Bernice Badal
University of South Africa

Pragmatic interpretation: There is a difference in the way that L1 and L2 learners experience the interpretation of a literary text

Abstract

ABSTRACT This study investigated the premise that pragmatic competence which is needed to access certain features of a literary text differs amongst first language and second language learners in a home language classroom in South Africa. It focused on understanding learners' difficulties with pragmatic questions in contextual analysis and drew on findings from a qualitative study that examined learners' pragmatic awareness and strategies in accessing a prescribed literary text. The findings illustrate how linguistic behaviour and exposure to certain features of the target language contribute to differing levels of pragmatic competence. The need is pointed out for the development of pragmatic knowledge of second language learners whose contextual knowledge and worldviews may be different to those of first language speakers but who compete at the same level in the home language classroom.

Keywords: pragmatic competence, contextual analysis, communicative competence, inference

1.   Introduction

"When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said in a rather scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less."

– Lewis Carroll, Through the Looking Glass

It is known that university academics in South Africa argue that the Grade 12 English results do not sufficiently reflect the actual proficiency of learners in English and that learners are thus not prepared cognitively for the tertiary environment (Weideman, 2003: xi; Mkhabela & Malan, 2004; Van Dyk & Weideman, 2004; Rademeyer, 2005; Brüssow & Wilkinson, 2010; Hoadley & Jansen, 2012). In this way a second language (L2) learner who is reasonably competent linguistically may struggle to access meaning beyond the level of the text in the form of inferencing which is a skill needed in the tertiary arena.

In the South African English Home Language (HL) Grade 12 classrooms, English is not necessarily the language spoken in the home. Learners have a choice to be taught English as a subject at home language level or as a Further Additional Language (FAL) which is an option provided for second language (L2) speakers. However, the perceived global and economic status of English influences parents to enrol their children in schools that offer English as HL. Often learners' proficiency level is not at HL level, which could be problematic as teachers are required to plan and deliver their lessons at the HL level. This discrepancy poses challenges for L2 learners in various ways. Apart from linguistic constraints affecting their understanding, most L2 learners have cultural frames of reference vastly different to first language (L1) learners and these may work as a barrier to learning in the classroom (Van Rooyen, 1990). When all learners are treated like L1 speakers, the dynamics of the multicultural classroom are ignored, and L2 learners whose pragmatic knowledge is not fully developed in the L2 may struggle to understand and interpret the author's message beyond the surface.

Debates and criticism in the media about the poor throughput and dropout rates at universities blame secondary education (amongst other issues) for not preparing the learners adequately for the cognitively challenging tertiary education arena. (Weideman, 2003a: xi; Mkhabela & Malan, 2004; Rademeyer, 2005; Van der Slik & Weideman, 2007; Van der Walt & Steyn, 2008; Sebolai, 2014). A crucial area in which students were performing poorly was their ability to engage critically with texts, a deficiency which affects their ability to interpret the intended message beyond the semantic level.

Studies (conducted internationally) that demonstrate L2 speakers' struggle to interpret the intended message of the author or speaker include those by Bouton (1988, 1999), Lee (2002), Taguchi (2005, 2007), Bromberek-Dyzman and Ewert (2010) and De Aquino (2011).

While a South African study by Barry (1999) also found that L1 learners outperformed L2 learners (Grades 4, 5, 6 and 12) in interpretation and comprehension that needed

deeper processing of texts, it did not fully investigate the phenomenon under scrutiny in this study but looked mainly at English as a language of learning and teaching. There is little or no evidence of studies on pragmatic competence in South African research, especially on how learners access the pragmatic features of literary texts which help learners to acquire deep processing skills that can be transferred to cognitively challenging academic conventions like understanding inferences and comprehending implied meaning.

This article reports on a study that specifically investigated whether L1 and L2 learners displayed the same level of competence when interpreting pragmatic features of a literary text. The study sought to answer the question: Is there a difference in the way that L1 and L2 learners access the pragmatic and contextual aspects of a literary text that is rich in implied language and may include many culture-specific references?

A Literature Contextual Test (LCT) which replicated the format of a LCT in the 2012 Exam Instruction document as prescribed by the Department of Basic Education was used to determine learners' textual and pragmatic competence. While the LCT is standardised in terms of its National testing format, it does not in any way reflect the participant's complete language competence. This test focusses on contextually mediated interpretation. The text used for testing purposes is an extract from a prescribed text: F. Scott Fitzgerald's (1990) The Great Gatsby, a Grade 12 set work. The unfamiliar setting and the period in which the story is set may provide challenges to both L1 and L2 learners and is a suitable instrument as it is rich in implied meaning and figurative language. To ensure validity and consistency, the test was designed as required by the Department of Basic Education Examination Guidelines of 2012. In order to better understand the reason for L1 and L2 learners' performance in pragmatic awareness; follow-up semi-structured interviews with learners were conducted in which their performance in the LCT was discussed. Information was gleaned about the language behaviour of the community in which they were raised, the age at which they were introduced to Western literature, and barriers to interpretation. This information provided valuable insight into why L2 learners struggle more than their L1 peers to make meaning beyond the semantic level of the text.

2.   Theoretical framework

The field of pragmatics falls within the realms of communicative competence that emerged from the need to define areas in which L2 learners needed assistance. The previous focus of L2 teaching, which was on grammatical competence, no longer sufficed since intercultural communication revealed gaps in the knowledge of L2 speakers resulting in cultural misunderstandings and misinterpretation as indirect and implied language proved to be problematic.

