LANGUAGE AWARENESS OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS ABOUT DEIXIS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

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ABSTRACT: In the teaching of the English language, meaning is of great importance in four skills. When meaning is not conveyed adequately, English language learners may face difficulties in learning the language. These challenges could be eliminated with the help of pragmatics by assisting learners to become more concerned about language and language use. Hence, this action research was carried out to draw attention to learners' language awareness about deixis. Deixis is a term for a word or phrase relating an utterance to a time, place, or person, investigating its importance for the learners in language classes, and highlighting the contribution of pragmatics to create language awareness. The participants of the study were university students in the intermediate-level preparatory class. The method of the research was a mixed-method study involving quantitative (numbers) and qualitative data (observations and focus group discussion) to give a broader spectrum of ways to understand the significance of language awareness. This empirical study proved that aware-ness via pragmatics contributes significantly to communicative skills and comprehension as well as other language skills when adequate knowledge is provided. Hence, English learners as well as other language learners such as African languages should be encouraged to use opportunities to practice the language in different contexts via pragmatics.

Keywords: ELT, pragmatics, linguistic knowledge, deixis, context

İngilizce Öğretiminde İngilizce Öğrenenlerin İşaret Zamiri Hakkındaki Dil Farkındalıkları

ÖZ: İngilizce öğretiminde dört beceride anlam büyük önem taşımaktadır. Anlam yeterince aktarılmadığında, İngilizce öğrenenler dili öğrenmede zorluklarla karşılaşabilirler. Bu zorluklar, öğrencilerin dil kullanımı hakkında daha fazla ilgili olmalarına yardımcı olacak edimbilimin yardımıyla ortadan kaldırılabilir. Bu nedenle, bu eylem araştırması, öğrencilerin deixis ile ilgili dil farkındalıklarına dikkat çekmek için yapılmıştır. Deixis, bir ifadeyi bir zaman, yer veya kişiyle ilişkilendiren, dil sınıflarında öğrenenler için önemini araştıran ve edimbilimin dil farkındalığı yaratmadaki katkısını vurgulayan bir kelime veya deyim için kullanılan bir terimdir. Araştırmanın katılımcıları orta düzey hazırlık sınıfında öğrenim gören üniversite öğrencileridir. Araştırmanın yöntemi, dil farkındalığının önemini anlamak için daha geniş bir yol yelpazesi sunmak için nicel (sayılar) ve nitel verileri (gözlemler ve odak grup tartışması) içeren karma yöntemli bir çalışmadır. Bu ampirik çalışma, edimbilim yoluyla farkındalığın, yeterli bilgi sağlandığında diğer dil becerilerinin yanı sıra iletişim becerilerine ve kavramaya önemli ölçüde katkıda bulunduğunu kanıtlamıştır. Bu nedenle, İngilizce öğrenenler ve Afrika dilleri gibi diğer dil öğrenenlerin yanı sıra edimbilim yoluyla farklı bağlamlarda dil pratiği yapmak için fırsatları kullanmaya teşvik edilmelidir.

Anahtar kelimeler: İngilizce Öğretimi, edimbilim, dil bilgisi, işaret zamiri, bağlam

Introduction

English, known as *lingua franca* or *a global language*, plays a significant role all over the world as a way of global communication for human beings that expect to connect. It is pointed out by Held et al. (1999:2) that

> "globalization may be considered firstly as the widening, deepening and speeding up of worldwide interconnect-edness in all aspects of contemporary social life, from the cultural to the criminal, the financial to the world into three different dimensions that differ from each other economically, socially, and historically".

The countries included in Kachru's studies (1990, 1992) employ English for different purposes and this results in the enhancement of the number of English speakers. Crystal (2003) surveys the speakers of English and states that English is now the language most widely taught. Also, it has been estimated that nearly two billion people are trying to learn English all over the world (Graddol,2006). As understood, English is a notable language known as an international language and English language teaching (ELT)

has become vital to help learners use spoken and written language effectively and manage to communicate with other people in various settings and situations through language competence as well as language awareness via subfield of linguistics called *Pragmatics and deixis*.

