

The Influence Of Language Shaping Context On Efl College Students' Metapragmatic Awareness

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Abstract

The current study aims at finding out the influence of shaping context through language on college students' metapragmatic awareness. The sample of this study consists of (70) third stage students at University of Tikrit, College of Education for Women, Department of English, for the academic year 2024-2025. The instrument of this study is test that is used to collect data. The instrument of the study have been validated, and different statistical means have been used to analyze the obtained data. The obtained results have shown the efficiency of shaping context through language in improving students' metapragmatic awareness. Finally, Some conclusions are put forward in the light of the obtained results.

Keywords: Context, Language, Metapragmatic awareness, College Students.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The problem of the study

According to Cook (1992), pragmatic principles and theories are important in language teaching and learning due to the fact that people generally tend to learn another language because they want to increase their opportunities of communication. There is more to communication than knowledge of language. Usually, the linguistic meaning of an utterance deeply is insufficient to specify the meaning or message conveyed by that utterance. Thus, even though the capability to produce grammatically well-formed utterances with comprehensible linguistic meanings in a particular language is a crucial prerequisite for successful communication, it is definitely not adequate. As pragmatics is a discipline which explores the diverse aspects of the complex link between the linguistic meaning and contextual interpretation, it must play a main role in learning and teaching a new language. This means that the discrepancy of function and form means that we cannot depend on teaching only form. Therefore, this study is conducted to implement contextual factors in shaping meaning to enhance students' metapragmatic awareness.

In production, learners need to select the words which most appropriately realize their intention, and this does not always involve the most closely related form; in reception of language, given the human desire for indirection, they also need to be talented to move from the form to the function. There are times when making language function successfully is more important than producing flawlessly pronounced, grammatically correct sentences. Likewise, the joining of form to function may aid learners to orientate themselves within a discourse. All learners of a foreign language are familiar with the stressful feeling of understanding every word, and the literal meaning, but somehow missing the point (Cook,1992).

1.2 Aim of the study

The current study aims at:

- Finding out the influence of language shaping context on EFL college students' metapragmatic awareness.

1.3 Hypothesis of the Study

To conduct the study and fulfill its aims, it is hypothesized that:

- There is no statistically significant difference between the mean score of the experimental group performance and that of control group in the posttest.

1.4 Value of the Study

The current study is estimated to be valuable to EFL university instructors to concentrate on enhancing students' abilities in communicating through improving their metapragmatic awareness and implementing the instruction strategy of shaping context through.

1.5 Limits of the Study

It is limited to implementing a strategy of meaning constructing through context, to the third stage university students at Department of English / College of Education for Women / University of Tikrit during the academic year (2024-2025).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Background

This section introduces a theoretical background and sheds light on the main variables of this study.

2.1.1 Overview on Pragmatics

According to Stadler (2002), pragmatics is the discipline that focuses on studying language in context and it seeks to discover utterance meaning based on the social and situational context in which it is entrenched. Linguistic knowledge, for example, knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, is one of the many concerns of the field of pragmatics. However, this knowledge alone is inadequate for interacting across cultures. Therefore, pragmatics asserts that utterance Alcón and Jordá (2008:193) suggested that pragmatic competence needs “knowledge of those rules and conventions under lying appropriate language use in particular communicative situations and on the part of members of specific speech communities.” Also, Mey (2016: 19) said that the question in pragmatics is “how we are able to put language to some decent, socially relevant use, and to do something sensible with it in the larger context of society,” meaning cannot always be interpreted in a literal manner, but rest on the context in which it happens. In this way, sociopragmatic knowledge must be acquired by any speaker from different background in order to enable him /her to deduce the meaning that is intended by others (Abd Aliwie,2024).

Thus, the capacity to produce meaningful and appropriate utterance for social and contextual setting in which it takes place and the capacity to interpret correctly other interlocutor’s message by inferring the intended meaning are both entailed by pragmatic competence. Hence, meaning construction which represents the speaker’s contribution and meaning interpretation which represents the addressee’s contribution of a message exchange are of equal importance and concern in this field of study in spite of emphasizing on productive skills than on perceptive skills. In this sense, context shaping meaning and language shaping context represent the most essential aspects to contextual knowledge that are mainly related to the notion of meaning making and inference across cultural contexts (Stadler,2002).

