

USING CULTURAL PRAGMATIC SCHEMAS IN IMPROVING STUDENTS' COMMUNICATIVE SKILLS

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***Abstract:** This study investigates the usefulness of using cultural pragmatic schemas in improving Arab students' communicative skills. Linguistic behavior is reflected through repetitive patterns of highly organized cultural repertoires. To better understand the relationship between such repertoires and actual language used by interlocutors, Sharifian suggested a new framework for studying cultural pragmatic schema. A group of Gulf University for Science and Technology students in Kuwait was given sets of specific speech acts and were asked to apply them in pertinent contexts. Having discerned the synergy between speech acts, as action verbs, pragmemes, as contextualized speech acts, and practs, as concrete manifestations of such acts, students have become more aware of the use and effectiveness of pragmatic schemas. They have become more confident in using pragmatic schemas in achieving their communicative goals. There is a great amount of cultural knowledge that is deliberately ignored in the English classroom because of prioritizing monolingualism. This erroneous technique erodes time and effort in the process of teaching and learning English as a foreign language. Making use of cultural pragmatic schema would give students a better opportunity to compare cultural strategies in manifesting a particular linguistic structure. As David Crystal emphasizes Pragmatics is the study of language from the point of view of users, especially of the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction and the effects their use of language has on other participants in the act of communication. Such a stance clearly means that teaching cultural pragmatic strategies in L1 would buttress and improve the teaching and learning of L2. Non-native English students need to know how to opt for the right word, phrase, and structure when speak in English. They need to understand the rationale behind selecting a particular linguistic structure rather than another. Using one's cultural repertoires would help one anchor appropriate meanings and as such appropriate structures in the appropriate context of situation. The conceptual knowledge that students bring to the ELT classes may best be viewed as assets and resources that could be drawn upon in developing metacultural competence in learners. This knowledge should be given to learners at an appropriate stage where they can perceive the difference between the two cultural systems. I asked a group of 30 Kuwaiti students at the*

Gulf University for Science and Technology in Kuwait to provide sets of culturally accepted sayings and to engage in conversations, in which situated speech acts, pragmemes, play an important role in manifesting action in conversations using the Kuwaiti dialect. Introducing students to several cultural schemas and letting them compare those ones with their English counterparts, if any, helped them understand the difference in cultural repertoires in both Arabic and English.

Keywords: *Cultural Schemas, Pragmatic schemas, Pragmemes, Practs, Allopracts*

1. INTRODUCTION

The 20th century has witnessed a rising interest in the complex relation between culture and language and the way language is constantly affected by culture. It started with the anthropologist Malinowsky (1923) who coined the term "functions of language" emphasizing the presence of communicative goals behind linguistic choices. The school of functional linguistics was then formed by scholars like John Firth (1890-1960) and Michael Halliday (1925- present), until we reach modern pragmatics and John Austin (1911-1960) who brought to light how people enforce cultural codes in their everyday language. Culture is mostly ignored in English classrooms rather than used to create links and relations between the various cultural concepts and expressions

that the students engage with or belong to. Due to teaching and viewing English as a foreign language and prioritizing monolingualism in class instead of focusing on the various cultural schemas deeply rooted in language, students lose an important opportunity to analyze, compare, and comprehend different cultural concepts and strategies.

By relying on Sharifian's (2011) Cultural Linguistic Theory and Mey's concept of the "Pragmeme" as micro-products that lie at the intersection between language and society and are schematically and discursively controlled, this paper will investigate the importance of cultural or conceptual knowledge in developing students' metacultural competence when it comes to learning languages.

2. BACKGROUND

Adhering to functional linguistics, the works of both Palmer and Sharifian have highlighted language as a social activity and argued for an anthropological linguistic paradigm of Cultural Pragmatic Schema, Speech Acts, Pragmeme, and Practs. Drawing on the concept of Cultural Pragmatic Schema as discussed in the works of various scholars (D'Andrade, 1995; D'Andrade and Strauss, 1992; Rumelhart, 1980; Shore, 1996; Strauss and Quinn, 1997; Lakoff, 1987; Rosch, 1978), Sharifian carried out studies that investigated the connection between linguistic choices and expressions and the enforcement or utilization of cultural conceptualizations in any given conversation.

