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SEÇÃO: ARTIGO

How to promote the pragmatic awareness and avoid the fossilization phenomenon through a role play activity in English as a foreign language classes

Como promover a consciência pragmática e evitar o fenômeno da fossilização por meio de atividade de dramatização nas aulas de inglês como língua estrangeira

Actividad social y desencapsulación del aprendizaje bajo la perspectiva multimodal en la enseñanza de la lengua inglesa

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Abstract: Many people, even after spending a lifetime studying a foreign language are prone to get stuck in a certain grammatical domain no matter the efforts made and the amount of the target language input offered in the classroom. Unfortunately, the great majority who pursues their dreams to be the closest possible to a native-like speaker, the lack of ability to analyze and synthesize linguistic elements makes them persist in the same errors, establishing a phenomenon known as Fossilization in their learning process. In fact, Fossilization can occur in all learning process levels: phonological, grammatical, lexical and pragmatic and the errors made seem to be similar from individual to individual. In an attempt to avoid this Fossilization process concerning the pragmatically ability to communicate, this article aims to present a suggestion of a role-play activity involving strategies to enhance pragmatic awareness related to politeness theory.

Keywords: pragmatic awareness, politeness theory, fossilization phenomenon, role play activity

Resumo: Mesmo após dedicarem uma vida inteira estudando uma língua estrangeira para adquirir a tão sonhada fluência, muitas pessoas estão sujeitas a esbarrar em determinado conteúdo gramatical e não avançar, apesar dos esforços e da quantidade de *input* linguístico oferecido na sala de aula. Infelizmente, para a grande maioria que persiste no desejo de falar igual a um nativo de L2, a falta de habilidade em analisar e sintetizar os elementos linguísticos faz com que persistam nos mesmos erros, estabelecendo um fenômeno chamado Fossilização no processo de aprendizagem. A Fossilização pode ocorrer em qualquer nível do processo de aprendizagem e os erros cometidos pelos estudantes parecem ser similares de indivíduo para indivíduo. No intuito de evitar esse processo no que tange à habilidade de se comunicar pragmaticamente, este artigo tem, por objetivo, sugerir uma atividade de dramatização envolvendo estratégias que promovam a consciência pragmática da teoria da polidez.

Palavras-chave: consciência pragmática, teoria da polidez, fenômeno da fossilização, atividade de dramatização

During their experience in EFL teaching, teachers have seen students face all sorts of difficulties in their learning process. Making mistakes while learning a foreign language is obviously prone to happen along the way, and so is the practicing encouragement, the L2 input, the constant feedback given in class. Despite all the improving opportunities,



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unfortunately many of these learners, usually adults, will never manage to overcome those obstacles and reach the level of competence they intend to - an aspiration apparently reserved for children who seem to acquire the target language at very early age, some even achieving a native-like proficiency straightforwardly. Unfortunately, for the great majority who keeps pursuing their dreams to be quite fluent in L2, the lack of ability to analyze and synthesize linguistic elements makes them persist in the same errors, establishing a phenomenon known as Fossilization in their learning process.

Many researchers have already written about Fossilization after Selinker (1972) had first proposed its concept. The author defends the term as being a fundamental contribution of second language acquisition (SLA) and defines it as the cessation of grammatical development in SLA. According to Han (2009), studies related to Fossilization show that the phenomenon is displayed selectively, i.e., one can get stuck in a certain grammatical domain no matter the efforts done and the amount of the target language input to master its skills and, at the same time, continue to acquire other complex structures of English. For the researcher (2013, p. 133), Fossilization is "a founding concept in second language acquisition (SLA) research". Tarone (1994) says that fossilization represents the last outcome of the L2 learning. Nakuma (1998, p. 247) sees Fossilization as a "term used generally to denote what appears to be a state of permanent failure on the part of an L2 learner to acquire a given feature of the target language." It is noteworthy that Fossilization can occur in all learning process levels: phonological, grammatical, lexical and pragmatic and, according to most teachers' point of view, the errors seem to be similar from individual to individual.

