me a pen.</td>
<td>I’d appreciate it if you lend me your pen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. You should lend me a pen.</td>
<td>How about lending me your pen?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I need a pen.</td>
<td>May I have your pen, please?</td>
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Request Expressions based on DCTs and Blum-Kulka et al.’s (3) CCSARP
Nigeria: a Multilingual/Multicultural Society: A multilingual/multicultural society, Nigeria uses English to express her indigenous cultures. Expressing a different culture in a foreign language usually poses the problems of interference, non-creativity in the language and failures in communication. In other words, socio-pragmatic language use as in greeting, making request, refusal, bargaining, the use of idioms, proverbs, metaphors and others, varies from culture to culture and so, have to be learnt. The use of English in Nigeria today is one of transplantation: the language has been extensively hybridized to meet the needs of the L2 users in their local environment. Today, there is Yoruba English, Hausa English, Efik English, Ijaw English, Igbo English and others. These new codes of communication have put the ESL learner in a dilemma between commitment to his culture or to the language of wider expression, English. Studies in Contrastive Pragmatics have empirically shown the differences in EMT and ESL. Hence, despite the acculturation of English to express unaccustomed concepts and modes of interaction and the focus of communicative competence on bilingual/multilingual environment, the goal of communicative interaction is not often achieved. This affirms Kachru’s assertion that “as the English Language undergoes acculturation…it shows various degrees of culture-boundness. The more culture-bound it becomes, the more distance is created between it and the native varieties” [6].

It has been discovered that ESL students encounter problems in their social use of the English Language. This problem hinders mutual intelligibility and shows communicative incompetence. According to Hymes,

The goal of a student of language should be to account for the fact that a normal child requires knowledge of sentences, not only as grammatical, but as appropriate. He or she acquires competence as when to speak, when not and as to what to talk about, with whom, when, where, in what manner. In short, a child becomes able to accomplish a repertoire of speech acts, to take part in speech events, to evaluate their accomplishment by others. This accomplishment is integral with attitudes, values and motivations concerning language, its features and uses and integral with competence for and attitudes toward, the interrelation of language with the other code of communicative conduct.

Hymes’ communicative competence captures abilities to avert hindrances or misunderstandings in communication but there are certainly other parts which vary from community to community, which have to be learnt. For instance, different communities have different conventions for answering telephone calls;

In English, one can say ‘Hello’

In Igbo, one considers certain variables like age, power distance, social distance, degree of relationship before answering the call. To his mate, he could say, “Nwoke, kedu ka I mere? (Guy, how are you?). But to an elderly person or his employee, he would say, Ututu oma, Nna m ukwu (Good morning, my master).

Sociopragmatic competence, then, is the appropriate usage and selection of language in accordance with the context and the social conventions that govern communication. Failure to use appropriate socio-pragmatic features may result in serious communication breakdown between interlocutors. The socio-cultural setting of the L2 user of English, to a large extent, influences the structure and meaning interpretation. In view of this, Emeruwa, Kinball and Walker assert that the culture in which the ESL learner finds himself is a major determinant of what a word will mean to him. They illustrate the point in this way:

Both our thoughts and everyday perceptions have a social origin, a demonstration of the influence of culture on the meanings which an individual will take to his language use.

The claim that language cannot be separated from its concomitant culture is a reality. Bardovi-Halig purports that appropriate usage demands adequate knowledge of the language and its culture. However, the study here shows that sociolinguistic competence, grammatical competence, culture, discourse skills and management serve as necessary conditions
for effectiveness in speech acts production and socio-pragmatics. The study, therefore, suggests that a more complete picture of this study, the interactions among ESL learners in secondary and even primary schools, their overall linguistic competence, discourse management skills and socio-pragmatic competence be explored in future research in order to better understand the nature of socio-pragmatic competence.

