**Speech Acts in English Language Teaching**

**1. Introduction**

Language as a means of communication is widely used by everybody in order to convey and share his ideas with other people. Language is not just part of us; language defines us”. In learning language, people should learn about pragmatics. Since we know that we have to know about how to use language in a proper situation and context. Pragmatics studies how people comprehend and produce a communicative act or speech act in a concrete speech situation which is usually a conversation. Pragmatics is an area that encompasses language use and involves issues of how people imply and infer intentions. It is important to communicate and behave successfully with others. This is achieved by conforming to  sociocultural norms of the particular group or society. Speech acts mirror the culture and social norms of the language. Therefore, the lack of such cultural, social, and pragmatic norms in communication may cause misunderstandings and pragmatic failure. Appropriateness of a speech act is measured against sociocultural norms which are the rules that a society uses to guide appropriate behavior in the community. They are intricately tied to pragmatics. A second/foreign language learner must be aware of the pragmatic expressions and reactions to them. Teachers should help learners to learn how to communicate their intentions and needs through practising language in contextualized language functions, such as in role plays. Since pragmatic expression and interpretation by definition are realized in the context of language use, a natural choice to practice pragmatics is found in dialogues in the classroom that the learners themselves have to create. Dialogues are valuable because they: entail a wider scope of language practice, at sentence level, move from word to phrase to longer units and emphasize co-construction of meaning or the changing roles of "speaker" and "listener". All this may provide students with the opportunity to be familiar with pragmatic expressions and appropriate reactions to them.

To improve their competence in performance of language, learners need to be able to put their linguistic knowledge to use in situational tasks that require language functions to be expressed. The use of role plays are contextualized ways that can help them improve their communication of intentions. Incorporating pragmatics into the language classroom enables students to improve their communication competence in terms of making learners aware of how to select the best ways to express themselves in the given context and also how to react to what is said to them appropriately and successfully.The teaching of pragmatics aims to facilitate the learners' ability to find socially appropriate language for the situations they encounter. Pragmatics is the study of linguistic acts and the contexts in which they are performed. Pragmatics is defined as the study of language from the view-point of the user, especially the choices he makes, the constraints he meets in employing language in social situations and the effects the use of language has upon others.

Speech act includes locution, illocution, and perlocution used in different situations and contexts. It is important to highlight the role of speech act in teaching and learning process of English as a foreign language. The focus must be on the components of communicative competence related to the use of speech acts in our daily life.

**2. Communicative Competence**

Communicative competence can be broadly defined as what a speaker needs to know in order to communicate appropriately within a particular speech community. It involves knowing what to say to whom, when, and how to say it appropriately in certain situation. It also involves the social and cultural knowledge, the factor enabling the speaker to use and interpret linguistic forms.

Communicative competence is the ability to use the language correctly and appropriately to accomplish communication goals. The desired outcome of the language learning process is the ability to communicate competently and effectively. It means that, communicative competence is related to the person’s ability to deliver what he has mind through language to the interllocuters in proper social context and situation. Since communicative competence plays important roles in teaching and learning process of English, learners should be able to make themselves understood, expressing themselves appropriately. They should try to avoid confusion in the message (due to faulty pronunciation, grammar, or vocabulary).

**Pragmatic Competence**

Pragmatic competence as an aspect of communicative competence is indispensable for communicating successfully in the target language. It can be defined as what a speaker must know in order to interpret and convey meaning in communication. Pragmatic competence can be defined as the knowledge of communicative action and the way to carry it out, and the ability to use language appropriately according to the context. Pragmatic competence is so vital that lacking it may lead to communication breakdown. It can cause misunderstandings, serious miscommunication, and even distort the communication goals when learners understand only the literal meaning of words but do not know the rules for interpreting them . In certain cases, speakers who fail to use pragmatically appropriate language might appear rude or insulting, particularly those speakers considered as advanced learners whom are expected to have high pragmatic competence. Pragmatic competence, one of the core components of communicative competence, is defined as knowing social, cultural, and discourse conventions that have to be followed in various situations. Students should be provided with opportunities to develop their pragmatic competence.

