THE EFFECT OF 'FOCUS ON FORM' VERSUS 'FOCUS ON FORMS' PRAGMATIC INSTRUCTION ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF PRAGMATIC COMPREHENSION

by

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KESAN PENGAJARAN PRAGMATIK 'FOCUS ON FORM' BERBANDING 'FOCUS ON FORMS' KE ATAS PERKEMBANGAN PEMAHAMAN PRAGMATIK

ABSTRAK

Anggapan umum ialah ciri-ciri pragmatik bahasa sasaran perlu diberi perhatian terhadap pelajar bahasa melalui pengajaran pragmatik berfokuskan "form". Untuk menilai tahap pemahaman pengajaran pragmatik "Focus on Form" dan "Focus on Forms", satu kajian eksperimen telah dijalankan terhadap 45 orang siswazah yang mengambil kursus Bahasa Inggeris di Universiti Sains Malaysia. Mereka telah dibahagikan secara rawak kepada tiga kumpulan, iaitu kumpulan "Focus on Form", kumpulan "Focus on Forms", dan kumpulan kawalan. Mereka menjalani 6-sesi intervensi berdasarkan tugasan yang melibatkan pendengaran. Kumpulan "Focus on Forms" menerima penjelasan metapragmatik tentang perbualan bahasa sasaran, kumpulan "Focus on Forms" menerima pengukuhan input menggunakan transkrip daripada pendengaran perbualan bahasa sasaran dan kumpulan kawalan melakukan beberapa aktiviti mendengar. Data kuantitatif telah dikumpulkan melalui perbualan ujian mendengar dalam bentuk soalan pelbagai pilihan serta menilai pemahaman perbualan sasaran sebanyak tiga kali: sejurus sebelum intervensi, sejurus selepas intervensi, dan satu bulan selepas intervensi. Data kualitatif dikumpulkan melalui penyertaan 10 peserta dalam temu bual kumpulan fokus berbentuk separuh berstruktur. Tahap kefahaman pragmatik telah ditentukan melalui pengkategorian pelajar bahasa kepada empat kategori, iaitu sangat lemah, lemah, baik dan pemahaman pragmatik secara optimal berdasarkan prestasi mereka terhadap ujian mendengar pragmatik dan pengiraan "cut score" yang diperolehi melalui ujian mendengar pragmatik terhadap 80 orang siswazah yang belajar Bahasa Inggeris di

Universiti Sains Malaysia. Keberkesanan serta kesan jangka pendek dan jangka panjang pengajaran pragmatik "Focus on Forms" dan "Focus on Forms" telah dinilai melalui "between-within" subjek ANOVA. Data temu bual juga ditentukan melalui analisis isi kandungan untuk menyokong data yang diperoleh melalui ANOVA. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa pelajar bahasa telah dikategorikan dalam dua kumpulan iaitu, pelajar yang mempunyai pemahaman pragmatik yang lemah dan pelajar yang mempunyai pemahaman pragmatik yang baik. Pengajaran pragmatik "Focus on Form" berkesan meningkatkan pemahaman pragmatik. Kedua-dua kaedah "Focus on Form" dan "Focus on Forms" adalah berkesan bagi membina pemahaman pragmatik, dan hanya pengajaran pragmatik "Focus on Form" yang menyumbang terhadap pengetahuan pragmatik yang kekal. Implikasi pedagogi penemuan mencadang menggabungkan teknik pengajaran pragmatik "Focus on Form" dalam setiap kursus Bahasa Inggeris.

