

## TEACHING THE SPEECH ACT OF PRAISE IN THE EFL CLASS

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**Abstract:** *Articolul dat se acsează pe descrierea competențelor lingvistice și pragmatice. Sunt prezentate unele definiții al actului de vorbire laudăși de asemenea sunt abordate criteriile de clasificare. Sunt propuse trei activități practice, care vor fi utilizate la orele de limbă engleză ca limbă străinăavând drept scop utilizarea corectă în vorbireal actului de vorbire lauda.*

**Cuvinte cheie:** *cometență lingvistică, competență pragmatică, act de vorbire, laudă, clasificare*

“Pragmatics is the study of speaker and hearer meaning created in their joint actions that include both linguistic and non-linguistic signals in the context of socio-culturally organized activities”  
(LoCastro, 2003, p. 15)

### Introduction

To be considered a proficient speaker of a language, in addition to linguistic competence (proper pronunciation, grammatical accuracy, relevant vocabulary, good listening and speaking skills, etc.), one also needs pragmatic competence (PC). The term was introduced in 1983 by sociolinguist Jenny Thomas in her article *Cross-Cultural Pragmatic Failure* in which it is written that she does not use the term PC as a synonym for 'communicative competence' like Candlin (1976) and Schmidt & Richards

(1980),but rather she uses “it to refer to one of several levels of knowledge (Hymes 1972)”thatcomprises grammatical, psycholinguistic and 'social' competences (Bell 1976). “Communicative competence might be thought of as a kind of 'mixer' which performed the function of balancing available linguistic forms chosen by drawing on the linguistic competence of the user, against available social functions housed in some kind of social competence”.Thomas adds “a speaker's 'linguistic competence' would be made up of grammatical competence ('abstract' or decontextualized knowledge of intonation, phonology, syntax, semantics, etc.) and pragmatic competence (the ability to use language effectively in order to achieve a specific purpose and to understand language in context)” (Thomas1983: 91-92).Taguchidefines PCas “the ability to use language appropriately in a social context” (Taguchi 2009). In other words, pragmatic competence means “using language in a socially appropriate way thanks to increased awareness of linguistic structures and social norms.”<sup>7</sup>

Being acknowledged as an essential aspect of a broader communicative proficiency, pragmatic competence has becomean indispensable tool for effectivecommunication in a contextually suitablemanner. Language teachers (LT) are aware of the importance of the PC in foreign language acquisition and they agree that it must be included in the curriculum and be taught in the English as a foreign language classroom.LTare conscious that PC, unlike linguistic competence that is traditionally explicitly described and trained during the lesson, regrettably is often ignored. Nevertheless, PC is considered to be fundamental in developing students' effective communicative skills in a foreign language.

### **Teaching Speech Acts**

Using speech acts (SA) appropriately is undeniably key to successful communication. David Crystal (1999) describes a SA as “A *communicative activity* defined with reference to the intentions of a speaker while speaking and the effects achieved on a listener” (Crystal 1999: 314). Yule regards SA as “*actions performed via utterances*” (Yule 1996:47) used by interlocutors to exchange information, while Green (2014) views them as “*staples of*

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<sup>7</sup>The Importance of Developing Pragmatic Competence in the EFL Classroom, 2015, <https://corkenglishcollege.wordpress.com/2015/06/15/the-importance-of-developing-pragmatic-competence-in-the-efl-classroom/> )

