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THE PRAGMATICS OF SPEECH ACTS OF REQUEST IN EFL TEACHING

Досліджено мовленнєві акти прохання та систематизовано різноманітні засоби їхнього утворення з точки зору прагматичної компетенції.

Ключові слова: прагматична компетенція, культура, теорія ввічливості, прохання, пом'якшувальні методи.

Исследованы просьбы как речевой акт и систематизированы разные методы их образования с точки зрения прагматической компетенции.

Ключевые слова: прагматическая компетенция, культура, теория вежливости, просьба как речевой акт, смягчающие методы**.**

The paper researches speech acts of request and attempts to systemize the various strategies used for the purpose of requesting from the pragmatic point of view.

Key words: pragmatic competence, culture, politeness theory, speech act of request, mitigating devices.

It has become clear that the goal of teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in a university setting is to develop L2 (Second Language) learners' ability to communicate appropriately in this language. This means that teaching practices should pay attention not only to the key features of the linguistic system of English, but also to its pragmatic norms since lack of this knowledge may impede communication. As David Crystal promptly noticed, «in theory, we can say anything we like but in practice, we follow a large number of social rules that constrain the way we speak. There are norms of formality and politeness that we have intuitively assimilated, and that we follow when talking to people» [5, 45]. This, in its turn, presupposes acquiring strategies of verbal behavior more contextually appropriate in the target language (TL), as well as a large range of linguistic means which can intensify or soften communicative or speech acts. Given this reality, teachers of EFL may well find that an understanding of speech act theory and practice will improve their ability to prepare their learners to meet the challenge of producing more contextually appropriate speech in the target language.

In order to help lecturers in this task, it is the aim of this article to present a learner-based instructional method designed to develop L2 learners' pragmatic ability when using request mitigating devices in EFL. It attempts to systemize the various strategies used for the purpose of requesting from the pragmatic point of view**.** This article is divided into two major parts: first, we address the importance of tackling pragmatics in the EFL classroom by focusing specifically on the speech act of requesting. Reasons behind the selection of this particular pragmatic feature are provided; second, we present a large range of learner-based mitigating devices to facilitate the teaching of that particular speech act, and, consequently, help learners communicate successfully in English.

Linguists and anthropologists have long recognized that the forms and uses of a given language reflect the cultural values of the society in which the language is spoken [7], [9], [3], [4]. Linguistic competence alone is not enough for learners of a language to be competent in that language. Teaching of L2 words and phrases isolated from their sociocultural context may lead to the production of linguistic curiosities which do not achieve their communicative purposes. Language learners need to be aware of the culturally appropriate ways to address people, express gratitude, make requests, and agree or disagree with someone. These factors refer to those norms of interaction that are shared by members of a given speech community in order to establish and maintain

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successful communication. They are related to one of the vital components of the construct of communicative competence, that is pragmatic competence [2, 145]. Pragmatic competence involves speakers' ability to employ different linguistic formulae in an appropriate way when interacting in a particular social and cultural context. According to David Crystal, pragmatics presupposes «the study of language from the point of view of users, especially of the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction and the effects their use of language has on other participants in the act of communication» [5, 240]. In other words, pragmatics is the study of communicative action in its sociocultural context. Communicative action includes not only speech acts – such as requesting, greeting, and so on – but also participation in conversation, engaging in different types of discourse, and sustaining interaction in complex speech events.

A lack of this competence on the part of learners may result in misunderstandings that can subsequently provoke a breakdown of communication. Consequently, learners need to be aware of the importance of behaving in an appropriate way when using a variety of pragmatic features if their goal is to achieve full and successful communication in the English language and culture. Among those pragmatic features, the speech act of requesting is one where learners need a great deal of expertise in order to avoid communication problems.

Speech acts of request are the mostly widely examined object in interlanguage pragmatics. They are one of the many speech acts used quite frequently in every day human interaction. A request has been defined as a directive speech act in which the speaker asks the hearer to perform an action which is for the exclusive benefit of the speaker. Therefore, requests have been considered as one of the most face-threatening speech acts (FTAS) in Brown and Levinson's «politeness theory» [4]; by making a request, the speaker impinges on the hearer's claim to freedom of action and freedom from imposition, therefore they are intrinsically likely to generate interpersonal tension or conflict, in other words, they threaten the hearer's «face». The pragmatics of speech acts of request in the L2 context involves issues of usage such as the appropriateness of the learners' utterance for the situation and the degree of politeness as perceived according to the target culture.

