Pragmatic Use of Direct and Indirect Speech Acts of Students in Public Primary Schools in Plateau State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the pragmatic responses and context interpretation of students in public primary schools in Plateau State, Nigeria, to direct and indirect speech acts. Methodology: Using qualitative data that were collected using Discourse Completion Tasks (DCTs) and classroom observation, the study analyses the responses and interpretations of the direct and indirect speech acts of the students. The study paid close attention to the context of the use of speech acts. The DCT were administered on 100 students in primary schools. Findings: The data revealed that majority of students within the Nigerian primary school system have problems interpreting indirect speech acts. The students also have problems in understanding the role of context in helping to shape their responses to the indirect speech acts. The findings also showed that majority of the students demonstrated a good understanding in interpreting direct speech acts and the context of its occurrence. Study implication: The findings of this study contribute to the general understanding of the significance of context in interpreting and producing indirect speech acts. The problems associated with the interpretation and production of correct speech acts bring to the fore the need to incorporate some aspects of pragmatics into the teaching curriculum of English language teaching at the primary levels. This strategy will help in raising the pragmatic awareness and pragmatic competence of the students at the primary school level.

Keywords: *Direct Speech Acts, Indirect Speech Acts, Pragmatic Competence, DCT.*

Introduction

The proficient use of the English language in Nigeria is seen as the bedrock upon which other academic and life successes of individuals is built on. This perspective is anchored on the pride of place that the educational policy of the Nigerian nation places on the English language compared to other indigenous and foreign languages. Some scholars (Leech 2016; Locher and

Bousfield 2008) have emphasized the importance of English language in Nigeria by contending that almost all activities (meetings, education, entertainment etc) are conducted in the English language in Nigeria. The importance of the English language in Nigeria has placed significant demand on both teachers and students at the various levels of education in Nigeria to acquire the language and attend a certain level of competence and proficiency.

The English language within the context of education in Nigeria is the official language of instruction. Many scholars (Gonsum and Cavusoglu 2019). believe that the English language dominates not only the educational sector but all spheres of activities within the Nigerian nation. Therefore, students' comprehension abilities are often measured and assessed in both national and state examinations using the English language. To positively impact and better achieve set objectives of both teachers and students, English teaching curriculum are beginning to incorporate certain components of pragmatics, such as the teaching of speech acts. This is done with the intention of improving learning outcomes as well as improve the pragmatic competence of the learners, especially as they appropriately use and respond to these speech acts.

The speech acts theory by Austin, J. L. (1962) accounts for the various stretches of expressions and statements that language users deploy to perform actions through their utterances. When the intended meaning of an utterance is covert, or implied, the speech act is said to be an indirect speech act. Conversely, when the intended meaning of the utterance is overt, the speech act is said to be a direct speech act (Leech 2014). The ability of the language learner to use or make adequate and appropriate interpretation of speaker's intended meaning is seen as the attainment of pragmatic competence especially in a second language (L2). Gonsum and Çavuşoğlu (2021) explained that, the phrase pragmatic competence is often used to refer to the ability of a person to use a language within the socially accepted norms of the speakers of that language. Proficiency in a target language, therefore, entails the attainment of linguistic and pragmatic competence.

Many scholars (Flanagan and Symonds 2022; Prastio, Ibrahim, Susanto and Nurzafira 2024; Terkourafi 2011) have advocated for early child learning of the English language as the most viable way of wholesomely acquiring both linguistic and pragmatic competence by the language learner. The primary school setting in Nigeria where early/child learners is expected to take place is constrained by many problems ranging from poor infrastructure, lack of qualified teachers among a host of other problems. Therefore, the quality of what is taught in

these primary schools is suspect at many levels: the quality of instructions from the teachers and the quality of the interpretation of the feedback gotten from the students. This study investigates the students' abilities to appropriately understand, use and interpret context of direct and indirect speech acts. The study therefore looks at the framing of these speech acts in the contexts of their occurrence, the shared background knowledge of the speakers and their shared cultural linguistic awareness. These investigations are necessary as they help to provide useful information on the ability of the learners to make the appropriate inferences and to also demonstrate their pragmatic competence in the English language.

