

PRAGMATICS THROUGH LITERATURE: A TEACHING EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT

The article deals with a ten-hour teaching experience in “English Language 2” at Udine University in the second year of the Degree Course “Lingue e Letterature Straniere”. The main aim was to raise the students’ awareness of how conversation between literary characters can offer effective examples of what people can ‘do’ with language. The first part gives an overview of the basic literature in the history of pragmatics, touching upon key concepts, such as ‘speech act’, ‘cooperation’, ‘adjacency pair’, politeness and conversation management with ‘turn-taking’ and ‘floor-holding’. The second part gives an account of the workshops on the same topics. The intention is to provide some examples of a pedagogic approach to pragmatics through dialogues from literary texts. At the end an additional excerpt is used to evaluate the effectiveness of the module through the students’ autonomous analysis.

1. INTRODUCTION

This article is about a teaching experience of English as a foreign language and pragmatics in the second year of the Degree Course “Lingue e Letterature Straniere” at Udine University. In the first part, before the presentation of the workshops, an overview of the basic literature in the field of pragmatics is given; the second part will discuss the themes of pragmatics dealt with in the workshops organized for the students of “English Language 2”.

Since the workshops make use of literary texts, the first part includes a short section on pragmatics and literature to highlight a

further perspective of literary interpretation. Conversation between characters can offer impressive examples of what people can ‘do’ with language, therefore becoming a source of valuable material for analysis.

To conclude, some pedagogic benefits of the study of pragmatics in a foreign language course are mentioned and explained. If learning a foreign language means learning to ‘perform’ social acts according to the target culture, a student should be aware that pragmatic errors prevail over grammatical ones with regard to communicative efficacy. Hence the inclusion of this field in the course.

The second part shows examples of student activities aimed at understanding concepts of pragmatics, while applying them to the analysis of literary texts. The areas the activities touch upon are: Searle’s (1975: 1-29) typology of ‘speech act’, ‘illocutionary force’, ‘perlocutionary effect’ and ‘implicature’; Grice’s (1975) ‘cooperation maxims’; Brown – Levinson’s (1987: 61-65) ‘adjacency pairs’, ‘face-saving’ and ‘face-threatening’ in politeness; Schegloff – Sack’s (1973: 289-327) conversation with ‘turn-taking’ and ‘floor-holding’. The literary texts are: an excerpt from *Look back in Anger* (Osborne 1957), the short story *Cat in the Rain* (Hemingway 1925) and, finally, an excerpt from *Pygmalion* (Shaw 1916). This text is used with the aim of evaluating the effectiveness of the module through the students’ autonomous application of the key-concepts already introduced and developed during the previous activities.

2. PRAGMATICS

Pragmatics refers to the meaning of language beyond grammar: since language is the expression of human beings, pragmatics «is the study of understanding intentional human action» (Green 1989: 3). The concept of language as behaviour was first developed in the 1960s. Austin’s investigation into the philosophy of language was about the use of language as «doing things with words» (Austin 1962). Searle

(1969), Austin's former student, continued the research, focusing on the 'force' of an act, adjusting Austin's 'illocutionary act' into 'illocutionary force' – the speaker's goal when performing an act – and the 'perlocutionary act' into the 'perlocutionary effect' – the result of a 'speech act' on the listener.

In the same decade Hymes's (1964) collection of essays related the idea of language use to ethnography and sociolinguistics. When speaking, we do more than construct grammatically possible linguistic utterances: ungrammatical utterances may be socially appropriate, just as grammatical utterances can be socially inappropriate. The interpretation of a 'speech act' as the minimal unit of communication derives from the social status and the relationship of the participants, as well as the immediate social context in which a 'speech event' within a 'speech situation' takes place (Gumperz – Hymes 1972: 56). Therefore each utterance is the result of both the linguistic form and the social norms. Communicative competence derives from a combination of the two aspects (Hymes 1972: 269-293).

The process of communication is left without a successful conclusion if sender and addressee do not cooperate with each other. In the 1970s Grice (1975: 45-47) pinpointed the relevance of three cooperation maxims that speakers should abide by when uttering their speech acts: the 'maxim of quantity' (be as informative as required), 'quality' (give information for which you have evidence), 'relation' (be clear) and 'manner' (be relevant). The new perspective brought forward the idea of 'implicature' (1975, 1981), namely, the message that is implied by means of the context and the receiver's cultural schemata. So, when speakers do not comply with the maxims, they 'flout' them, provoking misunderstanding in communication or damaging the interaction.

