Tetiana Maslova,
Lecturer, National Technical University of Ukraine
"Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute"

DEVELOPING PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE
FOR PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION

Key words: language, professional communication, discourse, communicative competence, pragmatic competence, pragmatics, English for Specific Purposes (ESP)

As stated in the National English for Specific Purposes (ESP) Curriculum of 2005, the practical aim of ESP teaching and learning is to develop learners' general and professionally oriented communicative language competences, thus allowing them to communicate effectively within academic and professional environments [1: 33]. In the CEFR communicative language competence is defined as the one comprising linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic components [1: 35; 2: 13; 3: 66-70]. Linguistic competence includes lexical, grammatical, semantic, phonological, orthographic and orthoepic competences, all of these being typically the objectives of language lessons to teach. Socio-cultural competence involves developing the skills of understanding and interpreting different aspects of culture and language behaviour, and it is often the focus of language lessons designed to study the social dimension of language use. Pragmatic competence is sometimes regarded as integral part of socio-cultural competence since they both are to provide intercultural insights into the communication [4], and it seldom takes much space, if any, in the language lesson plans. However, it can be viewed as independent component of communicative competence which primarily implies the knowledge of the

principles according to which utterances and discourses are organized, structured and arranged (discourse competence), used to perform specific communicative functions (functional competence), and sequenced to follow interactional and transactional schemata (design competence) [2: 123; 4: 7]. In terms of today's globalization and technology advancement, which makes English the language of workplace in different industries, it is pragmatic competence that has been identified as a crucial aspect of communicative language ability as pragmatic infelicities have been reported to be a major cause of communication breakdown in workplace environments [4; 5; 6]. Even advanced learners of English do not seem to be well-prepared for pragmatic challenges in the English-medium workplace. What is worse, unlike grammatical or other mistakes in language accuracy, normally perceived as the speaker's linguistic deficiencies in a target language, failures in pragmatic appropriateness tend to be attributed to his/her unfriendly personality or rude manners, and result into subconscious negative impressions of the speaker [4: 20-23; 6: 65]. For this reason, it is important to attend learning pragmatics, especially in ESP classes, and the present research tends to review the relevant theories and tools to deal with the development of pragmatic competence.

Pragmatics is the study of language from the point of view of language users, whose linguistic choices are affected by the socio-cultural context of interaction, and the effects to be made on other participants of the communication. In this respect, pragmatic phenomena differ widely, ranging from speech acts and functions over register, formality and politeness to lexis, deixis, and genre. Thus, pragmatic competence is actually closely interrelated with semantic and grammatical knowledge of using linguistic resources (pragmalinguistics), on the one hand, and with the rules and conventions of culturally and socially appropriate language use (sociopragmatics), on the other hand [6: 63-64]. It follows that teaching pragmatics should start at the earliest stage of language learning process and continue on and on, raising the pragmatic awareness of the contextual use of language [3], in other words, of the immediate features of the communicative situation, such as time, location, cultural settings, social roles of participants, preceding discourse etc.

As a matter of fact, there are two basic guidelines to teach pragmatics, namely to expose learners to pragmalinguistic and socio-pragmatic forms (e.g. of apologies, requests, offers, refuses, hedges) naturally occurring in the authentic language samples with real-life contexts, and to apply the approach of "input-interaction-output", which suggests that learners should interact, analyse and interpret the language samples as well as socio-cultural information involved in order to make general conclusions about the nature of pragmatic meanings and functions before they can practise knowledge they have acquired to perform task-based activities (co)constructing discourse of the same or different socio-cultural contexts [3: 69-70; 6: 70].

A number of studies have found out that explicit pragmatic instruction is more effective than implicit teaching, or at least these two should be combined [6: 66-67] so that in addition to language development tasks the interaction stage should also contain a "lecture component" to help learners comprehend pragmatic phenomena and adapt their linguistic choices to a particular communicative situation.

Audiovisual media and linguistic corpora may be employed as authentic materials for teaching pragmatics, providing learners with enough empirical evidence of speech acts, communicative intentions, registers, cultural differences. In general, the sources for pragmatic input can be found in television, radio, and podcast talks, research papers, specialist magazines, websites etc. [4: 20; 8: 142].