Study context

Plateau State, located in Nigeria's North-Central geopolitical zone, is renowned for its linguistic diversity, with over 300 indigenous languages spoken alongside Hausa, Nigerian Pidgin, and English. Some scholars like Gonsum and Cavusoglu (2019) and Terkourafi (2011) noted that this multilingual environment presents both opportunities and challenges for language learning and language development across different levels of education. Public primary school students often navigate between the languages spoken in their homes and the language (English) of instruction in their schools. As can be expected, the variation in language used based on context of use meant that these students are compelled to navigate through many challenges that may affect their ability to use and effectively interpret direct and indirect speech acts.

This study aims to investigate the pragmatic competence primary school students in Plateau State on how they interpret, use and employ direct and indirect speech acts in their interactions in the school environment. The study will therefore espouse the influence of the cultural and linguistic influences of the students' first language on the utilization of the direct and indirect speech acts. It is hoped that an understanding of how and why these students employ direct or indirect speech acts will provide insights into the best strategies that could be used to improve the pragmatic competence of the students.

By addressing these questions, this paper sheds light on the interplay between language, culture, and communication in an educational context.

Direct and Indirect Speech Acts in Pragmatics

Indirectness is another significant face-saving strategy that has been employed especially by lecturers as a deliberate strategy to negotiate face support and mitigate the face loss of their students. According to Blum-Kulka, an indirect speech act can best be measured based on "the degree to which the speaker's illocutionary intent is apparent from the locution" (18). The use of 'can' rather than 'could' has often been highlighted as a feature of language development resulting from language transfer since most Nigerian languages do not have dual modals. The use of 'can' therefore is not necessarily a lack of politeness (Gonsum and Çavuşoğlu 2021).

Indirectness like honorifics is a strategic means of achieving interactional goals in ways that humility and respect are not lost. This seemed to justify why past researchers such as Blum-Kulka (2019) and Saleh (2013) treated indirectness as a strategy of politely executing requests, apologies and other similar speech acts invariably. Indirectness is, therefore, a positive face support strategy in interpersonal face to face interaction. In Nigerian languages, it is observed that indirectness has a relational value in interaction that is often transferred into Nigerians' use of the English language. Within the frame of English as a Foreign Language (ELF), politeness strategies draw greatly from the first language of the language user (Flanagan and Symonds 2022; Gonsum and Çavuşoğlu 2021; Suryandani and Budasi 2022). This view elaborates on the research that found that Zimbabwean English language users use indirectness primarily to avoid imposition as well as to mark politeness in interaction (Grainger 2011). The need to avoid imposition is equally observed by Austin (1962) as the reason for the employment of hedges, indirectness and honorifics in interactions by language users. The interactants in this study have employed what some scholars (for instance, Blum-Kulka 2019 and Grainger 2011) have categorized as indirectness (conventional and nonconventional indirectness).

Direct speech acts explicitly communicate their intent, making them easier to understand. For instance, the assertion by Grainger (2011) that in contrast to the direct speech acts, indirect speech acts require the listener to interpret implied meanings based on context. For example, the utterance "The door is open" might be an indirect request to close the door, or for the person standing by the door to come in depending on the situation. Context in this regard helps in the decoding of meaning by listener or the hearer as the case maybe. Therefore, the interpretation of indirect speech acts to an extent depends on the proper interpretation of the context of the production of the utterance.

Pragmatics, being the study of language in use (Zienkowski 2011) emphasizes the importance of context in interpreting speech acts. Context includes linguistic, social, and cultural factors

that help in shaping communication. For children to develop pragmatic competence, it involves learning to interpret both the explicit and implicit meanings of an utterance, a text or indeed stretches of verbalized and nonverbalized expressions within an interactional encounter. To effectively do this, the language user undergoes a process language development that is largely influenced by the user's cognitive development, language exposure, and a good understanding of the underlying norms of social interaction.

