

Raising Pragmatics Awareness: How to Raise Conversational Implicature Awareness through Movies

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Abstract

Learning a language is not merely learning its grammar. There are some other factors which should be covered in language learning, e.g. language in use, or meaning and communication. In other words, L2 learners of English not only need to reach grammar competence, but also pragmatic competence. Unfortunately, pragmatic competence is rather neglected as language learning and teaching, most of the time, puts emphasis on grammar competence. Hence, in this paper, I would like to discuss the importance of integrating pragmatic competence, in this case, conversational implicature, in English language teaching and learning materials. A previous study, conducted by Manowong (2011), reported that non-native speakers of English have difficulty in interpreting conversational implicature. Thus, teachers should make great efforts to help the learners raise their conversational implicature awareness. One of the most effective ways to raise learners' awareness on conversational implicature is by making use of authentic materials. Movies could be great sources to help learners raise their conversational implicature awareness. Therefore, in this paper, I would like to propose a model of materials which integrate some scenes of a movie that might be useful for teachers and learners in English language learning and teaching.

Keywords:

Raising pragmatics awareness, conversational implicature, movies

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Pragmatics is often defined as “the science of language use, the study of context-dependent meaning and the study of speaker-intended meaning, presupposing the existence of language, language user and context on the one hand, and context-independent meaning on the other” (Fetzer, 2011). Hence, pragmatics deals with the interpretation of utterances produced by language users which is based on contexts.

In second language learning, the objectives of teaching and learning pragmatics are to help learners use and understand appropriate language in the situations they encounter (Harlig and Taylor, 2003). In other words, the teaching of pragmatics aims to reach pragmatic competence. Moreover, knowledge about pragmatics would be useful for language teachers to enable them to explain why in a given cultural setting, for instance, we should understand certain conversation strategy (Gunarwan, 1999). Harlig and Taylor (2003) further say that in regard to second language learning and teaching, pragmatics include speech acts, conversational implicature, conversational management, discourse organization, and sociolinguistic aspects of language use, such as choice of address forms.

As mentioned above, conversational implicature is one of the aspects in pragmatics covered in second language teaching and learning. It is worth noting that learners should be knowledgeable of conversational implicature in order to understand the message that native speakers would like to convey (Manowong, 2011). That means they should be able to understand the intended meaning of literal utterances conveyed by the speakers and be able to make an inference of words, phrases, or sentences the speakers utter. (Taguchi, 2005 cited in Manowong, 2011). In addition, since conversational implicature deals with communication, which is indirect communication (Bouton,1999), it is beneficial for EFL students to enhance their communicative skills and prepare them to be a proficient language learner who can successfully communicate with people and is able to cope with communicative situations which require interpretation (Manowong, 2011).

Manowong (2011), however, reported that non-native students showed poor performance in interpreting implicature. Another study, conducted by Bouton (cited in Slabakova 2009), reported that L2 learners of English, compared with native speakers, are less outperformed in comprehending implicature though it could improve gradually. This may occur because L2 learners often develop grammatical competence rather than pragmatics competence, such as the competence of interpreting conversational implicature (Harlig and Dornyei, 1998).

What Manowong and Bouton underline regarding the findings of the research they have conducted might be supported by what Harlig and Taylor (2003) state related to pragmatic competence. They point out that pragmatic competence has not been integrated in language teaching curricula and language teacher education programs pay less attention on the teaching of pragmatics, whereas Blanche (2009) says that teachers could and should include pragmatic components in the language curriculum. Rasekh (2005) underlines that language teachers are not really concerned with pragmatics issues in ESL teaching methodology; consequently, they encounter problems with the materials used to teach pragmatics.

Referring to the descriptions above, English teachers should make efforts to help L2 learners improve their pragmatic competence, in this case, raising their conversational implicature awareness. The question is “How do teachers assist the learners to raise their conversational implicature awareness?” Are there any effective strategies to help L2 learners raise their conversational implicature awareness?