In terms of Phonological fossilization, Brazilian students tend to face some difficulties in recognizing the [l] and [ɫ] sounds in English simply because they do not exist in their native tongue. Therefore, instead of pronouncing the word *thank* as [æŋk], they usually produce [tæŋk] or [sæŋk], affected by their L1 phonological alphabetic

system. Another example can be observed in the pronunciation of the final *-ed* of the simple past regular verbs, in which the three different possible forms - [t], [d], [ɪd] - have been constantly neglected by learners.

Morphological fossilization can be observed in cases where errors are repeatedly made, for instance, when Brazilian pupils forget to add the final *-s* in the third person singular verbs in the simple present tense form, and say sentences such as *He usually wake up at 7 o'clock*. Some difficulties can be seen in the appropriate use of the plural forms as well. In Portuguese language grammatical rules, adjectives must agree with the nouns they are referred to so if the noun is in the plural form, the adjective also has to be in the plural. The same happens to gender; if the noun is masculine, the adjective attached to it must be in the masculine, too. The same does not occur in the English language, in which adjectives are invariable; they are not assigned to noun's number and gender. These rules transfers lead some Brazilian L2 learners to produce sentences like *The girls are beautifuls*. Plurals of nouns also seem to be a challenge since in L1 most of the words end in *-s*: *mulheres, pessoas, crianças*, differently from the English target language, when very common words - *women, people, children* - need to be dealt in quite early ages of the learning process.

One of the main struggles against Syntactic fossilization refers to the differences in use of the Simple Past and Present Perfect forms. Whereas the former structure is familiar to our mother tongue because of its similarity to the L1 structure, the same does not happen to the latter, and since the Present Perfect Tense represents one of the most difficult structures to be learned, they are frequently chosen instinctively. Sentences like *I have broken my arm* would not make sense in L1 literal translation since it gives the idea of a repeatedly event in Portuguese: *Eu tenho quebrado o braço*.

Semantic fossilization is characterized by the wrong use of language forms that exist in learners' L1 in the attempt to make themselves understood,

not realizing that they do not have the same meaning as in L2 context. It usually happens when they do literal translation of their mother tongue into the target one. This is why Brazilian students misuse the verb *have* when they intend to ask a person's age: *How old do you have?* instead of *How old are you?* In class, it is common to see pupils selecting their target language choices from their own thinking set, transferring slangs and idiomatic expressions used in L1 literally into the L2, in their attempt to communicate.

Semantic fossilization and Pragmatic fossilization are closely connected, since both semantics and pragmatics involve the study of the meaning of words and their use within sentences. The main difference between them is that pragmatics gives emphasis to the context and situations in which these sentences are being used. Whenever the speaker's pragmatic force fails during the communication process, we can say that this is a matter of pragmatic failure. If the failure remains constant, it might be fossilized. Pragmatic failure, the subject of this article, was defined by Thomas (1983, p. 81) as being the "inability to understand what is meant by what is said" and can be of two sources: (a) pragmalinguistics failure, the one resultant from the speaker's disagreement towards the linguistic habits of the native speaker; this is observed, for instance, when the student misunderstands his teacher's request: *Daniel, would you like to answer this question?* and then wrongly replies: *No, I wouldn't!*; (b) sociopragmatic failure, when what the nonnative speaker says is not in accordance to the customs and social culture of the native speaker. An example of that can be seen when Brazilian students say: *Please, teacher!* not realizing that it is uncommon to call a person by his/ her occupation. The correct way would be to address the educator by Mr/Mrs, since to call them by their first name may sound plain awkward.

The aim of this work is to present some suggestions of activities to be done in the EFL classes as an attempt to elicit in the students the pragmatic awareness, avoid the pragmatic failures and the consequent pragmatic fossilization. Since

pragmatics embraces the study of meaning in the interactional context, it is common to hear curious and funny stories of misunderstandings from speakers of a foreign language.

