

POLITENESS IN SECOND LANGUAGE TEACHING

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Abstract

This paper is dedicated to politeness, the communicative features of politeness and the influence of politeness on people's communicative behaviors in teaching a second language. In order to understand an interlocutor from another culture, it is essential to be aware of (im) politeness in his/her culture and teach politeness to second language learners as well. In the present study, we aimed at analyzing the various approaches proposed in association with teaching politeness to second language learners, highlighting the importance of politeness and its communicative characteristics as well as reviewing the different approaches to teaching politeness to second language learners. One practical shared attribute across all approaches is raising awareness and developing analytical skills among second language learners. Although different approaches to teaching politeness to second language learners have been developed, these approaches have either been extremely theoretical in their politeness conceptualizing or involved patterns that could not properly draw the understanding of politeness among respondents/learners in different cultures. Thus, it is discussed that an approach encompassing learners' understanding of politeness is a more reliable triggering point in order to raise the learners' sociopragmatic awareness of (im) politeness in different languages and cultures. This strongly endorsed approach is a practical intellectual approach, in which raising the learners' pragmalinguistic awareness in connection with the interactional fulfilling of specific meanings and actions through personal interactions is interconnected with raising the learners' sociopragmatic awareness regarding what underlies evaluations of those meanings and actions as (im) polite. In fact, by raising the learners' sociopragmatic awareness through this approach, learners are equipped with appropriate means of analyzing differences that happen between the politeness systems in their first and second language [Huang 2008]. In conclusion, by concentrating on politeness, the communicative specificities of politeness as well as teaching politeness in a second language, the critical element of culture of the target language in understanding the words, sentences and expressions as well as (im) polite features in a target language is highlighted. In other words, in order to master a foreign language, it is not only essential to learn the vocabulary and grammatical structures, but also mastering the cultural characteristics and (im) polite standard characteristics of the target language which play an essential role.

Keywords: Politeness, second language teaching, pragmalinguistic awareness, sociopragmatic awareness

1 INTRODUCTION

Politeness as an important specificity of communication between people has drawn great consideration from scientists in different fields of sociolinguistics, pragmatics, discourse analysis and intercultural communication. Politeness determines communicative behavior and shapes communicative styles (Larina 2015, 2020, Wierzbicka 1991/2003). Numerous difficulties in communication emerge from the fact that

people do not only speak different languages, but they use their languages differently. As Wierzbicka notes these differences are systematic, deep differences which reflect different cultural values (Wierzbicka 2003: 69).

People who come from distinctive cultures do not always have common perspectives in order to judge polite and non-impolite behavior (Sifianou 1992, Pizziconi 2003, Watts 2003, Larina 2003, 2009 and others). As a result, the same verbal or non-verbal acts may be perceived as both polite and non-polite in different cultures at the same time (Larina 2015: 196). As Wierzbicka [1985: 145] states linguistic differences are shaped due to specificities of culture which act more effectively than mere norms of politeness. These differences are connected with differences in culture. Therefore, the understanding of distinctions in two different cultures that impact cultural behavior is a crucial component of intercultural communicative competence (Larina 2008). It is worth mentioning that achieving success in intercultural communication pertains strongly to understanding communicative objectives of interlocutors as well as the pragmatic meaning of their speech acts. In other words, behaving politely in another culture necessitates skills in applying culture-specific strategies as the verbal and non-verbal behavior in the target culture that require modifications.

Many scholars presume that politeness is a phenomenon with universality in nature. This phenomenon as a conventional social norm could be detected in all cultures. In spite of universal nature of politeness, the actual revealing of politeness, the tactics, in which we identify politeness as well as the standards, through which we decide on polite and impolite behaviors differ in different cultures. These differences come from the original notion of politeness in various cultural contexts. Watts [2003: 14] states that “polite” and “politeness” as two lexemes, from the viewpoints of meaning and connotations which are related to them, may even also be different in different cultures. He emphatically claims that people’s understanding of politeness and polite behavior differ among cultures.

Since different cultures have different values and standards which influence on politeness criteria, understanding of politeness as well as norms of politeness vary in different cultures. Culture-specific differences in politeness have been reviewed in numerous studies (e.g. Blum-Kulka 1989, 1992, Culpeper, Haugh and Kadar 2017, Hickey and Stewart 2005, Huang 2008, Leech 2005, 2014, Leech and Larina 2014, Larina 2008, 2015, 2020, Locher and Larina 2019, Lakoff and Ide 2005, Mugford 2020, Pizziconi 2003, Reiter 1999, 2000, Sifianou 1992, Watts 2003, Watts, Ide and Ehlich 1992, 2005, Wierzbicka 1991/2003 among many others).