2.1. Theoretical Framework

This study is conducted within the pragmatic framework of meaning as a product of speakers, situation and context. These elements of meaning are considered by Zienkowski (2011) and Yusuf (2018) as significant components of meaning in any interactional encounter. To adequately account for the meanings of the speech act, the speech acts theory J. L. Austin and the categorization of speech acts: locution, illocution and perlocution have been relied upon. This is to help account for the meaningful utterances that have been produced (locution), the function that such a meaning utterance is per-forming (illocution) and the effect that the utterance has; listener (perlocution).

2.1.1. Pragmatic competence

Pragmatic competence refers to the ability of the language user to use the language efficiently to achieve his/her linguistic goals. Chomsky's ideas regarding a speaker's linguistic competence and performance and Hymes' onward developments on the concept of communicative competence (Leech 2016) have all contributed to generating more interest and advancements in pragmatic studies. The term 'pragmatic competence' has been represented variously by language scholars. Some scholars like Suryandani and Budasi (2022) prefer the term pragmatic awareness while other scholars like Gonsum and Cavusoglu (2019) prefer to use the term receptive pragmatic competence, all of which emphasized a language user's ability to adequately and correctly interpret the intended meaning of an illocution. To achieve a comprehensive interpretation of an illocution, it is believed that the context of the occurrence of the illocution must be investigated. Following Leech (2014) perspectives five important aspects of context that require attention are summarized:

1. The identification of the general social context (for-mal/informal, public/ private)

2. The identification of the specific social context (e.g. opening a formal meeting, introducing somebody at a party)

3. The identification of the relevant factors in the given context, for example, participants' social status, their positional and situational roles, and their role relationship

4. The identification of conventions (social norms) pertaining to the given context

5. The identification of the overall ongoing action and the sequence of acts preceding the speech act under comprehension.

Pragmatic competence, therefore, must account for illocutionary competence is the language users' knowledge of the referents and signs in a language that helps in the interpretation of the linguistic signals while and sociolinguistic competence refers to the knowledge of context of interaction) [19]. In other words, pragmatic competence is the ability of a language user to engage and consider all these points when saying something or when interpreting another speaker's intended meaning. To achieve this, many scholars, for instance Leech (2014 and Zienkowski (2011) have advocated for ethnographic investigation of context as the pathway towards understanding the underlying structure of the norms of interaction that are culturally specific to a linguistic code. Interactional practices are not uniform across cultures. As such, what appears appropriate in one culture might be grossly inappropriate in another culture as some cultures are intrinsically collectivist and others individualist (Hofstede and McCrae 2004). This binary division impacts on how the mechanics of interaction operate in each language and context.

2.1.2. Children's pragmatic competence

Primary school students are in a critical stage of linguistic and cognitive development. Their ability to understand and use speech acts depends on factors such as age, linguistic background, and exposure to diverse communication styles (Olayemi 2010). Research on child language acquisition highlights the gradual development of pragmatic skills. Younger children tend to rely on explicit cues, such as tone or gestures, while older children increasingly use contextual information to infer meanings.

In multilingual settings like Plateau State, the development of pragmatic competence can be complex. Students must navigate between the norms of their native languages and the norms and conventions of English, the medium of instruction. This dual linguistic environment may

either enhance their ability to infer meaning or create confusion, particularly with indirect speech acts that are tied contexts and may differ across cultures.

2.3. Cultural and Linguistic Context in Plateau State

Plateau State's rich cultural and linguistic diversity plays a significant role in shaping communication patterns. Plateau indigenous languages will often reflect the cultural norms of the Plateau people, including their politeness strategies and conventions of direct and indirectness of the people. For example, in most Plateau communities, indirectness is a marker of respect, particularly when addressing elders. Conversely, direct communication may appear rude but may be preferred in other contexts to ensure clarity.

