Pragmatics Role in the EFL Teaching to Indonesian Junior and Senior High School Students

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Abstract

EFL students crucially need pragmatic competence to communicate appropriately and effectively. However, teaching pragmatic aspects is easier said than done in the Indonesian classroom context. This study aimed to question (1) how Indonesian EFL textbook writers introduce pragmatic aspects to junior and senior high school students, (2) what barriers to teaching pragmatics are encountered by the Indonesian EFL teachers, and (3) to what extent EFL students make use of pragmatic aspects when they speak Indonesian and English. To address these questions, some English textbooks written by Indonesian writers were analyzed, and some Indonesian EFL teachers and students were selected to be respondents: answering questionnaires and composing short dialogues respectively. The result revealed that pragmatic aspects were partially discussed in the textbooks and rarely taught by the EFL teachers due to some obstacles. As a result, the EFL students' pragmatic competence was not developed properly. Because of the importance of students' pragmatic skills, a further study of a practical teaching is needed for the EFL teachers in order to facilitate the EFL students to develop their pragmatic competence.

Key words: pragmatic aspects, EFL teaching, pragmatics competence, EFL textbooks

1. Introduction

Students are considered to be skillful speakers when they are able to make use of pragmatic aspects in communication. Lack of ability to employ the pragmatic aspects or inability to speak English appropriately according to whom, how, when, and what they speak to leads to misunderstanding and miscommunication (Hymes 1974 and Amaya 2008).The following simple situation illustrates the use of inappropriate English. An Indonesian student of English department met a foreign tourist at *Gajah Museum* Jakarta to have a short visit. Afterwards they went to Indonesia *National Monument* to have a half-day tour. After a two-hour walk around the monument, the tourist and the student had a rest at one of coffee shops close to it. As soon as they sat down, the tourist asked, "You like to have a drink" to the student. "No, thanks," the student replied. Due to the student's response, the tourist only ordered and enjoyed the drink for himself, while the student wished he was offered again to have a drink. Why did the student say, "No, Thanks?"This happens since in his culture, it is considered impolite to say "Yes" at first hand when offered something to drink. By contrast, the tourist thought that the student refused his offer.

The above example illustrates the important role of pragmatics to be learned by EFL students as some previous studies also suggest. For example, Amaya (2008, p. 11) found in the study that "the resulting lack of pragmatic competence on the part of L2 students can lead to pragmatic failure and, more importantly, to a complete communication breakdown." For that reason, Deda (2013, p. 63) argued that "pragmatic competence should be a leading goal for all those who teach English as a second language, which simultaneously represents a challenging task as well." In spite of the important role of pragmatics in language teaching, pragmatics is partially introduced in the EFL textbooks, rarely taught to EFL students, and still ignored by EFL teachers. Rasekh (2005, p. 199) argued that the ESL teachers included less pragmatic aspects in the materials and lacked emphasis on pragmatic aspects in ESL lessons.

Lenchuk and Ahmed 2013, p. 89) also stated that the importance of cultural aspects of speakers is very often neglected in teaching practices so that it is essential to teach pragmatic aspect explicitly to EFL students. The ignorance of pragmatic aspects in EFL teaching in Indonesia was also identified by Suprijadi (2013, p.1) who found that Indonesian English teachers put the emphasis on linguistic forms or grammatical patterns instead of pragmatic development. And even, the current study by Qiao (2014, p. 406) revealed that one of the causes of pragmatic failures was due to the classroom teaching in which the teacher focused on structure elaboration and neglected pragmatic knowledge. What remains unknown is, however, to what degree pragmatics is used in the Indonesian EFL context. Therefore, the current study aims to (1) analyze how Indonesian EFL textbook writers introduce pragmatic aspects to junior and senior high school students, (2) find out the problems in teaching pragmatics for the Indonesian EFL teachers, and (3) investigate to what extent EFL students of junior and senior high schools make use of pragmatic aspects when they speak Indonesian and English.

