Challenges of teaching English pragmatics in the Norwegian context: Settings, Methodologies, Attitudes

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Overview

- The context: English in Norway and teaching/learning pragmatics
- The current research project
- Looking ahead
English in Norway

- “unique position as 1st foreign language” (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research 2003: 17)
- Our context?
  - *English as a SECOND language or English as a FOREIGN language? Does this make a difference?*
- Pragmatics
  - how language is used to achieve a communicative intent in a particular context
  - (Im)politeness, (in)appropriateness, register, ‘hidden’ meaning, humour, irony etc.
“Non native speakers may opt for pragmatic distinctiveness (sometimes, always, or depending on context) as a strategy of identity assertion” (Kasper & Schmidt 1996: 157)

“L2 pragmatic practices may provoke affective responses in L2 learners that are unlikely to have counterparts in learners’ responses to grammar” (Kasper & Rose 2002: 275) since they are “closely related to people’s cultural and personal beliefs and values, making it more of a personal value decision whether learners wish to converge to target practices” (Kasper & Rose 2002: 276)
Advanced learners are “more at risk than lower proficiency learners since for these learners grammatical proficiency is no longer seen as an excuse for impoliteness”, and their “deviations from conventional usage” tend to be attributed “to personality issues rather than to issues of language use” (Barron 2002: 2).

About the research project

Pilot study

Research topic

Research methodology

Research aims

- to investigate the development of L2 requests in young Norwegian EFL learners
  - to identify specific request strategies that emerge at different stages of development (a pragmalinguistic focus)
  - to explore learners’ sensitivity to social power as a contextual factor at different stages (a sociopragmatic focus)

A competence aim for spoken communication after grades 2, 4 & 7: the ability to use (context-appropriate) polite expressions
Research design

Participants
- 58 pupils
- 27 boys, 31 girls
- Three age groups
  - Grade 2: 18
  - Grade 4: 20
  - Grade 6: 20

Data collection
- 2 Role-play tasks
- Grade 2
  - Dress the girl and boy
  - My pencil case
- Grades 4 & 6
  - School party
  - Forgetful students
SCHOOL PARTY

STUDENT A

It is the end of the school year and you are planning to organize a school party for all your classmates. You need some help from a friend and from your English teacher.

Ask your friend to:

- Ask her/his mom to bake cookies for the party
- Bring some snacks to the party
- Buy drinks for the party
- Bring some good music
Ask your teacher to:

- Bake a cake
- Help arrange desks and chairs
- Bring some flowers
- Bring some napkins
Some findings: request strategies and language complexity

- Clear indicators of pragmalinguistic development
- A wider range of language strategies, increasing syntactic complexity in higher grades
- A higher frequency of use of external modifiers
- A greater variety of lexical devices to mitigate requests

**Give me... I want/ need**

**Can/ Could/ May I ...**

That would be great if you could bring some balloons.

**Can you maybe help me with the cookies?**

Please (12%/34%)

I forgot my notebook at home.

I know that it’s school time but (can I please borrow a mobile phone to phone my dad?)
Some finding: social context

- Inconclusive findings regarding sociopragmatic development
- 6th grade: Fewer direct strategies and more hints with peers than with the teacher vs. 4th grade
- Non-linear pragmatic development or a choice to move “away from native speaker norms”? (Hill 1997 in Kasper & Rose 2002: 146; Brubæk 2012)
- Back to EFL vs. ESL contexts: results in line with previous research in EFL contexts (Hill 1997; Rose 2000; Rose 2009; Trosborg 1995) vs. language development

Can I very please borrow it? (peer)

Can you please give me a notebook please? (teacher)
Looking ahead...

- English Fordypning course: Politeness in L2 module
- Current BA research projects
- Research into:
  - Learners’ pragmatic competence
  - Teachers’ competence
  - Learners’ and teachers’ attitudes
  - New research methods
References


Brubæk, S. 2012. Pragmatics competence in English at the VG1 level: To what extent are Norwegian students able to adapt to contextual demands when making requests in English? Acta Didactica Norge, vol. 14, no. 1, art. 20


Thank you!