

IDENTIFYING PRAGMATIC FAILURES IN DIALOGUE SCRIPTS OF EFL LEARNERS

Shally Amna

UPI 'YPTK' Padang, Indonesia

Email : shallyamna@gmail.com

Abstrak

Sebagian besar pelajar EFL sadar atau tidak sadar berbicara bahasa Inggris menggunakan cara yang sama mereka berkomunikasi bahasa ibu mereka yang memiliki pola dan latar belakang budaya yang berbeda. Dalam menulis skrip dialog bahasa Inggris, sebagian besar siswa di provinsi Sumatera Barat mentransfer bahasa ibu mereka ke bahasa nasional terlebih dahulu dan kemudian ke bahasa Inggris. Akibatnya, di luar banyak kesalahan ejaan dan sintaksis yang ditemukan dalam skrip, kegagalan pragmatis adalah masalah yang paling dominan ditangkap. Kegagalan pragmatik siswa dikategorikan ke dalam kegagalan pragmlinguistik dan sosiopragmatik sesuai dengan Jenny Thomas (1983). Penelitian ini memberikan gambaran umum fenomena dalam skrip dialog EFL yang dibuat oleh mahasiswa UPI YPTK Padang. Ini menyelidiki siswa dari 6 kelas yang telah belajar bahasa Inggris dasar pada semester sebelumnya. Para siswa diminta untuk membuat dialog sederhana dalam kelompok dengan topik tertentu yang dipilih dan diizinkan untuk menggunakan kamus jika perlu. Studi ini menunjukkan bahwa siswa keterbatasan kemahiran bahasa Inggris dan hasil transfer pragmatis dalam kegagalan pragmlinguistik seperti kegagalan untuk mengikuti kebiasaan ekspresif asli, kesalahpahaman kata-kata, menggunakan bahasa Inggris dengan semantik dan struktur bahasa ibu siswa, kata kerja verbose dan kegagalan sosiopragmatik terletak dalam persepsi dan ekspresi konvensi pragmatis lokal.

Kata Kunci: kesalahan pragmatic, pragmlinguistik, sosiopragmatik, script percakapan

ABSTRACT

Most of the EFL learners consciously or unconsciously speak English using the same way they communicate their native languages which have different patterns and cultural backgrounds. In writing English dialogue scripts, most students in West Sumatera province transfer their mother languages to national language first and then to English language. As a result, beyond many spelling and syntactic errors found in the scripts, pragmatic failures are the most dominant issues captured. The students' pragmatics failures are categorized into pragmlinguistic and sociopragmatic failures in accordance with Jenny Thomas (1983). This present study provides overviews of phenomenon in EFL dialogue scripts made by students of UPI YPTK Padang. It investigated students from 6 classes who have learned basic English in the previous semester. The students are asked to make a simple dialogue in groups with certain chosen topics and are allowed to use dictionary if necessary. The study showed that the

students limitation of English language proficiency and pragmatic transfer result in pragmalinguistic failures such as failure to follow the native expressive habit, misunderstanding of words, use English with semantics and structure of students's mother tongues, verbose verbs and that sociopragmatic failure lies in perception and expression of local pragmatic conventions.

Keywords : : Pragmatic failure, Pragmalinguistics, Sociopragmatics, Dialogue Scripts

INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia, English language is one of the compulsory subjects taught from elementary to university level with the main material given by teachers are vocabulary and grammar. Even though these skills can improve the students' English competency, they are not enough to improve their communication skill. In fact, most of the students still tend to speak English using their native language concept. This situation might happen because students do not have enough opportunity to execute direct communication with the natives who aware the mistakes and fix them. Besides that, the teachers at school also accept this failure in their students' English language and regard it as a part of learning process.

In West Sumatera, the ways of speaking have been regulated by the elderly generation called as *Kato Nan Ampek*. This regulation consist of *kato mandaki*, *kato mandata*, *kato malereng*, and *kato manurun*. These rules regulate about how people talk to someone older, younger or in the same level of age or education. In transferring sentences into English, students whose their native language is Minangkabau language usually translate it into Indonesian language as national language, before it is used to English. That is the reason that cause having a good English communication skill can be even more difficult.