The concept of language as social action was soon applied to the analysis of conversation. An outstanding contribution came from Brown and Levinson (1987: 151-210), who related politeness as social behaviour to Goffman's (1967: 5-45) 'face', the addressee's self-image, which can be 'saved' or 'threatened' by the speaker, according

to the type of politeness act that is performed: if it is 'face-saving', the speaker shows concern about the addressee's independence in formulating the answer as he or she pleases, choosing not to impose his or her request on the interlocutor; if it is 'face-threatening', the speaker shows less respect for the interlocutor, because the immediate fulfillment of his or her needs is of greater importance. Hence he or she formulates his or her utterance in a very direct way, indicating pressure, indifference or disregard for the interlocutor.

The idea of language as action was there to last. In the late 1970s van Dijk (1977: 12) defined 'discourse' as 'text in context' and 'action', and Halliday (1978) drew the linguists' attention to the main aspect of a text: language as social action. As a consequence, before the end of the same decade, the development of discourse analysis was already closely connected to the investigation of language as communication and as a reflection of the socio-cultural process.

At the beginning of the 1970s Schegloff and Sacks (1973) investigated the idea of 'adjacency pair', the minimum exchange in interaction that is socially determined, with an opening and closing act, which at times works as an opening act of another utterance. This unit is typical of politeness, with requests, apologies, thanks, compliments and many more acts, such as the ones that occur in social and service encounters. Each 'adjacency pair' is characterised by a sequence that produces social expectations between the interlocutors. When they are met, the linguistic moves are called 'preferred'; when they fail, they are called 'dispreferred'.

Sacks, H. – Schegloff, E.A. – Jefferson, G. (1974) analysed the structure of conversation, more specifically turn-taking within a conversation, which is called the 'Transition Relevance Place' (TRP). The recurrence of each TRP shows the pattern of moves in an interaction, revealing the participants' moods and attitudes towards each other. The results may show two extreme patterns of conversation or a combination of the two: a quiet exchange where everybody manages to avoid keeping the floor for too long, allowing the others to have their say at an equal level; a conflictual interaction

in which participants interrupt, grab their turn at the expense of the others and hold the floor as much as they please. The analysis shows the quality of relationship between participants, including, among various features, the degree of closeness, considerateness, power and mood.

Therefore, in the 1970s the focus in linguistics shifted from the form of language to the inclusion of the listener/reader's role and the context in which he or she operates. The difference between semantics and pragmatics is later discussed by Leech (1983: 5) in eight postulates among which there are the following: the form of a sentence does not account for the pragmatic sense or force of an utterance, which means more than what it says; grammatical explanations are 'formal' and refer to 'discrete' categories, whereas 'pragmatic explanations are primarily functional' and refer to 'continuous and indeterminate values', owing to the 'interpersonal' perspective of pragmatics, including 'addresser', 'addressee', 'context', 'goals', 'illocutionary act' and 'utterance' (1983:14). It is «a remarkable shift of direction within linguistics away from 'competence' and towards 'performance'» (1983: 4), in other words, from mastering the language appropriately to achieving a communicative goal.

2.1. Pragmatics and Literature

In the 1980s pragmatics became an interpretative perspective in literature. The concepts of 'speech act', 'politeness', 'face', 'cooperation' and 'implicature', from a wider range of pragmatic themes, were applied to literary text analysis. Leech – Short (1981: 291) devote a whole chapter to conversation in the novel, giving the analysis a pragmatic slant, focusing on speech acts and implicatures. They urge the reader to «keep separate the pragmatic force of an utterance and its semantic sense». By the end of the 1980s Hickey (1989: 10-11) used the word 'Pragmastylistics' to focus «on either end

of the interdisciplinary scale, the pragmatic or the stylistic, or anywhere in-between». He concluded with the statement «it seems certain that only a stylistics which includes a pragmatic component can claim to be complete».

The pragmatic approach to a literary text takes into account not just the interaction between writer or author and reader, but also between character and reader and character and character. Bakhtin (1981) developed the idea of ‘dialogic imagination’, in which the various ‘personae’ speak to each other. Leech – Short (1981) analysed the dialogue between author and reader giving various examples, as when the former shifts from the narrative past to the present tense. Much later, in an explicitly pragmatic perspective, Mey (1998) worked on the concept of multivocality in a literary text, through which he emphasised the roles that the author, the reader and the characters play in the development of a story: they are voices that cooperate, compete or clash, while attempting to give meaning to the events they are involved in.

