

DISCOURSE ANALYSIS AND PRAGMATICS IN THE TEACHING OF GRAMMAR: A NEED FOR INTEGRATION

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Abstract

This paper sets as its main purpose to bring some of those insights from discourse analysis and pragmatics into the English grammar classroom at the university in an attempt to help learners to become conscious of the processes that operate when they use language. In order to investigate the English clauses, declarative, interrogative and imperative, the two areas mentioned above are brought into a symbiotic relationship which draws upon a communicative orientation. The main leading principle is that when the grammar of language is taught for communication, clauses or any other grammatical items are held as resources for the creation and interpretation of discourse in context. The grammatical system is, thus, learnt for the sake of communicating.

More than at any other time, in the new millennium where different cultures are being brought closer to one another, we are faced with the need for an interactive mode of learning / teaching. The demand arises from a necessity to cope with world new challenges. One such a challenge is FL teaching methodology. This methodology must ensure that learners are given interactive presentations of language in use. These presentations should contain linguistic forms and structures in contexts of use so as for learners to be able to understand and produce accurate as well as appropriate utterances, hence to do something with language. It is just as much a matter of language competence to produce and understand grammatically well-formed sentences as appropriate utterances. To be contextually appropriate or in Hymes's (Hymes 1972: 277) terms to know when to speak, when not, what to talk about, with whom, when, where and in what manner is accounted for under pragmatics.

Pragmatics is the study of language in use. Studying language in use entails an ability to match the formal aspect of language with the appropriate context, that is, utterances with their situations. To deal with language from this perspective, is to account for the relationship holding between language forms and language users.

The issue is far more important in a foreign language context whereby instruction in pragmatics is expected to raise students' pragmatic awareness and makes them participate fully in the TL communication (Kasper 2001, Bardovi-Harlig 2001, Bardovi-Harlig and Mahan-Taylor 2003). Failure to do this may cause learners to miss key points in what is communicated to them or make the others misunderstand what they themselves want to communicate (Thomas 1983).

Current approaches to pragmatics in second and foreign language classrooms (Blum-Kulka, S. and Olshtain E. 1984, Blum-Kulka, S. & House, J., & Kasper, G. 1989, Bardovi-Harlig 1998, 1999, 2001, 2003; Kasper 1997, 2000, 2001; Kasper & Rose 1999, 2001) have demystified to some extent the issue of pragmatic competence within SL and FL settings, to the point that teachers and learners are attending to such areas as speech acts, reference, presupposition, implicature, shared knowledge, conversational management, co-operative principle, politeness principle, deixis and other aspects of language use for the purpose of using language appropriately.

The above areas were discounted from study within both pre-Chomskyan and Chomskyan models of language analysis. These two models marked a clear and unjustified bias in favour of the formal aspect. In fact, one of their weaknesses was the imbalance they caused between grammar and pragmatics. Tipping the balance towards the formal aspects of language caused more harm than good to both language analysis and language pedagogy. It was held that formal description and analysis made the whole story of linguistic knowledge. The consequence was that language was stripped of its social, interactive nature.

FL pedagogy was not safe from the bad effects of the form-based orientation. This is most apparent in grammar instruction.

It seems that students' performance in grammar is relatively higher in class but their capacity to use such a grammatical stock of knowledge effectively outside is far from being satisfactory. The cause may lie in the fact that learners have not been initiated in parallel to the types of competence, making up the whole of communicative competence (grammatical, discourse, sociolinguistic, pragmatic and strategic competence) (Canale and Swain 1980, Canale 1983).

As Corder (1973) puts it

'It is probably unnecessary to point out that when we are teaching a second language, we are trying to develop in the learner not just grammatical competence in the Chomskyan sense, but communicative competence. We are teaching him not only what we call "the formation rules" of the language, but in addition what Hymes has called "the speaking rules". The learner must, it is true, develop the ability to produce and understand grammatical utterances, he must be able to distinguish grammatical from ungrammatical sequences, but he must also know when to select a particular grammatical sequence, the one which is appropriate to the context, both linguistic and situational. His utterance must be situation-related. Or to put it another way, he must not only learn to talk grammatically in the target language, he must also talk coherently and to the point.' (Corder 1973: 93)

Works have been published ever since calling for a balance between formal, grammatical and socio-pragmatic aspects (Hymes 1972; Widdowson 1972, 1978, 1979, 1983; Wilkins 1976 and others). In fact, the introduction of pragmatic findings in FL pedagogy is not as old as those from various schools of linguistic inquiry. The scope of application from the former is rather insignificant if compared to the formal grammatical one.

