Abstract

A learner of English for Specific Purposes may say words clearly, construct grammatically correct sentences and use specific terms, but still may have a communication problem, if he or she does not follow the rules of pragmatics, that is does not present knowledge of speech acts, speech functions and sociolinguistic awareness.

The primary goal of the instructor of English for future aviation specialists is to teach them speaking, paying less attention to grammatical correctness of the statements. The development of pragmatic competence during English language acquisition is very important as aviation safety depends on that.

There exist two specific subject and language educational zones in English for Civil Aviation: the first is Aviation English taught to air traffic controllers and cabin crews, whereas the second is English for civil aviation taught to future professionals of ground handling operations, namely, passenger services and aircraft handling services. While English for Pilots and Air Traffic Controllers is strictly regulated in grammar, vocabulary, sentence structures, English for other professionals of the aviation industry is more flexible, and pragmatics here is the key study priority.

The objective of the paper is to determine the set of components of pragmatic competence to be taught to students of aviation-related majors in universities, then to decide how to teach pragmatics, finally, how to assess pragmatics awareness and pragmatic skills of students.

Keywords: English for civil aviation, pragmatic competence, task design, tests, foreign language education in Russia.

1 INTRODUCTION

English for Civil Aviation is a wide educational area with two distinct types of English: the first is Aviation English for air professionals – air traffic controllers and cabin crews, whereas the second is English taught to future ground staff – aircraft ground handling services, passenger services, airport administration, airline employees. English for Pilots and Air Traffic Controllers is strictly regulated in grammar, vocabulary, sentence structures, but English for other professionals of the aviation industry is more flexible. This article relates to English for ground operations in civil aviation and non-native English students of universities.

English is a language of international communication in civil aviation, with the concept of intercultural communicative sensitivity and pragmatic competence having risen in the recent years. As a result, the need for developing awareness of cultural diversity and pragmatically correct usage of English has gained tremendous attention. This requires development of teaching programs aiming the acquisition of pragmatic skills in addition to traditional speaking, writing, reading, listening skills with a scope of work-related vocabulary and grammar.

Based on the reality of English as a world language and its geography, both native speakers’ language culture and non-native language cultures should be seriously thought about. The socio-cultural and socio-lingual diversities among the different nationalities using English in civil aviation as a lingua franca have effects on individuals’ interactions, making it critical to decode what has been meant in terms of discourse and pragmatics. The importance of mutual understanding gets more crucial in cases where a respond to communication situations closely connected with aviation safety is needed. Teaching loyalty to cultural backgrounds and national principles of verbalization of universal speech acts is to be compulsory in the study of aviation-related English.

The aim of the article is to introduce some ideas about components of pragmatic competence, which could be instructed during English courses in universities, to suggest ways to teach pragmatics and to assess students’ achievements.
2 METHODOLOGY

This article studies the researches on language proficiency and its components, attempts to outline what to be instructed to achieve the pragmatic competence, how the pragmatic competence to be brought into the classroom, how the efficiency of the learning pragmatics module to be assessed.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Pragmatic competence for an aviation-related professional

ICAO Manual (2010) for pilots and ATC on the implementation of its language proficiency requirements, which might, in some terms, be applied to ground handling operation professionals, describes the pragmatic competence as "a number of skills used to make or give meaning to language in a given situation or context. These include: a) strategic competence refers to how language users mobilize or balance their resources to activate skills and procedures, in order to fulfill the demands of communication in context and successfully complete the task in question in the most comprehensive or most economical way feasible; b) discourse competence refers to the ability to combine sentences or utterances to make coherent, whole texts; c) functional competence refers to the awareness of and ability to make use of the rules governing the way in which language structures are interpreted conventionally or in a given context – “language functions” – and the ways in which these functions are commonly sequenced to establish conversational structures (interactive scripts or schemata); d) evaluation of outcomes of the use of language in the real world, for example, impacts on safety or impacts on efficiency." [1]

However, descriptors from the ICAO Rating Scale (2010) reveal criteria on pilots and ATC’s proficiency of pronunciation, structure (= grammar), vocabulary, fluency (= tempo, discourse markers), comprehension (= a range of topics) and interactions (= switching between standard phraseology and plain language), which are the criteria of linguistic competence, but not pragmatics. [2] Therefore, a foreign language teacher cannot refer to Aviation English guidelines designing the program of studies on pragmatic competence for ground operation students. Here, the question arises of what exactly an English-language instructor would teach in a classroom, which categories could be taught and then assessed.