In 1987 an international symposium, sponsored by the British Council, the Research Institute of the Åbo Akademi Foundation and the English department of Åbo Akademi University, was organized on literary pragmatics (Sell 1991). Among the various aspects, Sell (1991: 217) highlighted the relevance of analysing politeness: «not the politeness *of* literary texts, which would have something to do with the relationship between the writer and the readers, but the politeness *in* literary texts, which is a question of relationships between personae and characters dramatized within the world of mimesis».

In the same decade Sperber – Wilson (1995: 250-287) developed their studies on ‘Relevance Theory’, drawing on Grice’s assumption that utterances raise expectations of relevance in the listener/reader: after understanding what is uttered by a character or by the narrator, he or she has to understand the intended meaning, choosing the most relevant interpretation of an utterance (‘communicative principle’). The ‘implicature’ must be compatible with all the other elements in the text, as well as with the addressee’s pre-existing knowledge and

cultural schemata ('cognitive principle'). Sperber and Wilson's work became seminal in the field of literary pragmatics (Furlong 2014).

The interest in the pragmatic interpretation of literature has been developing in the 21st century. Among the various contributions, Black's *Pragmatic Stylistics* (2006) analyses spoken discourse focusing on speech acts and cooperation in fictional dialogues between characters, as well as between narrator and author. Chapman – Clark (2014) supply a historical overview of studies of literary pragmatics and highlight the link between literary research and the main areas of pragmatics, organising them into two main frameworks of reference: a post-Gricean perspective, which follows Spenser and Wilson's 'Relevance Theory' mentioned above, and a neo-Gricean theory, which accepts the concepts of implicature, cooperation and politeness between characters.

2.2. Pragmatics and Pedagogy

The study of pragmatics can offer positive and new insights to students. According to van Dijk (1980: 2), the study of the «textual structure, textual processing and the structures of the socio-cultural contexts» has an educational relevance for both school and university students. «Education is predominantly textual» (van Dijk 1980: 2), owing to the many texts that are used all through the educational process. But life as a whole is textual, because, during everyday life, a human being is exposed to all forms of communication, taking an active or passive part in it. So, what van Dijk advocates is that practice should be provided in educational institutions to develop a critical attitude both towards the texts that students use in the study of the various subjects and towards any other text they come across in life.

The pedagogy of pragmatics goes even further in a course of foreign language and literature, since, if language is seen as action, it is not neutral, but deeply culture-bound and, therefore, subject to diversified implicatures, which may lead to misunderstanding. When

developing their communicative competence, foreign language learners are expected to increase their awareness of the fact that there may be no equivalence in forms between their mother tongue and the target language, owing to the different worlds they refer to. In the early 1980s, when pragmatics was starting to spread among academic language researchers, Sauvignon (1983: 25) clearly foresaw the second language teachers' responsibility in this field: the duty of developing communicative competence in students «puts a tremendous burden on the teacher who must become an anthropologist of sorts, discovering and interpreting cultural behavior for which there are no explicit rules».

Cohen's and Holstein's (1981: 113-133) research on everyday speech acts across cultures proves how highly educational pragmatics can be for foreign language students: comparing the various forms that politeness speech acts can take in various languages, the two researchers show that they are influenced by the social rules of the community that uses them. For example, apologizing can be expressed by a mere performative verb, like "I apologize", or by the expression of a feeling, such as "I'm sorry", or an "offer of repair", or an "acknowledgment of responsibility", or a "promise of forbearance": the focus of the speech act can vary from inner reactions to external factors, producing different 'perlocutionary effects' on the addressee according to his or her cultural schemata. The cross-cultural reflection on speech acts goes beyond the practical need for a non-native speaker not to misunderstand or not to be misunderstood, since it can develop the learner's awareness of the cultural dimension of language and of the prevailing value in communication of pragmatic errors over grammatical errors.

