

PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE OF INDONESIAN EFL LEARNERS

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Abstract

Pragmatic competence is the skill to communicate in foreign language intended meaning. The objective of the study is to describe pragmatic competence of Indonesian EFL learners. This study was using descriptive qualitative approach. The participants were EFL learners, especially students in the first semester which take English course in Balikpapan University majoring mathematics and Health and Safety Environment. Furthermore, pragmatic test in the form of multiple choice DCT was used to assess learners' pragmatic competence. It was applying and/or adapting some of the items devised by Rover (2005: 122-129 and Hudson, Detmer and Brown (1995: 107-130) in Viljamaa (2012). Based on the analysis of the test, most learners have quite low pragmatic competence in implicature and speech act part. Although cultural background is usually a quite problem for us, it can be handled by a good cooperation and good awareness of pragmatic aspects between the speaker and the hearer. Therefore, we should increase our pragmatic competence in everyday life with many kinds of English activities because English is still a foreign language in Indonesia.

Keywords: Pragmatic competence, EFL Learners

INTRODUCTION

Learning foreign language usually involves knowledge of grammar and vocabulary. English is an example of foreign language in Indonesia. In learning English, the focus is usually on grammar, syntax, lexicology, and also vocabulary. Teachers try to teach rules and structures on how to form language and memorize the words in English. Although knowing the forms and words of the foreign language are important in learning English, we cannot separate pragmatic competence in order to communicate successfully in the target language. Failure may cause users to misunderstand each other.

Pragmatic competence is the skill to communicate in foreign language

intended meaning. Indeed, pragmatics, the study of "meaning in communication" (Thomas 1995: 22) has not become significant in Indonesia's language teaching. Furthermore, pragmatic competence of English as Foreign Language (EFL) has not been the focus in language learning. In fact, EFL learners sometimes use different expressions for the same feelings and the difficulty of understanding illocutionary force of utterances in English. Therefore, pragmatic competence help showing how the target language is typically used in communication.

Generally, English has studied only at school. Students have limited access to use English in real communication. They think English is a difficult subject because

it focuses on grammar. They also usually feel shy when they meet or talk to foreigners using English. Moreover, they are also reluctant to do English conversation with their friends or environment. Indeed, English is still viewed as foreign language in Indonesia.

In other word, we can say that pragmatic competence of EFL learners may not developed greatly. Chen (2011:235) stated that students' pragmatic competence in China can't get effectively improved their pragmatic competence, which finally leads to difficult employment of university students after their graduation. Another study by Hu in 2014 stated that studies in China show that College English students' pragmatic competence is poor. These facts are very surprising because besides misunderstanding language, difficult employment can be the result of failure or poor in pragmatic competence.

METHODS

This study belonged to a descriptive qualitative design. Data in this research will be ninety one EFL learners in Balikpapan - Indonesia, especially students which take English course in Balikpapan University for the first semester. They are from mathematics and Health and Safety Environment major because they are not taking language major in the university. It is interesting to

conduct research to them to know whether their English teacher in senior high school could transfer pragmatic competence or not.

The researcher then assesses pragmatic competence of Indonesian EFL learners based on her experiences and background knowledge. She is supported by other instruments, like a pragmatic test and background questionnaire to get the data.

The pragmatic test is in the form of DCT to assess learners' pragmatic competence. A multiple choice inferencing test was compiled by applying and/or adapting some of the items devised by Rover (2005: 122-129 and Hudson, Detmer and Brown (1995: 107-130) in Viljamaa (2012). Furthermore, there is a background questionnaire of all learners consists of eleven questions.

These examples were deliberately chosen because they were found in some literatures. In other words, some studies have been used them as the instrument. They were also felt to have authenticity as a sample because the preferred multiple choice responses had originally been developed on the basis of actual native speaker interpretations of speakers' meaning in a set of scenarios. Furthermore, the distractors were adapted from the most common non-native speakers' 'incorrect' answers. However,

there were some modifications and reductions according to the needs.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Result Of Pragmatic Competence Test

The test performance of the students was calculated as the number of correct answers in the test of pragmatic competence.

