

The Relation Between Pragmatic Awareness and Realization of Requests Among Non-Native English Instructors

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Abstract

Language acquisition requires the learners to develop their pragmatic competence so that they are able to comprehend and produce the language as a mean of conveying meaning that is understandable by certain strategy or manner. Foreign language learners with lack of pragmatic awareness realized inappropriate target language. This study, therefore, was aimed to describe the English instructors' pragmatic awareness and realization in requests, and how the awareness relates to the realization. The study used a descriptive qualitative in order to describe and elaborate the pragmatic awareness and realization of request speech acts among the 12 representations of non-native English instructors studying English Education in Graduate Program of State University of Semarang. Multiple Discourse Completion Task (MDCT) and role play were used in collecting data. Triangulation that included English native speaker's analysis was also used in order to enhance the validity of the data. The result of the study shows that the participants' awareness was high in the term of power relation but lower in ranking of imposition and social distance. Power relation was the social factor that mostly influenced the choices of request strategies in the oral production of requests. It is, therefore, concluded that there is causal relation between pragmatic awareness and its realization.

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INTRODUCTION

In acquiring language, the learners are supposed to comprehend and produce the language as a mean of conveying meaning that is understandable by certain strategy or manner. Thus, having pragmatic knowledge enables the language users to use language in effective way as a mean of achieving the goal of communication that is delivering message, idea, or thought to the hearer or the reader. As pragmatic knowledge being included in the communicative competence, pragmatic competence includes the ability of analyzing language in a conscious manner. It can be concluded that in acquiring language, the learners are supposed to comprehend and produce the language as a mean of conveying meaning that is understandable by the usage of the linguistic systems and the use of certain strategy or manner. It is clear to assume that the foreign language learners will be required to be able to use the language to communicate which is defined as having communicative competence by developing their pragmatic knowledge. When the learners have an oral communication that involves many spontaneous utterances, they have to aware of the language choice in order to convey the meaning clearly and understandable.

Though the curricula have been proclaimed to focus on the communicative competence, the teachers and the teaching instruments are found to be oriented to the structure. It can be seen by the existence of National English examination which seems to be designed to assess the students' linguistic competence such as grammar, syntax instead of pragmatics. The phenomenon has happened as a result of this kind of examination, the students appear to merely focus on their linguistic knowledge instead of pragmatic knowledge so that their communicative competence has not reached the expectation in which they have to be able to apply their knowledge in spoken English. Not to mention, the Indonesian students who are able to pass the Secondary and Senior Secondary English examination cannot perform

their spoken English in real communication where the required situation does exist. It is issued that the lexical and grammatical knowledge had been extensively developed, but the knowledge was often unable to be applied by the learners in their real communication because of their limited pragmatic knowledge (Siddiqui, 2014: 118).

Misunderstanding which is caused by inappropriate language use influences the communication happening between the speaker and hearer. Therefore, it is important to maintain pragmatic awareness in order to make the effective communication. The way the learners perform their request has direct influence towards the hearers' act. Most of the studies of request are found to use written response instead of oral response. When the oral communication gives the language users short time to think of what they are going to say, the results of written and oral tasks probably give different description.

As stated earlier, in acquiring foreign language which in this case is English, the learners need to extensively develop their pragmatic knowledge. Indonesian government has tried to developed the English teachers as the facilitators by redesigning the English curricula that exposes the teachers to pay more attention to the use of English as a mean of communication, which then it theoretically requires them to acquire pragmatic knowledge. English teachers are supposed to integrate the grammar principles into communicative framework. Hence, without leaving the importance of using correct grammar, the English teachers need to facilitate their students to learn pragmatic so that it enables the students to use the language appropriately. Considering the curricula that are designed for the junior and senior secondary school, the universities in Indonesia which produce English teacher candidates are supposed to pay attention to the goal of the curricula. In order to gain the communicative competence, the candidates need to improve their pragmatic competence. Once, Yuan (2012: 9) stated that 'pragmatic

awareness could help improve pragmatic competence and ensure that fewer instances of pragmatics failures arise'. The Indonesian government probably has also realized that in acquiring language, the learners need to have communicative competence so that the 2013 still focuses on communicative approach. Then, the hypothesis arises whether the non-native English instructors in Indonesia have enough competence to fulfill the goal of learning in Indonesia or not, and whether they have realized that they have to apply the communication approach in their teaching and learning as has been designed in the English curricula in Indonesia. Thus, in advance, the researcher examines the English instructors' pragmatic awareness and realization of request speech act as foreign language learners in a university, and the possible relation between the awareness and realization of the speech act.