In an aviation university course of English as a foreign language, the goal of teaching intercultural communication is supposedly not the assimilation to norms of the target culture, but the study of some universal principles of intercultural and cross-language communication.

Pragmatics in English of civil aviation is based on a merge of different concepts and theories, for example: speech act theory, communicative competence concept, cooperative principle, politeness theory.

Speech act theory of J.L. Austin (1962) and later J.R. Searle (1969, 1975) is concerned with the ways in which words can be used to present information and also cause actions. It considers the types of verbalization leading to performance of some action as locutionary (words are used in their literal meaning), illocutionary (the actual meaning of words appears in context), perlocutionary (words are used to cause some effect). This part of pragmatics is especially important to be paid attention to while studying how to express approval, disapproval, complaining, disagreeing, saying “yes” or “no”, persuading, with the focus on direct and indirect speech acts. [3, 4, 5]

D. Hymes (1972) developed the concept of communicative competence, and he argued that in order to understand the interlocutor, both grammatical accuracy (includes grammatical structures and word usage) and the proper use of language (contextual accuracy) are needed. A language learner needs to study how to vary his speech register, choose a speech act, change emotional content or avoid words, and how to “repair” the conversation in case of communication failures. [6]

P. Grice’s maxims (1975) demonstrate the cooperative principle of how listeners and speakers need to act cooperatively, so that mutually understand each other in a particular way. The maxims are the maxim of quantity (be as informative as required), the maxim of quality (be accurate and clear), the maxim of relation (be relevant), maxim of manner (be perspicuous). Understanding of cooperative principle is culturally determined, but, nevertheless, these maxims describe the commonly accepted traits of successful cooperative communication and may determine a successful conversation. [7]
G. Leech (1983) created the conversational maxims of politeness: tact (maximize attend to others wants), generosity (maximize benefits to others), approbation (maximize approval of others), modesty (minimize self-praise), agreeability (maximize agreement), sympathy (maximize sympathy with others). What may be considered polite in one culture may be downright rude in another, but also with the focus on interpretation of the effect on the hearer rather than the speaker the non-productive communication might be repaired while following these maxims. [8]

Taking aviation context into account, we define the pragmatic competence as the ability to use English appropriately in different circumstances in native or non-native culture, and assume that the following components are to be studied in the classroom of foreign language studies in universities:

1. language functions, e.g., greetings and small talk, agreement, disagreement, dealing with invitations, asking questions, giving commands, guessing, expressing wishes, persuading, expressing opinions;
2. expression of language functions directly and indirectly;
3. variations in verbalization of language functions defined by a spectrum of registers, native language interference, a native speech act paradigm;
4. a variety of norms of politeness and agreeability around the world;
5. expression of emotions and modalities around the world;
6. accommodation to an interlocutor with lower language proficiency;
7. strategies to fix communication mistakes.

The primary goal of a language instructor is to develop language-tolerant and interlocutor-oriented communication. Technically, this area of studies in Russia is a subject area of cross-cultural communication courses, not English language courses, but as the world is rapidly changing and as new requirements to effective foreign-language communication occur, we need to reconsider the language study framework in institutions of technical higher education, expanding it with pragmatic components at all steps of learning programs and at all levels of English command of students.

The Russian tradition of teaching foreign languages in technical universities means that students learn grammar, work-related vocabulary, practice reading technical literature, as well as receptive listening, but Russian students lack productive speaking or writing skills fearing to make a mistake. Nowadays, teachers of English in Russia are increasing their professional competency and are shifting their teaching aim to communication instead of achieving grammatical or vocabulary accuracy from students, although teaching pragmatics is mostly terra incognita for both students and teachers. Therefore, it is vital to start acquisition and appliance of pragmatics in an English classroom in Russia with education of non-native English language teachers in this subject.

3.2 Strategies for achieving pragmatic competence

English courses for students of aviation universities in Russia generally consist of three modules: General English, future-work-related English, basic business communication skills (business correspondence and presentations). None of courses tends to raise pragmatic awareness, therefore design of new learning materials is required.

Without some form of instruction and practice, components of pragmatic competence would not develop sufficiently. There is a need to know how pragmatic components can be taught and which instructional approaches may be the most effective.