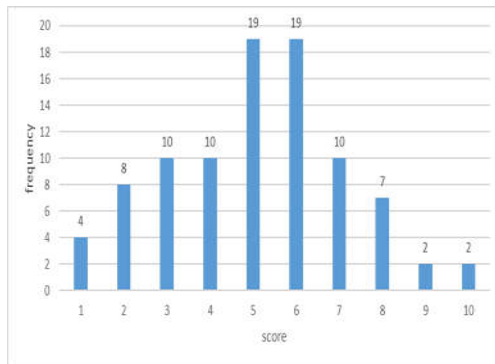


Figure 1. Result of Pragmatic Competence Test

Figure 1 above shows the distribution of the scores in the pragmatic competence test. The scores ranged from one to ten points. Thirty eight learners got five and six. Four learners got only one points whereas no learners reached the maximum score of 12 points. In fact, there are two learners who got the lowest score that is two. It means that they only get two correct answers of all test items. We can infer that the learners have quite low pragmatic competence because the mean score of all learners 5.1 or we can say that from all questions, they got percentage of correct answer which is 42%.

Performance in the Test of Pragmatic Competence

Performance in the test of pragmatic competence consist of two parts, they are implicature and speech act test items.

1. Implicature

When we want to know whether in any utterances contain implicature or not, we need to pay attention to five things, like the real meaning of the words, understanding cooperative principle and its maxims, utterances' context, our background knowledge, and the fact. It was found in the item number one to eight.

Figure 2 below shows the percentage of correct item test number in the pragmatic competence test in implicature part. The items start from number 1 to eight.

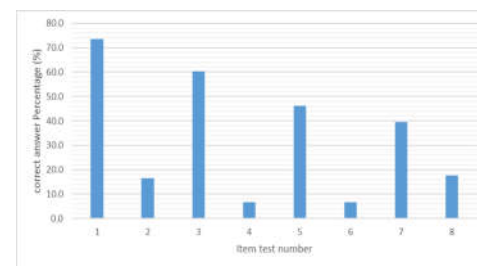


Figure 2. Result of Implicature Part in Pragmatic Competence Test

In the first item, the learners who give correct answer are sixty seven people or 73.6% of them. It is about relevance maxim implicature. In the second item, the learners who give correct answer are fifteen people or 16.5% of them.

It is about indirect criticism through implicature. In the third item, the learners who give correct answer are fifty five people or 60.4% of them. It is about relevance maxim implicature. In the fourth item, the learners who give correct answer are only six people or 6.6% of them. It is about indirect criticism through implicature. In the fifth item, the learners who give correct answer are forty two people or 46.2% of them. It is about POPE Q implicature. In the sixth item, the learners who give correct answer are six people or 6.6% of them. It is about POPE Q implicature. In the seventh item, the learners who give correct answer are thirty six people or 39.6% of them. It is about relevance maxim implicature. In the eighth item, the learners who give correct answer are sixteen people or 17.6% of them. It is about relevance maxim implicature.

Based on the description above, the learners are mostly wrong in the part of indirect criticism through implicature POPE Q implicature especially in item number two, five and six. They mostly do not understand the concept. Indirect criticism through implicature means they criticize something indirectly. POPE Q implicature is based on the prototype, "is the Pope Catholic?" In fact, we all know the answer that Pope is a Catholic. The Pope Q implicature is a question that does not need to be answered since the

intention or the answer of it is contained in the question itself.

2. Speech act

In English, specific labels are commonly given, such as apology, complaint, compliment, invitation, promise, or request." (Yule, 1996:47). These descriptive terms for different kinds of speech acts are directly related to the speaker's intention in producing an utterance, since he/she normally expects that the hearer will recognize his/her communicative intention.

Figure 3 below shows the percentage of correct item test number in the pragmatic competence test in speech act part. The items start from number 9 to 12.

