

THE ROLE OF PRAGMATICS IN TEACHING LANGUAGE

O PAPEL DA PRAGMÁTICA NO ENSINO DE LÍNGUA

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Abstract: Today, it is largely accepted that English has become a lingua franca in numerous contexts worldwide. In the last decades, the teaching of English has shifted from the teaching of the most prestigious varieties (British and American) to the teaching of English as a lingua franca (Jenkins, 2000). Such a shift requires an awareness of the role of pragmatics since the linguistic behavior of native speakers is not taken as a model to be followed. Yet, whether the pragmatic behavior of native speakers does not offer a reliable model to foreign speakers, in which model the teaching of English as a lingua franca has to lie? The first part of this article will present some of the main features of teaching English using the pragmatics of native speakers as a model – this question is equally valid for working with other languages. The second part will present teaching pragmatics by the use of pragmatic tools. Afterwards, the role of pragmatics in the teaching of English as a lingua franca will be discussed in order to understand how it works and in which ways the current view of teaching has changed. In the third part of this article, we will bring some light to the teaching of English. In summary, the shift in English language teaching towards English as a lingua franca underscores the importance of pragmatics in today's globalized world. The conventional approach of imitating native speakers' behaviors is no longer sufficient for effective communication in diverse contexts. While authentic models of speech remain valuable, they are just part of a broader toolkit.

Keywords: English as a Lingua Franca. Language Instruction. Pragmatics. Cross-cultural Communication.

Resumo: Hoje, é amplamente aceito que o inglês se tornou uma língua franca em vários contextos em todo o mundo. Nas últimas décadas, o ensino do inglês passou do ensino das variedades mais prestigiadas (britânica e americana), para o ensino do inglês como língua franca (Jenkins, 2000). Tal mudança requer uma consciência do papel da pragmática, uma vez que o comportamento linguístico dos falantes nativos não é tomado como modelo a ser seguido. No entanto, será que o comportamento pragmático dos falantes nativos não oferece um modelo confiável aos falantes estrangeiros, em que modelo deve residir o ensino do inglês como língua franca? A primeira parte deste artigo apresentará algumas das principais características do ensino de inglês utilizando como modelo a pragmática dos falantes nativos – essa questão é igualmente válida para o trabalho com outras línguas. A segunda parte apresentará o ensino da pragmática através do uso de ferramentas pragmáticas. Posteriormente, será discutido o papel da pragmática no ensino do inglês como língua franca, a fim de compreender como ela funciona e de que forma a visão atual do ensino mudou. Na terceira parte deste artigo, traremos algumas luzes sobre o ensino de inglês. Em resumo, a mudança no ensino da língua inglesa para o inglês como língua franca sublinha a importância da pragmática no mundo globalizado de hoje. A abordagem convencional de imitar os comportamentos dos falantes nativos já não é suficiente para uma comunicação eficaz em diversos contextos. Embora os modelos autênticos de discurso continuem valiosos, eles são apenas parte de um conjunto de ferramentas mais amplo.

Palavras-chave: Inglês como Língua Franca. Pragmática. Comunicação Intercultural.

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Introduction

Since the conceptualization of English use by Kachru (1985), English has expanded its use and influence over the globe. Also, the three concentric circles proposed by Kachru may not be sufficient to explain how English is used, especially if we are to consider teaching English as a lingua franca. To put in other words, teaching English as a lingua franca requires taking into consideration that teaching of the pragmatic aspect may impose a shift in teaching practices since a monolithic view of language may not offer adequate tools to experience language as a whole. Besides that, teaching may take place without imposing on learners the values of a particular variety of English as the one to be followed and/or to be compared with. Thus, teaching in a democratic view may need to take into consideration that the number of non-native speakers of English has largely outnumbered the number of native speakers (KACHRU, 1992). As a consequence, informed practices about intercultural interactions may be followed to guide teaching practices. Furthermore, the norms of the Kachruvian inner circle (1992), are not just incapable but useless in a globalized world in which many interactions occur without the presence of native speakers of English. House (2009) already discussed the diversification that encompass non-native- non-native interactions throughout the world. Also, Jenkins (2000), discussing 'Lingua Franca Core' specified those phonological features essential, and indeed non-essential, for intelligibility when English is spoken between non-mother tongue speakers. Whereas intelligibility has to be considered in a wider scope being the phonological phenomenon just one of the phenomena involved in mutual understanding, intelligibility may revolve around many other aspects like power, distance, context and so on. Thus, the phonological aspect of the language is a relevant aspect but not an exclusive one while considering intelligible communication in a globalized world.

