

Fostering the Pragmatic Competence of Yemeni EFL learners: The need for instructional and pedagogical intervention

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Abstract :

With every new study, there is a new contribution to our current understanding of second and foreign language teaching. Recently, new theories based on interlanguage pragmatics research have meant a reappraisal of the way language is used in the classroom. For Arab learners of English, the classroom is the only existing resource of target language (TL) input. This hard fact leads to difficulties and sometimes failure in communicative proficiency in English. Such pragmatic failure is attributed to various reasons such as the context of foreign language (FL) where they learn the use of English, and their loyalty to the native language and culture. In an

effort to support the Arab learners of English in avoiding miscommunication and its negative consequences at the personal and social level, this paper focuses on the importance of raising the pragmatic knowledge of these learners. To this end, research in second language (SL) acquisition maintains that through instruction, SL or FL learners could be equipped with the necessary pragmatic norms and conventions of the TL as the instructed learners outperform the uninstructed ones .

Key Words: Pragmatic competence, Yemeni EFL learners, Pragmatics teaching, Pedagogical implications.

Introduction :

However, traditionally there has been greater emphasis on developing the linguistic rather than the pragmatic competence in FL contexts; the primary objective of teaching/learning an SL is to produce in the learners what is called communicative competence implying the general ability on part of the learners to use the SL in a variety of domains. A number of studies have shown that currently pragmatics plays a minor role in the production and preparation of

textbooks and course materials. To compensate for these shortcomings, Martinez-Flor and Fukuya (2005), for example, suggest that it would be desirable for instructors to integrate pragmatics into content-based and FL instruction. Examples of such kind of pragmatic integration will be provided later in section 5 below.

Bardovi-Harlig (2001:31) states that “the role of instruction may be to help learners encode their own values (which again may be culturally determined) into a clear unambiguous message...without asking learners to comprise their values and adopt those of the target culture”. The claim here is not to view the target culture as a product, but as a process that shapes language and also expresses, embodies and symbolizes cultural reality. This claim tallies with Kramsch’s (1993) view of “culture seen as discourse” where language and culture are inherent to people’s interaction and consequently susceptible to contextual factors, such as relative power and social distance. This approach was backed up by Bardovi-Harlig (2001), who points out that FL and SL curricula should provide students with information on the socio-cultural rules of the target language (TL), letting learners decide to what extent they want to conform to the dominant norms.

In this sense, it is the language teachers’ job to realize that instruction in the SL and FL classroom should entail the fulfillment of three functions: (1) exposing learners to appropriate TL input, (2) raising learners’ pragmatic and metapragmatic awareness about the instructed aspect, and (3) arranging authentic opportunities to practice the already acquired pragmatic knowledge. One way of compensating for the restricted opportunities for learning TL pragmatics in the FL setting is to provide instruction for longer periods of time, supplying sustained focused input in pragmatic and metapragmatic aspects instilled through collaborative practice activities and metapragmatic reflection (Ohta, 2001). The argument, regarding the metapragmatic reflection, is that some studies have confirmed that an instructed approach combining communicative practice and corrective feedback enhances noticing and optimizing learners’ abilities to attend to the interactive needs of the addressee. In addition, for the collaborative practice, constant practice contributes to a faster and more efficient access and the integration of sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic

knowledge with the learners' interlanguage system. Kasper and Rose (2002: ix) highlight that "... unless learners consciously attend to the complex interaction between language use and social context, they will hardly ever learn the pragmatics of a new language."

Although it is very likely that learners' nontarget-like production is the result of not noticing the differences between their interlanguage production on the one hand and the TL on the other, it is also possible that some of the differences in interlanguage production stem from the emergent and still developing linguistic system of the learners (Bardovi-Harlig, 2003). Bardovi-Harlig and Mahan- Taylor (2003) point out that the consequences of pragmatic differences, unlike the case of grammatical errors, are often interpreted on a social or personal level rather than as a result of the language learning process. Making a pragmatic mistake or being outside the allowed range of language use in a particular language may have serious consequences .

In this vein, the point at issue is that if after years of learning English at the preparatory, secondary and post secondary levels of education, an average Yemeni learner unfortunately fails to perform the day-to-day communicative chores in English in his or her personal, professional and social spheres with an optimal degree of competence and confidence. As a result, something vital has got lost in the EFL system that needs to be identified and if necessary, suitably remedied. It is the intention of this paper to discuss some of the crucial perspectives of the role of instruction in fostering and developing the communicative and pragmatic abilities of the Yemeni EFL learners.