Pragmatic competence refers to the ability to communicate properly in a social situation. It is a key aspect in communicative competence. It needs the knowledge of Pragmalinguistics, how to make speech acts, like apology, complaint, etc. in a certain language, and sociopragmatics, knowledge about how to use such speech acts in appropriate situations. The interaction of pragmalinguistic aspects and sociopragmatic elements is significant in intercultural communication where the participants have usually had more access to pragmalinguistics than to sociopragmatics, particularly if the target language acquisition occurs in the classroom. This presumes that second/foreign language learners frequently have more pragmalinguistics competence than sociopragmatics. Knowledge of speech act theory will support second language teachers in equipping their learners to overcome pragmatic competence problems. Pragmatic competence is the knowledge required to determine what sentences mean when spoken in a certain way in a particular context. That’s why, most second/foreign language acquisition theories focus on the acquisition of knowledge of rules for language use.

**3. Definitions of Speech Acts**

One important area of pragmatics is that of speech acts*,* which are communicative acts that convey an intended language function. Speech acts are usually defined as functional units in communication. Speech acts are acts of communication that are intended to convey a given intention. They include functions such as requests, apologies, suggestions, commands, offers, promises, refusals, complaints and appropriate responses to those acts. Of course, speakers of these acts are not truly successful until the intended meanings they convey are understood by listeners.

A second/foreign language learner needs to be able toidentify what each speech act intends to convey.

In general, speech acts are acts of communication. To communicate is to express a certain attitude, and the type of speech act being performed corresponds to the type of attitude being expressed. For example, an apology expresses a regret. As an act of communication, a speech act succeeds if the audience identifies, in accordance with the speaker's intention, the attitude being expressed. A speech acts can be one word or more (e.g., Pardon) or sentences (I’m sorry for being late. I forgot your book).

Performing a speech act, in particular an illocutionary act, is a matter of having a certain communicative intention in uttering certain words. Such an act succeeds, the intention with which it is performed is fulfilled, if the audience recognizes that intention.. One must choose one's words in such a way that their utterance makes one's intention recognizable under the circumstances.

A speech act is usually defined as functional unit in communication. When the speaker says something, there are several activities attached to the statement. Speech act is divided into three different acts including:

1) **Locutionary act** - (what is said) the utterance of the message, referring to the literal meaning. For example, “It is cold in here”. It only brings the meaning of the cold temperature in the room.

2) **Illocutionary act** - (what is meant) has to do with the social function of an utterance. An illocutionary act communicates the speaker’s intentions behind the locution. The meaning of “It is cold in here” carries another meaning which may be a request to close the window in a certain room. The illocutionary force of an 'utterance conveys what the speaker intends to do with the particular utterance. Often the literal meaning of an utterance is apparent while its illocutionary force is not. An utterance such as “ that bull is very angry ” can be issued as a warning. If a speaker utters, ‘It’s too hot here.’ he expects the hearer to do a certain action like bringing a glass of water or switching on the fan.

3) **Perlocutionary act** - (the effect on the hearer) the exercise of influence on the addressee. A perlocutionary act reveals the effect the speaker wants to exercise over the hearer. The statement has not only the communicative aspect but also influencing effect on the listener.Perlocutionary act focuses on the result or effect that is produced by an utterance. The example of “It is cold in here” has the result of the window has to be closed because of the temperature of room is cold.

Perlocutionary act is a matter of trying to get the hearer to form some correlative attitude and in some cases to act in a certain way. For example, a statement expresses a belief and normally has the further purpose of getting the addressee form the same belief. A request expresses a desire for the addressee to do a certain thing. A promise expresses the speaker's firm intention to do something and normally aims at making the addressee expect the speaker to do it.

**4. Categories of Speech Acts**

There are five categories of speech acts; declaratives, representatives, expressives, directives, and commisives.

**a. Declaratives**

Declarations are those kinds of speech acts that change the word through their utterance. For example, “I now pronounce you husband and wife.”

**b. Representatives**

Representatives are those kinds of speech acts that state what the speaker belives to be

the case or not. The speakers makes words fit the word (of belief). It can be the forms as statement of fact, assertion, and conclusion. For instance, “Thomas Alva Edison invented the lamp.” It has been widely known that Thomas Alva Edison invented the lamp and it is the truth.