Therefore, this research study aims to search the deictic knowledge of the learners through the learning process and see whether they have adequate pragmatic competence as well as their language awareness through the foreign language learning process. Specifically, this research has addressed to find the answers to the following questions regarding language awareness of English learners about deixis in ELT and the importance of pragmatics:

1. In what ways does pragmatic competence enable learners to achieve communicative aims via the knowledge of deixis?
2. What are the roles of deictic expressions to understand the reading context through language learning?
3. To what extent the foreign language learners are capable of noticing the deictic expressions and using linguistic knowledge for interpreting the meaning in a reading context?
4. What are the opinions of foreign language learners about the importance of deixis?

Literature Review

Pragmatics

The study that examines the association between linguistic acts and the contexts in which the utterances are presented is pragmatics (Crystal, 2008; Levinson, 1983; Stalnaker, 1970, 1972). It is the study of relationships between linguistic forms and the users of those forms. Crystal (2008) states that pragmatics is the choice of language depending on the views of the users, the social situation, and its effects on the participants who act through interaction. In other words, pragmatics is the study of interactive activities in the socio-cultural context of the action (Rose &Kasper, 2001). Hence, the sociocultural dimension of the action should be regarded as one of the prime features of interaction especially in second or foreign language teaching as indicated by Bardovi-Harlig (1996) because learners use the language in a significantly different way from native speakers in the comprehension of speech acts, conversational functions, and conversational management.

Roever (2010) proposes that pragmatics mainly focuses on the interconnection between language use and the social and interpersonal context of interaction with social knowledge, and the selection of the language forms that are appropriate to different settings, roles, and position is fundamental (Bachman, 1990). Barron (2003) underlines that pragmatic competence, the knowledge of using language to interpret intended meaning (Hedge, 2000), is an indispensable component of communicative competence. Also, Canale and Swain (1980) support that communicative competence includes sociolinguistic competence, and people vary their language according to factors such as whom they are speaking to, in what situation, and what kind of activity the language is being used for(Hymes, 1971; Leech, 1983). Erton (1997) also claims that the functional study of language refers to studying how language is used and through learning languages, four skills that cannot be regarded separately from each other to enhance communicative competence as well as to develop pragmatic competence to practice language knowledge.

Deixis

Linguistic knowledge is another main part of pragmatic awareness. As the main subject, deixis could be presented. Different linguists have defined what deixis is. *Deixis* means " pointing " (Yule,1996: 9) as cited in Al-Saif, 2008: 68). According to Al-Saif (2008), the notion of deixis has been given different names: "pure index" (Peirce, 1932), "zeigwörter (index) + symbolwörter (symbol)" (Bühler, 1934), "indexical symbol" (Burks, 1948), "indicator" (Goodman, 1951), "indexical expression" (Bar-Hillel, 1954), and "shifter" (Jespersen, 1965). This proves that the knowledge of deixis has a long history and different names. Also, Lyons (1977) states that deixis includes pronouns (personal and demonstrative), tense, and various grammatical and lexical features that are related to utterances to the spatiotemporal interrelations of the act of utterance as well as the placement and identification of people, actions, objects, processes, and notions mentioned about, or referred to, regarding the spatiotemporal context made and maintained by the act of utterance and the participation in which a single speaker and at least one

addressee generally contribute to. On the other hand, Levinson (1983) argues that deixis is concerning languages encoding or grammaticalizing the main aspects of the context of utterance or speech event. Also, semantic features need to be known while understanding deictic expression.

Deixis is a broad category. There are some words such as *here, there, this, that, now, then, yesterday, or* pronouns like *I, you, it, her, and us*, which are hardly understandable or difficult to understand when there is no exact knowledge about the physical context. These are defined as *deictic expressions* derived from *deixis*. Deictic expressions are generally classified into three categories: person, place, and time (Bühler, 1934). Moreover, some linguists add two other deictic categories: "social deixis" concerning the social roles of speaker and referents or address(es), and "discourse deixis", which presents the encoding of reference in which the utterance is located (Levinson, 1983:62-63; Lyons, 1968, 1977; Fillmore, 1971). The vital component of deictic pointing is that it refers to referents not only in communication using gestures towards finding them in connection to a speaker and a hearer but also in reading while referring to a person or time to interpret what has been implied. Thus, it provides ways in which the interpretation of utterances relies on the understanding of that context of utterance. For this reason, the importance of being aware of deixis cannot be ignored.

Al-Saif (2008) summarizes deictic expressions in Table 1:

Table 1.

Deictic expressions in English (Al-Saif, 2008:170).