There seems, then, to be a pressing need for a balance that gives each component-part its due importance. This importance stems from the role that each of

these components plays in building language users' communicative competence (Canale and Swain 1980, Canale 1983).

If the teaching of pragmatics aims at enabling learners to use language appropriately, it becomes imperative that teaching English as a FL at different levels of instruction, and especially at the tertiary level, be directed at this purpose.

The present paper addresses the issue of developing students' grammatical competence in parallel with a discourse and pragmatic consciousness-raising (discourse and pragmatic competence).

The goal is not to present a brand new approach to teaching either of the two types, but to provide instances where the two areas of inquiry can work cooperatively for instructional purposes. Put another way, the goal is to provide students with learning experiences that will make them feel 'in the club' of English speakers (Bardovi-Harlig & Mahan-Taylor 2003). In particular, it focuses on the grammatical item of 'clause' (declarative, interrogative and imperative) and offers some suggestions, through tasks and activities, to develop these two types of competence. The study is carried out within a discourse analysis framework attending to such areas as 'cohesion', 'coherence' and 'pragmatic acceptability' in relation to grammar teaching. The assumption underlying the current investigation is that much can be gained from the proposed framework in raising students' awareness to understand and produce the English clause, formally and contextually.

The present inquiry also aims at helping language teachers interested in incorporating insights from the two areas of discourse analysis and pragmatics into their teaching, by suggesting some classroom tasks and activities that may help facilitate students' use of the TL.

The ultimate goal to learn grammar for FL learners is to be aware of the structure and functioning of the language system. This awareness remains useless unless it is made operational communicatively, viz. if the learner does not capitalise on it in performing various communicative acts.

With this well-defined double objective in mind, grammar instruction will be situated and more adequately perceived among other not less important FL subject-matters such as Oral / Written Expression, etc.

We reject the view that accumulating grammatical items, functions, notions and repertoires of various communicative settings are sufficient tools for communicating actively and appropriately within a target situation. Rather, we take the view that grammar is a cornerstone in language learning process which cannot be taught in an atomistic way. It is one component interrelated with other language components, linguistic and non-linguistic, i.e. socio-cultural.

It is for this reason that learners should be presented with an integrated model of language learning within a discourse framework. This model is based on the major findings in the field of discourse analysis and pragmatics, in particular those by Widdowson (1978, 1979, 1983), Brown and Yule (1983), McCarthy (1991), Kasper & Blum-kulka (1993), Celce-Murcia & Olshtain (2000), Kasper (1997, 2000, 2001), Kasper & Rose (2001), Bardovi-Harlig & Mahan-Taylor (2003).

On the other hand, in order for learners to understand and produce appropriate instances of language, it is suggested that pragmatic components be incorporated into

the proposed framework. These components will enable FL learners to comprehend and produce contextually communicative acts in the TL (Kasper 1997).

The approach we wish to outline, here, represents an attempt to teach English grammar through the analysis of discourse at university level. An approach which, in our view, has potential value for the teaching of the language as a whole. So, in addition to enabling learners to be aware of the various grammatical patterns, i.e. mastering rules of usage (grammatical competence) and their combination in forming larger connected discourse, i.e. mastery of rules of discourse, formal and semantic to form larger units of communication (discourse competence), this approach will also urge learners to acquire sociolinguistic and pragmatic types of competence, i.e. the ability to choose language that is appropriate to a context in the various settings they encounter and in which grammatical patterns, say, clauses, are embedded.

The reason for this approach is that a discourse processing model of language teaching, in general, and of grammar in particular has suggestive and heuristic power (Widdowson 1972, 1973, 1978), in that it enables both the teacher and the learner to have more fruitful insights into the real functioning of the language.