To sum up, literature in L2 pragmatic development generally supports the view that instruction can indeed facilitate TL pragmatic development even in L2 beginners. It is also proved that learners tend to benefit more from explicit metapragmatic awareness-raising tasks and activities and through constant occasions for communicative practice. On this basis, Kasper (1997a) reported that the responsibility of L2 teaching should lie in the provision of realistic pragmatic environment such as; appropriate input, opportunities for output, and provision of feedback to optimize the benefits to learners.

Pragmatic Competence vs. Pragmatic Failure :

Along the continuum of the interlanguage process, L2 learners are already equipped with general pragmatic knowledge, i.e., the communicative use of language in general as defined by Blum-Kulka (1991), and L2 pragmalinguistic knowledge (knowledge of particular linguistic forms conveying particular illocutions) as defined by Leech (1983). Communicative competence or pragmatic competence is described as the ability to use such utterances in an effective and efficient manner (Francis, 1997). In Bialystok's (1991) study, pragmatic competence refers to abilities required for discourse participants (both speakers and hearers) in successful conversations. That is, the speaker must possess an ability to perform the different speech acts of a given language; in the meanwhile, the hearer must possess an ability to interpret and understand the speakers' intention both directly and indirectly. In addition to discourse rules (e.g., turn-taking, interruption, cohesion and so forth), Gass and Selinker (1994) suggest another component, 'whose language is being used'; namely, learners must have enough knowledge of social and pragmatic rules to choose appropriate forms to use with each type of interlocutor (e.g. of different genders, ages, social distance, social status.)

Moreover, Kasper (2001 b) holds that pragmatic ability can be achieved with success under two circumstances: (1) when there is some universal pragmatic knowledge, such as the ability to express pragmatic intent indirectly; the main categories of communicative acts or the politeness phenomenon, and (2) when both pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic knowledge can be positively transferred from the first language to the TL. However, getting the chance to benefit from these two situations, learners may not know how to use what they already know (Kasper 2001 b). Through findings from research conducted on both production and perception of different pragmatic aspects, Bardovi-Harlig (2001) proves that learners differ considerably from NSs in terms of pragmatic competence. Then, both (Kasper, 2001 b; and Bardovi-Harlig, 2001) agree on the fact that instructional intervention may be useful to facilitate learners' acquisition of their pragmatic ability in the TL.

Taking into account the necessity of pragmatic competence in the TL as discussed above, there are some empirical studies on speech act behaviour signifying the communicative and pragmatic competency of the Arab learners of English as an FL or an SL. Among these studies is El-Shazly's (1993) study of the request strategies in American English, Egyptian Arabic, and English as spoken by Egyptian ESL learners. The author indicates that there are differences in the request strategies used by these groups. The Arab speakers of English demonstrate a high tendency towards using conventional indirectness that depends on the use of interrogatives. Modifiers examined among these groups showed that there are no differences with respect to the use of 'upgraders'. The Arabic native speaker is found to use 'downgraders' more frequently, sometimes, more than one downgrader in the same utterance. According to Al-Eryani (2008), many of the Yemeni undergraduate nonnative speakers of English tend to use downgraders such as 'please' and 'excuse me' in the same situation of requesting. This fact has been attributed to the conventions of politeness followed in the native community. In another instance, Al-Ammar (2000) has studied the linguistic strategies and realization of request behaviour in spoken English and Arabic among a number of Saudi female English majors at Riyadh college of Arts. The results reveal that the subjects vary their request behaviour according to the social situations. Directness increases with decrease in social distance and power. The findings also indicate that English shares with Arabic a rich set of requesting strategies, which is fully exploited in actual use. This finding lends support to the issue of universality in speech act behaviour, as Umar (2004) investigated the request strategies used by advanced Saudi Arab learners of English as compared to those used by NSs of English.