For example, local people in Bahasa Minangkabau like to say something in *Basa basi* or indirect speech, in almost every condition. They may say "are you busy today?" to an English speaker, for asking availability of the person related to their visit. In fact, the native speaker may answer "no, I am not", because he/she doesn't have

much work to do, but it doesn't mean that she will welcome someone for a visit. In this situation, sociopragmatic failure happen because the native English speaker does not catch the real intention in local people questions.

In the term of pragmalinguistics, as I got on students script, "who is your name?" as *Siapa namamu?* and "How many is your phone number?". *Barapa nomor telepon mu?*, and even, "there what?" as *ada apa'* and "No what-what" *tidak apa-apa*. These sentences are the transferring word to word from bahasa Indonesia to English. These may be regard as a joke for some lecturers or English teachers. But when it comes to a number of similar mistakes after taking years of English classes, there are issues that must take into account.

At school, their friends may understand the English they set up in English conversation class. However, in reality, the students which are probably feel good with their English can be fail to talk in English with the natives. The grammar of the sentence might be correct but the sentence is not even found in English communication. As a result, they may feel frustrated realizing how their English skill that they have built in schools for years does not work properly. There, pragmatic awareness needs to be concerned.

By investigating the student's dialogue composition, we look at how the students implement their English into daily communication. Thus, the aim of this study is to investigate EFL learners in dialogue scripts, to analyze the pragmatic failure existed, to analyze the causing factor and to attain some insight into teaching method to cover students' pragmatic ability.

Pragmatics is an inseparable part of other skills to learn a language. This skill enable you to master the way of saying something based on the appropriate context so the hearer catch the actual intention the speaker means in his utterance. When the speaker and the hearer come from different linguistics or cultural background, though they have knowledge in grammar and vocabulary, pragmatic failure may happen as what have been explained by Jenny Thomas (1983) in her article Cross-Cultural Pragmatic Failure. She explains that Pragmatic failure occurs when the EFL learners do not master the whole concept and context of L1 and L2. Crystal (1985) associated pragmatic competence to "languages use from the point of difficulties in terms of language choice and the constrain learners encountered in the act of communicating events" (p. 240). When the students have lack of experience in having conversation with English native speakers, they tend to hesitate and fail in making mutual communication.

In the process of converting the target language input into intake, noticing is necessary and understanding is facilitative (Schmidt, 2010). When students as speakers produce an utterance or are engaged in L2 communication, they need to be aware of the listeners language and social background, they have to understand the background so they can transfer L1 into L2 appropriately. Barron (2003) states that knowledge of the linguistic resources available in a given language for realizing particular illocutions, knowledge of the sequential aspects of speech acts and finally, knowledge of the appropriate contextual use of the particular languages. Moreover, Locastro (2003, p.313) says that "even in our first language, to present ourselves as we wish requires comprehending and producing pragmatic meanings in a variety of contexts, ranging from a simple speech act requesting the salt to processing irony and comprehending joking".

The pragmatic failure which happens to EFL Learners is related to their comprehension, knowledge, and skill to transfer what they mean to say in their mother language into English along with the appropriate context. The students who don't have enough information about how it is supposed to say such an expression into the target language will fail in a communication. When the communication in a kind of the practice among the EFL learners, it may not be a problem at all since they have the same language comprehension background. However, when the EFL learners speak to the native language of English, unless they know how to transfer L1 to L2 appropriately, pragmatic failure cannot be avoided.

Pragmatic failure can be identified in two types. Thomas (1983) uses the terms pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics derived from Leech (1983). In her article, she uses the term of 'pragmalinguistic failure' to refer to a part of grammar and 'sociopragmatic failure' to refer to ones' knowledge of language include social and cultural context. After all, Thomas (1983: 101) explains that pragmalinguistic failure is principally a linguistic problem, caused by differences in the linguistic encoding of pragmatic force; while sociopragmatic failure stems from cross-culturally different perceptions of what constitutes appropriate linguistic behaviour.