Dimension	Proximal	Distal
Object	This	That
Place	Here	There
Person	I	You
Time	Now	Then
Day	Today	Yesterday/Tomorrow
Tense	Present	Past/Future

In addition to deixis, anaphora is salient and considered as the utilization of a word through the description of the word used earlier in text or conversation to avoid repetition. In the literature, a certain referent that the listener or the reader determines to find in the end can be reached at any time in all types of referencing types called exophora, anaphora, and telephora (Thomas, 1977, as cited in Doğan, 2015), which has a remarkable place in linguistics, especially in semantics (Clibbens, 1992; Barss, 2003) and needs to be focused while teaching in ELT.

Methodology

Research design

This study is based on a combination of mixed research design and action research. To solve difficult practical challenges, mixed methods research can complement other approaches—such as action research—by providing a strong methodological foundation and developing an integrated strategy as suggested by Ivankova and Wingo (2018). Thus, both quantitative data and qualitative data enhance the reliability of the findings. By gathering quantitative first and then qualitative data, Creswell and Creswell (2018) describe exploratory sequential mixed methods design. In this research, a quantitative feature was created to be tested by observing the subject observations, the same feature was tested in another quantitative section, and this attempt was made to meet the needs of individuals learning English as a foreign language with the intervention.

Participants

The present study was held at a foundation university located in İstanbul, Turkey. The participants of the study (n=13) include the intermediate class students from the preparatory class of the Law department of the university 6 of the participants were females and 7 of them were males. Since this research is a small-size study, it is aimed to have a comprehensive understanding of the research focus during the observation involves as can be seen in the study of Supriadin (2017).

Data Collection Tools

The research had five phases: 1. Observation, 2. The performance of the learners on finding deictic expressions without any support and fostering the ability to notice in a given reading context, 3. Intervention (Giving adequate knowledge about deictic expressions by giving examples and practicing the pragmatic use of deictic expressions and then asking the students to find them in another reading context), 4. Comparing the results of the findings and giving feedback, and   5.   The learners' interpretations of their performance (focus group discussion).

Research Procedure

There were five phases in conducting the research: Observation, first reading implementation (Phase 1), intervention including classroom activities on deixis, second reading implementation (Phase 2), and focus group discussion. The research started with observations on deictic expressions made by the researcher as an observer participant. In the first quantitative phase, the data were collected via the reading context in the coursebook of the students in the preparatory class to assess how much linguistic competence the learners knew without any indication or intervention. The students first comprehended the text and then the researcher asked them to underline deictic expressions with their referents (22 referents) without any notification. The data were collected. In another lesson, the researcher as the lecturer of the class took the attention of the learners on the use of deixis and the referents by creating a communicative language area in the class by giving clear instructions in the contexts (intervention). Hence, the researcher expected the learners to be more aware of deixis and new data were collected. In the second phase, the students were asked to implement the linguistic knowledge by finding 30 deictic expressions with 30 referents.

Data Analysis

The content analysis was used to analyze the data that were acquired from several sources (observations, classroom implementation, focus group discussion). This model guided the researcher's methodical collection of the data, evaluation of the meanings and relationships of specific terms, and formation of the data. The results of the first implementation and the second implementation were compared to have clear results. The qualitative phase was conducted as a follow-up to the quantitative results to help explain the quantitative results. In addition, the data were examined by ELT specialists through peer debriefings.

Findings

The main aim is to see the general competence of the learners in finding deixis and how well they comprehend them in a reading context and use them in their communicative acts. Therefore, the research questions seek answers to these questions:

Research question 1. In what ways does pragmatic competence enable learners to achieve communicative aims via the knowledge of deixis?

Pragmatic competence can also be regarded as communicative competence. It allows individuals to understand each other clearly while communicating. Deixis is one of the factors that help communication to be more effective and more understandable. Knowing the pronouns especially helps students whose mother tongue is Turkish and who learn English as a foreign language. The most important thing to be mentioned here is that since there is no gender difference in Turkish pronouns, personal deictic expressions such as *he* and *she* can cause the student to experience confusion while learning English. With deixis teaching, it is possible to comprehend spoken and written language more quickly. Besides this, students' reflections on this subject support this view. An example is that S3 reveals the importance of deixis for communication and says,

"It is easy to understand some of the pronouns in English in grammar lessons. You can fill in the gaps without thinking too much. But when I heard these pronouns which were used during the conversation, it was not easy for me to understand that they are talking about a man or a woman directly. Especially I had the same problem when I tried to transfer from Turkish to English. After a while, I think communication problems do not occur as I have been taught about deixis".