Different researchers [9, 10, 11, 12, 13] examine bringing pragmatics to a classroom, but universal methods of teaching pragmatics or the most productive type of instruction (inductive, deductive, implicit, or explicit) have not been defined yet.

Following activities to raise pragmatic awareness among students and its practice may be offered:

1. observation of real language contexts to detect speakers’ intentions and to identify a type of a speech act;
2. observation of language tools used to verbalize a proposition and speaker’s intention;
3. language practice of language functions by role-playing;
4. language practice of register-changing, tone-changing, distancing and softening;
5. self-observation and peer review;
6. extra curriculum reading on pragmatics.

Thinking of teaching materials to recognize pragmatic components, different resources occur, for example, monologues and dialogues extracted from TV documentary series on airport life (Heathrow: Britain’s Busiest Airport [14], Ultimate Airport Dubai [15], Bangkok Airport [16], Airport 24/7: Miami [17]), feature films (Terminal [18], Up in the Air [19], View from the Top [20], Flight [21]), Aviation English course books (Flightpath: Aviation English for Pilots and ATCOs [22], Aviation English: For ICAO Compliance [23], English for Aviation: Express Series [24]), or Business English course books and their resource packages (Market Leader [25], Business Result [26], the Business [27]).

The insight on how to design tasks to practice pragmatic competence might be got from the website Teaching Pragmatics of the Resource center of American English by the United States Department of State [28], books with tasks and activities Teaching Pragmatics by Kathleen Bardovi-Harlig and Rebecca Mahan-Taylor [29]; Pragmatics: Teaching Speech Acts (Classroom Practice Series) [30], Pragmatics: Teaching Natural Conversation (Classroom Practice Series) [31].

Among current objectives of an English language instructor in a Russian university there are objectives to study incorporation of pragmatic studies in English language teaching, design curricula integrating pragmatic competence development, tasks and activities to practice pragmatics, test and endorse learning materials.

3.3 Assessment of pragmatic awareness

Even though researchers and educators are focusing on developing methods of teaching learners to use foreign language in a communicatively appropriate way, not many methods of assessing learners’ ability to communicate pragmatically effective have been developed and extensively tested in empirical research. [32, 33, 34, 35]

The most controversial issues of assessment techniques are as following: 1) What is assessed (rubrics, categories)?, 2) What are criteria of a gradation scale (an advanced user of pragmatics or a satisfactory one)?; 3) How is an assessment process to be conducted (oral tests, written tests, with reading, writing, listening modules, time limits for tests)?

The modest suggestion of what a test on pragmatics would be is in Tab. 1 below. We suppose that a test should be written, evaluated by a language instructor. A speaking part would be a valuable addition to a written part and could be role-played, although formulations of tasks and assessment descriptors are a subject of further research. Tab. 1 lists the components of the pragmatic competence to be tested and suggests possible test activities for each.

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<th>Category</th>
<th>Tasks</th>
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| Language functions   | 1. Students are exposed to examples of language functions, they need to identify greetings, small talks, agreement-disagreement, invitations, commands, opinions, compliments.  
2. Students are asked to produce requests, refusals, apologies, compliments, suggestions, based on situations, which are likely to happen in a workplace. |
| Emotions             | Students are exposed to examples of subjective modality, they need to identify sarcasm, deference, politeness, importance, anger, humor, criticism. |
| Accommodation        | Students are to paraphrase dialogues by: a) changing registers; b) simplifying vocabulary and grammar; c) softening directness of utterances by using a diplomatic language in situations, which are likely to happen in a workplace. |
| Breakdown repair     | Students study a case of communication breakdown, notice communication failures and offer solutions to fix them, based on situations, which are likely to happen in a workplace. |

As it may be observed, such test would check students’ ability to comprehend speech acts and language functions, together with an ability to produce speech acts in a simulation of the real world context.
4 CONCLUSIONS

In order to communicate effectively in the internationalized aviation industry, university learners of English in Russia need to develop pragmatic competence, which can be accomplished through pragmatic instruction in the classroom. With the raise of pragmatic awareness, it is expected that learners will acquire the competence and their English language performance will improve. Besides university instructors of English in Russia are to explore the subject of pragmatics, to design materials on pragmatics, and to develop curricula including pragmatic components.

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REFERENCES


