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TEACHING WITHOUT TEARS: APPLYING PRAGMATICS TO SECOND /FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING

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Abstract

There is always a connection between the teacher and the learner in a functional foreign/second language class. This connection is often reinforced by the teacher's employment of appropriate methods and approaches to his teaching. As the learner is a product of a different cultural milieu from the teacher, and language is part of culture, the paper emphasizes the crucial role of culture in foreign/second language teaching. While describing the significance of second language learning, the paper examines how the teacher can make a second language class practical and result-oriented with insights from pragmatics. By applying aspects of pragmatics described, it is revealed that a certain level of immersion relevant to language learning can be achieved in the class, with the determination of the teacher. Rather than "chalk-talk" merely as a matter of professional drudgery, it is contended that the teacher can make his second language class exciting for himself and the learner as well by being "pragmatic" and doing "things with words".

Keywords: Pedagogy; pragmatics; linguistics; language teaching.

Introduction

Beyond the realm of technological and socio-economic parameters, one crucial dimension of the Friedmanian "Globalization 3.0 era" and its accompanying dotcom burst for the world is communication explosion (Friedman, 2005). That the "world is flat" engenders a serious need for the individuals and nations of the world to understand more of one another and foster cooperation and harmony rather than conflict and dispute. Though the role of language in constructing and de-constructing human relations and advancing development has never been effervescent within the academic circles, it is not until recently that it has been given the right policy thrust (Adedimeji, 2005). The year 2005, for instance, was named "The Year of Languages" in the

US and the National Security Language Initiative (NSLI) was launched by the US President on January 5, 2006. It appears evident that language is justifiably being given the right attention as a sine qua non to national and global interests. In many African nations including Nigeria, language issues are still considered rather irritant, unfortunately.

Language is such a multi-faceted behavior all aspects of which serve the purpose of generating meaning. It is "a complex and dynamic system of conventional symbols that is used in various modes for thought and communication" (Ruscello, 2005: 73). Language is that single faculty that makes human beings unique, in a way different from other creatures (Adedimeji, 2005:1). According to Trask (1995:1),

Human language is arguably the single most remarkable characteristic that we have, the one that most truly sets us apart. Our faculty of language, which we usually take for granted, exhibits a number of properties which are remarkable, even astonishing. Without language, we could hardly have created the human world we know. Our development of everything from music to warfare could never have come about in the absence of language.

It is thus a favor of unquantifiable proportions to be endowed with the knowledge of language and it is a privilege of unparalleled level to be able to teach it. Knowing a language and being able to teach it are different things entirely. Language teachers are thus in a class of their own as the custodians of linguistic transference from generation to generation. This paper discusses the significance of second/ foreign language and the desirability of applying Pragmatics in teaching it.

Need for Learning a Foreign Language

Why should an American learn Yoruba? Why should more Nigerians learn English? Why should an Igbo man learn Hausa? Why should a Yorubaman learn Igbo? Why does everyone today need the knowledge of a language other than his/her mother tongue? The answer to these

questions is straightforward. Learning a second/foreign language is crucial because it is beneficial and expedient. A second/foreign language is usually sought for integrative and instrumental purposes. An American learning Yoruba may want to integrate well with the people of South-western Nigeria who are many in her neighborhood or one of whom she plans to marry. Almost all Nigerians learn English as an instrument of vertical movement upward the social ladder and a means of securing a livelihood, as a trader or employee. The various ethno-linguistic groups in Nigeria learn other languages in Nigeria for vertical integration and nationalism. The instrumental purpose of second/foreign language learning also informs the submission of Honorable Sam Monk of the US Department of Labor : "In order for us to be internationally competitive, we must know the language of our trading partners" as "95% of the potential customers for American products live outside the U.S and the majority of them speak languages other than English" (cited in Abbot and Brown, 2006:7).

But the relevance of a foreign or second language is not limited to these two. Another language is another perspective because every language is a mirror, a lens of viewing the world. As such, monolingualism is limiting; a form of myopia. For instance, as Ansary (2005) illustrates, if you were born wearing pink glasses and could never take them off or exchange them for another shade, you would assume the world is pink without being aware of pinkness as a quality. In the same vein, if you speak only one language, it is hard to be aware that you are looking through a lens: you think you are seeing the world as it is.

what you are seeing is not the world, but a reflection of your own lens. Ansary adds further that any encounter between two languages involves an intersection between two frames of reference. "Fluency in a second language cultivates an ability to put oneself in another point of view".

