Pragmatic Competence: A Meta-Analytic Account of Current Issues and Research into Its Acquisition and Instruction

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Abstract

Despite being a component of communicative competence, pragmatic competence has only recently become the focus of attention. This paper addresses the historical evolution and the models of pragmatic competence. Next, it gives an account of the categorization of speech acts. Finally, it provides a review of the studies related to the instruction of pragmatic patterns in conjunction with internal/learner and external/environmental factors underlying the acquisition of pragmatic competence.

Keywords: pragmatic competence, speech acts, language functions, explicit instruction, implicit instruction, learner factors

Introduction

Whereas Canale and Swain's (1980) framework of communicative competence conceptualizes it as a separate component, pragmatic competence has only fairly recently become the focus of attention in SLA studies. The rationale for this recent attention is three-fold:

1. the emerging theoretical enthusiasm to explore a neglected component of communicative competence, particularly in view of its significance as one of the two principal components of lan-

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guage competence (Bachman, 1990)

2. new trends in interlanguage studies which views pragmatic competence as a field of study pertaining to interlangauge pragmatics

3. the necessity of providing students for the acquisition of pragmatics or speech acts.

This paper explores the emerging field of pragmatic competence from three perspectives: (1) the definition and historical evolution of pragmatic competence, (2) the categories of language functions subsumed under pragmatic competence, and (3) research into the acquisition of pragmatic competence through naturalistic exposure and interventionist instruction as well as the factors affecting its acquisition.

Definition and Historical Evolution

Since its inception, pragmatic competence has been mapped out in various, albeit overlapping, ways, reflecting different theoretical orientations and pedagogical emphases. One of the earliest definitions has been proposed by Hymes (1971). Dividing the notion of communicative competence into grammatical and pragmatic competence, to achieve a desired communicative effect. Halliday (1978), as Malmkjær (1995) points out, does not separate pragmatic competence from grammatical competence because he regards grammar as a meaning potential which both language and its speakers share. Leech (1983) sees pragmatic competence as the speaker's and writer's ability to accomplish goals which require not only getting things done but also attending to interpersonal relationship with other participants. Still another much-quoted definition is proposed by Crystal (1991), who relates pragmatic competence to the use of language in social interactions. The reference to language use in all of these definitions functions to characterize and differentiate it from grammatical competence at the same time. Although the modern concept of pragmatics, as Barron (2002) argues, is rooted in the philosophical conceptualization in 1938 by Morris (1964), the

concept of pragmatic competence was born out of Hymes's (1972) reaction against Chomsky's (1965) nation of competence, which encompassed knowledge of grammar rules alone and disregarded contextual appropriateness.

Pragmatic competence in SLA theories, however, grew out of Canale and Swain's (1980) three-part framework of communicative competence, followed by modified or expanded models spawned from the contribution of Canale (1983), Bachman (1990), and Bachman and Palmer (1996). Further developing Hymes' concept, Canale and Swain (1980) and later Canale (1983) divided the construct of communicative competence into four components: grammatical, discoursal, sociolinguistic, and strategic. Although pragmatic competence does not stand as a separate component in their proposed framework, it is embedded into sociolinguistic competence, which consists of choices of language in use.

Communicative Competence

grammatical competence   sociolinguistic competence   discourse competence   strategic competence

(rules of grammar)(sociocultural rules of language)(cohesion and coherence)(communication strategies)
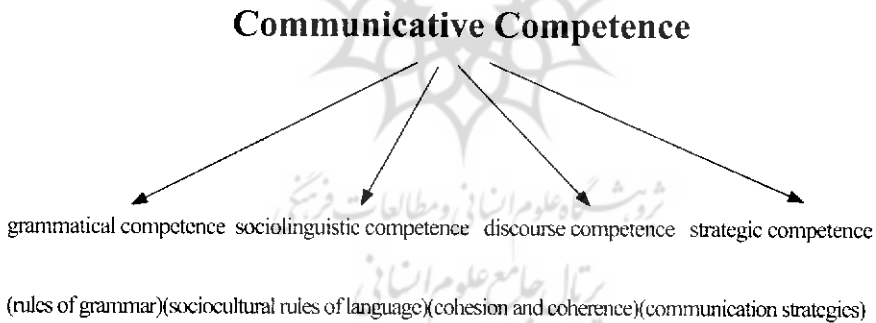
Figure 1: Canale's (1983) Model of Communicative Competence

