The Implication of Pragmatic Meaning Comprehension in Teaching ESP Reading Skill

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Abstract: The aim of this article is to describe the implication of pragmatic meaning comprehension in teaching ESP reading skill. It is assumed that the reader needs pragmatic meaning comprehension to deal with ESP text consisting of linguistic devices which can be interpreted by paying attention to pragmatic meaning of language. The research was conducted at the Industrial Engineering Faculty of Trisakti University with sample (n) of 100 students using simple random sampling by Lottery. The data analyzed by using simple regression test and simple correlation test revealed that there is a positive relationship between pragmatic meaning comprehension and ESP reading skill. The strength of correlation between pragmatic meaning comprehension and ESP reading skill is stated by the coefficient of determination \( r^2 = (0.711)^2 = 0.5055 \). It means that 50.55% of ESP reading skill is determined by pragmatic meaning comprehension. In other words, pragmatic meaning comprehension gives a contribution of 50.55% to ESP reading skill.

After all, it is concluded that increasing of pragmatic meaning comprehension implies for the increasing of ESP reading skill. Therefore, the implication toward teaching strategies as the efforts to increase pragmatic meaning comprehension should be systematically undertaken in teaching ESP reading skill as it proves to be very significant in improving students’ ESP reading skill.

Key Words: Pragmatic Meaning Comprehension, ESP teaching, ESP Reading Skill

Introduction

The goal of applying ESP teaching in the University is to meet the need of non-English department students in studying English related to their specialties. A need analysis reveals that ESP learners need English in order to be able to read texts in their subject specialties (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987). Therefore, one important goal in ESP teaching is to increase the non-English department students’ reading skill.

By having good ESP reading skill it enables the non-English department students to support their academic studies, personal development and professional success. About 400 million people in the world today use English as a second or foreign language. Many of these people are professionals whose success or failure may well depend on their ability to read the latest scientific and technical publications in English (Lopez, Marchi B., and Coyle, 1997). In addition, reading is as a skill of great importance to the learner, because (a) it provides him with access to a great quantity of further experience of language, and (b) it gives him a window onto the normal means of continuing his personal education (Strevens,1977).

From the descriptions above we can’t deny that teaching ESP reading skill is very much needed by non-English department students not only for their academic studies, personal development and professional success but also experience of language and a window to further education.

However, the factual condition in teaching ESP reading skill for non English department students is many of them leave high school without having enough skill in English particularly in reading. Many more depart with reading skills so inadequate that they can’t hope to survive the demands of English reference books in their academic studies. Most non-English department students find that the subject matter materials are more difficult to read than those that tell a story. In this case most students fail to learn to read adequately in a foreign language (Karlin, 1984).

The condition above is admitted by many ESP students. It is true that some can communicate in English however they still have problem in dealing with reading skill particularly when they have to deal with the English reference books on their academic studies, they prefer finding a short cut way to pay a translation agent though the result cannot satisfy them.

The fact above cannot be left alone without any meaningful action from us as a lecturer. Therefore, an adjustment effort should be made in order to produce good quality of education. In this case, ESP reading skill should be applied correctly by searching for the factors that can give
significant contributions toward the improvement of teaching and learning process. This article will propose the pragmatic meaning comprehension to be applied in teaching ESP reading skill.

**Literature Review**

**The Role of Pragmatic Meaning Comprehension in ESP Reading Skill.**

If we mean by reading only the ability to sound out words, such as a newsreader on TV of course the majority of the students can do it. However, ESP reading in this case requires a skill to comprehend the message delivered by the author. Reading is aiming to get the message or idea conveyed by the author. Reading process often depict the act of reading as a communication event between a sender (the write) and a receiver of information (the reader) (Vaca, Vaca and Gove, 1987). In this case, pragmatic meaning is the meaning a sentence has only as part of the interaction between writer and reader. This is the meaning that reflects the writer’s feelings, attitudes and his intention that the reader should understand (Nuttall, 1982). In other words, it can be meant that ESP reading process involves the pragmatic meaning in which the reader can grasp the writer’s feelings, attitudes and purposes in the ESP text.

Furthermore, reading activities can be going on based on text consisting of linguistic devices which can be interpreted by paying attention to pragmatic meaning of language in the text (Nunan, 1992). we could not interpret the characteristic of a language correctly if we do not understand it pragmatically (Leech, 1993). Furthermore, pragmatics is concerned with the study of meaning as communicated by a speaker (or writer) and interpreted by a listener (or reader) (Yule, 1996).

In line with the statements above it can be identified that one important factor to be taken into account in dealing with an attempt to increase the students’ ESP reading skill is pragmatic meaning comprehension.