2. Methods

2.1 Research Design

This study was designed to investigate the extent to which pragmatic aspects were taught to Indonesian EFL students of junior and senior high schools and what forms of pragmatic expression were invoked by the students. To find out whether the pragmatic aspects were taught, some English textbooks compiled by some Indonesian (non-native of English) writers were analyzed, and a questionnaire related to the barriers to teaching pragmatics were designed to be responded by some non-native English teachers. To find out the pragmatic forms invoked by the students, some practices on dialogues were composed by them.

2.2 Respondents

There were three groups of respondents, namely non-native English textbooks writers, non-native English teachers, and students of senior high schools. The first group was recognized as experienced English teachers. The second group was junior and senior high school teachers who earned Bachelor Degree in English Language Teaching. The last group was the second grade of the vocational senior higher schools.

2.3 Data Collection

The study used three types of data collection: (1) English book texts, (2) questionnaires, and (3) students' dialogues. The English textbooks, which were based on scientific approaches (Djatmika, et al 2014 and Daryanto 2014) and KTSP (*Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan*or School-Based Curriculum) approaches (Daryanto 2014 and Wijayanti 2015), were designed for junior and senior high schools. The questionnaire was designed to elicit what barriers faced by the teachers, and the students' dialogues were collected to see the extent to which they made use of pragmatic aspects.

2.4 Data Analysis

The three stages in data analysis were as follows: *first,* each section in every chapter of some English textbooks of junior and senior high schools written by non-native English writers were to identify some linguistic aspects, such as grammatical points, vocabulary, and pragmatic aspects. The identified data were classified and analyzed into three aspects---priority of presentation, pragmatic appropriateness, and a variety of pragmatic forms and functions. *Next*, the data from questionnaires were analyzed to see the barriers faced by the EFL teachers to examine whether the pragmatic aspects were taught to their students appropriately or not. *Third*, the students' note on dialogues to identity what types of pragmatic aspects invoked by them when they speak Indonesian and English.

3.Results and Discussions

3.1 English textbooks by Indonesian EFL writers

On the basis of the data analysis of the English textbooks used in SMP (Junior High Schools) and SMA (Senior High Schools), there are three crucial points to be discussed: (1) the high priority of vocabulary and grammar presentation, (2) the inappropriate use of pragmatics, and (3) a less variety of pragmatic forms.

3.1.1 The high priority of vocabulary and grammar

In general, it was found that speaking and listening skills were presented at the earlier sections before vocabulary and grammar.

However, compared to grammar and vocabulary, pragmatic aspects were partially discussed in the textbooks. To illustrate this argument, four English textbooks written by Indonesian writers - two texts for SMP and SMA respectively - were analyzed as seen in table 1.

The writers claimed that their textbooks were based on *KTSP* (the standard of content and graduate competence) as well as *Pendekatan Saintifik* (Scientific Approach).The result of analysis shows that vocabulary and grammar were presented comprehensively in four textbooks. Each unit of the textbooks had similar formats. First, vocabulary section and practices were provided in listening and speaking activities; whereas, grammar parts and exercises were presented in the reading and writing activities. Next, a list of new vocabulary was used as the starting strategy to assist students to understand the content of dialogue and to comprehend the content of reading texts. To make student aware of the use of correct grammar, they were exposed to some tasks which triggered them to learn the grammatical rules of English. In spite of the comprehensiveness of grammatical discussion as well as the sufficient exposure of vocabulary through several and a variety of tasks, lacks of pragmatic aspects may cause the students unable to use English appropriately.

