

Enhancing Language Teaching Pedagogy and Materials

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TEACHING L2 PRAGMATICS IN THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

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Pragmatics

“the study of language from the point of view of users”

- the choices users make
- the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction
- the effects their use of language has on other participants in the act of communication

(Crystal 1997: 301)



Language competence

Grammatical competence

The ability to create and understand grammatically correct sentences.

Communicative competence

The ability to produce and understand sentences that are appropriate and acceptable in a particular situation.



“I’ve got a headache”

I need a prescription. (request)

Turn down the music. (complaint)

No. (refusal)



*“We are constantly doing things
with words.”*

John Austin
How to Do Things with Words (1962)



Implicatures

“what is *suggested* in an utterance, even though neither expressed nor *strictly implied* by the utterance”

Communicative competence entails understanding an implicature in your own language (or in a foreign language)



“Scusi, ci sarei prima io.”

“Non vede che siamo in fila?”

“C’è sempre chi fa il furbo.”

“Il signore con la giacca verde è l’ultimo della fila.”

“Abbassa il volume della musica! (per favore)”

“La musica è troppo alta, io devo studiare”

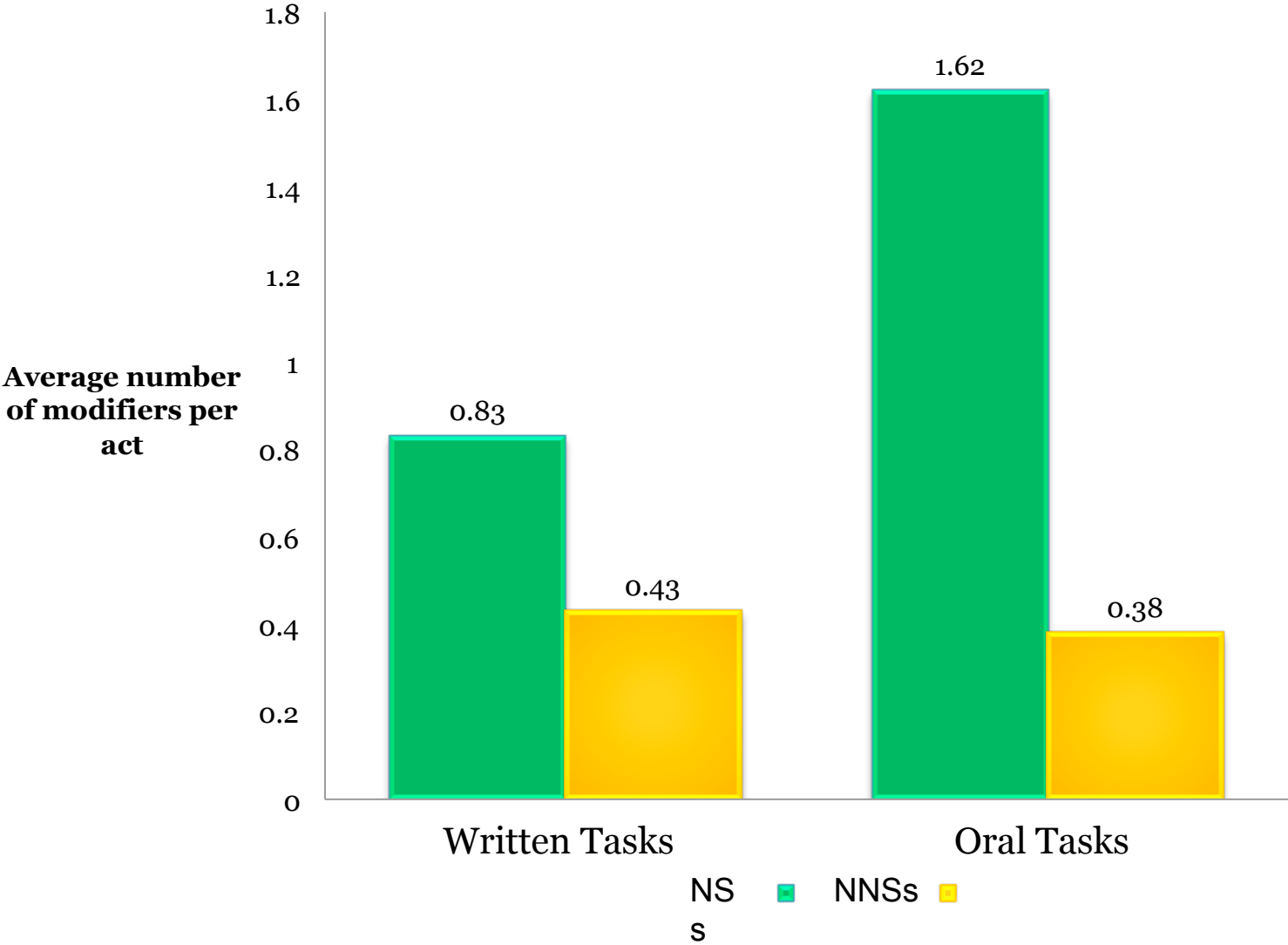


“Non è un po’ altina?”

