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**Abstract:** *The article discusses the role of pragmatic instruction in EFL classrooms, with a focus on the speech act of advice. After revealing some peculiarities of advice in the Anglo and Romanian cultures, it offers some activities that may contribute to raising learners' pragmatic awareness regarding the functioning of this speech act in the Anglo culture.*

**Keywords:** *advice, culture, pragmatic competence, pragmatic failure, pragmatic instruction.*

### 1. Importance of pragmatic instruction

Learning a foreign language involves learning different aspects of the language: pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar. However, mastery of these aspects is not sufficient in order to communicate successfully in a foreign language. Although many foreign language learners can produce grammatically correct speech, in conversation with native speakers they may fail to render their message appropriately, which may lead to breakdowns in communication. Of equal importance in speaking a foreign language, alongside accuracy in grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation, is the ability to use the language appropriately in a variety of contexts. The ability “to communicate your intended message with all its nuances in any socio-cultural context and to interpret the message of your interlocutor as it was intended” is referred to as pragmatic competence [5, p. 15]. It is true that pragmatic competence “has come to be viewed as an essential part of learners’ competence” [6, p. 145]. Since the aim of foreign language instruction is developing students’ ability to use it successfully in communication, developing students’ pragmatic competence should become a must.

My teaching experience shows that one area which seems challenging for Romanian students of English is speech act production. What I witness in most cases is a transfer of the norms from the students’ mother tongue when formulating speech acts in English. Researchers refer to it as pragmatic transfer and explain it as „the influence exerted by learners’ knowledge of languages and cultures other than L2 on their comprehension, production and learning of L2 pragmatic information” [9, p. 5]. Jenny Thomas makes a distinction between two types of pragmatic transfer: pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic. She explains pragmalinguistic transfer as

the inappropriate transfer of speech act strategies from one language to another, or the transferring from the mother tongue to the target language of utterances which are semantically/syntactically equivalent, but which, because of different 'interpretive bias', tend to convey a different pragmatic force in the target language [13, p. 101].

An example of pragmlinguistic transfer from Romanian into English is the use of imperative sentences to formulate requests in English. Students use the syntactic structure of Romanian requests when making requests in English, being unaware that an imperative conveys a different pragmatic force in English, and namely, that of an order or a command.

Sociopragmatic transfer goes beyond language, being seen as "the interface of linguistic actions and social structure" [2, p. 8] As Elite Olshtain and Andrew Cohen explain, speakers may transfer their perceptions about how to perform in given situations from native language behavior to a second language situation. Such transfer could effect whether they would use a given speech act, and if so, how frequently, and how much prestige they afford other participants in the encounter [11, p. 61].

As examples of sociopragmatic transfer noticed at Romanian learners of English may serve the scarce use of certain speech acts and the overuse of others. Thus, apologies and thanks may sometimes be absent from the linguistic repertoire of students of English when required in the Anglo culture, while unsolicited advice may be used too often, in situations which are considered inappropriate in the Anglo culture.

The two types of pragmatic transfer often result in two kinds of pragmatic failure: pragmlinguistic and sociopragmatic [13]. It is worth pointing out that researchers prefer to use the term 'pragmatic failure' rather than 'pragmatic error'. As Jenny Thomas explains,

the nature of pragmatic ambivalence is such that it is not possible to say that the pragmatic force of an utterance is 'wrong'. All we can say is that it failed to achieve the speaker's goal [13, p. 94].

Pragmlinguistic failure occurs when there is a difference in the way a native speaker and a non-native speaker assign pragmatic force to a certain linguistic structure or when speech act strategies are inappropriately transferred from L1 to L2 [13, p. 99]. In many cases it is the result of a pragmlinguistic transfer.

Sociopragmatic failure refers to "the social conditions placed on language in use" [13, p. 99]. It arises from different cultural perceptions of what constitutes appropriate linguistic behaviour. When foreign language learners speak the target language, they tend to interpret utterances according to their own cultural norms and understanding of the world, which often differs from the target language cultural norms. This fact may lead to sociopragmatic failure and hence to breakdowns in cross-cultural communication.