Table 1: Focus of Linguistic Aspects in English SMP and SMA Textbooks

No	Title of Textbooks	School Levels	Focus of Linguistic Aspects		
			Vocabulary	Grammar	Pragmatics
1	Passport to the World 1. A Fun and Easy English Book (KTSP)	Grade VII of Junior High Schools (SMP)	Comprehensive	Comprehensive	Partial
2	Be Smart in English (KTSP)	Grade X of Senior High Schools (SMA)	Ditto	Ditto	Ditto
3.	Passport to the World. A Fun and Easy English Book (*Pendekatan Saintifik*)	Grade VIII of Junior High Schools (SMP)	Ditto	Ditto	Ditto
4	English in Use (*Pendekatan Saintifik*)	Grade X of Senior High Schools (SMA)	Ditto	Ditto	Ditto

The high priority of grammar and vocabulary in the textbooks was in line with the non-native English teachers' responses**.** Based on the questionnaires, most teachers also put the high priority on teaching grammar (syntax) and vocabulary. Unfortunately, they provided less emphasis on the pragmatic aspects (see table 2). There may be at least two plausible reasons. First, most of them graduated from undergraduate programs of English which might provide subjects merely on four levels of linguistics areas, such as phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics; and yet, they pay little attention on pragmatics. Second, they might have very insufficient exposures on the authentic English practices or at least on the native-like classroom activities.

Table 2: Priority to Teaching English in Indonesian EFL Classroom
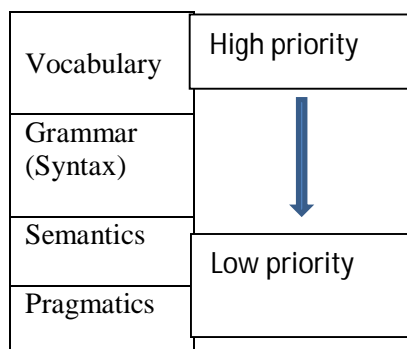
One interesting point of the teachers' responses is, however, they put vocabulary, instead of grammar, the top priority. This idea implies that every student must have a sufficient repertoire of vocabulary although he or she is still week at grammar of English. This finding is likely to be different from some previous studies conducted by Suprijadi (2013) and Qiao (2014) which argued that the EFL teachers lay on the emphasis on grammatical structures.

3.1.2 Inappropriate materials of pragmatics

It is necessary to pinpoint that the main purpose of English teaching at schools is usually to equip students to have communicative competence in English. To this end, they have to acquire not only linguistic aspects, such as grammar and vocabulary, but also pragmatic elements in order to be able to use language in socially and culturally appropriate ways and to infer both implied and overt meaning of the language according to its context. When a student already has sufficient knowledge of grammar as well as a great deal of vocabulary, but he or she still lacks knowledge of pragmatic elements, she will use English inappropriately. Pay attention to the dialogue below:

Dialogue 1 (No detailed context of dialogue is provided)

Tika : Hi, Mita.
Mita : Hi, What's up?
Tika : Are you free next Saturday?
Mita : I think so. What's going on?
Tika : I have a plan to visit my grandmother in Malang for a day and I don't have a friend to chat in the journey
       would you like to join me?
Mita : That sounds nice. But, I have to ask my parents for permission.
Tika : That's good then. Okay, I'll wait the news from you tonight. Bye…bye.
Mita : Bye.
       (Source: "Be Smart in English for Grade X of Senior High Schools," by Wijayanti 2015, pp. 33-31)

In fact, it is rather hard to infer the relation between two speakers in the above dialogue because no context and situation are provided by the author of the book. However, the implied context indicates that Tika and Mita is a close friend. Their close relationship can be inferred from the expression, like "Hi,"and "Bye…bye." Problems of grammar and vocabulary don't occur in the above dialogue. The girls' knowledge of vocabulary and grammar does not appear to be wrong. When Tike uttered "Would you like to join me?" to Mita; that is exactly correct grammar and vocabulary. The problem is that Tika did not utter the expression appropriately (or oddly heard to competent hearers even in Bahasa Indonesia). In both English and Indonesian, such as "would like to join me?" or in Indonesian "*Sudikah anda /saudara bergabung denganku*" is too polite which is normally expressed to one who is older than a speaker or one who is not yet close to a speaker. As a best friend, Tika should invite Mita, "Won't you join me?", "Can you join me?", or merely "Join me?"