METHODS

In order to describe the case in detail, this study applied qualitative approach. The design of the study is a descriptive qualitative which allows the researcher to describe and elaborate the pragmatic awareness and realization of request speech act among non-native English instructors. The descriptive qualitative is frequently applied by using the technique of searching, collecting, classifying, analyzing the data and drawing conclusion. Interpretation was used in this study in order to perform qualitative data analysis. MDCT and role play were applied as instruments used in order to collect the data. The interpretation of the gathered data was conducted by adapting several steps that included the process of (1) coding, (2) code categorizing, (3) identifying, and (4) developing some general statements. In designing this qualitative study, triangulation was used to deal with its validity threats. Triangulation was applied in this study by providing three English native speakers to ensure that this study is rich, comprehensive and well-developed.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The awareness of non-native English instructors in requests

47.5% that represents the average percentage of the non-native English instructors' awareness towards request speech act can be said as a few numbers of awareness. In addition, their awareness was found to be general because they could not notice the variation of request expressions that English native speakers used. This finding supports the result of the study that was conducted by Ekin and Damar (2013: 185) towards English teacher trainees. The finding concluded that the participants of the study had pragmatic awareness which was general and was mostly on theoretical knowledge so that they were not able to perform well in their application of pragmatic knowledge. The non-native English instructors seemed to have the theoretical knowledge of the use of request speech act like the use of conventionally indirect request "*Can I use your pen after you fulfilled your administration?*" instead of "*Would you happen to have a spare pen?*" in situation number 20. The use of "*can I*" represents conventionally indirect request (hearer-oriented condition) ability, whereas "*would you*" represents willingness. The situation in MDCT number 20 demonstrates equal power since it does not indicate legitimate, referent either expert power. In the term of ranking imposition, the request contains "non-free good" so that it requires permission and higher indirectness. The higher level of indirectness is also needed because the requester is stranger to the hearer. "*Would you*" which is more hearer-oriented becomes the more appropriate request, and the result of the triangulation with the native speaker shows the same conclusion. In fact, there was no participant in this study chose that answer. It indicates that the non-native English instructors in this study had the knowledge of request speech act by choosing the conventionally indirect request, but their awareness was general towards the more polite expression that the

native speakers would use based on the social distance. This study's finding also indicates that the subjects' higher education and profession as English instructors in this study did not possess the higher pragmatic awareness. The non-native English instructors in this study were believed to aware of the social factors such as social distance, ranking of imposition and power relation which influence their options that ranging from direct to indirect request. But the variations of the request they chose were found to be often inaccurate. The inaccurate variations that had been made by EFL were also found by Akutsu (2012: 132) in his study towards EFL college students.

The request strategies realized by non-native English instructors

The realization of request speech act by the non-native English instructors studying in Graduate Program of State University of Semarang was based on choices from the variety of direct to indirect request.

Direct request: "*Sit next to me!*" (329)

Conventionally indirect request: "*May I borrow your proposal*" (344)

Indirect request: "*Do you have a pen?*" (389)

The variety of the realization of request speech act in this study indicates the request behavior that ranged from direct to indirect one that had been described in the cross-cultural study of speech act realization patterns (CCSARP) by Blum Kulka&Olshtain in 1984. The findings support the statement which said that the use of strategies varied based on the given situation.

The request realizations of the participants of this study show the different tendency happening in Aribi's (2012) study towards Tunisian EFL learners. Comparing to Aribi's (2012) finding in his study which came out with the result showing the use of direct by requester with higher position, in this study it shows a bit different. Direct request was realized by both requester who were having higher position and those with the same position. The result means that having the same power and

higher power has triggered the requester to use direct request like the use of "*Just 'whatsapp' me*"(325) by the requester with the same power; and "*join me*"(264) by the requester with higher power. In the term of conventionally indirect request that has been found by Aribi (2012: 112), the tendency of using indirect strategies by the speaker with lower power did not happen in this study. Indirect request in this study was used by the requesters who were having higher power. The use of conventionally indirect request also shows different result as it is compared to Aribi's. Conventionally indirect request in Aribi's study was mostly used by the requester with high ranking of imposition and far social distance, whereas in this study conventionally indirect request like in the following:

"*May I have your signature here, please?*"(3)

"*Can you bring my book?*"(73)

"*May I borrow your proposal?*"(344)

"*Can you tell me if Bu Anggani is coming?*"(410)

They had been used by most of the requester with higher and lower ranking of imposition as well as those with far and close social distance. Conventionally indirect request that was used differs in the terms of hearer or speaker oriented condition. Conventionally indirect request (speaker-based conditions) was used whenever the power was higher or the ranking of imposition was high; on the other hand, conventionally indirect request (hearer-oriented conditions) was used whenever the power was lower or the ranking of imposition was low. The different result in this study can be influenced by the different cultural background as stated by Bulm-Kulka and Olshtain (1984). Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984: 209) concluded that the differences in the use of strategies and types of request were based on the individual, situation and the given culture. It can be concluded that, although the participants in both studies were non-native English speakers, they were apparently having different cultural background since the variety of the given situation was the same.