The coming of pragmatic competence into its own, however, owes to Bachman (1990). In his two-dimensional model, pragmatic competence receives a salient position, parallel to organizational competence. Bachman draws on van Dijk's (1977) work to portray pragmatic competence in view of the relationship between utterances and the concomitant acts on the one hand and features of the context facilitating appropriate language use on the other (Safont Jorda, 2005).

Therefore, pragmatic competence comprises illocutionary competence (Conceived as knowledge of both speech acts and language functions), and sociolinguistic competence (termed as knowledge of the contextual appropriateness). The distinction between the two sub-components of pragmatic competence is reminiscent of Leech's (1983) and Thomas' (1983) pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics as the two composites of pragmatics.
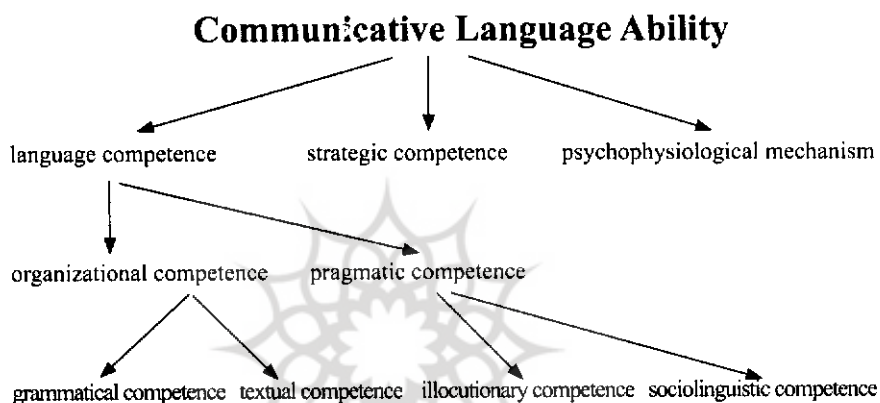
Communicative Language Ability

language competence   strategic competence   psychophysiological mechanism

organizational competence   pragmatic competence

grammatical competence   textual competence   illocutionary competence   sociolinguistic competence

Figure 2: Bachman's (1990) Model of Language Competence

Regardless of being first designed in view of language testing and evaluation considerations, Bachman's model, as Safont Jorda (2005) points out, has been influential on the studies of the development and use of pragmatic competence in L2 learning. It heightens the awareness that the achievement of communicative competence does not end up with improving learners' grammatical knowledge, and requires the development of pragmatic competence. However, Bachman's model has its obvious shortcomings. The first point is that, like Canale and Swain's (1980) model, it "offers a non-interactional picture of communicative competence" (Tajeddin, 2005), thus not specifying the relationship of pragmatic competence with other constituents of communicative competence (Sofont Jorda, 2005; Tajeddin, 2005), nor does clarify how incompetency in pragmatic competence affects the ability to draw on the other competencies and

the other way round (Tajeddin, 2005). Second, as Barron (2003) contends, although Bachman's model of communicative competence is termed communicative language ability, only two of its components, namely strategic competence and psychophysiological mechanism are concerned with ability, while the other components, "of which pragmatic competence is a part, is concerned only with knowledge (p. 9).

