INTEGRATING THE SPEECH ACT OF REFUSALS IN THE INSTRUCTED SETTING*

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The purpose of this paper is to provide an instructional approach for the integration of a particular pragmatic aspect, specifically, the speech act of refusals. To do that, the paper begins with a description of the speech under study and with a review of proposals for the teaching of pragmatic features in instructed settings. Following that, an instructional approach for the integration of refusal strategies in the instructed setting is proposed.

Key words: *Pragmatic competence, speech acts, refusals, instructional approaches*.

El objetivo de este trabajo es presentar un enfoque instructivo para la integración de un aspecto pragmático en particular, concretamente el del acto de habla del rechazo. De este modo, el trabajo empieza con una descripción del acto de habla objeto de estudio y con una revisión de propuestas de enseñanza de aspectos pragmáticos en el contexto de instrucción. Seguidamente, se propone un enfoque instructivo para la introducción de las estrategias el rechazo en el contexto de instrucción.

Palabras clave: *Competencia pragmática, actos de habla, rechazo, enfoques didácticos*.

1. INTRODUCTION

It has been suggested that language learners should develop their pragmatic competence in order to reach communicative

competence (Kasper and Rose, 2002). Pragmatic competence, which is one the main components of the communicative construct[1] (Bachman, 1990; Celce-Murcia et al., 1995; Usó-Juan and Martínez-Flor, 2006), should be fostered in the instructed setting in order to aid learners to communicate efficiently in various social encounters (Olshtain and Cohen, 1991; Judd, 1999; Martínez-Flor and Usó-Juan, 2006; Usó-Juan and Martínez-Flor; 2008, Beltran-Palanques, 2011). Specifically, this particular competence involves the knowledge of pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic features, which might be taken into account when performing speech acts in different communicative interchanges (Kasper and Roever, 2005). The former refers to the linguistic resources that are required to convey communicative moves, while the latter is related to the social factors such as social status (i.e. the relative power that speakers have) and social distance (i.e. the degree of familiarity between speakers) that affect language performance (Brown and Levinson, 1987).

On that account, it seems important to integrate pragmatic competence in the instructed setting by focusing on speech act realisation, paying special attention to the social factors which might affect language production (Olshtain and Cohen, 1991; Judd, 1999; Martínez-Flor and Usó-Juan, 2006; Usó-Juan and Martínez-Flor; 2008). Hence, the purpose of this paper is to provide an instructional approach for the integration of a particular pragmatic aspect, specifically the speech act of refusals. To do that, the paper begins with a description of the speech under study and with a review of suggested proposals for the teaching of pragmatic features in the instructed setting. Following that, we present an instructional approach for the integration of refusal strategies in the instructed setting.

2. THE PRAGMATIC FEATURE UNDER STUDY

The pragmatic feature selected for study in this paper is the speech act of refusals, which falls into the category of Searle's (1979) directive acts or into Bach and Harnish's (1977) category of constative acts. This particular speech act is usually performed to convey a refusal in answer to other initiating acts such as requests, offers, invitations or

suggestions. According to Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, refusal strategies are considered as one of the most face-threatening acts. The notion of face refers to the self-image that a person might possess, which can be somehow damaged by the utterance of a refusal, as it conveys a dispreferred message in which the interlocutor's expectations are contradicted.

Due to the face-threatening aspect of refusal strategies, there is a tendency to perform them in a rather indirect manner as an attempt to mitigate their face-threatening nature and reduce the negative effect that their realisation might evoke (Gass and Houck, 1999). In fact, by avoiding directness, speakers can reduce the face-threatening nature of this speech act. To do so, it seems necessary to understand how to use pragmalinguistic resources adequately in view of the sociopragmatic conditions of the context of interaction, specifically the social distance between the participants, the social status of each interlocutor and the setting in which interaction occurs (Brown and Levinson, 1987). Other aspects that might be taken into consideration when refusing are the cultural values and perceptions of the interlocutors.