The increasing volume of empirical work around ELF interactions through databases has amplified the findings over lingua franca contexts. Such findings may develop an understanding of pragmatics in lingua franca contexts and shed light into the functioning of it. The main goal of these findings might be a betterment in teaching learners ways of interacting since the current view of English as a lingua franca resides in a view that considers not just the interactions of native speakers as a vital source of authentic linguistic behavior. The interactions in English may take place between native-native, native-non native and non-native non-native participants and this web of nets may not offer feasible "models" for teaching due to its multiplicity and/or complexity to be worked on in class. If we are to consider that teaching any model of linguistic behaviour might result in the repeatedly criticized behaviorist view of teaching languages (MURRAY, 2010), a more informed teaching practice must come into play. As pragmatics has been taught mainly as the appropriateness of particular speech acts in determined contexts, the applicability of using particular instances of English and its assumed speech acts may be too simplistic to cover the multiplicity of intercultural interactions. As a result, it seems more appropriate to equip learners with pragmatic understandings that enable them to perform more appropriately in intercultural contexts of use. Also, the applicability of the insights between speakers of different mother languages who use English as a means of communication might bring restrictive samples of language that are excessively tied to the sample of language they are expressing (MURRAY, 2010, p. 294).

Most versions of the current views of language teaching give little attention to some components that enable speakers to communicate efficiently, especially the pragmatic competence. The appropriateness of use is crucial in actual processes of communication and its lack may hinder speakers to achieve his/her main goals. For this reason Gilmore (2007, p.11), among others, insists on authentic materials as they represent a variety of naturally occurring contexts. This is not, according to him, the sole benefit of using authentic materials and not their only relevance. There are other benefits associated with their use, other than their potential to motivate students as:

they provide learners with a richer source of L2 input to work with, which has two advantages: a) It is more likely to meet the varying interlanguage needs of individual students within the class and; b) It is more likely to develop a range of communicative competencies in learners, particularly the sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic ones (Emphasis added).

Teaching Pragmatics by the use of Native Speakers as a Model

Using authentic models of speaking as the only source to enhance learners' repertoire of possible language realizations seems to lack the idea that the main goal of teaching pragmatics in a lingua franca context is to enable learners to deal with misunderstandings. Such misunderstandings may happen by wrongly perceiving acts as *face threatening acts* (BROWN & LEVINSON, 1987) that are language realizations not fully understood by speakers during interaction. Yet, dictating mimicking the pragmatic behavior of a group of speakers is still a reality in language teaching and such practice keeps the speaker/learner in a subordinate position. Also, in many contexts English is still taught as a predominantly 'foreign' language, i.e., as "owned by its native speakers" (WIDDOWSON, 2013, p. 193), rather than as a 'shared' language, which prevents learners from achieving their potential as efficient users of English (SIFAKIS, 2019).

A few decades ago, the competence of an English learner was taken as the development of his/her interlanguage (SELINKER, 1972) since the native speaker was seen as a model to be imitated and/or achieved. As a result of the shift in English language teaching, being competent in English as a lingua franca means considering that the speaker/learner competence would mean not a certain variety to be achieved but his/her command of the language. More recently, Seidlhofer (2011, p.77) argued that ELF is not a variety of English but a variable way of using English. Also, at about 80% of English language communication does not involve native speakers (PRODOMOU, 1997 apud TIMMIS, 2002) thus, this implies an understanding that language use becomes denationalized/deterritorialized. That is, it is not or should not be connected to the values and presumptions of North American or English culture and the insistence on such practice might result in the loss of a great amount of teaching time. As pointed out by Jordão (2014, p. 35), "[...] despite all the discussions about ELF, this language is still tied to its uses perceived as 'native' and, thus, still anchored in the inner circle as normative reference and use [...]". In other words, the question of power still has great influence on the way the English language is perceived by learners.

