

# A Call for Empowering the Non-Native EFL Teacher through Professional Development in Pragmatics: Focus on Thai-EFL

Lakshmi Kala Prakash<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mae Fah Luang University, Thailand

Correspondence: Lakshmi Kala Prakash, Mae Fah Luang University, Thailand. E-mail: 5771006258@lamduan.mfu.ac.th

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## Abstract

The Non-Native EFL teacher is most often the by-product of an educational system blamed for the language skills of its EFL learners. An EFL community such as Thailand is no exception. A canon of research into the need for enhancing the organizational competence of a learner in the L2 has been conducted and reported over several decades. In addition, empirical studies in pragmatics involving and benefiting the learner have gained ground in several ESL and EFL countries. However, the EFL teacher, who is usually the chief facilitator in an EFL context, is marginalized both as a focus of research and in the development of their pragmatic skills in English. An unfair reason generally given is that adult learners have a sufficient stockpile of already acquired pragmatics knowledge in their L1, which would serve them as needed. Yet, as observed over the years this assumption is proving costly. The academic paper authored here, based on literature and a recent needs analysis, makes a case for the immediacy of including explicit instruction in pragmatics through professional development workshops in the Thai EFL context with the chief aim of empowering the Asian EFL teacher.

**Keywords:** pragmatics, professional development, needs analysis, in-service professional development workshops

## 1. Introduction

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has taken a prominent root in Second and Foreign Language Teaching and Learning contexts over the last four decades. Historical propositions and perspectives offered on the topic of communicative competence by Hymes (1971), predominantly a view from linguistic anthropology and by Habermas (1984) from social philosophy, underline the influence of theories generated from social sciences and humanities on language pedagogy, its goals, and assessment guidelines. Research into the development of the notions proposed in the fields outside language, led to the renowned and elaborate communicative competence framework offered by Canale and Swain (1980). At this time the concept of pragmatics was not explicitly indicated yet the importance of pragmatic ability was made under the category of 'sociolinguistic competence'. Canale (1983) reviewed and elaborated on the initial communicative competence framework of grammatical, sociolinguistic, and strategic competencies, with the addition of 'discourse competence', which outlined pragmatic features as 'rules of language use'. However, it was not till a decade after the initial version of communicative competence framework, that Bachman (1990) in his comprehensive language competence model explicitly categorized 'pragmatics competence' equivalent with 'organizational competence' as a vital requisite in assessing the ability to communicate.

The study of pragmatics has posed both an exciting challenge, with respect to how people understand each other and therefore meet the needs for a successful communicative act, yet, it can also be frustrating when making sense of what the speaker actually intends or has in mind at the time the utterance is made. This frustration can be compounded when the participants in the communication come from different L1 backgrounds. In addition, utterances that are indirectly conveyed can pose additional strain and effort for processing on the hearer. Furthermore, aligning utterances from socio-cultural contexts, which serve as a backdrop, plays a vital role in either the success or failure of the communicative act in progress. Crystal (1985:240) proposed the widely used definition of pragmatics

“Pragmatics is a study from the point of view of the users, especially of the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction, and the effects their use of language has on other participants in the act of communication.”

The seminal works of Austin (1962), Searle (1975) and Grice (1975) acknowledges the pervasive use of non-literal meaning although their theoretical tenets vary in focus. In sum, however, the theories, conveyed collectively, acknowledge the significance of context, shared knowledge, and presupposition in understanding speaker’s meaning.

### *1.1 Background*

In recent years, serious attempts have been made into the inclusion of pragmatics components into language teaching contexts, curricula, and materials. Instruction of pragmatics aspects is being guided through empirical studies chiefly using a native speaker model. In addition, comparative studies in interlanguage pragmatics have sparked a cannon of research findings in pragmatics. Despite the deep interest in pragmatics, the realm of second language teaching and learning that includes pragmatics aspects of language has received relatively less attention. One persisting gap lies in the lack of pragmatics Instruction to the Asian EFL teachers.

In the field of second language teaching and learning Bardovi-Harlig and Mahan-Taylor (2003) state that although pragmatics encompasses speech acts, conversational structure, conversational implicature, conversational management, discourse organization, and aspects, such as address forms, they are not addressed in language teaching curricula nor in language teacher training programs. In addition, they share that learners of the language perceive these forms as ‘the secret rules of English’. In a recent study Yildiz Eikin, and Damar (2013) found teacher-trainees’ pragmatic awareness remains at the theoretical level, as they have not be exposed to pragmatic features explicitly. Furthermore, lessons delivered by teachers lacked situational content that could raise their pragmatic awareness in order to perform successfully in their professional practice.

At a ‘Colloquium on Innovations in Teacher Education’, Cohen (2015) made a case for including explicit pragmatic instruction in teacher education. He proposed the inclusion of more than the usual pragmatics features so as to increase exposure to varied characteristics in authentic native speaker exchanges such as jocular insults, cursing, noticing impoliteness, even lesser studied speech acts of ‘criticism’ and other instances that could result in pragmatic failure. An EFL context such as Thailand, offers limited exposure for enhancing users, in our context the EFL teachers, pragmatics awareness and competence on aspects such as noticing impoliteness for instance, and becoming more tolerant of the ways of other cultures. Most foreign language teachers are products arising from similar backgrounds that lack adequate instances of real and challenging situations for implicit acquisition of real language. Although keen and highly ambitious as well as motivated to excel in their profession, it is apparent that EFL teachers have limitations due to restricted exposure once they, in likeness with their students, step outside their academic and professional borders.

