

**Elena VARZARI**, Senior Lecturer,  
Alec Russo Balti State University,  
**Oxana CEH**, Senior Lecturer,  
Alec Russo Balti State University

The goal of this paper is to explore the notion of teaching with respect to pragmatics, the role that pragmatics research plays or should play in bringing pragmatics into the language classroom. The paper also studies the classroom as a source of input, and the role of classroom activities and pedagogical materials as part of that input, proving that bringing pragmatics into the classroom successfully will require the joint effort of many professionals involved in different endeavours related to it.

Pragmatics, although it is becoming more and more popular and it's possible to find hundreds of resources on-line, is still considered a very sophisticated and confusing field of study, open to further research and requiring a lot of thorough investigation.

Generally, pragmatics is agreed to be regarded as a component of communicative competence, whose concept and notion, if examined scrupulously, have, by the 1980's, already been considered by Bachman and Savignon (1986) to have been overused and misused (Hadley, 1993:381). Yule has defined pragmatics as the study of the relationships between linguistic forms and the users of those forms (Yule, George, 2003: p.4); Canale and Swain (1980, 1988) have outlined the four separate subgroups of communicative competence (grammatical, discourse, strategic, and pragmatic/sociolinguistic), while Hudson (1980:220) considers that the term "communicative competence" also includes attitudes, values, and motivation.

At the same time a more recent survey of communicative competence by Bachman (1990) divides it into the broad headings of "organizational competence" and "pragmatic competence". Grammatical and textual competence are placed under organizational competence, which is the first branch of Bachman's (1990) Language Competence Model, called "Pragmatic Competence", with grammatical competence including knowledge of vocabulary, morphology, syntax, phonology, and the graphemic elements of the language; cohesion and rhetorical organization being within textual competence.

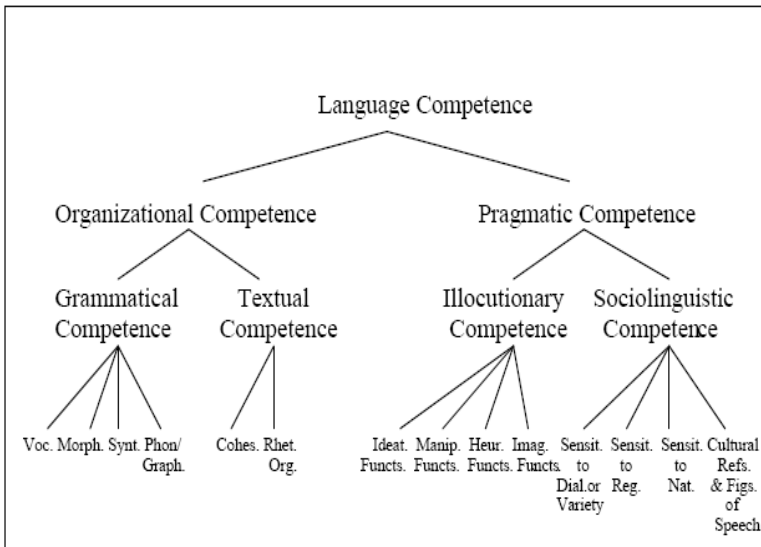
The second main branch of the model includes both illocutionary and sociolinguistic competence. Illocutionary competence refers to the functional use of language while sociolinguistic competence refers to the appropriateness of an utterance to context. Illocutionary competence comprises four functions or abilities, i.e.

- the ability to express ideas and emotions, i.e. ideational functions
- the ability to get things done, i.e. manipulative functions
- the ability to use language to teach, learn, and solve problems i.e. heuristic functions
- the ability to be creative, i.e. imaginative functions.

Sociolinguistic competence includes four categories called “sensitivities”:

- sensitivity to dialect or variety
- sensitivity to register
- sensitivity to naturalness, i.e. native-like use of the language
- sensitivity to cultural references and figures of speech. (p.87-98)

Figure 1.1: Bachman’s (1990) Model of Language Competence



Source: Bachman, 1990:87

Unanimously recognized by contemporary researchers as an important part of communicative competence and being concerned with the stu-

dy of meaning as communicated by speaker (or writer) and interpreted by a listener (or reader), pragmatics should necessarily be taught in the FL class. As Poole (2000, p.11) states "**the disparity between what we intend to communicate and what we actually say is central to pragmatics**", and, having more to do with the analysis of what people meant by their utterances than what the words of phrases in those utterances might mean by themselves, pragmatics becomes an integral component of FL teaching.