In the 1990s research showed more awareness of the beneficial link between pragmatics and pedagogy in speakers of a second and foreign language. The monograph series *Pragmatics and Language Learning* (Bouton ed. 1996: 3) aimed «to serve as a forum for research into the pragmatics of the language learning process and to encourage the interaction between scholars involved in pragmatics and in language

pedagogy in a common effort to increase the level of communicative competence achieved in the language classroom». One of the essays of Vol. VII, for example, was openly meant to «bring pragmatics and pedagogy together» (Bardovi – Harlig 1996: 21-40); another essay focused on ‘intercultural pragmatics’ and communicative competence in non-native speakers (Cenoz – Valencia 1996: 41-54).

In the *Common European Framework of Reference* (2001: 118-125) threw further light on the components of Communicative Competence for language teachers and students beyond the lexico-grammatical-semantic areas: the sociolinguistic and the pragmatic components. In the description of the sociolinguistic component, politeness rules, norms and rituals governing relationships between social groups are mentioned to underline how language communication can be affected by different cultures or sub-cultures. Regarding the pragmatic component, the importance of speech acts is recalled, thus confirming the pedagogic role that pragmatics must play in foreign language learning.

3. TEACHING EXPERIENCE

The teaching experience that is the subject of this paper took place in the academic year 2015-2016 within the framework of a course of English (“English Language 2”) in the second year of the undergraduate degree course of “Lingue e Letterature Straniere” at Udine University, in Italy. As the name of the course suggests, the main aim is the development of English as a foreign language. This is pursued through two different actions: workshops organised according to the requirements of the *Common European Framework of Language*, precisely the level between B2 and C1; workshops on discourse analysis and pragmatics aimed at language improvement as well as development of language awareness in the field of pragmatics. This result is encouraged through the students’ participation in various language activities: oral and written text comprehension, group

discussions on text analysis and group presentations of the results in plenary sessions. The workshops are accompanied by interactive mini-lectures meant to introduce or to round up the pragmatic analysis.

What follows is an account of the teaching-learning process of a 10-hour module on pragmatics and conversation, within the second type of workshop. The areas that were touched upon were: ‘speech act’, including ‘locutionary act’, ‘illocutionary force’ and ‘perlocutionary effect’; ‘adjacency pairs’ and ‘implicature’; ‘conversation management’ with ‘turn-taking’ and ‘floor-holding’; politeness and ‘cooperation maxims’. The procedure included text comprehension, group text analysis, a plenary session to share and discuss the answers and a mini-lecture to introduce or to round up the main theme.

Act 1 of *Look back in Anger* (Osborne 1957) was chosen as a first working resource to offer an insight into ‘doing with words’ through the main characters’ memorable ‘speech acts’. In order to understand and discuss the concept of ‘illocutionary force’ and ‘perlocutionary effect’, we analysed the interaction between the main character, Jimmy, his wife Alison and his friend Cliff: a sort of skirmish in which Jimmy attacks the other characters through provocations, which are used as weapons to wound them; their responses show if Jimmy has hit the target (as a tangible ‘perlocutionary effect’) or has failed to achieve his intentions.

The second literary text was *Cat in the Rain* (Hemingway 1925), which was selected to work on ‘adjacency pairs’, politeness and ‘cooperation’: the husband in the short story offers an outstanding example of action that does not produce the expected result; the wife embodies an extreme case of failure in responding to it.

The third literary passage was taken from *Pygmalion* (Shaw 1916) to provide a concrete situation of lack of ‘cooperation’ in conversation. Since oral communication includes the non-verbal and the paralinguistic dimension, the film versions were added to the two play scripts: the 1989 *Look back in Anger* directed by Dench J. and the 1981 *Pygmalion*, a Yorkshire TV production.

The literary texts were used mainly because they offer the students situations and conversations suitable for the pragmatic analysis of oral language. At the same time, they show a pragmatic approach to literature, which does not claim either to be exhaustive or to replace other approaches.

Workshop 1. 'Speech Act' and 'Implicature'

Text: *Look Back in Anger*, by J. Osborne:

- play script, Act I, from the beginning to «God, how I hate Sundays! It's always so depressing»;
- film version, 1989, directed by Dench J., scene corresponding to the play script.

Objectives:

- understanding the concept of a 'speech act' (task 1);
- connecting 'speech act' to Searle's typology (task 1);
- understanding the concept of 'implicature' and the distinction between 'direct' and 'indirect speech acts' (task 2);
- being able to identify 'illocutionary force' and 'perlocutionary effect' (task 3).

