PRAGMATIC FAILURE IN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN ENGLISH

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ARTICLE INFORMATION

ABSTRACT:

As English is more and more used as a global means of communication by people from a variety of different cultures, it has become increasingly apparent that problems do occur in interpreting the meanings of words and phrases. In communication, the issue of language misuse can arise when there is a mismatch between the language used and the social context. This is known as pragmatic failure. Pragmatic failure can be described as a failure in communication because speakers are unable to either use or interpret language in the appropriate context. Intercultural communication in English is often marred by pragmatic failure. This phenomenon is explored in the following article which looks at the common manifestations and underlying causes of this issue. Previous research suggests that misunderstandings arising from a pragmatic or conversational context are frequently the result of cultural differences rather than grammatical errors. Without awareness of the pragmatic factors, it is possible for communication to fail and relationships to suffer as a result. English language programmes

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ought to incorporate teaching in intercultural pragmatics to ensure effective communication in the multicultural context.

Introduction

International communication typically takes place in the English language worldwide in education, trade and in the media. As the global community of non-native English speakers grows, speakers often encounter misunderstandings because of the linguistic and cultural differences between them. Most communication breakdowns are due to a pragmatic failure, a concept formulated by Thomas (1983) who defined it as the inability to either send, or receive information which is contextual. Intercultural communication often experiences pragmatic failure when native speakers use rules governing the usage of their first language in a foreign language. Pragmatic errors, in comparison with grammatical mistakes, are typically harder to detect and may be considered impolite, offensive or simply inappropriate. This article aims to explore the nature of pragmatic failure in intercultural communication in English, identify its main types and causes, and discuss its implications for English language learning and teaching.

Literature review

Intercultural communication between speakers of English and those of other cultures is often hindered by pragmatic failure. Padilla Cruz (2013) shifts the emphasis from learners as producers to learners as receivers, pointing out that communication failures arise more frequently in the comprehension than in the production phase. From a relevance theory point of view, he suggests that, second language learners do not possess the interpretive abilities of native speakers and so should be trained to be "cautiously optimistic hearers", capable of questioning and discarding misleading interpretations. Among Chinese learners of English as a foreign language, Lin (2008) found key causes for communication breakdowns to be cultural transfer, the inappropriate use of speech acts and limited pragmatic knowledge. This study shows the importance of teaching methods that teach students how to express themselves in social situations in a school setting. Research carried out in Jordan by Altakhaineh et al. (2000) more recently, discovered that the bacterium responsible was E. coli. A study of the proficiency of Jordanian learners of English as a foreign language found that learners who have high levels of grammatical competence may still fail to communicate effectively. A significant problem identified in the research is the

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users' failure to use appropriate indirect speech acts and politeness, which highlights the fact that a lack of social skills is a major obstacle in correctly interpreting messages. It is evident from these studies that there are a variety of problems which can lead to pragmatic failure in intercultural communication, which include cultural and interpretive factors.

Methodology

The research design adopted in this study is qualitative descriptive. This choice was based on a thorough analysis of existing literature from pragmatics, intercultural communication and English as a lingua franca. By studying real life examples of intercultural communication in schools and everyday situations we were able to see what common problems can occur. This was done alongside a thorough analysis of academic papers and books which described cases where the rules of communication had broken down. This research concerns the analysis of speech acts, like saying 'no' and asking for information, politeness theories such as Brown and Levinson's Negative and Positive Politeness Theory and the Impact Theory of ImPol by Leech, and language usage which varies depending on context.

Results

The failure in intercultural communication in English can be broadly classified into two groups, that of sociolinguistic and sociological failure. Misuse of linguistic forms by speakers to express a particular function leads to pragmalinguistic failure. Such requests in a direct manner, like "Can you pass the salt?", can be regarded as impolite in some cultures where indirectness is valued. In these cultures, an indirect manner such as "The salt is over there" is preferred. Where speakers from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds interact, they are likely to experience sociopragmatic failure. This occurs because different cultures have varying norms and expectations. In different cultures, social norms on politeness vary; views on authority are also diverse as are the subjects that are deemed suitable for conversation. Different cultures have different norms in informal and friendly communication. In one culture physical contact may be common and considered friendly, while in another culture it is considered an invasion of personal space. Similarly, in some cultures direct and blunt communication is the norm, while in others roundabout language is used to avoid giving offence. Often, people misjudge the character of those who use language inappropriately rather than their ability to use language. In intercultural situations differences in body language can cause problems, making the other person feel uneasy or even lead to conflict.

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Discussion

It appears that the breakdown in communication is primarily due to cultural disparities rather than poor language skills. They assume that communicative norms in their native language are also used in English when communicating with native English speakers. The way people use language is influenced by the power structures and social norms in their culture. These include values such as the importance given to individualism and group harmony, the level of formality required in politeness conventions and the power distance between different members of society. Traditional language teaching tends not to provide students with the language skills they require for everyday inter-cultural communication. The use of authentic materials, role-plays, cross-cultural comparisons, and explicit instruction can all assist learners in attaining pragmatic competence. In global communications, it is essential for native English speakers to appreciate the varying degrees of pragmatics that different users bring to interactions involving English.

Conclusion

In spite of perfect command of the language, there are many cases where a message is not understood through English as a result of differences in the cultures of the speakers. The breakdown in such interactions is typically due to differing communication expectations. English language teaching should give due attention to the learners' pragmatic competence to ensure effective communication; communication failure in most cases is due to the learners' lack of pragmatic competence. Further research may be conducted with the aim of establishing through experience how the teaching of intercultural communication skills can be improved, including the creation of learning materials that cover the topic of intercultural pragmatics.

Literature

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