THE EFFECT OF 'FOCUS ON FORM' VERSUS 'FOCUS ON FORMS' PRAGMATIC INSTRUCTION ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF PRAGMATIC COMPREHENSION

ABSTRACT

The common assumption is that target language pragmatic features need to be brought to language learners' direct attention through form-focused pragmatic instruction for them to be learned. To assess language learners' level of pragmatic comprehension and the effectiveness and sustainability of Focus on Form and Focus on Forms pragmatic instruction on pragmatic comprehension, an explanatory experimental study was conducted on 45 undergraduates studying English language at Universiti Sains Malaysia by random assignment of participants to three equal groups of Focus on Forms, Focus on Form, and Control and conducting a 6-session intervention based on listening tasks. Focus on Forms group received metapragmatic explanations of target language conversational implicatures, Focus on Form group received input enhancement by highlighting target language conversational implicatures of listening transcripts, and control group practiced some listening activities. Quantitative data were collected through the administration of multiple choice pragmatic listening comprehension tests, assessing comprehension of target language conversational implicatures, three times: immediately before intervention, immediately following intervention, and one month following intervention. Qualitative data were collected through participation of 10 participants in a semi-structured focus group interview. The level of pragmatic comprehension was determined through the categorization of language learners into four categories: poor, weak, strong, and optimal pragmatic comprehension performers based on their performance on a pragmatic listening test and the calculation of the cut score

obtained through piloting the pragmatic listening test on 80 other undergraduates studying English language at Universiti Sains Malaysia. The effectiveness and sustainability of Focus on Form and Focus on Forms pragmatic instruction were assessed through "between-within subjects" ANOVA. Interview data were also analyzed through content analysis to support the data derived through ANOVA. The findings revealed that language learners were categorized mainly into two groups: weak pragmatic comprehension performers and strong pragmatic comprehension performers, form-focused pragmatic instruction was effective in developing pragmatic comprehension to a great extent, both Focus on Form and Focus on Forms methods of pragmatic instruction were equally effective in developing pragmatic comprehension, and only Focus on Form pragmatic instruction led to sustaining obtained pragmatic knowledge. The pedagogical implications of the findings suggested the incorporation of Focus on Form pragmatic instruction techniques into every English language course.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1   Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the main components which guide the development of the thesis through subsequent chapters. The major sections included in this chapter consist of background of the study, statement of the problem, rationale for the study, purpose of the study, objectives of the study, research questions, research hypotheses, significance of the study, scope of the study, and operational definition of the terms. What follows is the detailed elaboration on each section.

1.2   Background of the Study

The view of pragmatics was first introduced by the philosopher Charles Moris in 1971 who considered pragmatics as part of the science of semiotics which deals with the relationship between signs and sign users. Semiotics consists of three main branches including: syntactic (syntax),

semantics, and pragmatics. Syntax refers to the study of the relationship between signs, semantics refers to the study of the relationship between signs and the objects to which the signs are applicable, and pragmatics involves the study of the relationship between signs and the interpreters (Levinson, 1983).

Since then, the study of language has been divided into four levels: phonology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. Phonology, syntax, and semantics are components of grammar which explore language without any reference to context or interpreters. Pragmatics, on the other hand, is a component of linguistics which explores the principles leading language in use in its various contexts (Tan, 1994; Moeschler, 2009).

Early language instruction had focused on the accurate use of language. Then the trend of language instruction shifted from focusing on grammatical competence to focusing on communicating appropriately in 1970s when Hymes (1967; 1971; 1972a; 1972b; 1972c; 1974) introduced the notion of communicative competence. The aim of communicative competence is to teach language learners to use language both accurately and appropriately.

The concept of communicative competence states that using language accurately through mastering the phonological, lexical, and grammatical rules does not suffice to be a proficient language user (Chang, 2009) rather language learners must acquire the sociolinguistic (pragmatic)

rules of the language to be learned including "when to speak, and what to talk about with whom, where and in what manner" (Wolfson, 1989).