The use of Nigerian Pidgin (NP) and Hausa as lingua franca adds another layer of complexity to the linguistic landscape on the Plateau. Some scholars like Kangiwa, and Koko (2021), Locher and Bousfield (2008) and Ndiribe and Aboh (2022) also believe that while these languages facilitate communication among speakers of different native languages, they may also influence how students interpret English speech acts. For instance, Pidgin speakers might prioritize literal interpretations of speech acts, which can hinder their understanding of indirect requests or idiomatic expressions in English, while Hausa speakers on the other hand, could fare better, in interpreting indirect speech acts because of the ability of the language to seamlessly borrow from other languages.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

The study adopts qualitative data collection. This design has enabled the researcher to examine the use of direct and indirect speech acts in a naturally occurring pattern. This was done through the administration of a Discourse Completion Task (DCT), the recording of the verbalized speech acts and the classroom observation of the primary school students. The use of the DCT enabled the researcher to capture the contextual nuances that birthed some of the interpretations of the students. To examine the contextual interpretation of the students and their use of the direct and indirect speech acts, ten (10) contextual situations were created to account for the students' use of direct or indirect speech acts by the students.

3.2. Population Size

A total of six schools in both rural and urban centres in Plateau State were selected for the study. Two schools were selected as model schools in Jos North and Bukuru metropolis, two schools were selected in Mangu and Pankshin and two other schools were also selected in Langtang North and Shendam local government areas of Plateau state. The researcher believes that the choice of these schools will provide a pictorial and diverse view of the linguistic performance of the students regarding their pragmatic use of direct and indirect speech acts.

The six schools that were selected for this study cut across cut across the three zones (Northern, Central and Southern zones) of the state. This was done primarily to receive data that reflect the diversity of the state. The data samples were gotten from students of primary 4-5. These sets of students are regarded to be in the bracket of accelerated learning and critical language development period. The choice of these sets of students from both the rural and urban areas provide a balanced view of their linguistic and cultural diversities.

3.3. Data Collection Tools

The following data collecting tools were used to capture as accurately as possible, the students' use of direct and indirect speech acts:

3.3.1. Discourse Completion Tasks

One of the data collection tools is the Discourse Completion Tasks (DCTs). DCT allows for accurate collection of discourse data where it is properly administered (Vanrell, Maria del Mar, Ingo Feldhausen and Lluisa Astruc 2018). The discourse data collected for the proper administration of the DCT often reflects the actual linguistic performance of the language user in a natural and authentic way. The choice of the DCT is informed by the need to receive first-hand in-formation of the linguistic ability of the students to elicit the appropriate response to given speech acts.

The DCT was administered on the same respondent twice using the technique of pre-test and post-test. It is believed by many scholars such as Pan and Sana (2021) believe that pre-test and post-test are important in conducting result-oriented research as they have great pedagogical benefits as well as help in appropriate curriculum development. The first time the pretest was administered on the students, it was aimed at gauging the understanding of the students on the use, meaning and the appropriate responses to both direct and indirect speech acts. It was also aimed at ascertaining their levels of pragmatic competence. The second time the DCT was

administered was to see the levels of their improvements after exposing them to topics on the contextual use of direct and indirect speech acts.

3.3.2. Recording Device and Observation Notes

To collect the data in their natural occurring forms, the researcher has relied on the use of a Sony recording device and an observation notebook. The use of both the recording device and the observation notebook is informed by the perspective of Linguistic Ethnography (LE) scholars on the importance of marrying discourse data with observation such that the nuances of language use of the learner are never lost and are accurately presented (Gonsum and Cavusoglu 2019). The use of the recording device is aimed at trapping the linguistic performance of the students by voicing aloud their responses to speech acts. Also, the use of the recording device is to enable the researcher to account for non-verbal cues that ac-company the verbalized direct and indirect speech acts. This enabled the researcher to capture the responses of these students in real time, as well as identify the levels of the students' challenges.

