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Building University Students' Awareness of Socio-Pragmatic Meaning: Socio-Pragmatically-Oriented Speaking Tasks

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The Practical Context of Teaching Socio-Pragmatic Competence

Teaching socio-pragmatic competence is identified as a pivotal skill for communication in a second language (L2). The communication is not only about expressing or delivering messages to interlocutors, but it further works with social contexts and cultural rules. In order to promote socio-pragmatic awareness in the EFL classroom, these features should be infused in various teaching tasks and activities or tasks. The extant research on using activities for promoting socio-pragmatics awareness in the Spanish context suggests that the activity of telecollaboration provides opportunities for authentic exchanges (Marti & Fernandez, 2016). Other teaching activities or tasks in promoting the students' socio-pragmatic knowledge and competence particularly in the Spanish context, show that form-focused communicative tasks would certainly be beneficial for learners as they forge links between their conceptual knowledge and performance abilities (Van Compernolle et al., 2016). From these facts, it is vital that teachers play a crucial role in setting explicit tasks or practices arouse the students' socio-pragmatic awareness. Inserting socio-pragmatic competence into these classroom tasks or activities need teachers' creativity and commitment.

However, the most frequent activities done by the teachers in the Indonesian context are pseudo-communication activities where teachers ask their students to make a dialogue, memorize it, and then perform it in front of the class (Wijayanti, 2017). Mostly, they emphasize linguistics forms or grammatical patterns (Widodo, 2015). This condition is also supported by the use of the textbook. Socio-pragmatic competences, however, are not seriously taken into account in the students' textbook. As a result of excluding socio-pragmatic competences in the classroom, this may lead to communication failure and intercultural misunderstandings when facing real situations (Marti & Fernandez, 2016). With these ideas, students need more contextual activities in order to attain socio-pragmatic awareness and competences. Arousing the students' socio-pragmatics knowledge and awareness can be embedded in teaching activities or tasks. In line with this idea, Widodo (2016) states that these teaching materials play a crucial role in shaping language instruction in EFL classrooms. It is a part of the learning outcomes to provide students with the ability to use available linguistics resources and engage them in a contextually appropriate fashion. Based on this empirical evidence, the present study aims to explore how university students build their Socio-pragmatic awareness through Socio-pragmatically oriented speaking tasks as

they go through various activities. To achieve this aim, this study investigates the following research questions:

1. How do students develop their Socio-pragmatic awareness through Socio-pragmatically oriented speaking tasks?
2. How do students engage actively in the Socio-pragmatically oriented speaking tasks to build their Socio-pragmatic awareness?

The Study

This report showcases a qualitative case study examining how first-semester students in a state Polytechnic in East Java, Indonesia experienced socio-pragmatically oriented speaking tasks to build their socio-pragmatic awareness between 2019 and 2020. It was implemented in a speaking class, aimed at developing students' speaking skills. In this respect, students had to perform language functions, particularly expressing an apology. Thirty students (11 males and 19 females) participated in the class where the study was situated. They ranged in age from 18 to 19 years old. The class lasted one hundred and twenty minutes. The classroom instruction was in English, but sometimes some students switched into *Bahasa Indonesia* or other local languages (Javanese and Madurese). They came from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds. To activate the students' socio-pragmatics knowledge and competence, the teacher deployed planned activities or tasks as a part of teaching material in the EFL classroom. The planned activities proposed by Brock and Nagasaka (2005) were in the form of SURE (*See, Use, Review, and Experience*). Data was collected through group interviews which were conducted in English; during the implementation of Socio-Pragmatically-Oriented Speaking Tasks. The data collected were transcribed by considering the following: (1) listening to talking the data, (2) shaping talking data, (3) communicating data with an interpretive intent, (4) reproducing or (re)constructing the talking data, and (5) building data credibility (Widodo, 2015). These data were utilized as the consideration or basis of how the students engage in socio-pragmatically-oriented speaking tasks. They were used to see how the students' promoted socio-pragmatics awareness. These tasks featured guided and authentic activities to provide students with a variety of strategies that are beneficial for socio-pragmatic knowledge and competence development.

