

ESP TEACHER'S PERCEPTION AND PRODUCTION OF REQUESTS

by Oktavia Widiastuti

Submission date: 14-Jan-2020 02:25PM (UTC+0700)

Submission ID: 1241770334

File name: PRODISING_SNIB_Polinema-81-84.pdf (339.06K)

Word count: 2181

Character count: 12465

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Oktavia Widiastuti, M.Pd
Universitas Kanjuruhan Malang
widiastuti_oktavia@yahoo.com

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Abstract

This study aimed at investigating Indonesian ESP interlanguage request behaviors in terms of both perception and production of requesting acts. Data were selected from eligible subjects with some criteria, i.e. ESP teachers who had been teaching in vocational schools and universities. The design used in this study is descriptive research. Both quantitative and qualitative analyses were employed. Data for analysis consisted of 1950 perception responses collected through six-point Scaled-Response Questionnaire (SRQ) and 659 production responses obtained through Discourse Completion Task (DCT) and Role-Play in which degree of Imposition, Status, and Distance were contextual factors embedded in each situation. Some important findings were obtained. Regarding the perception data, most ESP teachers in this study were aware of the difference between English native-speaker's culture and Indonesian culture. Yet, in terms of the teaching and learning process in the classrooms, only few teachers apply the curriculum and understand well what and how to teach ESP with regard to pragmatic competence. In terms of strategy preference, most of the responses found in both DCTs and Role-Plays show that Indonesian teachers tended to employ conventionally indirect strategy, namely query preparatory as 86.3% found in DCT and 67.8% found in Role-Play.

Key words: ESP teachers, request perception, request strategy

I. BACKGROUND OF STUDY

Some research findings; Gabriele Kasper as stated in Eslami-Rasekh (2005: 200), Santi (2009: 107), Grace (2007), He (2006), Cohen & Ishihara (2009: 1) stated that ESP teachers and English teachers' producers should have internal evaluation so that English for Specific Purposes Language Teaching could improve. So far, the researcher herself has found less research investigating either teacher's pragmatic awareness or how ESP teachers develop students' pragmatic competence in the classroom, particularly in the Indonesian context.

On the other hand, speech acts, one branch of pragmatics, is a widely-used topic in interlanguage pragmatic research. Research in interlanguage pragmatics has much been conducted to investigate the area of speech acts, such as apologies (Blum-Kulka, et al., 1989; Olshtain & Cohen, 1983; Mir, 1992; Moehkardi, 1993; Shih, 2006), compliance responses (Wu, 2006; Al Falasi, 2007; Yu, 2007), requests (Blum-Kulka, et al., 1989; Keovilay, 1993; Moehkardi, 1993; Janarto, 2000; Chen, 2006; Syahri, 2007; Siu, 2008), and so on. Those studies are not only interlanguage as they are but also cross-cultural, comparative studies.

A request is one speech act that mostly occur in daily interaction since much of what people do in communication revolves around their desire to get someone else to do something (Carroll, 1986). According to Brown & Levinson (1987), a request, by definition is face-threatening because it involves an imposition to the addressee, thus it is necessary to employ an appropriate strategy in performing requests in order to mitigate the imposition and avoid losing face. Hence, requests are considered a noteworthy topic to be investigated in the area of Interlanguage Pragmatics.

With regard to English Language Teaching in the ESP context, it is clear that pragmatic competence should be developed within ESP classrooms since English, as the target language being learned, is not widely exposed in daily interaction. Therefore, teaching how requests are performed cross-culturally in an appropriate way is quite needed to avoid misunderstanding or rudeness in cross-cultural communication.

To the researcher's knowledge, how requests are realized by Indonesian learners of English has been under researched. The researcher is aware of only three previous studies dealing with

interlanguage request (Moehkardi, 1993, Janarto, 2000 and Syahri, 2007) in the Indonesian context. Two of those investigated interlanguage requests of ESP learners of undergraduate program and the other one compared the pattern of written requests in Australian English and *Bahasa Indonesia*.

On the other hand, many previous studies in the same field, interlanguage pragmatics, have explored ESP students; most are undergraduate students or those who are in English courses (Janarto, 2000; Chen, 2006; Syahri, 2007; Siu, 2008) and some others are post-graduate students (Umar, 2004; Sattar, et al, 2009) or even both undergraduate and post-graduate students (Jalilifar, 2009).

Accordingly, it is quite reasonable then to delve into how ESP teachers perceive and realize requests as one of the representation of their pragmatic competence in order to find out and see whether the teachers are well-prepared and have adequate understanding of competences because they are one of the key elements and have an important role in teaching and learning process. As it is assumed that teachers are people who facilitate the students to learn communicative functions of the target language being taught, so that they have to master all communicative competence in order to provide the students with adequate information and knowledge about communicative competence, particularly, pragmatic one.

However, this study was not going to examine the teaching and learning process in the actual classrooms nor the strategies used by the teachers to sensitize the students' pragmatic awareness. It was conducted to see how English for Specific teachers in Indonesia particularly perceive and produce one aspect of pragmatics, namely speech acts, which was represented by one particular communicative act, requesting.