The concept of communicative competence was further developed in 1980s by Canale and Swain (1980) and Canale (1983) to specify its diverse elements. In Canale and Swain's (1980) model of communicative competence there are four competencies. The first one is grammatical competence which entails the knowledge of syntactic, lexical, morphological, and phonological aspects of the language and the ability to use these aspects in order to produce accurate sentences. The second one is sociolinguistic competence which refers to the understanding of the socio-cultural context in which the language is used. The third one is discourse competence which involves connecting a series of utterances in order to form a meaningful unit. The last one is strategic competence which refers to the knowledge of communicative strategies used to make up for insufficient knowledge of rules as well as factors which constrain application of these rules (Alptekin, 2002).

In 1990s, Bachman (1990) developed a model in which pragmatic competence was explicitly introduced in communicative competence. In this model, language competence comprises two competencies. The first one is organizational competence which consists of grammatical competence and discourse competence. The second one is pragmatic competence which consists of sociolinguistic competence and illocutionary competence (Eisenchlas, 2011).

Following the introduction of pragmatics by Charles Moris in 1971 and its subsequent inclusion in communicative competence by Bachman in 1990s, research in the area of interlanguage pragmatics has extensively attracted the attention of a large body of linguistic scholars. Interlanguage pragmatics deals with the way non-native speakers comprehend and produce linguistic expressions in a target language and the way they acquire target language pragmatic knowledge (Kasper, 1992).

There have been two types of research in the area of interlanguage pragmatics. One type is a group of cross-sectional (contrastive) studies in which language learners' ability to produce or comprehend target language pragmatic features are compared with native speakers' ability. The other type is a group of developmental (longitudinal) studies in which the progress of a group of language learners in the production and comprehension of target language pragmatics is examined.

Studies in interlanguage pragmatics in the past two decades have been predominantly cross-sectional. Only recently developmental studies on target language pragmatics especially focusing on the acquisitional perspectives have been paid attention to (Kasper & Schmidt, 1996; Bardovi-Harlig, 1999a; Rose, 2000; Kasper & Rose, 2002a; Barron, 2003; Achiba, 2003; Hakasson & Norrby, 2005). Furthermore; although most developmental studies in the domain of interlanguage pragmatics have focused on pragmatic production, only few studies to date conducted by Bouton (1992; 1994), Kubota (1995), and Taguchi (2007a; 2008b; 2008d)

have investigated pragmatic comprehension (Taguchi, 2005; 2007a; 2007b; Tan & Farashaiyan, 2012).

Even among the developmental studies conducted by Bouton (1992; 1994), Kubota (1995), and Taguchi (2007a; 2008b; 2008d) only the study conducted by Kubota (1995) included pragmatic instructions. Furthermore developmental studies have relied mostly on only quantitative data (Kasper & Rose, 2002a) and a large body of scholars (e.g. Schauer & Adollphs, 2006; Geluykens, 2007) are calling for supplementing quantitative data with qualitative methods in order to improve the reliability of obtained data (Halenko & Jones, 2011). Moreover, most pragmatic acquisitional studies have been conducted over intermediate-level, advanced-level and postgraduate language learners and there is a dearth of research over undergraduate language learners (Rose, 2005).

Also, a review of literature shows that in most pragmatic acquisitional studies explicit instruction which refers to classroom techniques served to direct language learners' attention to target language forms is more effective than implicit instruction which refers to methods of allowing language learners to infer target language rules without awareness (Takahashi, 2001; Norris & Ortega, 2001; Jeon & Kaya, 2006).

However implicit pragmatic instruction has been described as both conceptually and methodologically underdeveloped area (Fukuya & Zhang, 2002) because in most studies they have been defined as mere exposure to

input (e.g. Tateyama, 2001; Takahashi, 2001) or the withholding of metapragmatic information (e.g. House, 1996). Only few studies (e.g. Fukuya & Clark, 2001; Fukuya & Zhang, 2002; Martinez-Flor & Fukuya, 2005) have operationalized implicit instructions in terms of Focus on Form paradigm (Nguyen et al., 2012).