Bachman and Palmer's concept of pragmatic competence is essentially similar to what Bachman proposed in 1990. Dividing language knowledge competence into organizational and pragmatic knowledge, they define the latter as involving the knowledge enabling learners to "create or interpret discourse by relating utterances or sentences and texts to their meaning, to the intentions of language users, and to relevant characteristics of the language use setting" (Bachman and Palmer, 1996: 69). In this model, there are two areas of pragmatic knowledge: functional knowledge and sociolinguistic knowledge. Functional knowledge, corresponding to what Bachman (1990) terms illocutionary competence, is involved in the interpretation of utterances, sentences, or texts and the intentions of L2 users. In this model, functional knowledge is conceived to include knowledge of four language function categories: ideational, manipulative, instrumental, and imaginative. Sociolinguistic knowledge enables L2 users to create or interpret language appropriate to a particular setting of language use. It includes knowledge of the conventions related to the appropriate social use of language. As the specification above indicates, Bachman and Palmer's model implies no major change to the nation of pragmatic competence as conceptualized by Bachman. It follows that both models suffer from rather the same deficiencies.

In Celce-Murcia et al.'s (1995) framework, as illustrated in Safont Jorda (2005), communicative competence subsumes five constituents: linguistic competence, actional competence, sociocultural competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence. Although the model dose not involve the designation "pragmatic," actional competence bears resemblance to Bachman's (1990) prag-

matic competence and Canale and Swain's (1980) sociolinguistic competence. It involves knowledge of language functions and speech acts that helps interpret and show speakers' intention. One aspect of Celce-Murcia et al.'s model that distinguishes it from the previously described models in that it conceptualizes pragmatic competence as interrelated with the other components of communicative competence.
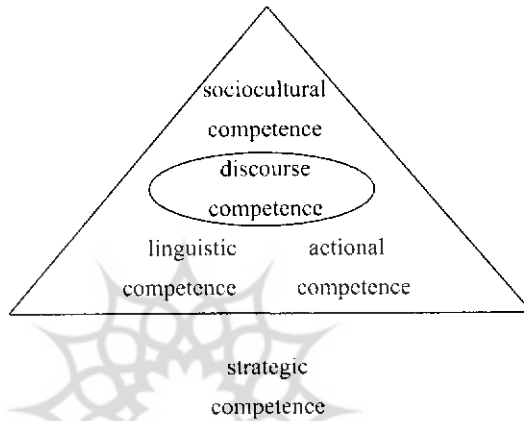

Figure 3: Celce-Murcia et al.'s Model (1995) of Communicative Competence

The last concept of pragmatic competence described here was proposed by Alcón (2000, cited in Safont Jorda, 2005). Developed on the basis of Celce-Murcia et al.'s (1995) model, it encompasses three main components: discourse competence, psychomotor skills and competencies, and strategic competence. The central component in Alcón's model, like Celce-Murcia et al.'s, is that of discourse competence, which is composed of pragmatic competence, linguistic competence, and textual competence. In this model, pragmatic competence, along with textual competence, correspond to Bachman's pragmatic competence and Celce-Murcia et al.'s actional and sociolinguistic components. This model seems to be interactional in that pragmatic, textual, and linguistic components bear a relationship with each other to allow the creation and interpretation of discourse, thus resulting in discourse competence. Discourse competence, in turn, is influenced by psychomotor skills and communication and

learning strategies identified in strategic competence.

Components of Pragmatic Competence

A central concept in the study of pragmatic competence, as Jernigan (2007) posed, is speech acts or language functions as the makeup of such competence. Speech acts have been classified in different ways over time, from a more linguistics-oriented to a more teaching-oriented categorizations.

