In the Name of God

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The Effect of Metapragmatic Awareness and Language Proficiency on the performance of EFL Learners on Interlanguage pragmatic Assessment Tasks

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts in teaching English as a foreign language

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عنوان:
بررسی تاثیر آگاهی فرازبانی و مهارت زبانی بر روی عملکرد زبان آموزان درآزمون های کاربرد شناسی بین زبانی

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کلید واژه ها به زبان فارسی:
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کلید واژه ها به زبان انگلیسی:

metapragmatic awareness, linguistic proficiency, interlanguage pragmatics, written discourse completion task, multiple-choice discourse completion task, discourse self-assessment task

چکیده

الف. موضوع و طرح مسئله (اهمیت موضوع و هدف):

زبان آموز در روند یاد گیری زبان نه تنها باید دستور آن زبان را داشته باشد بلکه باید توانایی تشخیص زمینه و شرایطی را که گفتمان در آن انجام می گیرد نیز داشته باشد. هدف از این تحقیق بررسی تاثیر آگاهی فرا کاربردی و مهارت زبانی بر روی عملکرد زبان آموزان در آزمون های منظور شناسی بین زبانی می باشد.

ب. مبانی نظری شامل مرور مختصری از منابع ، چارچوب نظری و پرسشها و فر ضیه ها:

چارچوب نظری این مطالعه شامل تئوری کنش گفتاری، توانش ارتباطی ، کاربرد شناسی بین زبانی و فرا گیری زبان دوم می باشد و پرسشهای تحقیق عبارتند از:

1. آیا آگاهی فرا کاربردی تاثیری بر روی عملکرد زبان آموز در سه آزمون کاربرد زبان شناسی(آزمون نوشتاری تکمیل گفتمان، آزمون چهار گزینه ای تکمیل گفتمان، خود ارزیابی گفتمان) دارد؟
2. آیا مهارت زبانی تاثیری بر روی عملکرد زبان آموز در سه آزمون کاربرد زبان شناسی(آزمون نوشتاری تکمیل گفتمان، آزمون چهار گزینه ای تکمیل گفتمان، خود ارزیابی گفتمان) دارد؟

پ. روش تحقیق شامل تعریف مفاهیم ، روش تحقیق ، جامعه مورد تحقیق ، نمونه گیری و روش های نمونه گیری ، ابزار اندازه گیری ، نحوه اجرای آن ، شیوه گرد آوری و تجزیه و تحلیل داده ها:

92 زبان آموز زن یکی از موسسات زبان شهر ارومیه در این تحقیق شرکت کردند. بر اساس نتایج آزمون تافل در 2 گروه متوسط و پیشرفته و 2 گروه کنترل قرار قرار گرفتند. 4 آزمون کاربرد شناسی بین زبانی نیز جهت سنجش میزان یادگیری کاربرد شناسی قبل و بعد از آموزش نیز طراحی شدند. هر کدام از این آزمون ها بر اساس دو کنش گفتاری تقاضا و معذرت خواهی بنا نهاده شده بودند. بعد از انجام فنون مربوط به افزایش آگاهی فرا کاربردی هر دو گروه متوسط و پیشرفته از تمامی شرکت کنندگان در مطالعه آزمون های فوق الذکر به عمل آمد.

ت. یافته های تحقیق:

نتایج تحقیق نشان دهنده این واقعیت بود که آموزش های افزایش آگاهی فرا کاربردی، یادگیری منظور شناسی را در هر دو گروه با مهارت های زبانی بالا و پایین افزایش می دهد و توانایی زبان آموز در درک و تولید کنش های گفتاری تقاضا و معذرت خواهی در زبان دوم را بهبود می بخشد.

ث. نتیجه گیری و پیشنهادات:

اولین قدم برای فراگیری قوانین کاربردی کنش های گفتاری ، تهیه و تدوین یک برنامه آموزشی با هدف آگاه ساختن زبان آموزان از تفاوت های فرهنگی در تولید و درک کنش های گفتاری تقاضا و معذرت خواهی است و از آنجایی که مهارت زبانی پیش شرط لازم و نه کافی برای فراگیری مهارت های کاربردی است. لذا آموزگاران زبان دوم و مولفین کتابهای زبان دوم باید به طور جدا گانه هر کدام از کنش های گفتاری و کاربرد مختلف آن را در جامعه زبان دوم جزء برنامه درسی خود قرار بدهند.

صحت اطلاعات مندرج در این فرم بر اساس محتوای پایان نامه و ضوابط مندرج در فرم را گواهی می نماییم.