There are two types of form-focused instruction: Focus on Forms and Focus on Form. Focus on Forms is equal to the traditional teaching of discrete linguistic structures in separate lessons in a sequence which is determined by syllabus designers (Long, 1991). "Focus on Form overtly draws students' attention to linguistic elements as they arise incidentally in lessons whose overriding focus is on meaning or communication" (Long, 1991:45-46). In other words, Focus on Forms instructional method uses explicit awareness raising activities whereas Focus on Form instructional method incidentally directs language learners' attention to target language forms (Dastjerdi & Rezvani, 2010).

Therefore, there is a growing need to investigate the acquisition of target language pragmatic comprehension over undergraduate language learners including both implicit and explicit form-focused instructions. Furthermore, inclusion of a mixed method approach consisting of quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection and data analysis can help to gain more reliable findings.

1.3   Statement of the Problem

A speaker's intended meaning cannot be merely derived from syntax and semantics. Semantics studies the conventional or literal meanings of expressions (what is said) whereas pragmatics studies the way speakers use context and shared information to convey information which supplements the semantic content of the expressions (what is meant). Therefore, comprehending semantically incomplete expressions needs to be supplemented with pragmatics (Jamaliah, 1999; Bianchi, 2004; Holtgraves & Kashima, 2008; Bahaa-eddin, 2011).

This is referred to as the semantic underdeterminacy view of verbal utterances. According to this view, the encoded meaning of the linguistic expressions employed by a speaker (what is meant) underdetermines the proposition explicitly expressed by the expression (what is said). Therefore, some pragmatic inference processes are required to be undertaken in order to arrive at the speaker's intended meaning (Carston, 2002).

Introduction of the semantic underdeterminacy view of communication implies that in order to communicate accurately as well as appropriately, language learners need to learn the pragmatic rules of the target language besides the grammatical rules. This is of crucial importance since, according to Bachman's (1990) model, pragmatic competence and grammatical competence are two distinct aspects of communicative

competence. Hence, a high level of grammatical competence cannot essentially lead to a high level of pragmatic competence.

However; studies conducted over language learners' pragmatic comprehension ability have revealed that language learners in general possess a low ability to comprehend the intended meaning of target language expressions and are not able to comprehend the intended meaning of target language expressions fully (e.g. Taguchi, 2005; Alagozlu & Buyukozturk, 2009; Lee, 2010; Manowong, 2011).

In fact, as a major problem faced by language learners worldwide, a large body of research on language learners' pragmatic competence has revealed that a high level of grammatical competence does not lead to a high level of pragmatic competence and even language learners at the advanced levels of language proficiency cannot achieve a native-like communicative competence (Bardovi-Harlig, 1996; Bardovi-Harlig & Dornyei, 1998; Bardovi-Harlig, 1999b; Bardovi-Harlig, 2001; Barron, 2003; Liu, 2006; Rose, 2005; Gharaghani et al., 2011).

The reason is that every utterance can perform three types of acts (Austin, 1962). The first act is called locutionary act which is the act of conveying literal meaning through expressing an utterance. For instance, it is cold in here. The second act is called illocutionary act which is the force carried with a word or sentence. For instance, the expression "it is cold in here" indicates "close the window". The third act is called perlocutionary act

which is the effect of utterance on interlocutor or the change caused by the utterance. For instance, closing the window after hearing the expression "it is cold in here" (Zhao & Throssell, 2011).

The illocutionary force of utterances in a given context might differ considerably from culture to culture resulting in various interpretations of the same utterance (Murray, 2010). For instance, the remark "your wife is really pretty" or complimenting a woman by saying "you look sexy" is considered customary and acceptable by Westerners while Chinese perceive such expressions as rude or offensive (Zhao & Throssell, 2011; Muir & Xu, 2011).

As another example; in response to a compliment such as "how clever you are!", a Malaysian uses a contradiction such as "no, I am not. I am just like the others!" which can be quite surprising and even confusing for a native English speaker who usually expects a "thank you" in response to a compliment (Asmah, 1996).