**Linguistic and Communicative Competence:** Research has shown that the utmost desire of a second language learner of English is to achieve communicative competence in the target language; to be able to use the language effectively in the social milieu. Many linguists have used the term, ‘competence,’ in different contexts to refer to different types of knowledge. Chomsky defines it as the speaker-hearer’s knowledge of his language. He goes further to elucidate that language is primarily concerned with competence since it presupposes performance (what the native speaker actually produces by applying the rules). According to him, a native speaker knows intuitively which sentences are grammatically correct and which are not. Hence, he distinguishes between two types of competence: linguistic or grammatical competence which borders on knowledge of the rules of language structure and pragmatic competence which is concerned with the role played by nonlinguistic information such as background knowledge and beliefs in the use of language. Consequently, the native speaker’s pragmatic competence enables him to bring into play nonlinguistic information in the interpretation of sentences. However, some linguists considered Chomsky’s monolithic, idealized notion of linguistic competence inadequate.

In 1972, Hymes introduced the broader, more elaborated and extensive concept of communicative competence which embraces not only linguistic competence but also pragmatic competence. Celce-Murcia states that it includes not only referential elements of language but also the social aspects related to language use. In view of this, Paulston defines it as the ability to use language in its socio-cultural, interpersonal aspects, beyond the sentence level. Richard *et al.* also made the following assertions: “Communicative competence borders on the knowledge of the grammar, vocabulary of a language, rules of speaking, appropriateness and response to different types of speech acts”. Building on Canale and Swain’s notion of communicative competence, in 1996, Bachman and Palmer proposed the most comprehensive model of language ability to date, called communicative language ability (CLA). The model of CLA consists of organizational knowledge, which is, how individuals control language structure to produce grammatically correct utterances or sentences and texts and pragmatic knowledge, that is, how individuals communicate meaning and how they produce contextually-appropriate utterances, sentences, or texts. However, while the former includes grammatical and textual knowledge and the latter consists of sociolinguistic and functional knowledge. Canale and Swain identified four components of communicative competence such as:

- Grammatical competence
- Sociolinguistic competence
- Discourse competence
- Strategic competence

Grammatical competence means the acquisition of phonological, morphological, semantic and syntactic rules and orthography. Today, it is usually called linguistic competence. Concentration on grammatical competence alone, according to Yule, will not provide the learner with the ability to interpret or produce words appropriately.

Sociolinguistic competence, on the other hand, refers to the learning of the pragmatic aspect of the various speech acts, namely, the cultural values, norms and other socio-cultural conventions in the social contexts. These, according to Yule, are the context and topic of discourse, the participants’ social status, sex and age and other factors which influence styles and registers of speech. Since different situations call for different types of expressions as well as different beliefs, views, values, attitudes, the development of sociolinguistic competence is essential for communicative social action. In a nutshell, it is the knowledge of the culture, register, dialect and accent and interaction skills of the target language. This enables the learner to know when to say, according to the context, “Can I have your pen?” Hence, this is the ability to produce and understand utterances which are appropriate to the context in which they are uttered.
Discourse Competence is the knowledge of the rules regarding the grammatical structures and appropriate combination of communicative functions of various types of discourse. Canale and Swain emphasize that sociolinguistic rules of use and rules of discourse are crucial in interpreting utterances for social meaning, particularly when the literal meaning of an utterance does not lead to the speaker’s intention easily.

Strategic competence is the ability to use verbal and non-verbal strategies to communicate effectively. These strategies compensate for breakdowns such as self-correction and at the same time, enhance the effectiveness of communication such as recognizing discourse structure, activating background knowledge, contextual guessing and tolerating ambiguity.

However, Communicative Competence has undergone a variety of permutations since 1972 when Hymes introduced it into foreign language study. Nativization or domestication and hybridization are part of the measures used by different users of English to bring it to their own level of understanding. Current views, however, argue that to achieve communicative competence, a much greater emphasis should be placed on teaching the students how to respond appropriately to different cultural contexts and to recognize appropriate language changes with the setting and people involved.

In 1980, Carroll felt it important to remind language professionals that there are rules of grammar without which the rules of use are inoperable (p.8). In support of the above assertion, Holmes opines that knowledge of form and function of a language is very essential but some forms are culture-specific such that they cannot be effectively used in absence of the knowledge of the social conventions that govern them [7]. Idioms, proverbs, metaphors, speech acts are culture-specific because they are cultural values of a particular speech community. To use these aspects of language effectively, therefore, demands socio-pragmatic competence.

