

# Bringing Pragmatics Activities in a Classroom: An Effort to Shape Students' Language Competence

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**Abstract.** The central point of this article is that pragmatics is deeply rooted in people's communication ability. Being able to interact and communicate with others in various situations becomes the pivotal goal in teaching English as a foreign language. Yet, little empirical evidence shows how to deploy pragmatics awareness, particularly, in vocational educational setting. To fill this gap, this special affinity requires the English teachers to explore the activities in speaking classroom in which these help students use appropriate expression and have accurate interpretation to result successful communication. There are three activities; listening to passages about complaining in other cultures, presenting L2 strategies for complaining and performing role play with discussion, which fleshed out procedural activities to trigger successful communication. The article contributes a deep insight of pragmatic competence as a fruitful context for building the students' language competence.

## 1. Introduction

Vocational education which has been frequently categorized as an anachronistic, dead – end path for students, is growing tremendously and is now becoming an educational investment [1]. In Indonesian context, Indonesian government takes part actively in promoting vocational education as one fascinating choice to produce qualified labour market outcomes. It becomes a pivotal role in the demands of skillful and productive employees. Based on this position, therefore, students will be equipped with job competencies in which make them ready to face workplace. These job competencies are influenced by experiences where the students have undergone them through the teaching learning process in the classroom.

Teaching vocational English is a very challenging program for both educational institution and English teachers. It is due to a fact that teaching vocational English is intended to meet the English language needs of students in a myriad of specializations in which prepare them for both immediate employment and for higher education either at college or polytechnic [2]. When students start continuing their study at polytechnic, they absorb 30% vocational knowledge in lecturing class and 70 % employment (vocational) skill in practicum class. Both vocational knowledge and employment skill are embedded in social practices. Widodo [2] added that currently vocational English becomes a major trend addressing the integration of language learning and vocational learning for students across vocation. The most important thing in this program is the process of equipping them to have vocational knowledge and employment / vocational skill so that they experience them socially. They are expected to actively engage during teaching learning process based on the teaching activities

provided by the teachers. These experiences shaped the students as a qualified and skillful individual who are ready to face the real workplace.

In one of state polytechnics in Indonesia, particularly English Study Program, the learning outcomes cover knowledge competencies and specific skills. In relation with knowledge competencies, the students are required to be competent at the concept of inter-cultural communication and its application in social life and workplace. While for specific skills, the students are required to communicate orally and in written form by applying the principles of English language, ethic, and communication strategy accurately so that they are able to communicate effectively in the social life and workplace. To reach the learning outcomes, they study in this polytechnic for three years Diploma as an associate degree, particularly in business communication and tourism. In order to achieve those learning outcomes, Widodo [3] reiterated that teachers should re-contextualize what the learning of English as a foreign and second language means to them. Due to a fact that learning English plays a crucial role as an investment in building and maintaining social relationship and bridging transactional communication, it requires the teachers' creativity to provide chances of bridging pedagogical knowledge and vocational skill with workplace.

During the three-year diploma degree, there were several courses, specifically in speaking skills, required by the students; Speaking for Daily Communication, Speaking for Group Activities, and Public Speaking. Speaking for Daily Communication requires the students to use English for survival function and confidently engaged in a conversation. They were introduced with everyday contexts using various types of utterances. Speaking for Group Activities focused on the use of English for group activities or communities. This course remained to provide them with specific context for group activities (e.g. presenting an annual report in a meeting). In Public Speaking, the students were exposed to apply the basic principles of public speaking in order that they are able to prepare and deliver various speeches confidently in front of public, including informative and persuasive speech. Therefore, the English teachers become a central role in facilitating the learners in order to have the integration of vocational knowledge and employment/vocational skill. This article reports on the teachers' innovation particularly in Speaking for Daily Communication class, involving 24 students from a state of Polytechnic in East Java. In fact, in order to make the students involve in speaking activities, particularly on complaining language function, the teachers provided three (3) activities, which provided chances of having pragmatic activities in this class. They were required to actively engage in all activities; listening to passage about complaining in other culture, presenting L2 strategies for complaining, and the last is role playing with discussion [4].

When classroom is not only a place for transferring vocational knowledge and skill, the teachers need to recontextualize the language learning, not only forcing them to engage actively during the activities, but also provide social events which involve social roles [3]. For this reason, the teachers should not rely too much on the use of textbook in the classroom. Although textbooks provided prepared materials, and often categorized as an unproblematic solution, many textbooks also tumble in terms of appropriate language use in context (Ishihara, 2011; Pulverness, 2003, in [5]. Therefore, they should provide activities which give chances to them to produce effective communication.