3.4. Data Analysis

The Data were analysed using a pragmatic framework, focusing on the students' ability to identify, interpret, and appropriately respond to speech acts. Responses were categorized as successful or unsuccessful where a student fails to appropriately identify a direct speech act as a direct speech or an indirect speech act as such. The data were further subjected to analysis of the linguistic and cultural influences on the pragmatic performance of the students. As pointed out, the students were asked to respond to the ten (10) isolated speech acts to see how the students will interpret and respond to the speech acts based on the scenarios.

Five of the speech acts were structured as direct speech acts, while the other five were structured as indirect speech acts. The rationale for establishing the direct and indirect dichotomies in the administered DCT as well as the in-class responses was to identify the problematic areas, and the speech acts that the students are more comfortable or less comfortable with. Again, such a dichotomy offered the researcher and the students the opportunity to establish the current levels of their English language competence and use. The dichotomy also served as an opportunity to know what needs to be done to achieve the needed improvements in their pragmatic competence. To achieve these, the scenarios around the speech acts were made to be the same. Below is the sample of the DCT that was administered.

Direct speech acts

1. Speech act of order

Scenario: A student is making a noise in the class. Tell them to stop.

Speech act: stop talking!

Response: _____

Interpretation_____

2. Speech act of request

Scenario: You are very thirsty and want a glass of water. Ask any of your students to give you a glass of water.

Speech act: give me a glass of water

Response: _____

Interpretation: _____

3. Speech act of assertion

Scenario: the weather is very hot. Tell your friend how best to dress, to address the heat.

Speech act: you can't wear the jacket in this heat

Response: _____

Interpretation: _____

4. Speech act of promise

Scenario: You are late submitting your assignments. Assure your teacher that you will submit the assignment tomorrow morning.

Speech act: I will submit this assignment tomorrow, un-failingly.

Response: _____

Interpretation:_____

5. Speech act of declaration

Scenario: You are the class prefect of your class, tell your teacher, the number of those that made a noise in class.

Response: _____

Interpretation_____

Indirect speech acts

6. Speech act of request

Scenario: Your friend, has a book that you need to make use of, ask him indirectly to borrow you the book.

Response: _____

Interpretation: _____

7. Speech Act of Suggestion

Scenario: Your classmate is struggling with his maths assignment. Suggest to him indirectly, who in the class could help him understand the assignment.

Response: _____

Interpretaion: _____

8. Speech act of offer

Scenario: You know your friend is hungry, but he has not asked you for part of your lunch, make an indirect offer of some of your food to him/her.

Response: _____

Interpretation: _____

9. Speech act of dissatisfaction

Scenario: Your classmate borrowed your pen, and it was stolen. Tell him indirectly that you are not happy with him.

Response: _____

Interpretation: _____

Speech act of refusal

Scenario: your classmate needs to use your pen to write, you do not want to give him/her. State your refusal indirectly.

Response: _____

Interpretation: _____

Table 1: Table showing the distribution of DCTs and responses at the pre-test

Distributions of 100 DCTs According to Zones	Plateau North 34	Plateau Central 33	Plateau South 33	Total
Distribution of 100 DCTs According to LGS	Jos North =17 Jos South =17	Panshin =17 Mangu = 16	Shendam = 17 Langtang South= 16	100
Accurate Responses to Direct Speech Acts	School Purple= 11 School Black = 13	School Purple =10 School Black = 11	School Purple= 8 School Black = 8	61
Accurate Responses to Indirect Speech Acts	School Purple=2 School Black =3	School Purple=2 School Black =1	School Purple=2 School Black =1	11

Table 2: Table showing the distribution of DCTs and responses at the post-test

Distributions of 100 DCTs According to Zones	Plateau North 34	Plateau Central 33	Plateau South 33	Total
Distribution of 100 DCTs According to LGS	Jos North =17 Jos South =17	Panshin =17 Mangu = 16	Shendam = 17 Langtang South= 16	100
Accurate Responses to Direct Speech Acts	School Purple= 12 School Black = 14	School Purple =15 School Black = 13	School Purple= 10 School Black = 11	75
Accurate Responses to Indirect Speech Acts	School Purple=4 School Black = 5	School Purple=3 School Black =4	School Purple=3 School Black =2	21

