

## **How Should Pragmatics be taught at Vocational College?**

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### **Abstract**

*Despite some investigations on how pragmatics is to be taught in English classes, there has not been an acceptable solution offered to the teaching of pragmatics in higher education institution like vocational college. This qualitative research was aimed at finding how pragmatics is taught at vocational college. A group of 23 (twenty three) students majoring in tourism were chosen purposively. The research participants were given treatment of pragmatic-based English teaching. Test 1 (T1) was carried out in prior to the treatment and Test 2 (T2) was given upon the treatment. On the test, oral role play cards consisting of scenarios for the research participants to produce request and refusal utterances were used as testing device. The teaching of pragmatics in class was done for ten sessions using some handouts in which aspects of pragmatics were inserted. In the teaching sessions, implicit and explicit approaches were implemented. In addition, the teaching syntax (teaching stages) consisting of three stages was particularly designed for this purpose. Students were also to fill questionnaire to see how they think about the model developed for the pedagogical activity. The T1 and T2 results were explicated, scored, and analyzed using statistical device of paired samples t-test. The statistical result indicated that the approach and teaching stages designed were effective to improve students' pragmatic competence.*

**Key words:** pragmatic teaching and learning, English, vocational college.

### **I. Introduction**

Inserting pragmatics into teaching materials and pedagogical activities has been a special attention of many English language educators recently. Thus, many experts in the field of applied linguistics tried to find effective strategies to do the attempt. A number of endeavor has been done by some scholars to find out how pragmatics should be taught, one of which is with an explicit approach. One concept which underlies strongly the teaching of pragmatics was optimizing students' awareness of pragmatics (Bardovi-Harlig, 1996; Kasper, 1996; Hartford: 2006). Teachers are recommended to develop teaching materials which are able to rise students' awareness. To do so, teachers are to provide students with rich input of pragmatics by reading semantic formulas and asking students to listen to the teachers' information (Safont-Jorda, 2004). To facilitate students with extended practice, some linguists used cards consisting of scenarios which could trigger students to produce speech act utterances during a learning activity. This method was effective to promote students' speaking activities. Inserting pragmatics into teaching materials was also realized by involving sociological aspects of language including "power", "distance", and "rank of imposition" (PDR) (Brown and Levinson, 1987) in scenarios. A part form oral role play using cards, discourse completion task (DCT) was the instrument used to optimize students' production of speech acts nonverbally (Gordon, 2004). However, DCT was not as effective as oral role play card in triggering students' speaking.

As a determining factors of success in the pragmatic learning, students' attention and awareness was also a focus of some other studies. The teaching was designed in such way to provide students with an easy and practical learning, for instance, by providing learning stages (Denny, 2008). By using NAPKIN (need, accurate into the subject matter, practice, knowledge review, internalization, nature application) approach, Denny (2008) was successful in developing an experimental learning model to expose students with pragmatics. The strategy indicated that students could promote better pragmatic competence. Apart from this stages, Lenchuk and Ahmed (2013) introduced a lesson plan in teaching speech act of complimenting. The learning stages include warmingup, reading, acquiring compliment, listening, speaking, DCT and listening. The steps of teaching was designed to introduce students with the native speakers' language choices, such as expression, words, as well as semantic formulas.

Apart from the previous studies which (some of them) focused on sociopragmatics and (some others) focused on pragmalinguistics (Leech, 1985), Alcon Soler (2012) tried to see and design pragmatic teaching strategies form the two aspects. Sociopragmatic is stressing on involvement of sociological or cultural aspects in making learning materials and in learning activities, pragmalinguistics refers to linguistic resources, such as grammar, forms, expression, intonation, and pronunciation used to design learning materials. By using oral role play card, Alcon Soler (2012) proposed a set of step of teaching pragmatics which consists of identifying refusal in interaction, explaining refusal speech act explicitly to provide information on pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics, indentifying sequence of refusal, giving students chance to practice producing speech acts utterances. The method was found effective to improve students competence.

Yuan (2012) also found that pragmatic teaching as a complicated process and therefore proposed two aspects to be given real attention, they are "content" and "learning process". The content of teaching includes teaching pragmatic knowledge, knowledge of intercultural, and learning strategies. Learning process includes task-based learning (TBL) approach, intercultural approach, and language strategies approach. Both aspects was supportive to promote students pragmatic competence improvement. And, Rycker (2014) studied impact of intercultural or interlanguage pragmatic learning. By taking data from writing activities, which focused on refusal strategies students made in refusing an international business proposal, it was recognized that American students tended to refuse by doing mitigation and used more statement of thanks when making refusal than NS students.