Sharifian (2014) states in his study on the Aboriginal Australians: "In the case of Aboriginal English, many features of this indigenised dialect of English appear to dwell in conceptualizations that are derived from the beliefs, practices, norms and experiences specific to Aboriginal people (Malcolm and Rochecouste, 2000; Malcolm and

Sharifian, 2002, 2007; Sharifian, 2001, 2002a,b)" (Sharifian, 2010) Linguistic interaction, therefore, is based on knowledge of the cultural schemata, and the communicative goal can be reached through an awareness of the power and functionality of these choices deeply rooted in language.

Speech acts, the second element of this analytical framework, has been understood as an action verb, a definition that Mey (2003) has rejected in favor of emphasizing the power and effect of the context, or what Sharifian understands as the cultural schemata, and its effect on the speaker's discourse formation and negotiation, which leads to the production of effective pragmemes. Al Sharoufi (2013) explains: "A pragmeme is a sociocultural product, rather than a stern-fixed linguistic term, as some linguists mistakenly believe. Interlocutors in different cultures use their sociocultural background knowledge to use the appropriate pragmemes as such achieve their communicative goals" Al Sharoufi (2013) adds:

Speakers and listeners are actively involved in a negotiating process that leads to creating a cycle of actively changing contexts in which speech acts win their

legitimacy of being real doers of action in real-time situations. Particular cultural repertoires in human societies facilitate language with a wealth of contextual resources that can help anchor meaning by favoring particular speech acts to other ones. (Al Sharoufi, 2013)

The *pract* comes at the end of our framework as the final product that establishes social order and normalizes different societal relationships. A simple example would be the choice of certain honorifics or courteous titles when addressing one's elders as part of the cultural schemata of "adab" or good manners, which is a big part of the Arab culture. Discourse becomes digestible and legitimate because it is based on the right cultural schema. Motion and Leitch (2007) argue that "discourse is the vessel that carries power/knowledge," and our linguistic choices reflect this when we turn speech acts in a certain context into powerful or effective pragmemes" (Motion and Leitch, 2007)_Therefore, for a discursive practice to fulfil its communicative goal is has to be entrenched in a specific cultural pragmatic schema, which explains the pragmatic aim of discourse.

On the importance of the context in creating effective and powerful pragmemes to execute a certain action, Mey (2010) explains: "We cannot refer in and by ourselves alone: reference is only satisfactory and complete when a common interpretation for all referred items has been established. In other words, referentiality presupposes a collaborative effort, and by that token, it is a true pragmatic act" (Mey, 2010) Capone (2005) adds that pragmemes "are situated speech acts in which the rules of language and of society combine in determining meaning" (pp.13-55). Our linguistic choices are directed by the context; a *pract* that is not entrenched in a cultural schema has no meaning.

Therefore, we constantly work with a certain context that shapes our message through the right codes of reference so as to ease the targeted audience's digestion and comprehensibility of the message. Sharifian delineates the mission of cultural linguistics by saying: "Cultural linguistics is based on the premise that many features of human languages encode or instantiate cultural conceptualizations-or, in other words, that cultural conceptualizations are entrenched

or embedded in many features of human languages.” (Sharifian, 2011: 7) Language as such is nothing but a social product in which many cultural conceptualizations are engraved in it and are enacted for in social context. Teaching English as a foreign language should bear in mind this crucial precept. Teaching language as a set of rules only would definitely deviate language from its genuine course. English teachers, therefore, ought to teach English as part of its own culture and compare it with students’ native culture. Cultural determinants play an important role in shaping language and its structures, which be taught to foreign students with complete awareness. This was the main launching premise of this study. I have tried to teach my students at the Gulf University for Science and Technology English through contextualizing in its cultural environment. Drawing a cultural comparison between Arabic and English paved the way for creating a strong awareness of linguistic choices based on cultural selections.

3. METHODOLOGY

I asked a group of 30 students to provide sets of culturally accepted sayings, in which particular situated speech acts, pragmemes, play an important role in manifesting action in conversations using the Kuwaiti dialect. The following is a sample list of sayings in which speech acts are used in the following categories:

3.1. Targeted Speech Acts

- Accepting & agreeing
- Accepting & agreeing reluctantly
- Approving & approval
- Backing, supporting & defending
- Reassuring
- Supporters, members & defenders
- Words & phrases expressing agreement & acceptance
- Persuading

3.2. A new framework for teaching speech acts using pragma-cultural schemata

Introducing the effects of cultural metaphors on teaching English as a foreign language.