While Speech Act Theory and Brown and Levinson's (1978; 1987) 'Politeness Theory' have been influential in cross-cultural communication, and have made tremendous contributions to the development of linguistic and politeness strategies, this study is only

125

focused on how pragmatic knowledge, that is, knowledge about cultural and situational contexts, influences the interpretation of literature.

2.1   Communicative competence

The emergence of the concept of communicative competence is traced to Bachman's (1990), Bachman and Palmer's (1996) and Canale and Swain's (1980) studies which signaled a shift in the perspective of L2 learning from mastery of only grammatical forms to the acquisition of understanding and using language in context. This perspective postulates that pragmatic competence, especially the ability to produce meaning in context, involves interpreting the implied meaning of texts. Hence it can be defined as having knowledge about a language system as well as the ability to use this knowledge appropriately in the correct communicative contexts (Bachman, 1990:84). According to this definition, writers' intentions (what writers' intend to accomplish) in literary texts are crucial to the interpretation of meaning. This means that specific knowledge is necessary in order to process meaning which has been linguistically and intentionally communicated. Of great concern to this research was whether L2 learners, from diverse cultural backgrounds, have the required knowledge to process intentionality or a memory bank with adequate conceptual material to interpret an English text.

However, it was not ruled out that L1 learners would also have difficulty in this respect, as learners in the South African context have a different world knowledge and conceptual knowledge from speakers in other English-speaking countries.

This situation may have a negative impact on South African L1 speakers' pragmatic interpretation especially since The Great Gatsby was set in America in the 1920s.

2.2   Pragmatics

Sperber and Wilson (1981:281) argue that a speaker conveys information that has to be decoded by using material from previous experience to unlock meaning, which means that a reader should understand the context of use in order to make meaning and use knowledge obtained from either the verbal or the written form. This knowledge is acquired over a long period and is stored for processing and use in language events. Hence the pragmatic domain specifies language users' choices in terms of their appropriateness in context and of what they want to achieve within that particular communicative event (Blum-Kulka & Hamo, 2011: 143).

Statements in context have a range of purposes like warnings, affirmations, threats and promises or they can just be statements. Therefore it is required of the speakers or readers to use their pragmatic knowledge to decode statements or propositions and discover the intention of the author. Information thus encoded may create a mismatch between the words on the page and what they actually mean, thus causing cognitive

conflict on the part of a learner whose pragmatic knowledge has not been developed. Hence, Grade 12 learners whose pragmatic proficiency and ability to access meaning beyond the level of the text is underdeveloped or lacking would also struggle in the tertiary arena where cognitive demands of this nature are housed in academic texts of almost all disciplines. With the broad aim of the study in mind this research included cultural embeddedness of narratives, complexities of the HL English classroom and linguistic barriers to the interpretation of literary texts. For the purpose of this article only introduction to Western literature and exposure to manipulation of the target language in the form of verbal irony, sarcasm, idioms and indirect instruction from parents and caregivers will be addressed.

2.3   Pragmatics and the interpretation of literary texts

The literature has shown that one of the most common assumptions that the speaker or author makes is one in which it is believed that the receiver/reader knows the language in terms of linguistic and pragmatic content.

Knowledge in terms of implied meaning and figurative and metaphoric language which involves reading the text both literally and figuratively in order to process meaning is of particular importance. Mey (2003: 1) cites studies by Fludernik (1983, 1996), Ehrlich (1990), Iser (1978), Cohn (1978), Genette (1980), Stanzel (1982), Bal (1985) and Tsur (1992) who contribute to the debate. Kern (1989) argues that incomplete knowledge of the target language impacts negatively on L2 learners. Since inferencing skills need deep processing in order for readers to understand and achieve meaning, and learners have to rely on contextual clues, it is naturally assumed that L2 learners would mostly interact with a text on a literal level. Kern (1989) also supplies evidence from the studies of Henning et al. in support of the fact that L2 learners tend to be more "linguistically bound to the text than L1 learners". This means that L2 learners pay more attention to the surface structures of the language resulting in poor comprehension.

Van Rooyen (1990:2-3) argues that L2 learners lack the English community's childhood heritage of fairy tales and fables and other references that form part of their knowledge base. This does not mean that L2 learners are not exposed to stories in their own culture which may be transferred to their interpretation of texts written in English (Badal, 2013:61). Learners who are not exposed to the structure of the English language and its idiomatic nature in the home are sometimes only exposed to the western story structure in the classroom (Tsou, 2005). This often creates a disparity between L1 and L2 speakers' in terms of prior knowledge for scaffolding purposes. Avalos et al., (2008: 321), assert that metaphoric language in English language texts especially hinder interpretation and meaning making for L2 learners in contrast to L1 learners. Additionally, social constructivists (Vygotsky, 1978) also emphasise the influence of social and cultural contexts on learning and advance that meaning making is culturally orientated. Thus knowledge gained in this way often assists in interpretation and debates in classroom activities and discussion.

127

Accordingly Mateas and Sengers (1998:1), also propose that a person's development of a narrative structure begins at a young age and in a particular social and cultural context, through the verbal actions of parents and caregivers, and through the incorporation of texts such as fairy tales and oral stories into daily practices.