In his study, Umar (2004) found that the two groups adopt similar strategies when addressing their request to equals or people in higher positions. However, when requesting people in lower positions the Arabic sample shows a marked tendency towards using more direct request strategies in performing their request than the British sample. The author attributes these differences to socio-cultural reasons such as social power and social distance. A further test of the data, according to the author, reveals some significant differences between

the two groups in the way they modify their request strategies. It is found that the native speakers of English use more semantic and syntactic modifiers than their Arabic counterparts and hence their requests sound more polite and tactful. In another speech act study, a negative pragmatic transfer in the Arab students' realisation of apologies in English due to the influence of the native language as well as little exposure to the SL was noticed by Al-Zumor (2003). For instance, the use of more than one illocutionary force indicating device (IFID), different address terms that are not part of the NSs responses, the use of certain semantic formulae and avoidance of others, all these illustrate that transfer from Arabic as L1 does occur. From a cross-cultural point of view, Al-Zumor reported some differences. The linguistic realisation of apologising in different situations shows that due to cultural differences the English NSs and Arab learners of English assign different degrees of severity to the same situation.

Recently, Al-Eryani (2007) has shown that, with respect to sociolinguistic rules, the Yemeni learners of English tend to be less direct in their refusals in English than their American counterparts. Whereas Americans would precede 'regret' in the first position of their refusal when giving more direct refusal, Yemeni EFL learners would use a different semantic order by preceding 'reasons' or 'explanations' in the first position of the semantic formulae order, giving less direct refusals. These different strategies in making refusals in English by the Yemeni learners of English are due to some of their native speech community norms, when they fall back on their cultural background while formulating refusals.

All the participants in the above-mentioned studies were advanced Arab EFL or ESL learners of English who operate in situations that demand their grammatical competence. However, these studies reveal that they are not pragmatically competent enough. These participants show different socio-cultural conceptions and applications when involved in conversations in the TL. The reasons and consequences of such misconceptions will be addressed in the next section in terms of pragmatic failure .

Pragmatic failure, on the other hand, was defined by Riley (1989) as “Pragmatic errors are the result of an interactant imposing the social rules of one culture on his communicative behaviour in a situation where the social rules of another culture would be more appropriate”. In the same sense, Trosborg (1995) recommended that communicative competence must include pragmalinguistic competence (i.e. choosing appropriate forms) and sociopragmatic competence (i.e. choosing appropriate meaning) if intercultural pragmatic problems are to be avoided. In describing the causes of pragmatic failure Trillo (2002) hypothesises that learners of an FL follow what he calls a ‘binary track’ in their linguistic development, that is, the formal vs. the pragmatic track. The formal track refers to the grammatical and semantic rules that confirm the competent use of a given language, the pragmatic track on the other hand, relates to the social use of language in different contexts and registers. Native speakers of a language would develop both tracks simultaneously by means of natural language contact, and thus would establish a mutual relationship between both communication tracks. Non-native speakers of a language in a non-target language environment, however, would develop the formal and the pragmatic track through formal instruction.

There are several reasons behind such a lack of appropriate competence in the TL. Learners, for example, may not realize that there are different ways to convey the speakers’ intention; they know that they can say, “Please lend me your book” but may not know other or more indirect ways of making the same request, such as “Could I borrow your book?” “Would you mind if I borrowed your book?”, or “I was just wondering if I could borrow your book.” The possible reasons for these difficulties include the transfer of inappropriate norms from the learners’ first language and misconceptions about the TL. Since pragmatic competence involves sociocultural rules of language use, the consequences of the learners’ violation of these rules could be serious. Differences in cultural logic, embodied in individual languages, involve the implementation of various linguistic mechanisms. As several studies have shown, these mechanisms are rather culture specific and may cause breakdowns in inter-ethnic communication. Some other communication breakdowns are largely due to a language transfer (negative transfer) at the sociocultural level

where cultural differences play a part in selecting among the potential strategies for realizing a given speech act. Furthermore, LoCastro (2003: 253) reported that there are six main reasons that influence learners' difficulty in either comprehending or producing pragmatic knowledge in the TL, which may result in pragmatic failure. These six main possible causes of pragmatic failure are (1) pragmatic transfer (negative transfer), (2) stages in interlanguage development, (3) lack of adequate exposure to pragmatic norms, (4) inadequate or uninformed teaching, (5) loyalty to first language culture, and (6) motivation.

