The Role of Authentic Materials in Enhancing EFL Learners' Speech Act Performance of Requests the Case of Third Year Students, English Department, University of Batna 2

دور المواد الأصلية في تحسين براغماتية أداء الطَّلبات باللغة الإنجليزية لدى طلاب السنة الثالثة، قسم اللغة الإنجليزية، جامعة باتنة ٢

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Abstract: This study investigates the use of authentic materials as a pragmatic and semantic tool that exposes learners to the language in its natural context of use and function, and more precisely, it investigates the role of authentic materials in developing learners' way of making requests, which is one of the most frequently used speech acts in the English language. This study was conducted with the participation of 64 third year students, from the English department of Batna, University Mostefa Ben Boulaïd. The treatment was applied on one group, in comparison to a control group, a pre-test and a post-test were administered and findings prove that authentic materials help develop learners' way of performing requests in the target language.

Keywords: authentic materials; pragmatic competence; requests; EFL.

ملخص :يهدف هذا المقال الى دراسة ومعاينة الدور الذي تلعبه المواد الأصلية في تحسين وتطوير مهارة طلاب اللغة الانجليزية في تأدية الطلبات باللغة الانجليزية بطريقة براغماتية بحتة جد شبيهة

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بتلك التي يقوم بها الناطقون الاصليون للغة الانجليزية. ومنه اجريت هذه الدراسة بمشاركة 64 طالبا في السنة الثالثة من قسم اللغة الانجليزية جامعة مصطفى بن بولعيد بباتنة ، اين تم تدريس 32 طالبا بمواد اصلية عكس البقية، وتم إجراء اختبار مسبق وآخر نهائي لتثبت النتائج أن المواد الأصلية تساعد في تطوير طريقة المتعلمين في أداء الطلبات باللغة الإنجليزية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: مواد أصلية، الكفاءة البراغماتية، الطلبات، تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية

1. Introduction

The interest in teaching English as a foreign language has shifted from having to teach form rather than meaning, to equipping the learners to become more aware of the pragmatic differences between the target language and their mother tongues, in addition to being able to appropriately perform speech acts in the target language has been emphasized since the emergence of various models of communicative competence that included and highlighted pragmatic competence (Bachman, 1990; Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Canale & Swain, 1980). The focus thus is making the learners reach a native-like fluency and suggestiveness using English as a foreign language.

This kind of interaction requires a well-developed communicative competence, in which learners can establish a meaningful and pragmatically correct conversation without any break downs in meaning or interference from the mother tongue, where learners often resort to translating utterances and speech patterns from their mother tongue to the target language to convey a certain meaning and do a certain function such as apologizing, requesting, refusing and other speech acts. A fully competent EFL learner would be able to establish conversations without resorting to their mother tongue; they would be communicating efficiently and using the target language in a functional way even with natives without having any pragmatic breakdowns or translation.

This study aims at investigating how authentic materials help developing learners' ability to make requests in a pragmatically correct manner, by exposing them to authentic

situations where requests are made.   This exposure, by using authentic materials, will help create a suitable atmosphere for modals of requests to be channeled to learners. Authentic materials will help create a bridge in which such a rich genuine input is transferred to them, and by that raising their awareness of the norms of making requests in the English language**.**

1.2 Hypothesis

The exposure to authentic materials will help the learners develop their pragmatic competence and improve the way they make requests in the target language.

1.3 Research Questions

To what extent do authentic materials help develop learners' way of making requests?

2. Objectives of Teaching EFL

The focus on pragmatic competence and communicative teaching in general have been the major concern in teaching English as a foreign language since 1972 when Hymes introduced the concept of communicative competence. This has sat new objectives for teaching EFL such as having learners able to communicate effectively. This shift considered interaction as one of the most prominent parts of learning a language.

In addition, this shift is related to the field of linguistics becoming an active field of study and being taken into account in matters of use and function of language rather than form and usage Widdowson (1989). Hymes (1980) argues that it is not sufficient to use the language itself as a form but what's more important is to use the language to do something. Thus, it is clear that the objectives of TEFL transcend the form and would rather focus on developing learners' pragmatic competence, to teach the language as a social pragmatic tool to enable learners to perform social acts, and making form and meaning, rather function, serve together in one dimension, the functional dimension, where the deep and surface structure morph in one tool.