Just as learners’ communicative competence in English rests within the confines of the language classroom, since Thailand, which like many EFL countries does not have English as an official language, the EFL teacher is also dependent on institutional contexts for enhancing, and not fossilization of the second language they are teaching. As Hall (2011) stated, “the school, institution or educational system provides the immediate environment for the language classroom”. The lack of authentic environment, therefore, could have a major impact on the performance of language teaching and in turn enhancing the proficiency of the second language learner.

Apart from the environment, language input in real-life discourse and that provided in most second language teaching material has discrepancies (Pearson, 1986; Scotton & Bernsten, 1988). In his study, Bouton (1996) revealed that only 26% of the 80% of invitation forms included in textbooks appear in real-life. Moreover, instructional emphasis of one semantic formula over others results in overuse (Mir, 1992), especially absent is the use of these expressions out of context. Furthermore, McCarthy (1998) and Koester (2002) claim that simplification of real language in classrooms due to reliance of teachers on textbook contrivances, results in the speech acts being carried out only at the phrase level, therefore reducing complexity. Another relevant point is that of politeness strategies, which can be set aside in English, yet not considered out of the ordinary in similar contexts; however, unacceptable in a Thai context. Overcoming this barrier requires first and foremost raising awareness on such issues. Learners can only arrive at this conclusion if their teachers convey the same. Thai students observe their peers and emulate their behavior. Knowledge about issues is much more easily accepted in a classroom when it is relayed from their teacher. Recognition that teachers are the single most important factor affecting a student’s achievement is growing (Smith & Gillespie, 2007).

Another point bearing on the problem in the context of this discussion is ASEAN. Thailand and nine other Southeast Asian countries are at the doorstep of implementing a new alliance for improved Business, Tourism, Economic, Educational, Cultural, and Political benefits as a single entity labeled Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Sirikhan and Prapphal (2011) found that the most common errors committed by Hotel Front Office Departments in Thailand involved failure in giving correct speech acts, complete information, correct information, necessary information apart from an inability to use formulaic expressions. The study revealed that the Thai students from the Tourism Department lacked both pragmalinguistic features and sociopragmatic features, even appropriate politeness strategies and use of correct verb forms, which ultimately lead to break down in staff-guest relations. The official language for interaction and exchange in ASEAN is English. Disparity in English language proficiency among the ten nations in a field of strength such as Tourism for a nation like Thailand can result in catastrophic economic results. The failure of the students reflects strongly on the educational policies, materials, and teaching methods including teacher training that have been evaluated as requiring unique changes.

Although the countries at the lower end of this spectrum are working hard to reach an acceptable level, most of the focus in language acquisition especially in academic circles has revolved around the enhancement of four skills namely Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing, from the point of view of the learners. Hillary Clinton, at the Honolulu 2012 English Language Enrichment Program for ASEAN noted that, learning English is a valuable tool for the 21st Century and also that it is the most common request made at diplomatic meetings. The Language Enrichment Programs are striving hard to develop and provide teacher trainees with effective materials development and teaching methodology. Although an indication and need for improving cultural knowledge, and effective use of the language is stated explicitly, focus on pragmatics aspects is overlooked or left to chance acquisition.

In addition, factors such as unqualified, and poorly trained teachers, lack of cultural awareness of the target language, insufficient exposure to the target language outside of the classroom (Dhanasaboen, 2006; Wiriyaichitra, 2002) all lend to the failure of English language teaching and Learning in the Thai context. In a report on 8 major trends in the global English Language Teaching (ELT) field, Sun (2014) reports that teachers from the expanding and outer circle of English language users as proposed by Kachru (1985) are quite aware of the importance of enhancing their own qualifications in ELT beyond mere linguistic features. However, a number of studies have reported the overlooking of pragmatics explanations or exclusion of explicit pragmatics tasks by EFL teachers as something difficult to teach. One feasible way for EFL teachers to overcome this debilitating factor is through well-designed in-service professional development (PD) workshops. In the Asian context, professional development in the teaching of English as a foreign language has yet to provide workshops for the development of their academic staff in the area of L2 Pragmatics.

## 2. The Pertinent Literature

This section will draw upon both historical and current theories and practices in the field of Pragmatics and some critical issues with respect to Professional Development (PD) with an emphasis on PD in Thailand. It will emphasize and elaborate on the most pertinent aspects in pragmatics that will support the call for explicit pragmatics instruction of Asian EFL teachers in the Thai context through In-service Professional Development Workshops.

### 2.1 Pragmatics Research and Approaches in SLA

Firstly, on the development of pragmatics in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) Kasper (2001) discusses four chief approaches. The first one is integrated in the development of communicative competence in alliance with grammatical ability. In other words, raising linguistic and grammatical competence. Second, it is an approach using information processing through increased input for raising the awareness and metapragmatic abilities of a learner. Third, involves a sociocultural perspective in its approach. The fourth, based on a sociocultural model, involves the development of the learner's pragmatic competence through social interaction and experiences, or in other words, increased world knowledge.