In the light of what has been mentioned above, Al-Hamzi (1999) reported that an advanced Yemeni learner of English had witnessed a situation of miscommunication with English NS. According to Al-Hamzi, this learner, while working with a British health team in a hospital in Yemen, reported that while asking the English native counterpart to pass him a ledger, he was surprised to hear her say in an apparently annoyed tone 'You shouldn't talk to me this way, when I gave you inches in our relation you shouldn't take miles'. When asked what his exact question to her was, he repeated the request: 'Pass me the ledger next to you'! The author attributed this communication failure to the ignorance of the TL contextual use. This was because the learner applied his L1 sociocultural parameters in judging the speech act in the situation. At this, the English NS was annoyed because she activated her own native sociocultural parameters, thus creating a gap that would allow for serious communicative failure. Umar (2004) also maintains that different cultures view politeness from different perspectives and hence express it with different strategies. People in the Arab world may deem directness as appropriate when requesting a close person. Directness may be assumed to express intimacy and closeness rather than rudeness or impoliteness. His study supports the importance of the cultural dimension of communicative competence. FL syllabus designers as well as EFL teachers should sensitize their students to issues of cultural differences. More specifically, Arab learners of English should be aware of the pragmatic differences between Arabic and English. An appropriate Arabic requisite scheme in a given situation might not be appropriate in English in the same situation. This awareness can only be attained through a variety of classroom drills and exercises that involve realization of the speech

act of the request in different situations. Hence, it is the intention of the next section to address the vital role of instruction in awakening and developing the learners' pragmatic knowledge of the TL.

The role of instruction in developing learners' pragmatic ability:

The chief goal of instruction in pragmatics is to raise the learners' pragmatic awareness and provide choices for interaction in the TL. However, the goal of instruction in pragmatics is not to its end to insist on conformity to a particular TL norm, but rather to help learners become familiar with the range of instruction through which learners can maintain their cultural identities, participate effectively in TL communication and gain control of the force and outcome of their contribution. This goal can be achieved via some of the activities and techniques suggested in section 5 of this paper. Linguists like Billmyer (1990), Olshtain and Cohen (1990), Tateyama (2001), Alcon (2005), and Takahashi (2005) have investigated the role of instruction and the teachability of specific pragmatic aspects (e.g. requests, apologies, compliments, and comprehension of implicature). Findings from these studies have highlighted the positive effect of instruction on the learners' use of particular pragmatic items.

In the same vein, recent research has illustrated that the acquisition of pragmatic aspects requires the same three conditions as any other type of knowledge in the TL, namely those of appropriate input, opportunities for output, and provision of feedback (Kasper, 2001 b). Rose (2005) offered some tentative conclusion regarding the effects of instruction in SL pragmatics. First, there is considerable evidence indicating that the requirement is a range of variety of discourse, pragmatic, and sociolinguistic targets of instruction, such as discourse markers and strategies, pragmatic routines, speech acts, overall discourse characteristics and pragmatic comprehension. Second, it appears that learners who receive instruction are better than those who do not. However, given an environment that affords ample opportunity for exposure to and meaningful use of the TL, learners can acquire some, perhaps many, features of pragmatics without instruction. That is, instruction is not necessary for each and every pragmatic learning object in the sense it can be learned without

instruction. However, the fact that instructed learners outpaced their uninstructed counterparts indicates that pedagogical intervention has at least an important facilitative role which is especially good news for learners in an FL context. In their argument on pragmatic teaching, Kasper and Rose (2002: 249) proposed that studies on the effect of instruction in pragmatics seek to answer three types of questions:

- 1) Is the targeted pragmatic feature teachable at all?
- 2) Is instruction in the targeted feature more effective than no instruction?
- 3) Are different teaching approaches differently effective?
- 4) The following sub-sections will try to answer these three questions.

(1) Teachability of pragmatics :

Among these questions, the first one, whether pragmatics is amenable to instruction at all, is the most basic one. Findings provided by teachability studies have, more or less, outweighed pragmatics teachability. LoCastro (1997), for example, found no change after nine weeks of instruction because participants continued to rely on bar head acts at the time of the post-test. According to Rose (2005), if it was LoCastro's goal above to assess learners' ability to use these strategies in interaction, more than a single observation would have been advisable because it is possible that they might have learned in a single session. If the aim was to assess learners' knowledge of the strategies, some sort of individual measure would have done the trick. It is entirely possible, then, that learners benefited from the instruction, but this did not register on a single occasion of small-group interaction in a classroom context .