Introducing Sharifian’s new framework for analyzing speech acts from a pragma-cultural point of view:

*Cultural pragmatic schema-
speech act- pragmeme-pract*

Such is the order for teaching speech acts, which adds more practicality to using appropriate utterances within a contextualized pragmatic framework.

3.3. Benefits of the new framework in teaching communicative skills

Developing metacultural competence in learners is crucial for developing cultural awareness in second language acquisition, something totally ignored in language teaching.

The conceptual knowledge that students bring to the ELT classes may best be viewed as assets and resources that could be drawn on in developing metacultural competence in learners. This knowledge should be given to learners at an appropriate stage where they can perceive the difference between the two cultural systems.

If one wants to adopt an effective ELT curriculum, one should not pay attention to monolingualism; on the contrary, bilingualism and multilingualism today is dominating our world. The majority of English speakers around the world is non-native speakers. This forces one to accept

the importance of accepting cultural schemas used in a particular culture in promoting English as an International language. Teaching a second language SHOULD engage new system of conceptualizing experience (Sharifian, 2005)

There is a great amount of cultural knowledge that is deliberately ignored in the English classroom because of prioritizing monolingualism. This erroneous technique erodes time and effort in the process of teaching and learning English as a foreign language. Making use of cultural pragmatic schemata would give students a better opportunity to compare cultural strategies in manifesting a particular linguistic structure. As David Crystal emphasizes, all linguistic levels are subservient to Pragmatics, which clearly means that teaching cultural pragmatic strategies in L1 would definitely buttress and improve the teaching and learning of L2.

4. PROCEDURE

(28) Lecturer: I heard you've won a prestigious award. Congratulations! This is fantastic.
Student: Thanks so much. I haven't done anything. It's the

result of your effort and your knowledge. I owe it all to you.

(Depending on the Iranian schema of belittling oneself)

Lecturer: (appearing uncomfortable) Oh, no!!! Don't be ridiculous. It's all your work. (Sharifian, 2005: 337-338)

(Depending on the schema of individual merit)

Such a clash of schemas has led to a clash in understanding.

In Kuwaiti Arabic, this expression could mean several things depending on how the observed cultural pragmatic schema is used:

Example 1:

<p>-Muhammad: Hey, Jassim! I worked out your business with the company. -Jassim: Oh man! Finally!</p>	<p>محمد: اقول جاسم ترا ضبطتلك الموضوع ويا الشركة Muhammad: 'agul jasim tra dabattlek almawdue waya alsharika جاسم: اي يا معود ما بغينا Jassim: 'iy ya maeud ma bghyna</p>
<p>(Accept and Welcome)</p>	<p>(موافقة و ترحيب)</p>

Example 2:

<p>-Muhammad: Yesterday, I didn't go to work at all. -Jassim: Oh man! Why?</p>	<p>محمد: ما رححت امس للشركة كاش - Muhammad: ma rht 'ams lilsharikat kellesh جاسم: ليش يا معود؟ - Jassim: lysh ya maeud?</p>
<p>(Reproach)</p>	<p>(عتب)</p>

Example 3:

<p>-Muhammda: I'll show you what I'll do with you! -Jassim: Oh man! Show me what you can do!</p>	<p>محمد: ابي اواريك شسوي فيك - Muhammad: 'abi awaryk shasawy fik جاسم: يا معود يعني شتبي تسوي - Jassim: ya maeud yaeni shtabi tsawiy</p>
<p>(Reply to a threat)</p>	<p>(رد لتهديد او وعيد)</p>

Is there any appropriate equivalent to this expression in English?

What kind of communicative strategies are used in the above encounters?

John: I have talked to your director about your absence the other day.

Peter: Thumbs up!

I haven't gone to work.

You shouldn't have done that

I'll be damned if I'll forgive you.

Beware of your aggressive thoughts.