What Is Sociopragmatic Competence?: Sociopragmatic competence is a very crucial aspect of communicative competence which takes into account the appropriate use of language in a given socio-cultural context. As a branch of communicative competence, it accounts not only for the observable aspects of language event but also the unobservable: the choices the users make, the constraints they encounter in using the language for social interaction and the effect their use of language has on other participants.

Levinson defines it as the ability of the language user to pair sentences with the context in which it will be appropriately used [8]. Knowledge of Sociopragmatics, for instance, enables one to interpret not only the literal meaning of an utterance but also the meanings that derive from the norms of formality and politeness that exist in the society where the language is used as well as the unstated meanings that derive from the shared previous knowledge of the speaker and hearer and the situation in which the utterances are used. Leech describes it as a higher level of pragmatic competence since it refers to the competence of using language in appropriate terms by following the social rules (3).

Sociopragmatics and Communicative Competence: Sociopragmatics refers to “the social conditions placed on language in use” (Thomas 99). Harlow provides a distinctive feature of socio-pragmatics as the interdependent relation between linguistic forms and socio-cultural contexts (328). It is the knowledge on how to vary the language output in speech acts according to different situations and/or social considerations. ‘Saying sorry’, as an example of speech act, has different variations, such as, ‘I am so sorry, ’ ‘I apologize, ’ ‘I beg your pardon, ’ ‘excuse me.’ These expressions constitute the pragmatic aspect of language use and the awareness of -when to use what-, according to the social norms, is the socio-pragmatic aspect. The socio-pragmatic competence is the speaker’s adjustment of speech strategies according to social variables and the context (Harlow and Fraser, 42). The main areas of failure are specifically speech act realizations and vocabulary selection depending on socio-cultural concerns.

Factors Affecting Sociopragmatic Competence in Esl Situation: Developing socio-pragmatic competence in English as a second language is influenced mainly by three factors. They are: Linguistic, socio-cultural and socio-psychological factors. These factors can also be influenced by the attributes of the ESL learner’s L1 and the target language and also by his proficiency or knowledge of the target language culture.
Linguistic Factors

L1 Interference: Deviation from the normal way of speaking a language due to contact with another language could be regarded as interference. This linguistic problem exists alongside another problem, code mixing. When languages come in contact, there is usually mutual interference which affects the L2 user’s communicative ability. English language occupies a pride of place above every other language in Nigeria. In spite of the position and functions it performs, the forms spoken by most Nigerians are marked by errors which affect intelligibility. The environment has affected the English language. It is easy to tell which part of the country a person comes from the way he speaks. This is because of the L1 interference. To communicate effectively, an ESL learner should observe how language works, that what is said takes on its meaning as a result of the context of use where context is taken to mean a constellation of factors such as who the speakers are, their relationship to one another, what they are trying to say, what has just been said, where they are, in addition to the ideational content of what they are saying. Socio-pragmatic competence is very vital in determining the use of language. Functional use of language comes into play when a learner knows what to say in a given situation, that is demonstrating appropriateness. The interference of the mother tongue, therefore, leads the ESL learner to make inappropriate linguistic choices which could lead to socio-pragmatic failure.

Input Factors: If there is no input, learning will not occur. However, according to Kasper and Schmidt, sociopragmatic knowledge is particularly sensitive to the socio-cultural features of the context [9]. In second language learning contexts, learning the socio-pragmatic features occurs almost exclusively in the classroom where the teacher shares the same L1 and cultural background as her students and where only a limited range of social interactions is provided, for example, shorter and less complex discourse organizations, minimal openings/closings and fewer discourse and politeness markers. Therefore, it is not surprising that the majority of L2 socio-pragmatic studies contend that second language learning contexts provide richer input than foreign language learning contexts and thus are more conducive to developing socio-pragmatic ability. Cook states that given sufficient exposure and adequate input, the ESL learner will perform effectively in communicative tasks. Adequate exposure is correlated with the level of achievement in various areas of sociopragmatic ability, for example, conversational routines for socio-pragmatic fluency, acceptance of L2-specific request strategies, decreased verbosity through the use of fewer external modifications, appropriate mapping of speech acts to speech events and interpretation of conversational implicatures. In view of this, Austin states that the interdisciplinary nature of socio-pragmatic competence calls forth a need to acquire socio-pragmatic knowledge in a holistic context, encompassing all the discrete components of sociopragmatic ability, including discourse management ability and, most importantly, culture.