3.5. Discussion and Findings

3.5.1. Pupils' performance with direct speech acts

The findings from both the pre-test and post-test revealed that the students appear to have a good understanding of the use of the direct speech act. This is not unconnected with the findings of some researchers such as Suryandani and Budasi (2022) that the direct speech act is often the most used speech act by teachers as a means of instruction to their students on the need to execute assign tasks in the classroom. This has contributed in many ways to the understanding of the students as they find the structures of the direct speech acts familiar and relatable. For example, in both the pre-tests and post-tests, the students returned the correct responses to the direct speech acts "give me a glass of water" in their responses. This seemed to be tied to the fact that, responses to direct speech acts correspond in both meaning and action to the shared expectations of the interactants (Leech 2014).

Again, the fact that direct speech acts elicited certain responses from the students meant that the students' action (responses) are connected directly to the speech acts. Flanagan and Symonds (2022) have pointed out the relevance of context and cognitive levels of the students in the correct interpretation of speech acts. The words that are used must be of the right age and cognitively appropriate to the students for proper interpretation by the students. This point is true and is demonstrated in both the pre-tests and post-tests DCTs that were administered on the students. For instance, the students' interpretation of the scenario "You are late in submitting your assignments. Assure your teacher that you will submit the assignment tomorrow morning". Most of the students interpreted the scenario correctly by producing direct speech acts such "I will submit the assignment tomorrow unfailingly." Other students structured their direct speech acts as "I will bring it tomorrow morning Sir". One feature that is basic to the construction of all the students' speech act of promise is the underlining promise to submit the assignment tomorrow.

Another feature of direct speech act is the fact that they contribute to explicit interaction. Scholars such as Flanagan and Symonds (2022) and Leech (2014) believe that the overt nature of direct speech acts sometimes make speakers appear too direct and rude. For example, in the direct speech acts of declaration produced by the students in response to the scenario "You are the class prefect of your class, tell your teacher the number of those that made a noise in class", most of the speech acts are structured like; "John is the noise maker" while others use the

honorific before or after their declaration. As seen in "Sir, Philip made the noise in class". The use of the honorific preceding or coming after the direct speech is a status marker as well as redressive of impoliteness (Blakemore 1992; Gonsum and Cavusoglu 2019; Locher and Bousfield 2008). In other words, honorifics that have been used by the pupils with the direct speech acts is also reflective of the cultural norm of Nigeria speakers of the English language where age and politeness are highly regarded.

3.5.2. Pupils' Performance with Indirect Speech Acts

Indirect speech acts presented greater and deeper challenges to the students in terms of the interpretation of the scenarios and the speech acts. For instance, the speech act of request with the scenario: "You friend has a book that you need to make use of, ask him indirectly to borrow you the book", in both the pre-tests and post-tests, only a student used an indirect request "are you using this book?" Most of the students used structures such "help me with that book", "can you lend me your book" etc. This seemed to confirm the observation of Prastio, Ibrahim, Susanto and Nurzafira (2024) that most beginners and learners of the English language tend to interpret indirect speech acts as mere observations by the utterer that does not require or elicit response or action. This emphasizes the fact that a lot of attention needs to be given to these primary school students in a bid to improve their competence in structuring indirect speech acts.

Conversely, in interpreting the scenario "You know your friend is hungry, but he has not asked you for part of your lunch, make an indirect offer of some of your food to him/her", 45 students of the 100 hundred students that participated in both the pre-test and post-test were able to construct indirect request of structures such as "I am hungry". Some students also used "will you be able to eat all your food?" The high number of successful indirect speech acts of request recorded in the data seemed to validate the claim by Leech (2014) that cultures that emphasis politeness tend to be indirect because, they are mindful of the inconvenience that their request may cause. This finding suggests the need for deeper grounding and a deliberate drive for the development of other indirect speech acts in the students. Providing proper grounding, especially with relatable examples will help increase their pragmatic competence in the use and function of indirect speech acts.

