

Speech Acts In English Language Teaching

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Abstract: This paper mainly discusses the role of speech act in teaching and learning process of English as a foreign language. It focuses in the components of communicative competence related to the use of speech acts in daily life. Four competences (communicative, grammatical, sociolinguistic, and strategic competence) have great influence in order to gain good communicative competence in the process of building good understanding among the speakers in order to avoid misleading and misinterpretation in their mind. It also provides practices to train the students comprehending speech acts in order not to lead the misunderstanding when they have conversation.

Key words: speech act, communicative competence, discourse.

1. Introduction

Language as a means of communication is widely used by everybody in order to convey and share his/ her ideas to other people. According Ihsan (2011: 9), “language is at the heart of all things human...it’s vehicle for literature and poetry ... Language is not just part of us; language defines us”. In other words, language is the main characteristics of human being as the highest creature in the world and as a part of socialization and used to add our horizon about every thing including literature. It is not only from us but also determine who we are. In learning language, people should learn about pragmatics and discourse analysis. Since we know that we have to know about how to use language in a proper situation, condition, and context. In 2011, Liu said that, ”Pragmatics studies how people comprehend and produce a communicative act or speech act in a concrete speech situation which is usually a conversation.” Besides, discourse analysis is the study of spoken and written interaction as aim of much better understanding of exactly how natural spoken and written

discourse looks and sounds (McCarthy, 1991: 12). However, some people believe in the theory that pragmatics focuses on spoken language and discourse analysis stresses on spoken and written language. Both pragmatics and discourse analysis is overlapping which cannot be separated each other. Since if we learn pragmatics, subconsciously we learn discourse analysis.

Speech act is one of the materials learned in discourse analysis. It includes locution, illocution, and perlocution used in different situations, conditions, and contexts. As English teachers, we used to meet students who were able to produce well grammatical sentences which were not appropriate for the situation and context used by them. So this paper focuses on how beneficial speech as taught in English Instruction. It is aimed to explain the role of speech act in teaching and learning process of English as a foreign language. It focuses in the components of communicative competence related to the use of speech acts in our daily life.

2. Communicative Competence

According to Kurcz (2004: 6), communicative competence (CC) was defined by Dell Hymes in 1972. In his own words, it is competence for language use and not only “the tacit knowledge of language structure” in the Chomskyan sense. It is competence of language use appropriate to the other participants of the communicative interaction and appropriate to the given social context and situation. Besides, “Communicative competence is the ability to use the language correctly and appropriately to accomplish communication goals. The desired outcome of the language learning process is the ability to communicate competently, *not* the ability to use the language exactly as a native speaker does.” (NCRLC, 2004). In means that, communicative competence is competence owned by someone in order to deliver what in his or her mind through language communicatively to the interlocutors in proper social context and situation. In 2007, Baleghizadeh argued that there are four components of communicative competence; grammatical competence, sociolinguistics competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence.

Grammatical competence is the ability to recognize and produce the distinctive grammatical structures of a language and to use them effectively in communication. It is a kind of competence which deals with the understanding of language code (grammar, syntax, word formation, sentence formation, and pronunciation). According to Baleghizadeh (2007, a native speaker’s knowledge of his mother’s tongue, technically known as grammatical competence, is the tacit knowledge which enables him to form and interpret words, phrases and sentences in his native language (p.143-144). In other words, grammatical competence is

used by someone as basic knowledge which make them able to construct and interpret words, phrases, and sentences in his or her native language.

Sociolinguistic competence is the ability see and respond to language appropriately, given the setting, the topic, and the relationships among the people communicating. It has aim to address the appropriacy issues, how utterances are produced and understood in correct sociolinguistic contexts. As we have known that language is used in different situation, condition, and context. So sociolinguistic competence is the ability to use language in a society.

In addition, appropriateness of language is really beneficial used in communication. It can be both appropriateness of meaning and appropriateness of form. Appropriateness of meaning focuses on special communicative functions are used in proper situation. In contrary, Baleghizadeh (2007: 145) noted that “appropriateness of form concerns the extent to which a given meaning is represented in a verbal or non-verbal form that is proper in a given sociolinguistic context” (p.145). The ability to interpret the larger context and how to construct longer stretches of language so that the parts make up a coherent whole is called discourse competence.

Baleghizadeh (2007) said that:

“Discourse Competence. This type of competence deals with how sentences are combined to form unified spoken or written texts. This unity is achieved through cohesion and coherence. Cohesion deals with how utterances are glued together through pronouns, ellipsis, conjunctions, etc. Coherence, on the other hand, refers to the logical relationships among different parts of a text” (p. 146).

