

BEING COOPERATIVE: A PRAGMATIC APPROACH TO TEACHING COMMUNICATIVE ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT

The study of language, used in society and the context of the language used by the speakers, goes deep into the thought series of the speakers to dig out the intended or implied meaning. Teaching of English in the conventional way, beginning and ending with grammar rules, is of less help to the learner to dig out the intended/implied meaning. Teaching communicative English through a pragmatic approach would make the learner aware of the context. The learners in a traditional English classroom are taught English by way of learning the rules of grammar. Such traditional approaches to English language teaching make it difficult for the learner to use language in the society; in real speech situation, as a result they fail in communication. The present study advocates pragmatic approach to teaching communicative English with examples of utterances collected from Jane Austen's 'Sense and Sensibility' (1811) and Khuswant Singh's 'Train to Pakistan' (1956)

Key Words: English Language Teaching, Context, Pragmatics, Cooperativeness

Introduction

Language plays an important role in day-to-day conversation in the life of people in a society. Language reflects the thought of the society; it reflects the thought as well as the behavioural pattern of the person using it. It is necessary for the speakers to use appropriate language to express their true meaning(s). Language is so much associated with our thought that Samuel Johnson, in his *Lives of the Poets* (1779-81), calls it "the dress of thought." Language and its use in society is a very absorbing concept.

Language is basically used for the purpose of communication; and it is important to bring out the total meaning of an utterance, both the syntactic and the contextual meaning. According to Leech (1983:01) “...we cannot really understand the nature of language itself unless we understand pragmatics: how language is used in communication”.

The learners in a traditional English classroom are taught English by way of learning the rules of grammar. Such traditional approaches to English language teaching make it difficult for the learner to use language in the society; in real speech situation, as a result they fail in their communication. The paper focuses on the use of the theories of pragmatics, particularly the theory of cooperative principle, in a classroom where learners’ could learn the ways of expressing themselves by way of being cooperative in the process of communication. The learner would also learn the use of contextualized use of language. The paper makes use of conversational pieces from Jane Austen’s *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) and Khuswant Singh’s *Train to Pakistan* (1956)

The Theory of Cooperative Principle

Language, at core, is an analytical study of linguistics. Pragmatics is one of the branches of language studies among the various branches of linguistics. David Crystal (1971:243) says “pragmatics studies the factors which govern someone’s choice of language when they speak or write”.

Grice’s *Theory of Co-operative Principles* provides the maxims to be followed in conversation to be socially cooperative while people are engaged in an interaction with each other. H. P. Grice formulated the cooperative principle believing that speakers prefer to co-operate with each other in communication and so there is certain principle of being cooperative in conversation that underlies language use. Speakers and listeners make use of language in such a way that it helps them to continue communication.

The maxims of co-operative principle as formulated by Grice are:

Maxim of Quality:

Try to make your contribution one that is true.

- a) Do not say what you believe to be false.
- b) Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

By this maxim, Grice means that speakers should always provide true and valid information.

Maxim of Quantity:

- a) Make your contribution as informative as is required.
- b) Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

In this maxim, Grice means to say that in conversation people should always check the quantity of information that is required at a particular stage and in a particular context of communication to be co-operative.

Maxim of Relation:

Be relevant.

According to this maxim, speakers should provide information that is relevant to the topic of conversation. The information must be related to the subject matter of their communication in some way.

Maxim of Manner:

Be perspicuous.

- a) Avoid obscurity of expression.
- b) Avoid ambiguity.
- c) Be brief.
- d) Be orderly.

Although, these maxims are useful for analysing and interpreting conversation, they reveal the intended purposes of language use in communication in day-to-day social life.

Communicative Cooperativeness in *Sense and Sensibility* and *Train to Pakistan*

The analysis of selected conversational pieces for being cooperative would bring the importance of pragmatic approach to teaching of English. It would significantly prove the importance of change of meaning with the change of context whereas the grammar of the utterance may or may not change.

Maxim of Quality

Example I

‘Yes, yes, we can guess where he is; at his own house at Norland to be sure. He is the curate of the parish I dare say.’ (Mrs. Jennings)

‘No, *that* he is not. He is of no profession at all.’ (Margaret)

Vol. I, Ch. XII, p. 52

This dialogue is a piece of conversation between Mrs. Jennings and Margaret, in which Elinor and Marianne are also engaged. Here, Mrs. Jennings wants to know something more from Margaret about a certain gentleman with relation to Elinor, who is Edward. Mrs. Jennings guesses that he is a curate of the parish at Norland.

Here, she violates the maxim of quality as she says something about which she is not sure enough whether it is true or false, and she just makes a guess, but she is proved wrong by Margaret who confirms that the gentleman is ‘of no profession at all.’ The motive behind Mrs. Jennings’ violation of quality maxim is to get more information from Margaret about the certain gentleman whom Elinor likes, as she is always interested in collecting more information about the others’ affairs.