3. What's pragmatic Competence?

The term pragmatic competence has been argued and debated since the works of Hymes (1980). There are often many different definitions of this concept and it is mostly confused with

communicative competence. Pragmatic competence is 'the ability to use language appropriately in a social context' (Taguchi, 2009). In that, pragmatic competence becomes a part of communicative competence, as Canale & Swain (1980) argue that pragmatic competence is one of the constituting competences among others such as grammatical, strategic and sociolinguistic competences.

Oller (1979) on the other hand, takes another approach defining pragmatics, by referring to it as an interdisciplinary term that combines psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic factors. Oller (ibid) argues that pragmatics is about how people transmit certain feelings and how they express themselves and speech acts using the language. However, Chomsky (1981) argues that pragmatic competence and other competences must all function and find their suitable place in one system, grammatical competence for him is the knowledge of surface structures that go hand in hand with other skills and make a linguistic basis for them. He defines pragmatic competence as the ability to find functional and institutional use for the language in relation to the linguistic aims in hand. However, despite all of the definitions of pragmatics above, Crystal (2008) makes a clear and holistic definition of pragmatic competence, which goes as follows:

> Pragmatic competence entails a variety of abilities concerned with the use and interpretation of language in contexts. It includes speakers' ability to use language for different purposes—to request, to instruct, to effect change. It includes listeners' ability to get past the language and understand the speaker's real intentions, especially when these intentions are not directly conveyed in the forms—indirect requests, irony and sarcasm are some examples. It includes command of the rules by which utterances are strung together to create discourse. This apparently simple achievement to produce coherent speech itself has several components—turn- taking, cooperation, cohesion. (P.43)

This definition includes the most important components of

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pragmatic competence that make learners of EFL and native speakers alike pragmatically competence, these components are being able to use linguistic codes for many functions and speech acts, the ability to decode nonliteral forms such as sarcasm, and knowing about the rules to create a coherent course. As a consequence, mastering all of these three aspects gives the speaker or listener the ability to properly function within the terms of social and culturally bound use of the language.

4. Speech Act Theory

Morris' (1938) work the philosophy of language gave a basis for speech act theory to emerge, in addition to Austin J. L (1962) who developed Morris' work in the philosophy of language and thus giving the concept of doing things with words a new dimension rather than the basic philosophical root. Searle et al. (1980) defines speech act theory to be a theory that undertakes the assumption that the smallest unit of communication is neither a sentence nor an expression, but it is a performative act, with a certain functional use such as requests, questions, stating, thanking, and ordering. Any speaker, who performs one of these speech acts by uttering one of these utterances, however, the linguistic structure or unit, in this case a sentence, is not to be confused with the performance of the 'act' itself.

This notion was similar to that of Austin's (1962) where speech acts such as those mentioned above are considered to be 'illocutionary acts'. These acts often function in a structural manner but result in actions beyond form and such results are reflected in their effect on the hearer on a level that goes beyond comprehension such as convincing, persuading, annoying and amusing, therefore they represent the end of action or the receiving end of illocutionary acts, and they are called 'perlocutionary acts'.

Searle (1976) argues that Austin's (1962) classification is ambiguous, and does not clearly distinguish between the types of illocutionary acts. Thus, he presents five alternative 'basic' kinds of illocutionary acts as follows:

- Representatives or assertives such as claims and assertions
- Directives such as requests, instructions and suggestions

- Commissives such as promises
- Expressives such as apologies and compliments
- Declarations such as making a declaration

4.1 Requests

Following Searle's classification (1976), requests are considered to be a directive act. Trosborg (1995, p.8) defines requests as an illocutionary act that conveys the desire of the requester to perform an act that goes for his/her favor to the 'requestee'. Trosborg adds that the request can occur beyond verbal goods and services such as a request for an object or a favor in the shape of action, or it can be about verbal needs such as asking for information.

Also, needed act meant by requesting can occur post-utterance, either in the near or far future or with an immediate effect. Therefore, unlike other speech acts, requests are considered to be 'pre-event' because it occurs before the event takes place unlike apologies for complaints for example (ibid.)

