

## JUSTIFICATION FOR APPLICATION OF CONTRASTIVE PRAGMATICS IN EFL SETTINGS

Mohammad M. Fallahi

*Iran University of Science & Technology*

### ABSTRACT

Most teachers would agree that boredom is the main enemy of effective learning and that students and teachers are not a special breed of individuals who delight in being bored. Yet in most cases, the EFL materials do not generally reflect a concern for lively and entertaining lessons in non-English speaking countries. Perhaps the main reason is that it is felt that only topics with some kind of second language (ESL) orientation can be necessarily interesting and relevant for EFL students. The point is debatable and worth considering in detail. In fact, the teacher will need to decide, within the context of local conditions, just how limited or extensive a command of the language his particular students require. There would be a radical difference between the courses we design for EFL students who need the language for some very limited task like reading for comprehension and those designed for ESL students who need to acquire a great deal of basic academic training through the medium of English. In this article, it is argued that because of the restricted views concerning EFL instruction, even the best of ESL programmes are not adequate to account for the language acquisition of EFL students, no matter how they are applied.

### Introduction

For many years, error analysis has provided theories for the solutions to the linguistic problems raised by *ESL* students studying in English speaking countries. These theories have also been adopted for *EFL* students in non-English speaking countries, but experience has shown that *EFL* students have not necessarily succeeded through these theories. The examination of the potentials and limitations of the *ESL* and *EFL* environments will demonstrate that contrastive pragmatics, if designed with pedagogical intent, can more appropriately meet the needs of *EFL* programmes. Error analysis in such environments may only overcome the limitations of the pragmatic transfers and extend their power of pedagogical applications.

### **Pragmatic Competence in ESL Environments**

By virtue of its being a dominant language in native-language countries, English in *ESL* programmes is subject to considerations somewhat different from English programmes used at schools and colleges of non-English speaking environments. These considerations are studied analytically below :

In an *ESL* environment, students have more opportunities to be in direct contact with English. Although they are provided with regular class hours at the school or college they probably develop their language skills, to a large extent, from their interactions with the linguistic community to which they are exposed. In such a community, English is technically the sole medium of communication and the students are driven to adopt its prevailing forms in order to share the activities around them. They learn English in a native-speaking school system where English is the medium of instruction and the means by which all pupils get their education. Sometimes, their language acquisition takes place in the primary school at a time when their cognitive development is at a rapidly growing stage. They have an eminently practical purpose for learning the second language: to communicate with native speakers and those coming from various linguistic or cultural backgrounds in everyday situations. For them the indispensable sources of communication, such as radio, television, newspapers, and the communicative needs of peer and social groups, are of supreme importance, since they help them to learn English in an authentic way.

In the light of such circumstances, the *ESL* students who find themselves surrounded by verbal stimulation from morning to night and feel the need for direct command of the spoken language explore their environments, form their concepts and acquire reasonable measures of pragmatic competence with no awareness of the fact that the process of learning is taking place. Although the deep-rooted native language patterns may have influence in any environment, under a learning condition like this, it is impractical to expect a high degree of pragmatic transfer of the mother tongue.

If the picture sketched from the *ESL* settings is valid and if the transfer phenomenon is considerably less significant in such an environment, then error analysis can be a separate discipline that may have greater value and usefulness than contrastive pragmatics since the pedagogical value of the latter downplays under such an environment.

### **Non-pragmatic Competence in EFL Environments**

In an *EFL* environment, in contrast to that of *ESL*, the communicative needs of the learners are satisfied through the students' mother tongue. Language learners continue

to think, hear, and speak in their native language. Their minds are full of the linguistic patterns of their mother language, the pragmatic concepts of which do not appear to be adequate for the foreign language that they set about to learn. For them, the English language is solely a classroom activity which stops as soon as the bell announces the end of class time. They have hardly any opportunity to use the foreign language after leaving the school. If the rate of progress depends mostly upon the amount of time allotted, the time available for their English instruction at school (seldom more than four to six 45-50 minute weekly periods, and at the university level it is rarely more than 6-10 out of roughly 130-140 credit hours of undergraduate studies) is not adequate.

There are other considerations as well. The English taught in EFL settings usually starts from the secondary school and is directed to an older age group if compared to ESL pupils who most often begin English from the primary school. The objectives of EFL instruction are also rarely the primary goals of ESL programmes; for example, English at advanced level is often needed for specific purposes (ESP), like the college-level education in which the ability to read materials and textbooks in the field of specialization, in most cases satisfies the objectives of the related curriculum. We can still name other instances; however, the conditions indicated above are sufficient to illustrate how the limited exposure of EFL students to English is apt to bring about pragmatic transfers of the deep-rooted patterns of their mother tongue. The transfers reveal how the syntactic, semantic, and lexical systems of English may often be filtered through the students' linguistic system and converted into their native-language patterns.