Secondly, regarding pragmatic developmental differences, Niezgodna and Rover (Rose & Kasper, 2001) noted that grammatical competence and pragmatic competence do not increase in tandem. Furthermore, in independent studies, Niezgodna and Rover as well as Bardovi-Harlig and Dornyei claim that the gap between pragmatics and grammar in EFL samples is perhaps due to greater focus placed on micro-level grammatical components, and ignoring of macro-level pragmatic appropriateness (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001). Bardovi-Harlig states that ESL students are noted to be more sensitive to lapses in pragmatic infelicities than EFL students, and put the onus of blame on the lack of or no pragmatic instruction for their problems. A replication of the study, but in a separate global context, Niezgodna and Rover substantiated the results of Bardovi-Harlig with ESL students rating

pragmatic errors significantly more severe than grammatical errors (Kasper, 2001). Furthermore, Ellis (1997) acknowledges that areas of difficulty usually make up the areas requiring instruction.

### *2.2 Pragmatics Input in SL Learning and Teaching*

Input that is authentic and pertinent to the development of a second language has been widely studied. With regard to input for the development of pragmatics, several scholars have indicated that non-target like pragmatics can be overcome by improving input. However, the nature of the input whether authentic or representative language, lies in the domain of classroom instruction (Williams, 1988; Scotton and Bernstein, 1989; Bouton, 1996; Kasper, 1997). One difficulty lies in the use or nonuse of certain speech acts with respect to a cultural preference (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001), therefore, having either a positive or negative bearing on its inclusion in the input offered in Second or Foreign Language Contexts.

“while foreign learners are fairly amenable to corrections which they regard as linguistic, they are justifiably sensitive about having their social (or even political, religious, or moral) judgment called into question”, Thomas (1983:104).

The input that is provided within classroom settings is therefore essential to the development and processing not only at the surface level, but also for deeper thought processing and acquisition of meaning (Schmidt, 1995). Despite several studies in the effectiveness of teaching pragmatics both in second or a foreign language, teachers are still unsure on how to incorporate these aspects into their instructional plans on a day-to-day basis (Ishihara, 2010). Therefore, assisting EFL teachers with potential resources and insights into successfully incorporating and developing lesson plans that cover pragmatics issues could also prove beneficial.

Several studies have reported that learners who develop grammatical knowledge earlier than pragmatic appropriateness, display inadequate knowledge of both socio-pragmatic and contextual conditions within which to use the language (Beebe & Takahashi, 1989; Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1991). Bardovi-Harlig (2001) proposes that learners can be assisted more successfully in cultural semantic formula and interpretation of indirect speech acts involving implicatures, or in the social use of specific speech acts such as compliments. It is; however, poignant to keep in mind that the learning environment can differ in EFL contexts (Kasper, 2001). A pilot study conducted on NNS skills in interpreting implicatures in American English has revealed that formal instruction can be effective if the focus is on the formulaic implicatures than those less formulaic even in an ESL context (Bouton, 1996).

Understanding implicatures is a central concept of pragmatics (Yule, 1996). Bouton (1996) in his research exposed the lack of input in language textbooks and the decreased ability of language learners in the comprehension of American English implicatures. Driving him to question if explicit instruction is the answer for developing or improving this ability. His response of ‘Yes’ although emphatic did hold some reservations as to which type of implicature can be taught and to what extent. Kasper (2001) further claimed that a scarcity in developmental research persists and therefore there is a growing need for studies in this area. In addition, it is relevant for any future study that Bouton’s assumption was made almost two decades ago, which opens the doors for new research to test his claim, especially in light of present educational developments and integration of innovations in classrooms, and the age of technology in general.

A language learner’s ultimate goal is perhaps language competence. Bachman and Palmer (1982) provided a framework, where competence in pragmatics including illocutionary, and sociolinguistic competence is vital for achieving the language learner’s goal. Teaching the features outlined in the language competence framework is not only necessary, but also feasible, if the facilitator, namely the teacher, is first trained effectively. One area in pragmatics of high utility in day-to-day interaction is the area of speech acts.

### *2.3 Speech Act Theory*

Austin (1962) observed that people actually do something with the words they utter. In addition, he also noted that not all utterances are categorized as statements. As not all true or false statements are descriptions, Austin preferred to call them ‘Constative’. A constative thereby states the facts of a case.

For example:

S: ‘The man is in the car’.

Such a sentence has just one focus namely to state the fact that the man is in the car and not in the house for example. Therefore based on the actual situation this sentence can be deemed either True or False. On the other hand, a sentence that is uttered with the intention of more than merely saying it, was termed by Austin as a ‘Performative’. Such utterances indicate that there is something being done with the words used. A classic example offered by Austin is ‘I name the ship....’. This utterance is performing the action of giving the ship a name.

However, Searle (1975) delved deeper into the work of Austin and established that there were certain specific conditions that govern speech acts in general, which will be discussed in the following section.

### 2.3.1 Felicity Conditions

Searle (1975) proposed that speech acts or illocutionary acts are rule-governed or have specific conditions called 'felicity conditions' for their successful application, and discussed three notions namely rules, propositions, and meaning. In addition, the rules are further categorized as either 'regulative', which usually assume the form of an imperative, or 'constitutive', which not only regulate, but are also contained within the proposition.

For example: Soccer is played based on rules and does not exist independent of these rules.

On the other hand, regulative rules function within an already pre-existing activity.

For example: In a soccer match if a referee issues a red card to a player, while the soccer game is in progress, the rule is being enforced in order to regulate that specific player's or that of the team performing a deliberate foul.

The second notion necessary to state the condition for a speech act is 'proposition'. Searle espouses that a proposition is the common content within utterances that help to categorize them as specific speech acts. Propositions are also performances with similar intention on the part of a speaker perhaps leading to similar inferences on the part of a hearer with respect to why the utterance was stated.