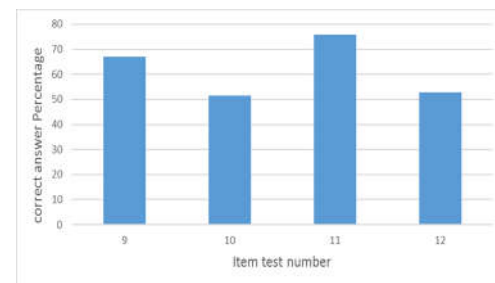


Figure 3. Result of Speech Act Part in Pragmatic Competence Test

Speech act was found in the item number nine to twelve. In the ninth item, the learners who give correct answer are sixty one people or 67% of them. It is kind of request speech act. In the tenth item, the learners who give correct answer are forty seven people or 51.6% of them. It is kind of request speech act. In the eleventh item, the learners who give

correct answer are sixty nine people or 75.8% of them. It is kind of request speech act. In the twelfth item, the learners who give correct answer are forty eight people or 52.7% of them. It is kind of apology speech act.

Related to speech act, most learners answered all questions correctly as expected. We can say that more than fifty percent of learners understand the principles of speech act, especially about request and apology and also politeness. They mostly know how to act with any kind of people. It can be said that they understand pragmatics as the study of the expression relative distance, i.e. the physical, social, or conceptual distance (or closeness) between the speaker and the listener (Yule, 1996:3).

Result of Background Questionnaire

Result of background questionnaire consists of two parts, they are result of background information questionnaire and result of free time doing English activities.

1. Background information

From background questionnaire, we can conclude that the learners consist of fifty two females and thirty nine males. They are from the first semester in Balikpapan University majoring mathematics and Health and Safety Environment.

Their age is around 17 until 24 years old. The distribution of learner's

age: The learners who are 17 years old consist of nine people. Most of the learners are 18 years old. They consist of 39 people. The learners who are 19 years old consist of 21 people. The learners who are 20 years old consist of nine people. The learners who are 21 years old consist of seven people. The learners who are 22 years old consist of three people. The learners who are 23 years old consist of two people. The learners who are 24 years old consist of nine people. He is the oldest one of the learners.

They have studied English at school from around three to seventeen years. The learners who studied English for three years consist of two people. The learners who studied English for six years consist of six people. The learners who studied English for eight years consist of six people. The learners who studied English for nine years consist of twelve people. The learners who studied English for 11 years consist of three people. The learners who studied English for 12 years consist of thirty seven people. The learners who studied English for thirteen years consist of eleven people. The learners who studied English for 14 years consist of only one people. The learners who studied English for 15 years consist of two people. The learners who studied English for 17 years consist of two people. We can conclude that in average, the learners studied English for 10.8 years. The

longest time of studying English is 17 years and the shortest time of studying English is three years.

All learners (91 people) have not visited English-speaking countries. The example of English-speaking countries are the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia.

From the explanation above, we can conclude that the learners are fifty two females and thirty nine males. Most of the learners are 18 years old. They consist of 39 people. In average, the learners studied English for 10.8 years. Furthermore, all of them have not visited English-speaking countries (e.g. the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia).

If we compare with the result of pragmatic competence test, as young people, they have studied English for more than ten years and have not visited English-speaking countries (e.g. the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia), we can infer that their quite low score is an effect of what they studied before. For example, the teacher only taught grammar and vocabularies. They might have not been taught the culture, politeness, and all aspects of pragmatics in foreign language. Moreover, they never travel outside Indonesia to see variety of culture. It can also be an influence of their lower score in pragmatic test.

2. Free Time Doing English Activities

This section presents the result of free time doing English activities questionnaire. The general profiles of how the questionnaire were presented can be seen in figure 4 to get more accurate descriptions about them.

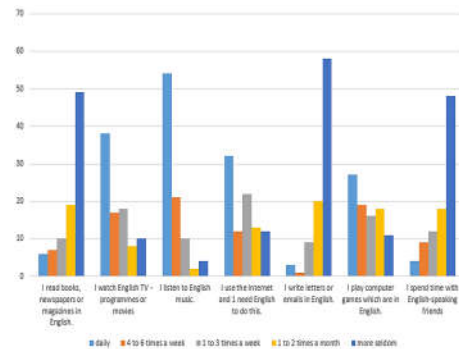


Figure 4. Result of Free Time Doing English Activities Questionnaire

Figure 4 above shows the distribution result of free time doing English activities questionnaire. Most of the learners with total number of 54 listen to English music daily. Learners who write letters or emails in English daily are only three people. Most of the learners with total number of 19 play computer games which are in English 4 to 6 times a week. Learner who write letters or emails in English 4 to 6 times a week is only one person. Most of the learners with total number of 22 using English to browse the internet 1 to 3 times a week. Learners who write letters or emails in English 1 to 3 times a week are only nine people. Most of the learners with total number of 20 writing letters or emails in English 1 to 2 times a month.

