

Communication and Pragmatic Skills in Foreign Language Classes

Olda Xhepa BALLIU, *Ph.D candidate*
Department of Italian Language,
Foreign Language Faculty,
University of Tirana, Albania
oldaxhepa@yahoo.it

Abstract

This paper tries to analyze the importance and the relationship between communication and pragmatic skills in foreign language classes. Philosophers and linguists have dealt with language, analyzing it from the psychological viewpoint. Communication in L1 or L2 is related and it depends on the science of pragmatics. While communicating, interlocutors interact impacted by the context, the situation, the receiver, the sender, by using the formal or the informal language according to the circumstances. For this reason, we try, in this paper, to make a thorough description of the relationship between communication and pragmatics.

Students need to master pragmatic skills in order to communicate. If Italian students or foreign language students have developed pragmatic skills in the native language, this will help them learning a foreign language. The goal of the foreign language teacher is to help students achieve communication skills. The pragmatic and communication skills can be practiced through communication activities like in L1 for speech acts are practiced in communication.

Keywords: *communication, speech acts, pragmatic skill, culture.*

Pragmatic Skill in a Foreign Language class

Methods of foreign language teaching were and still are analyzed from theory to practice through sociology, philosophy, psycholinguistics, pragmatics and other sciences, since the human being is exploring new ways of acquiring languages. Foreign language teaching or second language teaching are always a matter of concern and the foreign language is always compared to the way mother tongue is acquired. If in the past the language was considered on a scale ranging

from accuracy to grammar proficiency, nowadays learners are focused on communication. For this reason there is a shift from grammar competence to communication skills.

Then it should be analyzed how this communication is realized in foreign or second language classes, what is the role of speech acts, how they function in relation to the above mentioned sciences and what is their role in realizing such communication acts. In this paper is analyzed the relation and importance of pragmatics in relation to the goal of foreign language classes which is the communication.

Learners acquire language by beginning with utterances, passing to words, sentences, than to a whole speech. But the way learners acquire a foreign language may be different, beginning with their background, their cultural differences, their social relations and behavior. For this reason, have been conducted researches about speech acts belonging to learners of a foreign language. Researchers have tried to analyze the relation between pragmatics and communication.

Learners of the Italian, English, French languages study these languages because globalization offers new possibilities to study, work or make a living. For this reason communication is important. In Longmans dictionary, communication is defined as the process by which people exchange information, while pragmatics is defined as the study of how words and phrases are used with special meanings in a particular situation. For this reason, we can say that we need pragmatics in order to learn how to communicate in a foreign language.

Pragmatics teaches the manner in which the acts of speech should be used in different contexts and the type of language to be used: the formal or the informal one. From my experience, during my Italian classes, students sometimes find it difficult to communicate if they do not have a thorough knowledge of these two concepts. Although many students generally know the Italian language, they make mistakes or errors in communication just because of this lack in pragmatic skills. It is important for a foreign language learner to study pragmatics.

The pragmatic skill is acquired in the mother tongue, by practicing the language through communication activities. This is important to be done during foreign language classes, because this lack of input does not help learners acquire pragmatics and, therefore, communication. By using communication activities, the learners of the Italian language acquire cultural differences, intercultural communication, language and discourse.

Through communication there is an interaction between different interlocutors, who, in our case, study the Italian language. Some students find it

difficult to express themselves in Italian language because of the interference with the Albanian language. It is important to provide meaningful conversational contexts that involve them in communication, possibly materials that contain real life concerns and information to distinguish between L2 and L1 differences. For this reason the *Curricula of Foreign Languages* stresses upon the fact that culture plays an important role in learning a foreign language. By learning a language, students decode that particular language and input different cultural information, which make them appreciate the foreign language.