An example of these interesting testimonies we get in touch with while searching for theories is the one reported by Schmidt (Schmidt & Frota, 1986). He once pointed out that he used to face some difficulties in ending telephone conversations during his experience as a learner of Portuguese in Brazil. Although he knew that *tchau* (bye, in Portuguese) would be the perfect move for both parties, he could never manage the exact moment to say that, so he kept waiting for the person on the other line to be the first one to end up the call. As time went by, though, he observed that in many cases people used *então tá* (something similar to *so then*) as a signal for the conversation to end. And then he also started using it as a sort of "preclosing formula" which, he says, worked successfully. Later, he started asking native speakers how they did to close telephone conversations and they did not know exactly, but when he asked if *então tá* could work, they realized that yes, it was really the right way to do that. In fact, they were not able to explain why that choice was the most suitable; they only "felt" it was the right one to be picked up. And this is how things work in each culture. Even in our native environment, we are not aware of our pragmatic competences. From very early age, we are simply taught to say *thank you* and greet people as a sign of respect and good manners and so is burping in public in China, where – differently from western culture – the act is considered an indicator to the host that the meal has been appreciated. When we are inside and absorbed by our cultural habits, it is sometimes complex – especially if we are not a linguistics expert – to distance ourselves from what everybody around does and start questioning the reasons of our acts. The outsider is the one who questions!

Literature reports on several studies concerning pragmatic competence. (Schmidt, 1983, 1984; Kasper, 1997; Do'nyei, 1997; Bardovi-Harling, 1999 (apud Kasper, 2001) have demonstrated that the

level of grammatical proficiency a student achieves in the target language does not necessarily correspond to his/her pragmatic development. Even advanced learners who have such a high proficiency in grammar may misunderstand certain pragmatic intentions such as the ones related to politeness values, for example. Thus, the consequences of committing pragmatic failures might be potentially worse than making any - sometimes unnoticeable - grammatical error. This is due to the fact that pragmatic faults usually involve misunderstandings, like the false impression of a person sounding rude to somebody, for example.

On the other hand, the improvement in one's speaking skills seems to be more perceptible when pragmatic awareness has finally taken place. And now here comes another story. Richard Schmidt (1983, 1984) describes the case of Wes, a Japanese learner of English whose communicative competence level made up for his low performance of grammar proficiency. Schmidt reports the episode once happened in a movie theater when Wes asked him if he was feeling comfortable on his seat. As a native speaker of English, Schmidt did not realize at first that the student's question was, in fact, an indirect signal of his intention to change places with him. Indeed, Schmidt did not perceive that a non-native with a relatively low level of English proficiency would be able to succeed pragmatically.

What might politeness encompass?

Alongside the studies in the field of pragmatics, some definitions have been offered by theorists to politeness and impoliteness, most of them concerning the scientific abstracted bias of the terms. According to Lakoff (1975, p. 64), "politeness is developed by societies in order to reduce friction in personal interaction"; Brown and Levinson (1978, p. 13) say that "politeness is a complex system for softening face threats"; Ide (1989, p. 22) affirms that politeness "is language associated with smooth communication". Arndt and Janney (1985, p. 282) conceptualize politeness as "interpersonal supportiveness". Terkourafi

(2008) says that impoliteness has taken place whenever the expression chosen by the speaker is not conventionalized relative to the occurrence context.

Culpeper et al. (2003, p. 1546) refer to impoliteness as being "[...] communicative strategies designed to attack face, and thereby cause social conflict and disharmony". Cutting (2008) observes that, in terms of pragmatics, being polite goes beyond the social rules of behavior, the courtesy of letting someone go first through a door; it refers to the linguistic choices made in language usage, capable of showing a friendly attitude towards people. According to O'Keefe et al. (2011), deciding what constitutes polite language use and what is not has been object of great studies among researchers in contemporary linguistics and this fact probably explains why improving pragmatic competence might be so challenging for most learners. As Nakajima (1997, p. 50) points out, "pragmatic competence cannot be clearly judged as correct or incorrect according to prescriptive rules".