4.1. Targeted Speech Acts

- Accepting & agreeing
- Accepting & agreeing reluctantly
- Approving & approval

- Backing, supporting & defending
- Reassuring
- Supporters, members & defenders
- Words & phrases expressing agreement & acceptance
- Persuading

4.2. Procedure 1

I asked a group of 15 students to provide sets of culturally accepted sayings, in which particular situated speech acts, pragmemes, play an important role in manifesting action in conversations using the Kuwaiti dialect. The following is a sample list of sayings in which speech acts are used in the following categories:

Persuading	
(mid rujulik ealaa qad lahafik) مد رجولك على قد لحافك	-
- Cut your coat according to your cloth	
(al'aemal khayr min al'aqwal) الأعمال خير من الأقوال	-
- Acts speak louder than words	
('aid wahdah ma tusafeq) ايد وحده ما تصفق	-
- It takes two to tango	
(man talab aleula saher allayali) من طلب العلى سهر الليالي	-
- There's no royal road to learning	

- اضرب عصفورين بحجر ('idrib asfuryh bihajar)	-
- Kill two birds with one stone	
الباب اللي يجيب منه ريح سده واستريح (elbab 'illy yijyk menah rih sidah)	-
(westiryh)	
- Close the door that brings the wind and relax	

Requesting	
اعطي كل ذي حق حقه (aeti kula dhi haqin haqah)	-
- Give the devil his due	
طلبتك (talabtek)	-
- I'm seeking your help	

Forgive and forget	
عفا الله عما سلف (eafa allah eamaaa salaf)	-
- Past is the past (let bygones be bygones)	
الله يسامحك (Allah ysamhik)	-
- May Allah forgive you	

Backing, supporting & defending	
Supporters, members & defenders	
أنا وأخوي على ابن عمي وأنا وابن عمي على الغريب ('ana wa'okhui ealaa)	-
(ibn eami wa'ana wa'ibn eami ealaa algharib)	
- My brother and I against my cousin; my cousin and I against the stranger	
بغيناها عون صار فرعون (baghynah eawn sar fireawn)	-
- <u>We sought his help but faced his arrogance.</u>	
رقبتي سدادة (rugbty sadadah)	-
- You can rely on me	
اكون عند ويهك (eind wayhik)	-
- I'm ready to help	

Reassuring	
Wa asaa 'an takrahuu shayy'an) وعسى أن تكرهوا شيئاً وهو خير لكم (wahuwa khayrun lakum	-
- But perhaps you hate a thing and it is good for you; and perhaps you love a things and it is bad for you	
(yjib allah elly fih alkhayr) يجيب الله اللي فيه الخير	-
- hopefully everything will be fine/ May Allah provide us with what is best	
(elly katbah allah bysyr) اللي كاتبه الله بيصير	-
- what will happen shall happen / God's fate shall prevail	
('irgd wu aamen) ارفد وآمن	-
- Rest assured	

Accepting & agreeing reluctantly	
(ma lek 'ilaa khashmik law kan eawy) مالك إلا خشمك لو كان عوي	-
- Your crooked nose is still your nose /	
wsh hadik ealaa almur gal al'amar) وشحادك على المر قال الأمر منه (minah	-
- Damned if you do, damned if you don't	
- Between a rock and a hard place	
- Out of the frying pan, into the fire	
(alhashrah mae alnnas eid) الحشرة مع الناس عيد	-
- To gather up / follow people is better	

4.3. Procedure 2

I asked my students to engage in a conversation, where such expressions and proverbs are used. They started engaging in interacting with each other using those speech acts in order to reach effective practs according to

Sharifian framework: Cultural pragmatic schema- speech act-pragmeme-pract. Below are some sample utterances:

The below example clearly shows that the cultural schemata applied in Arabic is drastically

different from what an English counterpart might look like:

Cultural Pragmatic Schema: (Tasgheerul Nafs)
Speech act/event: Agreeing for a compliment
Pragmeme1: REASSIGN THE COMPLIMENT TO THE COMPLIMENTER
Pract (Lawla da3mikum la ma wasalna lima nahnu feehi)
Pragmeme2: REASSIGN THE COMPLIMENT TO GOD
Pract 2: Ma nahnu illa waseelatan yusakheruha Allah fal hamdu washkru lahu)

One can see from the above example that in English interlocutors do not mention God or any reference to any deity. This drastic pragmatic difference affects the production of practs respectively in the sense that communication takes a different

direction when persuading, agreeing, complimenting, etc. Any speech act thus is regulated by the higher cultural schemata, which in turn affects the use of appropriate pragmemes that contribute to producing the most appropriate pract.