In this context, Blum-Kulka proposes a model of "general pragmatic (GP) cum sociolinguistic knowledge" where an L2 learner's GP for a speech act is organized as schema containing the L2 linguistic forms used for the speech act. This schema, in turn, is governed by an L2 "cultural filter" which decides the situational appropriateness of the L2 linguistic forms. Consonant with Blum-Kulka, Wildner-Bassett advocates a solid connection between culturally bound schema, a specific situation and an utterance appropriate to that situation: If L2 learners acquire L2 cultural knowledge about archetypal structures of speech events, they will not only be able to better understand a given speech event in general, but effectively participate in that given speech event using appropriate speech acts.

ESL learners, however, may fail to acquire effective sociopragmatic skills due to a lack of relevant input and explicit feedback. Authentic language samples could be used to provide practice for the students with low proficiency in the L2. In Nigeria, for instance, the problem of variation may crop up since the syntax of the educated English learnt is bound to show permissible local variation in use. However, those who are positively motivated towards English show greater sociopragmatic awareness. Cook suggests that the development of sociopragmatic competence may depend more on individual learner characteristics - the degree to which they proactively attend to input and how it affects the assignment of attention to socio-pragmatic and grammatical aspects - than on the quality or quantity of input. According to Macos, even when positive input was provided by the teacher, the learners did not always utilize the available input because the learners' own developing competence had not reached a point where the positive evidence was perceived as relevant input, thus preventing them from noticing the form.
Bilingualism: This involves the speaking of two languages by the same person. Studies carried out by Durojaiye as quoted in Ugwu indicate that ESL learners who are taught two languages at a time are usually retarded in their development of each of the languages. This is a crucial problem in Nigeria where Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba languages are the major media of expression at home and in some schools. These learners develop their socio-pragmatic competence in their often used language, that is, the local language which in turn, becomes an obstacle when they become exposed to the English language usage later in life.

Grammatical Competence: One of the most consistent findings in L2 socio-pragmatic studies is that high level of grammatical competence does not ensure equally high level of socio-pragmatic competence. Nevertheless, "I am apologize" and " I very appreciate" as used by a student illustrate a minimal level of grammatical competence which seems to be necessary. The majority of studies that have looked at the relationship between grammatical and socio-pragmatic competence show higher proficiency learners to be generally better at drawing inferences, using speech act strategies and comprehending illocutionary force. In short, the literature presents two generally accepted claims about the relationship between grammatical competence and sociopragmatic competence: (1) grammar is not a sufficient condition for sociopragmatic competence; however, (2) grammar is a necessary condition for sociopragmatic competence.

The first claim is based on the observation that a learner already knows about linguistic structures but has not yet learnt that he/she can use them as some socio-pragmatic strategies. For example, a learner identified as problematic the sentence: If tomorrow is good for you, I could come any time you say; explaining that the past-tense verb ‘could’ was used with ‘tomorrow’ which made the sentence future tense. Apparently, the learner had not yet acquired the pragmatic function of the modal verb as an epistemic marker, although he had acquired the present and past inflections. Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford suggest that pragmatic extension of tense-mood-aspect forms to politeness markers is not acquired until core deictic (temporal) meanings have been acquired (3).