Example II

‘Where is the Lala?’ (one of the robbers)

‘I swear by the Guru he is out. You have taken all we have. Lalaji has nothing more to give’. (an old woman of Lala Ram Lal’s house)

Khushwant Singh’s *Train to Pakistan*, p. 12

Here the question is asked by one of the robbers who come to Lala Ram Lal's house, and the reply is from an old woman of Lala Ram Lal's house. It is an example of the violation of the maxim of quality. Here the old woman deliberately tells lie to the robber, she knows that Lalaji was hiding inside the house, but she flouts the maxim of quality to save Lalaji's life at the hands of the robbers, which she tries well but is unable to save Lalaji.

Maxim of Quantity

Example III

'I do assure you,' he replied, 'that I have long thought on this point, as you think now. It has been, and is, and probably will always be a heavy misfortune to me, that I have had no necessary business to engage me, no profession to give me employment, or afford me any thing like independence. But unfortunately my own nicety, and the nicety of my friends, have made me what I am, an idle, helpless being. We never could agree in our choice of a profession...' (Edward)

Vol. I, Ch. XIX, p. 88

This conversation takes place between Mrs. Dashwood and Edward when he is at Barton cottage for about a week. Mrs. Dashwood knows that Edward is not engaged in any profession for his living, so she takes the opportunity to suggest him of having a profession. Edward's reply to Mrs. Dashwood is the above dialogue, in which he provides more information than is needed. He talks about his past, his friends, his family, his choice of a profession, and his situations of not being able to engage himself in a profession.

Here, Edward violates the maxim of quantity to provide more information so that Mrs. Dashwood would not think of him to be really an idle man or a man without any aim of engaging himself in any profession, one reason of this might also be that he likes Elinor, and since Mrs. Dashwood is her mother, so he does not want to have her own imaginary thoughts about him by leaving the matter without stating it clearly.

Example IV

'Can I stay for two or three days?' (a young man)

'This is a gurudwara, the Guru's house- anyone may stay here. But you must have your head covered and you must not bring in any cigarettes or tobacco, nor smoke.' (an old Sikh)

Khuswant Singh's Train to Pakistan, p. 54

Here, a young man who asks an old Sikh, if he could stay in the gurudwara for two or three days. The old Sikh violates the maxim of quantity in his reply and adds extra information like covering the head, not to bring cigarettes, tobacco, or smoke. This violation of the maxim of cooperative principle provides the implied meaning that the gurudwara is a religious place, and it heightens the effect of religiousness in the context of the story of the novel. It could be seen that the violation of the cooperative principle plays a very important role to provide the hearer or the reader with full meaning of the text by taking into consideration the context and the implied meaning.

Maxim of Relevance

Example V

‘And what did the Colonel say?’ (Elinor)

‘Oh! -He did not say much; but he looked as if he knew it to be true, so from that moment I set it down as certain. It will be quite delightful, I declare! When is it to take place?’

(Mrs. Palmer)

‘Mr. Brandon was very well I hope.’ (Elinor)

Vol. I, Ch. XX, p. 99

Mrs. Palmer and Elinor are having a conversation in which Mrs. Palmer insists Dashwood sisters to come to her town. In order to change the subject, Elinor inquires her of Willoughby to get some information about him. Mrs. Palmer satisfies Elinor’s quest by providing information about Willoughby, and by saying that her sister would marry him. When Elinor denies it, she says that she asked about it to Colonel Brandon and took his silence as a positive reply. While continuing her dialogue, Mrs. Palmer asks Elinor about the time of the marriage of Marianne and Willoughby to which Elinor replies by inquiring her about the well being of Mr. Brandon. This reply of Elinor is not relevant to the question of Mrs. Palmer, and so she violates the maxim of relevance.

Elinor’s violation of the maxim of relevance is very relevant at an inner level, as she actually wanted to avoid any further discussion about her sister, Marianne, and her marriage with Willoughby.

Example VI

‘Do you not think they are something in Miss Morton’s style of painting, ma’am? - *She does* paint most delightfully! –How beautifully her last landscape is done!’ (Fanny)

‘Beautifully indeed! But *she* does every thing well.’(Mrs. Ferrars)

Vol. II, Ch. XII, p. 206

At the dinner party at John Dashwood’s house when John hands over a pair of painted screens to Mr. Brandon, which is done by Elinor, it grows the curiosity of others to have a look at the paintings. Among others there is Mrs. Ferrars, mother of Fanny, who is excited to have a look of the paintings but she does not know that these are the works of Elinor. When Fanny hands it to her mother and informs her at the same time that they are Elinor’s work, she does not pay much attention to them; when Fanny praises and asks her consent about the paintings, she gives an irrelevant reply by praising Miss Morton.