The realization of request speech act by non-native English instructors in this study also

indicates the same result as Akutsu (2012: 132) had studied. Akutsu concluded that the participants in his study who were Japanese college students had lower proficiency in producing accurate request because they did not use English in their daily life as they had no time to correct their mistakes. Some of the realizations of request speech act in this study were also found to be inaccurate or the native speaker in the triangulation stated as inappropriate ones either because they were considered to be rude or grammatically incorrect like in the following expressions:

"I haven't bring my pen". (42)

"May be can you BBM?" (412)

The inaccuracy of the request speech act realizations was not as much as happened in Akutsu's study, but the result indicates the same reason as in Akutsu's study because the expressions that were analyzed in the triangulation done by the English native speakers were stated to be unfamiliar for the native speakers. It means that the English native speaker would not use those expressions in requesting something to someone.

The relation between the awareness and the realization of requests

The finding of this study indicates the existence of causal relation between the awareness and realization of request speech act of the non-native English instructors who were studying in Graduate program of Semarang state university. The relation was shown by the use of request strategies which was mostly influenced the power relation factor. In addition, the awareness towards the request speech act used by English native speakers was reflected in the way the participants of this study realize request speech act. The result indicates that the participants were not really aware of the English native speakers' expression in request speech act so that they used either very basic expression or inaccurate expression such as *"May be can you BBM?"* (412). Relation between awareness and the realization of request speech act was also found in some previous studies. Ekin and dammar (2013: 185) found that the awareness of

teacher trainees towards pragmatic which was general and mostly on theoretical knowledge influenced its application in their lesson plans and reflective comment. In the study conducted by Akutsu (2012: 132), the limited meta-pragmatic awareness was said to be the reason of the EFL learners' incapability in producing many variation in their request. According to Schauer (2009: 18), having pragmatic awareness influences the way the language users interpret the intended meaning from what the interlocutor is being said. Glasgow in Ekin and Damar (2013: 177) also points out that pragmatic awareness enables the language users to realize speech act appropriately. The other idea that comes from Celce-Murcia (1995: 23-24) also states that the way the learners use English as the target language to communicate within the social and cultural context is influenced by the awareness of social contextual factors which include age, status, and social distance. Their way in producing the target language is also influenced by politeness strategies and cross cultural awareness. Considering the findings, some previous studies and some related theories about the awareness and realization of request speech act among non-native English speakers, it comes to conclusion that the awareness of non-native English instructors studying in Graduate program of State University of Semarang influenced their realization of requests.

CONCLUSION

The study has found that the non-native English instructors studying in Graduate Program of State University of Semarang were aware of the features of request speech and the social factors that influence the strategies they were supposed to choose. They noticed when they had to choose the direct request as well as choose the three others including conventionally indirect request (speaker-based condition), conventionally indirect request (hearer-based condition), and indirect request. In this case, their awareness towards request speech act was not high because the number did not possess

high awareness. The awareness was high in the term of power relation factor, whereas the two others including ranking of imposition and social distance were not as high as power relation. In addition, the non-native English instructors had lack of awareness in the case of request expressions that were performed by English native speaker.

The realization of request speech act also showed the same tendency. Power relation was the social factor that mostly influenced the choices of request strategies. The most request expressions produced by the non-native English instructors were identified to be appropriate although some of them were grammatically incorrect. The inappropriateness of the realized request appeared in the English native speaker's point of view. According to the English native speaker's analysis, the inappropriate expressions of request speech act could still possibly happen or be used but it tended to be less polite. Moreover, the realized incorrect expressions were assumed to affect the appropriateness.

The relation between the awareness and realization of request speech act of the non-native English instructors studying in Graduate Program of State University of Semarang that has been found in the study shows causal relation. The awareness of request speech act appeared to be reflected in the realization of the request speech act in the role play. Based on the result of the study, it can be concluded that the instructors' awareness towards the request features, strategies and social factors were appeared to influence the way they produce request speech act. And the variations of the request expression were found to be basic expressions and reflected the lack of awareness of the request expressed by English native speakers.

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