The second claim is based on the observation that a learner knows the appropriate pragmatic strategy for a given context, but does not know how to realize it due to limited linguistic knowledge. Studies have shown that higher-proficiency learners have the ability to soften their refusals with modal adverbs, while the lower-proficiency learners tend to use direct refusals such as I can't. Attributing this to a lack of modal resources, Takahashi and Beebe argue that the higher frequency of direct expressions among lower proficiency learners is not a function of native language transfer, but rather most probably a developmental stage where simpler and also more direct, expressions are being used (p.150). Another example is where a learner used a rather direct expression, ‘I know what you mean, but don't think so’ in disagreeing with her advisor. In spite of her apparent attempt to mitigate the force, her limited modal resources prevented her from making the disagreement polite. In addition to modality, a lack of knowledge of syntax also hinders developing socio-pragmatic ability. Francis considered an ESL learner's request; I register next session, can I? This is a failure to complete the syntactic inversion which is necessary to make a conventionally indirect request. He points out a clear absence of both syntactic and lexical down graders with lower-proficiency learners because of the linguistic complexity of such moves. The salient question here, is socio-pragmatic competence built on a platform of grammatical competence? Or, is Koike right when she asserts, "Since the grammatical competence cannot develop as quickly as the already present pragmatic concepts require, the pragmatic concepts are expressed in ways conforming to the level of grammatical complexity acquired"? [9], unfortunately, the questions still remain unanswered. As Bardovi-Harlig points out, studies have only looked at whether a failure to perform a particular soci-pragmatic feature can be attributed to a lack of grammatical competence in a general measure, for instance, school grades, scores on a standardized proficiency test. And such an unbalanced comparison clearly is limited in its ability to explain to what extent and in what ways grammatical knowledge facilitates or impedes socio-pragmatic development.

Misconceptions and distortions occur during communication because people tend to create their own pictures of the cultural and social values of other nations based on information obtained from secondary sources. The dichotomy between the Nigerian culture and the British has made it difficult for Nigerians to achieve communicative competence in English since language and culture are interwoven. Eleanor states that socio-cultural factors such as the difference between the L1 culture
and the target language culture can lead to wrong choice of words and situations of use. In Nigeria, there are social cultural norms regulating the use of the English language such as age, status, occupation and social value of the interlocutors. Many cultural characteristics of a language affect the L2 of the foreign language learning. From a pragmatic perspective, as stated by Dimitracopoulou, language is a form of social action because linguistic communication occurs in the context of structured interpersonal exchange and meaning is thus socially regulated [7]. In other words, shared values and beliefs create the traditions and social structures that bind a community together and are expressed in their language. To speak a language therefore, knowledge of the social norms guiding appropriate usage in context is important. It is well known that every language has its own rules of usage as to when, how and to what degree a speaker may impose a given verbal behavior on his/her conversational partner [8]. Due to the influence or interference of their own cultural norms, it is hard for non-native speakers to choose the forms appropriate to certain situations. For instance, in British culture, paying a compliment to someone obligates that person to call the other person by his first name despite the age and position and so on in order to show "modesty," whereas in Nigerian culture, precisely, the Igbo, such a response might be both inappropriate and embarrassing.

In addition, oral communication, as mentioned above, involves a very powerful non-verbal communication system, which sometimes contradicts the messages provided through the verbal listening channel. Due to a lack of familiarity with communication systems of the target language, ESL learners usually do not know how to pick up nonverbal cues. As a result, ignorance of the nonverbal message often leads to misunderstanding. The following is a case in point. One day, when a Nigeria student heard, “Let’s get together for lunch sometime”, he immediately responded to fix a specific date without noticing the speaker’s indifferent facial expression. Undoubtedly, he was puzzled when his interlocutor left without giving him an unexpected answer. It is evident that the student had not understood the nonverbal message, which illustrates that the socio-cultural factor is another factor that affects oral communication greatly [9].

Socio-Psychological Factor: Of the various types of individual learner variables, SLA research has identified socio-psychological factors such as motivation, attitude and identity as key factors that influence learning outcomes. However, Ellis states that insensitivity to or deviation from social norms of the target language culture, or misconception of and illusions about the target language may inhibit a person’s socio-pragmatic competence [1].

Home Background: The ESL learner’s first environment is the family. Fontana decries the poor living conditions and other socioeconomic problems of parents like unemployment, poor educational background and lack of efficient cultural and leisure facilities as great obstacles to the verbal ability and socio-pragmatic development of the ESL learner. Studies like that of Bernstein quoted in Ugwu show that children from higher socioeconomic background tend to develop language faster and appropriately than those from lower class since they have closer interactions and higher quality of exposure from parents, good schools and optimal linguistic environment. Some of them are exposed to computer conferencing known as web-based conferencing or on-line discussion where they are allowed with their peers especially from abroad. On the contrary, in the lower class family, language is simpler, unsophisticated, more of commands and directions. Children, here, have poorer and limited vocabularies. Developing competence in L2 socio-pragmatics is a difficult task and they grow with it.