For example here are some propositions:

- 1) Will Maria come to the office?
- 2) Maria will come to the office.
- 3) Maria, come to the office!
- 4) Would that Maria come to the office.
- 5) If Maria will come to the office, I will meet her.

The utterances listed above indicate an act of performance. In the first, it is a 'question', second, perhaps 'assertion' about the future, third, a request or order, fourth, 'expression', and the fifth, a 'hypothetical conditional' indicating the speaker's intention. However, all the utterances contain similar content namely they refer to the same person. They also have a common predicate namely 'come to the office'. Therefore according to Searle although the illocutionary acts are different, some non-illocutionary acts of reference and predication are common. Searle continues to explain that understanding an illocutionary or speech act is therefore dependent, to a large extent, on understanding the distinction between a function indicating device, and 'proposition' indicating device. Such levels of understanding cannot be achieved within a short frame of time without explicit instruction and exposure.

The third notion for categorizing a speech act, proposed by Searle, is 'meaning', which is central to understanding the 'what' is implied, meant or suggested by the speaker, which can either be context independent or context dependent. In addition, Searle (1975) categorized these implicatures as indirect speech acts. Understanding indirect speech acts requires second language learners to first comprehend the nuances presented, as well as, the features controlling speech acts in general. Providing teachers with opportunities to understand such nuances in the instructional design, tasks, and activities is therefore quite critical.

In addition, developing or enhancing pragmatics competence of any second or foreign language learner, from the discussion presented above perhaps depends to a large extent on understanding both the intentional and conventional meaning of an illocutionary act. Based on his analysis of the illocutionary act 'to promise', Searle proposed five rules for the use of function indicating devices. The last four rules in his list only applicable if rule one is fulfilled. Rules (2) and (3) termed 'preparatory rules' were based on certain preparatory conditions, which for instance in the case of 'giving an order' includes the S in a position of authority over the H. Rule (4) called 'sincerity rule' is based on certain sincerity conditions. Taking once again the act of 'giving an order', the sincerity condition could be, S truthfully wants the act done. Rule (5) called 'essential rule' is based on certain essential conditions being met. In the same case of 'giving an order' the utterance is attempting to essentially get the H to comply, or perform an action.

Other felicity conditions based on the propositional clause in an utterance are

- 1) Futurity condition: as the name suggests the S intends the act to be performed either by him or made to be performed by another through him in some future time.

For example: I promise to pick up your laundry.

- 2) Ability condition: The S must have the ability (for instance: mentally, physically, and/or financially) to perform the act.

For example: The President of a Country: 'I declare war on X (Country)'.

- 3) Non-expectancy condition: The speaker is not expected or obligated to perform the act in ordinary course of events.

For example: Wife to Husband: I will prepare your favorite meal on your birthday.

- 4) Benefit condition: The benefit to the H is clear through the utterance.

For example: Father to daughter: 'I will buy you a new car when you graduate'.

The speech acts are considered infelicitous when the above conditions are not met. However, the seriousness in interpretation or a breakdown in communication is dependant on other social and contextual factors. Such in depth application as discussed above is necessary for second language learners to acquire competency in the language being learned. In light of this, it further indicates the immediate need for training EFL teachers in such pragmatic applications first.

### 2.3.2 Illocutionary Force

Another aspect leading to the performance of a speech act is as Austin and then Searle proposed, the 'illocutionary force', which is the effect the speech act is intended to have on the hearer or in the context of the utterance. Yuan (2012) recognizes that understanding the illocutionary force of an utterance is important especially in cross-cultural encounters. EFL classrooms symbolize an environment where L1 cultural perspectives play a central role in the categorizing of illocutionary acts. The ability for the learners to step out of their comfort zone and comprehend the indirect meaning being conveyed in an on-going conversation in an L2 is required for developing language competency. Tannen (1984) discusses that people do not always say what they mean with the words they use in many cultures, they leave room for negotiation, or retrieval of words that might result in detrimental consequences.

For example:

In a short exchange, a student from Thailand was being given a suggestion although indirectly by a Native English Speaking Teacher (NEST) at the Self Access Center of a University, with the following words.

NEST: 'Actually, let's do a different take'.

The student was quite clearly at a loss and was unable to comprehend the meaning. Furthermore, the teacher who was new to the environment was also unable to catch the fact that the foreign language learner had not understood. Instructions continued and the student's bewilderment continued till she had a follow-up discussion with the EFL teacher. Such instances of engagement and exchange between NEST(s) and students can form fertile instructional grounds for EFL teachers to highlight and raise the pragmatic awareness of EFL students. Therefore, this further affirms that instruction that underlines such indirect utterances for EFL teachers can pave the way for improved language competence in an EFL context.

Another feature that has a bearing on illocutionary acts proposed by Bach and Harnish (1979) is the one built on the premise of intention-centered theory. The main focus of the threefold model on the communicative illocutionary acts followed a Speech Act Schema (SAS), which is sequenced in such a way as to use communicative presumption (Horn and Ward, 2004). Several scholars have attempted a more appropriate classification of the illocutionary acts than what was originally proposed by Austin (1962) and later refined by Searle (1975); however, due to diminished clarity, and a tendency to overlap between these classifications it has become generally acceptable to classify the speech acts into two broad categories instead, based on formal, or grammatical features and semantic, or pragmatic features (Saddock, 1985). Distinguishing regular speech acts from indirect ones is a challenge not only for pedagogical purposes, but also in language research. The following section will highlight some aspects on indirect speech acts that illustrate the need for EFL learners and teachers to develop both awareness of and competence in English as a Foreign Language.