Crothers (1978:55) uses an example from a children's fable about a wolf who accused a lamb of stirring the water and preventing him from drinking even though the wolf was upstream and the lamb downstream. To infer successfully that the wolf is being dishonest, readers must have knowledge from other tales about wolves being dishonest and also know that if a wolf is drinking upstream then the lamb's action downstream will have no effect on the wolf's action. Knowledge gleaned in this manner would assist children in pragmatically inferring that the wolf has sinister intentions and would help to build a knowledge base that should become more advanced as the child progresses to adulthood. Knowledge thus gained would assist learners in evaluating and understanding behaviour of characters in novels and be able to predict and recognise subversions in the storyline or if characters are not behaving true to form. It is knowledge of this nature that provides insight so that comparisons can be made.

Furthermore, Nelson (in Mateas & Sengers, 1998:1) argues that narrative frameworks "become an important part of the way children learn to approach the world" and that this process continues into adulthood. Thus, apart from direct language development skills, L1 speakers of English become more adept as they grow and engage with more advanced Western English narratives either as set works in school or in reading for pleasure. This skill would assist in the interpretation of The Great Gatsby, both in terms of familiarity with narrative structure, and in terms of identifying characters and their intentions in the narrative.

Schieffelin, Ochs and Poole (in Ortactepe 2011:15) propose that access to the way in which language is manipulated and used for specific purposes for L2 speakers is different from the L1 speakers' manipulations and use. Children in the target language community are raised by using the language to teach and correct behaviour through the use of language, referring to interactional sequences in which novices are directed to use language in specific ways and to use the language to encode and create meaning which is culture-specific. Thus, the acquisition of pragmatic knowledge in a target language is a long process and includes the acquisition of cultural norms if the language is to be interpreted meaningfully. One wonders then whether exposure to the chimeric nature of the English language can be acquired in doses in the HL classrooms and if so to what extent the knowledge gained differs to pragmatic knowledge and input of those who were born into the culture and were raised using innuendo, sarcasm, indirect instruction and verbal irony.
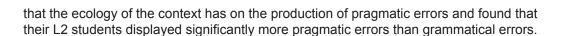
This is not to say that L2 speakers who have experienced the subtleties of the language to the same degree may not have the full benefit that an L1 speaker has.

In a study which replicated Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei's (1998) study with Czech English as Foreign Language (EFL) students, Niezgoda and Röver (2001) included the effect

that the ecology of the context has on the production of pragmatic errors and found that their L2 students displayed significantly more pragmatic errors than grammatical errors.

Sperber and Wilson (1981:285) assert that "pragmatics is not a separate device or sub-device with its own specialized structure: it is simply the domain in which linguistic abilities, logical abilities and memory interact". This is important because it highlights the fact that the process of interpretation is not solely governed by lexical cues and linguistic knowledge but also by pragmatic considerations. It means that while linguistic proficiency is necessary for the organisation and structure of the sentence and may assist in aiding interpretation, pragmatic proficiency should not be ignored.

A further problem that could arise is that learners whose pragmatic inadequacy is masked by competence in other areas, such as writing, grammar or verbal fluency, could struggle in environments where performance is dependent on all of the various competences, with pragmatic ability leading the way to engagement with the text and development into a critical reader.

3.   Research methodology

This ethnographic study took a qualitative approach to the research data and thus made interpretations about literacy practices based on a relatively small number of participants using the interpretative paradigm. According to Myers (1997:2-3) qualitative research makes use of qualitative data such as interviews, documents and data obtained from observing participants in order to understand and explain various social phenomena. The reasoning behind the choice of the qualitative approach is that it is by nature exploratory, interpretative and descriptive and provides a platform to understand multiple realities (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001:102; Babbie & Mouton, 2004:270-271). In qualitative research projects of a limited nature such as this one, the intent is not to apply the findings as a universal phenomenon.
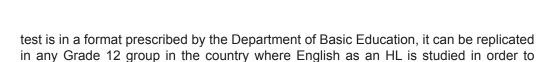
3.1   Context of research

The research took place at a high school which is a public, English medium co-ed school located in Pretoria, a city in the province of Gauteng, South Africa, from January 2012 to September 2012.The reason for using Grade 12 learners in this study was that within a very short period of time these learners would possibly be entering the tertiary arena and may struggle with cognitively challenging aspects like inference and meaning making. It is also necessary to evaluate students' ability in a school situation since intervention strategies can be implemented in the school environment in order to prepare learners for academic discourse which has pragmatic implications.

The results of the study cannot be applied to all L2 and L1 speakers since it took place in one school in Gauteng with a relatively small number of participants. However, since the

129

test is in a format prescribed by the Department of Basic Education, it can be replicated in any Grade 12 group in the country where English as an HL is studied in order to explore this phenomenon further.

Thus, this qualitative study investigated responses from 10 participants in order to ascertain whether there is a difference between L1 and L2 learners in the way that they access pragmatic features inherent in a literary text. Selection of participants was based on their respective home languages (with the aim of the study in mind), in the sense that five of the participants had to have English as their L1 and five of them had to be L2 speakers. A qualitative approach thus enabled examination and in-depth analysis of how L1 and L2 learners accessed the pragmatic contextual aspects of a literary text and the identification of challenges experienced by the learners.