While pragmlinguistic failure represents a linguistic problem and as such, can be corrected, dealing with sociopragmatic failure is a "far more delicate matter" since it is related to cultural norms concerning the size of imposition, cost/benefit, social distance, relative rights and obligations [13]. Such a failure, as researchers note, requires cautious discussion rather than correction [3]. Overcoming sociopragmatic failure turns to be quite difficult since it often involves changing one's system of beliefs and values.

What has been discussed so far confirms the idea that since language cannot be separated from culture, teaching language in use requires teaching two systems of knowledge: of language and of culture. Teaching the former seems to be less problematic than teaching the latter. Another important issue is the teacher's role in dealing with errors that arise when students use these two systems of knowledge. From the perspective of a foreign language teacher, the students' errors which result from using language resources are easier to deal with. Cases of cultural failure are more difficult to solve since they reflect the student's system of values and beliefs about the world.

The differences in cultural norms, which are reflected in the way speech acts are performed in English and Romanian, may lead to failures in communication between native speakers of English and non-native speakers. To fill this gap, more attention should be paid to pragmatic instruction, with a focus not only on the linguistic realization of speech acts, but also on the sociopragmatic features such as the setting, the context, the relationship between speakers and addressees since these factors shape the way individuals speak to each other.

An area which seems challenging for Romanian students of English is the production and use of directive speech acts, which represent “attempts (...) by the speaker to get the hearer to do something” [12, p. 11]. The challenges that are connected with this type of speech acts stem from differences in the cultural values characteristic of Anglo and Romanian cultures. A major concept in the Anglo culture is privacy, which refers to the autonomy of every individual. It is one of the Anglo cultural values which influences not only the Anglo behaviour in general, but also the Anglo communicative behaviour. This cultural value explains many peculiarities of the way people belonging to the Anglo culture communicate. It is the reason why there are more taboo topics (family problems, health, money) in English than in other languages. In addition, some questions that are appropriate in other cultures, seem intrusive in the Anglo culture. Tatiana Larina gives the following example: the question *Are you getting off?* asked by a passenger on a bus may seem too personal to a representative of the Anglo culture [15]. The reaction it may cause is: *Why should you know that?* The appropriate thing to say in this situation would be: *Excuse me, could I get by, please?* Other examples of language use influenced by this cultural value are: the use of interrogative sentences to issue directive speech acts such as requests (*Could you help me, please?*), suggestions (*Why don't we have a picnic tomorrow?*), invitations (*Would you like to go to the cinema tonight?*); speaker-oriented requests (*Can I have your book, please?*) rather than hearer-oriented requests (*Can you give me the book, please?*); avoidance of the imperative; avoidance of performative verbs (*I advise you to ..., I invite you ..., I ask you ..., I congratulate you ...*); the higher frequency of certain speech acts (such as apology, thanks) and a lower frequency of others (such as advice-giving). All these characteristics should be taken into account when teaching English as a foreign language.

## 2. Peculiarities of advice in the Anglo and Romanian cultures

Our discussion of peculiarities of advice in English and Romanian will start with an examination of the semantics of the English word *advice* and of its Romanian equivalent *sfat*. Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary offers the following definition to *advice* –“an opinion or a suggestion about what somebody should do in a particular situation”. The explanatory dictionary of Romanian defines *sfat* as “vorbe, argumente spuse cuiva pentru a-l convinge să procedeze într-un anumit fel, într-o împrejurare dată; povață, îndemn, îndrumare”. As can be seen, there is a difference between the semantics of the English word *advice* and of the Romanian word *sfat*. While the English word *advice* represents just an opinion or a suggestion (a suggestion being an idea or a plan that you mention for somebody else to think about), its Romanian equivalent implies persuading somebody to act in a particular way. This difference is further noticed in the linguistic structures of English and Romanian advice. While English has a preference for indirect ways of expressing advice, which makes it hard to be distinguished from suggestions (*Why don't you go to the doctor?*), in Romanian it is appropriate to use direct strategies, which sound more like orders (*Mergi neapărat la medic!*).