S.U.R.E (See, Use, Review, Experience): A Way of Activating the Students' Socio-Pragmatics Awareness

Implementing teaching activities which contain socio-pragmatics knowledge and competence has been studied frequently. Some empirical studies recommend that in order to develop socio-pragmatics, the students should take part in activities in which they can actively negotiate and co-construct meaning with their peers, and collaboratively manage interactions (Van Lier, 1988). Therefore, those activities should be implemented in the class as part of arousing the students' socio-pragmatics knowledge and awareness.

A previous study on utilizing socio-pragmatic awareness in Russian language classrooms suggests that both teaching and testing socio-pragmatics must start from an awareness level at an early stage (Stadler, 2015) However, further research rarely focuses on adult learners who have A2 or B1 level of proficiency (based on CEFR). To fill this practical void, the teachers used the "SURE" technique as planned and explicit activities to arouse the students' socio-pragmatics awareness and knowledge. To start with, we scrutinized background information about English in the Indonesian polytechnic context, namely that of a vocational college where the students of the English department are expected to be able to communicate using spoken and written English by applying communication strategies correctly and accurately so that they are able to communicate effectively in real life contexts and at the workplace. They are also equipped with ESP competence/ability to function in English-mediated professional or academic

encounters (Widodo, 2016). In terms of English curriculum documents, English teachers need to develop their own syllabi, students' workbooks, and tests. For decades, they have taught the speaking skill through drill and practice activities in which they asked their students to make dialogues in written form, memorize them, and then perform them in front of the class. Pseudo-communication emerged all too often and became prevalent in speaking activities. The contents of the students' workbook is only about the varieties of language function and patterns in dialogue. In line with these facts, Widodo (2016) shows further empirical evidence that teachers do not facilitate the students to engage actively in different English activities that are relevant to their daily life and social practices. However, nowadays,' demand has been changing. The objective of teaching the speaking skill is to engage actively during the communication process. Students can express themselves and learn how to follow social and cultural rules appropriately in each communicative circumstance (Asatryan, 2016).

As English teachers try to fulfil the demand, they have made efforts to equip the students with teaching activities, which provide chances for them to arouse their socio-pragmatics awareness and competence. To meet this need, they implemented "SURE" activities as socio-pragmatically oriented speaking tasks for several reasons. The first, implementing socio-pragmatically oriented tasks in speaking class, offers them chances with student-centred interaction, which assist them in developing self-awareness through using the appropriate language in an appropriate social context. They were equipped with interactive strategies whereby the teaching materials (speaking tasks) provided authentic examples and adequate contextual information to engage in socio-pragmatic analysis.

Secondly, the students were motivated to participate and engage actively during teaching activities of deploying socio-pragmatically oriented tasks. Since "SURE" activities cover *See, Use, Review,* and *Experience*, the activities provided were varied. These varied activities served to reduce the students' boredom in the classroom. There were no more monotonous activities because SURE activities involve students actively. Thirdly, by deploying these socio-pragmatically oriented tasks, the students can practice producing utterances in the English language through responding to a context provided. This means that the socio-pragmatic tasks allow them to interpret social meaning. Thus, it is believed that this project promotes the students' socio-pragmatic awareness and competence through providing socio-pragmatically oriented speaking tasks.

The Implementation of SURE: Socio-Pragmatically Oriented Speaking Tasks

Brock and Nagasaka (2005) reiterate that "SURE" activities for classroom instruction would guide the students to engage in learning. Before implementing these activities as a part of teaching material, the teacher gave an introductory class to introduce them to students.

Furthermore, students were also considered failures in communication due to a lack of socio-pragmatics competence. This means that it is necessary to understand and create an appropriate language in a particular situation because failure to do so may cause students to miss key points that are being communicated or to have their messages misunderstood (Rasekh, 2005). This introductory class took one (1) meeting. In week 2, we commenced the "SURE" activities as pedagogical language input to guide students to produce appropriate utterances in an appropriate context. We divided the class into several groups, each consisting of three or four students. Based on the simple acronym of "SURE", we implemented the first activity of "*See*".