In addition, requests can vary in power difference, social distance and the amount of imposition (Brown and Levinson, 1987). Thus in Taguchi's (2006) work this was mainly used to make two categories of requests, PDR-high which means requests with high level of power difference, social distance and a great amount of imposition, on the other hand PDR-low means a low level of power difference, where the speakers are almost on the same level of power with a low social distance and without imposition. The way in which requests are performed takes different strategies and different choice of words and levels of directness. The first kind PDR-high often requires a high level of politeness from the interlocutor with less power in addition to indirect ways of requesting. However, PDR-low often takes direct strategies and less polite language formulas as means to perform the desired request.

This classification offers a quite important basis to analyze the patterns and formulas in which requests are performed, it can also be of a great significance for comparative cross-sectional studies such as Taguchi (2006). However, this study adopts this

model for a different purpose, it takes it as a standard way to balance the performed speech acts under investigation. That means that in order to assess learners' request performance both varieties of requests, PDR-low and PDR-high, must be assessed. This creates a basis for the fieldwork conducted by this study and offers the needed contexts and situations to realize both kinds of requests. However, comparing which patterns of requests are more or better performed by learners falls out of the scope of this study.

5. The Treatment

Authentic materials have been heavily discussed throughout the decades and are often associated with communicative language learning. The definition of this term has been argued and many definitions have been presented, such as the realism such materials provide and expose the learners to (Morrow, 1977), the nature of task presented and the nature of assessment (Bachman, 1991), and the nature of the interaction between the participants and the authentic material presented (Widdowson, 1979).

The latter approach serves as a basis for this study as Widdowson's definition tends to be holistic and takes into account most of the element that makes language and its use authentic. Widdowson (ibid) argues that authenticity relies on a 'congruence' of the intentions of the speakers and the interpretation of the hearer which forms a mutual knowledge of conventions. Thus, only the exposure to authentic materials is not enough without knowing the conventions that produce and generate an authentic interpretation and response. In addition, he argues that the term authenticity is what learners will achieve, not what they start with.

Therefore, the same approach is adopted in this study, where authentic or genuine act of performing requests appropriately and genuinely is the terminal goal that learners will achieve. The authenticity of interpretation of conventions and learners' performance is developed and measured in a context related manner. Thus, choosing the appropriate discourse that learners will be exposed to and the situations included in the

WDCT are significant. The discourses chosen for learners were mainly situations were requests were performed such as sit-com shows, TED-Talks, e-mails, letters, political speeches and university related discourses where requests are performed. These varying discourses share many common features with the learners' interest and needs for communication, thus establishing a selection of materials and discourses and the kind of discourse that caters to learners' needs (Widdowson, 1979).

The materials selected for implementation are various in nature from listening podcasts, slams, audio-visual materials and written texts. The four skills were all taken into account to stimulate learners' pragmatic competence of making requests on many levels. The same approach was applied on the control group, where contrived materials were implemented.

6. The Fieldwork

6.1 Participants

The sample of the subjects chosen to be a part in this study consists of 64 learners of English in the department of English, University of Batna 2. The sample was originally one group, but later on learners were randomly appointed into two different groups using simple random sampling technique. The first group was labeled as a control group (CG) that did not receive the treatment and was taught in a traditional manner using contrived materials adapted to an EFL classroom where requests often take a certain static pattern that is often found in EFL textbooks. However, the second group which consisted of half of the sample (32 learners) was taught using authentic materials rich of pragmatically suited content where scenarios of making requests of different levels of formality, power difference, and social distance of imposition were exhibited and by that it was labeled as experimental group (EG).

6.2 Procedures

In addition to what has been noted above, this study was conducted using an Experimental Design, the data was collected from the two groups, control and experimental group, accordingly. This Experimental design is the simplest and most reliable with a high level of validity, thus it was adopted to show

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the effect of the treatment on the experimental group in contrast with the control group that was not administered the treatment. This design, in addition to the simple random sampling technique will give less chance for random occurring and make the study more significant and valid.

Also, two tests were administered, a pre-test and a post-test, to assess and determine that the two groups were homogeneous before conducting the experiment and exposing the EG to the treatment. Thus, the pre-test served as a background for application of the treatment and a valid basis for the results that show the size of the effect of the treatment.

6.3 Instruments

This study used a written discourse completion (WDCT) test in order to assess the learners' pragmatic ability in performing a specific speech act, which is a request performing act. WDCT were first used by Levenston and Blum (1978) as cited by Kasper and Dhal (1991). This test requires the subjects to read a description of a certain situation that vary in degree of power difference, size of imposition and social distance which tests both learners' pragmatic comprehension and production, in addition creating two types of situations. The first type is associated with power equality, with small distance low degree of imposition (PDR-low). The second type includes a greater power of the listener, large distance and high degree of imposition (PDR-high) (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Taguchi, 2006).