Furthermore, the scenario "You know your friend is hungry, but he has not asked you for part of your lunch, make an indirect offer of some of your food to him/her", the speech act of offer,

also show some understanding of indirect speech acts by the students. For example, some of the students correctly interpreted and produced indirect speech acts such as "are you hungry?", "will you eat" and "have you eaten?" The students demonstrated a good understanding of the use of indirect speech act of offer. It seems the speech act of offer, much like request is tied to the cultural nuance of the students. The students' sociocultural and linguistic background, where speakers are expected to be considerate of the face of the other speaker(s) seemed to contribute to their correct interpretation of the indirect speech act. The structuring of the speech acts as can be seen, are in questions form. This seems to corroborate the view of discursive scholars like Gonsum and Çavuşoğlu (2021) and Suryandani and Budasi (2022) and their claim that second learners of English draw from their cultural norms to avoid imposing themselves on their hearers as a way of appearing polite.

4. Conclusion

So far, we have used Searle's speech acts verbs, to account for the pragmatic competence of primary school students in primary four and five. It is evident from the study that speech acts (direct and indirect) as noted by Searle (1969) are composite and integral aspects of the English language teaching and learning. Unfortunately, the primary school curriculum does not have deliberate topics that will expose the students and get them properly drilled on the use and functions of these speech acts. It is important that curriculum developers, allow students to draw examples from their local languages that could be beneficial in accelerating their pragmatic competence in English language (Tomasello 2003). The multicultural nature of the Nigeria nation makes the advocacy for pragmatic competence of the students to be prioritized to enable the students to be competent interpreters of meaning and context of meaning. The findings suggest the need for early exposition of these students to the possibility of variation in meaning because of the contexts that the words or expressions are occurring.

The influence of the students' mother tongue was also a significant factor in the interpretation of speech acts. For the indirect speech acts, most of the students failed to interpret the indirect speech act, of request, but were able to make direct request using the discourse softener, please' to pre-cede the direct request. This is also like the interpretation of the other indirect speech acts. The post-tests demonstrate a lot of positive outcomes from when compared to the pretest. There were significant improvements in the understanding of the students regarding the distinction of the speech acts even though their demonstration of the use of the speech acts were lacking. This finding corroborates certain perspectives shared by Richards and Rodgers

(1986) on direct and indirect speech acts as being crucial in communicative language teaching on improving the levels of the comprehension of the students. This implies that the reliance of some of these students on certain familiar linguistic frameworks (i.e. of their native languages) could be the overcome certain ingrained local knowledge. This calls for a revisit of the curriculum of the primary school English language books to integrate drills with multilingual strategies that will enable the proper grounding of the students on the use and function of speech acts. This will go a long way in improving the pragmatic competence of the students.

Exposing the students to certain contextual cues could help improve their interpretation of speech acts and will go a long way in solidifying their linguistic and pragmatic competence in the English language. Suryandani and Budasi (2022) have been categorical that this cannot be achieved without improving on the quality of the English language teachers at the primary school level. Once this is done, the teachers will be in a good position to integrate the appropriate role-playing exercises using certain speech acts. As pointed out by Suryandani and Budasi (2022), role play helps in improving peer interaction in and out of the classroom. The long-term effect of this is that it will help raise the pragmatic awareness of the students regarding the place situational context in constructing meaning. It is important too that the teaching materials of these primary school students reflect the needs of the students by promoting multilingual proficiency which will in the long run improve the pragmatic awareness of the students.

Abbreviations

DCT   Discourse Completion Tasks

NP   Nigerian Pidgin

L2   Second Language

LE   Linguistic Ethnography

EFL   English as a Foreign Language

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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