Based on these considerations participants were selected from the researcher's own Grade 12 group that consisted of a cohort of about 120 learners.

3.2   Selection of participants

A questionnaire was administered to the entire group in order to obtain biographical data of prospective candidates so that participants could be selected.

Thereafter the purposive sampling method was used. Data solicited was based on participants' first language, exposure to the target language, attitude and competency in English, and cultural and religious affiliations as well as language preferences in terms of the language they chose to communicate in. Data obtained facilitated selection and profiling of the participants in terms of whether English was their first or second language. While learners' were able to converse in many languages as illustrative of the cultural diversity in South Africa, English was regarded as their second language in terms of verbal and written competency. Hence, learners who indicated that English was their third or fourth language in terms of language use were excluded.

Data was solicited on participants' home language, exposure to the target language, attitude and competency in English, as well as language preferences in terms of the language in which they chose to communicate. In order to differentiate between them without revealing their identity, the L1 candidates were given the following identifiable markers: AA, BB, CC, DD, and EE and L2 candidates were FF, GG, HH, II, and JJ. In this way their uniqueness and candour in their responses could be ensured.[1]

3.3   Ethical issues

Participants in the study were informed that their involvement was strictly voluntary and that it was within their rights and obligations to withdraw without prejudice or fear of victimisation. This information was included in the consent form. Grade 12 is an important

[1]   For more information on language profiling of participants (see Badal, 2013:28-31).

and busy year and time constraints and extra-curricular and co-curricular duties had to be factored in before consent was given.

Information about the nature of the study was communicated to all the parties involved. Permission was obtained from the principal of the school, the Research Ethics Committee at Stellenbosch University and from the Gauteng Department of Education, as well as the parents of the learners and the learners themselves. Learners were given an overview of the context as well as the process and time frame in order to volunteer freely.

3.4   Data Collection

A two-pronged approach (discussed below) was used to ensure validity and to elicit responses from the candidates in order to answer the research question.
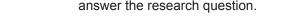
3.4.1 Literature contextual test

This study focused on investigating how learners responded to the pragmatic features of a literary text (which in this case was The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald) and how they used knowledge in context. The pragmatic component of the test had a total score of 25 and the non-pragmatic component had a score of 15 in keeping with the weighting suggested by the Department of Basic Education Examination Guidelines 2012. The test included questions of a pragmatic nature which required learners to use knowledge in context to infer implied meanings and questions that only involved superficial engagement with the text. The LCT required learners to be able to make inferences and access knowledge beyond the written word, make predictions, use linguistic cues, and interpret idiomatic language and specific phrases because the features mentioned are the pragmatic elements inherent in literary texts.

3.4.2 Semi-structured interviews

The next stage of this study took the form of individual interviews which served to yield qualitative information about the participants.

Welman and Kruger (2004: 161) list as one of the reasons that necessitate a semi-structured interview, the fact that the respondents come from diverse backgrounds. The candidates were asked questions restricted to particular themes, but the order and phrasing of the questions sometimes differed from person to person depending on the individual respondent's cultural background, experiences and level of competency. Semi-structured interviews also provided the opportunity to diagnose each individual candidate's performance in the test. Individuals were asked to provide possible reasons for the answers produced and in this way provided valuable insight, which helped to answer the research question.

4. Data analysis

Stemler (2001) notes that in priori data coding, categories are only described after the preliminary investigation of the data are concluded. The data captured in the interviews were therefore constructed inductively by proceeding from "particulars to general themes."

However the LCT was marked using a marking memorandum which was not exhaustive in nature as original responses that were well substantiated were credited.2

5. Findings

The aim of this study was to investigate whether there was a difference in the way that L1 and L2 learners accessed the pragmatic features of a literary test in order to examine whether poor acquisition of pragmatic behaviour and insufficient exposure to the indirect nature of the target language can cause poor interpretative skills especially in the understanding of implied language. In order to obtain these answers, pragmatic and non-pragmatic performance in the test was analysed and follow-up interviews conducted in which the respondents' answering strategies and conflict over pragmatic features (metaphoric and figurative components of language) in the test were discussed.

5.1 Literature Contextual Test

Both L1 and L2 learners struggled to make meaning, especially in deciphering implicatures and inferences because some learners concentrated on line references instead of context. However, L2 participants were especially disadvantaged by idiomatic language and specific expressions such as 'pulling my leg' and 'know you next time' as they looked at them superficially. Taguchi (2005:547) argues that when something is implied the reader has to be aware of incongruity between the literal interpretation of the utterance and the intention of the utterance and be able to understand the intention of its use. It was interesting to note that there were varying degrees of pragmatic development in learners within the same linguistic group and between the two groups, which revealed that pragmatic awareness had been acquired and developed in different ways in both the L1 and the L2 community.

The results are presented according to the scores obtained by the L1 and L2 groups and the focus is mainly on the difference in scores between the pragmatic and non-pragmatic features. In the study they were examined merely for descriptive purposes so a mixed method approach was not warranted.

---

2   For more information on the LCT, memorandum and participant responses (see Badal, 2013:82-246).

5.1.1 Scores obtained by the L1 and L2 groups

The following themes were identified, after the analysis of the LCT:[3]

- L1 participants scored higher than L2 participants in both the non-pragmatic and pragmatic features of the test.