> See
> Basic principle: Teachers can help their students see the language in context, raise consciousness of the role of pragmatics, and explain the function pragmatics in specific communicative events.

Firstly, the teacher asked the students about a common expression they used to perform speech acts, particularly expressing an apology. After a short discussion, she showed Speech Act Sets (SAS)

introduced by Ishihara and Cohen (2010), which could be used as a guideline to construct appropriate utterances. Then, the teacher provided language contexts to the student through Discourse Completion Task (DCT). It is believed that applying DCTs is suitable for the initial stages of learning the communicative functions of language (Rasekh, 2005). In this context, the teacher provided ten different DCTs and wrote them on each card. The following were example of DCTs.

CARD 1
You and your friend Jane, are working on Chemistry project together. You have an appointment with Jane in a school library. You promised her to bring a laptop to finish the project. Unfortunately, you forgot to bring it. What do you say to Jane?

CARD 2
You borrowed an electronic chopper from your old neighbor. Accidently you dropped it, and it was no longer work. What did you say to her?

CARD 3
One day, your friend has a new haircut. It is totally different with the previous hair style. You said that it was better before. She looks disappointed. How do you say to your friend?

Figure 1. The situational cards.

After choosing one card for each group, the teacher gave the group opportunities to discuss, negotiate, and interact among members. Then, he prepared apology scripts that illustrate each of the five SAS steps as follows:

Expressing the apology	*Well listen Jane, I got a bad news. I'm really sorry, for not bringing my laptop*
Taking responsibility	*It was totally my fault. I realized that I should have been more careful.*
Explaining the situation	*You see Jane, yesterday my sister borrowed it. And this morning I woke up late. I didn't have much time to prepare everything this morning so I forgot to bring it.*
Offering repair or compensation	*Don't worry Jane, I bring all the notes containing the result of our discussion yesterday. And after this, I'll go home immediately and make the best presentation.*
Promising	*I promise, it won't happen again*

Figure 2. The apology script.

This kind of activity helps raise students' socio-pragmatic awareness. The teacher could also open discussions with the students about other possible variations in producing utterances. The teacher should ensure that each situation has specific elements (e.g., age, context, past relationship) to assist students in understanding the pragmatic dimensions (Siegel, 2016). The students' comments on the role of cards and apology script are shown below:

> **Comments 1**: Firstly, I got confused about producing English expression. The situational cards and the apology script really helped me in expressing the apology. I loved being in groups because I could share ideas with my friends.

Comments 2: The use of cards in the teaching-learning process gave me clear imagination about the situation. Then, the apology script really guided me in constructing an apology based on the situation provided in the cards.

This empirical evidence reveals that when the teacher facilitates the students creatively by providing context in the form of cards and apology scripts, it raises their consciousness. It creates lively situations where each member could contribute to the production of apology expressions. These activities promote group work amongst the students as they were provided with clear and understandable guidelines. In this particular situation, having opportunities for collaborative knowledge building makes the students engage and participate in effective learning discussions (Sawyer, 2006).

Following "*See*" activity, in week 3, the teacher started the activity of socio-pragmatically oriented speaking tasks of "*Use*".

Use
Basic principle: Teachers can develop activities through which students use English in contexts (simulated and real) where they choose how they interact based on their understanding of the situation suggested by the activity.

In this activity, to achieve the primary goal of the EFL classroom, the teacher should give adequate opportunities to use the target language (L2). The activity which can be done by the teacher is letting them discuss and interact in a group. The teacher asked them to perform role plays, have short conversations, or mini dramas based on the script of the Speech act set. This means that the students had chances to practice and develop a wide range of socio-pragmatic expression based on the context provided. He asked them to engage in a role play or short conversations in groups that were assigned based on situation/context.