**c. Expressive**

Expressive are those kinds of speech acts that state what the speaker feels. The expression of various psychological states such as likes, dislikes, joy, sorrow, etc. For example, “ I am feeling great today!” the speaker feels pleasure to someone about something so that the speaker feels great today.

**d. Directives**

Directives are those kinds of speech acts through which the speaker gets someone to

do something. The speaker attempts to command, order, request, and give suggestion.

For instance, “Could you ask if she saw my shoes?”, in this case the speaker tries to

give request to the interllocuter to ask their mom whether or not she saw the speaker’s

shoes.

**e. Commissives**

Commissives are those kinds of speech acts that speakers use to commit themselves to

some future actions such as promises, threats, refusal, etc. For example, “I’ll pick you up tommorow”. It means, the speaker promises to the interllocuter to pick him or her up in the following day.

**5. Speech Acts in English Language Teaching**

Speech acts in English teaching and learning process are of vital importance. They are essential because they give us wide opportunities to perfom a lot of expressions; compliment, apologize, request, complain, etc. If speech acts give us the chance to do all this in our native language for sure they can do the same thing in the second/foreign language that we are attempting to learn. It is important to master speech acts while learning a second/foreign language because they not only facilitate the process of communication, but also make it more effective. It is important to implement speech acts while learning a second or foreign language.

The expression of apology in English could be in various sentences. For example; I am sorry, It was my fault, forgive me, I am very sorry to have bothered you, I didn’t mean to offend you. Teaching speech acts is necessary in order to train foreign language learners to express themselves with highly communicative competence. Activities should be expanded to include practice in perfoming speech acts as to give the learners the required practice in selecting language strategies.

**6. Strategies in Teaching Speech Acts**

There are some strategies to teach speech acts.

**a. The model dialogue**

The teacher provides some dialogues and makes his students listen and try to identify the kind of speech acts used. Language should be practised in functions (to accomplish goals), using:

Contextualized language.

An emphasis on communication needs and goals.

"Chunks of language," or set ways of saying things.

**b. Role-play**

This is a very beneficial technique which can be the follow up of the model dialogue. Having analyzed a number of dialogues in terms of their language functions, the students are grouped in pairs and have them to act out the dialogues. Dialogues and role plays work well to help learners understand and use second/foreign language pragmatics because they can emphasize both what the speaker says and what the listener says in reaction to sustain a coherent conversation. Dialogues and role-plays make learners aware not only of what they can or should say in response to a situation but also how they can or should respond to what they hear. This context can make them aware of how people express their intentions, in a context of language use.

**c. Discourse completion task (DCT)**

It is one of the most popular activity, the students are able to fill the blanks after reading the situation written in the text. It is very good exercise to train students in writing and to check their comprehension in pragmatics and discourse analaysis especially in speech acts.

For example:

Please write in the provided space whatever you would say in the following conversational situations.

You forget a meeting with a friend; this is the second time that the same thing has happened with the same person. At the end of the day your friend phones you and says:

"I waited for you for more than twenty minutes! What happened?"

You: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**D. Metapragmatic discussion**

Metapragmatic discussion has an important role in teaching pragmatics with reference to speech acts. It is discussion in which the teacher and students talk about pragmatic elements they observe in order to make them aware of pragmatics. Metapragmatic discussion is talk usually between teacher and students that focuses their attention on pragmatic elements in a set of utterances or in a text.

**7. Speech Act Sets**

An important point in teaching a given speech act such as apologizing, requesting, complaining, etc. is “to arrive at a set of realization patterns typically used by native speakers of the target language, any of which would be recognized as the speech act in question, when uttered in the appropriate context. This set of strategies is reffered to as a specific speech act. Here are some strategies:

1. An expression of an apology, whereby the speaker uses a word, expression, or sentence which contains a relevant performative verb such as apologize, forgive, excuse, be sorry.

2. An explanation or account of the situation which indirectly caused the apologizer to

commit the offense and which is used by the speaker as an indirect speech act of apologizing.

