

Video-Driven Prompts: Aviable Pragmatic Consciousness-Raising Approach in EFL/ESL Classrooms

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Abstract: Recent research in interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) has substantiated that some aspects of pragmatics are amenable to instruction in the second or foreign language classroom and that explicit teaching interventions are more fruitful to enhance both sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic awareness. However, there are still controversies over the most conducive teaching approaches and the required materials. Therefore, the present paper is a review of the concept of pragmatics within the construct of communicative competence, issues being addressed within ILP, pragmatic consciousness-raising and the challenges and dilemmas facing EFL/ESL learners and teachers. It mainly aims at materials developers and EFL/ESL teachers by illuminating some of the advantages of video-driven prompts as an influential source of input to sensitize learners' sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic competence.

Key words: Communicative competence • Sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic competence • Pragmatic consciousness-raising • Video-prompts

INTRODUCTION

The significance of pragmatic competence within the construct of communicative competence has been widely acknowledged in various models of communicative competence [1-4]. Pragmatic studies have focused on three strands of research, namely whether the targeted pragmatic feature is teachable at all; whether instruction in the targeted feature is more effective than no instruction and whether different teaching approaches are differentially effective [5]. There is a widespread consensus that pragmatics in EFL/ESL contexts is teachable. A solid body of research substantiates that educational interventions have been successful at enhancing pragmatic ability [6-12]. Similarly, as to the second issue, the pendulum has swung towards instruction. However, the third issue, i.e. whether different teaching approaches are differentially effective, has been a controversial area of research.

One cause of such controversy refers to the nature of input fed to EFL/ESL learners. [13] demonstrate that the pragmatic input, i.e. requests teachers made to students, was status-bound; consequently, they could not serve as

direct models for the learner. Research conducted in an EFL context unearths that the range of speech acts and realization strategies is marginalized and that the typical interaction patterns, i.e. IRF, impose inherent limitations on pragmatic input and opportunities for practicing discourse organization strategies [14-16]. In addition, Eslami-Rasekh *et al.* [10] and Rose [17] lay stress on the fact that large classes, limited contact hours and little opportunity for intercultural communication are some of the factors that impede pragmatic learning.

It is believed that video-driven prompts are beneficial sources of input which can help learners create their own interlanguage pragmatics. Alternatively, [18] stipulate that textbook conversations do not cater sufficient pragmatic input. In a similar vein, a solid body of research findings documents that textbook conversations are not a reliable source of pragmatic input [19-21].

As a result of the challenges and difficulties facing EFL/ESL teachers and learners, the use of audio-visual materials have drawn considerable attention in ILP studies. [22-24] are appreciative of the fact that both pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic awareness are difficult for EFL learners. Therefore, the authors believe

that the use of authentic audio-visual materials is legitimized to be drawn upon in these contexts. On par with these authors, our experience shows that due to the scarcity of native speakers, naturalistic input is not accessible inside and outside the classroom and that textbooks cannot simulate and authenticate real life situations; therefore, the use of video-driven prompts hold a great promise to bring real life to the classroom and to be able to raise learners' sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic awareness.

Pragmatics Within the Construct of Communicative Competence:

The construct of communicative competence and its various subcomponents have been described by different scholars in the field of applied linguistics. Inspired by Hymes's [25, 26] postulations, it was [3] who posited the first and the most influential model of what they called "communicative competence" as comprising grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, strategic competence and discoursal knowledge. Within this model, the sociolinguistic component implicitly encompasses pragmatics, as it refers to the rules of discourse and rules of use. The concept of communicative competence then went under some adaptations in Canale's [2] expanded model in which the notion of grammatical competence remains unchanged from the definition proposed by [3], but significant changes are made to the definition of other competences. Sociolinguistic competence now refers only to sociocultural rules and the rules of discourse have been subsumed under a discourse competence. Sociolinguistic competence is further defined as the appropriateness of meaning and of form, thus incorporating *pragmatics*. The new category of discourse competence is also defined as the ability to produce a unified spoken or written text in different genres using cohesion in form and coherence in meaning [2, p. 9].