The assumptions presented above raises important questions over the "authentic" pragmatics to be taught while considering teaching English in a lingua franca context. Having in mind that language interactions happen in contexts in which a new space is created by speakers/learners, new "behaviors" might be chosen by these participants to keep the flow of communication. According to Mauranen and Ranta (2009), EFL interactions tend to require participants to ignore or normalize infelicities around syntax, morphology, phrasing, idiom, and lexical choices. Moreover, speakers put some effort into minimizing and resolving non-understanding since these participants can construct and fine-tune their hybrid pragmatics (Murray, 2010). The main goal of teaching pragmatics in English as a lingua franca is to offer learners understandable and applicable ways to know how meaning is realized. In the first phase of *Lingua Franca Studies* researchers were mostly focused on identifying ELF features such as pronunciation and the "core" of this way of using English. Now, in the ELF third phase, Jenkins indicates that the field has passed through some advancements, and she affirms that ELF should take into account multilingualism. According to Jenkins (2015, p.63), "ELF is a multilingual practice, and research should start from this premise and explore how ELF's multilingualism is enacted in different kinds of interactions". The speakers of the inter circle still seem to be sacred entities whose linguistic behavior is taken as the default being other varieties not as privileged as the first. More recently, researchers do not insist anymore of mimicking linguistic behavior as an effective way of promoting mutual understanding in non-native English speakers' interactions. It seems that more applicable and trustworthy ways of dealing with the pragmatic aspect in lingua franca contexts have to come into play as studies in lingua franca seem to revolve around a pragmatic approach in which speakers are able to effectively express their meanings without having to rely on models. Thus, language teachers would be doing a greater service by developing in their students strategic competence on the basis allowing them to come to each interaction without necessarily sharing with their interlocutor a common social grammar. ELF users make "their multi-faceted multilingual repertoires in a fashion motivated by the communicative purpose and the interpersonal dynamics of the interaction" (SEIDLHOFER, 2009b, p.242).

House (2003) introduced a distinct definition of ELF, distinguishing it from interlanguage (SELINKER, 1972) by highlighting the absence of foreign norms, systems, errors, or non-errors within

ELF. Another scholar, MacKenzi (2012), supports this notion by stating that ELF users do not strive to imitate the idealized proficiency of native speakers or progress linearly towards someone else's target, as seen in the concept of interlanguage. Therefore, interlanguage is deemed inadequate when discussing ELF users since the command of the English language by speakers of other mother tongues is not seen as an interlanguage, that is, a language that is an "intermediate" language towards the target language. The problem with such perception of the command of the target language as being an "interlanguage" results that the language produced by learners would need to resemble the language native speakers use in order to be deemed competent speakers.

My own experience as an English teacher in language schools offered me a plethora of samples of how English language learners may perceive the linguistic behavior that is imposed on them by English textbooks. Once I was teaching the different ways to ask a favor in English, and how we may sound more polite by the use of different language structures. In doing so, a student's comment caught my attention as the lesson presented an increasing level of politeness. As I decided to show them a possible sequence of structures in order to make this grammatical item more understandable, I showed them how one could ask for a lift to a stranger by: Would you mind giving me a ride? The objective of such activity was to show how students should construct a sentence after "mind" as the verb would be necessarily in the gerund form. One of my students showed some resistance in using the aforementioned sentence and after some drills she said: professor! If I had to use a structure like this, I would not even ask for a ride for that person. This student accidentally revealed that setting the politeness parameter based on the spoken behavior of native English speakers may not serve as a complete and/or reliable model for imitation. Even the use of the word 'imitation' does not sound adequate while discussing English as a lingua franca. That does not necessarily mean that using authentic models of linguistic behaviour cannot be used as a template but being pragmatically effective may require a deeper understanding of the ways to lubricate social encounters in intercultural contexts. Thus, insisting on models of teaching solely based on the behavior of native speakers does not sound reasonable.