### 2.3.4 Indirect Speech Acts

Searle highlighted the distinction in a speaker getting a hearer to recognize certain effects which are rule governed, as briefly discussed in the previous sections, and effects that are derived by the hearer indirectly as a result of the original effect. The former effect was termed the illocutionary effect, while the latter the perlocutionary one. An

indirect utterance involves greater processing effort on the part of the hearer and is usually this inability that can lead to misinterpretations and possible communication breakdowns (Dascal, 1983).

In addition, indirect utterances are either conventionally indirect or non-conventionally indirect (Blum-Kulka, 1989) which lends to the difficulty in processing for the speaker's intent. An interesting yet relevant area where indirectness features, is in advertising. For instance the use of 'puns' or humorous representations through words are usually suggestive of more than one meaning (Van Mulken et al. , 2004). Although existing theories dealing with indirect speech acts do not explicitly indicate the reasons behind the use of such indirect forms, one notion that appears consistently is that of politeness or a need for preserving 'face'. The following section will outline the notions of politeness and 'face' relevant to implementing explicit pragmatics instruction.

#### *2.4 Linguistic Politeness Theory*

Discussing the principles of cooperation in a conversational act, as proposed by Grice: Fraser (1990) highlights one view to politeness based on the conversational maxims. Conversational maxims serve for a rational interaction between participants, and violations of such maxims result in conversational implicatures.

Brown and Levinson (1978) proposed 'face' as the public self-image that every member of society wants to claim for himself. The degree of claim that a S wants or wishes to afford a H leads him or her to what is 'positive face', which is the individual's desire to be liked, admired, approved of, and fulfill other such affective needs, while 'negative face' is related to a S needing independence and free will. Based on the two descriptions of face, Brown and Levinson proposed strategies for doing the Face Threatening Act (FTA) with redress as positive politeness strategies, or without redress as in the case of negative politeness strategies. In addition to the knowledge on the importance of face as it results in the prediction of face, understanding possible face threats as noted by Brown and Levinson are equally relevant, such as:

- 1) A threat to positive face as in the case of speech acts of accusation, interruptions, or expressions of disapprovals.
- 2) A threat to negative face as in the case of speech acts of orders, requests, suggestions, or compliments.
- 3) A self-threat to positive face as in the case of apologies, or confessions.

Many of the above FTAs are undertaken through indirect speech acts especially when negative FTAs are involved.

An area of deep concern in East Asian pedagogy lies in the unwillingness of students to commit in classroom interactions, as they do not like to lose face (Kennedy, 2002). One reason for such an inability is deep-rooted cultural behavior for remaining respectful, submissive, not questioning teachers, remaining modest and conscious of face of others in general (Kadar & Mills, 2011). Such instances of polite interaction can pose a barrier in the development of the pragmatic competence of the learners in the L2. Raising the awareness through situational practice of the EFL teachers who are perhaps also bound by such cultural norms could assist in the developing of the EFL learners' overall language competence.

#### *2.5 Cross-Cultural Pragmatics*

Another area of equal relevance in the EFL context is the awareness of cross-cultural influences in the understanding and conducting of speech acts in a second or foreign language. Gumperz, as noted in the International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, defined the universe as a speech community: "any human aggregate characterized by regular and frequent interaction by means of a shared body of verbal signs and set off from similar aggregates by significant differences in language usage". Language and culture determines the meaning to a large extent of the utterances made, used in the past, or interpreted (Tannen, 2006).

The concept of universality among languages got Blum-Kulka and Olshatain (1984) to explore to what degree the rules of language use in a particular context differ from culture to culture, and language to language. According to them, the concept of universality was especially evident in the execution of speech acts. Widdowson is cited in the same article as stating 'second language learners are not only capable of transferring rules of use, but also those of usage'. Blum-Kulka and Olshatain also explored the speech acts of requests and apologies using the methodological framework embedded in a context and arising from three types of variability

- 1) Intra-cultural, situational
- 2) Cross-cultural
- 3) Individual

Using an earlier verified Discourse Completion Test (DCT) and analyzing the responses cross-linguistically, they found that the main dimensions in the speech acts of requests and apologies could be deemed universal; however, rich cross-cultural variability was discerned when a cross-linguistic comparative analysis of the distribution of the realization patterns were undertaken. Bouton (1996), in his longitudinal study on implicatures in an ESL context, supports Blum-Kulka and Olshatain's findings that after 4 ½ years of living in a native speaking country second language learners acquire a reasonably good proficiency for understanding implicatures; however, they were still found to have difficulty interpreting and maintaining differences on some implicatures in the medium of American English, with respect to the second language learner's culture.

Another relevant area requiring pragmatics instruction in indirect speech acts and implicatures especially involving cross-cultural communication is discussed systematically by Tannen (1984). A framework for understanding the levels of communication differences through the following categories proposed by her are illustrated below:

- 1) When to talk: It is culturally relative.

For example: In some cultures greeting and initiating a conversation at a party is appropriate and expected among strangers; however, in others it is inappropriate to initiate such casual talk unless they are well known.

- 2) What to say: What is appropriate.

For example: Asking 'questions'.