Research of pragmatic teaching on foreign and second language above are basically interrelated. Explicit teaching of pragmatics was implemented by Jorda (2004), Alcon Soler (2012), and Rycker (2014), however Jorda (2004) focused on *request* speech acts using DCT. Alcon Soler (2012) investigated whether (or not) explicit pragmatics teaching could bring about differences or changes on students' pragmatic awareness. The research gave a positive input on teaching of refusal speech acts using oral role play card. Rycker (2014) investigated whether senior high school students competent pragmatically. Data collecting instrument used was that producing non-naturally occurring data. Development of learning model was undertaken by Castillo (2009) and Lenchuk and Ahmed (2013). By using a number of informants, such as ESL and EFL teachers, NSs and NNSs, TESOL students and professors, Castillo (2009) successfully investigated learning steps similar to the NAPKIN (Denny, 2008). However, the research was only focused on investigating speech acts of compliment. Lenchuk and Ahmed (2013) also succeeded in developing a learning stages and a lesson plan for teaching pragmatics. Even though Denny (2008) successfully invented a concept of experimental learning with NAPKIN stages and lesson plan, but the study was a class action research which covers smaller scup than the research and development. In addition, that research was only concerned with speech act of negotiation.

Bardovi-Harlig (1996) found out that pragmatic exposure is very important for learners and can be exposed with authentic input from teachers by explicit teaching of pragmatic. In line with the research, Gordon (2004) and Yuan (2012) viewed how pragmatics could be inserted in the teaching materials. Gordon (2004) inserted socio-cultural aspect of PDR into teaching materials. Yuan (2012) gave inspiring ideas to involve pragmatics into text book and used DCT and text book test to find out research data. All literatures reviewed above could not accommodate the needs on developing pragmatic-based teaching model at vocational college, either concerning context, theory, respondent, data analysis, as well as data collecting instrument. The visible gap brought and madethis research a useful investigation to undertake to see how pragmatic shall be taught at vocational college. This research was aimed at finding out an approach to teach pragmatic at vocational college.

## 2. Methodology

The qualitative research was undertaken in a vocational collage. A group of twenty three students in semester three majoring in Tourism was involved as respondents. The respondents chosen purposively were given pragmatic teaching using the designed, examined and validated approach of implicit-explicit-implicit.

Prior to the teaching, respondents were given test one (T1) to see how competent they were pragmatically. This is used as the base line of their competence. T2 was given after they were given the treatment. The test used was oral role play cards. There were four cards used as the pragmatic testing device. The cards are divided into two divisions, two request cards and two refusal cards. The request cards were divided into two parts, request with high rank of imposition (Rq R+) and request with low rank of imposition (Rq R-). Refusal cards were also divided into two parts, common refusal (Rf B) and specific refusal (Rf K). Each card has special scenario. The scenarios were chosen and determined by single exemplar generation model (Rose, 2000). It is a method to indicate the most frequently used speech acts of request and refusal in hotel. To execute the exemplar generation, a group of hotel staff from a number of hotels chosen purposively were given a form to list some speech acts situation of request and refusal from the most frequently used to the least one. The lists from the respondents were selected and ranked pursuant to their frequency. The two most frequent situations from each speech act were chosen to be the topic for the oral role play cards.

Upon T1 execution, the respondents were then taught with pragmatic-based English teaching materials. The teaching was undertaken for ten sessions. Upon the teaching respondents were given test two (T2). Pragmatic-based English teaching materials were made up of two contents, pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics aspects. Like on T1, respondents were paired up invited to test room. Each member was given chance to act as the hotel staff and guest. Each pair was given ten minutes to produce speech acts of refusals and requests by based on the cards' scenario. Students' responses were noted and recorded to be a document which is very necessary for data analysis. During the learning, students were given materials which were adjusted with learning duration. An approach was designed to find out an appropriate approach for the class activity. The approach was resulted from a long trial-and-error process. The model developed pursuant to the needs for the teaching includes learning syntax, learning materials, and assessment device. T2 in form of oral role play activity was given upon the ten-session teaching activity. Both results of the test in form of production of request and refusal utterances were explicated, scored and analyzed. Scoring was done by an expert speaker of English. A statistical analysis using paired sample t-test was used to see how effective the approach was. Result of analysis was described in the form of table and narration. Test results were rated by a native speaker and each respondent was given four points (point for Rq R+, Rq R-, Rf B, and Rf K). The rating was based one rating rubric with 5 scales ranging from 0 – 4. The lowest rate was 0 and the highest rate was 4. Both test results were then analyzed with paired sample t-test to see whether (or not) respondents were more competent pragmatically.