The significance of developing pragmatic competence further arises through realizing the fact that native speakers tend to tolerate non-native speakers' grammatical mistakes because they perceive the mistakes as non-native speakers' lack of sufficient linguistic knowledge. However; pragmatic mistakes, which stem from the differences between socio-cultural norms of the native and non-native speakers, might reflect badly on non-native

speakers and they run the risk of being perceived rude by native speakers (Thomas, 1983).

For example; when enquiring about a sensitive topic such as asking someone about "when he/she is planning to get married", indirectness is preferred in Malaysian context. Therefore, Malaysians use indirect ways of asking about the issue such as "when are we going to eat *nasi minyak* [special rice served at wedding reception in Malaysia]" which requires non-Malaysians the need to understand not only the literal meaning but also the intended meaning behind the utterance (Kamisah & Norazlan, 2003).

This is attributed to the fact that there are noticeable differences between sociolinguistic aspects of the target language culture and the language learners' heritage culture (Alptekin, 2002). Therefore, pragmatic competence of a particular language is best attained through being exposed to the target language culture and having access to authentic materials (Farashaiyan & Tan, 2012).

Language learners in the second language context are exposed to the pragmatic features of the target language community to a great extent and as a result have more opportunities to apply those pragmatic features in their everyday interactions. Nevertheless; in a foreign language context, language learners are deprived from exposure to the pragmatic features of the target language community in order to develop their pragmatic knowledge of the

target language (Taguchi, 2008b; Martinez-Flor, 2008; Neddar, 2012; Khodareza & Lotfi, 2012).

Moreover, as the other major problem faced by language learners, teachers in English as foreign language contexts focus dominantly on the grammatical aspects of the target language and do not pay sufficient attention to the pragmatic aspects of the target language. Consequently, they do not incorporate the pragmatic perspectives of the target language into their classroom instructions neither through explicit Focus on Forms instruction methods nor through implicit Focus on Form instruction methods (Al Falasi, 2007; Farashaiyan & Tan, 2012).

Furthermore; textbooks, which are the major and maybe even the only sources of providing target language exposure in a foreign language environment (Richards, 2005), either do not present the pragmatic aspects of the target language community (in the form of form-focused instructions) or contain conversational models which are not naturally evident in the target language interactions (Lee & McChesney, 2000; Martinez-Flor, 2008; Nguyen, 2011).

For example, a review of instructional materials for language learners reveals that textbooks normally mention the expression "I disagree with …" in order to provide models of disagreement in the target language context. However, observation of native speakers' interactions reveal that

the expression "well … but …" is much more frequently used than the ones mentioned in textbooks (Boxer & Pickering, 1995).

Understanding these culture specific expressions requires directing language learners' attention to the sociopragmatic as well as pragmalinguistic features of the target language. As the pragmatic perspectives of the target language culture are not often salient for language learners, mere exposure to these pragmatic perspectives does not help language learners to notice them (Kasper & Rose, 2002b). Consequently, many aspects of target language pragmatics either are not learned or are learned very slowly (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001).

In fact, learning without attention and awareness is impossible and in order to acquire target language pragmatics, language learners must notice both the linguistic forms of target language utterances and associated social and contextual features (Schmidt, 2001). Thus, some sorts of awareness-raising instructions, either in the form of explicit Focus on Forms or in the form of implicit Focus on Form, are advised by scholars in the area of interlanguage pragmatics in order to develop pragmatic competence in language learners (Kamisah, 2004; Kasper & Rover, 2005; Rose, 2005; Eslami-Rasekh, 2005; Bardovi-Harlig & Mahan-Taylor, 2003).