Learners who listen to English music 1 to 2 times a month are only two people. Most of the learners with total number of 58 more seldom writing letters or emails in English. Learners who are more seldom listening to English music are only four people.

From the description above, we can conclude that the activity that the learners mostly like to do in their free time listening to English music. They are very seldom to write letters or emails in English. If we see background questionnaire result, they tend to listen to English music which does not really help them in understanding the culture and pragmatic aspects in the songs. Songs are usually created in short form, sentences and vocabularies. They should do other activities to increase their pragmatic competence, some of them are watching English TV-programmes or movie and spending time with English-speaking friends.

If we watch the movie, we can understand the culture and how they interact with other people indirectly to learn the pragmatic aspects. If we spend time with English speaking friends, it will involve direct interaction with native language to learn the pragmatic aspects. Those activities will surely raise our pragmatic awareness. In this case, pragmatic competence help showing how

the target language is typically used in communication

CONCLUSION

The test performance of the first semester in Balikpapan University majoring mathematics and Health and Safety Environment was calculated as the number of correct answers in the test of pragmatic competence. Based on the analysis of the test, most learners have quite low pragmatic competence in implicature and speech act part.

The learners are mostly wrong in the part of indirect criticism through implicature POPE Q implicature. They mostly do not understand the concept. Related to speech act, most learners answered all questions correctly as expected. We can say that they understand the principles of speech act, especially about request, apology and also politeness. They mostly know how to act and interact with any kind of people with different relative distance.

Based on background questionnaire result, we can conclude that the learners are fifty two females and thirty nine males. Most learners are 18 years old. They consist of 39 people. In average, the learners studied English for 10.8 years. Furthermore, all of them have not visited English-speaking countries (e.g. the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia).

If we compare the result of pragmatic competence test and background questionnaire, as young people, they have studied English for more than ten years and have not visited English-speaking countries (e.g. the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia), we can infer that their quite low score can possibly be the result of what they have learnt before. For example, the teacher only taught grammar and vocabularies. They might have not been taught the culture, politeness, and all aspects of pragmatics in foreign language. Moreover, they never travel outside Indonesia to see variety of culture. It can also be an influence of their lower score in pragmatic test.

Related to the activity that the learners mostly like to do in their free time, they love listening to English music. They are very seldom to write letters or emails in English. If we see background questionnaire result, they tend to listen to English music which does not really help them in understanding and finding the culture and pragmatic aspects in the songs. Songs are usually created in short form, sentences and vocabularies. They should do other activities to increase their pragmatic competence, some of them are watching English TV-programmes or movie and spending time with English-speaking friends. If we watch the movie, we can understand the culture and how

they interact with other people indirectly to learn the pragmatic aspects. If we spend time with English speaking friends, it will involve direct interaction with native language to learn the pragmatic aspects. Those activities will surely raise our pragmatic awareness.

The suggestion of this study is surely propose the researchers, teachers and their students, also readers to pay attention in their pragmatic competence to clarify the understanding of this important phenomenon. Although cultural background is usually a quite problem for English foreign learners, it can be handled by a good cooperation and good awareness of pragmatic aspects between the speaker and the hearer.

Increasing pragmatic competence in everyday life with many kinds of English activities is a must because English is still a foreign language in Indonesia. Pragmatic competence also help showing how the target language is typically used in communication.

Finally, this study is also meant to motivate other study on any aspects and fields of pragmatic competence because it is still a small scale research. For example, by adding more participants with different places, background and many others. Moreover, pragmatic competence aspects should be explored, like deixis, cooperation, presupposition, entailment and politeness.

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