Different categories of language functions have been suggested, reflecting different schools of thought in linguistics, sociolinguistics, philosophy of language, and language teaching (Malinowski, 1923; Bühler, 1934; Jakobson, 1960; Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969; Robinson, 1972; Halliday, 1973; Wikins, 1976; Finocchiaro 1979; van Ek, 1980). One of the earliest attempts dates back to Malinowski's (1923) emphasis on the study of meaning in light of the functions of language in a given culture. Based on one of his studies, he draws a distinction between three major types of functions: (1) pragmatic function (language as a form of action); (2) magical function (language as a means of control over the environment), and (3) narrative function (language as a storehouse filled with useful and necessary information required to preserve historical accounts). He also used the notion of phatic communion to refer to the function of speech to create or maintain social bonds between speakers (Malmkjar, 1991). Bühler's (1934) division comprises three functions: (1) expressive, (2) representational, and (3) conative. Austin (1962) pointed out that the utterances of some sentences is, or is part of, doing some action. He suggested a number of broad classes of speech acts to account for these sentences: (1) verdictives (which have to do with giving a verdict, estimate, finding, etc.), (2) excersitives (exercising powers and influence, e.g. through ordering, urging, warning), (3) commissives (typified by promising or undertaking), (4) behavitives (which relate to social behavior, such as congratulating, apologizing, condoling), and (5) expositives (which function to clarify how our utterances are related to an argument or conversation). The classifications offered by Jakobson (1960), Searle (1969), Robinson (1972), and Hal-

liday (1973) are rather rooted in Bühler's categorization of speech acts. Jakobson (1960) distinguishes six categories: (1) emotive, (2) phatic, (3) referential, (4) poetic, (5) conative, and (6) metalingual. Jakobson's classification overlaps, to a large extent, with Bühler's in that conative function is common to both, Jakobson's emotive and poetic function figure in Bühler's expressive function, and Jakobson's referential function corresponds to Bühler's representational function.

Searle's basic language functions are (1) expressives, (2) representatives, (3) commissives, (4) declarations, and (5) directives. The last three functions largely embrace the conative function outlined by Bühler and Jakobson. A more detailed account of language functions is given by Robinson (1972). Linking functions to such factors as social situation, role, and class, Robinson expands Jakobson's taxonomy to identify the main functions or uses of language as (1) regulation of self, (2) encounter regulations, (3) reference to non-linguistic world, (4) aesthetics, (5) performatives, (6) regulation of others, (7) instructing, (8) inquiry, and (9) metalanguage.

While Malinowski's distinction between pragmatic and magical functions and Bühler's division of functions have their roots in sociological and psychological inquires, Halliday (1970) investigates the meaning potential of language to identify the seven functions language serves: (1) instrumental (satisfying material needs), (2) regulatory (controlling the behavior of others), (3) interaction (getting along with others people), (4) personal (identifying and expressing the self), (5) heuristic (creating a world of one's own), and (7) informative (communicating new informative (communicative new information).

In addition to above categories, other categories have been developed by those focusing primarily on the synthesis of theoretical and methodology of language teaching. In this regard, three accounts of language functions (Wilkins, 1973; Finocchiaro, 1979; van Ek, 1980) stand out, all of which put a communicative perspective on functions. Wilkin's functional categories include (1) modality (e.g. certainty, conviction), (2) moral discipline and evaluation (e.g. ap-

proval, judgment), (3) suation (e.g. presentation, advice), (4) argument (e.g. agreement, denial), (5) rational enquiry and exposition (e.g. inclusion, interpretation), and (6) personal emotions (positive and negative), (7) emotional relations (greeting, hostility, etc.), and (8) interpersonal relations (politeness and status: degree of formality and informality). Van Ek distinguishes six categories of functions: (1) imparting and seeking factual information(e.g. identifying, reporting), (2) expressing and finding out intellectual attitudes (e.g. expressing agreement, offering to do something), (3) expressing and finding out emotional attitudes (e.g. expressing and inquiring about preferences, expressing gratitude), (4) expressing and finding out moral attitudes (e.g. apologizing, expressing regret), (5) getting things done (e.g. suggesting, warning, instructing), and (6) socializing (e.g. when taking leave, when greeting people). Finally, Finocchiaro (1979) has developed a five-category classification of language functions, which largely corresponds to Halliday's classification. It includes (1) personal functions (dealing with the clarification or arrangement of one's ideas and the expression of one's thoughts and feelings), (2) interpersonal functions (enabling one to establish and maintain social and working relationships), (3) directive functions (related to one's attempts to influence the actions of others and to accept or refuse directions), (4) referential functions (talking about things or language) and (5) imaginative functions (discussing something, expanding ideas, etc.).