In her book *Русские проблемы в английской речи*, Lynn Visson has a chapter entitled *Когда и кому даются советы*. Comparing the American and Russian communicative behaviours, she points out that Americans consider that people should solve their problems by themselves. For this reason, when offered advice, they tend not to follow it and they seem not to take into consideration the others' opinion about their problems [14]. As Leo Jones notes, North Americans like to “do their own thing” and “mind their own business”. He also mentions that “advice on personal matters is usually given only to close friends or when someone asks for advice” [8, p. 61]. In everyday life, representatives of Anglo culture are guided by the principle of non-interfering in other people's affairs. The old English proverb which runs “Give not counsel or salt till you are asked” confirms this cultural peculiarity related to advice giving.

Another important thing is the last part of the advice. As pointed out by Lynn Visson, a person offering advice finishes it with the following remarks: *But after all, it's up to you; It's your decision; That's just what I would do; You've got to decide this for yourself* [14, p. 61]. These formulae stress the concern Americans have not to intrude into their interlocutor's privacy.

Romanian seems to place fewer restrictions on advice giving. It is true that some people may be “too generous” in offering advice and as a result create discomfort in communication, but sometimes advice is treated as a sign of closeness, as willingness to offer help, as an expression of concern for the interlocutor. An important distinction between the language of advice in English and

Romanian is that while English favours to soften the force of the advice by using indirect formulations (*Why don't you ...?*) or by using softeners (*It might be better for you to ...*), in Romanian the force of the advice is often strengthened by using intensifiers (*Mergi la medic imediat!*). The use of intensifiers in Romanian advice does not sound bossy. On the contrary, it seems to emphasize the speaker's concern for the interlocutor. Another thing is that Romanian people may give advice even when they have not been asked to, which is not characteristic of Anglo culture.

Thus, the perception of the speech act of advice in the two communicative cultures is different. While people from the Anglo culture perceive it as an intrusion into their privacy, Romanians treat it as a sign of closeness, which says *I care about you, You are not indifferent to me*. For this reason, advice occurs more frequently in the Romanian culture than in the Anglo culture. This difference may lead to misunderstandings (or even breakdowns) in cross-cultural communication. For example, if someone belonging to Romanian culture gives advice to someone from the Anglo culture, especially unsolicited advice, he/she may be perceived as intrusive. His/her goodwill and intention to help the interlocutor may be taken as an invasion of the interlocutor's privacy.

Taking into consideration the nature of advising, Eli Hinkel proposes the following definition for advice, which includes rules for the successful performance of this speech act:

The giving of advice is a complex speech act that should be performed with caution when the speaker is reasonably certain that the hearer is likely to do what is being advised, that all advice must be hedged and never given explicitly to avoid offending the hearer, and that the speaker is presupposed to have the right or the authority to give advice [7, p. 5].

This definition reflects some important peculiarities characteristic of advice in the Anglo culture, which show a respect for every individual's privacy: caution is required when giving advice, direct advice may offend the hearer, all advice must be hedged. In addition, there is a restriction on the speaker's status: he/she is presupposed to have the right or the authority to give advice.

### 3. Advice strategies in English

Researchers classified the linguistic structures used to give advice in English into several categories. What follows is Alicia Martinez-Flor's typology, which contains indirect, conventionally indirect and direct strategies of advice-giving [10, p. 144]:

Type	Strategy	Structure
Indirect	Hints	<i>You want to pass, don't you?</i>
Conventionally indirect	Conditional	<i>If I were you, ..... .</i>
	Probability	<i>It might be better for you ....</i>
	Specific formulae	<i>Why don't you ...? Isn't it better for you ...?</i>
Direct	Imperative	<i>Be careful!</i>
	Negative imperative	<i>Don't worry.</i>
	Declarative	<i>You should ... You ought to ...</i>
	Performative	<i>I advise you to ...</i>

As this table illustrates, advice-giving may be realized in a variety of ways: by using a hint, a conventionally indirect strategy, or a direct strategy. Of these three strategies, the direct one seems to be in contradiction with the cultural value *privacy*, which requires respect for an individual's freedom of action. The conventionally indirect strategies show more concern for the interlocutor's privacy, by letting him/her make the choice they consider best.