Research question 2. What are the roles of deictic expressions to understand the reading context through language learning?

Deictic expressions are used for contextual integrity in reading texts. They are also used in speeches, as they are words or phrases that indicate the time, place, or situation of the subject in reading texts, and expressions that may seem very complex if a student learning English as a foreign language does not know the subject. However, a student who is aware of deixis can deduce the personal pronouns in the context and can find the referents from the previous sentences. In this sense, context plays an active role in ELT. Thus, in this research, students were asked to find deictic expressions in the reading context including personal deixis, spatial deixis, and temporal deixis that are available in the texts.

Research Question 3. To what extent are foreign language learners capable of noticing the deictic expressions and using linguistic knowledge for interpreting the meaning in a reading context?

This research is a study of how students are successful in understanding reading texts using deictic expressions knowledge and linguistic knowledge as well as pragmatic competence. In phase 1, students were asked to circle all the deictic expressions (person, time, and space deixis) available in the text individually. There were 22 deictic expressions in the text involving personal deictic expressions. After it was completed, the students were asked to read the text given carefully and indicate what these deictic expressions referred to in the text by underlining. Finding the referents was the second process that the learners worked on. The results of Phase 1 are presented in Table 2.

Table 2.

Phase I: Finding deictic expressions and referents

Intermediate Level	The number of deictic expressions available in the context (22)		The number of referents available in the context (22)	
Students	The number of deictic expressions found	Percentages of deictic (%)	The number of referents found	Percentages of referents
S1	17	77.2	3	13.6
S2	11	50	1	4.5
S3	18	81.8	3	13.6
S4	21	95.4	1	4.5
S5	6	27.2	3	13.6
S6	13	59.0	6	27.2
S7	17	77.2	2	9.0
S8	17	77.2	9	40.9
S9	5	22.7	4	18.1
S10	19	86.3	0	0
S11	7	31.8	0	0
S12	12	54.5	0	0
S13	21	95.4	9	40.9

In Phase 2, the intervention became important and the researcher gave a lecture on what the deictic expressions were and what they referred to in the reading context. The examples were given to clarify, and different reading contexts were used to help the learners enhance their knowledge. The students worked collaboratively while detecting the deictic expressions and the referents. After practice, the students were distributed a new reading context copied from the same coursebook in the next lesson and asked to circle all the deictic expressions and their referents in the same context individually. The results of Phase 2 are presented in Table 3.

Table 3.

Phase II: Finding deictic expressions and referents

Intermediate level	The number of deictic expressions available in the context (30)	The number of referents available in the context (30)

Students	The number of deictic expressions found	Percentages of deictic (%)	The number of referents found	Percentages of referents
S1	30	100	23	76.6
S2	17	56.6	3	10
S3	23	76.6	1	3.3
S4	23	76.6	15	50
S5	23	76.6	15	50
S6	24	80	11	36.6
S7	25	83.3	15	50
S8	24	80	16	53.3
S9	20	66.6	16	53.3
S10	30	100	7	23.3
S11	28	93.3	10	33.3
S12	16	53.3	3	10
S13	24	80	17	56.6

As is seen from the tables (Tables 2 and 3) above, significant differences were observed between the number of deictic expressions that the students found in Phase 1 and the number of deictic expressions they found in Phase 2. Similarly, significant differences were found between the number of referents that the students found in Phase 1 and the number of referents they found in Phase 2. This proves how important the intervention is in acquiring the subject.

Research question 4. What are the opinions of foreign language learners about the importance of deixis?

As the main goal was to create awareness of the learners in the learning process, it was necessary to present the reflections of the students about deixis and referents. These are some responses from the students:

S1 emphasized the connection and stated,

"It is quite easier to make sense of the context after learning the relationship between deictic expressions and referents".

S8 indicated how demanding reading was and explained,

"Reading was really difficult. I had difficulty understanding the reading context. But now I am feeling more comfortable. When I see deixis, it takes my attention and I feel there is no need to feel frightened while reading. I have more fun now".

S9 expressed that noticing was important and said,

"Before I had done this study, I had no idea why those expressions were used, but now I am more attentive".