Similarly, Olshtain and Cohen's (1990) participants did not benefit from instruction in terms of overall frequency of semantic formulae used, but post-test responses contain a wider variety of apology strategies and an increased use of intensifier compared to the pretest, indicating more benefit from the pragmalinguistic aspects of the instruction. The problem appears to have been that instruction was not effective in equipping learners to deal with tasks for which some knowledge of sociopragmatics was required. The fact that learners' ratings did not change as a result of instruction and remained different

from those of Ns indicates a lack of sociopragmatic knowledge on their part. Olshtain and Cohen reported that this is a simple exposure issue, and that a long length of residence in the host community is the solution. In contrast, the results of the first post-test conducted by Liddicoat and Crozet (2001) showed that instruction has a greater impact on the over all content of the responses than on the use of appropriate interactional devices such as feedback and repetition, that is, all of the content features included in the treatment (e.g., on-topic talk, sufficient detail, opinions/feelings) were present in the role play production of most learners, but the instruction had little impact on the interactive devices. However, results from a delayed post-test one year after the instructional period showed that learners retained most of the content features, but the only interactional practice they performed was feedback. There was some evidence of feedback in learner production, the repetition was much less frequent and overlaps were almost entirely absent.

Regarding the Yemeni Learners of English, Al-Hamzi (1999) concludes that these learners show a considerable improvement over the four-month period of explicit instruction on English pragmatics. It became clear that both high and low proficient learners benefited from the course because the instance of negative transfer was reduced as compared to before the course. However, learners of higher proficiency showed an advantage over the low proficient ones. This indicates that higher proficiency in L2 plays a major role in facilitating the learning potential of L2 pragmatics. Al-Hamzi then recommended that courses on FL pragmatics should be included in the syllabus of higher proficient learners rather than learners with low proficiency. This is because high-proficient learners would have a stronger linguistic ability that would enable them to understand and express L2 pragmatic complexity better than the low proficient learners. Thus explicit instruction on L2 pragmatics plays a crucial role in the development of interlanguage pragmatic competence in learners.

(2) Exposure vs. Instruction

There are several studies addressed the issue of whether pedagogical intervention in pragmatics leads to more effective learning than no instruction, or put it differently, whether instruction is better and more effective than simple exposure. These studies have pitted instruction against no instruction and have provided ample evidence and support for the benefit of instruction in pragmatics. Billmyer's (1990) instructed group outperformed the controls for frequency of compliments, norm-appropriate news, spontaneity, and adjectival repertoire and favoured the response strategy of deflection as they were taught, while the control group favoured acceptance. Wishnoff's (2000) groups showed increase use of hedges, however, the treatment group's hedging devices increased more than fivefold, which is a statically significance difference across groups. In both Billmyer's (1990) and Wishnoff's (2000) studies, learners in the control groups registered noticeable improvement in the features targeted in the treatment provided to the experimental groups. Both studies dealt with subject matter that was of direct and immediate relevance to learners, and more importantly, the concerned pragmatic features that learners in both groups were called upon to deploy in actual communicative use of the TL outside the classroom, which seems a likely explanation for why learners in the control group improved despite a lack of targeted pedagogical intervention. Needless to say, a similar effect would not be observed in an FL context (Rose, 2005: 393).

(3) Explicit vs. Implicit instruction

To compare the effectiveness of different teaching approaches, most studies select two types of pedagogical intervention and in all cases the intervention could be constructed as explicit versus implicit. Explicit learning refers to a conscious process in which learners are aware of the new knowledge they are receiving (Schmidt, 1993, 2001; Ellis, 1994). Moreover, it involves the forming and testing of a hypothesis in a search for the correct structure (Ellis, 1994). Implicit learning, on the other hand, is defined as a non-conscious process in which learners are not aware of what is being learned, since they only focus attention on the surface features of a complex stimulus domain.

Implicit learning, according to Ellis (1994), is the process of acquisition of knowledge about the underlying structure of a complex stimulus environment by a process that occurs naturally, simply and without conscious operations.

According to Koike and Pearson (2005), it appears that explicit instruction and feedback are effective in helping learners understand pragmatic elements and contexts by calling their attention to pragmatic form. On the contrary, implicit instruction and especially the implicit feedback in the form of recasts may help learners produce appropriate pragmatic utterances. The implicit feedback in the form of question recasts may force learners to elaborate and mitigate their speech acts and speech act responses, noticing L2 pragmatic resources, upon receiving negative feedback in their successful attempts (Pica, 1998). Thus explicit/implicit instruction and feedback may have varying effects on different areas of learners' competence (Koike and Pearson, 2005). These authors conclude that the result of their study indicates that learners learn pragmatic material, in this case, on the complex speech act of suggestion and develop their pragmatic competence more effectively when they experience instruction of the speech act and responses before doing exercises. The explicit instruction and feedback led to an effect in helping learners to read, interpret and select the most appropriate pragmatic choices in the multiple choice sections of the tests .