Boersma (cited in Manowong, 2011) conducted a research on whether L2 learners of English can learn implicature through explicit teaching. The result is implicature could be successfully taught through explicit teaching though he said that there were some types of implicature which are easier to teach. According to Lee (cited in Manowong, 2011), authentic texts or authentic materials can be effective sources to expose L2 learners to the language used (pragmatics) by native speakers. The materials can be TV shows, movies, or other media clips which L2 learners can access from the internet. Thus, teachers can use movies to help the learners raise their conversational implicature awareness. This is in line with what Murray (2010) states that authentic materials and videos are new ways for pragmatics pedagogy.

In regard to the issues of teaching and learning pragmatics, I shall propose a model of materials to help L2 learners raise their conversational implicature awareness. The materials are designed for advanced learners of English. The main materials are some movie scenes taken from a movie entitled “Limitless.”

1.2 Objectives

The objectives of the material design are to help L2 learners of English raise their conversational implicature due to the fact that non-native students showed poor performance in interpreting implicature (Manowong, 2011), language teachers encounter problems with the materials used to teach pragmatics (Rasekh, 2005), and authentic materials and videos are new ways for pragmatics pedagogy (Murray, 2010).

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Conversational Implicature

According to Horn (2006), “Implicature is a component of speaker meaning that constitutes an aspect of what is meant in a speaker’s utterance without being part of what is said.” While Mey (2001) states that “a conversational implicature is something which is implied in conversation, that is something implicit in actual language use.” Bouton (1999) says that conversational implicature is “a type of indirect communication, based on the Cooperative Principle.” Basically, conversational implicature deals with the Cooperative Principle. That is, in order to interpret implicature, we should be able to comprehend some basic cooperative principle (Yule, 1996).

2.2 The Cooperative Principle

According to Yule (1996), the cooperative principle regards the four sub-principles called maxims. The maxims are divided into four parts:

1. Maxims of Quantity
 - a. Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange).
 - b. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.
2. Maxims of Quality: Try to make your contribution one that is true.
 - a. Do not say what you believe to be false.
 - b. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.
3. Relation: Be relevant.

4. Manner: Be Perspicuous.

- a. Avoid obscurity of expression.
- b. Avoid ambiguity.
- c. Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).
- d. Be orderly.

The following is some examples of utterances representing conversational implicature taken from some scenes from the movie entitled “Limitless.”

Scene 1

A: You still trying to write?

B: Matter of fact, *I have a book contract.*

Scene 2

A: Come on. Let’s get a drink.

B: I don’t know. *It’s two o’clock in the afternoon.*

Scene 3

A: Since when do you speak Italian?

B: *Self-improvement month.*

If the learners have watched the movie and understand the contexts, they will be able to interpret the implicature and they can see here that B always flouts the maxims, particularly the maxim of quantity so that the messages conveyed by B cannot be interpreted explicitly, which in pragmatics it is called implied meaning—that is, a meaning that is implicitly conveyed by a speaker. If the speaker and the hearer here do not understand each other’s contexts, in other words they cannot interpret the implied meaning (implicature) of the utterances, there might be a misunderstanding between them.

Therefore, learning a language is not only a matter of learning the grammar (grammar competence). Learners need to reach pragmatics competence too in order to avoid misunderstanding when having a conversation. As stated in the background that non-native students showed poor performance in interpreting

implicature (Manowong, 2011) and compared with native speakers, L2 learners of English are less outperformed in comprehending implicature (Bouton cited in Slabakova, 2009). Hence, raising awareness on conversational implicature is very important for L2 learners of English.

2.3 Previous Studies on Raising Conversational Implicature Awareness

The previous studies described here do not directly discuss raising awareness on conversational implicature, yet they cover the interpretation of implicature, and the explicit teaching and formal instructions to teach implicature. Bouton (cited in Manowong, 2011), for example, conducted a study to investigate whether explicit classroom instruction can enhance the students' ability to interpret implicature in English. The study indicated that formal instruction was an effective approach to develop non-native students' proficiency in interpreting implicature.

Boersma (cited in Manowong, 2011) conducted a similar study to investigate whether learners of English as a second language can learn implicature through explicit teaching. The result is implicatures could be taught with success, even though some types of implicatures were easier to teach than others.