A last example of the need for foreign language is for security purposes, implicit already in the foregoing. It is about the story of Author Laureus Vander Post who was given the arduous task of organizing guerrilla resistance against the victorious Japanese army during the Second World War at Java. He carried out the assignment for four months before the mission ended for him but he lived to tell his story:

Our small force had been surrounded by the Japanese during the night. A Japanese lieutenant shrieked an order; a platoon of Japanese soldiers fixed their bayonets and charged straight at me moving in a close circle. I raised up my hands and then out of my irrelevant past came a relevant word. There are many degrees of polite speech in Japanese. The politest form of all came unbidden unto my tongue although I had not spoken Japanese for sixteen years. I called out a phrase which can be translated as would you please be so kind as to wait an honorable moment? The advancing soldiers

It is the use and knowledge of another language that gives you the chance to see through a different lens as you realize that

stopped dead. Amazed, the other officer walked up to me, put the point of his sword into my navel and

asked, was that Japanese you spoke? And so my life was saved. (Read, 1999:3)

Pragmatics and Language Teaching

Contemporary views of human language maintain that (1) language evolves within specific historical, social and cultural contexts; (2) language, as a rule-governed behaviour, is described by at least five parameters_ phonologic, morphologic, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic; (3) language learning and use are determined by the interaction of biologic, cognitive, psychosocial, and environmental factors; and (4) effective use of language for communication requires a broad understanding of human interaction including such associated factors as nonverbal cues, motivation and socio-cultural roles (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 1983:44). These views provide an apt summary of what linguistics and its major sub-divisions are all about.

A linguistic theory that serves as a common factor to the contemporary views about human language above is pragmatics, which has been variously defined in literature. Leech and Thomas (1990:173) define pragmatics as the study of the meaning of linguistic utterances for their users and interpreters. Watson and Hill (1993:146) define it as the "study of

language from the view-point of the user, especially the choices he/she makes, the constraints he/she meets in employing language in social situations and the effects Pragmatics is the study of speaker meaning Pragmatics is the study of contextual meaning Pragmatics is the study of how more gets communicated than is said; and Pragmatics is the study of the expression of relative distance.

The main interests of pragmatists lie in functions, intentions, goals and effects of utterances, and ultimately in the kind of linguistic competence required to use language in specific social situations (Wales, 1989:369).

In essence, pragmatics is concerned with the study of who says what, where and how, our re-formulation of Harold Lasswell's famous definition of politics as who gets what, when and how? It studies the users of language (who), the context of use (where) and the manners of speaking/non-verbal cues and codes (how). *Linguistic competence* is insufficient without pragmatic competence because every utterance is context-dependent. *Communicative competence* (a language user's "ability to select, from the totality of grammatically correct expressions available to him, forms appropriately reflect the social norms governing behavior in specific encounters" (Gumperz, 1972: 205) is a dominant aspect of pragmatic competence.

Language teaching, on the other hand, is a conscious process of cultivating the knowledge of language in a learner. With this definition, we reject the formalist approach of language teaching as "imparting" knowledge, as if the learner is a tabula rasa, which he is not. As every

the use of language has upon others". To Yule (1996:3), the definitions of pragmatics can be captured fully from four perspectives:

child or everyone has the innate capacity for language, referred to by Chomsky as Language Acquisition Device (LAD) that takes "primary linguistic data", (Matthews, 1990: 121), teaching a language is cultivating its knowledge. The definition also gives a role to the learner, without who there can be no language teaching. Various aspects of this role have formed the thesis of Ellidokuzoglu (1999).

The history of language teaching is largely that of successive redefinitions of the nature of the task facing the learners, the conditions surrounding them and linguistic experience needed to be created by teachers so as to help them master the task (Wilkins, 1990:519). Approaches to teaching a second/ foreign language have switched from the traditionalist methods and their deductiveness to the modernist methods and their inductiveness. Various methods within the two spectrums have been developed and most linguists have embraced the communicative language teaching method, a product of the modernist school.

The success of language pedagogy depends on a number of factors among which the learner, the teacher and the material are central. The teacher is the fulcrum of this process and his own disposition will significantly attract or repel the learner from achieving the goal of language education. This is especially fundamental in second/foreign language learning where learners are strange to the culture and the language being taught and

are thus prone to lose "connection" or interest.

It is the duty of the teacher to motivate his learners by sustaining and maintaining teacher leadership (Conzemius, 2005) and the teacher being good. The four exceptional skills that distinguish exceptional teachers are knowledge, communication skills, interest and respect for students (Brain, 1998). All these constitute the good qualities expected from a teacher, a language teacher especially.