The terms pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatic has also been used by Leech (1983: 11) as seen in the figure below:

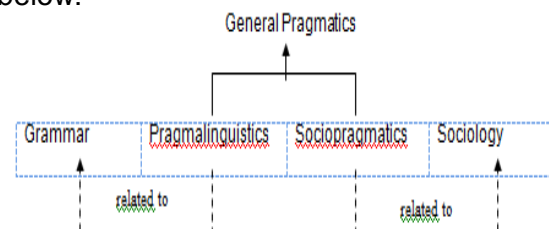


Figure 1
General pragmatics according to Leech (1983)

As seen on the figure, both pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics are two parts of pragmatics which play important role in communication. Pragmalinguistics, according to Leech (1983) refers to our grammatical knowledge of language use. Sociopragmatics, on the other hand, is related to how our sociological knowledge influences our interaction (Leech, 1983).

Pragmalinguistic failures are very common to see in daily communication, EFL learners may figure out "How do people say this words in English?" whenever they want to say something because to such an expression it can be very difference from word to word composition. For example, "Hello, is this correct Mr. James?" when she wanted to make sure that she talked to the person she intended to call. However, the sentence is this correct Mr. James? is not exist in English telephone conversation. What is usually say, "is this Mr. James?" "Can I speak to Mr. James?"

On the other hand, Sociopragmatic Failure occurs when the language has disconnection with the speakers' social and cultural background. Thomas (1983) states that sociopragmatic failure is caused when miscalculations are made about factors like size of imposition, social distance, relative rights and obligations, etc. Sociopragmatic decisions are, therefore, social in the first place rather than linguistic. For example: Question "Where is your village?" '*Dimana kampungmu?*' to ask where is someone originally from. However, this question will go to different interpretation if you ask a native speaker. He/she may answer like "I don't live in a village, I live in a city."

Xu (2011) argues that even though EFL learners can understand the utterances by native speakers after some years of learning, they seem to produce what is more likely to resemble their mother language than the target language. Along with this, the research also found failures the students made due to the influence of

their native linguistic and cultural background.

RESEARCH METHODS

In conducting the research, six classes which contain about 50 students for each have assigned to create dialogue scripts in groups about varied topics like hobby, job, giving instruction, future plan, etc. These classes are students on the second semester. They have learnt Basic English in previous semester and for nine years in school. 45 dialogue scripts have been collected in one period of class time (45 minutes). They were free to use the dictionary if necessary. The Data of this research are analyzed by using descriptive qualitative method.

1. Data Analysis and Discussion

4.1 The phenomenon of pragmatic failure in writing

Their pragmatic failure lies in the following:

(1) Pragmalinguistic failure

Pragmalinguistic failures are found as follows:

a. Fail to follow the native Expressive habit :

[1] I *join sad* Widya

[2] I *go to my home*

[3] A: Thank you

B: *Simple*

[4] It looks like you *less healthy*

[5] A: I *trust* you can get well soon Eka

B: I *trust* so.

b. Misunderstanding of words

[6] I will get SK but, I don't know how step to *finishing* it!

[7] I *am done with my* homework, so I can go.

[8] Now we will work hard *to finish* this motorcycle.

[9] Nurul : guys, guys! Listen, on the 17th of december *we'll be off* right?

[10] *son indonesian university field sister*

[11] May i bother you *a bit* , I want to interview you?

[12] May i ask you *a short time*?

[13] *Is it true* that here there strawberry's garden?

c. Use English with the semantics and structure of their mother tongue

[14] A: Hi friends, are you busy?

B: Hmm, *does not seem*

[15] *If me agree*. How about Rafi?

[16] *My body is not fit*.

[17] *Quiet can be set*

[18] Excuse me *if i may know the museum next to where sister?*

[19] *If i may know the sister college where ?*

[20] Ya. She always late. *Say something hard* to her is she come.

[21] to *place* my brother.

d. Verbose words.

[22] A: Are you *have SK too*?

B: Yes... I *have too*

C: I *have SK too*

A: We all *have SK*

[23] A: What is your plan *in long holiday, angga?*

B: for the moment have not got a plan *ahmad*.

C: How about your planning *ahmad*

D: What do you think *Imam?*

How much money usually we need *imam?*

It's so cheaper *imam*

Okay *imam*

Fall out 7 June *ahmad*

(2) Sociopragmatic failures

Sociopragmatic failure lies in their perception and expression of local pragmatic conventions.

[24] I hear you're *so skinny, if you think?*

[25] Thanks a lot friends I will *obey* your words.

[26] A: I am working assignment.

B: *Aha, you are very diligent.*

[27] A: If you not play futsal how do you feel?