A study conducted by Manowong (2011) indicated that to develop Thai EFL students' pragmatic competence as well as proficiency in interpretation of conversational implicature, explicit instruction of implicature is preferably recommended. That means teachers should provide examples of different types of implicatures and more importantly sufficient practices to allow students to exercise inferential skills, and a discussion to deepen their understanding of reasons behind implicature employment should be included.

Another research shows that conversational implicature in an L2 is learned only slowly unless it is explicitly taught and that formal instruction can accelerate the learning of most types of conversational implicature. Ishihara and Cohen (2010) and Lee (2002, cited in Manowong, 2011) points out that "Using authentic texts to expose EFL students to language used by native speakers in a variety of contexts is very essential." She further says that "effective sources for authentic materials can be media clips from television shows or movies which are easy to access from the internet." Kasper (2001, as cited in Wuryaningrum and Andanty,

2008) argues that “learners' awareness of appropriate pragmatic behavior can be raised through explicit teaching and meta-pragmatic treatment of pragmatic features by way of description, explanation, and discussion. English teachers should provide students with explicit teaching on pragmatic knowledge, exposing learners to the pragmatic aspects of language.”

2.4 Approaches to Teaching Pragmatics

According to Murray (2010), there are two approaches to teaching pragmatics: traditional and new directions. Traditional covers lists of useful expressions, conversations, and dialogues offering pragmatically inaccurate models, while new directions include using authentic materials and engaging learners in discourse completion tasks. In addition, new directions covers incorporating native-speaker role plays into classroom activities as a focus of student observation, developing observation tasks and allowing learners to ask the native speakers questions, etc., and using video as a vehicle for getting students to compare how aspects of pragmatics are realized differently in different contexts. Harlig and Taylor (2003) state that authentic language samples can be used as examples or models to teach pragmatics.

2.5 Examples of Teaching Implicature

Ishihara and Cohen (2010) propose an example of teaching implicature.

- a. Introduction of each type of implicature with the label, definition, and several examples for each;
- b. Discussion of new examples of implicature:
 - identification of the implicature;
 - explanation of how literal meaning did not hold and how the implicature was detected;
 - identification of what is actually implied in the messages;
 - illustration of learners' experiences with implicature;
 - identification of similar implicature in learners' L1s;
- c. Group work creating dialogues containing implicature;

d. Analysis of new examples of implicature provided by the teacher or by the learners.

Murray (2010) proposes another way to teach implicature. He said that teachers can use prompts to teach implicature, such as:

- Why are we sometimes indirect in the way we say things? What happens when we use very informal language in formal situations?
- Why might the amount we say be important?
- Why might we say more than we need to say?
- Why might we say less? Can you think of a specific example?

Brock and Nagasaka (2005) uses **S.U.R.E** to help L2 learners reach pragmatic competence.

- **See:** Teachers can help their students see the language in context, raise consciousness of the role of pragmatics, and explain the function pragmatics plays in specific communicative events.
- **Use:** Teachers can develop activities through which students use English in contexts (simulated and real) where they choose how they interact based on their understanding of the situation suggested by the activity.
- **Review:** Teachers should review, reinforce, and recycle the areas of pragmatic competence previously taught.
- **Experience:** Teachers can arrange for their students to experience and observe the role of pragmatics in communication.

Sherman (2003) points out that teachers can use videos to help learners raise their conversational implicature. The following is an example of procedures of using videos to raise conversational implicature. For example, the teacher would like to use a movie entitled “Limitless.” It is about a man who consumes a “drug” called NZT. NZT helps him to be an “instant” intelligent man who always comes up with a brilliant idea. Hence, the procedures of raising conversational implicature awareness could be:

1. Have the students guess what kind of movie it is and what it is about.
2. View the scenes.
3. Then write the subtitle (English subtitle) on the board.
4. Discuss the scenes (the meanings of the conversations).