The aim of this study is to highlight the importance of politeness and its communicative specificities while reviewing the different approaches to politeness teaching to second language learners. In this paper we will discuss the issues concerning types of culture, values and their relations with politeness, politeness in a second language, and approaches to teaching politeness in a second language. This study reveals that politeness is understood as a fundamental attribute of communication, principally among different cultures, where misunderstandings could result in very negative or even destructive consequences in relationships. Therefore, what is defined as the target of teaching a second language is to help language learners in order to acquire communicative competence through learning a foreign language. To be more explicit, in order to communicate competently and in an efficient way in a second language, it is not only adequate for learners to formulate a collection of grammatical constructions, but also, they have to be equipped with the necessary skills of the target language in compliance with the situational limitations, imposed by a given communicative confrontation (Tanaka and Kawade 1982).

2 TYPES OF CULTURE, VALUE AND POLITENESS

Culture is the main concept in comprehending behavioral differences that emerge from background differences. This is a subject which has attracted a great amount of attention not only in communication, but also in the management of literature (Guirdham 1999, Larina 2015: 32). There are numerous possible definitions of culture. Hofstede defines culture from a metaphorical viewpoint. In his definition, culture is programming of mind in a form of collective that differentiates the members of one group or category from another group or category (Hofstede 2001: 9, Hofstede et al. 2010: 6, Hofstede and Bond 1984). Everyone has a number of thinking, feeling and acting patterns which are carried by that person and obtained through the process of socialization. These patterns are encoded in language which is the most concrete component of culture and manifested through communication (Larina 2020: 421).

Williams (1976: 76-77, 1983: 89) claims that culture is one of the most sophisticated words in the English language. He emphasizes that the complexity of culture is partially due to the intricate nature of its historical development in a number of European languages and, principally, it is due to the fact that culture is currently

used for influential concepts in several different intellectual disciplines and in various inharmonious systems of thinking (Martin and Nakayama 2010: 84).

According to Adler (2003: 16), culture is the lifestyle of people in a community, the arrangement of all patterns of acquired behavior that are stereotyped more or less and conveyed from one generation to the next generation by means of language as well as through imitation. Moreover, House et al. (2004: 15, 57) define culture as a set of elements of collectives which distinguish the collectives from each other through meaningful approaches. In fact, culture is specially defined based on numerous processes that are frequently shared. These processes are summarized in common approaches in order to think, to feel and to show reactions, meanings of identities that are shared, environments that are socially structured in common, common approaches, in which lots of technologies are employed and shared experiences and events consisting of history, language and religious tendencies of members of society (Róðland and Vorkinn 2015). Since there are different definitions of culture, Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952: 181) did an analysis and concluded that these definitions can be set into six major categories established on the emphasis given by the definition's author. A synthesis of all these definitions was summarized into one exclusive description: Culture comprises explicit and implicit patterns, of and for behavior received and conveyed by symbols, consisting of distinctive accomplishments of human communities, including their representations and manifestations in artifacts. The essential essence of culture consists of historically emerged and preferred traditional ideas and their practically attributed values. On the one hand, the systems of culture may be viewed as productions of actions, on the other hand, they are as elements which are conditioned for next actions (Kluckhohn 1951: 86). Therefore, the main idea of Kroeber and Kluckhohn's concept of culture describes that all members of a cultural system make a collection of ideas, specifically values shared. Meanwhile, these ideas and values are conveyed in particular through successive generations by symbols and culture is formed by former activities of a group and its belonged members as well (Albut 2012: 57-58, Larina et al. 2019, Routamaa and Hautala 2008).

Through the definitions of culture, language is an important aspect (Triyuni et al. 2018: 151). People use language as a means of building communication. Communication is always associated with interpretations involving meaning. From a discourse perspective, meaning is not absolute and is always specified by different contexts, while communication refers to the signs of people's life, in which culture is placed. Therefore, language is not absolutely detached from cultural context and its presence along with its specific nature is determinedly under the influence of society's culture (Dharma et al. 2018). In order to understand differences in cultural logic, encoded in each language, it is critical to consider words that signify social classification and types of social relationships, as we can identify how people interact with one another through them (Larina 2020: 422, Ye 2004).