Time: 2 hours including a mini-lecture.

Task 1. In the excerpt from *Look Back in Anger* identify as many 'speech acts' as possible. Then connect each 'speech act' to Searle's typology, when possible: 'declarative' (e.g. pronouncing a judgement, declaring an intention...), 'representative' (e.g. asserting, stating, concluding...), 'expressive' (e.g. thanking, apologizing, complaining...), 'directive' (e.g. compelling, ordering, requesting ...) and 'commissive' (e.g. promising, threatening, offering...).

The expected answers are summarised below:

- 'Representative': (Cliff) «I'm trying to read».

- 'Expressive': (Jimmy) «Well, you are ignorant», «Go back to sleep» «Do that again», «She hadn't had a thought for years!», «I'd like to live too».
- 'Directive': (Cliff) «Leave the poor girlie alone», «Stop yelling», «Now, shut up, will you?», «give me the paper»; (Jimmy) «I'm getting hungry», «You can make me some more tea», «What about that tea? ».
- 'Commissive': (Jimmy) «I'll pull your ears off».

For the students Cliff's utterances were easier to identify and interpret, because grammar form and meaning coincide, like the imperative used to express an order and the present continuous tense used to indicate an on-going action.

With regard to Jimmy's utterances, students hesitated and were not too sure how to define some of the utterances. For example they considered the utterances «Well, you *are* ignorant» 'declarative' and «Go back to sleep» 'directive', connecting the grammar structures to their explicit functions. A reflection on the tone used by Jimmy in the film clarified that the same utterances were expressions of anger towards his wife and the world she seemed to represent.

Task 2. Are the speech acts 'direct' or 'indirect'? If the latter, what may the 'implicature' be?

As in the previous task, Cliff's utterances were clearer to the students compared to Jimmy's, for which they needed some guidance. As a result, Cliff's were defined as 'direct speech acts', since he speaks to the person he is talking to and means what he says through the corresponding grammar form, whereas Jimmy's are often 'indirect': through his frequent statements, while giving vent to his feelings, he gives orders, as in «I'm getting hungry». Besides, at times, when speaking to Cliff, he refers to his wife, as in «She hadn't had a thought for years!» and in «What about that tea?».

Task 3. While watching the same section in the film version, decide whether Jimmy's intentions ('illocutionary force' of his speech acts)

produce the desired result ('perlocutionary effect') on Alison and Cliff or whether they fail. Identify the moments when Jimmy realizes that nobody is reacting. Then refer to the script and see how the same information is given to the reader.

Thanks to the visual clues, the students were confident when supplying the answers. In fact, the film shows the failure of some of Jimmy's speech acts through his facial expressions of disconcertedness, accompanied by the absolute silence from the two addressees.

Thanks to the stage directions, the students could match the previous answer to the script, in which the reader is informed that Jimmy has failed in his act of provocation. Here are some examples.

1. After an exclamation about a piece of news in the newspaper that Jimmy is reading, the failure is underlined in the following way: «He looks up at both of them for reaction, but Cliff is reading, and Alison is intent on her ironing».
2. Soon after, Jimmy insists on asking Cliff: «Did you read that bit?». But Cliff answers: «Um?» showing he was not following. The stage directions provide the following information about Jimmy: «He has lost them...».
3. Again, when Jimmy reads another piece of news expecting a reaction from both Cliff and Alison, the stage directions say: «He looks up sharply for a response, but there isn't any».

Workshop 2. Conversation management

Texts: same as in Workshop 1.

Objectives:

- describing conversation management: 'turn-taking' and 'floor-holding' (task 1);
- identifying 'face-saving' and 'face-threatening acts' (task 2).

Time: 2 hours including a mini-lecture.

Task 1. Describe the conversational behaviour of the three characters, taking into account ‘turn-taking’ and ‘floor-holding’. Then draw a conclusion with regard to the power the characters show both in the film and in the script.

The students could easily state that Jimmy is the character who takes his turn more often and holds the floor longer: he is the one who initiates and develops topics, while the others tend not to interrupt him. It is an unbalanced interaction in which Jimmy has more control of its management. Alison must be aware of it, since she tries to dismiss Jimmy’s moves, either pretending she is not listening, or taking his utterances literally, ignoring his intentions. She never starts an exchange and she chooses not to answer him back. Unlike Alison, Cliff reads aloud a few lines from the newspaper, answers Jimmy most of the times and, sometimes, orders him to stop or makes a comment on his behaviour.