B: may be sick

A: *Oh amazing*

[28] A: I'm go on vacation with my family.

B: *Wow, you are so lucky*

[29] A: Yes, I get fever. I feel *appaling*. However, I must go to class for examination

B: Oh.. *poor you.*

[30] Excuse me if i may know the museum next to where *sister?*

2. Analysis of pragmatic failure

As listed in the above section, both the pragmatic failure, pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic aspects existed in most of the EFL dialogue scripts. In [1], the student said "I join sad Widya." to express her condolence to her friends. This student, though know exactly what she wants to say, is fail to understand the idiomatic use of English and simply use it by her mother language composition. However, in English, the appropriate expression to use is "I am sorry to hear that." the students failed to follow native response to the condolences. In the student's mother tongue, it is common to say your sympathy when you hear people talk about their problem as well as in English. However, the pragmatic transfer failures if the student only translate word to word from Indonesian language into English. In [2] *I go to my home* should be said "I've gotta go" if we want to quit the conversation and say good bye. The speaker in native language does not need to say where exactly he/she has got to go to the listener. In [3] the answer of the gratitude in Indonesian language "Bukan hal yang besar/Tidak apa-apa" may not be

translated as *Simple* in English. People tend to say “That’s not a big deal.”, Don’t mention it.”or “you’re welcome”. Another inappropriate transferring language due to the failure to follow the native expressive habit can be seen in [4] and [5].

The word ‘finish’ in [6] and [9] have been improperly used. In [6] the students talk about the procedure to join the make-up classes, ‘do’ is the word that is supposed to use. In [7] the students wanted to fix the motorcycle that day. The students were supposed to use the exact word ‘fix’. In [8], the students have finished doing their homework. So, what the students mean by saying ‘I am done’ is ‘finish’. Other similar problem in this group can be seen in [9] to [13], most of the students need to give clear message in their speech in order to avoid misunderstanding of words.

Most of the failures in this group happened because the students did not evaluate the difference between the semantic and structure of their native language and English, and because the lack of knowledge in pragmatic transfer. In [14], students B answer the question “are you busy’ by saying “does not seem’. This is a part of a sentence in English with reflect a very different meaning with what the student actually mean. The students supposedly said “No, I don’t.’ or “It’s apparently not.” In [15], the students wanted to say that “ if you asked me that I would agree with the decision”. In [16], the students referred to his body when he talked about his health. This is similar to Bahasa Indonesia “Badan saya tidak sehat.” In English, people will usually say “I am not feeling well today”. Others similar data is found in [17 to [21].

Another group of pragmalinguistics failure is verbose words. The students, in the influence of their native language, tend to repeat the word over and over again. In Bahasa Indonesia, or in Minangkabau language as most of the students’ first language, saying someone name again and again at the end of an utterance seemed to

be common and polite. However, when the students translated these languages into English, it doesn’t make any sense at all. This tendency is found in almost every dialogue scripts. The examples are seen in [22] to [23]

Sociopragmatic failure seems to happen as a reflection of students lack of interaction with native English speakers so they have no idea with English culture and way of life. Based on the data above, sociopragmatics failure happens in examples [24] to [30].

In [24] “*I hear you’re so skinny, if you think?*” Contain words which are considered as taboo for native speaker of English. Saying your friends so skinny inappropriate for talking about someone’s body and will make her offended. The students are better use the expression like “are you losing weight?”. In [16] “Thanks a lot friends I will *obey* your words” The word obey is not supposed to use when you agree with your friend’s suggestion. Moreover in English, people do not easily obey someone only by listening to a suggestion, especially if they don’t have rights or if they are not asked to do so. In [26] the students give a comment “Aha, *you are very diligent*’ to see a friend who was doing a regular homework. In Bahasa Indonesia, especially in Minangkabau language, it is usually said to tease someone or to make a joke. [27] the word ‘amazing’ here cannot used to express a simple response to someone’s hobby. The English listeners will mistakenly understand that the speaker said a satire or mocked at them. The statement “Wow, you are so lucky” in [28] may give different interpretation. Most of the university students will refuse to spend holiday with their parents and prefer to go with friends. That is why this statement may cause confusion to the listener especially if he actually expected not to go with his family. In [29], a students feel unwell but she must attend the exam. However, response received is “poor you” which may lead to ambiguity or satire. The students may feel

that B want to tease him or take his problem as a misery. In English, he just suppose to say "I am sorry to hear that." or "I think you can beat it". In [30], a student use the wrong concept at all. In this case, 'sister' as a nick name is used to ask a stranger for a direction. It is not acceptable since in English, there is no such a call like *kakak* or *abang*.