To conclude, the studies above gave sufficient indications of the effectiveness of teachability of pragmatics in both FL and SL contexts. Kasper (1997a), also, noted that without some form of instruction, many aspects of pragmatics do not sufficiently benefit the learners. Hence, the remaining sections of the paper will be devoted to address some of the implications and activities that can be taken to develop the learners' competence of the TL.

Classroom and Pedagogical implications :

In many SL and FL learning/teaching contexts, the vital pedagogical goal of various speaking and listening activities and materials is to introduce to students some motivating experience and greater amount of opportunities of exposure to the different norms and

voices of interpersonal talk in the TL. In such a context, SL or FL learners usually find the areas of pragmatics problematic. Consequently, one needs to take the issue of cross-cultural pragmatics into the classroom if as Jung (2001: 6) indicates, pragmatics is an indispensable part of language learning which has received insufficient attention in acquisition. But the question is how to go from recognizing the importance of the issue to moving into classroom language learning and mitigating cross-cultural communicative failure. There may be no easy solution, it would appear. Thomas (1983: 109) may be alluding to such difficulties when she refers to the “potentially explosive area” of making a judgment on what is pragmatically acceptable to the FL openness to different pragmatic interpretations consistent with the sensitivities of various cultures and social groups .

Trosborg (1995) and Kasper (2001b) as well, advocate the sharpening of learners’ awareness of appropriate pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic behaviour through explicit teaching and metapragmatic treatment of pragmatic features by way of description, explanation and discussion. Kasper’s (2001b) observation of what is required of teachers themselves is worth noting; teachers must be sufficiently socialised to L2 pragmatic practices, as to comfortably draw on those practices as part of their communicative and cultural repertoire, so that their metapragmatic awareness enables them to support students’ learning of L2 pragmatics effectively. This is a challenging requirement to fulfill, given that much pragmatic knowledge is implicit and only becomes available for use through carefully observation and conscious practice of distinguishing between expressed and implied meanings .

EFL teachers need to take into account the sociocultural aspects of learning English as an FL in order to ensure successful and effective communication in the TL. Learners need to be aware of the non-conventional implications that a certain utterance may have for a particular context. Learners need to learn to understand and produce utterances that are appropriate to the various contexts. In the process of teaching and learning English, in addition to the questions of first, ‘Is this grammatically correct?’ second, ‘Is the pronunciation

acceptable?’ a third question needs to be added, ‘Is this pragmatically appropriate to the particular context?’ In respect of teaching pragmatics in the classroom, Olshtain and Cohen (1991) propose a framework with different steps for teaching speech acts. They have collaborated five steps that include three conditions for learning any aspect of the TL. The first condition is input, where learners need to be exposed to most typical realisation strategies of the particular speech act under study. In the second condition, they should be explained the factors that are involved in selecting one specific form rather than another. Finally, in the third condition, they should be provided with opportunities to practice the use of these speech acts.

A Proposal for teaching pragmatics in the foreign language classroom :

Techniques of instruction in pragmatics or teaching any pragmatic device to learners of an SL are not the same as any other aspect of that TL language. Here, it is not enough for the teacher to stand in front of the students and explain the necessary communicative or pragmatic devices of making such speech act, requests for example, or using the appropriate politeness norms and strategies of that speech act while students are only listening. Put it differently, teacher-fronted approach is not effective in teaching pragmatics (Rose and Kasper, 2001). Learners, genuinely, should be the center of this kind of instruction and should be involved in the whole process of instruction in pragmatics. Based on Olshtain and Cohen (1991), the following activities and techniques are suggested to teach speech act of request, as a model, and the necessary related politeness norms required to realize this speech act in English. These techniques could be implemented to teach any other kind of speech act .