Motivation: Motivation is an imponderable variable in the acquisition of a language especially in a second language situation where the socio-cultural context of the L1 and L2 are like cheese and chalk [4]. Koontz refers to motivation as the drive and effort to satisfy a want or goal [6]. According to Okafor, motivation is a process by which a person is internally and externally stimulated towards activity. In this study, motivation refers to the process which spurs the ESL learner to engage in a purposeful learning experience and use of English. Baldeh suggests integrative motivation which is the learner’s desire to learn the L2 to actively participate in interaction with members of the target community. This is particularly relevant to socio-pragmatic development.
Research has shown that the high level of integrative motivation of the ESL learner can be facilitative for his development of sociolinguistic competence but not for grammatical competence. Salsbury and Bardovi-Harlig examined disagreements used by ESL learners. Although their participants EJ and MR were at the same stage in their development of linguistic competence and possessed the same range of modality markers, they differed markedly from each other in their use of acquired linguistic resources. MR, who had a higher level of desire and intention to communicate than EJ, pushed her linguistic resources to the limit. Thus, her linguistic resources were fully utilized in developing socio-pragmatic competence, whereas EJ's were not [6].

**Linguistic Attitude:** Attitude as defined by Adekunle is one of the major determinants of the pattern of human behaviour in the society (58). Expectedly, as a colonial heritage, the attitude towards the English language in Nigeria is either negative or positive. It consists of three components and they include: one’s belief in something which in turn affects the disposition of the mind and this accounts for one’s positive or negative action or human behaviour. However, a learner's positive attitude towards learning an L2 does not necessarily mean a positive attitude towards adopting L2 socio-pragmatic norms, especially when these L2 norms conflict with the learner's value system about how he/she should behave. Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei and Thurrell state, "Socio-cultural rules and norms are so ingrained in our own identity that it is difficult to change behaviour based on a new set of assumptions". Yet, despite the fact that sociolinguists long ago provided compelling evidence that a learner identifies and presents himself/herself as a member of a particular speech community through language use, many SLA theories draw an unnatural distinction between the learner and the learning context (Pierce, 5).

Arguing for the need to reconceptualize motivation as less individualistic and more social, Pierce proposes the notion investment as better capturing the complex relationship between a learner's motivation to learn the L2 and his/her willingness to use the L2 in socio-pragmatically appropriate ways.

**Late Exposure to the English Language:** Age, a biological factor, has received considerable attention from mainstream SLA research. One of the general contentions is that learners who begin learning an L2 after puberty are unlikely to acquire a native speaker’s level of proficiency and that, irrespective of whether native speaker proficiency is achieved, younger learners are more likely to reach higher levels of attainment than adults. A number of reasons for this have been suggested, e.g., neurological, motivational, cognitive and input factors. However, what seems to be particularly relevant to socio-pragmatic acquisition is that younger learners appear to lend themselves more readily to dealing with the threat imposed on their identities by the adoption of L2 cultural norms because they have not yet established a fixed idea of their own social identities. Another possible explanation is that younger learners benefit more from explicit input (e.g., explicit instruction and explicit socialization) than older learners. However, adult learners' pragmatic errors are more likely to be conceived of as idiosyncratic personal traits. Therefore, they rarely receive corrective feedback.

According to Kim’s study which is probably the only study which specifically investigates the age factor in L2 pragmatic development. She compared the request and apology strategies used by adult ESL learners and that of the native speakers of English through discourse completion tasks (DCTs), role-plays and questionnaires. Her results confirmed the general findings in SLA studies that an earlier onset age, more informal input, closer cultural orientation to the L2 and more native-like performance on the tasks were all positively correlated in L2 socio-pragmatic competence.