However, as another major problem faced by language learners, the majority of pragmatic acquisitional studies have merely focused on the explicit Focus on Forms methods of pragmatic instruction which have been

referred to as classroom techniques served to direct language learners' attention to target language forms (Takahashi, 2001; Norris & Ortega, 2001; Jeon & Kaya, 2006) whereas implicit Focus on Form methods of pragmatic instruction which have been referred to as mere exposure to input (e.g. Tateyama, 2001; Takahashi, 2001) or the withholding of metapragmatic information (e.g. House, 1996) have been ignored to a great extent (Nguyen et al., 2012). Therefore, there is a growing need to determine the immediate and long-term effect of Focus on Form methods of pragmatic instruction compared to Focus on Forms methods of pragmatic instruction on the development of pragmatic comprehension in language learners (Kamisah, 2004; Kasper & Rover, 2005; Rose, 2005; Eslami-Rasekh, 2005; Bardovi-Harlig & Mahan-Taylor, 2003).

To sum up; despite the fact that a high level of grammatical competence does not lead to a high level of pragmatic competence (e.g. Bardovi-Harlig, 2001; Rose, 2005), language teachers focus dominantly on the grammatical aspect of the target language (e.g. Farashaiyan & Tan, 2012). In fact, to acquire target language pragmatics, language learners must notice both the linguistic forms of target language expressions and associated social and contextual features (Schmidt, 2001). Thus, some sorts of awareness-raising instruction, using either explicit Focus on Forms or implicit Focus on Form techniques, are advised by the scholars to develop and sustain pragmatic knowledge in language learners (e.g. Eslami-Rasekh, 2005; Bardovi-Harlig & Mahan-Taylor, 2003).

1.4   Rationale for the Study

It is now highly acknowledged that achieving the ideal comprehension of target language expressions and texts requires knowledge of target language pragmatics (Bianchi, 2004; Holtgraves & Kashima, 2008; Bahaa-eddin, 2011) and the pragmatic rules of the target language should be incorporated into language instruction (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001; Rose, 2005; Gharaghani et al., 2011). However, the pragmatic aspect of the target language are neither sufficiently incorporated in language instruction nor naturally presented in language teaching textbooks (Martinez-Flor, 2008; Nguyen, 2011) as its significance has not been proven yet.

Therefore, it is considered to be of significance value to assess the actual effect of pragmatic instruction on language learners' ability to comprehend target language expressions and texts and to determine the ideal method of instructing target language pragmatic knowledge. The results will help to inform language educationalists whether or not it is necessary to incorporate target language pragmatic knowledge into language learning instructional materials and what the ideal method of instructing target language pragmatics is.

1.5   Purpose of the Study

Given the significance of pragmatic knowledge in comprehending speaker's intended meaning in interactions between native and non-native English language speakers, the idea of developing pragmatic comprehension through incorporating pragmatic knowledge of target language speakers into Language classrooms has come up. However, the debate over whether or not pragmatic comprehension is teachable needs to be settled.

In response to the question regarding whether or not pragmatic comprehension is teachable, this study has been conducted to investigate the issue. The purpose of the study is to explore language learners' current level of pragmatic comprehension and the influence of incorporating pragmatic information into classroom instructions on developing their pragmatic comprehension.

Furthermore this study seeks to identify the type of instruction, including Focus on Form and Focus on Forms, which can bring about the highest effects on developing language learners' pragmatic comprehension as well as the type of instruction which can bring about the highest sustainability of acquired pragmatic knowledge in language learners.

1.6   Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are:

1. To find out language learners' current level of pragmatic comprehension.

2. To find out the effect of form-focused pragmatic instruction on developing pragmatic comprehension ability.

3. To find out the type of pragmatic instruction (Focus on Form or Focus on Forms) which is more effective.

4. To find out the type of pragmatic instruction (Focus on Form or Focus on Forms) which is more sustainable.

1.7   Research Questions

1. What is language learners' current level of pragmatic comprehension?

2. What is the effect of form-focused pragmatic instruction on developing pragmatic comprehension ability?

3. Which type of pragmatic instruction (Focus on Form or Focus on Forms) is more effective?

4. Which type of pragmatic instruction (Focus on Form or Focus on Forms) is more sustainable?

1.8   Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses have been set for the study:

1. Form-focused pragmatic instruction has no significant effect on developing pragmatic comprehension ability.

2. There is no significant difference between the effect of Focus on Forms and Focus on Form pragmatic instruction in developing pragmatic comprehension ability.