However, it was [1] who explicitly subsumes the pragmatic component under the rubric of 'pragmatic competence'. The author makes a distinction between organizational and pragmatic competence. On the one hand, organizational competence refers to those abilities involved in the production and identification of grammatical and ungrammatical sentences and also in understanding their meaning and in arranging them to form texts. These abilities are subcategorized into grammatical and textual competences. In Bachman's model, on the other hand, pragmatic competence is perceived as dealing with the relationship between utterances and the acts performed through these

utterances, as well as with the features of the context that promote appropriate language use. The relationship between utterances and acts concerns the illocutionary force, whereas the context has to do with those sociolinguistic conventions involved in using the language [27]. In a rather similar line of inquiry, Celce-Murcia *et al.* [4] refer to pragmatic competence as actional competence, consisting of knowledge of language functions and of knowledge of speech act sets. More specifically, emphasis is paid to the pragmalinguistic aspects of language. Moreover, they include the sociocultural component as part of their construct of communicative competence. Sociocultural competence, according to them, refers to knowledge about appropriate use within particular social and cultural contexts of communication.

All these models and conceptualizations have greatly shed light on our understanding of ILP and its relevance to SLA. Inspired by SLA principles, the following definition by [28] explicates the interdisciplinary or 'hybrid' nature [29, p. 3] of interlanguage pragmatics as belonging both to pragmatics and SLA well:

As the study of second language use, interlanguage pragmatics examines how nonnative speakers comprehend and produce action in a target language. As the study of second language learning, interlanguage pragmatics investigates how L2 learners develop the ability to understand and perform action in a target language [28, p. 5].

The above definition illustrates that Kasper and Rose's [28] definition puts a great premium upon two important aspects of interlanguage pragmatics research. Firstly, it highlights that production and comprehension are two sides of the same coin and both of them are part of language learners' pragmatic competence in their L2. Therefore, second/foreign language learners do not only have to be able to produce utterances that are regarded as contextually appropriate by their target audience, they also have to be aware of what constitutes appropriate linguistic behavior in a variety of social situations in their L2. This shows the link between culture and pragmatic competence in a second/foreign language [30]. Secondly, the second part of Kasper and Rose's definition of interlanguage pragmatics emphasizes that interlanguage pragmatics is also concerned with the *development of pragmatic competence*.

[5] bring to the fore the tremendous challenge that learners encounter in acquiring the pragmatics of a second language because "they have to learn not only how to do things with target language words but also

how communicative actions and the “words” that implement them are both responsive to and shape situations, activities and social relations” (p. 317). Following Leech’s [31] demarcation, these two domains of pragmatic competence are referred to as *sociopragmatic* and *pragmalinguistic* competence. The former encompasses knowledge of the relationship between communicative action and power, social distance and the imposition associated with the past and future (Brown & Levinson, as cited in [5], p. 317), knowledge of mutual rights and obligations, taboos and conventional practices [30] and the social conditions and consequences of “what you do, when and to whom” (Fraser, Rintal & Walters, as cited in [5], p. 317). The latter, on the other hand, comprises the knowledge and ability to use conventions of means (such as strategies to realize speech acts) and conventions of form (such as the linguistic forms implementing speech act strategies) (Clark, as cited in [5], [32]).

Issues Being Addressed in ILP Research in EFL/ESL

Contexts: From cognitive-psychological and socio-psychological perspectives, interlanguage pragmatics research has investigated how factors such as *input*, *noticing* and *understanding*, *L2 proficiency*, *transfer* and *individual differences* affect ILP development. Given this, [5], in a seminal paper, recapitulate that three major questions have been great areas of interest in ILP research which are as follows:

- *Whether the targeted pragmatic feature is teachable at all;*
- *Whether instruction in the targeted feature is more effective than no instruction;*
- *Whether different teaching approaches are differentially effective.*

The results of a host of studies have substantiated that most aspects of L2 pragmatics are amenable to instruction and that instructional intervention is more beneficial than no interventional treatments [5-8, 11, 12]. As to the third question, the findings are more revealing corroborating that providing learners with explicit metapragmatic instruction yields more effective learning outcomes than providing them with implicit target input [e.g. 11, 33-36]. Rose [11] reviewing these three questions concludes that “the research provides ample evidence demonstrating the teachability of pragmatic features” (p.392). [11] summarizes that most studies comparing the effectiveness of different teaching approaches select two

types of pedagogical intervention and in all cases the intervention could be construed as explicit versus implicit and “the main characteristic distinguishing one group from another was the provision of metapragmatic information designed to make the target features more salient” (p. 392). Analogous to the second question, the instruction versus exposure studies, and interventional research on different teaching approaches also provides support for noticing: in most cases, learners who received explicit instruction in the form of metapragmatic information regarding the target features outperformed those who did not. Although there is a general consensus that students who received explicit instruction outperformed the ones with no such a thing, it was not the case that every study comparing two (or more) approaches to instruction found that provision of metapragmatic information produced better results. For example, [37] replicated Bouton’s [38] study on implicature comprehension concluding that learners in an implicit group outperformed those in an explicit group, although by the time of a delayed posttest, these differences had disappeared.