- The average difference in scores between L1 and L2 in respect of accessing pragmatic features of a text is 30, 4% while the average difference in scores with regards to accessing non-pragmatic features of the text is 22, 7%.

- There is an average difference of 20,8% in scores obtained by L1 learners in non-pragmatic features (76%) and pragmatic features (55,2%) of the text, which clearly illustrate that L1 learners performed better in non-pragmatic features of the text.

- The average difference in scores between L2 non-pragmatic features (53, 3%) and pragmatic features (24, 8%) is 28, 5% also clearly establishing the fact that the participants struggled to access pragmatic features of the text.

- There seems to be a greater disparity in the scores obtained by L1 (55,2%) and L2 (24,8%) in the pragmatic aspect of the test.

- The highest score obtained by L1 participants was obtained by EE (76%) while the highest score achieved in the L2 group was by GG and HH who both received just a pass of 40% revealing a 35% difference.

- The lowest score obtained by L1 participants was obtained by CC (40%) while the lowest score obtained by L2 participants was obtained by FF (8%) which reveals a 32% difference between the lowest scores achieved.

- All the L1 participants obtained scores of well over 40% except for (CC) in the aspect testing pragmatic knowledge, while only two of the L2 candidates obtained scores of 40% reflecting poor performance.

L1 participants obtained much higher scores than L2 participants in the pragmatic features of the test. However, the average difference in scores obtained by L1 learners between non-pragmatic and pragmatic features of a text indicates that they also struggled with pragmatic interpretation.

Another interesting phenomenon was that all the L1 participants obtained scores of 40% (which is regarded as a pass in the South African schooling context) and above on the aspect testing pragmatic knowledge, while only two of the L2 candidates passed with scores that reflect poorly on pragmatic awareness.

---

3   For the table indicating scores of individual participants (see Badal, 2013:40).

4.2 Interview data based on responses to pragmatic questions

Responses from the LCT and the interview were correlated and analysed in order to understand better how L1 and L2 learners interact with the text and whether epistemic factors contributed to their interpretation of a literary text. Candidates were given a copy of the transcripts and were asked to verify the information contained in it and give consent for its use, which they did.

All the L1 speakers listed interpretation and some aspect of metaphoric language as a barrier to obtaining really good marks and some complained that their interpretation was not like the teachers' (reference to the teacher's interpretation here relates to their experiences in previous English classrooms) and never referred to the author's intention, which revealed teacher dominance in providing the right answer. While they referred to aspects that prevented them from excelling, they were confident, at ease and articulate. Some of their responses are provided verbatim below:

AA (L1):   Ah Ma'am I think not every line will be a different interpretation, it might be the overall view of the novel, that might be a different meaning, most of the time it will bring the same meaning but some people might overlook a certain situation or a certain line ma'am, whereas others will focus on that line.

EE (L1):   want to say irony but I'm not sure if it's irony but if you asked me to explain what's irony, I couldn't and then I can identify it (pause) or what is exaggerated sometimes I'm a bit taken aback.

All the L2 participants struggled with the pragmatic questions. Many of them used prior cultural and epistemic knowledge which did not match that of the author and thus missed the intended meaning of the text. They also struggled to express the difficulties they experienced but this could also be because leading questions could not be asked. Predominantly, candidates revealed that they just quoted the line or passage referred to in the question when they were asked questions that required inferencing:

JJ (L2):   No ma'am I did the passage, I wrote the passage down.

FF (L2):   I understand but on a basic level, like I understand what's going on but not like maybe you know they always ask for the underneath, what's underneath, I don't get that, that's what I don't understand.

HH (L2):   Well it's the deeper understanding of things normally I just go and umm ask it or umm I don't go that deep into because when I read I read it as is I don't go deeper into what his trying to say.

FF (L2):   In Ghana they call people with one leg bootleggers, because I always thought someone who because we used to call people bootleggers as someone who doesn't have a leg.

134

There are many instances in the learners' scripts that reveal the disparity between the two groups in pragmatic knowledge especially in the form of inferencing speaker intention. It is not possible to mention all of them so the example provided should give some idea of areas in the text that could cause conflict.

In the following excerpt learners were asked to explain how the narrator reveals that Gatsby was lying about his adventures abroad:

> …with an effort I managed to restrain my incredulous laughter. The very phrases were worn so threadbare that they evoked no image except that of a turbaned 'character' leaking sawdust at every pore as he pursued a tiger through the Bois de Boulogne.

Learners' responses listed below reveal to what extent each group was disadvantaged or had an advantage over the other:

AA (L1):   The author portrays Gatsby as a puppet riding a horse while he was hunting tigers. I think he is not real so his story is also not real. He also says the words worn threadbare which means worn out and old, could be that his story is old. The narrator says that "restrain my incredulous laughter" means that he was laughing at Gatsby's story because he didn't believe it anymore.

JJ (L2):   He was hunting a tiger in the jungle. How can he go hunting when he is so rich he can have some go hunting for him? So I think he was lying.

Both the learners' answers are not perfectly constructed but AA demonstrates the ability to make an inference and only falls short in terms of extending the discussion. However, JJ's answer reveals that inferencing is challenging and fails to see the author's intention. Furthermore, her answer is a clear example of using epistemic knowledge that conflicts with author intention.