3. Acknowledgment of responsibility, whereby the offender recognizes his or her fault in

causing the infraction.

4. An offer of repair, whereby the apologizer makes a bid to carry out an action or provide payment for some kind of damage which resulted from the infraction.

5. A promise of nonrecurrence, whereby the apologizer commits himself or herself not to have the offense happen again.

This concept of speech act sets could have a wide application in developing language

teaching materials. This strategic-based use of speech acts should be extensively used in the language classroom. Speech acts may be presented in the form of model dialogues and acted out by students. Besides, the expression of apology is very common in daily life and this enables students to broaden their knowledge about speech act. This is the example of the task:

**Apologies**

**Speech Acts of Apology**

The speech act of apologizing involves of a group of strategies. Apology is defined as telling someone that you are sorry for having done something that has caused problems or unhappiness for him. An apology is a speech act which is intended to provide support for the hearer who was actually or potentially malaffected by a violation. In an apology, the speaker is ready to degrade himself to a degree that the apology is a face-saving act for the hearer and a face-threatening act for the speaker. The speakers who can express apology speech acts properly are considered as communicatively competent. Expressing apologies are important in everyday communication in order to sustain harmony. Thus, knowledge of the patterns of apologies and how to use them in different social situations is a significant skill.

Apologies come under expressive speech acts. For an apology to have an impact on the hearer, the speaker should be sincere and have true and honest feelings of sadness. There are three reasons for an apology: regret, responsibility and remedy. The apologizer should take the above mentioned points into account, otherwise the apology will not be sincere and effective. The speech act of apology has certain elements. These include:

1. Expressing of an apology, in which the speaker expresses feelings of regret, such as, “I am sorry”.

2. Clarifying the situation, in which the apologizer attempts to reconstruct the incident for the victim in order to show that the forgiveness is deserved.

3. Admitting the mistake, in which the wrongdoer admits fault as a part of the apology.

4. Presenting repair.

5. Promising of nonrecurrence.

Strategies for apology

1 Expression of apology

Expression of regret I’m sorry

Offer of apology Excuse me

Request for forgiveness Excuse me

2 Explanation or account of the situation The bus was late

3 Acknowledgment of responsibility

Accepting the blame It’s my fault

Expressing self-deficiency I wasn’t thinking

Recognizing the other person as deserving apology You are right

Expressing lack of intent I didn’t mean to

4 An offer of repair I’ll pay for the broken vase

5 Promise of forbearance It won’t happen again

People apologize in different ways. For example, if someone complains about the noise from your stereo, you can apologize and:

give an excuse: “I’m sorry. I didn’t realize.”

admit a mistake: “I forgot I left it on.”

make an offer: “I’ll turn it down right now.”

make a promise: “I’ll make sure to keep the volume down.”

A. Class activity. How do people usually apologize in your country?

What do you usually do when you apologize?

B. Listen to three people complaining. What are they complaining about? How does the other

person apologize? (More than one answer is possible.)

Complaint:

1……………………………

2 ...........................................

3 ............................................

Type of apology:

Give an excuse

admit a mistake

make an offer

make a promise

As can be viewed in this activity, at first students are acquainted with different strategies used in making apologies. Then, students practice what they have learned by listening to a number of conversations. This method is more attractive and effective as it gives students more language awareness.

**8. Conclusion**

In order to achieve the goal of communication, the students as foreign language learners should have good communicative competence. Students should have enough practice in speech acts such as; the model dialogue, role-play and discourse completion task, These tasks are good devices to promote students’ language awareness. Moreover, apologizing is the easiest example to broaden the students’ knowledge about speech act as it make the students aware that if they want to apologize, they can either use an apology word, or use an apology word and extend it by adding something like promise of non-occurrence of it. Teachers need to provide learners with activities that aim at raising their pragmatic awareness and activities that offer opportunities for communicative practice. Through awareness-raising activities, students acquire information about pragmatic aspects of language; for instance the strategies used for apologizing in the second/foreign language. Learners are in need of being exposed to the pragmatic aspects of language they and provided with the analytical tools they need to arrive at their own generalizations concerning contextually appropriate language use.