110

As recent social and technological changes have greatly impacted language use in the workplace, it is essential to come up with up-to-date and relevant samples of language use in professional communication contexts. Today, being the intersection of ESP practice and language socialization, professional discourse represents complex and dynamic settings that involve different number of participants of communicative events: single person communicative events (individual writing and reading), two-person communicative events (face to face interaction, letter exchange, e-mails, chat), and group communicative events (small group meetings, collaborative writing, presentations, discussions, large group meetings, debates) [7: 7]. In addition, most of the communication is carried out at a distance, that is via telephone, internet, video, mail, and by means of telecommunication (e.g. in the service industries) [4: 21]. As for the genres across a broad variety of professional and business contexts, the most common ones are e-mails, business letters, proposals, contracts, reports, formal and informal meetings, telephone conversations and messaging, social talks, speeches at conferences, seminars, and presentations.

V. Timpe Laughlin et al. (2015) propose the tasks to promote pragmatic awareness of differences between requests for permission in formal and informal meetings in the workplace, which can serve as a good example of the pragmatics-focused ESP lesson. The learners consider different request strategies in the two scenarios, the first one showing the meeting with the supervisor in the office, and the other with a co-worker during the informal talk. Next, a video lecture presents more details on the speech act of formal and informal requests for permission, enabling the learners to explore further socio-cultural factors that could have effect on the specific pragmatic strategy, such as the age of and power relations between speakers. On doing exercises to practise using lexis, grammar and pronunciation of correct, model permission requests, the learners are provided with new situations in the role-play games, in which they have the opportunity to produce appropriate responses on their own. In the end, the learners should be able to reflect upon his/her output and upon the pragmatic knowledge gain [4: 26-27].

In a similar manner, one can deal with numerous other topics when designing ESP lessons to teach norms and rules that govern the appropriate use of English in the specific professional context: for example, when writing e-mails with regard to such pragmatic phenomena as register, style, and genre, or dealing with pragmalinguistic features, that is content, amount, and tone, of small talks in the workplace, and so on.

Once again, although it might seem to be the matter of learning vocabulary, this is not the case. Advanced levels of lexical and grammatical competence do not guarantee the learners to possess pragmatic competence; what they say may be grammatically correct, but may not be pragmatically acceptable. Regardless of their native language background or language proficiency ESP learners must be aware of the target language pragmatic expressions and interpretations that constitute cross-cultural and/or cross-linguistic difficulties.

Gaining pragmatic competence is crucial for developing communicative competence, cultural awareness and effective engagement in professional contexts. A growing cooperation between countries in the fields of science, education, economics, culture, and politics has recently revealed that non-native employees are likely to lack the knowledge of pragmatic and discourse norms appropriate for global workplace participation. Thus, it must be a priority for ESP practitioners to develop explicit instructions and authentic materials to focus on teaching pragmatics of the English language, and raise the pragmatic awareness of professional communication aspects.

References:

1. Програма з англійської мови для професійного спілкування. Колектив авторів: Г.Є.Бакаєва, О.А.Борисенко, І.І.Зуєнок, В.О.Іваніщева, Л.Й.Клименко, Т.І.Козимирська, С.І.Кострицька, Т.І.Скрипник, Н.Ю.Тодорова, А.О.Ходцева. – К.: Ленвіт, 2005 – 119 с.

2. Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment. Council of Europe. – Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. – 260p.

3. Маслова, Т. Б. Прагматична складова іншомовної компетентності / Т. Б. Маслова // Іншомовна освіта педагога: виклики, проблеми, перспективи [Текст] : матеріали Міжнар. науково-практ. конф., 5 листопада 2015 р. / Київський університет імені Бориса Грінченка, Гуманітарний інститут. – Київ : Київ. ун-т імені Бориса Грінченка, 2015. – С.66-71.

4. Timpe-Laughlin, V., Wain, J., Schmidgall, J. Defining and operationalizing the construct of pragmatic competence: Review and recommendations / Veronika Timpe Laughlin, Jennifer Wain, Jonathan Schmidgall // ETS Research Reports. – Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service, 2015. – 45p.

5. Riddiford, N., Joe, A. Tracking the Development of Sociopragmatic Skills / Nicky Riddiford, Angela Joe // TESOL Quarterly, 2010. – Issue 44. – p.195–205.

6. Ionel, S. Pragmatic competence – essential to developing business students' communication skills / Simona Ionel // Youth on the move. Teaching languages for international study and career-building. Bucharest, 13-14 May 2011. – p.61-73.

7. Gunnarsson, B.-L. Professional Discourse / Britt-Louise Gunnarsson // Continuum, 2009. – 275p.

8. Gesuato, S., Bianchi, F., Cheng, W. Teaching, learning and investigating pragmatics : principles, methods and practices / Sara Gesuato, Francesca Bianchi, Winnie Cheng // Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015. – 565.