The interviews revealed that almost all the L1 participants had either English stories or fairy tales read or told to them at an early age. Moreover, resources were provided for them in the form of books, movies or stories in the form of audio-books. It is important to clarify at this point that both L1 and L2 learners came from middle to high income homes so the availability of resources in the home was not a factor. All of them declared that they had access to books, TVs and other forms of media. However, only the L1 learners mentioned that they had fables and fairy tales read to them and went on to read on their own.

All the L1 participants have experienced some form of indirect instruction from parents and caregivers. They said that at times they had to interpret indirect instructions from their parents which were sometimes said in an ironic or sarcastic manner.

The L1 participants also indicated that they used puns, verbal irony and sarcasm for humour and comedic purposes, and illustrated the ability to use these devices, which gave them a platform for understanding how language is manipulated.

DD (L1):   'It's a beautiful day and the grass is so long, so long,' and then he would walk away, that means that I have to cut the grass or he would be sitting on the couch and be like, 'I'm really in the mood for coffee' and I'd have to make him coffee.

L2 candidates reported a different exposure to language and narratives. Most of the L2 candidates reported that they did not grow up with Western fairy tales or imaginative Western literature and some of them had exposure to the target language in terms of literature and manipulation of language only at school.

5.   Discussion

The current study, in keeping with the findings of Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei (1998) and Niezgoda and Röver (2001) mentioned earlier, found that pragmatic knowledge differed amongst L1 and L2 speakers and showed that there is a need for further research in the field and in the South African context in particular.

The premise that early introduction to Western literature facilitates understanding and interpretation of literature texts was borne out in the research which showed that L2 learners who were not exposed to such texts did not possess sufficient pragmatic knowledge to understand implicatures. Interestingly enough, both L1 and L2 learners referred to interpretation of the text, finding meaning and accessing deeper structures of the text to be challenging.

Exposure to the language through interaction with users of the language positively influenced the L1 learners in the acquisition of language behaviour. The L2 learners' responses revealed that they did not have access to appropriate language use and idiomatic language to the extent that their L1 peers had.

In addition, the marked difference between L2 learners' performance in non-pragmatic features and pragmatic features revealed the influence that insufficient knowledge of target language norms, literary conventions and pragmatic usage had on L2 understanding and on interpretation of a literary text. Overall results showed that L1 learners have better pragmatic skills and knowledge about how to use language in context than L2 learners.

Limitations to this study are linked to time constraints. More time would have allowed the researcher the opportunity to re-test the learners in order to observe whether they had actually benefitted from the corrective feedback provided in the interviews.

6.   Conclusion and recommendations

The study that is reported in this article sought to investigate whether there is a difference between L1 and L2 learners' ability to access meaning and the extent to which their frames of reference influenced their ability to extract meaning from the text (from The Great Gatsby) which was chosen to set the LCT.

Sperber and Wilson (1981) suggest that communication is not obtained by deciphering the words in a text only but by interpreting contextual clues, thus making inferences regarding the speaker's intention.

It was evident that learners who were not exposed to Western stories, narratives or discourse had difficulties interpreting such texts as the literature in the theoretical framework revealed. These difficulties came through in a number of ways: superficial interpretation of the text, inadequate knowledge of target language norms and behaviour and difficulty with specific English phrases and idiomatic language which they associated with their L1 and searched for answers as follows: FF in Tri4; GG in Afrikaans; HH in Mandarin; II in Sotho and JJ in Xhosa instead of the target language. The research showed that L2 learners who did not have a storehouse of knowledge of textual structures and did not interact with caregivers and their community in an indirect manner in keeping with language behaviour found in the text, struggled with pragmatic content (Rosaldo, cited in Hinkel, 1994).

The results indicated that the disparity between L1 and L2 pragmatic fluency exists and should be addressed. The type of skill demonstrated in this research may be required in other learning areas as well. The tertiary environment also requires an advanced level of pragmatic skill for which the foundation is laid at school.

Teachers should be especially knowledgeable in areas of a story that might cause miscomprehension and also be sensitive to learners whose pragmatic knowledge may be different because of different cultural backgrounds.

When lessons are planned, activating prior knowledge (a stipulated requirement) should not be understood to mean all learners have knowledge related to understanding the text. Pragmatic knowledge cannot be given out in doses in the HL classroom, so opportunities to acquire the knowledge should be created from the Foundation Phase, as research has shown that pragmatic knowledge is acquired over time. Teaching contextual aspects of language use may create a heightened sense of awareness of the communicative boundaries of the target language and should not only focus on ability to locate answers and finding the answer that correlates with the teacher's memoranda or rubrics. In addition, teaching the importance of the socio-cultural context of language use necessitates the acquisition of knowledge of the theories and research models in the domain of communicative competence which would inform pedagogic lesson planning and classroom practice.

---

4   FF is originally from Ghana hence Tri is her L1.

So I come back to Humpty Dumpty – Humpty's arrogance lies in the fact that he is pragmatically aware of the implicit nature of language and is ready to use it to his advantage. In all fairness, shouldn't everyone have this knowledge if they are going to be tested by the same instrument?

References

Avos, M. A., Plasencia, A., Chavez, C., & Rascón, J. 2007. Modified guided reading: Gateway to English as a second language and literacy learning. *The Reading Teacher*, 61(4):31-53.

Babbie, E. & Mouton, J. 2004. *The practice of social research*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bachman, L.F. 1990. *Fundamental Considerations in Language Testing.* New York: New York Press.