*communicative life*” (Green 2014, online). Crystal adds: “In this context, the act itself is called a locutionary act; the intentional aspect is the act’s illocutionary force; and the impact on the listener is the act’s perlocutionary effect (Crystal 1999: 314). People perform SA when they intend to: apologize for a deed, greet someone, issue a request, express a complaint, submit an invitation, pay a compliment, etc., and anticipate a relevant response to the uttered SA. Correspondingly, a SA can be considered successful only when its intended meaning is clearly understood by the addressees. K. Bardovi-Harlig (2001) claims that “Much research has gone into identifying how speakers of various languages realize speech acts, take turns, and use silence [...]”. Experimental evidence demonstrates “that native and non-native speakers of a given target language appear to have different systems of pragmatics...” (Bardovi-Harlig 2001:13) It is hardly possible to acquire PC without spending a certain amount of time among native speakers in a target-language country, however, because not all the learners have got this opportunity, FL teachers are the ones to form this competence in their students. It is of paramount importance for students to study SA, as they learn that, in addition to the literal meaning, i.e. their grammatical form, the intended meaning, i.e. the practical use of words, stated by someone, ought to be taken into consideration by the hearer.

### **The SA of Praise: Definition and Classification**

In this article we intend to focus on the SA of praise, how to raise learners’ awareness on its appropriate usage in speech, as well as on ways of teaching praise in the EFL class. Praise belongs to the group of evaluative SA that also comprises compliments, laud, extolling, commendation, flattery, approval, etc. (To) *praise* is defined as: (n) words that show approval of or admiration for sb/sth; (v) to express your approval or admiration for sb/sth (Hornby 2000: 990); (v) to express admiration or approval of the achievements or characteristics of a person or thing.<sup>8</sup> In other words “praise can be described as *verbal, explicit, intentional, sincere and positive feedback* in relation to others. Moreover, by means of praise the addresser informs the addressee about the correctness of his/her action, expresses his/her positive attitude to the addressee’s individual actions and

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<sup>8</sup><https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/praise?q=praising>

success” (Varzari 2000: 302-303).

Researchers have come with several classification principles of the SA of praise, for instance, Mueller and Dweck (1998) distinguish two types of praise: for *being* and for *doing* (Mueller&Dweck 1998: 33), Kamins and Dweck (1999) consider such criteria as: expressing the addresser’s own attitude to the addressee, praising someone for achieved results, praising as the manifestation of gratitude for some activity (Kamins&Dweck 1999:842). Serebrenkova’s taxonomy of praise/ compliment is more fragmented and comprises praise for good performance, ethical qualities, actions, intents, arrangements, intellectual aptitudes, way of thinking and a certain point of view, toast, professionalism or abilities, and for correct answers at the lesson (Serebrenkova 2001:145-146). Bell’s (2004) taxonomy based on the function of praise in modelling one’s self-esteem is divided into praise as a social compliment, praise pointed toward enhancing addressee’s self-esteem and motivation that facilitates the development of the personality, and praise aiming at establishing relationships and fostering cooperation (Bell 2004: 1-4). Among other classification principles the contents of the praise, the target, the degree of directness, indirectness and emotionality, the tone and/or level of seriousness, time orientation, language form, means of expression, etc. could be mentioned.

### **Introducing PC into the EFL class**

As it has been mentioned above, PC is the skill to use language forms appropriately and efficiently in a certain context. Research has proved that the English classroom is the right place to develop and raise learners’ PC. For example, Gabriele Kasper (1997) affirms that the pragmatics of a FL is teachable, but the teachers should use functioning strategies, methods and techniques while introducing PC to students, because although there is a lot of material concerning PC, language users do not always know how to apply it in practice. Students’ pragmatic awareness can be improved via explicit and implicit instruction on using SA appropriately that will definitely lead to improved performance of SA, therefore students’ interactions with native speakers will be more successful. We are confident that activities designed for building PC have got their place in the language class, thus inspiring the students to practice and use language more naturally. We suggest several activities to be used at B2-C1 levels.

### **Activity 1. Define and translate the following words**

**Level:** B2

**Time:** 15-20 min

**Rationale:**the translation and understanding of the terms *compliment, praise, laud, extolling, commendation, flattery, approval* can be very tricky, as they convey a more or less similar meaning expressing an evaluative positive connotation. This activity is designed for students whose major is translation.