3. There is no significant difference between the effect of Focus on Forms and Focus on Form pragmatic instruction in sustaining pragmatic comprehension knowledge.

1.9   Significance of the Study

Although currently there is no consensus on the best way of developing pragmatic comprehension in language learners, the findings of this study are important to help English language teachers and English language coursebook designers to find out the significance of pragmatic instructions in general and effectiveness of types of pragmatic instruction in particular in this aspect of language education.

Identification of language learners' level of pragmatic comprehension prior to starting English language courses will help language

teachers realize the degree to which individual language learners' comprehension of pragmatically implied meaning in comprehension based courses including reading and listening suffers from lack of familiarity with and awareness of cultural perspectives of the target language community. It will also help them develop indicators of language learners' level of pragmatic comprehension based on the principle of Relevance Theory.

Consequently, through determining language learners' pragmatic comprehension level and indicating features which would specifically describe language learners' status within each level, the teacher will be able to adjust the instructions in such a way that meets with the needs of language learners. In this respect, the teacher can incorporate cultural components of the target language community into instructional materials and attract language learners' attention to the cultural features through consciousness-raising activities.

Language teachers will further realize whether traditional explicit Focus on Forms method of pragmatic instruction in the form of metapragmatic explanations of target language pragmatic features will lead to immediate and sustainable learning in language learners or implicit Focus on Form pragmatic instructions in the form of input enhancement techniques.

Moreover, testing the impact of pragmatic instructions on language learners' pragmatic comprehension in general, will help coursebook

designers to realize whether incorporating pragmatic knowledge of the target language society into instructional materials will benefit language learners or not. They will also realize whether incorporation of target language pragmatic knowledge into instructional materials in explicit forms can bring about more effective learning or in implicit forms.

1.10   Scope of the Study

This study which is on the issue of the influence of Focus on Form and Focus on Forms pragmatic instructions on the development and retention of pragmatic comprehension involves the participation of 45 undergraduate learners of English at Universiti Sains Malaysia. The participants, who were between the ages of 20 to 24 years old, were selected based on convenience sampling. The study which employs a pre-test, post-test, follow-up test true experimental design continued for 8 weeks from June 5th to July 24th. Data from the experiment were collected through an explanatory mixed method design using pragmatic comprehension tests and semi-structured focus group interview.

1.11   Operational Definition of the Terms

Focus on Form: implicit instruction of target language features in order to indirectly attract language learners' attention and noticing to those features.

Focus on Forms: explicit instruction of target language features in order to directly attract language learners' attention and noticing to those features.

Form-focused Instruction: a cover term to include both Focus on Form and Focus on Forms instruction.

Implicature: the implied meaning of a linguistic expression which goes beyond the literal meaning it offers.

Pragmatic Comprehension: the inferential process of understanding the communicator's intended meaning in a statement.

Sustainable Learning: learning in which learned knowledge can be maintained and continued to exist for a long period of time.

1.12   Summary

Considering the crucial role of knowledge of target language pragmatics to comprehend target language expressions appropriately, the current study investigated the effect of form-focused pragmatic instruction using implicit Focus on Form and explicit Focus on Forms techniques on the development and sustainability of pragmatic comprehension in language learners. The findings will be of great value for language teachers and coursebook designers to decide whether or not language classrooms should be enriched with target language pragmatic materials and, if so, which method of pragmatic instruction will bring about the best results.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1   Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of previously conducted related studies as well as a detailed elaboration of the study's major variables, underlying theories, and tasks involved in the experiment. The major sections included in this chapter consist of pragmatic definition, studies on pragmatic comprehension, studies on pragmatic instruction, form-focused instruction, Relevance Theory, Noticing Hypothesis, Bachman's model of communicative competence, theoretical framework, and conceptual framework. What follows is the detailed elaboration on each section.