Different cultures shape different viewpoints of values which influence the strategies of politeness and result in differences in various themes (Fitriyah and Ridwan 2019: 209). According to Huang (2008), there are several types of cultural differences, for instance, approaches to addressing, paying compliments, making requests or expressing appreciation to each other. When people from distinctive cultures communicate with each other, they have to be aware of what is appropriate and polite in the target culture and act based on accepted politeness criteria in that target culture in order to have successful communication and avoid misunderstandings made by differences in cultures (Sisson 2007: 2). Furthermore, in per culture there are different norms involving language norms. Regarding language norms, each language may have distinctive principles of politeness. Through verbal cross-cultural communication, people, specifically second language learners, should be aware of the politeness principles of the target language in order to prevent from making misunderstandings. Holmes (1992, 2001: 279) believes that appropriate approaches of making verbal communication with other people in different societies are precisely quite distinctive in different areas. In other words, behaving politely in other language and different culture consists of understanding values of that society and that culture which conduct the way, through which social dimensions such as status, solidarity and formality are illustrated (Kadar and Mills 2011, Marish 2010: 3).

In our daily interactions, we have a clear consciousness of what is a polite behavior or not. For instance, giving seat priority to elders and pregnant women or opening door and keeping it open for elders or women to go through first are considered as a conceivable phenomenon of polite behaviors in society. On the other hand, talking with a full mouth, jumping a queue as well as interrupting people are obviously understandable non-polite behaviors in society. In fact, we, as cultured and civilized persons, endeavor to do all these polite behaviors and manners in order to display our goodwill, our emotions of friendliness, cordiality, and true intentions to sustain our relationships in a harmonious context with other people. As Huang [2008] mentions, politeness in a form of social phenomenon could be perceived as an instrument for acquiring pleasant and smooth interpersonal relationships and a norm which has been established by community and social

conventions (Huang 2008).

3 POLITENESS IN SECOND LANGUAGE TEACHING

Although different approaches with the purpose of teaching politeness to second language learners have been developed, these approaches have either been significantly theoretical in their conceptualizing of politeness or employed patterns that could not appropriately attract the respondents' understandings of politeness among cultures. Therefore, the main argument is that an approach including learners' understandings of politeness is a more appropriate beginning point in order to raise the learners' sociopragmatic awareness about (im) politeness across different languages and cultures. This firmly advocated approach is a practical intellectual approach, by which raising the learners' pragmalinguistic awareness in relation to the interactional accomplishment of peculiar meanings and actions in interaction is merged with raising the learners' sociopragmatic awareness about what bases evaluations of those meanings and actions as (im) polite. In fact, by raising the learners' sociopragmatic awareness through this approach, learners will be equipped with an appropriate means of analysing differences which occur between politeness systems of their first and second languages. Meanwhile, second language learners could make more intellectual selections regarding both comprising their second language identities as well as their interactional relationships with others. Linguistic researchers and language teachers have reached a consensus on the great importance of helping learners of second language in order to master not only of the sounds, vocabularies and grammar structures in a target language, but also its pragmatics.

There is a distinction between pragmalinguistics and sociolinguistics which is made in most cases in teaching pragmatics to second language learners. The former consists of forms and strategies of linguistics applied to transfer meanings in interpersonal or relational contexts, whereas the latter includes the learners' comprehensions of the context, involving conceived sociocultural norms, determining the perception as well as the performance of communicative actions as appropriate or not appropriate. In fact, by using a particular instruction, the development process of pragmatic competence, either pragmalinguistic or sociolinguistic, could be facilitated. On this point, second language learners are not only encountered with conceptualized input, but also it makes them enthusiastic to involve in a pragmatic analysis of related phenomena, by which language learners' awareness of pragmatic norms in their second language is raised. Politeness, as an essential part of pragmatic competence, has also attracted great attention regarding how politeness should be taught in a target language. Many approaches to teaching politeness in a second language have supported a collection of explicit and implicit approaches, in which forms and strategies in linguistics related to politeness are instructed in a direct way. Meanwhile, language learners involve in communicative mutual interactions which make them interested in developing their pragmatic competence by enforcing such forms and strategies (Bou-Franch and Garcés-Conejos 2003, Eslami-Rasekh 2005, Haugh and Chang, 2015, Larina 2015, Wierzbicka 2003).

4 APPROACHES OF TEACHING POLITENESS IN SECOND LANGUAGE

Awareness-raising comprises making informed second language learners of the fact that there are several different ways in order to ensure interactional relations proceed smoothly and harmoniously across different cultures by applying detailed, expressive and accessible frameworks along with research results. Awareness-raising approach could involve various approaches, for instance, making translations between the first and second language in order to demonstrate pragmalinguistic differences as resources applied for transferring the meanings in relational and interpersonal contexts of communicative actions. It could also be as making a potential discussion about problematic intercultural events in order to specify the differences in sociopragmatics which are social conceptions and values based on the comprehension and performance of communicative actions. Although awareness-raising plays the main role in most approaches to teaching politeness to second language learners, there is a serious difference between these various approaches in the basic assumptions about politeness and relational work.