## 3. Result and discussion

Result of statistical analysis using paired sample t-test indicated that respondents' pragmatic competence raised after they were given English learning. They were more competent to produce speech acts utterances. This is caused by the fact that they feel confident to produce speech acts of request and refusal. The treatment was really helpful to make them aware of pragmatic aspect. However, it was proved that respondents were able to produce speech acts of refusals better than request. This may be caused by the fact that they felt easier to produce utterances as they understand the concept of pragmatics.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean		Std. Deviation
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. error	Statistic
Total score T1	23	4	12	8,48	.435	2.086
Total score 2	23	12	16	12,70	.239	1.146
Valid N (listwise)	23					

They are three findings found after data analysis. Those three should be similar with how they are wrapped properly.

### 3.1 Explicit and Implicit Teaching

Explicit teaching is undertaken by introducing the topic (pragmatic aspects) directly and overtly (Safont Jorda,

2004).



As the goal of the model is to rise learners' pragmatic awareness (Kasper, 1999), teachers can undertake awareness rising task and tasks providing communication practice (Ortega, 2000). Students can be involved in observing pragmatic aspects in spoken and written discourse, doing role play and participating in simulation. In addition, focused group discussion, cooperative group, as well as other pragmatic oriented activities (Eslami- Rasekh, 2004) help students raise their pragmatic awareness.

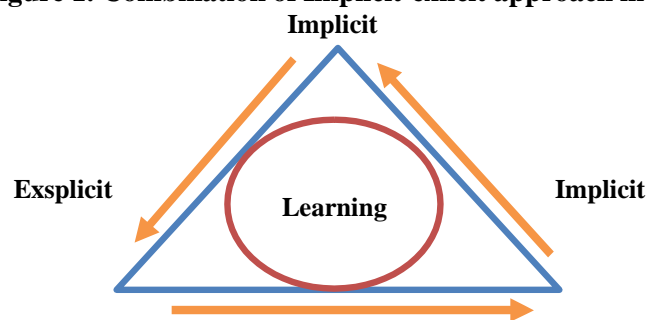
Explicit learning mostly done systematically by focusing on language, such as grammar, phonetics, vocabulary, and spelling, which is rational, formal, intellectual and done consciously (Madrid & Schez, 2001; Stern, 1992). Implicit learning is undertaken in purpose to rise and improve students' intuition about the topic of discussion. However, the learning is behavioristic and is able to trigger students to develop communication strategy, social and affective skill with empirical approach. The teaching of pragmatics for vocational college students has to be done implicitly and explicitly. These approaches should be integrated considering that college students have higher thinking skills and more mature characteristic which meet both approach. In addition, they have better metacognitive skill that younger learners which is very effective to help them improve their critical thinking.

### 3.2 Noticing Hypothesis Theory

One of the research goals is to examine whether (or not) the grand theory underlying a research is still valid. This research was also done to see validity of noticing hypothesis theory. This theory states that in order for the learning to be successful, students should consciously notice the input to be an intake. In other words, the inputs (sentences, expressions, function of language, semantic formula of request and refusal in accordance with context) should be consciously comprehended to be intake. When learners are able to find intake, a real learning can be considered to occur successfully (Schmidt, 1990). The theory which promotes an explicit learning approach was proven to be less effective to implement considering that there were some stages done in the learning process. This theory exposes learning activities which was done consciously by students, such as explaining forms or semantic formula or request and refusal to students. However, as the research also successfully made a specific learning stages or learning syntax consisting of *Engage, Enrich, Encourage*, implicit approach to the teaching of pragmatic was also found necessary to implement. Implicit approach to the teaching was used on the activity which does not intend to expose language very explicitly.