2.1.2 The Concept of Context

Widdowson (1996) defined context as a schematic construct in the mind and it is one of the aspects the circumstances of language use that are related to the meaning. He also concentrated that it is a schematic construct that is used to achieve pragmatic meaning by relating linguistic elements of the code with the schematic elements of the context. Here, the external relationship between semantic and pragmatic is highlighted. This definition determines that context is one of the factors that relate two linguistic analysis levels ((Aliwie, 2024).

According to Cook (1992), in the narrow sense Context is the knowledge of the world about the factors beyond the text but in the broad sense it represents the knowledge of the world about these factors and other parts of the text under consideration or co-text. While Yule (2006) defined it as the physical environment in which a specific word is used.

For Requejo (2007), context is not some extra data that we use when bare semantic is not sufficient because in real uses it comes first before the interpretation of a given linguistic unit. The reason is that before the linguistic meaning construction some pieces of information had already been accessible for the participants that can guide them to construct meaning (Abd Aliwie, 2025). Other scholars like Song (2010) regarded that it represents the environment or circumstances factors in which discourse appears. Nordquist (2018) also said that it refers to the words and sentence that surround any part of discourse which implies the meaning of a given discourse. This type is called linguistic or co-text context. This implies that word derives the meaning from their fellow words based on the context in which they are used “beyond the lexical meaning of the words” (Aliwie, 2025)

In sum, the concept of context has various dimensions and it is defined differently depending on its roles and functions it plays. So, it is necessary to classify it in order to get a clear idea about its terminology.

2.2 Context Classification

Requejo (2007), stated that context is classified into two types: the one that includes the morphological, phonetic, syntactic and textual materials surrounding the word is called linguistic context. While the one

that includes anything that has to do with the immediate environment and the socio-cultural background in which the linguistic event occurs is called the situational context. Also, Requejo indicated that individual experience and participants' beliefs, perceptions and intentions should be taken into account not only the objective situational context because of their effect on the way in which the meaning is constructed in language events. Since 1987, the integration of context to meaning has stayed one advocacy in cognitive linguistics. Furthermore, he clarified that word meaning in the proper context determines the way in which the meaning of

specific utterance goes beyond the meaning of its parts and the interpretation of the whole is before the meaning of each.

In addition, context is classified into three: linguistic, situational and cultural context by Song (2010) who governs its main roles: eliminating vagueness, determining referents and detecting conversational implicature. Therefore, she clarifies that it clears the structural, phonetic and lexical ambiguities that arise because of polysemy and homonymy in phrases, clauses and sentences.

2.3 Shaping Context through Language

Though context plays a crucial role in constructing and interpreting the meaning conveyed by a message, language also shapes the context in which an utterance occurs. This process is called "a self-perpetuating cycle of communication process" in which context affects the language and language affects the context. Kecskes presented an example which indicates how language can affect the way in which context is shaped.

1) Sam: Coming for drink?

Andy: Sorry. I can't, My doctor will not let me.

2) Sam: Coming for a drink?

Andy: sorry. My mother in law will not let me.

Sam: What's wrong with you?

In spite of that the change is simple (replacing a word 'doctor' with another one 'mother in law'), the meaning of the surrounding utterance is changed directly. In this way, "What's wrong with you?" undergoes the meaning not only the word itself makes the change in meaning. Whereas, in the first example, the word indicates the state of health, in the second one, it calls into a question. Therefore, the language also shapes the context and the resultant meaning not only the situational and the social surroundings shape the language. This influence is an important equally to the impact of context on meaning in pragmatics and cross- cultural pragmatics particularly. So, if the participants lack the background knowledge, they will face critical challenges of changing the context that language choices evoke (Kecskes,2010).

2.5 The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis

The impact of language on thought and perception was proclaimed by "The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis". Sequentially, this implies that the speakers of different languages think and perceive reality in diverse ways and that each language has its own world view. According to Sapir (1929), language does not reflect reality but shapes it to a large extent and language plays a dynamic role in the process of cognition because the perception of reality is affected by our linguistic habits,. Sapir's linguistic relativity hypothesis can be identified as follows:

a) The language we speak and think in shapes the way we recognize the world.

b) The existence of the numerous language systems suggests that the people who think in these different languages must perceive the world contrarily.

Sapir's views on the association between language and culture are clearly conveyed in the following passage taken from his book "Language".