The ability to use language appropriately in myriad contexts is urgent to be done especially on communication in a second language [4]. She further said that to develop the students' communication skill, it should include pragmatic competence. It is really needed to be owned by the learners since it becomes their provision to produce successful communication in the real encounter. Farashaiyan and Tan (2012) in [6] revealed the fact that in the real classroom, English teachers in EFL context frequently dominate the materials delivered in the class on linguistics features and do not pay great attentions to the pragmatic features. The students, particularly in Speaking for Daily Activity class, were not aware of using pragmatic competence; therefore, the communication did not run successfully. Sometimes, they did not apply the language expression appropriately during communication. They were also shy and reluctant to get involved in speaking activities. These barriers made a gap in communication, which made them failed to catch intended messages delivered by other people. To cope with these problems, thus, during the teaching learning process in Speaking for Daily

Activity class, the teacher deployed some speaking activities, particularly on complaining language function; listening to passage about complaining in other culture, role playing with discussion. This article discusses pragmatics activities in English Language Teaching (ELT) classroom in enhancing students' language competence.

## **2. Research Method**

The research employed a qualitative descriptive method. The subject of this study was an English lecturer teaching English for Daily Activities at English Study Program, Politeknik Negeri Jember. The data were obtained from interview and observation. The lecturer were interviewed twice and was asked about her teaching strategies and activities in her Speaking for Daily Activity class and the underlying conceptual framework for implementing them. In the observation, the researchers used observation checklist and note to record classroom activities conducted by the lecturer. The observation was carried out six times, following schedules of the practicum classes conducted by the lecturer. The data obtained from the interview and observation were then analyzed descriptively to describe the phenomenon studied.

## **3. Result and Discussion**

To answer the research objective related to the lecturer's pragmatic activities in English Language Teaching (ELT) classroom, interview and observation were conducted. From the interview and observation, it was found out that there were three pragmatics activities conducted by the lecturer.

The first was listening to passages about complaining in other cultures. The English lecturer used this technique to provide a great number of contexts from different cultures. This activity provided stated information about the speech act of complaining from other country. Thus, the students got exclusive experience by listening to it. In this activity, she divided the class into 8 groups which consisted of 3 students each. Each two groups got the same recording and they had to fill the table given by the lecture. The groups played the recording and tried to finish the table by listening carefully to the recording. After filling the table, they had to present the result of discussion in front of the class, then, compared the result with another group who had the same recording. Providing them with the recording passages in each group enabled them to have authority within the group to manage how many times they would listen and discuss the content of the passages cooperatively among their group members. This could be used also as a pedagogical language input as a source to construct the students' knowledge also facilitated them to create free topic group conversation about complaining by involving four strategies of complaining. The teacher mentioned that assigning the students to perform the conversation in front of the class and letting the other groups to evaluate the performance became a great chance to increase the students' confidence, particularly in joining classroom interactions. Therefore, interaction among the students in groups or even as a whole class established a catalyst to create interactive fundamental communication which helps them involve in it confidently.

The second activity was presenting L2 strategies for complaining. In most cases, the students were reluctant to get involve in practicing conversation. They felt afraid and hesitate of producing utterances especially complaining when they were provided with myriad contexts. Limberg (2015) recommends specific steps to complete speech act. This catalyzes a strong foundation to build the knowledge of producing utterances of complaining step by step. He further presents the worksheet which eases the students to draw on complaining utterances. First, the students were divided into smaller groups. They were introduced with the speech act step of complaining. Then, they sequenced the phrases provided to be a good order. In the final step, they were invited to create their own new complaint in groups. The first and second activities to build students' communication skills were supported by [5] that pragmatics includes politeness/impoliteness, speech acts (greetings, thanks, requests, compliments, apologies, complaints, etc.), conversational style, humor, sarcasm, teasing, cursing, discourse markers, conversational implicature, and deixis and focusing on the notion of speech act, this teaching tip concentrates in the hands of students' pragmatic competence of giving complaint. This provides technical guideline in producing utterances of showing dissatisfaction.

Hilliard [4] added that by following the components or strategies in the speech act of complaining, the communicative function will be accomplished successfully.

The third activity was role play with discussion. The lecturer mentioned that the easiest way to facilitate the students with pragmatic activities is through role play. It requires them to practice the conversation like in a real encounter. In class, the students were divided into small groups. The teacher gave them complaint cards which provided them with context situation. Then, they made a conversation to be performed in front of the class, while the other groups had to pay attention on the performance. The other groups had to involve in this activity by identifying the steps of complaining and filling the provided table. After that, there was an open discussion, inviting all students to exchange ideas about presented complaint. In this activity, interactions among students were deployed. It provoked the students engaged in every situation to practice their English communication. What the lecturer did was in line with [4], who said that it is very crucial to give them a variety of context and social setting, thus those make them get sufficient social practice.

#### 4. Conclusion

The students of English Study program in Politeknik Negeri Jember were equipped with vocational knowledge and employment skills because graduated students are required to be ready to face the real workplace. These provisions can shape the students to be qualified and skillful graduates. To reach this goal, the activities in the classroom play a very crucial role. Particularly in the speaking activities, they were introduced with pragmatics competence since they have to face different context situation in the real workplace. By being provided pragmatic activities in speaking class, the students' awareness to adjust the expression used in different situations can be enhanced. The activities of listening to passages about complaining in other cultures, presenting L2 strategies for complaining and performing role play with discussion encouraged them to confidently engage in classroom interaction. These allowed them to practice complaining through using effective guideline of complaining speech act. Furthermore, the effort to implement these pragmatics activities was intended to help students to avoid misuse of expressions which lead to failure of communication.

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