Culpeper (2011) says that politeness can show up in several forms, keenly influenced by culture. He illustrates the situation in which someone has been invited to a British dinner. In that particular context, he affirms, politeness is expected to be expressed in three ways: saying *thank you* when having something passed - the salt, for example -, praising the cook on the food served, and categorically not burping. By the way, *thank you* has been one of the first expressions taught to a child in every British family. But when the infant grows up, things become more and more complex in the pragmatic world and praising the cook on the food may turn into such a tricky adventure. According to the author, if the cook simply accepts the compliment, he/she may sound snob. On the contrary - if he/she doesn't accept it - the person who praised might be offended. In the attempt to find a balance between these two positions, Culpeper (2011) suggests a response like *it's kind of you*. In this way, the compliment then becomes partly due to the value of the food and partly directed to the kindness of the person who praised the cook. Culpeper (2011) adds that,

in regard of the cultural aspect of politeness, it is worth saying that in some cultures, like on the Indian subcontinent, burping at the dinner table may not sound rude, but at most, in our common sense, eccentric. Contrary to western popular custom, a sonorous burp can simply express a welcome sign of food appreciation.

Nowadays it is impossible to talk about politeness without mentioning Brown and Levinson's theory which will be briefly explored in the next section.

Brown and Levinson's politeness theory

The concept of face was indeed introduced in the literature by Goffman (1955, p. 213), who defined it as the "social value a person effectively claims for himself." Brown and Levinson developed the notion of the term and, according to them (1987), each individual needs to be socially appreciated. In other words, everybody wants to have their self-image preserved (positive face) and, together with the positive face, there is one's desire to make their own decisions freely and to impose themselves upon varied circumstances (negative face).

Politeness theory relies on the constant effort to keep the balance between positive and negative face in interpersonal interactions and any communicational moves that might threaten this negotiation process, called **Face Threatening Acts (FTA)**, are avoided at any cost. There seems to be a deal between all participants in the conversation to co-operate in this common goal that is to support each other's face. FTAs occur regularly in everyday interaction. They can be softened through the use of positive politeness resources like *please*, when trying to attract the person's interest or through the use of negative politeness, such as *I see this might sound like terrible imposition* in the attempt to give the interlocutor some space and make him comfortable in his own position.

Brown and Levinson (1987) classified the strategies used to avoid or, at least, to soften the face threatening acts into different categories, which will be discussed below.

Strategies to avoid/soften Face Threatening Acts (FTA)

We are used to committing FTAs several times in our day-to-day interaction and creating situations that threaten the recipient's face. In fact, it is impossible to establish a conversation without threatening one's face or being face threatened. Therefore, all we need is to make use of strategies that show our conversational partner that we consider his/her point of view and we will do our best not to ruin the self-image this person claims for him/herself while we present our opposite ideas. In simple words, we have to secure our partner that we respect his arguments *despite ours*.

According to Brown and Levinson (1987 [1978], p. 64), there are five possible communicative choices performed by a speaker to soften FTAs: bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, off record, and finally not to perform the FTA and they are represented by the following diagram.