In the descriptions above, an overview of the pragmatic component of communicative competence and the classifications of language functions or speech acts were provided. In what follows, the aim is to present field of teaching speech act/language function as the constituents of pragmatic competence as well as the factors influencing their teaching in an EFL or ESL context.

Teaching Pragmatic Competence
The issue of pragmatic instruction in developing L2 learners' pragmatic competence may be approached from three vantage-points: (1) implicit vs. explicit instruction of speech acts, and (2) learner factors

affecting the acquisition of speech acts (for a brief review, see Tajeddin, 2008).

Implicit vs. Explicit Teaching of Pragmatic Competence

The focus on the role of instruction on L2 pragmatic development arises from the general debate over whether instruction affects SLA. A survey of studies reveals that instruction by and larges has an effect on SLA, while the nature of the effect is not clear for other aspect of language, including pragmatic competence.

As many features of pragmatic competence appear not to develop without some form of instruction (Kasper, 1997), much research has been devoted to investigating the effects of L2 instruction on L2 learners' pragmatic development over the past several years. Various instructional approaches have been the focus of research, including explicit vs. implicit instruction (House and Kasper, 1981; House, 1996, Tateyama et al., 1997), instruction vs. non-instruction (Billmyer, 1990; Bouton, 1994), deductive vs. inductive instruction (Kubota, 1995), and the teachability of pragmatic features (Olshtain and Cohen, 1990; Wildner-Bassett, 1994; Morrow, 1996). The majority of studies have shown that explicit instruction is more effective than implicit instruction in teaching pragmatic competence (House and Kasper, 1981; Kubota, 1995; House, 1996; Tateyama et al., 1997; Pearson, 1998; Takahashi, 2001).

Many studies have focused on the explicit (interactionst) or implicit (non-interactionist) development of pragmatic competence. Empirical evidence on this point is contradictory. While the majority of studies show that L2 learners' pragmatic competence benefit from instruction, particularly beyond a beginning level of proficiency, some others found that L2 learners did not improve considerably in their ability to use or interpret speech acts after having received instruction. A synopsis of studies is addressed in the following.

Takahashi (2001) examined the effects of input enhancement on the learning of request strategies by Japanese EFL learners, setting up four input conditions: explicit teaching (a teaching-fronted instructional setting, in which learners were provided with metaprag-

matic information on the form-function relationship of the target request strategies), (2) the form-comparison condition (learners being instructed to compare the utterances with those of native speakers and determine differences), (3) the forms-search condition (learners comparing non-native with native speaker utterance, but not with their own), and (4) the meaning-focused condition (reading transcripts of interactions and answering comprehension questions). The results showed that explicit teaching had the strongest impact on advancing L2 learners' pragmatic competence.

Ishihara (2003) explored the immediate and delayed effects of formal instruction on giving and responding to compliments in an ESL classroom setting. The results lend support to the positive effects of formal instruction on the use of complements. As to the delayed effects of instruction, a subset of learner exhibited their retention of central skills. Rose and Ng (2001) examined the benefit from instruction in English compliment and compliment responses and the effects of inductive and deductive approaches to teaching compliments. Three measures of learner performance were administered: a self-assessment questionnaire (SAQ), a written discourse completion questionnaire (DCT), and a metapragmatic assessment questionnaire (MAQ). The results were mixed. Although the SAQ and MAQ results did not bear evidence to the benefit of instruction, the results from the DCT showed some evidence that instruction was effective. Results for complement responses manifested a positive effect only for the deductive group in developing sociopragmatic proficiency.

Morrow (1995) studied the pragmatic effect of instruction on ESL learners' production of complaint and refusal speech acts. The results suggested that speech act instruction led to clearer, more polite, and, to a smaller extent, more native-like performance of complaints and refusals. Trosberg (2003) researched into the teaching of business pragmatics by focusing on complaints. She found a slight advantage to explicit instruction with 15 students. Kubota (1995) documented the effects of both deductive and inductive instruction in the acquisition of implicature, with an advantage for the inductive approach

over the deductive one.