2.2   Pragmatic Definition

During the past three decades numerous scholars in the area of sociolinguistics have come up with various definitions for pragmatics. The definitions presented up to now look at pragmatics from different

perspectives including pragmatics, pragmatic competence, and pragmatic comprehension. What follows is a review of definitions presented for each aspect of pragmatics.

2.2.1 Definitions for Pragmatics

One of the earliest definitions for pragmatics was proposed by Leech (1983) who defined it as "the study of how utterances have meanings in situations" (p. 10). Since then several scholars in the field tried to define pragmatics. Koike (1996) defined pragmatics as the study of the relationship between language, its communication, and its contextualized use. He (1997) also referred to pragmatics as "a brand of new linguistic area, studying utterances in given situations and how to understand and use language through context" (p. 4). According to Verschueren (1999) pragmatics refers to "the study of linguistic phenomenon from the point of view of their usage properties and processes" (p. 1). Xiong (1999) also stated that pragmatics "studies the relationship between linguistic signs and sign users" (p. 1).

Levinson (2001) referred to pragmatics as "the study of relations between language and context that are grammaticalized, or encoded in the structure of a language" (p. 9). As Peccei (2000) stated pragmatics "concentrates on those aspects of meaning that cannot be predicted by linguistic knowledge alone and take into account knowledge about the physical and social world" (p. 2). Fasold (2000) declared that pragmatics

"studies the use of context to make inferences about meaning" (p. 119). According to Verschueren (1999) pragmatics could be defined as "a general cognitive, social and cultural perspective on linguistic phenomena in relation to their usage in forms of behavior" (p. 7). Sperber and Wilson (2001) defined pragmatics as "a capacity of the mind, a kind of information-processing system, a system for interpreting a particular phenomenon in the world, namely human communicative behavior" (p. 183). Mey (2001) mentioned that pragmatics "studies the use of language in human communication as determined by the conditions of society" (p. 6).

Jaszczolot (2004) referred to pragmatics as "the study of how hearers add contextual information to the semantic structure and how they draw inferences from what is said" (p. 1). From Crystal's (2008) point of view 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" (p. 301). As Fernandez and Fontecha (2008) stated pragmatics "deals with the mismatch between what is said and what is really meant since, in most communicative scenarios, speakers mean more than they say in a strictly semantic sense" (p. 31). Palumba (2009) asserted that pragmatics "deals with speaker's meaning and the way it is interpreted by the hearer(s), in what is known as implicature" (p. 89). Richards and Schmidt (2010) saw pragmatics as "the study of the use of language in communication, particularly the relationships between sentences and the contexts and situations in which they are used" (p. 412).

Finally as Yule (2010) pointed out pragmatics is "the study of intended speaker meaning" (p. 127).

Considering the above mentioned definitions provided by numerous scholars in the field of interlanguage pragmatics, pragmatics can be referred to the study of the social context in which an expression is expressed. Accordingly, the study of the social context of the expression helps complement the semantic content of the expression, thus, making the expression comprehensible to the listener or reader without any misconception and misunderstanding.

2.2.2   Definitions for Pragmatic Competence

Apart from the definitions provided for pragmatics, a variety of definitions have been also presented for pragmatic competence. Chomsky (1980) defined pragmatic competence as "the knowledge of conditions and manner of appropriate use (of language), in conformity with various purposes" (p. 224). Fraser (1983) stated that pragmatic competence is "the knowledge of how an addressee determines what a speaker is saying and recognizes intended illocutionary force conveyed through subtle attitudes in the speaker's utterance" (p. 29). Thomas (1983) referred to Pragmatic competence as "the ability to use language effectively in order to achieve a specific purpose and to understand language in context" (p. 92). According to Canale (1988) pragmatic competence includes "illocutionary competence,