“Abbasseresti un po’ il volume?”

modifiers/modification devices

Native Speakers make use of a higher number of modifiers than Non-Native Speakers when complaining:



Pragmatic Failure

Pragmalinguistic Failure

Sociopragmatic Failure

Non-native speakers are often subject to **pragmatic failure:**

- “... Hearer perceives the force of Speaker’s utterance as other than the Speaker intended s/he should perceive it”

(Thomas 1983:94)

Pragmalinguistic Failure

A result of difficulties in the linguistic encoding/decoding of pragmatic force.

- interlanguage specific errors
- pragmatic transfer

Anonymous
Young
couple

Hungary

May 20, 2010

Hotell/rooms in good/clean condition, good light/noise isolation. Enormous bathroom. Arena 1500m, beginning of centre zone 700m walk. Hotel meets 3* expectations.

Bottom of shower tub in our room was relatively new, but extremely dangerous, unsafe, leaning and slippery and would need immediate replacement. Only one chair in the double-room. Need to do a U-turn driving from the ring road (non-trivial without GPS). Receptionist told us things like "you will do this or that" probably rather due to her English and not her impoliteness'.

Tomorrow you will wake up and you will go and have breakfast before 9:30am. You will not smoke in your room and on Friday you leave before noon. Ok?

She is so impolite!



Sociopragmatic Failure

Due to the lack of awareness or disregard for social conditions placed on language in use.

There might be different perceptions of what constitutes appropriate linguistic behaviour from one language to another.



Pragmatic Failure

Pragmalinguistic Failure



“Friday you leave before noon.” X

“We would appreciate if on Friday you could vacate your room anytime before noon” ✓

Sociopragmatic Failure



“Pronto Kamal? Mi serve un favore.” X

“Ciao Kamal come stai? La tua famiglia come sta? Il bambino mangia?” ✓



Summary

- Pragmatics deals with language in use
- “We are constantly doing things with words” (J.Austin)
- Implicatures
- Pragmatic Failure (Pragmalinguistic Failure & Sociopragmatic Failure)



Is the teaching of pragmatics important?

“Pragmatics is perhaps one of the most difficult areas for learners, since they are generally unaware of the negative perceptions that native speakers might have of them as a result of their pragmatic errors.

This happens especially with relatively proficient non-native speakers, because the source of difficulty is more likely to be attributed to a defect in personality (individual or cultural) than to a non-native speaker’s inability to map the correct linguistic form onto pragmatic intensions.”

(Gass & Selinker, 2008)



Interlanguage Pragmatics (ILP)

“The study of NNSs’ use and acquisition of L2 pragmatic knowledge”

(Kasper & Rose 1999:81)

Acquisition of L2 Pragmatic Knowledge - The Learning Context -

The Second
Language (SL)
Context


The Foreign
Language (FL)
Context

The acquisitional context determines the **input** which the language learner is being exposed to as well as the **output** and **feedback** opportunities available.

Acquisition of L2 Pragmatic Knowledge - The Learning Context -

The FL Context

- scarce opportunities for exposure to target pragmatic norms (input)
- an impoverished environment for practice (output)
- teachers are often the only models of appropriate behaviour
- learners are often not exposed to social situations and social roles



How can I start teaching pragmatic competence in my language classroom?

Some ideas...



1. Always highlight the importance social variables such as:

- social distance
- power difference
- rank of imposition

2. Make use as much as possible of authentic, audio-visual material:



3. Present a variety of different situations by making use of discourse completion tasks...

Cambiamento di corso

Ti sei iscritto/a a un corso d'italiano, ma dopo le prime due lezioni devi cambiare l'orario del corso a causa di un nuovo impegno che non puoi spostare. Cosa dici nella richiesta alla segretaria della scuola?



Tu:.....
.....



... and role-plays

Camicia da cambiare

Ruolo A


Hai comprato una camicia per tuo padre, ma quando lui la indossa ti rendi conto che la misura è sbagliata. Torni al negozio dove l'hai comprata e cosa dici alla commessa?



Camicia da cambiare

Ruolo B

Sei il commesso in un negozio di abbigliamento.



5. Show students how face-threatening situations can be modified by using politeness strategies and modification devices.

Modification devices

Some examples of modifiers in Italian

Lexical modifiers:

- intensifiers
- softeners
- politeness markers

davvero, proprio ...

un po', un attimo ...

per favore, per piacere...

Syntactic modifiers:

- the conditional
- the imperfect
- the negative interrogative

vorrei ..., potresti ...?

volevo ..., poteva ...?

non è che...

Why teach L2 pragmatics?

“...to equip the student to express her/himself in exactly the way s/he chooses to do so – rudely, tactfully, or in an elaborately polite manner. What we want to prevent is her/his being unintentionally rude or subservient”

(Thomas, 1983)





° THANK YOU !