The use of indirect refusal strategies involves a rather complex process in which not only a good command of English language proficiency might be required, but also, and more importantly, a great degree of pragmatic competence. Both of these are required to perform such acts efficiently, and thus avoid miscommunication problems. In this regard, Eslami (2010: 217) points out that "there is strong need for pragmatic instruction in order to help learners interpret and realise this speech act successfully". Therefore, language learners should know how to use refusal forms and functions appropriately depending on the social conditions of the context of interaction, which involve both a) possible differences in social distance and social status existing between the interlocutors, and b) the hearer's cultural values and perceptions of the utterance performed. To that end, teachers might design specific methodological approaches that can favour language learners' reflection on language realisation from a pragmatic perspective (Olshtain and Cohen, 1991; Judd, 1999; Martínez-Flor and Usó-Juan, 2006; Usó-Juan and Martínez-Flor; 2008).

3. THE INTRODUCTION OF PRAGMATIC FEATURES IN THE INSTRUCTED SETTING

It has been indicated that the setting in which the instruction takes place might have an effect on the quantity and quality of learners' exposition to authentic pragmatic input as well as on the output opportunities (Kasper and Roever, 2005; Martínez-Flor and Usó-Juan, 2010a). On the one hand, in second language (SL) contexts learners will have greater opportunities for being exposed to contextualised pragmatic input and to use the language for real-life purposes (Kasper and Roever, 2005). On the other hand, in foreign language (FL) contexts, the possibility for both being exposed to appropriate pragmatic input and employing the target language (TL) are somehow limited to the instructed setting (Martínez-Flor and Usó-Juan, 2010a). Consequently, especially in FL contexts, it seems essential to provide learners with appropriate and contextualised pragmatic input as well as to design specific methodological approaches which might engage learners in purposeful communicative activities (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001; Martínez-Flor and Usó-Juan, 2010a, 2010b; Beltran-Palanques, 2011). In fact, it is in the FL contexts where pragmatic instruction becomes even more significant due to the drawbacks that might be found.

In most instructed settings, teaching practices rely on the use of traditional language materials such as those of language textbooks (Vellenga, 2004), despite the fact that this type of source has been criticised for not incorporating sufficient and suitable pragmatic information (Martínez-Flor and Usó-Juan, 2010b; Beltrán-Palanques, in press). In order to improve such a situation, audiovisual materials (Washburn, 2001; Alcón, 2005; Martínez-Flor and Usó-Juan, 2006; Martínez-Flor, 2007, 2009; Usó-Juan and Martínez-Flor, 2008; Kondo, 2010; Usó-Juan, 2010; Beltran-Palanques, 2011) or natural occurring data (Martínez-Flor, 2010) can be employed as a way to provide learners with something like an authentic representation of speech act realisation. It is, however, important to note that the language used in audiovisual material as well as the scenarios shown are not real since they are designed for specific purposes such as entertainment. Also, they are not pedagogically-oriented. Nevertheless, this particular type of source can be of paramount interest for teachers since it might

contain appropriate samples of language use in contextualised situations. In fact, as indicted by Martínez-Flor and Usó-Juan (2010a), one of the most important aspects that should be taken into account when fostering pragmatic competence in the instructed setting is the quality of input, and it seems that by means of audiovisual materials learners can be exposed to appropriate examples of speech act performance. The authors also argue that other important aspects to bear in mind are those of output and feedback opportunities. In this regard, it could also be pointed out that learners should be engaged in purposeful production activities which might reflect everyday situations that they are familiar with; and that they should be provided with feedback on performance in order to better assist their process of learning. In line with this, several researchers in the field of interlanguage pragmatics have proposed different pedagogical approaches and techniques for developing pragmatic competence in the instructed setting (Olshtain and Cohen, 1991; Judd, 1999; Martínez-Flor and Usó-Juan, 2006; Usó-Juan and Martínez-Flor; 2008). As reported by Martínez-Flor and Usó-Juan (2010b), Olshtain and Cohen (1991) are the first who advance a pedagogical approach for the integration of speech acts. Specifically, the authors consider that learners should be first exposed to the main pragmalinguistic features of the speech act under study, and after that, they should be given information about the different factors that might affect their realisation. Finally, learners should be provided with output opportunities in order to practice the different speech act realisations examined, as well as with feedback on performance. Olshtain and Cohen (1991) suggest the implementation of a methodological approach which consists of five steps. The first step, diagnostic assessment, consists of analysing learners' level of awareness of speech acts in general and in particular that of the speech act object of study. The second step, a model dialogue, implies learners' exposition to particular examples of the speech act studied in different situations so as to make them reflect on the sociopragmatic features that might be involved in the speech act realisation. Then, learners can be provided with natural examples in which learners can observe speech act use. The third step is known as the evaluation of a situation, its purpose being to reinforce learners' awareness of the factors that might influence the choice of the different semantic formulae. In the fourth step, role-playing, learners are provided with output opportunities to