"Human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society. It is quite an illusion to imagine that one adjusts to reality essentially without the use of language and that language is merely an incidental means of solving specific problems of communication or reflection. The fact of the matter is that the „real world“ is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group...We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation." (Sapir, 1929:207).

Whorf extended Sapir's thoughts, and went much further than saying that there was a "predisposition". According to him, the correlation between language and culture was a deterministic one. He stated that:

“The background linguistic system (in other words, the grammar) of each language is not merely a reproducing instrument for voicing ideas but rather is itself the shaper of ideas, the program and guide for the individual’s mental activity, for his analysis of impressions, for his synthesis of his mental stock in trade. Formulation of ideas is not an independent process, strictly rational in the old sense, but is part of a particular grammar, and differs, from slightly to greatly, between different grammars. We dissect nature along lines laid down by our native languages. The categories and types that we isolate from the world of phenomena we do not find there because they stare every observer in the face ; on the contrary, the world is presented in a kaleidoscopic flux of impressions which has to be organized by our minds — and this means largely by the linguistic systems in our minds. We cut nature up, organize it into concepts, and ascribe

significances as we do, largely because we are parties to an agreement to organize it in this way — an agreement that holds throughout our speech community and is codified in the patterns of our language. The agreement is, of course, an implicit and unstated one, but its terms are absolutely obligatory; we cannot talk at all except by subscribing to the organization and classification of data which the agreement decrees.”(Carroll, 1956:212-14).

Thus, a new principle of relativity is presented which indicates that all observers are not led by the same physical evidence to the same picture of the universe, unless their linguistic backgrounds are similar, or can in some way be calibrated (Carroll, 1956).

2.10 Metapragmatic Awareness

According to Adaption theory, adaptation and negotiation in verbal communication are important aspects that affect the generation and interpretation of senses. People need to choose from different languages when uttering a word or a sentence. These free choices take place in the language users’ awareness consciously or unconsciously. Thus, the whole process occurs in the mind which belongs to realization or consciousness. Verschueren (2000) refers to this process as “metapragmatic awareness” because it is prior to linguistic choices.

2.11 Principles of Metapragmatic Awareness

There are three main principles of metapragmatic awareness which are:

1-Salience: according to Verschueren, in the process of adaption, language users make various choices consciously or unconsciously under various degree of metaprgmatic awareness after adjustment and negotiation. This is done on the scale of explicit and implicit markedness. High degree indicates that prototype, position, the storage of knowledge, schemata frame, social representation and draft are activated actively and frequently. Therefore, the speaker can employ some pragmatic strategies to accomplish the communicative intention quickly such as humors and parenthesis in the adaption in morphology, phonetics and sentences.

2- Reflexivity: the difference between metapragmatic awareness and other consciousness is that metapragmatic awareness can reflect the speaker’s way of saying and his/her observation of how to say it. According to Verschueren (2000), all linguistic choices are under a certain degree of awareness and some of these choices are self-reflected. This kind of reflexivity refers to the fact that the natural language can describe itself. In this way, the communicators not only concentrate

on the content of communication but also focusing on the communication itself by describing, defining and commenting on the communication itself. “In Summary”, for instance, represents an sign of summarizing the entire text or using (she/he) said to imply that the following sentence is not his/her.

3-Self-monitoring: it is the highest level on the markedness scale of metapragmatic awareness. People monitor the words and the ways of their forming. The most observable indicators of this process are hesitation and error correcting. Language users can plan in advance or consider the strategy and the form, monitor and control their discourse process in the communicative situation. The type of self- monitoring is shown through, for example,”. I think so”, “That is to say....”, “what do you mean by?” in a text (Verschueren 2000).

3.METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This section is concerned with presenting the main procedures used to achieve the objectives and verify the hypotheses of the current study.

“Posttest only for Two Equivalent Groups Design” is used in this study. Thus, The two groups of the third stage college students are chosen randomly and divided into control group which is taught according to the conventional methods as well experimental group which is taught according to language shaping context strategy. The experimental design of the study has been illustrated in table (1).