By discussing the scenes and the explanations from the teachers, the students are expectantly able to understand conversational implicature. (Sherman, 2003)

3. Discussion

In reference to the background, theories of implicature and the cooperative principles, previous studies on raising implicature awareness, as well as examples of how to teach pragmatics/implicature, it is worth noting that pragmatics should be included in English language learning and teaching materials. Previous studies indicate that L2 learners of English have poor performance on interpreting implicature as they merely pay attention to grammatical competence rather than pragmatic competence. Ignorance to pragmatic competence will impede the learners to reach communicative competence, the main objective of learning a language.

To help the learners achieve pragmatic competence, teachers should integrate pragmatic points, for instance, conversational implicature, in the teaching and learning materials. They should not put emphasis on grammatical points only as it makes learners less communicative when conveying their ideas. Teachers can use authentic materials, such as the audio-visual ones, e.g. movies, advertisements, or clips from the internet to raise pragmatic awareness. However, they should adapt and adopt the authentic materials before they are used in the classroom. It is very important to adapt and adopt authentic materials as they are not designed to be used as language teaching and learning materials. When designing the materials, there are some factors which have to be taken into account. They are, for example, the level of the learners and the objectives of the teaching and learning.

4. Conclusion

To sum up, L2 learners of English should achieve pragmatic competence, for instance, raising conversational implicature awareness, in order to be able to communicate successfully and effectively with their interlocutors. Furthermore, teachers should remind their students that by being knowledgeable of pragmatics, e.g. being aware of implicit meanings of a message (implicature), they can avoid

misunderstanding with their interlocutors when having a conversation. Besides learning implicature in the classroom (with explicit teaching and movies as the medium or the tools), teachers may recommend their students to actively watch movies themselves (self-study).

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APPENDIX

MATERIALS DESIGN FOR TEACHING CONVERSATIONAL IMPLICATURE (TEACHERS' GUIDE)

CONVERSATIONAL IMPLICATURE

LEVEL	: Advanced
TIME	: 120 minutes
AIM	: To raise conversational implicature awareness
PREPARATION	: Prepare some scenes taken from a movie entitled “Limitless”
PROCEDURES	:

Pre-activities (before watching some scenes of the movie)

Have the students guess what kind of movie it is and what it is about. Teachers can develop the discussions by talking about what movies the students like and the reasons why they like certain genre of movies. Tell them that they are going to watch a movie entitled “Limitless.”

While-activities (watching some scenes of the movies)

- View the scenes several times.
- Then write the subtitle (English subtitle) on the board.
- Teachers may use the scenes as listening practices for the students (the subtitle is off).
- Discuss the scenes (the meanings of the conversations).

Post-activities (after watching the scenes)

- Discuss once again the scenes the students have watched and teachers start to explain conversational implicature and the cooperative principle (explicit teaching) using the movie scenes as the examples.

- Teachers are recommended to tell the whole story of the movie.
- If there is some time left, have the students watch the movie.
- To check the students' comprehension of conversational implicature, assign them a small quiz on conversational implicature using MCQ or multiple-choice questions or open-ended questions.
- Teacher can have the students have a group work creating dialogues containing implicature; or
- Analyzing new examples of implicature provided by the teacher or by the learners.

The details of the teaching and learning could refer to the one proposed by Ishihara and Cohen (2010) like the following:

- identification of the implicature;
- explanation of how literal meaning did not hold and how the implicature was detected;
- identification of what is actually implied in the messages;
- illustration of learners' experiences with implicature;
- identification of similar implicature in learners' L1s;

TEACHERS' NOTES

When doing the explicit teaching, teachers should explain the theories of conversational implicature and the cooperative principles as well as cross cultural pragmatics to the students as movies are closely related to cross-cultural understandings. Expectantly, the students will be able to absorb the explanations easily as they learn conversational implicature from real-life situations, taken from authentic materials—that is the movie they have watched.

To make sure the learners comprehend conversational implicature, teachers should have some sessions with explicit teaching and movie watching several times in certain period of time. One session of explicit teaching with movie-watching is not sufficient to raise the students' awareness of conversational

implicature. Comedy movies or sitcoms are recommended movies to help the learners raise their awareness as they usually contain many jokes and jokes can reflect or represent culture. One thing to remember is that the interpretation of conversational implicature often depends on one's culture.