produce the speech act. The last step is that of feedback and discussion in which learners can express their expectations and perceptions as well as the possible similarities and differences between their mother tongue (L1) and the TL. Similarly, Judd (1999) provides some techniques for the development of pragmatic competence which consists of three main parts, namely those of cognitive awareness, receptive skill development, and productive use. The first part is designed to help learners become aware of the differences between L1 and TL speech acts. The second one focuses on the learners' recognition and understanding of the speech act under study. Finally, in the last part, learners are involved in a set of activities which range from controlled productive activities to free integrated activities in order to practice the specific speech act analysed.

In addition to this, Martínez-Flor and Usó-Juan (2006) propose the so-called 6R Approach which consists of a methodological approach that is divided into main six phases. The focus of this approach is the integration of the speech acts of requests and suggestions in the instructed setting from a communicative approach. In the first phase, that of research, learners are provided with pragmatic information about the two speech acts under study. Then, learners are asked to write some requests and suggestions in their L1 as well as to give information about the sociopragmatic aspects that are involved in their pragmalinguistic realisation. The second phase, reflecting, implies both working on the examples that have been collected in the previous phase and completing an awareness-raising questionnaire. In the third phase, receiving, learners are provided with explicit instruction on the pragmalinguistic sources used for performing requests and suggestions. After that, learners are encouraged to compare those speech act realisations with the speech acts strategies that are identified in their L1. In so doing, learners can examine the similarities and differences that can be observed in the two different languages. In the fourth phase, reasoning, learners should complete three different types of awareness-raising activities which could serve to enhance their pragmatic knowledge. Once they have completed this phase, learners are engaged in the fifth phase, rehearsing, which involves two main productive activities (i.e. controlled activities and free activities). The final phase, revising, refers to learners' provision of feedback on performance. Finally, Usó-Juan and Martínez-Flor (2008) propose a

learner-based method to teach request-mitigating devices which is divided into three main stages. The first stage, learners' exploration, consists of two main types of awareness-raising activities. The aim is that of providing learners with opportunities to work on the pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic aspects of the speech act examined. In the second stage, learners' production, learners are encouraged to practice request mitigating devices in the oral and written mode. Finally, in the third stage, learners' feedback, learners have opportunities for receiving peer feedback on performance.

As can be seen, some methodological approaches and techniques can be implemented in order to foster pragmatic competence in the instructed setting. To do so, teachers should carefully select the pragmatic input, design specific communicative activities, and provide learners with feedback on performance (Martínez-Flor and Usó-Juan, 2010a).

4. SUGGESTIONS FOR THE TEACHING OF REFUSALS

The proposed instructional activities have been elaborated following Martínez-Flor and Usó-Juan's (2010a) suggestions concerning the teaching of pragmatic aspects. These authors emphasise the importance of providing learners with appropriate instances of input and opportunities for production as well as with feedback on performance. In this particular case, the teaching of the speech act of refusals is not based on spontaneous data, but rather on pragmatic input selected from audiovisual materials. The input selected captures the use of refusal strategies in various contexts so that learners may be exposed to different pragmatic realisations (Beltrán-Palanques, 2011). The proposed activities aim at teaching learners how to perform refusal strategies by paying special attention to the contextual factors which might affect language use, and feedback on performance is also provided so that learners may reflect on their output. Drawing on previous research (Olshtain and Cohen, 1991; Martínez-Flor and Usó-Juan, 2006; Usó-Juan and Martínez-Flor; 2008), the suggested activities are divided into the following set of phases: comparing, exploring, selecting, producing and providing feedback.

The first phase, comparing, involves first the teacher's exposition of the notion of social distance and social status and how these aspects might affect language use. After that, teachers may make learners reflect on the realisation of refusal strategies not only in the second language (L2), but also on their own L1 (Martínez-Flor and Usó-Juan, 2006; Usó-Juan and Martínez-Flor, 2008). In so doing, learners can be asked to think of various strategies in both languages in order to compare them in terms of pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic features. To complete this activity, learners should be provided with two different data-collection sheets (Table 1 and Table 2).