- 3) Pacing and pausing: With respect to conversational control and turn taking, the factor of politeness, although generally universal can come into play when judging for instance the length of time that needs to be allotted for a response to be initiated. However, this is a condition of automatic processing, and negotiation on the amount of time in discussions in normal conversations, is not necessitated.

- 4) Listenership: The factor of processing utterances is also dependent on cultures and socio-cultural factors for instance gender.

For example: In Iran, a respectable and religious man will not gaze into the eyes or face of an unfamiliar woman either when speaking or listening. Their head is either down or their eyes wander on to surrounding objects.

- 5) Intonation: Intonations comprise pitch, loudness, and rhythm, which are characteristics of utterances. Slight differences in any of these features can lead to miscommunication.

For example: New Zealand speech is characteristic of a rising intonation in utterances at the end of statements this leaves many migrants bewildered as to whether something is being said to them or asked of them.

A recent survey by Pearson of 700 managers revealed that even though they were assessing young Britons using 'Australian Question Intonation', 70% regarded the inflections as annoying. In addition 85% stated that this non-Australian usage could indicate insecurity, which could lead to decreasing a young Briton's chances for promotion.

- 6) Formulaicity: This lies in respect with what is considered culturally conventional or novel in a language.

- 7) Indirectness: As with 'Formulaicity', the way formulaic utterances are actually said and inferred, vary in cultures. The utterances are usually indirect and based on context and audience experiences. Kadar and Mills (2011) state that several literatures on world travel do indicate the existence of indirect and implicit styles of communication in East Asian countries, which could lead to loss in clarity and misunderstanding. This trait is also a preferential one within cultures especially with respect to the language used by women. In many cultures for instance as reported by Tannen the words uttered on procuring permission from a father by a daughter in Greek culture is key to understanding whether or not the permission has been actually granted.

- 8) Cohesion and Coherence: According to Tannen cultural differences are also evident in the use of surface structures that indicate relationships among elements termed 'cohesion' in an utterance and the organizing structure that unifies the words and sentences into a culturally relevant discourse termed 'coherence'.

In sum, the points identified by Tannen although generally involve different cultures and languages, yet discusses other points that may be unique, such as involving indirectness that are not acquired or considered the norm in countries in Southeast Asia. This further, supports the reason for explicit pragmatics instruction to the facilitators.



### 2.6 Studies in the EFL Context

A meta-analysis of 34 studies reported till 2003 with quantitative data suitable of meta-analysis in instructed L2 pragmatics was investigated and reported by Jeon and Kaya (2006:198-203), who determined that most studies of L2 pragmatics instruction concentrated on Asian EFL/ESL advanced learner populations. In addition, the chief instructional focus lay in speech acts either in isolation or in combination with forms that were more formulaic if the sample in the study was of a low-intermediate proficiency. The meta-analysis also indicated that the most popular method for gauging the learning effects was the DCT. The review of instructional conditions revealed a large influence of SLA theoretical frameworks, rationales on noticing proposed by Schmidt, output and metalinguistic collaborative consciousness-raising concepts as proposed by Swain and Fotos. In addition, the form of instruction most employed was the explicit type of instruction. However, the comparisons with respect to the different forms of instruction and length of instruction, was inconclusive.

Several studies have been conducted since the meta-analysis discussed in the previous paragraph. Although discussing all such studies falls beyond the scope of this paper, a couple of recent studies have been highlighted to show the relevance and need for pragmatics instruction to the EFL teachers if the ultimate aim is to enhance the pragmatics competency of the L2 learners.

First, Takimoto (2012) investigated the effects of two types of instruction with the chief aim of consciousness-raising in pragmatics with respect to English request downgraders. One type involved problem-solving tasks with metapragmatic discussion and the other problem-based tasks without metapragmatic discussion. The control group did not receive either. The results garnered from 45 non-English major students from a University in Japan indicated statistically significant differences between both groups that received the instruction and the control group. In addition, the group that received instruction with the metapragmatic discussion following the problem-solving task performed better in the un-planned written-production tests indicating that metapragmatic discussion supported the acquisition of sociopragmatic discussion. The researcher thus concludes that firstly, problem-solving tasks provide gains for learning English request downgraders when they are accompanied by processing of features that interlink pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic features. Secondly, metapragmatic discussion following problem-solving tasks lead to enhanced production of English request downgraders. Therefore teachers need to design effective problem-solving tasks followed by metapragmatic discussion for learners to process both pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic features in specific ways. In sum, in an EFL context, enhancing the teacher's capabilities in producing effective lesson plans specifically focusing on the designing of such activities will need to be included in teacher training programs or provided via professional development workshops.

Second, Chen (2014), using a genre-based pedagogical approach developed by Systemic Functional Linguistics, collected email requests from 28 Chinese Intermediate students after 6 hours of instruction. A total of 224 emails were collected and analyzed both quantitatively via paired t-test and qualitatively using move analysis. Although improvement in request forms with respect to the framing moves was indicated, the content moves were still underdeveloped. He concluded that framing moves are more familiar and based on interpersonal needs between the participants in the email exchange. In addition, they are also highly formulaic. However, content moves can be highly idiosyncratic and could be overloaded with information. Furthermore, adding to Bouton's perspective that idiosyncratic information prohibits student's progress, as teachers are not usually capable of providing background information on their occurrence in specific situations. Thus, this study implies a need for exposure of EFL teachers to similar situations whereby understanding idiosyncratic information is made possible. Moreover, this can lead to enhancing the teacher's abilities in providing background information in specific situations.