In other words, discourse competence emphasizes on the combination of words produced by the speaker both in spoken and written language based on the grammatical rules and has tight relationship among words.

Strategic competence is the ability to recognize and repair communication breakdowns, how to work around gaps in one’s knowledge of the language, and how to learn more about the language and in the context (NCLRC, 2004). In addition, Baleghizadeh (2007) argued that, “Strategic competence deals with the mastery of using communication strategies to compensate for breakdowns in communication and to enhance the effectiveness of communication.” To be exact, strategic competence is used by the speaker to provide alternative words and repair harmful problems occur in communication. For instance, if the interlocuter does not know the definition of the word “dentist”, a speaker may use a term of

“a doctor who takes care of people’ s teeth” in order to make the interlocuter comprehend more about what the speaker says.

Those four competences above have great influence in order to gain good communicative competence in the process of building good understanding among the speakers in order to avoid misleading and misinterpretation in their mind. Since communicative competence plays important roles in teaching and learning process of English. So that, the early stages of language learning, instructors and students may want to keep in mind the goal of communicative efficiency: That learners should be able to make themselves understood, using their current proficiency to the fullest. They should try to avoid confusion in the message (due to faulty pronunciation, grammar, or vocabulary); to avoid offending communication partners (due to socially inappropriate style); and to use strategies for recognizing and managing communication breakdowns.

3. Definitions of Speech Acts

As it has widely known that speech acts has important capacity in making effective communication. According to Baleghizadeh (2007: 146) “a speech act is usually defined as functional unit in communication.” In other words, speech act carries every single meaning of words in communication and it brings different point of view if it is used in improper context. Sahragard and Javanmardi (2011) commented that:

“The term speech act includes actions such as requests, suggestions, compliments, apologies, complaints, and refusals. In the present study, the researcher selected the speech act of refusal for two reasons: first, this concept is among the most complex issues in the process of communication and deals with such phenomena as face-saving activities and second, due to the fact that every day and in every situations people perform the act of refusal frequently, one of the important topics in research on discourse pragmatics has been considered to be the speech act of refusals” (p.182).

Baleghizadeh (2007:146) assumed that utterance has three kinds of meaning; locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary.

a. Locutionary meaning

Locutionary meaning or locution has literal or propositional meaning of an utterance. It carries the real meaning produced by the speaker, there is nothing beyond

the sentence. For example, “It is cold in here”. It only brings the meaning of the cold temperature in the room.

b. Illocutionary meaning

Illocutionary meaning or illocution has to do with the social function of an utterance. The meaning of “It is cold in here” carries another meaning which may be a request to close the window in a certain room.

c. Perlocutionary meaning

Perlocutionary meaning or perlocution focuses on the result or effect that is produced by an utterance. The example of “It is cold in here” has the result of the window has closed because of the temperature of room is cold.

4. Categories of Speech Acts

According to Bagladezh (2007: 146) as cited in Yule (1969), there are five categories of speech acts; declaratives, representatives, expressives, directives, and commissives. These are the clear explanations of those categories.

a. Declaratives

Declarations are those kinds of speech acts that change the word through their utterance.

For example, “I now pronounce you husband and wife.”

b. Representatives

Representatives are those kinds of speech acts that state what the speaker believes to be the case or not. Megah (2012: 4) argued that the speakers makes words fit the word (of belief). It can be the forms as statement of fact, assertion, and conclusion. For instance, “Thomas Alva Edison invented the lamp.” It has been widely known that Thomas Alva Edison invented the lamp and it is the truth.

c. Expressive

Expressive are those kinds of speech acts that state what the speaker feels. The expression could be various psychological states such as likes, dislikes, joy, sorrow, etc.

For example, “ I am feeling great today!” the speaker feels pleasure to someone about something so that the speaker feels great today.

d. Directives

Directives are those kinds of speech acts through which the speaker gets someone to do something. The speaker attempts to command, order, request, and give suggestion. For instance, “Could you ask if she saw my shoes?”, in this case the speaker tries to give request to the interlocuter to ask their mom whether or not she saw the speaker’s shoes.

e. Commissives

Commissives are those kinds of speech acts that speakers use to commit themselves to some future actions such as promises, threats, refusal, etc. For example, “I’ll pick you up tomorrow”. It means, the speaker promises to the interlocuter to pick him or her up in the following day.