Example 3:

Cultural Pragmatic Schema: (tahiyyatun wa thana'a)
Speech act/event: Responding to a compliment
Pragmeme1: OFFER THE OBJECT OF THE COMPLIMENT TO THE COMPLIMENTER
Pract (After being applauded on a great project: Hatha laysa bigadrik wa laken tafaddal bi akhthil Jaeza)
Pragmeme2: REASSIGN THE COMPLIMENT TO GOD
Pract 2: (Hatha Fadlun Mina Allah wa lakinny La astahel kul hatha al takdeer)

Following the above encounter, one observes that the cultural

schema of offering a gift is a ritual on its own in Arabic. The recipient

of the gift is so embarrassed that he belittles himself by saying: (This is a God-sent reward, which I do not deserve.) Again, reference to God is crucial for the completion of this turn. If one

encounters the same encounter in English, one will see that there is a considerable difference between the two cultural systems as follows:

Cultural Pragmatic Schema: Greeting
Speech act/event: Offering a compliment
Pragmeme1: REASSIGN THE COMPLIMENT TO THE COMPLIMENTER
Pract (After being applauded on a great project: I really appreciate it.)
Pragmeme2: REASSIGN THE COMPLIMENT TO THE COMPLIMENTER
Pract 2: (Very kind of you)

Greeting in English as such is more direct and polite, without any religious reference. This basic difference between the two languages coerces one to consider teaching such frames to non-native students of English. Creating class awareness of the existence of cultural schemata is a very important step towards teaching effective communicative strategies.

Having asked my students to engage in a number of conversations where they used specific speech acts like the ones mentioned above paved a way for a more in depth understanding of the intrinsic cultural differences between Arabic and English.

Knowing and being aware of different cultural repertoires in both languages will help students avoid drawing one-to-one comparisons between Arabic and English; as such they will become more conscious users of both Arabic and English.

Understanding cultural schemata and their role in generating practs in conversation is important in language teaching. It is worth mentioning that “Cultural schemata are represented in a heterogeneously distributed fashion among the members of a speech community” (Sharifian, 2016)

It is thus important to bear in mind that cultural pragmatic

schema produce speech acts that in turn produce specific pragramemes,

which can be manifested in various practs as per the following figure:

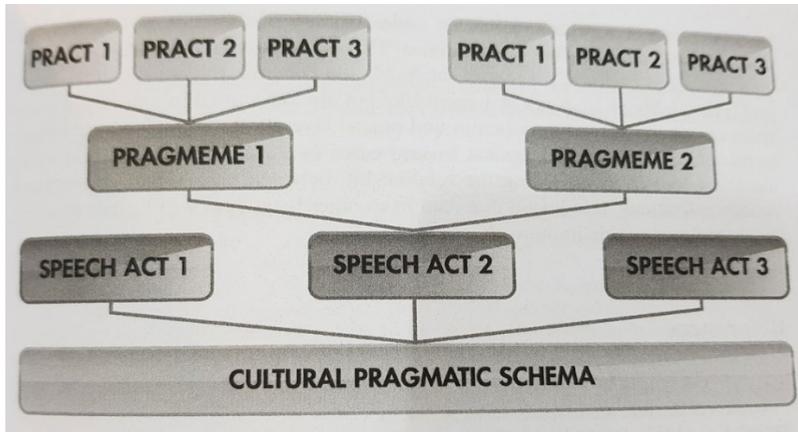


Figure 1: Cultural Pragmatic Schema.

5. CONCLUSION

Understanding language as a type of social behaviour paves the way for analysing human communication in a more concrete way. Language is goal-oriented and whatever strategy interlocutors might use in their daily conversations depends on an actual need for socializing in the first place. Speech acting should be seen at through a pure cultural prism where language is part and parcel of what interlocutors want to do in real-time situations. Cultural linguistics and pragmatics pave the way for a more societal theory of language use, where language used by real people is

analysed, rather than artificial sentences analyzed sporadically and bereft of any human context.

Non-native speakers of English intuitively draw upon their own cultural schemas when speaking a foreign language. They thus rely on their cultural repertoires in selecting most effective pragramemes in achieving their communicative goals. Teaching English as a foreign language as such should not depend only teaching lexis and grammar; on the contrary, a great stress should be put on teaching equivalent cultural repertoires, which in turn reflect on the production of language itself. It

is very rewarding and beneficial to build on non-native students' cultural schema when teaching them English.

Know how to use English appropriately is a genuine challenge for most English teachers, and the way to confront this challenge is to immerse students culturally, which can be done in the English classroom through teaching cultural schemas and effective pragmemes when achieving specific communicative goals.

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