Specifically, the activity consists of collecting various refusal strategies in learners' L1 and L2 in order to reflect on their pragmalinguistic realisation as well as on the sociopragmatic features which can influence their use. Then, learners should consider the refusal strategies and classify them according to their level of directness or indirectness (Table 1).

Table 1. Data-collection sheet (adapted from Martínez-Flor and Usó-Juan, 2006)

Data-collection sheet
Refusals in L1 - Data-collection sheet
Level of directness and indirectness
Refusals in L2 - Data-collection sheet
Level of directness and indirectness

Once learners have classified them, they should discuss with the rest of learners the data obtained and how the different strategies are organised. After that, learners can complete the answer sheet shown in Table 2 in which information concerning the different strategies should be given. Particularly, learners are required to provide a context in which the different refusals collected might occur by focusing on the participants' relationship, role, age, gender, and their intention.

Table 2. Data-collection sheet for examining refusal strategies

Refusals in L1
Strategy:
Context:
Participants' relationship, role, age, gender, and intention:
Refusals in L2
Strategy:
Context:
Participants' relationship, role, age, gender, and intention:

In this phase learners are expected to reflect on the cross-cultural differences between their L1 and L2 as well as on the different factors that can affect refusal realisations. Moreover, learners can be asked to describe situations in which they consider that failures in communication when performing refusal strategies might arise. The major aim of this activity is to make learners reflect on their pragmatic performance of refusals in both languages by paying attention to the pragmalinguistic realisation and the sociopragmatic features underlying that production.

Having reflected on the differences between refusal realisations in L1 and L2, we can move to second phase, that of exploring. Specifically, in the second phase, teachers should present learners with pragmatic input. To do that, teachers can use some film scenes in which the speech act of refusals is used in different contexts. In this way, teachers expose learners to authentic-like samples of language in which the speech act under study is employed contextually (Alcón, 2005; Martínez-Flor and Usó-Juan, 2006; Martínez-Flor, 2007, 2009; Kondo, 2010; Usó-Juan, 2010; Martínez and Fernández, 2008; Beltran-Palanques, 2011). When carrying out this particular activity, learners should also be given an answer sheet which contains a short questionnaire (Table 3).

Table 3. Film answer sheet (adapted from Martínez-Flor and Usó-Juan, 2006)

Which strategies are employed?   Describe the participants in terms of gender and age.   Where are they?   What is the role played by each participant?   What status is represented by each participant?   How would you describe their relationship?   What are the participants' intentions?
Select the option you think is suitable   Speakers' social distance: stranger / acquaintance / intimate   Speakers' social status: equal / high
Recapitulating   How might sociopragmatic features affect pragmalinguistic realisations?   To what extent might communicative purposes not be achieved if pragmalinguistic features are not realised according to sociopragmatic conditions?

Learners should pay attention to the different refusal strategies appearing in the input provided and examine the sociopragmatic conditions under which each pragmalinguistic realisation occurs (Martínez-Flor and Usó-Juan, 2006; Usó-Juan and Martínez-Flor, 2008; Kondo, 2010; Usó-Juan, 2010; Beltran-Palanques, 2011). In order to present learners with varied contextual situations, it is important that the input selected should contain different settings and that participants' roles as regards social distance and social status relationships should also vary.

After completing the answer sheet, learners can take part in a whole-class discussion on the information collected, paying particular attention to the form and function of the refusal strategies, and how they are affected by the context of the situation. The purpose of this activity is twofold, first it attempts to extend the presentation of refusal strategies, which is not appropriately presented in language textbooks (Beltrán-Palanques, in press), and secondly it aims to make learners reflect on the use of refusal formulae in various contexts.

In the third phase, selecting, teachers can show learners different situations in which various refusal strategies are used in answer to other speech acts. In this particular case, excerpts from films might be also employed, albeit, when possible, natural occurring data should be used as it can provide a better representation of speech act performance. Then, teachers can present learners with different scenarios and with various refusal strategies in order to make them select the formulae that they think are most suitable for such contexts. Moreover, learners should also justify their pragmalinguistic choice by taking into account the sociopragmatic conditions of the situation. In order to help learners better understand the situations it is important to provide them with sufficient contextual information about the participants and the settings. Example 1 might serve to illustrate how this activity can be designed. In this specific case, a refusal is given in answer to a request.