Here is where the notion of «politeness» comes into play. Brown and Levinson suggest that during the face-threatening events or moments, we commonly utilize an array of linguistic strategies, or «politeness behaviors», in order to mitigate or defray interpersonal conflict. Kitao thought of politeness in requests as a communication strategy used by the speaker to decrease imposition on the hearer and thus, maintain a good relationship with him/her [11, 184]. Many researchers such as Blum-Kulka, Olshtain, and Meir found that a variety of standard factors such as age, social status, familiarity, or gender played important roles in the use of politeness strategies in requests. Suh argues «given that request are face-threatening acts, and that the use of politeness strategies is affected by various factors, it would not be an easy task for language learners to perform requests in linguistically, socially and culturally appropriate manner» [7, 436]. They should not only have sufficient linguistic resources to encode a request, but also know sociocultural rules of involving in the choice of politeness strategies in a given situation with taking into account a variety of situational factors.

There have been several attempts in theoretical, as well as empirical works, on the speech acts of request [12], [9], [3] to set up a classification of request strategies that would form a cross-linguistically valid scale of directness. On theoretical grounds, there seems to be three major levels of directness that can be expected to be manifested universally by requesting strategies, namely a) direct, realized by requests syntactically marked such as imperatives (for example, 'Give me some money'); b) conventionally indirect (for example, 'Could you give me some money?'); c) non-conventional indirect (for example, «Excuse me, I am sorry to bother you like this, but my pen ran out of ink, and I had been wondering if I might possibly borrow yours, just for a second?»),

i.e. the open-ended group of indirect strategies(hints) that realize the request by either partial reference to object or element needed for the implementation of the act ('Why is the door open?'), or by reliance on contextual clues ('It's cold in here').

The three of them have the function of requesting and can stand by themselves, which is why they have been referred to as the core or head act of the request. However, given the nature of this speech act as an imposition, it is usually necessary to soften the impact it may have on the hearer by means of using the indirect strategies rather than direct or conventionally indirect ones. According to Searle [12, 60-61], in indirect speech acts «the speaker communicates to the hearer more than he actually says by way of relying on their mutually showed background information, both linguistic and non-linguistic, together with rational powers of rationality and inference on the part of the hearer». In this way, the requester may save face and avoid communication problems, since the use of indirect strategies gives the impression that the hearer has more freedom to comply or not with the request being made. In addition to minimizing the face-threatening nature of requests via indirectness, the requester may also resort to the use of some specific mitigating devices. These devices, which have also been regarded as part of this speech act, refer to optional elements that may follow and/or precede the request head act (for example, 'Excuse me, could you give me some money, please?'). In addition to Blum-Kulka's classification of request head acts [3], head acts were examined according to their internal and external modifications [7, 237]. The former refers to those devices that appear within the request head act itself. They include mitigators which soften direct requests and comprise both lexical (diminutives, *please,* mental verb such as *I think/believe*) and syntactic conditional, imperfect mitigation. Finally, the latter involves the use of devices that occur in the immediate linguistic context surrounding the request head act. External modifications include optional supportive moves that modify the head act. Those peripheral elements include reasons, preparation (e.g., 'I have a problem with the class, can I borrow your notes/and discourses' [7, 67]).

It should be noted that the individual types and functions of internal and external mitigating devices differ among the classification schemes presented in the literature since this is an inherently fuzzy area of language. However, some kind of workable systematization of those devices is needed for pedagogic purposes. Therefore, the following analytical scheme which is supported by examples extracted from film excerpts [12, 131] could be of help for language teachers. This classification is founded on empirical investigations carried out in the fields of interlanguage [1, 234] and cross-cultural pragmatics [8, 165]. Starting with the internal mitigating devices, three subtypes have been outlined:

1) openers: i.e. opening items and expressions that introduce the intended request ('Gentlemen, would you mind leaving us, please?');

2) softeners: i.e. items that soften the impositive force of the request (e.g., 'Listen, can I talk to you for a second?'; 'If you could possibly return this to Fred's for me, please.');

3) fillers: i.e. items, such as hesitators ('er', 'erm'), cajolers ('you know, you see, I mean'), appealers ('OK?', 'right?') or attention-getters ('excuse me', 'hello', 'Mr. Smith?'), that fill in gaps in the interaction ('Excuse me, can you tell me how to get to Beverly Hills?'; 'Oscar, lower it a bit, would you?').