Another example of inappropriate use of pragmatics taught to the students can be seen in the following dialogue:
Dialogue 2

Miss Ani: Honey, **would you do me some favor**?
Jeni: What's that, mom?
Miss Ani: I need you to go to aunt Rina. She called me to bring her the mixer. She would like to make brownies
        for the party this evening. I'm busy my own.
Jeni: Don't worry, mom. I'll take it there.
Miss Ani: Thank you dear. You [are] really helpful.
        In Aunt Rani's house
Jeni: Hi, Aunty. This is the mixer you asked for?
Miss Rina: Oh. Thank you very much, Jeni.
Jeni: **Do you need some help here?** I can help you to make the cake. I'm really good at it.
Miss Rina: Hmm, that's would be great then. Let's make it. Once again, thank you very much; you've been really
        helpful today.
Jeni: Don't mention it Aunty. I do it with my pleasure.
(Source: *Be Smart in English for Grade X of Senior High Schools*, by Wijayanti 2015, p. 101)

When Miss Ani said to Jeni "Would you do me some favor?" it does not sound appropriate because Jeni is younger than Miss Ani, Jeni's mother. By contrast, Jeni is considered impolite when she said to Miss Rina, "Do you need some help?" since Miss Rina is older than Jeni. This example of dialogue indicates that the pragmatic aspects are not taught properly to the student. The dialogue in the textbook does not provide appropriate and natural English expressions as what the native speakers of English do normally to the EFL students, and thus consequently they do not have communicative competence in English as expected. Alinezhad (2015, p. 19) also asserted the essential roles of pragmatic components in communication between speakers and interlocutors because such components can cause misunderstanding during conversation.

3.1.3 Lack of variety forms of pragmatic expressions

Another fact that pragmatic aspects is not taught properly to the EFL students is related to language function as seen in the dialogue below:

Dialogue 3 Asking for and offering help

Rudi : **Would you like some help**?
Andi : Yes, that would be great. **Could you help me move this tent**? It's very heavy.
Rudi : Yes, of course. You can't lift it by yourself. Where do you want to move it?
Andi : Near the tree. Ups…there's a big stone next to the tree.
Rudi : **Would you like me to move it first?**
Andi : Oh, **would you really**. Thank you very much. After moving the tent, **could**
      You please tie the bamboo sticks.
Rudi : Sure. **Would you like me to move them near the tree**?
Andi : No, thank you.
(Source: *Passport to the World 2. A fun and Easy English Book for Grade II of Junior High Schools*,
by Djamika , Agus Dwi Priyanto, and Ida Kusuma Dewi 2014, p.159)

In the above dialogue, the students are exposed to the use of expressions for help in merely one language function, such as **interrogative** "Would you….?" and "Could you…?", and yet they are not used in suitable or inappropriate ways in relation to the roles of interlocutor between Rudi (the speaker) and Andi (the participant). It is implied that to have language competence the speaker can select a variety of language functions for expressing his acts or intentions. To express for help, for example, there is a variety of utterances that a speaker could use according to whom he speak to and in what social and physical situation. Thus, a student may select not only **interrogative** form such as, "Would you like to …?" and "Could you help …?" or **declarative,** like "How about…?" and "What about…?" but also **imperative** like "Help me." Thus, one language function can be expressed through several utterances in communication.

3.2 Barriers to teaching pragmatics

The survey shows that there are three barriers—a low level of students' English proficiency, practical methods, and different cultures—that make the EFL teachers are not optimistic to include pragmatic elements in English teaching (see table 4), and consequently these three factors may make the Indonesian EFL students do not have communicative competences which lead them not be able to use English as appropriate as possible to other speakers of English. The biggest barrier, as reported by 50% of EFL teachers, was due to the low level of their students' English proficiency. It goes without saying that most Indonesian EFL students' English proficiency, even those at university, are still at below threshold level (Nurweni and Red 1999, Suryoputro, 2015). Thus, it cannot be denied that the low level of English proficiency is the main cause of unsuccessful learning. This has also triggered the teacher to keep putting the emphasis on the grammatical and vocabulary teaching in the classroom. The second big problem is the lack of the practical teaching method. 42.30% of the Indonesian EFL teachers in this survey stated that there were some difficulties to find a practical guidance for teaching pragmatics. As mentioned above that the rare pragmatic instruction is also reflected in the inclusion of pragmatic aspect in the textbook which usually includes the steps and guides of presenting the materials for teachers, this finding may suggest that the further study on the pragmatic teaching is still needed for the EFL Indonesian teachers since to date there have been a few studies conducted by some previous researchers. As far as the writer is concerned there is one study on the practical teaching pragmatics in the EFL classroom carried by Brock and Nagasaka (2005).