CONCLUSION

Teaching English as *Mata Kuliah Umum* or supplementary subject in University can be challenging for some lecturers. The syllabus insists us to cover a lot of topics and skill to master in two semesters (Basic English and English for Special Purpose). Some lecturers may find themselves convenient to focus just on communicative skill by giving more oral and practical exercises and leaving some topics behind, others may feel cautious to catch the whole topics and achieve the target of the syllabus by testing the water of each topics and units and giving so much homework for students to do. At the end, we finally agree that those all choices do not satisfy the teachers to see their students' English language skills.

Based on the investigation, we have found the fact that pragmatic failures exist universally in the students' dialogue scripts. After doing the analysis, it can be concluded that the pragmatic failures on EFL learners conversation scripts happen because of some factors as follow:

- (1) Need of L2 linguistic and cultural knowledge.

Different language has different cultural and linguistic context which is used in communication. The students need to know more about English by the lectures' experience, movie, novels and real interaction. This will give the the concept of English language as a whole.

- (2) Need of dialogues and interaction with English native speakers.

Even though West Sumatera has a lot of tourism sites. International tourists is hardly found, especially to talk and discuss lots of things. And even they

find some failure during the communication, as a stranger, a tourist may not fix the mistakes in our sentences. International students are also quite busy with a list of schedule they have in the university. The chance to speak with them will depend on their free time. Based on those facts, unless the students are eager to practice their English, they will end up with some text books. The teacher, therefore, should be the one who provide the chances for the students to talk with native speakers. They can have live conversation or virtual conversation using Skype, Facebook groups, or other available devices. The students who have much experience speaking with native speakers feel more confident and not hesitate to ask for a word or expression they do not have yet such as an idiom.

- (3) Need of oral exercises and role plays in English class.

The students need to be examined based on their oral English skills. Although this kind of tests takes more time, this will give them experience to test their English and improve their confidence. The teachers should not correct the students' mistake when they are speaking. It is better to give language models, clear instruction, and at the end class hour, fix some problems together. Correcting the mistake directly will cause hesitation to the students and reduce their confidence. The oral exercises and role play include playing games, making and performing dialogues, and interviewing.

- (4) Lack of teachers' explanation, guidance and correction toward the students' language production.

In the education systems, to produce a good and proficient EFL learner, those teachers who teach English to the EFL students should not only teach the grammar and other linguistic materials, but they also have to provide them with

good instructions about the pragmatic competence in order to make the EFL learners to be aware and competent when he or she faces interaction in the language (Abdulrahman, 2012). It cannot be argued that vocabulary and grammar are basic skills in learning language. It provides students what and how to say something. However, the teachers are also expected to explain grammar and vocabulary along

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abdulrahman, B. S. *Effects and implications of pragmatic competence for enhancing EFL university students written performance* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from AuthorHouse. (Accession No.978-1-47725-005-1). 2012.
- Barron, A. *Acquisition in Interlanguage Pragmatics: Learning How to do Things with Words in a Study Abroad Context*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. 2003.
- Crystal, D. *A dictionary of linguistics and phonetics*. Blackwell: Oxford Publishing, 1985.
- Leech, G. *Principles of pragmatics*. New York: Longman Publishing. 1983.
- LoCastro, V. *An introduction to pragmatics: Social action for language teachers*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. 2003.
- Muir, P. Y. & Xu, Z.. Exploring "Pragmatic Failure into Writing of Young EFL Learners: A Critical Analysis" *Journal of English Language Teaching* Vol 4, No.4. December 2011..
- Schmidt, R. W. "Attention, Awareness, and Individual Differences in Language Learning". *Proceedings of CLaSIC 2010* (pp. 721-737). Singapore: National University of Singapore, Centre for Language Studies
- Thomas, J. *Cross-cultural Pragmatic Failure*. *Applied Linguistics*, 4(2), 91-112. 1983.