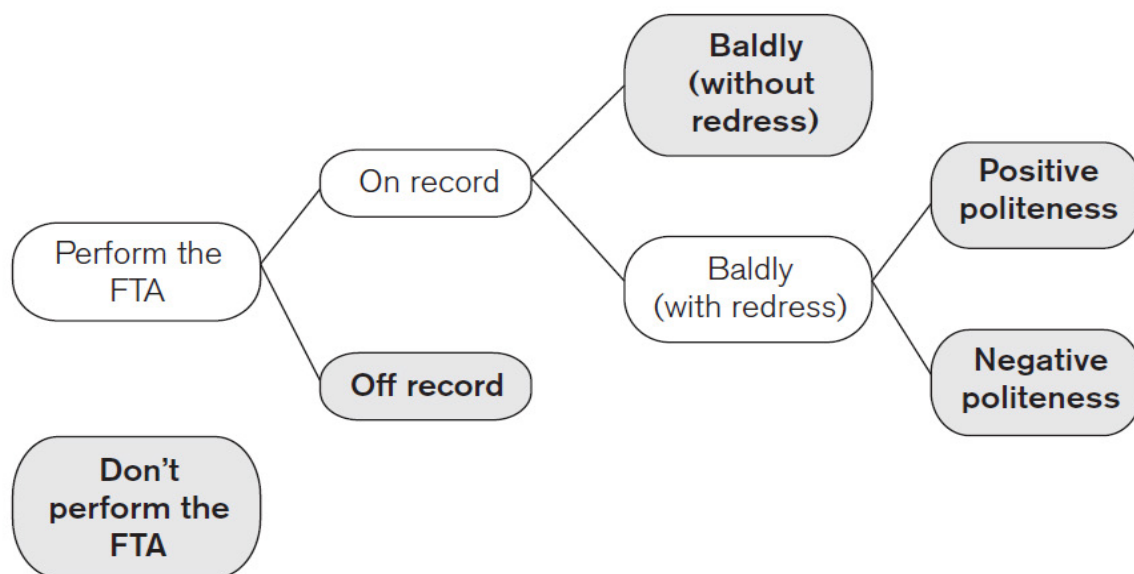


Figure 1 – Brown and Levinson’s strategies for performing FTAs.

Source: Adapted from O’KEEFFE, CLANCY, ADOLPHS, 2011. p. 65.

To illustrate each possible strategy showed in the graphic, suppose a hypothetical example created from the text **Life on International Space Station**, whose imaginary situations will base the suggested activity to be presented further. Considering a dialog between two veteran astronauts with divergent ideas: *astronaut 1*, with a higher hierarchical rank and *astronaut 2*, his advisor. Both are finishing their mission in the space station and while *astronaut 1* has been already missing the work and life routine there, *astronaut 2* is fed up after spending six months on space and cannot wait to come back home. From the present context, we know that if *astronaut 2* simply says the truth about his willing to leave the station, he may be criticizing his colleague’s face and his aim to be approved of. Criticism is prone to be the face threatening act (FTA) observed in conversation between *astronaut 1* to *astronaut 2*. In fact, *astronaut 1*’s question *Would you like to stay longer in the station?* represents a negative face threat to *astronaut 2*, who would rather remain silent towards the unwelcomed imposition. According to Brown and Levinson, there are four possible strategies to be followed in the same episode and they are going to be detailed below from the least polite to the most.

Bald on the record without redress

In a way to respond baldly on record to the question *Would you like to stay longer in the space station?* *astronaut 2* may say something like: *Don’t be ridiculous! All I want now is to go back home!* By doing that, he will be clear and direct enough, not caring about preserving *astronaut 1*’s face. This choice would obviously be quite inappropriate considering the hierarchical difference between them.

Bald on the record with the redress

The term “on the record with redress” still encompasses the directiveness of the act, as in “bald on the record”, but now some approaches are followed by the conversational participants to minimize the social gap between them in the attempt to avoid face threats. Using in-group identity markers, finding common ground, giving or asking reasons, and assuming or asserting reciprocity are some ways suggested by Brown and Levinson (1978) to guarantee face worth. Sentences such as *I’m sorry, I would love to stay longer at the space station but I miss my family so much!* or *I would rather give this opportunity to someone else* function perfectly well as positive politeness strategies for the situation given. In an informal circumstance, an utterance such as: *Well,*

I love the place, but I love my family more! would be possible as well, but it is not suitable here.