Teaching Pragmatics by the use of Pragmatic Tools

According to the traditional view, semantics tells us what someone literally says when she/he uses a certain utterance and pragmatics explains the information one conveys as well as the action one performs in or by saying something. However, in lingua franca interaction what the speaker says frequently coincides with what she/he actually means. To put in other words, the meaning of the utterance is usually limited to its literal sense while in first language communication the gap between what is said and what is meant seem to be greater (KECSKES,2013). Thus, when lingua franca speakers produce an utterance, it usually signifies more or less its compositional meaning. Interlocutors in lingua franca interactions need to be more inventive and ingenious when commonalities or conventions are missing or limited. According to Kecskes (2015), intersubjectivity has a great impact on lingua franca interactions since it captures the way a person relates to the other. As a result, the subjective perception of reality is lowered by the intersubjective acts employed in actual interactions carried out by speakers of the English lingua franca. Communication is a dynamic process in which individuals are not only constrained by societal conditions, but they also shape those conditions. The interlanguage pragmatics of English as a lingua franca raises the question of what pragmatics should be considered while teaching English in a lingua franca perspective. Having in mind that language interactions happen in contexts in which a new space is created by speakers/learners, new "behaviors" might be chosen by these participants to keep the flow of communication. According to Mauranen and Ranta (2009), EFL interactions tend to require participants to ignore or normalize infelicities around syntax, morphology, phrasing, idiom, and lexical choices. Moreover, speakers put some effort into minimizing and resolving non-understanding since these participants can construct and fine-tune their hybrid pragmatics (MURRAY, 2010). The main goal of teaching pragmatics in English as a lingua franca is to offer learners understandable and applicable ways to know how meaning is realized. As the "core" of these multitude of linguas francas was not literally "found" and its researchers do not insist anymore on this tool as an effective way of promoting

mutual understanding in non-native speakers interactions, it seems that more applicable and trustworthy ways of dealing with the pragmatic aspect in lingua franca contexts have to come into play. More recently, studies in lingua franca seem to revolve around a pragmatic approach in which speakers are able to effectively express their meanings without having to rely on models. Thus, language teachers would be doing a greater service by developing in their students strategic competence on the basis of allowing them to come to each interaction without necessarily sharing with their interlocutor a common social grammar. Thus, such a strategy should be encouraged to employ other means to establish mutual intelligibility in negotiating that interaction successfully.

Jenkins (2009) cleverly pointed out that English as a lingua franca may be called 'language with no native speakers'. Thus, if there are no native speakers there is no natural language and we find ourselves teaching a language through its code system keeping aside its "heart" and "soul". In English as a native language, the code system and its conventionalized use result from the natural development of language and its own sociocultural background. With English as a lingua franca its users make use of a language that has been molded by the needs of a speech community. Speakers of lingua franca English may use the code system for their own needs in temporary sociocultural interactions where English is used as a means of communication. Kecskes (2007,2013,2015) and Canagarajah (2014), affirm that when people spend even a short time together, they tend to create their own norms no matter how short this time might be.

According to Cogo (2015, p. 89), we have to leave behind a static description of language and consider the fluidity and flexibility of human interactions. Thus, we should focus on practices and processes "[...], which emphasize the multilingual nature of ELF and the language contact situation of most ELF communication". Such practice places more importance on speakers' creative practices in their use of plurilingual resources to flexibly co construct their common repertoire in accordance with the needs of their community and the circumstances of the interaction.