S10 states,

"Before this study, I was just marking what the pronoun was and I trusted my grammar knowledge. However, I have never asked myself this question: What exactly do the pronouns in the reading passages point out? Now I can look differently, and as a class we had fun. At first, it was not easy but now everybody asks the lecturer if we are going to do similar activities again".

S12 believes in hard work and the importance of awareness and explains,

"We did not even realize that we were directly involved in a research topic. Because the subject was the same in the book. Only when our teacher distributed the papers, she said, <I am distributing the copies so that you can circle or underline a little more, you can also mark from the book if you wish >. Although she did not say that she would make a direct application during the lesson, it was very enjoyable to see how we all focused on the subject. I took photos in the classroom. I have never seen the class trying to learn so much. Everyone was listening carefully. When we realized that the study we did was meaningful, I thought about how valuable our effort was. We were just reading and passing without thinking

about what the pronouns refer to in the text. I think we have become more conscious and the comparison with Turkish resulted in difficulties".

Briefly, the students had more positive attitudes toward learning deixis, and reading contexts were useful to create awareness for the learners.

Discussion

This study includes research on how much linguistic competence students have, as well as how much they benefit from contextual knowledge, especially in speaking and reading skills. As seen from Table 2, the learners were able to find deictic expressions more easily than referents since deictic expressions have a "semantic deficiency" feature as discussed by Levinson (2004). To comprehend them, contextual knowledge is necessary. Deixis directly involves the significant relationship between the structure of language and also the context in which it is used (Levinson, 1983). In addition, the research proved that the students also had some problems with how to relate their linguistic knowledge with the given context and had some misunderstanding or incomprehension. Similarly, Hanks (2005) underlines that deictic usage and interpretations are influenced by the relationship between the speaker and the addressee to comprehend easily, and deictic words are significant components of pragmatics since they are identified with the context of the utterance. In parallel with the findings of this study, spatial deixis needs to be examined and taught during the courses as Levinson et al. (2018) have emphasized.

Moreover, during the intervention, it was indicated that the learners need to be trained to be more aware of cues to notice deictic expressions and referents. This is in line with the statement of Van Engelenhoven (2011, p. 247) who explains, "By deixis (…) we mean here all cues provided by a language that localize a speech event and its participants in space and time".

This research has demonstrated that grammatical knowledge does not assure an equivalent level of pragmatic development. So, there is a necessity to create a discussion on how important pragmatics is in language classes. Because pragmatic competence is one of the vital components of communicative competence. Moreover, many pragmatic phenomena that include implicit or indirect meaning present challenges to learners of all ages (Grigoroglou & Papafragou, 2017; Papafragou, 2018). As this study took place in Turkey, it shows some similarities with Turkish language studies done in Turkey. For example, in Karahan's study (2009), the use of pronouns was a prime concern as stressed in this research study. Another study by Demirci (2010) clarifying the subject pronoun with the help of universal grammar took attention to linguistic competence, which is a sub-consideration of this research. Banguoğlu (2011) and Karaağaç (2012) carried out similar studies on the significance of pronouns indicating deixis in the Turkish language. Nonetheless, a current study involving both quantitative and qualitative data (mixed method) on the use of deixis in a reading text in Turkish or English language in the class environment in terms of pragmatic competence and language awareness in the Turkish context has not been encountered yet.

CONCLUSION

In ELT classes, the use of the target language efficaciously requires the contextualization of language use and fluency. This study is the product of the activities that the researcher applied in her class during the lesson. The purpose of the research is related to the use and understanding of the deixis, which is one of the difficulties students experience while communicating and comprehending. Consequently, this study underlined the necessity of pragmatic and communicative competence by presenting discussions as Bachman (1990) and Eslami- Rasekh (2005) stressed because pragmatic competence also includes formal linguistic and textual knowledge and interacts with organizational competence. Therefore, language classes should be interactive and support the learners to be involved in more communicative acts (Congmin, 2013) since foreign language settings are usually constrained by inadequate opportunities for intercultural communication activities (Alcon-Soler, 2005). For this reason, this study has also given an insightful understanding of teacher-student and student-student collaboration as well as language awareness.

Further studies, it is expected to create language awareness as suggested by Ellis (2012) and Tomlinson (2003), and practice in teaching English, Turkish or other languages with new research studies. Also, the same topic could be investigated in African languages and comparative studies could be produced. Also, a great number of insights may be gained if the number of students increases.

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