Acquiring intercultural communication through pragmatics

Pragmatics is the science that analyzes the use of language from real people for their own purposes and the ability to understand and use the language. Learning pragmatic rules help students master conversational skills and interaction. For pedagogical purposes, such conversations help learners decode cultural information without the interference of L1. The social environment in which we live imposes us the rules of our behaviour. Citing Richards¹ Communicative competence includes some aspects of language knowledge such as:

- *Knowing how to vary our use of language according to the setting and the participants (knowing when to use formal and informal speech or when to use language appropriately for written as opposed to spoken communication)*
- *Knowing how to produce and understand different types of texts (narratives, reports, interviews, conversations)*
- *Knowing how to maintain communication despite having limitations in one's language knowledge (through using different kinds of communication strategies)*

The aspects he highlights offer to students the possibility to practice the language. The activities should take place in meaningful contexts to help learners understand the pragmatic use of the language. The interaction in L2 outside the classroom happens rarely and for this reason, teachers should provide classroom activities to help students achieve speech skills.

Nowadays, in teacher-centered classes, it is possible to do it. If teachers bring authentic materials and use them for the communicative purposes of learning a foreign language, in our case the communication in Italian is facilitated. Authentic materials provide authentic cultural information. As an example the use

¹ Jack. C. Richards, *Communicative Language Teaching Today*, CUP. 3-20, (2006).

of novels, magazines, videos containing documentaries are a good choice to help students develop pragmatic and communication skills.

Providing communication activities to students

As we mentioned above, through communication, students can master everything. In foreign language classes, it is important to choose from a variety of topics and activities to make students practice the language. The topics should be relevant, up to date, interesting, connected to students' interests. The activities should be communicative. There is a list of such aspects, but let us mention what the CLT method, according to Richards, considers as being communication activities: Information gap, gathering activities, jigsaw activities, task completion, role plays. He states that use of authentic materials provide students with cultural information and support a more creative approach to teaching. In the classes of *Text Linguistic with Italian students, I provide them with advertisements, newspapers as materials to be used to analyze texts (argumentative, narrative) because, since they are authentic, students find better what type of texts they deal with, this also helps them analyze the discourse and the speech acts.*

Conclusion

To summarize what we tackled in this paper, we can say that communication can not be seen as something separated from pragmatics. In order to communicate, students need first of all to understand discourse and speech acts from a pragmatic point of view. Students should be exposed to meaningful contexts to understand the pragmatic use of language. If there are limitations in using literature, then both teachers and students may collaborate to make communication possible. By manipulating texts, students develop critical thinking and not just merely a general comprehension. The Pragmatic Skill and the Communicative Skill help students understand the language, its meaning, the cultural differences and the practice of communication skills in meaningful contexts.

Bibliography:

1. Brown, H. Douglas. *Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy*. New York: Pearson Education, 2007.
2. Canale, Michael, and Swain, Merrill. "Theoretical bases of communicative approach to second language teaching and testing." *Applied linguistics*, 1980, 1-47.

3. Dibra, Klodeta, and Varfi, Nonda. *Gjuhësi teksti (ribotim)* (Text Linguistic). Tiranë, SHBLU, 2005.
4. Dressler, Wolfgang. *Introduzione alla linguistica del testo* (Introduction to text linguistic). Roma: Officina, 1972.
5. Kasper, Gabriele, and Rose, Kenneth R. *Pragmatic development in a second language*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2002.
6. Kurrikula Kombëtare e Gjuhëve moderne. Ministria e Arsimit dhe Shkencës. Tirane, 2000. (National Curriculum of Modern Foreign Languages. Ministry of Education and Science. Group of Authors. Tirana, 2000).
7. Lloshi, Xhevat. *Stilistika e Gjuhës Shqipe dhe Pragmatika*. SHBLU, 2001. (Stylistic of Albanian Language and Pragmatics. University Press).
8. Richards, Jack. C. *Communicative Language Teaching Today*. CUP. 3-20, 2006.
9. Simone, C. *Fondamenti di linguistica* (Fundamentals of Linguistics). Milano: Mondadori, 1988.