A study conducted by Andrea DeCapua and Joan Findlay Dunham revealed that in giving advice American speakers of English seldom use grammatical forms with the verb *should*, opting out for a variety of different discourse strategies and embedding advice in larger narrative contexts [4]. It is curious that namely this structure is presented in many English grammar books as an advice-giving formula.

### 4. Teaching the language of advice in EFL classrooms

The cultural differences between advice giving in English and Romanian stress the need to pay more attention to this topic in the process of teaching English. A question that arises is which pragma-

tic norms to teach since English is spoken in so many different parts of the world and these norms may vary. In answer to it, researchers suggest that ELT classrooms should provide opportunities for learners to develop intercultural awareness, but which norms to teach is less a matter for concern. Successful intercultural encounters depend upon awareness that different socio-pragmatic norms do exist. What matters is to help language learners understand the interplay of culture and language and how their socio-pragmatic behavior is just one way language is used in communicative situations [4]. If the chief goal of instruction in pragmatics is to help learners increase their pragmatic awareness language teachers should give them choices about their interactions in the target language. By increasing pragmatic awareness researchers mean a variety of things – helping learners listen to interactions, watch for reactions, consider what may result from one choice of words over another [1]. A focus on pragmatics in the classroom also offers learners tools to interpret and to respond to a variety of speech acts when they are addressed to them [1].

Language educators have suggested different techniques and activities to teach speech acts. This section presents several activities that can be incorporated into the classroom to develop students' pragmatic competence in the speech act of advising. They include both awareness-raising activities and production activities.

Pragmatic instruction will start with awareness-raising activities, in which the speech act of advice is discussed. To begin with, learners are encouraged to think about how advice functions in their own language and culture. Students may be offered several questions regarding advice:

1. Whom do you usually give advice to?
2. How often do you give advice to others?
3. Do you sometimes give advice without being asked?
4. What do you say to give advice in your mother tongue?
5. Do you ask others for advice? Whom?
6. How do you feel when the person you gave advice to did not follow it?

Students discuss these questions in small groups and then as a class. They may also be given several situations which require giving advice and asked to make dialogues in their mother tongue. The situations will involve different relationship between the speakers, e.g. friends, parent and child. As students listen to each others' dialogues, they note down the formulae used to give advice and point out the differences in dialogues which involve different relationships between interlocutors.

Depending on the available material, a second activity may be reading or listening to English dialogues which contain the speech act of advice. Students are asked to note down the structures that are used to give advice in English. They compare the language of advice in English to that in their mother tongue and point out the differences. The teacher draws the students' attention to the linguistic structures used to give advice in English and to the way the relationship between the speakers may influence the choice of formulae.

As homework assignment, students may be asked to pick examples of advice and responses to them from films or from advice columns. They are also asked to pay attention to the relationship between the speakers.

Apart from awareness-raising techniques, tasks involving productive activities are also necessary since learners need to be provided with opportunities for communicative practice. Role plays seem to be the most appropriate in this respect. In role plays, students assume certain roles in hypothetical scenarios and interact with peers to practice giving and responding to advice.

## **5. Conclusion**

Since students' mother tongue influences their acquisition and use of the foreign language, cases of inappropriate use of the target language are nearly unavoidable. Inappropriate language use may lead to communicative failures in cross-cultural communication. To avoid them, teachers should incorporate pragmatic instruction in foreign language classrooms. Pragmatic instruction does not imply insisting on conformity to a particular target-language norm, but rather helping learners become familiar with the range of language devices regarding the production of certain speech acts in the target language and the way they vary depending on context. In other words, EFL learners should be offered opportunities to see the interplay of language, culture, and communication.

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