Therefore, the WDCTs, in both the pretest and posttest, include four situations two are PDR-high and two are PDR-low, even though the difference of ability of performance between PDR-high and PDR-low falls out of the scope of this study, the construction of a reliable and a valid test that represents both high and low PDRs would truly reflect the essence of making requests in both types. Additionally, each situation is ranked according to directness, politeness, grammar and discourse control, all measured on a scale from 0 reflecting no performance at all, to 5 which reflects excellent performance, which makes a scale for rating appropriateness (Hudson et al., 1998; Taguchi, 2006).

6.4 The Treatment

The treatment was applied to the experimental group following the experimental design explained above. The treatment, being authentic materials, made by native speakers for non-educational purposes and meant to revolve around everyday life situations in which different forms of requests of varying degrees of imposition, social distance and power were performed. During this course of Oral Expression, all of the four skills were tackled by exposing the learners to a variety of authentic materials, such as podcasts, news and current affairs videos, YouTube videos, Vice News short documentaries, written materials such as emails, letters, public requests and so on. The learners later were asked to role-play situations in which requests were performed according to the authentic formulas they extract from such authentic materials.

However, the exposure to audio-visual materials was faced with some classroom constrains in which a necessity to implement a flipped-classroom technique where learners are required to watch the videos at home and do the practice in the classroom after extracting the needed language as a homework. In addition, the control group was taught using contrived materials that tackle the four skills as well, in the same manner and had role-plays after in order to make sure that learners were taught using the same techniques but the only difference between the control group and experimental group was the implementation of authentic and contrived materials.

6.5 Data Collection

The collected data were analyzed in a descriptive and inferential statistics to test the hypothesis mentioned above, in addition, these kinds of statistics offer a simple systematic description of the data acquired. Furthermore, the significance value is estimated to be 0.05, any value that falls less than 0.05 will have significance, any values that go beyond the set value will prove lack of significance. The data, as mentioned before, were collected through a post-test and a pre-test where subjects were acquired to fill a WDCT, later on the scores, means, t-value, significance and standard deviation were counted, compared and analyzed.

7. Results and Discussion

In order to test the hypothesis provided, the means of the CG and EG achievement were compared before and after applying the treatment on the EG, in addition to measuring the effect that treatment has on learners' performance in making requests in the target language. Furthermore, the comparison of means before the treatment was administered, aims at showing how homogenous the two groups, CG and EG, are. The results obtained are in exhibited in Table 1

Pre-test Comparison between CG and EG					
	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pre-test	Control Group (CG)	32	10,53	1,626	,287
	Experimental Group (EG)	32	10,41	1,456	,257

Table 1: Obtained Pre-test Results of CG and EG

The results of the pretest show little difference of means estimated to be 0.12, and a t-value of 0.32 as it is shown in table 1. This provides a homogenous background for the implementation of the treatment and measuring its effect in a precise manner.

Post-test Comparison between CG and EG					
	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Post-test	Control Group (CG)	32	10,81	1,512	,267
	Experimental Group (EG)	32	15,44	2,828	,500

Table 2: Obtained Pre-test Results of CG and EG

An independent t-test was used to compare the means of the CG and EG in the post-test in order to measure the effect of the treatment on the EG. It is clear that the EG performed better than the CG, by comparing the means of both groups, the EG means is 4.63 higher than that of the CG. The t obtained is 8.159, which shows the existence of difference between the two means. In addition, the p-value obtained is 0.004 which falls far less than

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the significance value 0.05, which means that the results are very significant. Therefore, the results indicate that the implementation of authentic materials helps the learners to improve the way they make requests in the target language.

8. Conclusion

This study aims at highlighting the importance of the cultural context that authentic materials provide in order to successfully perform speech acts, specifically, performing requests in English. The importance of context lies in the claim that the best way to assess pragmatic ability and performance lies in the communicative situation that surrounds the subjects. Authentic materials brought the different formulas that natives use to perform requests to the attention of the learners' and WDCT provided the communicative contextual situation in which the speech act of requests was performed. Thus, the findings obtained from the data analysis factually support the hypothesis that authentic materials help learners perform speech acts accurately, and developing their pragmatic competence.

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