5. Speech Acts in English Language Teaching

There are a lot of beneficial of learning or acquiring speech acts in our daily use of language especially in English teaching and learning process. They are essential because they give us wide opportunities to perform a lot of expressions; compliment, apologize, request, complain, etc. Baleghizadeh (2007) commented that:

“Now if speech acts give us the chance to do all this in our native language for sure they can do the same thing in the second/foreign language that we are attempting to learn. It is important to master speech acts while learning a second language because they not only facilitate the process of communication, but also make it more effective” (p. 147).

It goes to show you that how importance speech acts to be implemented while learning a second or foreign language. As we know that, English is as a foreign language in Indonesia, we as English teachers will find many obstacle in delivering knowledge about speech acts to the foreign learners.

English as a foreign language sometimes seems blur for Indonesian students. Since we have totally different cultures with the native speakers. It will lead some misunderstanding and misinterpretation among the speakers, especially when one speaker come from Indonesia and another is from England. If the first speaker has a high level of comprehension in English, he or she will not get difficulties when he or she speaks to the native one. Meanwhile, if the first speaker has low level of understanding in English, he or she must find obstacles in conversation with the second speaker who is originally from

England. Since there are a lot of differences in expressions as the basic of different cultures between both of them.

In addition, the expression of apology in English could be in various sentences. For example; I am sorry, It was my fault, forgive me, I am very sorry to have bothered you, I didn't mean to offend you. However, in Indonesian, we only find the expression of apology "saya minta maaf".

Teaching speech acts is necessary in order to train foreign language learners to speak native-speaking counterpart with highly communicative competence. This point is supported by Baleghizadeh (2007: 147) as cited in Tajvidil is as follow:

"Activities should be expanded to include practice in performing speech acts with addressees of different ages, sexes, and social status as to give the learners the required practice in selecting language strategies (emphasis added) according to these variables."

6. Strategies in Teaching Speech Acts

In order to deliver the materials and transfer the knowledge to the students, there are some strategies in teaching speech acts which enable to be implemented to the English classroom activity (Baleghizadeh, 2007, p. 147).

a. The model dialog

This strategy was introduced by Olshtain and Cohen (1991), where the teacher provides some dialogs and make his students listen and try to identify the kind of speech acts used. The next step is they have materials presented with more dialogs without any information concerning the particluar situation, and they have to do their best to guess the age, social status, and the relationship between the speakers.

b. Role-play

This is a very beneficial technique which can be the follow uf of the model dilaog. Having analyzed a numbers of dialog in terms of their language functions, the students are grouped in pairs and have them to act out the dialogs. Besides, it is necessary to give some information to the students related to the age, sex, and social status of the participants so that they will not get lost in practicing those dialogs.

c. Discourse completion task (DCT)

It is one of the most popular activity, the students are able to fill the blanks after reading the situation written in the text. It is very good exercise to train students in writing and to check their comprehension in pragmatics and discourse analysis especially in speech acts.

For example:

Please write in the provided space whatever you would say in the following conversational situations.

You forget a meeting with a friend; this is the second time that the same thing has happened with the same person. At the end of the day your friend phones you and says: "I waited for you for more than twenty minutes! What happened?"
You: _____

d. Discourse rating task

This type of exercise requires the students to rate various response on a continuum (e.g. unassertive to assertive, indirect to direct, or impolite to polite) basen on a given scenario. The following is an example of discourse rating task which appears in Baleghizadeh (2007: 148) as cited in Lee and McChesney (p.136).

Bob is a senior manager who has worked at the company for 20 years. Two months ago a college student intern, Barbara, started a three-month project there. There is a "no smoking" policy at the company. However, Bob, who is not Barbara's supervisor, has seen her openly smoking in the office several times, even after he has told her that there is "no smoking" policy. Bob feels very strongly that the smoke is harmful to the employees. He is trying to persuade Barbara to stop smoking in the office.

<pBob: Barbara, can I talk to you for a minute?
Barbara: Sure, what's up?

a) I would appreciate it if you could smoke outside.

non-assertive ☐ ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥ assertive

b) Look, smoking is not allowed in here. Please smoke outside.

non-assertive ☐ ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥ assertive

c) Don't you think it might be a good idea to smoke outside?

non-assertive ☐ ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥ assertive

d) I've been smelling smoke in the office, have you?

non-assertive ☐ ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥ assertive

e) How many times do I have to tell you there is a “no smoking” policy in the office?

non-assertive ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥ assertive

Those strategies above are very essential to promote awareness of language, because train students to give reflection about situations given. As teachers we merely wish to facilitate in our students the ability to be understood in English and to use it to achieve their desired aims. We want them to be aware that there are levels of meaning and to encourage and facilitate them to get a deeper knowledge of the language. In teaching speech acts we are preparing our students for situations which commonly occur and providing them with the functional language and sociolinguistic skills to do so effectively and without a loss of face. In appendix, I will show you other examples of materials in teaching speech acts.