13 RESEARCH METHOD

The design of this study is a descriptive research since it is aimed at describing how teachers of English for Specific Purposes both perceived and realized one of the speech acts, namely requesting act. The data employed in this study are both quantitative and qualitative. The quantitative data are taken from Scaled-Response Questionnaire (SRQ) to gather teacher's perception. Thus, quantitative analysis is also done, to see the distribution and frequencies of each factor asked in the SRQ.

For the data taken from the words or utterances used by the teachers in performing their requests based on the situation given in Discourse Completion Test (DCT) and Role-Play (RP), both

quantitative and qualitative analysis are also done. Quantitative analysis is done to see the frequency of strategy used in requesting based on Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP) coding scheme developed by Blum-Kulka, et al (1989), while qualitative analysis focused on contextual factors embedded in each situation involved in requesting acts, particularly in strategy preference.

Regarding the instrument employment in this study, there is one thing to remember and consider that teachers are not necessarily required to be able to perform naturally-correct requesting act, or any other communicative acts, otherwise they need to be aware and understand what and how to teach pragmatic aspects which are often neglected. Therefore, the use of DCT and Role Play as the instruments of production data in this study can be considered appropriate.

III. RESEARCH FINDING

The result of this study shows that although Indonesia has many customs and races, but most of those various cultures basically have the same norm or value in interacting and communicating with other people. Those people within various local cultures might be different in the way they express communicative acts, yet they still be able to be categorized as the same general and unified culture, that is Indonesian culture. That generalization is derived from the same norm or value they share with their own various ways in expressing communicative acts within society.

That finding proves that pragma linguistic aspects of native language much influence even manifest in the way non-native speakers perform communicative acts, in particular Requesting, of the target language. Since the structure or pattern of native languages particularly used in requesting is different from those of target language, in this study English, negative pragmatic transfer occurs

Regarding that strategy preference in performing requests, the findings in both DCT and Role-Play were similar to what had been found in Syahri's study (2007) that the most preferred strategy used by EFL learners was Query Preparatory. This finding supported CCSARP studies (Blum-Kulka, et al, 1989) that conventionally indirect strategy to be the most frequently used in performing requests. Thus, in consequence, the universality of CCSARP was also confirmed.

On the other hand, this fact could be seen as the chain effect of English teaching and learning process within Indonesian ESP classrooms. ESP learners tend to employ Query Preparatory in performing requests since they are provided with a

lot of conventionally indirect strategy, particularly Query Preparatory, to perform requesting acts in their classroom, as the structure of their native languages does too.

Regarding the issues on developing pragmatic competence within ESP classrooms, this study also supports the finding of Santi (2009) in the use of textbooks as the main resources in developing pragmatic competence. This also strengthens the notion that pragma linguistic transfer occurring in this study is not mainly caused by native cultural background but it is also influenced by the negative effect of classroom instruction.

IV. DISCUSSION

In this part, there are two points to be discussed. First, ESP teachers' perception were much influenced by some contextual factors embedded in each of situation used in this study not only those three factors involved in this study but also the other factors such as age, religious value, and behavior or body language which are related to native-cultural value. Hence socio-pragmatic transfer occurs, since Indonesian people tend to fall back to their cultural background in the way they perform communicative acts, particularly in requesting.

In terms of the teaching and learning process in the classrooms, the only few teachers, the interviewees confessed, apply the curriculum and understand well what and how to teach to ESP students with regard to pragmatic competence. In other words, the teaching of those aspects was often neglected since there were many problems occurring within ESP classrooms in Indonesia, from finance-related matters up to human-resource-related ones.

Second, in terms of strategy preference, ESP teachers were not really influenced by contextual factors involving in this study since in all situations, there was merely query preparatory as the most preferred strategy. However, that most preferred strategy was influenced by their native language structure of requesting which manifested in the way they performed the requests in both DCT and Role-Play. In addition, the negative effect of classroom instruction also influences this preference. The structure of requesting here refers to the strategies employed by ESP teachers in performing the requests, namely query preparatory as mostly found in DCT and Role-Play. Consequently, positive pragma linguistic transfer also occurs in this study as that occurring in the previous studies conducted by Janarto (2000) and Syahri (2007).

V. CONCLUSION

Since this study aimed at examining two kinds of requesting data, namely perception and production data, this study contributes to not only the field of interlanguage pragmatics per se but also to ELT in Indonesian context. Regarding the field of Interlanguage Pragmatics, this study enriches the pragmatic data, both perception and production. With regard to the universality of CCSARP coding scheme in terms of strategy preference, i.e. Query Preparatory was also confirmed although there were some strategies which were not found in this study, i.e. Obligation Statement in both Role-Play and DCT, and the other two strategies were not found in DCT, i.e. Explicit Performative and Suggestory formula.

On the other hand, this study also contributes to ESP teaching and learning with regard to the understanding of cultural differences between English native speakers and Indonesian as one of important aspect which was often neglected in Indonesian ESP classrooms.

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