Comments 3: Formerly, the teacher only gave examples of language function, then forced me to memorize the dialogue provided. After that, he asked me to perform in front of the class. Now I feel different. It is a lovely experience. I can use my English to create expression then show it to the class in the form of role-play.

Comments 4: Wow, this is a wonderful experience. It trains me to produce utterances based on the situation provided. And I realize now that by understanding the situation, I could maintain communication among other people.

Comments 5: Showing the result of discussion in front of the class makes me feel alive. It is a good place to present my work in the form of role-play in front of the class.

The excerpts of the reflective account showcase how the "USE" step helps the students to understand the context. Performing the discussion by role-playing in front of the class trains students to deploy the targeted language expression. This collaborative learning experience helps students respond to the situation spontaneously and with suitable and appropriate expressions.

In week four, to accomplish the activity, the teacher implemented "*Review*" activity.

Review
Basic principle: Teachers should review, reinforce, and recycle the areas of pragmatic competence previously taught.

The teacher asked the students to perform the role play for the rest of the class. When one group was performing the role-play, the other groups were observing their performance. After each performance, other groups were invited to give comments on their friends' performance.

Comments 6: This activity gives chances, especially for me to evaluate my own performance. Watching the process of reviewing makes me realize to improve my expression in order to be more appropriate with the situation provided.

Comments 7: Giving feedback on the other groups' performance is amazing. This experience gives me opportunities to speak up and interact actively with other students.

Comments 8: I don't feel offended when getting comments from the other groups. It is a lovely experience because I know my mistakes.

Most students voiced positive comments about this activity. A peer assessment in the form of giving comments on groups' performance motivates them to improve their performance. To support this idea, Widodo, Budi and Wijayanti (2016) clarify that any comments and corrections were geared towards reworking or revising the students' work. Finally, a humanistic review on students' performance triggers the student's self-awareness to be more motivated in expressing ideas or opinions freely.

In week five (5), as the last activity in "SURE", the teacher implemented "*Experience*".

Experience
Basic principle: Teacher can arrange for their students to experience and observe the role of pragmatics in communication.

After experiencing an authentic context, making a role-play, performing it, and reviewing the performance, the teacher facilitated the students to watch and observe the role of socio-pragmatic functions in real communication. As the last activity of the socio-pragmatically oriented speaking task, the teacher let the students experience watching "Live" apology video about the controversy over remaking the protests at Ewha Women's University in South Korea. After watching them, the students were asked to observe the speech act shown in the video. Since it was an authentic video that contained natural language functions input, the students could easily observe and identify the apology produced.

Figure 3. An example group project: Tiger Wood's Apology.

Furthermore, the teacher also facilitated the students' group work by assigning homework. Students could find any TV show, mini-drama, soap opera, or situational comedy; then they had to identify and observe the apology speech act. This activity encouraged them to be researchers by observing native speaker data. In the following meeting during week six, they had to submit and present the project to the class. The teacher invited the other groups to critically evaluate the speech act sets. Classroom open discussion served to successfully engage and arouse the students' socio-pragmatic awareness since it was conducted in very natural and authentic language input. After presenting all the projects, students prepared themselves for a midterm test. Despite this, they showed enthusiasm in finishing the project given and appreciated the other groups' projects.

> **Comments 9**: Wow, this step really opens my eyes. The use of video assists me in identifying apology expressions. So I can use them in real situations.

> **Comments 10**: Observing apology expression in real context through video is really beneficial. I can feel deeply about the problems that appear in the situation. I know how people apologize to other people. So this video raises my self-awareness in responding to the situation sensitively.

The findings reveal that the use of authentic input in the form of video promotes the students' awareness in responding to the situation. By watching the video, it enables the students to put themselves in a real-life situation and understand the pragmatics of the language used by the characters (Bajrami & Ismaili, 2016). With this in mind, the video contributes significantly to understanding the situation which will lead them to behave appropriately.