Gradually, more and more researchers and teachers are becoming interested in structuring conversation classes and designing appropriate methodologies and sequenced teaching materials (Richards 1990; Celce-Murca et al. 1995; Bou-Franch 2001, etc.); trying to introduce a wide range of communicative oriented activities and situations in their teaching practice; often aiming at promoting learners' pragmatic competence, that is the successful acquisition of social norms in the target language and the ability to select linguistic forms appropriate for a given situation. Recent research into pragmatic competence, which has repeatedly proved that even proficient speakers of English often lack necessary pragmatic knowledge; that is, that they are not aware of the social, cultural, and discourse conventions that have to be followed in various situations (Bardovi-Harlig 1999), has again enhanced one of the indisputable advantages of studying language via pragmatics: the possibility to talk in the class about people's intended meanings, their assumptions, purposes or goals, and the kind of actions (e.g. requests) that they are performing while speaking.

Although some researchers claim that we do have a pragmatic competence, which can be formally described and is universal, and that namely this competence allows us to use language in concrete situations, to utter relevant arguments and to be considered a competent conversant; pragmatics is rightly thought to be difficult to teach and to have serious real consequences for second language learners that include not only the failure to get jobs and good grades, but also serious cross-cultural misunderstanding. Thomas (1983: 96-97) underlines the importance of pragmatic failure by comparing it with grammatical errors: grammatical errors may be irritating and impede communication, but at least, as a rule, they are apparent in the surface structure, so that the hearer is aware that an error has occurred. Once alerted to the fact that the speaker is fully grammatically competent, native speakers seem to have little difficulty in making allowances for it. Pragmatic failure, on the other hand, is rarely recognized as such by non-linguists. If a non-native speaker appears to speak fluently (i. e. grammatically competent), a native speaker is likely to attribute his/her apparent impoliteness or unfriendliness, not to any linguistic deficiency, but to boorishness or ill-will.

While grammatical errors may reveal a speaker to be a less than proficient language user, pragmatic failure reflects badly on him/her as a person.

Developing pragmatic competence in an L2 can be perceived as developing one's sociocultural savvy (Cohen, 1996), but, though most textbooks contain appropriate grammar and vocabulary data, focusing on lexical, syntactic, and phonetic development, they usually fail to provide the necessary and appropriate input in speech acts, and the material they present often differs from real life speech. Nowadays FL teachers are becoming aware that comparative studies and needs analyses might be carried out to address the most challenging pragmatic issues facing particular groups of students, with special emphasis given to pragmatic rules that are different from or nonexistent in the students' first language. To achieve this language teachers/ trainers should change their vision of FL teaching, considering communicative competence as the overall goal of language acquisition and assessment. That's why it seems reasonable to start introducing pragmatic competence as soon as the learners are more or less able to communicate, as experience shows that pragmatic studies are extremely important and beneficial to students' final skills and knowledge. FL teachers are not only aware that students learning a foreign language find difficulties in acquiring pragmatic knowledge independently, but they also realize that not all learners who have a good command of English (or any other foreign language) possess corresponding pragmatic abilities and skills, which finally leads to the interpretation of the consequences of pragmatic differences on a social or personal level rather than as a result of the language learning. Besides, unfamiliar communicative situations and over-reliance on linguistic cues may also contribute to L2 learners' difficulty in matching the utterance to a familiar context, thus hindering comprehension.

Bardovi-Harlig (2002) claims that input that is available from television, radio, books, plays and the internet (all sources available to foreign language learners as well as second language learners)-and even the ambient input in the host environment – may not be salient to learners. As a result, the language learner and the language instructor face two problems: the absence of input and its potential lack of salience. The classroom is the place where learners can encounter pragmatically appropriate input whose salience is enhanced through the instructional process; it is also a place where they can safely experiment with using the target language. As learners show different rates of acquisition, students in the same class are often at different acquisitional stages which imply rich, varied and unmodified input. The developmental aspect of L2 pragmatics suggests that learners may need even more guidance instructionally than previously

thought and that instructors should be prepared to assist learners in making form-function associations, because without this association of form and function, even syntactically advanced learners cannot be expected to produce such suggestions themselves.