The approach was appropriately used in some activities in the engagement stages; such as warming up, elicitation, or lead in activity, and in the encouragement step of learning stages, like freer practice and role play. On the warming up activity, students were invited and involved in an implicit-typed activity, like watching video. As the purpose of this stage was to introduce an abstract concept prior to main learning activity, students were invited to use their critical thinking to formulate an hypothesis. This stage functions to teach the concept implicitly before students are taught the real concept in the main learning activity. In other words, noticing hypothesis will be effective if it is completed with implicit approach. There were two approaches combined and formulated as implicit-explicit-implicit in the learning activity using engage-enrich-encourage stages. Implicit approach was mostly used in engage learning stage, explicit approach was mostly used in enrich stage, and the last stage of encourage mostly required implicit approach. The use of the two approaches can be drawn as follows.

**Figure 1. Combination of Implicit-explicit approach in the learning activity.**



### 3.3 Syntax of Teaching

The syntax of the pragmatics-based English learning at vocational college is a procedure teachers have to follow when executing the learning. It consists of a one-session teaching stages.

The stages are grouped into three main steps known as "Tri E + +", such as *engage*, *enrich*, *encourage*. During *engage*, students are involved in activities which attempt to optimize their intuition. Students are invited to build a concept in their mind by guessing, imagining, summarizing or concluding things. There are activities providing chances for students to trigger their intuition, they are *warming up*, *elicitation*, and *lead in activity*. All of the activities are based on implicit learning approach, an approach which attracts students' pragmatic awareness (Kasper, 1999; Madrid & Sauchez, 2001).

To realize the goal, students were given chance to watch a video consisting of the way how speech acts of request and refusal are used properly in hotel context. Upon their watching the video, they were guided and asked to make a pre conclusion about the dialog in the video. This implicit learning activity could trigger students to use their prior knowledge and intuition to make an hypothesis. *Elicitation* and *lead in activity* were helpful for them to do a practice using semantic formulas and request and refusal strategies.

*Enrich* is the main stage in the learning. It was done with learning the language explicitly. In this stage, teachers explained forms of request and refusal (grammar, kinds of request and refusal expression, structure of request and refusal, vocabulary related to those speech acts, social aspects influencing the use of the speech act variations). In this case, focus of the lesson was to introduce the language to the students in order for them to comprehend the language before use. Thus, although there were communication practices, the lesson was filled mostly with syntactic-analytic activities. It was attempted to improve students' comprehension of language prior to practice. *Encourage* provided students with communicative practice. In this moment, students were involved in activities promoting their speaking skill, including role play activities, task-based oral practice, dialog practice, and demonstration. Those activities were mostly based on implicit approach. The activities were in purpose to expose students' fluency in producing the speech acts. Apart from those three stages, there is a sign "+ + " (double plus) which refers to supplement activities students can do to optimize their oral practice. The activities supporting this stage are *freer practice* and *role play*. The activity brings about a sense that practice can be done as much as possible in accordance with students' needs.

#### 4. Conclusion

The teaching of pragmatics proposed by some scholars in advanced were still found incomplete and ineffective to respond to the needs on learning English at vocational college. Almost all scholars suggested that explicit approach is the most adequate for the teaching of pragmatic-based English. The point which made those research result partly or fully inapplicable for vocational college context is difference in a number of aspects. Some of them used native speakers of English as research respondents, some research were done in business and university or academic context. They were only viewed from a small aspect of language learning, for instance speaking. In addition, there was also difference in data collecting instrument.

There were eventually three findings successfully found upon the research execution, including implicit-explicit-implicit approach for pragmatic-based English language teaching, invalidity of noticing hypothesis theory, and specific learning syntax. As the learning syntax specifically designed for the learning of pragmatic-based English at vocational college comprised three stages, such as *engage*, *enrich*, *encourage*, the learning approach appropriate for the stages were implicit-explicit-implicit. Each approach has its own function pursuant to the material and goal of the learning. The theory of noticing hypothesis (Schmidt, 1990) was partially adequate to implement in the learning of pragmatic-based English at vocational college. The theory which implies explicit approach to language learning was appropriate only for small part of learning activity, for instance learning the language or form. However, the learning of English at vocational college covers a wider range of stages, such as opening, on the learning, and closing which is formulated into "Tri E + +" learning syntax. In addition, the main goal of learning is for students to be able to use the language contextually in verbal interaction. Thus, the research finding promoted implicit-explicit-implicit approach instead of noticing hypothesis's explicit approach.

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