ILP, Consciousness-Raising and Noticing Hypothesis:

Kasper and Rose [28] state that the first explicit proposals to draw on cognitive-psychological theory to pragmatic development can be traced back to no more than the early 1990s. Two of the most influential cognitive processing approaches proposed in SLA are Sharwood Smith’s Consciousness-raising [39, 40] and Schmidt’s noticing hypothesis [41, 42]. Sharwood Smith [39] conceptualizes that the term “consciousness-raising” represents a deliberate focus on the formal properties of language with a respect toward enhancing the development of second language knowledge. [40] argues that “CR implies that the learner’s mental state is altered by the input; hence, all input is intake” (p. 176). Given that CR plays a crucial role in enhancing properties of language, [43] cogently introduces video-prompts as an approach so as to promote pragmatic consciousness-raising since they can provide the fundamental aspects of pragmatics which can be capitalized upon by teachers of both native and non-native speakers.

In line with Sharwood Smith, Schmidt [41, 42] contends that the noticing hypothesis is primarily concerned with the initial phase of input processing and the attentional requirements for input to become intake. [42] conceptualizes that any target L2 feature needs to be noticed by the learner for learning to occur: “while there is subliminal perception, there is no subliminal learning”

(p. 26). Because more attention results in more learning, “attention must be directed to whatever evidence is relevant for a particular learning domain, i.e. that attention must be specifically focused and not just global” (p. 30).

He then extended his hypothesis to pragmatics postulating that, “in order to acquire pragmatics, one must attend to both the linguistic form of utterances and the relevant social and contextual features with which they are associated” [42, p.30]. He also mentions that “pragmatic knowledge seems to be partly conscious and partly accessible to consciousness, although it cannot be the case that all pragmatic knowledge is accessible to consciousness” [41, p. 23].

“Simple exposure to sociolinguistically appropriate input is unlikely to be sufficient for second language acquisition of pragmatic and discoursal knowledge because the linguistic realizations of pragmatic functions are sometimes opaque to language learners and because the relevant contextual factors to be noticed are likely to be defined differently or maybe nonsalient for the learner” [41, p.36]. [44] further makes a distinction between noticing and understanding. Noticing is defined as the “conscious registration of the occurrence of some event,” while understanding connotes “the recognition of some general principle, rule, or pattern. Noticing refers to surface level phenomena and item learning, while understanding refers to deeper level(s) of abstraction related to (semantic, syntactic, or communicative) meaning, system learning” (p.29).

Pragmatic Language Learning: challenges and Dilemmas Facing EFL/ESL Learners and Teachers: From cognitive-psychological and socio- psychological perspectives, interlanguage pragmatics research has investigated how factors such as *input*, noticing and understanding, L2 proficiency, transfer and individual differences affect ILP development. When teachers are faced with the task of teaching second or foreign language to EFL/ESL learners, one of the fundamental decisions to be made is related to the type of input, the amount and the time it should be provided. As to the first factor, it is postulated that the classroom context is limited compared to spontaneous flow of interaction outside the classroom and naturalistic contexts in terms of learners' opportunities to authentically take on different conversational roles in a wide array of situations and engage with a range of fluent competent speakers of the language who provide them with expert input and opportunities for practice. Notwithstanding these inherent

constraints, there are some other possible ways through which innovative teachers can boost the socialization experience through their teaching approaches and materials [45]; furthermore, drawing upon innovative approaches, teachers can make learners more *aware* of pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic features [15, 46- 48].