Some scholars (Jens Allwood, 2002) have already identified and singled out several of the most important practical applications of the pragmatic research:

### **A. Language Teaching**

Developing into an important element of all teaching, pragmatics is especially useful in language acquisition where not only the language used as the medium of instruction can be pragmatically analyzed but also the language which is to be learnt. A syllabus, that would integrate the study of grammatical and linguistic development with the study of the acquisition of pragmatic competence should urgently be developed, because, as it is suggested by Bardovi-Harlig, even in the light of the role that grammatical development plays, in order for learners to acquire L2 pragmatics in second or foreign language classrooms, they must be exposed to a variety of pragmatically appropriate language. (Bardovi-Harlig, 2002). There are also a number of pragmatic phenomena which doubtlessly are part of an individual's communicative competence and also vary from culture to culture which so far have not been included in traditional language instruction. Since many of these pragmatic phenomena are of great importance to any individual wishing to communicate effectively in a strange culture, this is a very unsatisfactory state of affairs. The answers to such pragmatically-oriented questions, as, e.g. "How can we teach students differences in the ways attitudes and emotions are expressed in different languages? Do satire and irony work the same way in various languages? To what extent are things such as these communicated non-verbally and to what extent are they communicated verbally?" are crucial for the proficient language learners. But the problem is that this intricate field is only being studied and much more research into these areas should be done. Still, it seems reasonable and even necessary for the teachers/trainers to work out teaching pragmatics utilizing what they already know.

Besides, very often the case is that one learns a foreign language more easily when it is being used purposefully, i.e. in communicative acts and language games. As a consequence it seems relatively clear that these notions could be beneficially used as the theoretical backbone of language instruction programs. This does not mean that instruction in the grammatical and phonological patterns of a language should be abandoned. It only means that they should be seen and taught in relation to the pragmatic purposes they serve.

## **Pedagogy**

Classroom teaching is not always as effective as we would like it to be. One thing that is missing in our efforts to correct this is insight into the nature of communicative interaction in the classroom. That's why the instructors should constantly bear in mind the questions that will help them to improve the situation: "What are the typical language games of the classroom? Why are we there? What are their effects on the systems of beliefs, emotions and attitudes of teachers and students?"

## **Political and Social Effects**

The use of pragmatics in pedagogy shows that in understanding some of the patterns our various language games force upon us, we simultaneously create the possibility of freeing ourselves from these patterns if we find their effects non-desirable. Then, it is fairly clear that certain types of both verbal and non-verbal communication have such non-desirable effects in that they reinforce certain patterns of power and dominance distribution. So, by understanding these mechanisms we will somewhat enhance the chances of creating a society with access to power, information and responsibility for more members of that society.

Clearly, the goal of getting pragmatics into the classroom represents the huge work of joining pragmatics research and language teaching. It also implies the development of preliminary materials, utilizing not only authentic language, but also taking into account distribution and frequency of occurrence of the alternative forms presented to learners. It is obviously a meaningful task for everyone interested in working on pragmatics, whether your speciality is second language acquisition, material development, innovations in language teaching, methods, classroom oriented research; whether you are a researcher, teacher educator, or language teacher; whether the language you teach is English, French, German, or Italian.

## **References**

1. **Allwood Jens**, (2002) A Bird's Eye View of Pragmatics, in Gregersen (Ed.) Papers from the Fourth Scandinavian Conference of Linguistics, Odense University Press, pp. 145-159.
2. **Bachman, Lyle & Savignon, Sandra**. (1986). A Critique of the ACTFL oral interview. *The Modern Language Journal*. 70 (ii). 380-390
3. **Bachman, L. F.** (1990). *Fundamental considerations in language testing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
4. Bardovi-Harlig, K. 1999. Exploring the interlanguage of interlanguage pragmatics. *Language Learning* 49 (4): 677-713.
5. Bardovi-Harlig, K, 2002. Understanding the Role of Grammar in the Acquisition of L2 Pragmatics.

7. **Bou Franch, Patricia** (2001) "Conversation in Foreign Language Instruction." In: Codina, V. & Alcón, E. (eds) *Foreign Language Learning in the Language Classroom*, Castellón: Servei de Publicacions de la UJI
- Canale, M. & Swain, M.** (1980). Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing. *Applied Linguistics 1*, 1-47.
8. **Celce-Murcia, Marianne, Dörnyei, Zoltan, & Thurrell, Sarah** (1995). "Communicative competence: a pedagogically motivated model with content specifications." *Issues in Applied Linguistics*, 6.2, pp. 5-35
9. Cohen, A.D. (1996). Developing the ability to perform speech acts; *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 18, 253-267.
10. **Hadley, Alice Omaggio.** (1993). *Teaching language in context*. Boston: Helinle&Helinle
11. **Hudson, Richard A.** (1980) *Sociolinguistics*. New York: Cambridge University Press
12. Poole, S. (2000). *An Introduction to Linguistics*. PRC (China): Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press
13. **Richards, J.C.** 1990. *The Language Teaching Matrix*. Cambridge: CUP.
14. **Thomas, J.** (1983). Cross-cultural pragmatic failure. *Applied Linguistics* , 4 , 91-112.
15. **Yule, George**, 2003, *Pragmatics*, Oxford University Press,