EFL schooling, therefore, is a system unto itself, closely related to ESL, but set apart from it by a number of fundamental, persistent, and systematic differences. This means that while students enjoy the opportunity to put their knowledge to practical use, the EFL students seldom find such an opportunity.

Under such circumstances, there is evidence to believe that the linguistic habits that the students have learned from their first language are likely to be transferred into new habits necessary for learning the foreign language. It is at this level of instruction that the task of learning the new language becomes the task of fighting off the old set of structures in order to clear the way for the new set.

### **Theory of Contrastive Pragmatics in EFL Education**

Once the concept of transfer in EFL is understood, there appears a pressing need for a theory about particular aspects of teaching a foreign language conceived in the light of cross-linguistic influence and cut to the measure of the EFL classroom needs.

A linguistic theory that may follow the aspects of the foreign-language teaching strategy is *contrastive pragmatics*, also called *sociolinguistic-transfer theory*, which refers to the use of the rules from one's own native speech community when speaking or writing in a foreign language, which would lead to what Thomas (1983) called *pragmatic failures*. Studies in this area (e.g. Wolfson 1981, Blum-Kulka 1983, Eisenstain & Bodman 1986) have investigated the learner's communication competence of specific speech acts. By comparing the second language learner's behaviour with that of native speakers of both the first language and the second language, the above-mentioned researchers have attempted to find out the extent to which there is a tendency in the learner to transfer sociocultural rules from the first language to the second language.

As indicated by Yoon (1991), one of the central issues in contrastive pragmatics is the relationship between form and function. For example, knowing how to say "*thank you*" or "*I'm sorry*" in another language does not mean one can express gratitude or apologize in that language. One should also know *when* and *to whom* to say "*thank you*" or "*I'm sorry*" according to the norms of interaction of the respective community. As Coulmas wrote (1981:89), *while thanks and apologies may exist as generic types of activities across cultures, it is obvious that the pragmatic considerations of their implementation are culturally defined*. In fact, the study by Barnlund and Yoshioka (1990:193) revealed that the Japanese respondents prefer to apologize directly without explaining their actions. They employ a wider range of apologies and adapt more to the status of their partners. The American respondents also prefer to apologize directly, but more often they offer explanations to justify their acts and adapt their manner of apologizing less to the status to their partners.

Such studies suggest a hypothesis indicating that there are pragmatic and specific ways of performing linguistic acts, and this specificity in the first language may be substantially manifested in the foreign language when learning English with a non-pragmatic competence in an EFL environment.

Based on this hypothesis, it is not unfair to claim that in EFL environments, contrastive pragmatic analysis will have validity as a device for revealing pragmatic conflicts between the mother tongue and the language to be learned. It is also reasonable to maintain that contrastive pragmatics will prove to be uniquely an appropriate methodology for the study of fundamental processes of transfer in a foreign language learning task. It will provide a promising basis for investigating general properties of the mind and will make a major contribution to the foreign language teaching and learning strategy in non-English speaking countries.

## Conclusion

Since ESL and EFL education involves fundamentally dissimilar environmental relationships, the acquisition of English in an EFL environment cannot be justified simply by an analogy drawn from ESL. Nor is it legitimate to allow a linguistic theory of ESL to discourage the pedagogical research related to EFL. While it is true that error analysis can be an applicable approach in an ESL language programme, it is also true that larger doses of the same medicine in a new bottle do not appear capable of curing the linguistic deviations distinctive in an EFL environment. This means that although a foreign language learning strategy in non-English speaking countries may utilize error analysis, it should go beyond this approach and render information on the pragmatic properties of the two languages. It should go beyond a mere listing of errors and provide teachers with an explanation of why such errors are made, how great their degrees of difficulty are, and what steps must be taken to avoid them.

A contrastive pragmatic analysis, if based on pedagogical intent, can specify these features and help the course designer develop a more detailed and elaborate syllabus for the EFL language course. The information yielded by such an analysis can be of great value not only to the teacher in planning his/her personal approach but also to the methodologist in writing pedagogical materials for EFL instruction. As a result, contrastive pragmatics can make a significant contribution to language learning experiments and help students master the English language when they are learning it in non-English speaking countries.

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