There is a general consensus that learning a language means learning not only the morphology, phonology, syntax, semantics, but also pragmatics, i.e. learning how to appropriately draw on language sociopragmatically and pragmalinguistically under different circumstances, being influenced by a number of extra-linguistic contextual factors such as social status of the speakers, social and psychological distance and degree of imposition or power. This kind of pragmatic language use capitalizes on areas such as deixis, conversational implicature, presupposition and speech acts. However, due to some constraints imposed on teachers and learners, teaching pragmatic language use makes great challenges and dilemmas for students and teachers.

[22] enumerates the pragmatic language learning problems facing EFL/ESL learners as follows:

- The lack of varied, naturally occurring input in both EFL and ESL contexts;
- A lack of salience in the available input;
- A lack of awareness about the forms, norms and limits; and
- A lack of direct or explicit feedback about violations of the norms in natural contexts or in textbook models.

Given the importance of the challenges students encounter, [49] mentions that although naturalistic interactions with native speakers cater a beneficial means for learners to gain input and practice, there are some criticisms leveled against them. First, due to the scarcity of native speakers, naturalistic input is not always accessible outside the classroom, particularly in foreign language contexts. Second, even when naturalistic input is available, certain pragmatic features may not be adequately salient for learners to be noticed [41, 22], Third, native speakers are unlikely to provide learners with feedback on certain types of pragmatic violations, particularly those that are regarded to be social rather than linguistic [50, 51] and learners may be more sensitive to the correction of pragmatic errors that seem to reflect more upon their knowledge of the world than on their knowledge of the second language [32].

It should be emphasized that teachers are the agents of change, so the responsibility of teaching the pragmatic aspects toward the mastery of sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic features of language falls on teachers and instruction. However, as language teachers, we face certain dilemmas and challenges [50, 20]. We lack adequate materials and training, which are hinged upon a lack of emphasis on pragmatic issues in ESL/EFL teaching methodology courses. Moreover, oftentimes little or no consistent attention is paid to pragmatic language use because it is regarded as subsidiary course content in other learning contexts. Gilmore [21], contrasting the discourse features of seven dialogues with comparable authentic interactions, finds out that textbook dialogues differ significantly from their authentic counterparts across a range of discourse aspects including length and turn taking patterns, lexical density, false starts and repetitions, pausing, use of hesitation devices and back-channeling.

Textbooks cannot simulate and authenticate real life situations and bring the closest approximation of real life situations to the classroom environment. Even if textbook dialogues simulate natural conversations accurately, Washburn [22], for instance, argues that the characters in our language textbooks are usually one-dimensional; their relationships are defined in stereotypical ways (e.g. teacher-student, classmates) and their motivations are simplistic. Of particular relevance to this issue, Kasper's [53] contention is suggestive of the fact that the incomplete or artificial input provided by pedagogical materials is one of the reasons for which learners' pragmatic performance is non-target-like. In 1997, Kasper again pinpoints that as a result of asymmetrical relationships between the interlocutors in the classroom context, i.e. teacher-student interaction, oftentimes teachers monopolize discourse organization. Consequently, the adjacency pairs and interactions are contrived; the openings and closings are simplified and discourse markers are limited. In a nutshell, it can be stated succinctly that teacher-dominated discourse is not conducive towards the mastery of appropriate sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic interactions.

Gilmore [21] states that information or knowledge about language should never be held back; the task is to make it available, without artificial restrictions, in ways which best answer learners' needs. To tackle the problems concerning the inadequacy and inappropriateness of input in the pragmatically-oriented teaching materials

raised by [52, 21, 53, 22, to name a few], video-driven prompts as input hold great promise in terms of simulating authentic interactions and sensitizing learners' sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic competence. This heightened awareness of contextualized pragmatic language learning can build confidence in the learners' communicative competence.

ILP and the Advantages of Video-Driven Prompts as an Influential Source of Input:

As a consequence of the constraints and challenges involved in dealing with teaching sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic features in the foreign language context mentioned above, the use of authentic audiovisual and video enhanced materials and the role of instruction have gained considerable attention in the development of pragmatics. Analogous to other areas of language learning, [14] contends that learners could be exposed to pragmatic input through classroom interaction, textbook conversations and films. [18] explicate that in EFL contexts the range of speech acts and realization strategies is marginalized and that the typical interaction patterns, i.e. IRF, impose inherent limitations on pragmatic input and opportunities for practicing discourse organization strategies. Alternatively, [18] stipulate that textbook conversations do not cater sufficient pragmatic input. In a similar vein, a solid body of research findings documents that textbook conversations are not a reliable source of pragmatic input [19-21].