Task 2. In the light of Brown and Levinson’s typology of ‘face-saving’ and ‘face-threatening acts’, decide which behaviour fits Jimmy’s and explain why.

Jimmy’s utterances sound ‘face-threatening’ without any doubt. The students supported their answers with the following examples:

- (to Cliff) «Well, you are ignorant. You’re just a peasant. (to Alison) What about you? You’re not a peasant are you? [...] I said do the papers make you feel you’re not so brilliant after all?».
- (to Cliff) «Can’t think! She hasn’t had a thought for years! (to Alison) Have you?».
- (to Alison) «I’m getting hungry».
- (to Alison) «Like hell! Make some more».
- (to Alison) «Sounds rather like Daddy, don’t you think so?».

When explaining why, the various groups referred mainly to Jimmy’s lack of respect towards the other two characters, especially Alison. He also shows disregard for her self-image. Besides, he gives

her orders to cook and make tea in a very impolite way. Finally he imposes his frustration on the other two characters, shouting «I'd like to live too» and «God, how I hate Sundays!».

Workshop 3. 'Adjacency Pair' and Politeness

Texts: *Cat in the Rain* by E. Hemingway.

Objectives:

- identifying 'adjacency pairs' in politeness exchanges;
- distinguishing 'illocutionary force' and 'perlocutionary effect'.

Time: 2 hours including a mini-lecture.

Task 1. Identify in *Cat in the Rain* some 'adjacency pairs', as exchanges between husband and wife that reflect social patterns of politeness.

The students needed to be guided in identifying the characters' exchanges as social patterns of politeness. But after the first few examples, they seemed confident in carrying out the activities and managed to give an appropriate answer. Here is the result:

1. (wife) «I'm going down and get that kitty' [...]. (husband) «I'll do it»;
2. (wife) «No, I'll get it» [...]. (husband) «Don't get wet»;
3. (husband) «Did you get the cat?» [...]. (wife) «It was gone»;
4. (husband) «Wonder where it went to» [...]. (wife) «I wanted it so much»;
5. (wife) «Don't you think it would be a good idea if I let my hair grow out?» [...]. (husband) «I like it the way it is»;
6. (wife) «I get so tired of it [...] I get so tired of looking like a boy» [...] (husband) «You look pretty darn nice»;
7. (wife) «I wanted to pull my hair back tight and smooth and make a big knot at the back that I can feel» [...]. (husband) «Yeah?»;

8. (wife) «And I want to eat at a table with my own silver and I want candles. And I want it to be spring and I want to brush my hair out in front of a mirror and I want a kitty and I want some new clothes»
 (husband) «Oh, shut up and get something to read».

Task 2. For each of the following utterances identify the following pragmatic aspects: ‘illocutionary force’ and ‘perlocutionary effect’.

Husband’s utterances:

«I’ll do it», «Don’t get wet», «Did you get the cat?», «Wonder where it went to»; «Oh shut up and get something to read».

Wife’s utterances:

«I wanted it so much...», «Don’t you think it’s a good idea if I let my hair grow out?», «I get so tired of it [...] I get so tired of looking like a boy», «I want to pull my hair back tight and smooth [...] I want to have a kitty to sit [...] and purr when I stroke her», «And I want to eat at a table [...] and I want it to be spring and I want to brush my hair [...] and I want a kitty [...] new clothes...».

The students answered that the husband seems to be polite at first, but he reveals a completely different attitude as the situation develops: although he shows some interest in her, he is not willing to help her; he speaks to her as if she were a child; finally he sounds very annoyed, ordering her to ‘get something to read’ in a very ‘face-threatening’ way. The wife makes requests in a childish way, without answering, but showing unhappiness in her own way.

The students were able to pinpoint the fact that neither of the two characters seems to obtain an effect on the addressee: the lack of communication between husband and wife supports the conclusion that the ‘illocutionary force’ never turns into the desired ‘perlocutionary effect’.

Workshop 4. 'Cooperation' and Grice's 'Maxims'

Texts:

- *Cat in the Rain*, text from the previous workshop (task 1);
- *Look back in Anger*, play script from workshops 1 and 2 (task 2).

Objective: identifying Grice's 'Cooperation Maxims' in conversation.