The literature summarized thus far has exposed the value of introducing pragmatics components in teacher education especially in an EFL context where the classroom is the chief source for acquisition of finer elements in an L2. The following subsections will enlighten the reader on the current professional development with a chief focus on Thailand.

### 2.7 Professional Development (PD) in Teacher Education

Professional Development as Day (1999) claims 'consists of all natural learning experiences and those conscious and planned activities which are intended to be of direct or indirect benefit to the individual, group or school, which constitutes, through these, to the quality of education in the classroom.' This professional development implemented continuously (CPD) is considered to have wide ranging benefits in schools, which could have positive effects in improving both teaching and learning of the content being exchanged (Goodall et al., 2005).

In teaching practices it is perhaps well accepted that teachers are willing to implement new methodology, tasks, content, and other relevant changes, only when they have first-hand experience regarding the success of such new

pedagogical contributions (Guskey, 2002). Despite the fact that learner achievements are not usually visualized immediately, teacher's expectations are most often unchanged. Therefore, effective PD can help in instilling this reality whilst strengthening support to the teachers during the process of implementing new concepts, content, and other relevant components into the syllabi (Gulamhossein, 2013).

### 2.7.1 PD and In-Service Professional Development in Asia: Focus on Thailand

In Thailand as reported by UNESCO the Institute for the Promotion of Teaching Science and Technology (IPST) developed Teacher Professional Development Programs, which lay emphasis on Information and Computer Technology (ICT) in order to support educational reforms within the country. With respect to teaching practices in general the Bureau of International Cooperation (2005) has laid down objectives for teachers directing them to upgrade their knowledge and skills in order to be more prepared to meet both challenges, and provide effective guidance to their students.

Several studies argue that the quality of training provided to teachers is below par (Charupan, 2002; Hickok, 1998; The Thailand Education Reform Project, 2002). In addition, the two pathways available in Thailand for teacher qualification is that of obtaining a degree in Education and the other obtaining a degree in another subject. With most under-qualified teachers opting for a degree in Education, this could leave them incapable of effectively carrying out their professional duties in an academic subject (Charupan, 2002). Furthermore, Tantranont (2009) claims that 'low admission standards, lack of subject matter knowledge, low grading standards, vague curricular requirements, unqualified staff, out-of-date courses, and lack of available resources are the responsible factors. Discussing the role of the Ministry of Education (MOE) in Thailand she added that MOE formulated three key themes for enhancing the quality of teachers and educational perceptions, namely:

- 1) Change the perceptions on a career in education
- 2) Produce new trend in teacher training institutions
- 3) Develop the potential of teacher, staff and educational personnel through ongoing CPD

Despite calls for enhancing professional skills to meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century learners by the Bureau of International Cooperation, and the subsequent key themes proposed by the Ministry of Education in Thailand (2007), the quality of teacher training is still considered below par (Current Thai Education Policies and Reforms, 2015).

### 3. Needs Analysis

Needs analysis (NA) is a tool that is used for ascertaining perceptions of teachers and learners in education. It is a powerful tool for curriculum developers to help clarify and validate needs that are truly required (Akyel, & Ozek, 2010) for effective change. Validating needs prior to actual development, and implementation of a new program can be substantiated by retrieving information from the target population. Avalos (2011) states that before structuring the instructional instruments for the professional development of teachers it is pertinent to extract the objectives and needs of the teachers.

The triangulation research method employed in this study collected the perceptions of Asian EFL teachers through first, a semi-structured interview followed by a questionnaire. The items that were covered in both the interview, and follow-up online questionnaire via Google Forms, dealt with procuring the voluntary and consensual perceptions of 15 participants on the need for explicit pragmatics instruction to develop the pragmatic competence of Asian EFL teachers. The data collected was analyzed using both descriptive stats with respect to the means and standard deviations and inferential stats using content analysis followed by framework analysis that categorizes the responses under pragmatics, effective communication, up-to date pragmatics training, and suggestions for pragmatics workshop. Reliability of the coded data and findings were achieved through the process of test-retest method (Gordon, 1992).

The following research questions provided focus for this undertaking.

#### 3.1 NA Research Questions

- 1) What is the current self-awareness and evaluation of pragmatics among Asian EFL teachers?
- 2) How do the Asian EFL teachers evaluate the need for effective communication in their profession?
- 3) To what extent are the Asian EFL teachers willing to participate in pragmatics Professional Development (PD) workshops?
- 4) What is the Asian EFL teacher's opinion on the effectiveness of explicit instruction to enhance their L2 pragmatic awareness or competence?
- 5) What task or activities do the Asian EFL teacher's favor including in a PD workshop instructional plan?

### 3.2 Participants

A convenient sampling was used. 15 Asian EFL teachers frequenting the Self Access Center of a University in the North of Thailand voluntarily participated in both the semi-structured interview and online Google form.

### 3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

Both a semi-structured interview followed by an online Google form was used to procure the perceptions of each of the 15 Asian EFL teacher participants in the needs analysis. The semi-structured interviews were recorded and transcribed with the written consent of the participants.

The data analysis employed both quantitative and qualitative tools. A quantitative descriptive statistics of means and standard deviation using a free online descriptive calculator was ascertained. In addition, the graphic representation and analysis via Google analytical tools provided percentile results on closed-ended question responses on the questionnaire. The qualitative analysis of the transcribed data from the interview responses, and open-ended responses on the questionnaire used content analysis as its principle approach for overall comprehension of the utterances. Following this, a framework analysis of defining themes was used to categorize textual data into relevant indices from interviews, and open-ended responses on the questionnaire, which were determined a priori. The following paragraph will outline the qualitative analysis employed.