Table (1) Experimental design

Group	Pretest	Independent Variable (Treatment)	Dependent Variable	Questionnaire of metapragmatic awareness	Posttests
Experimental	Students' Achievement in Metapragmatic test	The integration of Context shaping meaning and language shaping context	Metapragmatic Awareness	Students' Metapragmatic awareness	Students' Achievement in metapragmatic test
Control		Conventional method			

3.2 Experimental Design

3.3 Sample of the study

The sample represent a set of objects, events or individuals chosen for a study from a specific population to represent the larger group from which they are chosen (Aray, et al,2018). Richard and Schmidt (2010) states that it refers to a subgroup of the target population that is chosen to be evaluated to generalize the population.

The sample of the current study consists of seventy 3rd stage students, It includes only female who are selected from morning studies ,Department of English at College of Education for Women , University of Tikrit for the academic year 2024-2025. As shown in table (3).

Table (2) The Sample of the Study

Group	Number	Total
Experimental	35	70
Control	35	

3.4 Instrument of the study

The instrument that is used in this study is test in order to collect data and assess students' metapragmatic awareness. It includes two objective questions and two subjective questions. . Question number one , two (section A) are objective and two(section B) is semi-objective. While the third and fourth questions are subjective .As shown in table (3) below:

Table (3) Categories of the first Post Test

Question N.	Type	No. of item	Category	Total Score
1.	Multiple-choice	5	Objective	20
2. A	Listening and choosing the correct emotion expression	5	Objective	15
2.B	Reading & Writing	3	Semi-objective	15

3.	Writing	3	Subjective	18
4.A	Listen and make a conversation	1	Subjective	16
4.B	Listen and make a conversation	1	Subjective	16

3.5 Face Validity

A jury of lecturers and specialists in ELT and linguistics, have been requested to agree upon the face validity of the posttest. They have approved the items and the scoring schemes. All the notes and adaptations specified by jurors have been considered

3.6 Content Validity

The content validity of the tests of this study is accomplished throughout the construction of the table of specification based on "Bloom's Taxonomy" of cognitive objectives to ensure the content analysis.

3.7 Statistical Means

T-test for Two Independent Samples is used to find out the significance between the two groups in the equalization of age. It is also used to find out the significance of differences between the two groups in the posttest.

4. Analysis of the Results

This section is assigned to the statistical analysis of the collected data and the discussion of the results in order to verify the hypothesis of the study.

5. Comparison between the Mean Scores of the Experimental Group and that of Control Group in The Metapragmatic Awareness Posttest

To analyze the data related to the first hypothesis specifically: There are no statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental group which is taught according to meaning shaping through context strategy and that of the control group which is taught according to the conventional method in the metapragmatic awareness posttest, the independent sample test has been used. Therefore, the aim of the study namely: Finding out the influence of meaning shaping through context on college students' metapragmatic awareness in the posttest, is achieved. According to the following results in table (4), the mean scores of the experimental group is 70.685 and standard deviation is 10.529. While the mean scores of the control group is 60.685 and the standard deviation is 12.390. The calculated t-value 3.638 is higher than the tabulated t-value 2.00 with a degree of freedom 68 at a level of significance (0.05). Observing the values of T-calculated above, it is found that the calculated T-value 3.638 is much greater than the tabulated T-value of the field 2.00, and from this it can be concluded that there are statistically differences between the mean scores of the experimental group which is taught according to meaning shaping through context and that of the control group which 'is taught according to the conventional method in the metapragmatic awareness posttest, for the benefit of experimental group. So, the hypothesis is rejected.

Table (4) Means, Standard Deviation, and t-Values of the Two Groups at the Achievement Posttest

Group	N.	Mean	S.D.	T-Value		DF	Level of Sig.
				Calculated	Tabulated		
Experimental	35	70.685	10.529	3.638	2.00	68	0.05
Control	35	60.685	12.390				

6. DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

The results show that the experimental strategy, through which language shaping context is taught explicitly, is more effective than conventional teaching methods in fostering metapragmatic awareness among students. This finding aligns with existing literature that emphasizes the importance of the interplay between language and context. The higher mean score of the experimental group indicates that students are better able to understand and apply metapragmatic concepts when taught using the proposed

strategy. The significant differences between the two groups underscore the need for educators to consider innovative instructional strategies that incorporate contextual elements.

6. CONCLUSION

The enhancement in metapragmatic awareness could have important implications for educational practices, particularly in fields that rely heavily on pragmatic understanding and communication skills. It is concluded that structured interventions can lead to measurable improvements in students' abilities to navigate and understand pragmatic cues in communication.

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