All the studies done to investigate the teachability of pragmatic knowledge of L2 in classrooms such as Kasper, 1997; Bardovi-Harlig, 2001; Fukuya et al.,1998; Rose and Kasper, 2001 have shown that interlanguage pragmatics is teachable not only to advanced learners but also to beginners. This should be very encouraging to teachers particularly in foreign language settings, where learners do not have as many opportunities to interact with native speakers of the target language. The importance and necessity for the teaching of pragmatics have also been recognised by Rose and Kasper (2001). We cannot deny that the pragmatic choices that one can make has become a recent key issue in pedagogical circles. However, two main problems encounter this issue of teachability: the first problem is to decide on the pragmatic systems to be taught. The dominance of English all over the world has not only given rise to several English but also made the notion of native speakers redundant/obsolete. The choice of one type of English at the expense of another is more dictated by both political and economical considerations rather than by pedagogical concerns. British English is often relegated to a secondary position for historical, mainly colonial reasons in the Arab world, for example, where the preference leans more to American English than to any other variety. Furthermore, and because of a pertinent risk of assimilation into the Anglo-Saxon cultures, not all EFL learners set the native pragmatic behavior as their main target (WASHBURN, 2001), especially in countries with high nationalistic feelings (the case of China and Vietnam for instance); the second difficulty that puts constraints on the teaching of pragmatics has to do with testing. Indeed, the absence of valid testing methods is a crucial argument that is given by some teachers. Despite a sustained and consistent body of work done since 1981, particularly at Hawaii University, drawing attention to the importance of terms of speech acts, implicatures, routines and rules of appropriateness. Yet, pragmatic knowledge continues to be by far the most reasonable norm that teachers in testing can depend on and refer to. All testing material cannot be designed without reference to the norms of the native speaker culture. There appears to be no alternative to the standard of the native speaker variety. A better standard, if any, has yet to emerge. Meanwhile, studies are necessary to investigate the variability of native speakers and the effect of this variability on testing pragmatic competence as a whole. English outside its ancestral lands and its adoption by other nations has made the notion of native speaker so elusive that on reflection, one wonders if it exists at all (CARTER and McCARTHY, 2003). With its massive expansion across the globe, English has somehow been de-nationalised, cut off from its cultural roots and adapted to suit new surroundings:

diverse sociolinguistic histories, multicultural identities, multiple norms of use that a large majority of foreign learners hope to adorn their oral performance with. Teachers are themselves non-native speakers (NNSs), and all they can do is to rely on their intuitions and experience with native speakers (NSs). However, this intuition and this experience in themselves are very limited in scope and thus not enough. In spite of these problems, a lot of researchers have stressed the need for instruction on interlanguage pragmatics in order to develop learners ability to communicate appropriately in the target language, particularly in foreign language contexts (KASPER, 1997, 2001; BARDOVI-HARLIG, 2001; KASPER and ROSE, 2002). In fact, in comparison to second language contexts where learners have more rich exposure to the target language and ample opportunities to use it for real-life purposes, in a foreign language environment learners lack the chances to engage in genuine communications with native speakers. As a result, a growing body of investigation on the effects of instruction now exists as illustrated by the collections of studies provided by Rose and Kasper, 2001, Bardovi-Harlig and Mahan-Taylor. The question of how these interlocutors use the English code system with a different sociocultural background is a matter that arises many questions. The functioning of ELF cannot be compared with interlanguage (SELINKER,1972) as already said in this text as English as a lingua franca is not a developing a system but as a 'variable way' of language use as proposed by Seidhofer (2011, p. 77). Also, higher grammatical skills help learners to overcome pragmatic problems in language production as well as pragmatic skills helps to overcome poor grammar. According to Ariel (2008), pragmatics and grammar are inseparable and support one another. The intersubjective in lingua franca contexts captures the way a person understands and relates to another, and by which we share experiences with one another, The goal of intersubjective arises in communication is to eliminate the difference between two or more subjective perceptions and/or definitions of reality.

Teaching pragmatics in a lingua franca perspective

The teaching of English as a lingua franca recognizes that placing on non-native speakers the same communicative ability displayed by native speakers is not just unrealistic but unreasonable. Also, there is still an implicit understanding that adequate pragmatic competence should be based on a native pragmatic ability. In other words, learners' desire for convergence with native speakers are a result of their experiences with them in various encounters. According to Siegal (1996), "Second language learners do not merely model native speakers with a desire to emulate, but rather actively create both a new interlanguage and an accompanying identity in the learning process" (SIEGAL,1996, p. 362). Nevertheless, total convergence by language learners on target language pragmatics may be perceived as intrusive and inconsistent in their role as "outsiders". Also, successful communication between non-native/native speakers is a matter of "optimal" rather than total convergence (GILES, COUPLAND, 1991).