- 1) Warm up activity: This activity aims at helping the learners to awaken their pragmatic knowledge of the speech act under study in their native language. Role-plays in Arabic can be effective in this sense. In this activity students can be asked to act as different interlocutors in different social encounters such as student/teacher, father/son, friend/friend, and manager/employee. This simple kind of tasks can help students

- to realize in their native language how contextual factors (e.g. familiarity, power relations, and age) differences between the interlocutors can affect their language use.
- 2) The modal speech act: This activity aims at acknowledging the students of the way such particular speech act is used in the target community, to let them become equitant with some of the devices used to mitigate them, and to explore their own attitudes to the use of these devices. For this purpose, the lesson prepared by Linda Yates in Bardovi-Harlig and Taylor (2003) can be used. Her goal in this lesson is to introduce students to a range of different ways in which native speakers soften their requests and to develop their awareness of how these softeners are used by different speakers in different situations in the speech community .
 - 3) **Discussion:** This technique aims at reinforcing the students' awareness of the different factors that might affect the choice of an appropriate speech act strategy according to the situation and the context in which the speech act is taking place. The teacher might ask the students about the various speakers' gender, age, occupation; what the relationship between the requester and requestee in each situation might be, what does the requester want the requestee to do in each case, and how each speaker soften his/her request and why each chooses to do it that way .
 - 4) Audio-visual samples: This activity would help in providing ample opportunities to address the various aspects of language use in a variety of contexts. Besides, it offers the possibility of choosing the richest and most suitable systems, analyzing them in full and designing them in software to allow learners to access such pragmatic aspects as needed. In this way, film analysis, for example, can be introduced as an effective means of pragmatic consciousness-raising. A clip from the film *A few Good Men* (Brown, Scheinman, & Reiver 1992) cited in Fujioka (2003) can be used to address the norms of politeness and appropriateness used while requesting in English. In this clip, a young, ambitious military attorney, the main character, asks a senior marine officer for a document to investigate the murder of a private named Santiago, saying "Colonel, I just need a copy of Santiago's transfer order". In this stage, the teacher discusses

with students the different contextual social variables that take place in this clip like power relations, age, and familiarity between the interlocutors. The students discuss if the attorney has used an appropriate strategy of request and what the officer's reaction would be according to the relations between them. Then, in the next scene the officer shows his agitation by the attorney's manner of request saying, "You have to ask me nicely". In this stage the teacher discusses with students the reasons that made the officer unhappy and the students will have to suggest appropriate norms and devices of politeness the attorney should use. The last scene in the clip gives the appropriate request as attorney's actual words: "Colonel Jessep, if it's not too much trouble, I'd like a copy of the transfer order, Sir."

- 5) Role-play activity: Now it is the proper time for learners to be involved in such role-plays in the TL that are suitable for practicing the use of speech acts in accordance with what they have seen and learnt in the previous stages. This stage is the most functional in making students creating and imagining themselves in real social situations where the teacher should guide the students and discuss with them the different social variables that could affect their interactions in different social contexts.
- 6) Feedback: Learners at the end of the lesson should be provided with feedback to make them realize whether any possible inappropriate expression has been used during the role-plays. They should also be given the opportunity to express their perception and any similarities or differences they noticed between their native language and the TL according to the various contextual and social variables. The teacher can discuss with students where did they had violated the appropriateness norms of the TL and the factors behind that violation like negative pragmatic transfer from their native language.

Conclusion :

Research into the pragmatic competence of adult FL and SL has shown that learners often struggle to communicate appropriately with native speaking counterparts, even when they have a high level of general language proficiency (Bardovi- Harlig and Hartford, 1990). Grammatical development does not guarantee a corresponding level of pragmatic development. Even advanced learners fail to convey or understand the intended illocutionary force or politeness norms of the TL. The consequences of the pragmatic errors are potentially more serious than of the grammatical errors. While native speakers find it possible to identify a grammatical error produced by a non-native speaker as a language problem, they are less likely to identify a pragmatic error as such.

In such an environment, like the one in which Yemeni Arabic speakers learn English as an FL, efforts should be pooled to see that useful English is taught at all levels, preparatory, secondary and post secondary. The responsibility is greater at the Faculties of Education where teachers of English are prepared for Yemeni schools. The activities that take place in the English class should provide opportunities to the teacher trainees to improve their English and foster similar activities in their class when they teach English in the future. Overloading them with novels, whether Western or Eastern, or pumping into them transformational/generative grammar or the phrase structure rules are not the needful remedies in this direction. What they need to develop is a set of skills to speak and listen, read and write, skills to refer to a dictionary or an atlas when necessary, to follow lectures in English, to be involved in role-play tasks, to participate in group and pair discussions and skill to give responses in English suitable to questions, suitable to persons and suitable to situations. For teacher-trainers it will be disastrous to lose insight into this essential aspect of teacher education courses.

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