نام استاد راهنما:

سمت علمی:

رئیس کتابخانه: نام دانشکده:

Dedicated to my mother

with respect

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Abstract

In order to achieve mutual intelligibility, metapragmatic awareness as part of the pragmatic competence seems prerequisite. This study investigated the role of metapragmatic awareness of learners who have different linguistic proficiency levels, in their performance on interlanguage assessment tasks, which may help teachers to include pragmatic aspects of language learning in their curriculum and learners in whatever setting they may encounter in the future. By focusing on performance of EFL learners in the speech act behaviors of requesting and apologizing in three kinds of interlanguage pragmatic assessment tasks with respect to their metapragmatic awareness and linguistic proficiency this study aimed to increase L2 learners awareness of metapragmatic knowledge and see whether this enhancement have any effect on the performance of the EFL learners with different proficiency levels on WDCT, MDCT and DSAT interlanguage pragmatic assessment tasks and to find the relationship between metapragmatic awareness and linguistic proficiency.

The results from the data analysis supported the claim that metapragmatic awareness facilitates interlanguage pragmatic development. The results also revealed that awareness-raising activities in classroom settings makes significant contributions to the learners' speech act comprehension and production processes.

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List of Abbreviations

DSAT   Discourse self-assessment task

ILP   Interlanguage pragmatics

MDCT   Multiple-choice discourse completion task

MJT   Metapragmatic judgment task

WDCT   Written discourse completion task

Chapter one

Introduction

1. Introduction

1.1. Statement of the problem

For many years, the learning of a second or foreign language (FL) was equated with linguistic or grammatical accuracy. However, since the adoption of the communicative approach, this focus has passed to second place, giving primary importance to the achievement of functional abilities in the target language (TL) with the final purpose of understanding and producing language that is appropriate to communicative situations in accordance with specific sociocultural parameters. Failure to do so may cause misunderstandings and sometimes communication breakdowns as well as the stereotyping of the TL learners as insensitive or rude.

The main purpose of learning a second language is communication. Nevertheless, many students are surprised when they realize that, in spite of having a perfect dominion of the L2 grammar rules, they have difficulties at interpersonal level when establishing a conversation with native speakers. This is due to the fact that even fairly advanced language learners often lack communicative competence (Hymes, 1974), that is to say, the necessary knowledge and experience to correctly use the sociocultural norms of the L2.

Whether we speak in a first or second language, we are influenced by sociocultural norms and constraints that affect the way we communicate. Most of the problems that EFL learners face in intercultural communication are mainly pragmatic because teachers of EFL often choose not to stress pragmatic knowledge in their classrooms, focusing instead on linguistic knowledge. Eslami-Rasekh (2005) warns that this might result in pragmatic failure when EFL learners actually communicate with native speakers (NSs), something that is attributed to some other cause, such as rudeness.

Interlanguage pragmatics, according to Kasper and Blum-Kulka (1993), is `the study of the nonnative speaker's use and acquisition of linguistic action patterns in a second language. Since the idea of interlanguage pragmatics was introduced into language education, it has received more and more attention in language courses.

Thus, pragmatics constitutes a fundamental element of language ability for L2 learners. However, L2 teachers often overlook pragmatics, due to the difficulty of its teaching, and instead focus on the grammatical aspects of language. The resulting lack of pragmatic competence on the part of L2 students can lead to pragmatic failure and, more importantly, to a complete communication breakdown. As Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984, p.169) point out "… pragmatic failure might carry serious social implications".

Studies have shown that interlanguage pragmatic knowledge is teachable. One of the approaches that can be used for teaching pragmatics is awareness-raising; through metapragmatic awareness-raising; students acquire sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic information. Therefore investigating the role of metapragmatic awareness of learners who have different linguistic proficiency levels, in their performance on interlanguage assessment tasks, may help teachers include pragmatic aspects of language learning in their curriculum and learners in whatever setting they may encounter in the future.

Low level of metapragmatic awareness causes failure in intelligibility. Besides, the speaker fails to perform the action and/or utterances required by the speech-act situation, such as apologizing, making an offer, saying thanks… The most probable reasons might be limited

knowledge on the relevant social and cultural values and not to know how to vary speech strategies in cross-cultural communication (Kasper, 1997; Thomas, 1983). Sociocultural factors such as differences between the first and the target language cultures can mislead the learners in language productions and interpretations. Different studies have shown that Metapragmatic awareness can be raised through instruction. The necessity and importance of teaching pragmatics have been recognized before (Eslami-Rasekh, 2005; Kasper & Rose, 2002), but still language teachers hesitate to teach pragmatics in their classrooms. This reluctant can be attributed to the lack of empirical studies about the influence of such awareness raising instructions on the performance of EFL learners in interlanguage pragmatic tests.

1.2. Significance of the study

A learner in the process of acquiring a second language must be able to process linguistic input successfully, to be sure. However, without the ability to understand the context in which an utterance is produced and the ways in which that context affects the discourse properties and sociolinguistic impact of the utterance, the learner cannot be said to have acquired the new language. In that sense, the learner's ability to successfully develop overall L2 communicative competence, and not only linguistic (grammatical) competence, is a major feature of SLA.