Time: 2 hours including a mini-lecture.

Task 1. Are the wife and husband in the short story abiding by Grice's maxims?

The students needed to be guided towards their answers. Regarding the husband's polite responses, they agreed on the following answers:

- when he says «I'll do it», «Don't get wet», «Did you get the cat?», «Wonder where it went to», he abides by the maxim of manner, since he responds in the way that is socially expected. What he says is also related to the situation. As to the 'maxim of quantity', he says just what is needed. But does he mean it? Is he truthful? Maybe he is 'flouting' the 'maxim of quality'. In conclusion, he is cooperative only if he really means what he says;
- when he says «Oh shut up and get something to read»: the 'maxim of manner' is 'flouted', since he speaks in a very rude way, showing he is not truly concerned about his wife's malaise, in fact he cannot stand her any longer. He is not cooperative.

With regard to the wife's polite response, the students gave the following answers:

- when she says «Don't you think it's a good idea if I let my hair grow out?», she 'flouts' the 'maxim of relation', since she drops a question which is not related to the situation;
- when she adds «And I want to eat at a table... and I want it to be spring and I want to brush my hair... and I want a kitty... new clothes», both the 'maxims of quantity' and 'relation' are 'flouted',

since she mentions a range of topics that sound unrelated. Of course this is an indirect sign of her malaise.

Task 2. Now, go back to *Look back in Anger* and answer the following question: is Alison's interaction cooperative in the following exchanges? Explain.

- When Jimmy asks her if she is not a peasant, she answers: «What's that?».
- When Jimmy repeats the concept, asking her if the papers make her feel not so brilliant, she answers: «Oh – I haven't read them yet».
- When Jimmy asks her if she hasn't had a thought for years, she answers: «No».
- When Jimmy asks her if she is moved, after Cliff's reference to the Bishop of Bromley, she answers: «Well, naturally».

At this stage the students were able to maintain that Alison chooses not to cooperate: when answering, she takes what he says literally, in so doing 'flouting' the 'maxim of relation'. She prefers to ignore his provocation.

Workshop 5. End-of-module evaluation

In order to conclude the module, a workshop was organised to evaluate the effectiveness of the previous teaching sessions. To differentiate it from individual assessment, the students were encouraged to work in groups. Feedback data were collected during the activity and at the end of the session, so that decisions could be taken to plan further tutorial work.

First the students went through comprehension activities, watching the film and reading the script. The analysis of the text followed, which was not guided as in the previous workshops, but left to the students' autonomous skills at applying the pragmatic concepts they had been studying to a new literary text.

Text: *Pygmalion* by B. Shaw (act III from the beginning to Eliza's departure) both in the film version (1981 Yorkshire TV production) and the play script.

Objective: evaluating the effectiveness of the previous workshops and mini-lectures.

Time: 2 hours.

'Speech acts' with their 'illocutionary force' and 'perlocutionary effect' were clearly identified. The first example that was given by all the groups without hesitation was Eliza's introduction by means of «How do you do»: although correct and appropriate in its structure, in the film it sounds like the utterance of a robot or a machine, as the students put it, which corresponds to the quotation «with pedantic correctness... but... quite successful» from the stage directions in the script. A discussion followed on its effectiveness in the film and ended with the conclusion that Mrs. Higgins's guests' attention is drawn by her beauty and elegance, rather than by the awkwardness of the speech act, which, after all, produces the planned 'perlocutionary effect'. Two groups mentioned a non-verbal act: Professor Higgins's coughing, a signal for Eliza to stop talking and leave, which produces the expected result immediately.

The first 'adjacency pair' that was mentioned by the students was the one in which Mrs. Higgins starts speaking – in the script 'conversationally' – saying «Will it rain, do you think?» and Eliza answers without understanding the 'implicature' of the utterance: «The shallow depression in the west of these islands is likely to move slowly in an easterly direction [...]».

The second 'adjacency pair' refers to Freddy's reaction: «Ha! ha! how awfully funny!», which provokes Eliza's disappointment: «What is wrong with that, young man?», followed by an explicit statement about the actual purpose of her speaking: «I bet I got it right».

The third ‘adjacency pair’ is between Mrs. Eynsford Hill and Eliza: the former mentions influenza as a result of bad weather and the latter answers without getting the right ‘implicature’: «My aunt died of influenza: so they said», sounding inappropriate with such a tremendous revelation. Since Eliza has become in the meantime very fluent and self-confident in her way of speaking, she is carried away by her new speaking skill. The result is that she can speak properly, but does not know the social rules of small talk.