Bachman, L.F. & Palmer, A.S. 1996. *Language testing in practice: Designing and developing useful language tests*. Oxford: OUP.

Badal, B. 2013. Investigating English home language and L2 learner's ability to access pragmatic and contextual aspects of a literary text. Masters' thesis. University of Stellenbosch. (Unpublished).

Bardovi-Harlig, K. & Dörnyei Z. 1998. Do language learners recognize pragmatic violations? Pragmatic versus grammatical awareness in Instructed L2 Learning. TESOL Quarterly, 32(2):233-262.

Barry, D.M. 1999. Curriculum Reform in South Africa: Assessment of English in the National Qualifications Framework. PhD thesis. Johannesburg: Rand Afrikaans University. (Unpublished).

Blum-Kulka, S. & Hamo, M. 2011. Discourse pragmatics. In: van Dijk, T. Ed. 2011. *Discourse Studies: A Multidisciplinary Introduction*. 2nd ed. London: Sage Publications.pp. 143-164.

Bouton, L.F. 1988. A cross-cultural study of ability to interpret implicatures in English. *World Englishes,* 7(2):183-196.

Bouton, L.F. 1999. Developing nonnative speaker skills in interpreting conversational implicatures in English. In Hinkel, E. Ed. 1999. *Culture in Second Language Teaching and Learning.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.pp. 47-70.

Bromberek-Dyzman, K. & Ewert, A. 2010. Figurative competence is better developed in L1 than in L2, or is it? Understanding conversational implicatures in L1 and L2. In: Pütz, M. & Sicola, L. Eds. *Cognitive Processing in Second Language Acquisition: Inside the Learner's Mind.* Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company. pp. 317-334.

Brown, P. & Levinson, S. C. 1978. Universals of Language usage: politeness phenomena. In: Goody, E. Ed. *Questions and politeness.* Cambridge: Cambridge University press.

Brown, P. & Levinson, S. 1987. *Politeness: Some universals in language usage.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Brüssow, S. M. & Wilkinson, A. C. 2010. Engaged learning a pathway to better teaching. *South African journal of higher education*, 24 (3):374-391.

Canale, M. & Swain, M. 1980. Theoretical Bases of Communicative Approaches to Second Language Teaching and Testing. *Applied Linguistics*, (1):1-47.

Carrol, L. 1871. *Through the Looking Glass*. United Kingdom: Macmillan.

Crothers, E. J. 1978. Inference and Coherence. *Discourse Processes*, 1:51-71.

De Aquino, C. 2011. Pragmatic Competence: how can it be developed in the foreign language classroom? *BELT Journal*, 2 (2):140-153.

Department of Basic Education (DBE) 2012. Examination Guidelines Grades 10-12. English Home Language. Literature. Department of Basic Education. South Africa.

Fitzgerald, F. 1990. *The Great Gatsby*. England: Penguin Books

Hoadley, U. & Jansen, & Jansen, J. 2012. Curriculum: organizing knowledge of the classroom. 3rd ed. Cape Town: Oxford University Press Southern Africa.

Hinkel, E. 1994. Native and Non-Native Speaker's Pragmatic Interpretation of English Texts. *TESOL Quarterly*, 28(2):353-376.

Kern, G. R. 1989. Second Language Reading Strategy. Instruction: Its Effects on Comprehension and Word Inference Ability. *The Modern Language Journal, 7(2):135-149.*

Lee, J. S. 2002. Interpreting conversational implicatures: A study of Korean learners of English. *The Korea TESOL Journal*, 5(1):1-25.

Leedy, P. & Ormrod, J. E. 2001. *Practical research: planning and design*. 7th ed. New Jersey: Pearson Education International and Pretence Hall.

Mateas, M. & Sengers, P. 1998. *Narrative Intelligence*. American Association for Artificial Intelligence. Available: https://users.soe.ucsc.edu/~michaelm/publications/mateas-aaai-symp-ni-1999.pdf [Accessed: 14 November 2016].

Mey, J. L. 2003. Literary Pragmatics. In: Schiffrin, D., D. and Hamilton, H. E. Eds. 2003. *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing. pp. 236—247.

Mkhabela, M & M Malan. 2004. By die 40% eerstejaars druip. Skoksyfer kos belastingbetalers R1 miljard p.j. Rapport 26 September p. 2.

Myers, D.M. 1997. *Qualitative Research in Information Systems*. MISQ Discovery Archive. Available: http://misq.org/misq/downloads/download/editorial/353/ [Accessed: 15 November 2016]

Niezgoda, K. & Röver, C. (2001). *Pragmatics in language teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ortactepe, D. 2011. A conversation-pragmatic approach to explore Turkish international students' conceptual socialization in the United States. *SLA & Teaching*, 18:12-24.

Rademeyer, A. 2005. Te veel studente „hoort nie werklik op universiteit": Tot soveel as 30% van eerstejaars het nie vrystelling nie. Die Burger, 14 Mei 2005.

Sperber, D. & Wilson, D. 1981. Irony and the use-mention distinction. In: Cole, P. Ed. *Radical Pragmatics*. New York: Academic Press.

Sebolai, K. 2014. Evaluating academic literacy teaching at a South African University: a case study of an academic literacy programme. *Journal for Language Teaching*. 48(1):51- 69.