Language learners have been observed having difficulty adequately performing speech act behaviors in target languages. Little research (Eslami-Rasekh et.al, 2004) has examined the relationship between learners' linguistic proficiency and their speech act behaviors and perceptions of these behaviors with respect to the foreign language learning environment in Iran. Empirical evidence supports the separation of pragmatic processing skills from linguistic comprehension skills for native English speakers .Furthermore, the

language tests used to assess the learner's linguistic comprehension did not indicate their success on the pragmatic comprehension task.

The acquisition of second language (L2) pragmatic competence by adult language learners is a daunting task by any measure. The difficulties attached to L2 pragmatic competence acquisition have to do with the complex nature of the process itself. In order to acquire pragmatic competence, learners must develop in terms of not only linguistic competence, but also in terms of sociocultural awareness, attaining a useful understanding of how language functions in social and cultural contexts (Kasper & Roever, 2005). Given the challenges presented by L2 pragmatic acquisition, greater understanding of the process and those factors that may contribute to pragmatic acquisition in additional languages is a worthwhile goal, and should help to illuminate further some aspects of the overall process of second language acquisition (SLA) as well.

Assuming that students learn pragmatics in the classroom the way we go about assessing their pragmatic behavior, and especially what they have learned from instruction is also important in classroom setting. It is necessary for teachers to check for adherence to sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic norms for appropriateness. In addition, they could check to see if learners are able to make appropriate modifications in the delivery of the speech act, showing proper intensity given the seriousness or importance of the situation; adjusting the speech act for age, gender, or relative status of the interlocutors (called metapragmatic awareness) Something which is neglected in second language research in Iran .

1.3. Purpose of the Study

This study focuses on the performance of EFL learners in the speech act behaviors of requesting and apologizing, in three kinds of interlanguage pragmatic assessment tasks with

respect to their awareness of metapragmatic knowledge in order to find whether learners' metapragmatic awareness and linguistic proficiency have any influence on their performance in these kind of tasks or not, and also to explores the correlation between the learners metapragmatic awareness and their proficiency.

In other words, this study explores the extent to which L2 learners of English are aware of differences in target-language pragmatic production and to what extent this metapragmatic knowledge can enhance their performance on interlanguage pragmatic tests.

The present study contributes to the fields of language education and evaluation in several ways. First, it contributes to the measuring speech act ability in second language learners so the field of testing. Second, the paper is related to second language teaching because of implementing selected awareness raising activities for the development of pragmatic competence in foreign language contexts.

1.4. Research Questions

1- Does metapragmatic awareness have any effect on the performance of EFL learners in 3 kinds of interlanguage pragmatic assessment tasks of: WDCT, MDCT and DSAT?

2- Does linguistic proficiency have any effect on the performance of EFL learners in 3 kinds of interlanguage pragmatic assessment tasks: WDCT, MDCT and DSAT?

3- Is there any relationship between learners' metapragmatic awareness and their proficiency?

1.5. Null Hypothesis

1- There is no relationship between pragmatic awareness and performance of the EFL learners in 3 kinds of interlanguage pragmatic assessment tasks: WDCT, MDCT and DSAT.

2- There is no relationship between linguistic proficiency and performance of the EFL learners in 3 kinds of interlanguage pragmatic assessment tasks: WDCT, MDCT and DSAT.

3- There isn't any relationship between learners' metapragmatic awareness and their proficiency.

1.6. Definition of the Key Terms

Interlanguage Pragmatics (ILP): Kasper and Blum-Kulka (1993, p.3) define ILP as "the study of nonnative speaker's use and acquisition of linguistic action patterns in a second language".

Speech act: A communicative action, realized by means of spoken or written language and drawing on the social and cultural context, that reflects the intended meaning of the speaker or the speaker's desired effect (Brown and Levinson, 1987; Searle, 1976).

Sociopragmatic proficiency: The degree to which one is able to negotiate social situations involving social variables in pragmatically appropriate ways, including the ability to perceive and produce language that is sensitive to the context (Leech, 1983; Thomas, 1983).

Pragmalinguistic proficiency: The degree to which one is able to use appropriate linguistic forms to realize speech acts and their associated strategies (Leech, 1983; Thomas, 1983).

Metapragmatic awareness: Explicit knowledge that a speaker/listener possesses about the forms and functions of pragmatic speech acts (House, 1996).

Written Discourse completion task (WDCT): They are written questionnaires including a number of brief situational descriptions, followed by a short dialogue with an empty slot for the speech act under study. Participants are asked to provide a response that they think is appropriate in the given context.

Multiple-choice discourse completion task (MDCT): MDCTs consist of test items where the test taker is required to choose the correct response (the key) from the several given options. Most commonly, multiple-choice items include an instruction to the test taker

and a stem (typically either a phrase or sentence to be completed, or a question). The key and several distracters then follow in random order.

Discourse self-assessment task (DSAT): On the DSAT, instructions are first given, followed by exponents of the functions. The participants, after reading each situation, are asked to give an overall rating of their intended performance on a five-point scale , from very unsatisfactory   to   completely appropriate.

Metapragmatic judgment task (MJT): learners are required to judge the social variables of the situations which include power relationship, familiarity and imposition or severity.