**Strategies for Developing Sociopragmatic Competence in ESL:** Studies have provided ample evidence that L2 learners' L1 sociopragmatic knowledge significantly influences their socio-pragmatic performance in the L2. Negative socio-pragmatic transfer has been well documented in a wide range of areas of speech acts. For example, learners seem to transfer L1 socio-pragmatic strategies. Learners also appear to transfer L1 linguistic means as a function of speech act realization, for example, L1 apology semantic formulas, L1 conventional forms for requesting and expressing gratitude, L1 modal verbs in requests and the frequency, order and content of semantic formulas in refusals (Beebe et al, 90). Furthermore, learners transfer the L1 norm of social discernment in assessing one's relative social position. Finally, learners often show an inappropriate response to their native speaker interlocutors in discourse. House, however, suggests that this can be a result
of L1 schematic transfer, a problem stemming from a lack of the culture-specific pragmatic knowledge needed for a given situation rather than a lack of linguistic competence. For example, House observed that an ESL learner of English at a party responded to a native English speaker’s suggestion: “Should we go and get some cheese now?” With “Oh, no, no, no, I stay here,” interpreting it as a question indirectly asking if she wanted to discontinue the conversation, as it would have been in the L1. The following strategies have been suggested to help the ESL learner develop his sociopragmatic competence in English as an L2.

Strategies, as used in this study, are those techniques, ‘tricks’ which ESL learners can either learn, create or use in order to achieve their goal or desired outcome. According to Ellis, L2 learners use these strategies to compensate for their inadequate L2 knowledge. They would also help the L2 learner of English to explore the socio-pragmatic aspects of communication in their native and target cultures. They include:

The Model Dialogue: This is intended to be a representation of actual speech encounter in the real world. Ideally, it is an effective means of practising the normal give and take in conversation which helps the learners and users of English to develop socio-pragmatic competence. Through this useful technique, students can be presented with examples of language in use. At first, the students can listen to a dialogue and then identify the kind of speech acts used. Next they are presented with more dialogues without any information concerning the particular situation and they have to do their best to guess the age, social status and the relationship between the speakers.

Role-Play: This is a very useful technique in the development of socio-pragmatic competence which can follow the model dialogue. The ESL learners are encouraged to use their knowledge and imagination in the process of constructing these dialogues. They can act out the parts that have been assigned to them in well defined situations, that is, after they have analyzed a number of dialogues in terms of their language functions, they will divide them in pairs and have them act out. Again, here, it is important to bear in mind the guideline as to give students enough information on the age, sex and social status of the participants so that they will not blindly exchange a number of utterances. By way of developing socio-pragmatic competence, role-play will also help minimize the risk of stereotypical information being applied when learners find themselves interacting with members of the target cultural group.

Discourse Completion Task (DCT): This is one of the most popular tools in teaching socio-pragmatics and cross-cultural pragmatics in which students are required to do a completion exercise and provide appropriate responses to various scenarios.

Speech Act Sets: According to Cohen, an important strategy in teaching a given speech act such as apologizing, requesting, complaining, etc. is “to arrive at a set of realization patterns typically used by native speakers of the target language, any of which would be recognized as the speech act in question, when uttered in the appropriate context”. This set of strategies is referred to as the speech act set of a specific speech act. As Cohen rightly observes, lack of even partial mastery of different speech act sets may cause serious breakdowns in normal communication.

Oral Communication: Language is a very important tool in communication which can be carried out with any form of language: gestures, emotional expressions, speech or written language. It is most commonly and effectively done by speech. Communication is best achieved in interactions in a friendly atmosphere with fellow bilinguals or native speakers and this helps the ESL learner to think in the target language and use the language in a natural, comprehensible and communicative way. He can also enter unprepared into a conversation with familiar topics. Chamot and O’Malley state that for the ESL learners of English to reach high levels of proficiency in the language, they must engage in high levels of oral interaction, negotiating meaning and solving problems in and with the language. However, Cook asserts that children acquire socio-cultural knowledge by participating in language-mediated daily interactions which transmit important socio-cultural values to them. He, therefore, proposes that caregivers while socializing children through language should teach the appropriate
behaviour governing an immediate social interaction by providing information on the social norms shared by members of that society with regard to the speech act of event. This is because children learn to be competent members of the society by participating in daily routines and acquiring their regularities with no recourse to overt instruction. This is essential since they grow with this competence which in turn, helps them to use language meaningfully, appropriately and effectively and, in this respect, become socio-pragmatically competent.