Example 1. (source: Beltrán-Palanques, 2011: 79, taken from The Constant Gardener)

Situation 1: Tessa and Justin, a couple, leave the hospital after Tessa gives birth. Unfortunately, their baby has not survived. While they are on the road, Tessa sees a woman carrying a new-born baby, accompanied only by another child. They were also at the hospital and the mother of the baby died after having given birth.

Tessa: Stop, stop, stop. [Justin stops the car.]
Justin: Tessa.
Tessa: It's 40 kilometres to Miluri. It's gonna take them all night.
Justin: We shouldn't get involved in their lives, Tessa.
Tessa: Why?
Justin: Be reasonable. There are millions of people. They all need help. That's what the agencies are here for.
Tessa: Yeah, but these are three people that we can help.
Justin: Please.
Tessa: Justin.
Justin:

Select the refusal strategy that you think is more suitable:
1.   No way Tessa.

2.   I'm sorry, Tessa.
3.   Are you kidding?
Justify your choice: _____

        In completing this activity, learners might have the opportunity
to reflect on the sociopragmatic features that can influence the
pragmalinguistic selection. Particularly, learners are presented with
examples which resemble authentic language.

        Once learners have become aware of the relationship between
the pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic features which might affect
refusal realisations, they can be engaged in the fourth phase, that of
producing. Specifically, we propose two different activities: email
exchanges and role-plays. In these two activities, special emphasis is
given to social factors (i.e. social status and social distance) as they
can exert a great influence on pragmalinguistic realisation. The first
activity, email exchanges, involves teacher-learner and learner-learner
exchanges of emails. To do this, teachers should elaborate on various
situations in which learners might use refusal strategies. The scenarios
should contain sufficient information about the roles and relationship
between the participants for learners to understand what they are
expected to do. At first, teachers can initiate the email exchange with
learners, and once the latter become more familiar with the activity,
the on-line interaction can be done exclusively among learners.

        As regards role-play activities, learners should be first provided
with written examples taken from films in which refusal strategies are
employed, so that they can examine the different dialogues from a
pragmatic perspective. After that, they can be encouraged to elaborate
on situations which involve different instances of social status and
degrees of social distance. In designing the different role-play
situations, learners should discuss with teachers any doubts related to
the roles they are expected to play and the relationship between the
participants, as well as to the settings in which the interactions take
place. While some students are performing the different role-play
scenarios, the remaining group of learners can be asked to focus on
their peers' interactions in order to pay attention to the sociopragmatic
features underlying their pragmalinguistic realisation.

Finally, the last phase, providing feedback, focuses on learners' opportunities for receiving feedback on performance. In this case, we suggest first having a whole-class discussion about the different activities performed throughout the whole instructional sequence in order to see whether learners have appropriately understood the smooth functioning of the speech act of refusals. Moreover, learners may also be encouraged to state the difficulties found when performing refusals and teachers should make comments on learners' performance in order to better assist their process of learning. After that, teachers can have small individual interviews with each learner to provide further feedback on performance.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The aim of the current paper is to present an instructional approach for the integration of the communicative speech act of refusal in the instructed setting, since its realisation appears to be rather complex due to its face-threatening nature (Brown and Levinson, 1987). Therefore, it seems paramount to propose an instructional approach for the integration of this particular speech act in the instructed setting as an attempt to show learners how social aspects might influence language production. The suggested instructional approach might serve as an example to show teachers how the speech act of refusals can be taught. Particularly, the proposed activities involve a set of phases in which special attention is paid to the pragmalinguistic features and the sociopragmatic conditions that might determine language use. In fact, the instructional approach begins with a set of activities whose purpose is to show learners how language performance depends on the underlying context of the situation, that is, the relationship between the participants and the setting in which such communicative actions occur. Also, it presents learners with opportunities for output in the written and oral mode, as well as with feedback on performance. To sum up, by means of this practical approach, learners can become aware of the fact that social features such as the context of interaction and the participants' relationship in terms of social distance and social status might influence the realisation of speech acts.

NOTES

[1] The term communicative competence was first coined by Hymes
      (1972) who indicates that language should be examined by
      paying attention to communication.

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