Learner Factors

In line with the fact that individual differences affect second language acquisition, many aspects of pragmatic acquisition hinges on learners factors. In the literature on interlanguage pragmatics, the role of such factors as proficiency, age, gender, motivation, social and psychological distance, has been addressed (Kasper and Rose, 2002). In what follows, the focus will be on the two factors of proficiency and motivation.

Language Proficiency

Research on the relationship between L2 learners' pragmatic performance and their L2 proficiency abounds (Omar, 1991; Trosborg, 1995; Koike, 1996). These studies, however, do not provide sufficient data to confirm any cause-effect relationship between L2 proficiency and pragmatic development.

Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei (1998) studied the role of language proficiency in pragmatic awareness. They found that the high-proficiency EFL learners outperformed the low-proficiency EFL learners in the pragmatic items. By contrast, Niezyoda and Röver (2001), replicating Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei's (1998) study, found that their EFL participants had higher pragmatic awareness then their ESL participants. Cook and Liddicoat's (2002) comparison of high- and low-proficiency ESL learners' pragmatic awareness of requests suggests that increased proficiency might results in enhanced ability for the interpretation of request utterances. Koike's (1996) cross-sectional investigation of the pragmatic development of learners across three proficiency levels showed mixed results. While no significant difference was found between first and second-year learners, the advanced learners (either in their third or fourth year) were significantly better than the other two groups. Maeshiba et al. (1996) found that advanced Japanese ESL learners performed better than the intermediate learners in emulating native English speaker's pragmatic behavior of using apology strategies. The finding suggests that L2

proficiency is a causal foster in the development of pragmatic competence.

Matsumura (2003) aimed to document L2 proficiency a potential causal factor in pragmatic development. The findings revealed very weak and non-significant effects of proficiency on pragmatic competence. Addressing the issue of pragmatic development, Takahashi and Beebe (1987) found an inverse relationship between level of L2 proficiency and pragmatic development, with high-proficiency Japanese ESL learners transferring more L1 sociocultural norms of refusals to L2 and thus making move pragmatic errors that low-proficiency learners. Maeshiba et al. (1996) found that advanced Japanese ESL learners performed better than the intermediate learners in emulating native English speaker's pragmatic behavior of using apology strategies. The finding suggests that L2 proficiency is a causal factor in the development of pragmatic competence.

Motivation

Motivation may be another factor, as Kasper and Rose (2002) argue, to be linked to "noticing input, having knowledge of L2 pragmatic practices, and making productive use of this knowledge." Some studies attribute better pragmatic performance to learners' motivation. Niezgoda and Röver (2001) pointed out that motivation might be on influential individual variable influencing English learners' sensitivity to pragmatic errors. Takahashi (2005) employed a proficiency test and an awareness questionnaire to investigate the relationship between the two. The finding showed that the learners' awareness of the L2 pragmatic features was not correlated with their proficiency. In the study of the effect of motivation on pragmatic awareness, Takahashi (2005) found motivation to be closely related to pragmatic awareness.

Input and Environmental Factors

EFL vs. ESL Learning Context

Bardovi-Harling and Dörnyei (1998) compared the pragmatic aware-

ness of learners in the ESL vs. EFL contexts. They found that the EFL group to be more aware of grammatical violations than of pragmatic ones, whereas the ESL group recognized a significantly higher number of pragmatic errors than grammatical ones.