Table 3: Barriers to Teaching Pragmatics

No	Barriers	Numbers of English Teachers	Percentage (%)
1	Low level of Students' English Proficiency	13	50
2	Rare guided and practical teaching methods and strategies	11	42.30
3	Different Cultures of L1 and L2	2	7.70
	Total	26	100

The least but crucial obstacle to teach pragmatics to EFL students is due to the cross-cultural understanding between English (L2) and Indonesian (L1), as stated by Limberg (2015, p. 275) that "intercultural communicative competence is a paramount goal of modern foreign language teaching." This finding challenges the EFL teachers to make well-designed cross-cultural materials and lessons which facilitate the EFL learner to learn.

3.3 Types of EFL Students' Request Forms

The results show that there were two types of Indonesian request uttered by the students—"want –statement" and modal auxiliary "can" and "could." Some Indonesian requests which indicate "want-statement" and "can" or "could" are:

Table 4: Indonesian Request Forms Invoked by Beginner Indonesia EFL Students

Want-statement and Imperatives	**Modal "Can" and "Could"**
"Saya **ingin** mengajukan ulangan susulan…." *(I WANT to propose the re-test….)*	"Kapan saya **bisa** mengikuti ujian susulan…." *(When CAN I join the re-test….)*
"Saya **ingin** meminta ulangan susulan…." *(I WANT to ask for the re-test….)*	"**Bolehkah** saya mengikuti ujian susulan…." *(COULD I join the re-rest….)*
"Saya **ingin** mengikuti ulangan susulan …." *(I WANT to join the re-test….)*	"**Bisakah** saya melakukan ulangan susulan?" *(COULD I do the re-rest….)*
"**Maukah** ibu memberikan ujian susulan?" *(Do you WANT to give me the re-rest….)*	"**Dapatkah** saya mengikuti ulangan susulan?" *(CAN I join the re-test….)*

Table 4 reveals that Indonesian "ingin" and " maukah" indicate " want-statement and imperatives; whereas, "bisa" or "bolehkah" and "dapatkah" indicate modal "can" and "could." This finding suggests that the students as respondents of this study still had low level of English competences. At this level they are normally merely able to express pragmatic aspects, such as want-statement and modal "can" and "could."

4. Conclusion

Referring to the above problems found in the preliminary study, it is really noticeable that causes of EFL students' communicative incompetence in English are due to the following aspects: 1) pragmatic elements are partially presented in EFL textbooks and 2) pragmatics teaching does not seem to be a priority in the EFL classroom. These problems suggest that the important roles of pragmatics in English as a Foreign Language be maximized in order to develop the Indonesian EFL communicative competence in English. As for the inclusion of pragmatic features in the English textbooks, Indonesian writers have to provide propositional section of pragmatics in the exercises. They have to take into account all aspect of pragmatics—linguistics and extra-linguistics—when they create a dialogue or conversation. They have to provide not only the formula of a variety of functional expressions but also the variety of language function used in real contexts. To maximize the roles of pragmatics in EFL teaching, however, is easily said than done due to the teachers' poor knowledge of pragmatics. It, therefore, suggests that pragmatics course be included in the curriculum of the prospective teacher training. Moreover, more contextual and appropriate examples of pragmatic elements could be designed more comprehensively by English textbook authors. Finally, conducting another research on how to teach pragmatics will also be crucial in order to find out its practical and significant contributions to EFL teachers and practitioners.

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