Positive politeness is redress to the addressee's positive face, his perennial desire that his wants (or the actions/ acquisitions/ values resulting from them) should be thought of as desirable. Redress consists in partially satisfying that desire by communicating that one's own wants (or some of them) are in some respects similar to the addressee's wants. (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 101)

However, there are moments in which, throughout communication, one of the participants is not interested in choosing the "baldly with redress positive politeness" strategy to perform the FTA. Instead, he/she prefers to maintain a distant and formal posture towards the hearer and, in order to avoid sounding too bossy, imperative requests are then changed by conventionally indirect utterances. These pragmalinguistic mechanisms, together with the use of hedges – *It is widely known that...; One possible explanation is...* – are just some of the ways to avoid threatening negative face. O'Keeffe et al. (2011) point out that negative politeness is more evident in formal conversations between people in hierarchical organizations and observe that, besides changing imperative forms for conventionally indirect sentences due to a less demanding form, the use of *would*, combined with *by any chance* gives the impression of a distant and pessimistic situation, as if the expected answer could be somehow negative. An example of a "baldly with redress negative politeness" could be *astronaut 1's* proposal: *Would you by any chance like to stay longer in the international space station?* is the use of negative politeness strategies like being indirect, being pessimistic and minimizing the imposition makes *astronaut 1's* negative face remains protected, as desired.

Summarizing, positive politeness means the attempt to lower the threat to positive face, reassuring that the other person's face is worth despite the inevitable FTA whereas negative politeness refers to redress the threat to negative face, showing him/ her that his/her desire to be left alone has been respected and understood.

Off-record

Another way described by Brown and Levinson (1987) to soften face threatening acts is to perform the FTAs "off record". In general, off-record politeness can be expressed in basically two main ways. In the first case, the speakers can invite conversational implicatures, strategies such as giving hints, clues of association, presupposition; using tautologies or contradictions, metaphors, rhetorical questions. In the second case, acting vaguely or ambiguously may be a good strategy for the speaker, who may also over-generalize and be incomplete, using ellipsis, for instance.

Turning to our example, if *astronaut 1* chose this strategy, he would probably not be explicit nor direct in his reply and might have inferred his disagreement: *Oh, but we were supposed to stay in the space station for only 6 months, right?* Since both participants are not close enough to each other to establish the desirable affective function, being humorous at this point of conversation might evoke a relationship of familiarity between them. In fact, it is culturally and pragmatically expected that both participants understand the persuasive purpose of the rhetorical question used. Besides, the act of criticizing indirectly has its vantage: due to its *plausible deniable* characteristic, in case of any confrontation in his argument, the speaker can go back anytime and argue: *But I did not say that!*

Not perform the FTA

Finally, the most polite strategy to avoid or minimize FTA is just *not performing* it, corroborating the saying that sometimes silence is the best answer. In our fictitious scenario, *astronaut 2*, towards the question *Would you like to stay longer in the international space station?* may come up with the diplomatic answer *Yes, I would!* and consequently, no positive face damage has been done.

We have seen that communication is permeated by rules and each culture has its own set of *do's* and *don'ts*. FTAs are inevitable in any discursive practices and it only takes an instant for a person to decide which strategies to use - mostly being chosen subconsciously. Based on that, many of

us wonder if pragmatic competence in L2 can be taught? Is a teacher able to prepare his/her students to deal with all sorts of situations, for instance? What activities should be used in class to enable pragmatic competence and consequently avoid fossilization? These issues will be discussed below.

Can pragmatic competence be taught?

Focusing our attention on the EFL classes again, we observe the continuing grammatical improvement during a lifelong learning of a foreign language; the period that enables the achievement of the ability to recognize lexical, syntactical, morphological and phonological features of a language, as well as the effective use of all these features to interpret, encode and decode words and sentences. Nevertheless, the same progress cannot be clearly detected in terms of pragmatic competence even though our L1 repertoire of pragmatic routines keeps growing throughout our lives. Why does the same not happen regarding the target language we are learning?

It is necessary to take into account the difficulties that some EFL face while stimulating their students to speak the target language since this group itself is also inserted in the group of people who must be aware of the social use of the L2.