**Materials needed:**

Flipcharts, markers, English- English Dictionaries, Romanian-English Dictionaries, Russian-English Dictionaries.

**Procedure:**

1. Divide the class into 7 pairs / groups. Each pair/ group gets a slip of paper on which a SA (*compliment, praise, laud, extolling, commendation, flattery, approval*) is written.

2. Instruct the students to consult appropriate dictionaries, define the terms and give their Romanian and Russian translations. [e.g. (to) **Compliment**(n) a remark that expresses praise or admiration of somebody; (v) to tell sb that you like or admire something they have done, their appearance, etc. *Rom.* Compliment, laudă, măgulire, amabilitate; *Rus.* КОМПЛИМЕНТ, похвала, любезность.]

3. Discuss the similarities and differences.

**Activity 2. Collocations with “Praise”**

**Level:** B2- C1

**Time:** 30-35 min.

**Rationale:**this activity is based on students’ collaborative activity. It aims at helping learners to use the SA of praise in a broader context. It will enrich students’ vocabulary, will facilitate its understanding and will practice the writing skill.

**Materials needed:**

Flipcharts/ A3 paper, markers, English- English Dictionaries, Oxford Collocations Dictionary for students of English.

**Procedure:**

1. Divide the class into several groups.

2. Each group gets 2 dictionaries- *English- English Dictionaries* and *Oxford Collocations Dictionary for Students of English*.

3. Tell them to find the entry PRAISE and systematize the information on the flipchart. E.g.

**[Adj + Praise]** glowing, great, high, lavish, special, unstinting, warm, faint, universal;

**[Verb + Praise]** be full of, be fulsome/ loud/unstinting, give sb., offer, single sb. out for, heap, shower (sb. with), come in for, receive, attract, draw, earn, win; be quick to

**[Preposition + Praise]** beyond ..., in ... of,

**[Praise + Preposition]** ... for, ... from, ... of

**[Phrases]** a chorus of praise, a paean of praise, to have nothing but praise for sb/sth, sing sb's praises, a word of praise

**[Adv. + Praise]** highly, lavishly, warmly, privately, publicly, rightly], etc.<sup>9</sup>

4. Tell the students to use the vocabulary in context, for instance, the 1<sup>st</sup> group makes up a story, the 2<sup>nd</sup> writes a fairy tale, the 3<sup>rd</sup> writes a poem, etc.

5. Each group presents their writings.

### **Activity 3. Guess What Am I Praised for?**

**Level:** B2

**Time:** 7- 10 min.

**Rationale:** the activity will provide speaking practice based on visual arts (photos, pictures, drawings, etc.) The learners critical thinking skills will be trained.

#### **Materials needed:**

Photos, pictures, drawings of prasing people for various resons. A4 paper, coloured pencils/ markers/chalks, etc.

#### **Procedure:**

1. Tell the students you are going to draw and play.
2. Each student/ pair gets a sheet of A4 paper and coloured pencils, markers or chalks.
3. Tell them to draw a person/ an animal that has done something for which s/he/it deserves praise.

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<sup>9</sup>Oxford Collocations Dictionary for students of English (p.588)

4. After they have finished, ask them to show the drawings to the class and the students should try to guess the reason for being praised.

### **Variation**

Teachers can prepare sets of photos, pictures, cartoons, comics, etc.

The students are asked to make up sentences, dialogues, write stories/poems, etc.

### **Conclusion**

Much research on how SA are performed by foreign language students has been done, quite a few differences between FL learners' and native speakers' awareness have been identified. (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001). Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper (1989), Bardovi-Harlig (1999, 2001), Kasper & Schmidt (1996) suggest how to reduce this imperfection recommending to include explicit pragmatic training into the FL curricula. The contents should be presented explicitly, include evaluation, have personal reference and a definite value. We agree that such a pedagogical involvement will definitely lead to a positive outcome, improving the quality of language acquisition, thus raising learners' pragmatic ability via well-designed classroom activities.

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