Taguchi, N. 2005. Comprehending Implied Meaning in English as a Foreign Language. *The Modern Language Journal*, 89:543-562.

Taguchi, N. 2007. Development of speed and accuracy in Pragmatic comprehension in English as a foreign language. *TESOL Quarterly*, 4, (2):313-338.

Van der Slik, F.W.P. & Weideman, A. 2007. Testing Academic Literacy over time: Is the academic literacy of first year students deteriorating. *Ensovoort*, 11 (2): 126-137.

Tsou, W. 2005. Improving the speaking Skill through Instruction. *Foreign Language Annals*, 38(1):46-55.

Van der Walt, J.L. & Steyn, J.N.R. 2008. Pragmatic Validation of a test of academic literacy at tertiary level. *Ensovoorts*, 11(2):138-153.

Van Dyk, T., H. and Weideman, A. 2004. Switching constructs: on the selection of appropriate blueprint for academic literacy assessment. *Journal for Language Teaching*, 38(1): 1-13.

Van, Rooyen, H. 1990.The disparity between English as a subject and English as the medium   of learning. (A final report of the Threshold Project) Report SOLING-20 Pretoria: HSRC.

Vygotsky, L. 1978. *Mind in Society. Cambridge*, MA: Harvard University Press.

Weideman, A. J. 2003. Academic Literacy: *Prepare to Learn*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.

Welman, J. C. & Kruger, S.J. 2004. *Research methods*. 2nd ed. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bernice Badal

Lecturer at the University of South Africa

Email address: badalb@unisa.ac.za

Bernice Badal is a Lecturer at the University of South Africa. Her field of interest: educational change: teacher/student empowerment; teacher/learner status and autonomy and issues in multicultural educational spaces

Tydskrif vir Taalonderrig - Journal for Language Teaching - Ijenali yokuFundisa iLimi - IJenali yokuFundisa iiLwimi - Ibhuku Lokufundisa Ulimi - Tšenale ya tša Go ruta Polelo - Buka ya Thuto ya Puo - Jenale ya Thuto ya Dipuo - Ijenali Yekufundzisa Lulwimi - Jena?a ya u Gudisa Nyambo - Jenala yo Dyondzisa Ririmi - Tydskrif vir Taalonderrig - Journal for Language Teaching - Ijenali yokuFundisa iLimi - IJenali yokuFundisa iiLwimi - Ibhuku Lokufundisa Ulimi - Tšenale ya tša Go ruta Polelo - Buka ya Thuto ya Puo - Jenale ya Thuto ya Dipuo - Ijenali Yekufundzisa Lulwimi - Jena?a ya u Gudisa Nyambo - Jenala yo Dyondzisa Ririmi - Tydskrif vir Taalonderrig - Journal for Language Teaching - Ijenali yokuFundisa iLimi - IJenali yokuFundisa iiLwimi - Ibhuku Lokufundisa Ulimi - Tšenale ya tša Go ruta Polelo - Buka ya Thuto ya Puo - Jenale ya Thuto ya Dipuo - Ijenali Yekufundzisa Lulwimi - Jena?a ya u Gudisa Nyambo - Jenala yo Dyondzisa Ririmi - Tydskrif vir Taalonderrig - Journal for Language Teaching - Ijenali yokuFundisa iLimi - IJenali yokuFundisa iiLwimi - Ibhuku Lokufundisa Ulimi - Tšenale ya tša Go ruta Polelo - Buka ya Thuto ya Puo - Jenale ya Thuto ya Dipuo - Ijenali Yekufundzisa Lulwimi - Jena?a ya u Gudisa Nyambo - Jenala yo Dyondzisa Ririmi - Tydskrif vir Taalonderrig - Journal for Language Teaching - Ijenali yokuFundisa iLimi - IJenali yokuFundisa iiLwimi - Ibhuku Lokufundisa Ulimi - Tšenale ya tša Go ruta Polelo - Buka ya Thuto ya Puo - Jenale ya Thuto ya Dipuo - Ijenali Yekufundzisa Lulwimi - Jena?a ya u Gudisa Nyambo - Jenala yo Dyondzisa Ririmi - Tydskrif vir Taalonderrig - Journal for Language Teaching - Ijenali yokuFundisa iLimi - IJenali yokuFundisa iiLwimi - Ibhuku Lokufundisa Ulimi - Tšenale ya tša Go ruta Polelo - Buka ya Thuto ya Puo - Jenale ya Thuto ya Dipuo - Ijenali Yekufundzisa Lulwimi - Jena?a ya u Gudisa Nyambo - Jenala yo Dyondzisa Ririmi - Tydskrif vir Taalonderrig - Journal for Language Teaching - Ijenali yokuFundisa iLimi - IJenali yokuFundisa iiLwimi - Ibhuku Lokufundisa Ulimi - Tšenale ya tša Go ruta Polelo - Buka ya Thuto ya Puo - Jenale ya Thuto ya Dipuo - Ijenali Yekufundzisa Lulwimi - Jena?a ya u Gudisa Nyambo - Jenala yo Dyondzisa Ririmi - - Tydskrif vir Taalonderrig - Journal for Language Teaching - Ijenali yokuFundisa iLimi - IJenali yokuFundisa iiLwimi - Ibhuku Lokufundisa Ulimi - Tšenale ya tša Go ruta