Regarding the external mitigating devices, five subtypes have been identified:

1) preparators: i.e. devices that prepare the addressee for the subsequent request (e.g., 'I do have to ask you a couple of questions about September the 6th.');

2) grounders: i.e. devices that give reasons that justify the request (e.g., 'Call my family, I'd like them to have dinner with me tonight', 'Excuse me, I've just missed my bus and you live on the same road. I wonder if I could trouble you for a lift?);

3) disarmers: i.e. devices that are employed to avoid the possibility of a refusal (e.g., '…if it's not too much trouble, I'd like a copy of the transfer order, sir.');

4) expanders: i.e. devices related to repetition that are used to indicate tentativeness (e.g., 'Can you take him to the airport in the morning? … Can you pick him up at 8.30?');

5) promise of a reward: i.e. devices that are used by the requester so that his/her request may be accomplished (e.g., '…she wants a bottle of wine … I would promise to send you the money').

All the above mitigating devices can be employed to minimize the impact a request may have on the hearer. Therefore, learners' knowledge of these mitigating devices is vital to help them to perform socially appropriate requests for successful communication. Being aware of the social and cultural context in which a particular communicative situation takes place, as well as the participant relationship observed in such a situation are of paramount importance for a pragmatically appropriate use of request mitigating devices.

More specifically, attention needs to be drawn to those interactional and contextual factors illustrated in Brown and Yule's discourse interaction types, and Brown and Levinson's politeness theory. On the one hand, Brown and Yule distinguish two main types of interaction that affect an appropriate requestive behavior, namely transactional and interactional. The former refers to that kind of interaction in which the request is merely made to transmit information and therefore does not need to be softened (for example, a police officer's direct order to a subordinate during a car accident). The latter involves a sort of interaction in which the request is performed to establish and maintain relationships and consequently, it is usually mitigated since the speaker may place an imposition on the hearer (for example, a conversation between friends). On the one hand, the three sociopragmatic parameters identified by Brown and Levinson are also important to perform an appropriate request. These factors involve power, which refers to the social status of the speaker with reference to the hearer (for example, boss–employee, teacher–student), social distance, which is related to the degree of familiarity between interlocutors (for example, close friends versus strangers), and rank of imposition, which concerns the type of imposition the speaker is exerting over the hearer (for example, asking for a pen versus asking for a huge amount of money). Given the importance of these factors, learners need to be aware of them in order to overcome particular problems when communicating in EFL.

In this article we have tried to explain why learners may experience communication difficulties in EFL, and how those difficulties may be overcome by tackling pragmatics in the classroom.

Specifically, we have focused on the particular speech act of requesting, as an example of a pragmatic feature that requires a great deal of expertise on the part of the learners in order to achieve full communication. Given the face-threatening nature of this speech act, in the first part of this article we have addressed the importance of employing mitigating devices when requesting. The variety of types and functions that these devices can adopt has been presented, and the importance of considering the interactional and contextual variables in which they take place has been discussed.

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ОБУЧЕНИЕ ПРОФЕССИОНАЛЬНЫМ ПРЕЗЕНТАЦИЯМ СТУДЕНТОВ НЕЯЗЫКОВЫХ СПЕЦИАЛЬНОСТЕЙ

Висвітлено актуальні проблеми теорії та практики підготовки й проведення фахових презентацій іноземною мовою студентами немовних ВНЗ.
Ключові слова: фахові презентації, мультимедійні презентації.

Освещены актуальные проблемы теории и практики подготовки и проведения профессиональных презентаций на иностранном языке студентами неязыковых вузов.
Ключевые слова: профессиональные презентации, мультимедийные презентации.

The article deals with the urgent theoretical and practical problems of teaching professional presentations for the students of non-linguistic departments.
Key words: professional presentations, multimedia presentations.

Постановка проблемы. Расширение международного сотрудничества и международных контактов Украины требуют сегодня глубокого, свободного владения иностранным языком и, как следствие, новых технологий преподавания. Возникает вопрос: каким образом построить учебный процесс в условиях отсутствия языковой среды, чтобы обучаемые смогли овладеть иностранным языком на уровне, позволяющем вести профессиональную и научную деятельность?

Преподавание дисциплины «иностранный язык» имеет ряд особенностей и требует предельно четкой организации самостоятельной работы обучаемых. Информационные технологии обладают высоким педагогическим потенциалом активизации самостоятельной работы студентов при изучении иностранных языков в вузе. Использование возможностей мультимедиа для интенсификации самостоятельной работы студентов может реально восполнить этот пробел и оптимизировать процесс обучения.

Мультимедийная презентация – это качественно новый подход в изучении иностранного языка. Для подготовки такой презентации студент должен провес-