Limberg (2015) says that a good way to promote pragmatic awareness is by using and showing specific examples and contexts in a way that enables students to compare speech acts in their first and second languages. Aquino (2011), on her paper *Pragmatic Competence: how can it be developed in the foreign language classroom?* advises teachers to make students aware that, even having the linguistic knowledge of the target language, they will surely face those times of doubts concerning the speakers' communicative intentions.

Garcia (2004) states that the development of language structures and pragmatic awareness may happen concomitantly but states that this fact does not ensure one's prompt ability to perform the purpose of the pragmatic competence: to use the language acquired in specific context. Washburn (2001) defends the use of situation sitcoms because

they offer varied, rich, and contextualized real-life similar models and show the consequences of violations of pragmatic standards.

According to Gabriele Kasper (1997), pragmatic competence cannot be taught. She defends that competence, whether linguistic or pragmatic, is not teachable. Instead, this is knowledge that can be possessed, developed, acquired, used or lost by learners. She (1997) defends that pragmatic knowledge accompanies the development of other abilities, such as lexical and grammatical ones and so it does not require any pedagogic intervention. Along with the study of L2, though, adult learners receive an extra amount of the pragmatic knowledge of the target language due to its universal nature and to the capacity of being transferred from the learners' own native language.

But what could EFL teachers do to make students improve their conversational competence in the classroom? As Kasper (1997) observes, communicative actions go beyond speech acts such as greeting or requesting. They encompass participation in conversation, engaging in different types of discourse and dealing with interaction in quite complex speech events as well. The author believes that, as soon as learners begin to master linguistic knowledge of the target language, their abilities to transfer the set form-function from L1 to L2 - even with some adjustments in social categorization, when necessary - will lead to the acquisition of specific pragmalinguistic understanding. But in general things do not seem to be so simple, she affirms, since learners frequently do not make use of what she calls "free ride", or rather, they do not use the just-acquired available knowledge and/or strategies to new tasks. Instead, they opt for the literal interpretation of L2 based on their knowledge of L1. Unfortunately, learners take utterances at face value rather than inferring their meanings through context interpretation and consequently, end up underusing politeness markings in the target language. Kasper (1981) points out that, though adult learners possess a great amount of pragmatic information, they do not always know how to use it properly. That's when pedagogic intervention must take place. The author emphasizes the need to make students

aware of what they already know from the target language and encourage them to put their familiar pragmatic knowledge – whose nature is universal and transferable – in contact with L2 contexts.

Having taught EFL for over 30 years, I believe that pragmatic awareness can undoubtedly be implemented in the classroom. Although this might not be the way chosen by many educators who prefer to teach grammar since it is easier to deal with rules and ready-made formulas than having to help students cope with something so broad and adventurous as pragmalinguistic issues. Besides, most English courses are guided by course books which do not always address pragmatic needs and this fault would surely demand extra efforts from the teacher to fulfill the gap. On the other hand, students tend to turn their attention to the teacher whenever he/she points out that an utterance has been used inappropriately out of the context and due to cultural implications, since anybody wants to be successful in their verbal communication process, so moments like these are considered as great opportunities to introduce politeness strategies.

The A1/A2 level course² book *Wider World American Edition*, adopted by the elementary school at Colégio Militar de Porto Alegre (CMPA) brings, on page 34, a set of grammatical activities related to the text *Life on International Space Station*. The aim of the unit is to make students improve their abilities to find specific information in an article through the reading strategy of scanning and talking about free-time activities. Before having contact with the text, they are elicited to guess if some pieces of information about it are true or false. Then, after reading and listening, students are asked to match the headings given to the text paragraphs. Subsequently, students check if they have understood the underlined phrases from the text, by doing an exercise in which they have to choose, from a set of three options, the most appropriate word to complete the specific sentence, for example: *How often do you watch TV or movies online?; I usually browse*

the internet for thirty minutes before breakfast. This kind of activity allows the students to realize that, although they are offered two other options – *look* and *see* – the most suitable verb is *watch* in the context given. The same happens to the verb *browse*: you only browse the *internet*; not the *TV* or the *radio*, the other options offered. These combinations, such as *browse + the internet* or *watch + TV* are mentioned by the book as “word friends” and, in the last activity, in pair work, students are encouraged to use them while telling the class what they and their classmates *often/ sometimes/ never* do.