In contrast to classroom interaction and textbook conversations, the use of audiovisual input has been substantiated to fruitfully enhance both sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic awareness. [24, 14, 54], for instance, believe that authentic audiovisual input caters for abundant opportunities to address all aspects of language use in a variety of contexts. In like manner, [55] proposes that video prompts have the potentiality to contextualize language that may be misunderstood based on the linguistic code alone due to L1 transfer. [56] cogently emphasizes that video presents "complete communicative situations" to learners where relationships between speakers and hearers are readily apparent and the context of the interaction (e.g. home, business, etc.) is clear. Similarly, [57] note that authentic FL videos can visualize different kinds of registers and cultural contexts to learners. They also conclude that videos provide visual cues along with auditory material that improve both comprehension and learning of the content presented.

In a similar line of inquiry, [58] expound that videotaped materials enjoy a lot of merits. They expose students to variation in the medium of classroom materials. They also simulate and authenticate real life situations and bring the closest approximation of real life situations to the classroom environment. Hence, they not only add interest to the lessons but also increase motivation [59]. Quite on a par with others, [49], further, explicates that videotaped materials in classroom instruction have some advantages over other means of input such as naturalistic interactions and textbooks.

[60], in a seminal article, elaborating upon expanding elicitation tasks to accommodate acquisition studies, cogently argues that if we want to broaden our interlanguage pragmatics studies to include acquisition as part of the research agenda following [61], we ought to involve learners at all levels, especially at the lower levels. She succinctly states that including lower-level learners will require some modifications to standard elicitation practices in order to make them more accessible. Visually oriented tasks such as presenting scenarios on video or the use of printed cartoons [43] have become more important because lower-level learners can interpret them more easily than the common written presentation [60]. [62] cogently argues that “one way to overcome the inherent limitations of a FL environment is through the use of television and film, which represent rich sources of data on language use and should be fully exploited in teacher education”. (P. 134)

Pedagogical Implications: Textbooks are one of the most accessible sources of gaining knowledge for learners studying English in EFL contexts. However, in the case of teaching pragmatic language use, they seem to fall short of sensitizing learners’ interlanguage pragmatic abilities and the research findings are suggestive of the fact that textbooks are usually not responsive enough to the most current pedagogical theories [63] and that pragmatics plays a subsidiary role in textbooks and course materials [20, 64]. Therefore, ESL/EFL teachers should realize the limitations of textbooks used in their classes and they should take the initiatives to compensate for these pitfalls. We strongly argue that if EFL/ESL learners want to operate independently in English outside the classroom, they are to be immersed in the authentic and contextualized language.

To this aim, this article has been directed primarily at materials developers and teachers of EFL/ESL to embark

on video-driven prompts as one of the substantial sources of input to raise pragmatic awareness in the classroom context.

CONCLUSION

This paper reviewed some of the main concepts in pragmatics such as sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic competence, the teachability of pragmatic ability, challenges and dilemmas facing EFL/ESL learners and video-driven prompts as an influential source of raising pragmatic awareness. In a nutshell, it can be concluded that video-driven prompts have some merits over textbooks. One problem with textbooks is that the language used in them is often decontextualized and even when it is contextualized it frequently diverges from the language used in comparable naturalistic interactions [19, 20, 65, 66]. Conversely, videotapes offer more contextual information in a more efficient manner than do textbooks. They provide learners with a more complete image of the interlocutors and the setting, as well as information about posture, gestures, clothing and proxemics, all of which lead to the better observation of politeness in interactions [67, 58]. Learners with no experience of the target culture and limited familiarity with it can really take advantage of these features [49]. In addition, with video the learners can hear paralinguistic features such as loudness, stress and intonation, all of which carry pragmatic and affective information [22]. Moreover, because of these extralinguistic and paralinguistic cues, videotapes can bolster learners’ comprehension of the discourse [58]. Furthermore, when the videotapes display naturalistic interactions, they allow learners to hear authentic language. Washburn [22] also concludes that videotapes can, therefore, help the learners overcome these problems if the pragmatically aware instructor stops the video at critical moments and points out non-salient pragmatic features and pragmatic violations in order to raise the students’ awareness of them.

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