The qualities that make a good teacher have been discussed by Beidler (1997). According to him,

Good teachers really want to be good teachers;

Good teachers take risks;

Good teachers have positive attitudes;

Good teachers never have enough time;

Good teachers think of teaching as a form of parenting;

Good teachers try to give their students confidence;

Good teachers try to keep students and themselves off-balance;

Good teachers try to motivate students by working within their incentive system;

Good teachers do not trust student evaluations;

Good teachers listen to their students.

Pragmatics in Language Teaching

The first implication of pragmatics for second/foreign language teaching is obtainable from its etymology. Pragmatics derives from the Greek word, "pragma" which means "deed" or "action". It was based on this background that the proponent of pragmatics as a linguistic discipline, J.L.Austin, entitled his seminal

their interest. Second/foreign language learning need not be a mere drudgery of an instrumental and integrative requirement; it could be fun too to the learner. This becomes achievable with the idea of

book *How to Do Things with Words* (1962). Therefore, for second language teaching to be effective, it has to be performed. This performance requires that the teacher does not limit himself to "chalking and talking" upon the learners; rather, he performs the activities that he is

referring to. The application of media and technology in this respect may be necessary and important, though not outright indispensable.

A teacher of Yoruba for instance would have to jump, sit, write, sneeze, run and dance to teach the class the verbs "fo", "joko", "kowe", "sin", "sare" and "jo" respectively. (The traditional grammar translation method is not considered adequate). After performing these actions, he then asks the learners to associate the actions with the words and it is more fun to the teacher and much easier for the learner to learn than memorizing the vocabulary as words becomes associated with experience. The younger learners should be required to perform the activities the teacher performs. After this exercise, the teacher may then proceed to "mo fo", "mo joko", "mo kowe", "mo sin", "mo sare" "mo jo" for I jump, I sit, I write, I sneeze, I run and I dance respectively. After this simple present form, the progressive form, "mo n fo", "mo n kowe" (I am jumping, I am sitting, etc.) can be added. This pattern will be replicated for all the personal pronouns. In this process, grammar and vocabulary would have been integrated

and the class would be lively. Thus, teaching a second/foreign language is performing.

Then, the definition of pragmatics itself is applicable to the second/foreign language class. The American philosopher, Charles

Morris, is credited to have first used the word pragmatics to convey its modern sense. According to him, pragmatics is one of the three (with syntax and semantics) components of semiotics, the study of signs and sign systems. Morris regarded syntax as the study of the relationship

between signs, semantics as the study of the relationship between signs and the things for which they stand and pragmatics as the study of the relationship between signs and their users (Taylor, 1988:514).

Of primary relevance is first the notion of signs. Second/foreign language teaching will be ineffective and dull without the use of signs or symbols. Signs here include objects, slides, pictures, maps, charts, etc., not just the linguistic signs of letters and words alone. If English is taught as a second language, book, chair, board, chalk, pen, shoes, etc. should have to be signified by pictures or by the objects themselves to make the learner associate the signifier with the signified. The same pattern is true of Yoruba or any other language where the words, meaning *iwe*, *aga*, *patako*, *efun*, *gege*, *bata* etc. respectively, are given practical signification.

Another implication at the definition level is that users of language vary, and in Yoruba especially, choices are made according to relationship. There is the use of honorific plural especially by the young to the old, the junior to the senior, or based on other relational stratifications. For instance, a teacher will let the learners know *E kaa ro* (good morning), *E kaa san* (good afternoon), *E kuu irole* (good evening), *E kaa le* ("good night") *E ma*

binu (I am sorry) ,*E kaabo* (You are welcome/ welcome) as choices made by the young/junior while addressing the old/senior (or more than one person). If it is the other way round, the forms lose their first morpheme, {*E*}: *kaa ro*, *kaa san*, *kuu irole*, *kaa le*, *ma binu*, *kaabo* all of which are used among peers or by the old/senior to the young/ junior. Making the right choices by the right users and interlocutors is essential: this underlines the definition of pragmatics as "meaning in interaction" and being appropriate is pertinent to successful interaction (Thomas, 1995).

Also of importance to teaching without tears is the concept of meaning, which the second/foreign language class must deal with to be meaningful. Semantics and pragmatics are the linguistic domains of meaning. While semantics deals with meaning in a dyadic relation between form and meaning (i.e. *X* means *Y*: mother means a female parent), pragmatics deals with meaning as a triadic relation among speaker, meaning and form/utterance (i.e. *S* means *X* by *Y*: by saying she is my mother, I mean she is kind and caring to me)(Leech and Thomas, 1990:185). Semantic competence is therefore inferior to pragmatic competence; the former is a precursor to the latter. In other words, knowing the meaning of a word is not an end in itself, it is a means to knowing how it is used. Teaching a foreign /second

language should be directed towards pragmatic competence so that language learners will be able to function within actual speech situations.