Most approaches tend to have a rather theoretical form in their conceptualizing of sociopragmatic features of politeness. Therefore, little consideration has been paid to what actually establishes politeness, impoliteness and so forth. The proposed approach by Bou-Franch and Garces-Conenjis (2003) is considered an exception to this trend. In fact, their definition of politeness as "connected to social appropriateness" or in a more specific definition as "the linguistic ciphering of social relations that people create in interaction" contribute limitedly to highlight culture-specific features of politeness for a second language learners and approve the idea that distinctions in politeness among language and cultures are clearly the consequence of existing different linguistic collections (pragmalinguistic differences) to explicate politeness. In this respect, the approach proposed by Meier (1997) illuminates little more where politeness is conceptualized as

appropriateness. Bou-Franch and Garcés – Conenjis believe that it is difficult to understand how second language learners will be qualified to judge social appropriateness in different cultures, if they are not primarily given adequate tools for analysing social competence. In fact, Meier's approach does not provide adequate detail for language learners to step beyond the boundaries of their intuition about politeness. Meanwhile, it seems that Brown and Levinson's model (1978/1987) plays a crucial role in raising learners' awareness of the linguistic reflections of socio-cultural differences. How could they be expected to make judgments of social appropriateness in two cultures without first providing them with the specific linguistic tools that enact social adequacy and open the way to analysing social interaction. Without these linguistic means, judgments of appropriateness will be based on intuition, not on linguistic inquiry (Bou-Franch and Garcés-Conejos 2003, Eslami-Rasekh 2005, Haugh and Chang, 2015, Larina 2015, Wierzbicka 2003).

5 CONCLUSIONS

Every person who has lived in two different countries for a long time confirms that people in different countries speak in different ways, not only because they have different linguistic codes, which include lexicons and grammars, but also because they have different approaches to using linguistic codes. A number of these distinctions are so rigid and systematic that people are unable to distinguish between different codes and distinct approaches to applying them, as well as different grammars and distinct ethnographies of utterance (Afghari and Karimnia 2007, Hymes 1962, Larina 2008, Wierzbicka 1991/2003]. Therefore, successful intercultural communication depends on understanding the intentions that interlocutors follow through communication as well as the pragmatic meaning of interlocutors' utterances.

To be more specific, people who come from different cultures don't have a common opinion about what is considered a polite and impolite act. In other words, the identical verbal or non-verbal act that is conceived as politeness in one culture may be understood as impoliteness or inappropriateness in another. In fact, in order to act politely in another culture, people must be equipped with applicable skills in applying culture-specific strategies that presumably differ from the same strategies in their own culture. In similar circumstances, they must modify verbal and non-verbal actions. From Wierzbicka's standpoint (1985: 145), verbal differences are because of this fact that cultural particularity acts deeper and more influential than politeness norms and are greatly connected with cultural differences. To be more explicit, fully comprehending of cultural differences which make impressions on communicative behavior is considered as an essential part of intercultural communicative competence (Gladkova and Larina 2018, Larina 2008, Thomas 1984, 1995). Larina (2015) claims that in order to have satisfactory and effective intercultural communication, it isn't only sufficient to possess verbal skills, but also one should be aware of the culture of the target language, particularly those particularities of culture that have an influence on communication and those communicative styles that are specific and directly related to the target culture.

In conclusion, with concentrating on politeness, its communicative particularities and teaching politeness in a second language, a noticeable attention has been paid to the culture of target language as an important element in understanding the words, sentences, expressions as well as (im) polite specificities in a target language. In other words, in order to learn and master of a foreign language fluently, it is not only crucial to learn the vocabularies as well as grammatical constituents, but also focusing on cultural aspects and (im) polite standard structures of a target language play an influential role. Paying weighty consideration to politeness norms and principles in the cultural context of a target language through learning that second language has a great importance, so that second language learners could be able to comprehend target language competently. The individuality of awareness-raising approach in teaching politeness to second language learners is found on the assumption that linguistic involvement should be strongly viewed in order to support the development and mastery of second language. In fact, raising consciousness of second language learners about differences among the systems of politeness in their native (first) and second language is the primary step in developing pragmatic competence in the understanding and following politeness in their target language.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The publication has been prepared with the support of the "RUDN University Program 5-100".

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