7. Speech Act Sets

According to Baleghizadeh (2007) cited in Cohen (1996:385), An important point in teaching a given speech act such as apologizing, requesting, complaining, etc. is “to arrive at a set of realization patterns typically used by native speakers of the target language, any of which would be recognized as the speech act in question, when uttered in the appropriate context” (p.11). This set of strategies is referred to a specific speech act. In addition Cohen (1996: 386) also gave some strategies as follows:

1. An expression of an apology, whereby the speaker uses a word, expression, or sentence which contains a relevant performative verb such as *apologize, forgive, excuse, be sorry*.
2. An explanation or account of the situation which indirectly caused the apologizer to commit the offense and which is used by the speaker as an indirect speech act of apologizing.
3. Acknowledgment of responsibility, whereby the offender recognizes his or her fault in causing the infraction.
4. An offer of repair, whereby the apologizer makes a bid to carry out an action or provide payment for some kind of damage which resulted from the infraction.
5. A promise of nonrecurrence, whereby the apologizer commits himself or herself not to have the offense happen again.

This concept of speech act sets could have a wide application in developing language teaching materials. Unfortunately, this strategic-based use of speech acts is still not extensively used in ELT textbooks. Most of these textbooks present speech acts in the form of model dialogs and at best require students to role play them. Besides, the expression of apology is very common found in daily life which enable to add the students' horizon about speech act. This is the example of the task:

APOLOGIES

People apologize in different ways. For example, if someone complains about the noise from your stereo, you can apologize and:

- ☐ give an excuse: "I'm sorry. I didn't realize."
- ☐ admit a mistake: "I forgot I left it on."
- ☐ make an offer: "I'll turn it down right now."
- ☐ make a promise: "I'll make sure to keep the volume down."

A. Class activity. How do people usually apologize in your country?

What do you usually do when you apologize?

B. Listen to three people complaining. What are they complaining about? How does the other person apologize? (More than one answer is possible.)

Complaint:

- 1.....
- 2
- 3

Type of apology:

Give an excuse

admit a mistake

make an offer

make a promise

As can be viewed in this activity, at first students are acquainted with different strategies used in making apologies. Then they discuss how they make apologies in their native language. This discussion allows the teacher to make the students aware of cross-cultural differences which might sound impolite to native speakers of English. Finally,

students practice what they have learned by listening to a number of conversations. This method is more attractive and effective as it gives students more language awareness.

8. Conclusion

Speech act will carry every single meaning of words in communication and it brings different point of view if it is used in improper context. So, in order to achieve the goal of communication, the students as foreign language learners should have good communicative competence consisting of grammatical competence, sociolinguistics competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence. Those four competences are overlapping each other so that the students have to master all of them in order not to lead the misunderstanding when they have conversation. In addition, there are some practices to train the students comprehending speech acts such as; the model dialog, role-play, discourse completion task, and discourse rating task. These tasks are good devices to promote students' language awareness. Moreover, apologizing is the easiest example to broaden the students' knowledge about speech act as it makes the students aware that if they want to apologize someone, they can either use an apology word, or use an apology word and extend it by adding something like promise of non-occurrence to it.

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Appendix

2.18

Allie Where are you from in the United States, Mark?

Mark The West Coast. San Francisco.

Allie Is it nice?

Mark Oh yeah. It's a great city. Are you from London?

Allie No, I'm from Cambridge. My family live there but I live here in London.

Mark Sorry. Hello darling, how are you?
..... I'm fine, yeah. Don't worry. Fine, fine. That's great. Bye, darling. I love you.
..... Sorry.

Allie That's OK. Your wife?

Mark No, no, my daughter. She always phones me when I'm travelling.

Allie How old is she?

Mark She's nine. She lives with her mother in Los Angeles. We're divorced. Are you married?

Allie No, I'm not.

Mark How old are you?

Allie That's very personal! What do you think?

Mark 25? 26?

Allie Thanks, I'm 27. How old are you?

Functions analysis (Worksheet 4)

Thanking	Thanks.
Apologizing	Sorry.
Requesting	I would like (to)... / Can I (have)...?
Granting requests	Of course you can. / Here you are.
Refusing requests	I'm sorry, that's not allowed here.
Inviting	Do you want to (come)...?
Accepting invitations	I'd love to!
Turning down invitations	I'd love to, but...
Offering (help)	Can I help? / Do you want me to...?
Accepting help	Yes, please.
Refusing help	That's okay, I think I can manage.