**Storytelling:** This is another way of developing socio-pragmatic competence because it helps the ESL learner to use language extensively. The speaker shows his ability to communicate effectively by using appropriate words and phrases to distinguish characters in the story being narrated. Socio-pragmatic aspects of interaction are generally not discussed in any textbook. The ESL classroom does not provide the learner with the opportunity to practise in the language but story telling as a measure helps the learner to use the language and to receive adequate training through corrections from a competent teacher.

**Drama:** Spoken proficiency can be acquired by performing a drama. It helps the ESL learner to develop his communicative skills; to create and use language effectively. Where the lines of the play are forgotten, he improvises, thereby, showing his linguistic competence and communicative expertise.

**Composition Writing:** This is another exercise that promotes socio-pragmatic competence in English. It helps the ESL learner to combine the skills of reading for exact information and the skill of using the information to organize a coherent text according to the context with proper consideration for appropriateness and grammaticality.

**Using Language Acquisition Videos and Other Visual and Audiovisual Aids:** Watching and listening to native speakers during the CNN and BBC news casting on television and radio, watching life events in English films and practising what has been heard and learnt which includes the norms displayed by the native speakers in interactions, aid the ESL learner in developing vocabulary on everyday activities which eventually improves his sociopragmatic and communicative competence in English. Panscofar, a speech-language pathologist suggests that the use of language acquisition videos is a fun and interesting way to encourage and facilitate second language growth and communicative competence especially in children whether they are yet to talk or already forming words since these engaging videos encourage imitation by using animals, objects and activities that children love. Also, the video series target the basic language skills that will help to give the children a laudable foundation in ESL. They also teach and reinforce the skills of identifying, labeling, imitating and vocalization.

**Consistent Reading and Language Games:** Elaborate reading has always remained one of the outstanding tools for language acquisition and development. Sociopragmatic competence can be acquired through reading books, newspapers and magazines like *FOCUS ON BRITAIN* (highlights on the English Culture and Language) and using language games like the puzzles.

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**Asking Questions for Clarification and Cooperation:** The ESL learner asks the speaker to repeat, explain or elaborate already made statements for clarification purposes. By this, he goes into an interactional dialogue with the speaker who could be either a native speaker or his fellow bilingual and this helps him to develop socio-pragmatic competence in English.
Repetition: The act of repeating continuously what the native speaker says or teaches is another communicative exercise which helps the ESL learner to develop his socio-pragmatic competence. A learner who regards L2 learning as additive and who has integrative motivation and positive attitudes towards the TL culture is more likely to achieve native speaker proficiency not only in vocabulary and grammar but also in sociolinguistic mastery of the L2.

Engaging in Internal Monologue: This involves the art of talking to oneself which the ESL learner does in the target language to enhance his socio-pragmatic competence. It could be the recitation of a poem, a piece of writing or self-constructed speech.

CONCLUSION

This study upholds the belief that language cannot be separated from its concomitant culture and therefore, advocates that the culture which is represented by its language should not be neglected since there is a solid connection between the L2 and its culture. If the L2 learner acquires L2 cultural knowledge about archetypal structures of speech events, they will not only be able to better understand a given speech event in general, but effectively participate in that given speech event using appropriate speech acts. Language and culture is an entity which cannot be separated.

Recommendations: Socio-Pragmatics helps the language teacher to acknowledge that language and culture are inseparable thus; English should be taught alongside its culture. It should be included in the curriculum as a course of study in tertiary schools and as an important aspect of language teaching in primary and secondary schools. Students should be given adequate opportunity to interact with the language during the delivery of lessons.

Adequate awareness on this aspect of the language should be created in language textbooks, journals and other teaching and learning materials. All the language teachers should be encouraged to study the Socio-pragmatics of the English Language and that of their mother tongue since this will enhance their understanding and use of the target language. Seminars and workshops should be organized to enlighten teachers of the English language on L2 sociopragmatics. Government should sponsor teachers and students to visit the native speakers in Britain like the French learners who go to France to interact with the native speakers.

REFERENCES