In essence, the form of language should always accompany its function. "Pele" in Yoruba has a broad range of functions: it is a form of greeting from the older to the

younger. It is inappropriate to greet an elder with "E pele"; "E pele" is used rather to sympathize with an older person (i.e. "sorry", or "condolences") than to greet an elder. The same (E) pele is used as an expression of contempt, insult, etc. with a raised eyebrow. There is a proverb that literally translates to "Pele has male and female forms" meaning that it can serve

Typical conversations and drills on transactions and interactions among different participants or people at the market, home, school, farm, etc. are very appropriate in second/foreign language class. Visiting a restaurant, attending a cultural function (be it naming, marriage or festival) will open vistas into the dynamics of the contexts of language use among the Yoruba people as a case study. It will also make teaching to be exciting and learning to be a pleasant experience.

Thus, there are insights within pragmatics as a linguistic discipline that teachers will find relevant to effective and stimulating teaching. Pragmatic concepts such as speech acts, the Gricean Cooperative Principle (CP), Face Maintenance (FM) in relation to politeness in conversation (and teaching) are rewarding when the insights they engender are brought into a second/foreign language class. The goals of pragmatic theories, which relate also to teaching a foreign/second language, that may be applied in the class include, but are not limited to:

- (a) explaining how utterances convey meaning in context;
- (b) explaining how meaning is decoded from utterances in context and in particular situations;
- (c)

positive and negative communicative purposes. Thus, teaching a foreign language should integrate the what (semantic) and how (pragmatic) values of words. Explaining and demonstrating these nuances make the class exciting.

Of vital importance to the pragmatic theory is the notion of context, as mentioned previously. Contexts are of four kinds: physical, linguistic, psychological and socio-cultural and each of them tallies, more or less, with our definition of pragmatics as "who says what, where and how". For our purpose, these physical, linguistic, psychological and socio-cultural contexts are places, expressions, people and social norms/ culture respectively. Of special significance is culture and second/foreign language teaching must necessarily involve culture teaching. Teachers are wont to find it effective to teach who says what where and how within a foreign culture. All these can feature, for example, in greetings, a very important aspect of Yoruba culture (for instance, every occasion such as birth, marriage, death, burial, joy, misfortune, season, etc. has its peculiar greetings).

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- (a) explaining how utterances convey meaning in context;
- (b) explaining how meaning is decoded from utterances in context and in particular situations;
- (c)

- (d)
- (e) explaining how context contributes to the encoding and decoding of meaning;
- (f) explaining how speakers and hearers of utterances perceive them as conveying the meaning they are considered as conveying in particular utterances;
- (g) explaining how speakers can say one thing and mean something else; and

Conclusion

Rather than the traditional “chalk-talk” model that makes teaching, especially of a second/foreign language, a rigorous and painful exercise, findings in applied linguistics have revealed the inadequacy of traditional methods and the desirability of substituting them with modern methods.

Communicative methods have been found useful by many practitioners and suggestions are still being made for improving second/foreign language pedagogy by integrating the methods (aspects of the traditional with the modern) and being eclectic in approach. Within these communicative methods, the driving objective is making the learner able to function in actual situations, in a way akin to how children acquire their mother-tongues. Language pedagogy should largely be a learner-centered approach and learning cannot be successful without the teacher playing his roles, motivating, stimulating and activating the learner. His ability to stimulate and encourage his learners depends on how

- (h) explaining how deductions are made in context with respect to what meaning has been encoded in a particular utterance (Adegbija, 1999:189).

The implications that pragmatics holds for teaching has largely formed the crux of recent works such as those of Rose and Kasper (2001), Kasper and Rose (2003), Celce-Murcia and Olshtain (2001), Hinkel (1999) among others.

much he is involved or interested in what he is doing.

The thrust of this paper is thus an approach to teaching that will make the teacher a performer, engaging in speech acts, as a way of making his teaching exciting. It centralizes the teacher as the pivot of a foreign language class whose behavior (teaching is a form of behavior) largely shapes his success as a teacher. As “learning a language is learning to respond accurately and approximately to stimuli” (Wilkins, 1990:526), the learner will only learn when the teacher gives appropriate stimuli. The paper submits that generating these stimuli involves acting, performing, culturally exposing the target language and being generally pragmatic in teaching.

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