Exposure to L2 and Length of Stay

In addition to L2 proficiency, exposure to L2 and length of stay in L2 community have been examined as indicators of pragmatic development (Blum-Kulka and Olshtain, 1986; Bouton, 1992, 1994; Bardovi-Haring and Hartford, 1993; Yamashita, 1996; Enochs and Yoshitake-Strain, 1999). Matsumura's (2003) study demonstrated the great potential of the amount of exposure to account for pragmatic development. It also provided support for the suggestion that the effect of proficiency on pragmatic competence occurred via exposure. In a study of the ESL learners' perceptional appropriateness of advice utterances, Matsumura (2003) asked participants to select the most appropriate utterance from a 4-option choice. The results showed that proficiency was not a significant factor on the learners' pragmatic development. However, it had an indirect effect when combined with a higher level of exposure to the L2. The results of Matsumura's (2003) study showed that the learners who had a greater exposure to English displayed a greater amount of pragmatic competence at perceiving appropriate advice utterances. Replicating and extending Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei's (1998) study, Schauer (2006) investigated the pragmatic awareness of learners in the EFL vs. ESL context in terms of the length of stay. The results revealed ESL learners' higher awareness of pragmatic infelicities compared with that of EFL learners. In addition, the length of stay in the L2 environment affected rise in the pragmatic awareness.

L2 Output and Interaction

Evidence from L2 classrooms, as Eslami-Rasekh (2005) indicates, indicates that even advanced L2 learners often fail to produces or interpret pragmatic intentions appropriately. Output is contended to promote SLA. Despite the claim that successful SLA is not depen-

dent, in any significant way, on output, the proponents of the output hypothesis, as reported in Jernigan (2007), have provided empirical evidence as to output as a contributing factor to SLA because of its ability to promote noticing (Izumi, 2002), hypothesis testing (Mackey et al., 2000; Mackey, 2002), and metalinguistic reflection (Swain, 1995, 1998, 2005). To investigate the application of the output hypothesis in the case of pragmatic development, a number of studies have been conducted. The potential effects of output on developing L2 pragmatic competence has been studied in three areas (Jernigan, 2007):

1. noticing/triggering: as learners attempt to produce pragmatic forms (speech acts), they realize that they cannot accurately convey their intended meaning, which triggers their seeking input from others or searching their own developing system for more appropriate forms.
2. hypothesis testing: in response to input or feedback that targets their production of speech acts, learners conduct "trial runs" (Swain, 2005) in which they modify their pragmatic output.
3. metalinguistic/reflective: when learners are required to struggle over the production of pragmalinguistic form, they use language to reflect on the form and function of the speech acts being attempted.

In a study of learners of German, Belz and Kinginger (2003) found that the majority of the learners benefited from the opportunities for meaningful interaction with native speakers to improve their use of address forms. Martinez-Flor and Fukuya (2005) found that both implicit and explicit instruction improved the production of suggestions. The improvement by the group receiving explicit instruction, they suggested, followed from the raising of metapragmatic awareness during explicit instruction regarding suggestion forms and functions. However, to explain the effect of implicit instruction, they posited that the improvement likely resulted form the learners' practice of suggestion forms in role-plays, i.e. the role of output.

Liddicoat and Crozet's (2001) study showed that learners producing targeted pragmatic forms in their interaction with peers promoted their knowledge. In addition, it was found that focusing on interactional competence improved L2 learners' use of pragmatic forms. In the same vein, Bardovi-Harlig and Salsbury's (2004) study suggests that opportunities for output and interaction with native speakers help ESL learners develop their use of pragmatic forms. Jernigan (2007) investigated the effect of output on L2 pragmatic speech acts in the context of instruction. It was found that the output instructional treatment significantly affected participants' performance on the pragmatic acceptability judgment task. Further, the researcher identified no significant effect for the effect of output on either the written discourse completion task or the oral discourse completion task. The findings of Jernigan's study also revealed the significant effect of output on the perception and production of the speech acts of directives and expressives.

Conclusion

Research on the acquisition of pragmatics is still a young field of inquiry. In this paper, the nature of pragmatic competence, along with research on the effect of individual and environmental factors on its acquisition and development, was addressed. However, given the increasing significance of pragmatic competence, further research, particularly longitudinal studies, is required to shed more light on the order of pragmatic development as well as the role of instruction in the acquisition of language functions.

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