Mrs. Ferrars does not say a word about Elinor’s paintings but praises Miss Morton, which has no relation to the subject of conversation. The violation of the maxim of relevance is also clear from the thoughts of Marianne who considers Mrs. Ferrars praise of Miss Morton as ‘ill-timed praise.’ Mrs. Ferrars violation of the maxim of relevance has a relation to the context at a deeper level. She wants to show that she could not approve any work of Elinor, how beautiful it might be, and the reason behind it is that she has a hint that Edward is interested in Elinor.

Maxim of Manner

Example VII

‘Oh! Colonel,’ said she, with her usual noisy cheerfulness, ‘I am monstrous glad to see you-sorry I could not come before-beg your pardon, but I have been forced to look about me a little, and settle my matters; for it is a long while since I have been at home, and you know one has always a world of little odd things to do after one has been away for any time; and then I have had Cartwright to settle with-Lord, I have been as busy as a bee ever since dinner! But pray, Colonel, how came you to conjure out that I should be in town today?’ (Mrs. Jennings)

Vol. II, Ch. IV, p. 140-141

Elinor and Marianne are at the house of Mrs. Jennings in London and Marianne is expecting a visit from Willoughby, and she is always cautious for any sign of arrival of anyone. When there is a knock, she thinks it to be Willoughby but it turns out that he is Mr. Brandon. Mr. Brandon and Elinor have a conversation when Mrs. Jennings enters the room and at once starts speaking the above dialogue. She greets Colonel and goes on saying whatever she thinks, without thinking whether it is necessary or not for her to continue for so long.

Here, she violates the maxim of manner by speaking in a continuous manner without having any regard to give a chance to others till her speech was over. She violates to present herself as a very good woman and to support her apology to Brandon that she was unable to see him as soon as he came because she was really very busy.

Example VIII

‘Colonel Brandon’s character,’ said Elinor, ‘as an excellent man, is well established.’
(Elinor)

Vol. III, Ch. IX, p. 295

Mrs. Dashwood wishes to have a private talk with Elinor, about Marianne and Mr. Brandon’s wish to marry her. Mrs. Dashwood gets a chance to be alone with Elinor and to discuss with her on the subject, and she tells her that Mr. Brandon has ‘opened his whole heart’ (295) to her and that he is in love with Marianne and wishes to marry her. She further tries to prove Mr. Brandon as a better husband to Marianne than Willoughby and talks of his good character, sincerity, and the respect that he gains from the others. Elinor then utters the above dialogue.

In this piece of conversation it seems that, Elinor too supports the good character of Mr. Brandon. But her speech is ambiguous and proves to be a violation of the maxim of manner. Here, she not only supports Mr. Brandon’s character or her mother’s view about Mr. Brandon, but she provides the hint that if her mother wished that Marianne could accept him then she is right and it would make her happy too; which is very clear from Elinor’s direct explanation to it in the continuation of her conversation with her mother (Vol. III, Ch- IX, Page 296), where she says ‘that if Marianne can be happy with him, I shall be as ready as yourself to think our connection the greatest blessing to us in the world.’

Conclusion

The findings of the study would help the learners of communicative English to understand the use of language in social context in day-to-day life. It would also enable them to understand the importance of context in the use of language, and that only learning the rules of

English grammar would not suffice their need of communicating in English. The findings of the analysis are:

The maxim of quality is violated to get more information about their doubts and queries, such as Mrs. Jennings violation of the maxim to know more about a certain man (in example I).

Violation of the maxim of quality could be used by the speaker to divert the listener from getting the intended meaning or to make utterances that are not truth, such as the woman in Lala Ram Lal's house does to try to save the life of Lala Ram Lal (in example II).

The characters violate the maxim of quantity to support their own view on a subject or to provide evidence to support the truth of whatever they speak; such as Edward violates the maxim (in example III) to support whatever he spoke to Mrs. Dashwood was true. The maxim of quantity is also violated to put the terms and conditions without sounding harsh or impolite to the hearer, as in example IV. It is seen that the characters violate the maxim of relevance to have a certain change in the subject of conversation; such as Elinor (in example V) violates the maxim to have a change in the conversation regarding Marianne and Willoughby.

The maxim of relevance is also violated to show unwillingness to approve a piece of work by other, as in example VI. This strategy in communicative English is used to avoid being rude to the listener. People can be non-cooperative to apologise and also to praise. The characters violate the maxim of manner to apologise indirectly; such as Mrs Jennings (in example VII) violates to apologise to Mr. Brandon on her being late to see him. Again, the characters praise themselves by violating the maxim of manner, such as Mrs Jennings violates the maxim (in example VII) in order to praise herself as being a very good and busy woman at home.

The maxim of manner can be used to hint one's own thought about a particular thing, as Elinor does in example VIII.

Teaching communicative English through a pragmatic approach would make the learner aware of the context. They would learn to be cooperative by being non-cooperative; hence they would be able to understand the intended or implied meaning in more clear terms by way of using their knowledge of pragmatics, particularly the theory of cooperative principle. Learning grammatical rules would enable them to use language grammatically where as pragmatic application to communicative English would make them use language strategically and tactfully.

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