Peirce (1995) noted that language classrooms offer an ideal setting for investigating the connection between the personal perspectives of learners and their use of a second language (L2). In these classrooms, second language learners have the chance to think about their communication experiences and experiment with various ways of using language appropriately. For those learning a foreign language, the classroom may be the sole place where they can gain practical experience in using the L2 and assess their comfort levels with different aspects of L2 communication. The protected environment of the L2 classroom, therefore, equips and supports learners in becoming proficient L2 communicators.

Much of the L2 pragmatic knowledge is acquired for free since some pragmatic knowledge is universal, and some other aspects may be the result of first language transference. Pragmatic universals, for example, may result from learners understanding that conversations follow particular organizational principles as turn-takings and internal structures. Moreover, learners know that pragmatic intent can be indirectly conveyed as well as context information and various knowledge sources can be used to understand conveyed meaning indirectly. Learners intuitively know that recurrent speech situations occur by means of conversational routines (COULMAS,1981; NATTINGER & DECARRIO,1992). Factors such as social power, social and psychological distance,

and the degree of imposition involved in a communicative act may be realized by learners at a certain degree (BROWN & LEVINSON, 1987). Indeed, learners have demonstrated knowledge of the directive and expressive speech acts that have been most frequently studied in cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatics, such as requests and apologies, and they have shown to understand and use the major realization strategies for such speech acts. For instance, in requesting, users of any language studied thus far distinguish different levels of directness. In their early learning stages, learners may not be able to use such strategies because they have not yet acquired the necessary linguistic means, but when their linguistic knowledge permits it, learners will use the main strategies for requesting without instruction.

Final remarks

In conclusion, the paradigm shifts in English language teaching from emphasizing prestigious native varieties to teaching English as a lingua franca has brought to the forefront the vital role of pragmatics. As English has transformed into a global lingua franca, it no longer revolves around the linguistic behaviors of native speakers but is shaped by the diverse needs and interactions of its users world-wide. This transformation requires an educational approach that focuses on developing pragmatic competence to navigate intercultural communication effectively.

Also, the traditional notion of teaching English based solely on the behaviors of native speakers has proven inadequate in the complex landscape of lingua franca interactions. While authentic models of speaking still hold value, they should be seen as part of a larger toolkit rather than the sole blueprint for language use. Instead, a more effective approach involves equipping learners with the understanding of how meaning is realized in various intercultural contexts. This means recognizing that the goal of teaching pragmatics is not to mimic a specific set of behaviors but to enable learners to engage in successful communication regardless of their interlocutors' linguistic backgrounds. With English as a lingua franca, the focus shifts to enabling learners to navigate misunderstandings, negotiate meanings, and adapt to a dynamic linguistic landscape.

The concept of "interlanguage pragmatics" emerges as a crucial consideration, emphasizing the flexible coconstruction of a common linguistic repertoire based on shared needs and circumstances. As the term "native speaker" becomes less applicable in this context, the teaching of English as a lingua franca becomes an exercise in developing the ability to communicate proficiently in a multilingual and multicultural world. Hence, in this evolving landscape, educators should prioritize teaching pragmatic competence as an integral aspect of language education. This involves moving beyond a fixed model of linguistic behavior and embracing the fluidity and adaptability that define effective communication in a globalized world. As English continues to transcend geographical and cultural boundaries, the teaching of pragmatics as an essential skill equips learners with the tools they need to engage meaningfully and successfully in diverse linguistic interactions.

Sensitizing learners of linguistic tools to achieve intelligibility that are not based on models of behaving may equip learners with more reliable tools as well as empowering learners with an understanding of ways to speak a language with a deeper understanding of its function. Owing to the systematic relationship between language and its cultural and social contexts of use, an awareness of pragmatic behavior might be required in order to function socially well.

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