It seems clear that high level of grammatical competence is not sufficient for students to recognize and produce socially and contextually appropriate language. The trend is towards a methodology that is consistent with the use of more differentiated spectrum of discourse and pragmatic lubricants and strategies.

We believe that by giving much more prominent place to discourse in teaching grammar and enabling learners to know the conditions whereby sentences are combined and used to form stretches of connected discourse (Widdowson 1972, 1978, 1979) will help them to overcome many difficulties. Not only will they be able to manage discourse development on the level of cohesion (surface linking) and coherence (underlying relations) but they will also, and more importantly, manage it pragmatically (on the level of illocutionary and perlocutionary acts). Put another way, learners will be taught how to produce and interpret cohesive, coherent and pragmatically acceptable written modes of discourse.

It is for the purpose of a fuller picture that we see a combination of insights from the two disciplines will yield a highly beneficial crop for a better and more insightful account for language in general, and for promoting language learners' grammatical competence in particular.

Obviously, calling for integration does not mean to deny each side its right for existence, nor is it to strip one off its theoretical construct. All what we seek is to show that there are some aspects which bring the concerns of discourse analysis and pragmatics close to each other in the service of grammar. The reason for such integration is substantially the fact that pragmatic analysis has often been carried out on the level of isolated sentences (Coulthard 1978, Gardner 1985). A discourse analysis approach may, equally, seem to be no more than parsing a text or a sentence into their component-parts, or equating discourse analysis with some surface-based text-analysis.

The need for integrating pragmatic and discourse ingredients into the teaching of clauses is justified by the fact that elements (cognitive, contextual and socio-cultural) from both areas contribute to enhancing learners' communicative

awareness. This awareness is evidenced by the fact that once coming across an instance of language use from the material they are exposed to, learners proceed to bringing into play those elements relevant for the sake of interpretation.

Students should, then, be trained to put their grammatical stock of knowledge and their ability to manage the development of discourse in the service of communicating appropriately in different contexts of use. The notion of 'pragmatic acceptability' was set as a factor of raising students' appropriateness of use and a criterion against which their success in communicating or otherwise is to be decided.

Two pragmatic areas are, accordingly, chosen, 'Speech Acts' and 'the Cooperative principle' (Grice's maxims of co-operation), to shed light on grammar-pragmatics interaction. It is argued that a speech act analysis provides students with contextual elements that help them interpret what the speaker / writer intends to do with words and combinations of words. An utterance, thus, is multifunctional i.e. it can have a multitude of interpretations according to the setting it is used in. In addition, it is argued that an utterance has to be understood as a three-faceted act: locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary. Equally important are assumptions that participants in communication observe, i.e. maxims of co-operation developed by Grice (1975). Similarly, students are expected to be brought to a state where they should learn to observe these maxims if they want to maintain a sort of social harmony when communicating.

The pedagogical implications stated along the present work are such as to provoke within students a sense of language awareness likely to create within them the essence of language use, especially when it is a matter of written discourse in both its receptive (reading) and productive (writing) mode of communication. As a better strategy and for the sake of nurturing that sense of language-as-discourse and pragmatically led orientation, it is suggested that the two modules, Written and Grammar, be taught by the same teacher, who in the course of his/her teaching will instill in students the insights developed along the previous lines. This will remove a great deal of the backwash effect attendant upon module compartmentalization.

Teachers, in this connection, will see their role change from that of the 'knower of everything' to a collaborator, a negotiator and to someone who works for nurturing in his/her students the essence of applying cognitive skills in appropriate ways to produce and interpret written and spoken language effectively in various contexts of communication. Notwithstanding these new roles, teachers are not required to be more native speakers than experts in equipping their students with contexts of using English meaningfully, appropriately and effectively.

The proposed framework will, hopefully, chart new directions for research in other areas of language learning and teaching. More studies are needed to apply insights from the two areas of discourse analysis and pragmatics. Future research need to cover such field as teaching FL literature, culture, language skills, etc.

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