Still, after Eliza’s reference to her aunt, Mrs. Eysford Hill sympathises with her at first, by saying «How dreadful for you!». But Eliza does not capture the meaning, again owing to the fact that she does not share the same social rules. So she goes ahead with her revelations, until Mrs Eysford Hill is ‘startled’.

Another ‘adjacency pair’ that was noticed and commented on by the students was in the conversation between Eliza and Freddy, while she is leaving the room. She is not cooperative with Freddy, who has asked her «Are you walking across the park, Miss Doolittle? If so...», indirectly offering to escort her home. Her answer «Walk! Not bloody likely. I am going in a taxi» shows again that Freddy’s ‘speech act’ has not the ‘effect’ he wishes, due to the fact that she is only concerned about her needs and the fulfillment of her hopes.

Thanks to the film version and the stage directions in the script, the groups of students understood that, although the first turn in each exchange usually reflects the beginning of a social pattern, Eliza always fails to complete the ‘pair’ in a way acceptable to the conventions of the social milieu or to her interlocutor: she does not cooperate, as some groups concluded, in relation, quantity and manner, since what she says is not appropriate in content, amount of details and, at some stage, type of language. Unlike Mrs. Eysford Hill who, at some stage, can sympathise with Eliza, Freddy does not cooperate with the young lady when he laughs: he does not mean to be ‘face-threatening’, but this is the result he produces on Eliza.

Regarding conversation management, it seemed obvious to the students that Eliza holds the floor when speaking about the weather

and health, without allowing the other guests the expected turn-taking. In the plenary session that followed the students concluded that the failure of the small talk at Mrs. Higgins's house derives from cultural rules that are not shared by Eliza, just as they are not shared at times by the two young people, who do not want to comply with tradition.

Although the students' analysis had not covered all the key-concepts from the previous workshops and mini-lectures, the result was considered satisfactory as a whole: the central idea of 'speech act' as 'doing things with words' and 'cooperation' as a cultural and socially effective action had definitely been grasped.

4. CONCLUSION

The main aim of the present article is to highlight the potential role of pragmatics in foreign language learning, to reduce misunderstanding between native and non-native speakers and to increase the students' awareness of language as a form of cultural action.

In order to contextualise the presentation of a teaching experience in this field, in the first part a theoretical framework of reference is supplied, drawing on a historical background of the studies of the main issues in pragmatics and focusing on language as action in conversation. More specifically, the emphasis is placed on the 'speech act' as the basic unit of communication, 'implicating' an intention to have an effect on the interlocutor, the 'illocutionary force' and the 'perlocutionary effect'. Politeness is chosen as the most fertile field of research that proves both the idea of language as social action and the strong link between language and culture.

In the following section the article offers an overview of recent applications of pragmatics in literary analysis. This perspective has received wide academic acceptance by neo-Gricians and post-Gricians: both have proved that interaction between characters and between writer and reader can be interpreted within a pragmatic

framework, although they vary in the acceptance of some concepts, such as cooperation in interaction.

At the end of the first part the study discusses some pedagogic benefits of the inclusion of pragmatics in foreign language teaching at university level. The belief underlying the paper is that a cross-cultural reflection on speech acts goes beyond the practical need for a non-native speaker not to misunderstand or not to be misunderstood: it can encourage the learner's awareness of the cultural dimension of language and, ultimately, of the greater weight of pragmatic errors over grammatical ones in communication.

In the second part of the article a number of activities are shown as examples of what was discussed in class and how literary texts and film versions are used as substitutes for true-to-life communicative situations. Conversations are analysed focusing on 'speech acts' and their effects on the interlocutor, also aided by Searle's typology of 'speech acts'; cooperation between characters and disregard of social rules are interpreted in context; politeness is taken into account with examples of 'face-saving' and 'face-threatening' behaviour; finally conversation management is seen as a reflection of power over others. An end-of-module task proves the pedagogic achievements of the experience.

Through each activity, evidence is given of the potential of pragmatics in foreign language teaching: language is not a mere set of grammar and syntactic rules, where form and meaning match automatically, but it is also social behaviour, which is effective only if it complies with cultural rules.

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