Analyzing all the activities shown in the course book, we can see that none of them is indeed pragmatically oriented. Thinking about this common situation, I propose, next, an activity prepared over the same text presented in the *Reading and Vocabulary* session of the course book. It is worth saying that, by this time, the students are already familiarized with the vocabulary and structures related to the topic. The activity is designed for students whose age gap varies from 11 to 13 years old and the steps will be described as follows.

Activity: life on international space station

After exploring the text *Life on International Space Station*, students are asked to do a different activity for a change and, for that, they will have to gather in groups of three.

(1) Each group is oriented to role play a dialog in which each member acts according to the instructions given individually, as follows:

Instruction 1: You are an American astronaut who has been staying in the international space station for almost 6 months. You know you might not have another opportunity like this one and want to make the most of your stay there. You have been asked to be interviewed by a well-known TV channel. During the conversation, talk about your experience, give your own impressions about the station and the reasons why you would

² According to the Common European Framework.

like to stay longer.

Instruction 2: You are an American astronaut who has been staying in the international space station for almost 6 months. You eagerly want your mission to be accomplished soon so that you can finally go back home. You have been asked to be interviewed by a well-known TV channel. During the conversation, talk about your experience, give your own impressions about the station and the reasons why you want to leave.

Instruction 3: You are a journalist from a well-known TV channel and have been designed to interview two astronauts from the international space station. Prepare some questions to know about their work and life routine in space and their plans.

(2) They are given about 15 minutes to prepare the dialog. Ellis (2005) considers planning for challenging tasks as an essential opportunity for students to improve their performance. I see this moment as an important way to organize thoughts and put into practice contents learned in the previous activities, like the one about the "word friends".

(3) They are told about the possibility to take notes while planning but are warned not to use these notes during their performance, otherwise the dialog may turn into a reading activity and this is not the purpose here.

(4) After creating the dialog, each group has its rehearsal time. This is the most important moment of their project, since the teacher can monitor the students' performances, reminding them to pay attention at the most appropriate way – formal/ informal – by which they might address each other. How will politeness take place along the interaction, considering that their teacher is used to giving them cultural background when introducing a new topic, highlighting the pros and cons of language use?

(5) The students finally perform their dialogs to the teacher and their classmates. By this time, the earlier repetition of structures is expected to give them enough confidence and help reduce anxiety.

Using language inappropriately may have catastrophic consequences. Therefore, students should be given the opportunity to acknowledge sociocultural aspects of the language they are learning in order to develop their communicative competences so that misunderstanding, embarrassment, and insults could be easily avoided with a minimum of awareness of the sociocultural norms of the L2.

EFL teachers have been constantly striving against the lack of students' motivation and engagement in the classroom. As an attempt to make their pupils master their knowledge at speaking, listening, reading, and writing, all efforts are then directed to grammatical knowledge and the improvement of phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics. Unfortunately, little approach is given to pragmalinguistic skills and so pragmatic aspects of the foreign language seem to enter in hibernation mode and simply stop following the developmental process speed the other linguistic abilities do. It is known that the lack of pragmatic awareness leads to communication breakdown and its disuse may result in learning stagnation. Thus, it is essential to understand the relationship between English proficiency and the pragmatic fossilization and to highlight the importance of pedagogical intervention and the use of different teaching methods which encourage students to reflect on different forms of saying things according to the context of the communicative interaction.

Through a brief literature review of politeness strategies to control the effects of FTA, this article has proposed a role-play activity that brings to the classroom the opportunity to get in touch with contextualized language and to experience close to real-life situations. During their dialog preparation with the teacher as a monitor, students may get so naturally engaged in the task that will not realize they are using the target language efficiently, reducing pragmatic failures and pragmalinguistic fossilization.

References

Conclusion

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