Coffin (2014) defines the process of content analysis as ‘coding raw messages according to a scheme of classification’ and supports Kondracki’s claim that despite its shortcomings, content analysis affords a tailored approach to fully explore the richness of data gathered. Bearing this in mind the needs analysis incorporated framework analysis based on emerging themes for the classification of the textual data using the five-step process proposed by Jane Ritchie, and Liz Spencer in 1980 listed below:

- 1) Familiarization
- 2) Identifying a thematic framework
- 3) Indexing
- 4) Charting
- 5) Mapping and interpretation

### 3.4 Findings

The findings that emphasize the call for explicit pragmatics instruction of Asian EFL teachers in the Thai context, gathered from this needs are summed up below:

- 1) The majority of Asian EFL teacher participants in the study, only partially understood the meaning, or a concept of pragmatics in English.
- 2) The participants felt strongly regarding a need for effective communication in their profession. In addition, the qualitative analysis of reasons offered by the majority of participants in the interview regarding a need for and importance of effective communication, shows that reasons revealing ‘Strategic competence’ surpassed ‘Discourse Competence’, ‘Linguistic Competence’ and ‘Socio-cultural Competence’.
- 3) The Means achieved to pertinent questions on the online questionnaire from the participants depicted a unanimous willingness to participate in PD workshops in Pragmatics. In addition, interview excerpts strongly favor explicit instruction.
- 4) The popular suggestions for inclusion in the Pragmatics PD workshops indicate tasks, and activities framing General Language Awareness (GLA), and Speech Acts through situational dialogues, or role-plays in challenging situations.

Ascertaining a need for curricula practices is the primary step for successful and effective change in any academic setting. This need is further relevant when the actions and knowledge of the target population has direct or indirect bearing on the success of the general community. Especially in an EFL context, the knowledge and experience of the EFL teacher needs replenishing if they are to make a difference in the lives of the EFL students. Positive change in teaching practice is gained through four key themes leadership; planning and preparation; practice development; and monitoring and evaluation (Maughan, Teeman, & Wilson, 2012:5).

In addition, significant change to pedagogical practices argues Timperley (2008:17), requires providing teachers with information that is not only new, but also inclusive of its implications for implementation. The absence of reliable implementation in the domain of pragmatics instruction in teacher training observed and reported by Ishihara (2011), indicate that teachers relied more on their intuition rather than on validating their findings or

explanations based on empirical evidence. In addition, it also raised concern regarding the effectiveness of instruction in teacher training programs that lacked a comprehensive training plan or at best included a mediocre manual of instructions. Most research in L2 pragmatics, to date, focuses on pedagogically relevant contexts that have a direct influence on the end target population, chiefly the student. However, little attempt has been made in the development of the L2 pragmatics of the chief facilitator, namely the EFL teacher.

The needs analysis undertaken for this report, establishes that although EFL teachers are adults and assumed to have an established stock of pragmatics knowledge of their own L1, they are yet understanding of their lack of pragmatics competence in the target language. In addition, they are not resistant to change through explicit instruction of pragmatics issues in an L2. The findings although retrieved from a marginally small sample of only 15 Non-Native English Speaking Teachers (NNEST) practicing in Thailand, it yet offers pertinent perceptions on the part of the NNEST (s) in an Asian EFL context. First, that they are primarily concerned with enhancing their L2 pragmatics practically and with a chief aim for application in their professional community of practice, which in this case is TEFL Asia. In addition, they call for areas of increased input and practical applications that could include and lend greater focus on pragmatics issues with respect to ‘choice of users’, ‘constraints faced by users’, and ‘pragmatics competence’ with respect to both ‘pragmalinguistic’, and ‘sociopragmatic’ features. Furthermore, suggestions for tasks and activities support a need for including pragmatics issues through role-plays, situational dialogues, discussions, and other such tasks utilized for day-to-day communication in academic contexts. The suggestions of the NNEST (s) from Thailand, in this study, support the findings of the panel at the 18th Pragmatics and Language Learning Conference held in Kobe, Japan in 2010.

Another essential factor emphasized by the participants is perhaps that of a need, and relevance for effective communication. Thailand’s educational reforms have been raising the expectations of their teachers to perform better by updating their knowledge and skills to meet student challenges (Tantranont, 2009). A range of activities for inclusion in Continuous Professional Development (CPD) workshops have been proposed by Goodall et al. (2005); however, chief suggestions for the success of a CPD depend on fulfilling the learning needs of both the schools, and individual teachers.

#### 4. Conclusions

Heeding calls for pragmatics research to align itself with dynamic, and complex systems perspectives. Furthermore, to simultaneously probe interactive features and co-adaptive elements as well as interact with respect to any agents and operational systems, especially in congruence with the context, is the popular belief. Based on the discussion in this academic report, covering pertinent literature with respect to pragmatics and Second Language Acquisition, pragmatics issues, pragmatics studies in EFL, and professional development, as well as the recent exploratory needs analysis, the benefits for including EFL teachers as recipients of explicit pragmatics instruction in Thailand has been explicated. Further steps to ensure that explicit pragmatics instruction to the chief facilitator in an EFL context becomes a reality, probably requires a wider acceptance of the timing and importance of implementing pragmatics instruction to the EFL teachers.

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