Finally, after actively engaging in the socio-pragmatically oriented speaking tasks, the students were asked to reflect by answering three reflective questions. The questions were: (1) what have you learnt from these activities? (2) What new ideas can you get after implementing socio-pragmatically oriented speaking tasks? (3) What will you do after learning them? These reflective answers showed the students' awareness toward effective communication, enthusiasm in engaging in all classroom activities, and appreciation towards project presentations.

> **Comments 11**: At first, I was afraid of making mistakes of expressing ideas using English. My friends helped me a lot. Formerly, when I wanted to express apology, I only expressed, "I am so sorry". Now I know how to do it appropriately. It is not only saying sorry, but it has to be followed with further action, showing responsibility, explaining the situation, offering repair and promising. By applying those actions of apology, I believe that communication will run easier. These activities provide a lot of chances to practice English speaking skill. It also gives me chances to face authentic context; therefore when face this kind of situation in my real condition, it will be easier for me to apply the speech act.

> **Comments 12:** I think that applied activities are very interesting. I have been involved in the speaking activities of *SURE* provided by the teacher. These activities gave me ideas on how to create utterances of apologies. Those really stimulate my sensitivity in responding to the context; therefore, I can successfully use the language appropriately. In the future, when I face the situation of showing my apology speech act, I will apply it responsively.

In these reflective accounts, the students highlight some benefits of applying Socio-pragmatically oriented speaking tasks. These activities can function as a scaffolding process of socialization into an imagined L2 community (Norton, 2001). Since they were provided with an authentic situation, it would be easier for them to produce apology utterances using English. The creative activities provided by the teacher created new nuances in practicing English. It reduced the students' boredom because all students were required to participate actively in every stage of *SURE*. Besides that, these activities provided new

insights on apologizing in English. Now they know that when making mistakes, saying sorry is not adequate. These activities trigger their awareness of producing apology utterances appropriately.

Conclusion: Reflection and Pedagogical Implications

Socio-pragmatically oriented speaking tasks facilitated the students with a new path to arousing their socio-pragmatics awareness. The teaching materials empowered the students to be more sensitive in responding in context. During the teaching activities, students engaged actively in understanding the context through DCTs and speech act sets using language expressions of apology in making short conversation, reviewing other group performances, and experiencing the authentic video in the form of live TV shows, movies, or soap operas. It is in line with Brock and Nagasaka's ideas (2005) who have pointed out that in order to communicate successfully in English, the teachers can use English for both classroom management and language instruction and provide the students with chances to see, use, review, and experience the English language in communicative contexts. These activities successfully encouraged the students to develop their students' socio-pragmatics awareness and competence.

Furthermore, the implementation of socio-pragmatically oriented speaking tasks would enrich the students' language function repertoire. It would be easier for them to select the most appropriate utterances among the alternatives. They also had an opportunity to consider their choice based on the context they faced. This opportunity facilitated the students to have an interactive discussion among members, and negotiate meaning based on the context they got, and as a result, they actively practice their English.

By engaging students into interactive and communicative socio-pragmatic tasks, they were more interested in involvement in every step of language instruction. The teacher observed that there were some English skills and components included in this activity, namely speaking, listening, grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Therefore, the students showed a significant change to being more active students. The activities provided made them eager to understand, to think critically, and imagine creatively. Their boredom could successfully be eliminated since they engaged in learning.

These socio-pragmatically oriented speaking tasks were time-consuming activities. Despite this, the students were fully equipped with socio-pragmatic competences, which made them aware and sensitive when responding using English utterances appropriately. In line with this idea, Cohen (2005) emphasizes that raising the students' awareness may be enough to assist them in developing sensitivity towards pragmatic behaviour in the target culture. For this reason, socio-pragmatically oriented speaking tasks are recommended in the EFL classroom. At a time when adult learners need to be ready to face the workplace, these activities provide them chances to have social practices with authentic and natural language input. Furthermore, teachers may use these activities with different language functions (e.g., requesting) and areas of teaching socio-pragmatic (e.g., conversational implicature).

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