**The Concepts of Pragmatic Meaning Comprehension**

Comprehension is the ability of pupils to find, interpret, and use ideas (Kennedy, 1981). In addition, pragmatic meaning involves the interpretation of what people mean in a particular context and how the context influences what is said (Yule, 1996). Therefore, comprehension in this article involves the interpretation of what people mean in a particular context.

In line with the statement above it means that what we want to interpret dealing with pragmatic meaning is the meaning of a language based on the context. Much of everyday language use is not designed to be verbally explicit, direct and literal, but can achieve its ends in subtle ways by reliance on features of context (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975). In this case, pragmatic meaning tells us about which of several meanings to assign given the context of a sentence (Brown, 1994). Pragmatic meaning is the meanings that arise when sentences are used in contexts (Delahunty and Garvey, 1994). In addition, pragmatics is the use of language in conversation (Schapiro and Staff, 1999). Pragmatic meaning involves interaction and can be most clearly seen in conversation (Nuttal, 1982). Therefore, the term “pragmatic meaning” in this article can be defined as the meanings of sentence that arise when sentences are used in context of interaction.

Context can be broken down into different factors: addressee, purposes, addressee, content, form, medium, setting, and code (Thomas, 1987). The appropriateness in interpreting the language based on the context consisting of (1) sender, (2) receiver, (3) message form, (4) channel, (5) code, (6) topic and (7) setting (Stubbs, 1983). Furthermore, there are six characteristics which have to be available in context (1) setting: time and place; (2) participants: sender and receiver; (3) topics: what is said; (4) channel: communication facilities such as telephone, television, radio, letter, etc.; (5) pitch: in written language is signed by words such as emotionally, loudly, seriously, friendly, politely, normally, etc.; (6) purposes: communication target. Therefore, the term “context” in this research can be defined as (1) participants; (2) topics; (3) channels; (4) purposes; and (6) settings (Subyakto-N, 1994).

In line with the statements above, it can be concluded that the term “pragmatic meaning comprehension” in this article is defined as the interpretation of meaning of English sentences that arise when sentences are used in context consisting of (1) participants; (2) topics; (3) channels; (4) pitches; (5) purposes; and (6) settings.
The Concepts of ESP Reading Skill

The type of skill involving ESP reading in this case refers to cognitive activities. Reading is primarily a cognitive process, which means that the brain does most of the work (Eskey, 1986). In addition, reading involves an exercise, which is dominated by eyes and brain. The eyes receive messages and the brain then has to work out the significance of these messages (Harmer, 1991). Therefore, the term “skill” in reading process refers to the reader’s cognitive skills.

The cognitive skills are the strategies which the reader employs in making sense of a passage (Mikulecky, 1990). In addition, reading is strategic. Effective readers employ reading strategies appropriate both to the text and to the context in order to construct meaning when reading (Klein, Peterson and Simington, 1991).

Therefore, it can be pointed out that the term “skill” used related to reading means the strategies that are used by readers to attain the comprehension. The appropriate strategies applied by readers enable them to increase their speed and comprehension of texts. In other words, once the readers are conscious of the skills and how to use them, readers can learn to monitor their own comprehension and apply appropriate strategies as needed for making sense of a text.

The point of view above will imply that the main goal of the English for specific purposes reading program should be to enable students to apply the appropriate skills or strategies in reading.

Referring to the skills or strategies above, there are only three reading skills recognized as essential by most language instructors: scanning, skimming, and intensive reading (Ghani, 1983). Therefore, it can be stated that the term “skill” related to English for specific purposes reading in this research refers to (1) skimming; (2) scanning; and (2) intensive reading.

Skimming involves quickly finding the main ideas, usually by looking at the first and last paragraphs and the first sentences of other paragraphs; scanning is looking through the text for particular information, usually looking for the key words, dates, numbers, etc; and intensive reading is a kind of reading strategy which has to be done more carefully to comprehend detailed information (St. John, 1994). In addition, skimming and scanning are useful first stages for determining which parts to read carefully (Evans and John, 1998).

In most cases, especially in academic settings, a reader expects a text to make sense (Mikulecky, 1990). Furthermore, reading is comprehension; if you have not comprehended, you have not read (Flood and Lapp, 1981). The language of the text is only a tool to reach the end. The end is comprehension (Eskey, 1986). Therefore, it can be stated that the comprehension is the main goal of any reading activities.

A common way to view comprehension as being literal, inferential, and evaluative. When students read for literal meaning they are concerned merely with surface messages, when students read for inferential meaning they are concerned with reading between the lines, and when students read for critical meaning they may react to ideas from what writers say (Karlin, 1984).

From the points of views above, it can be inferred that the skimming and scanning are applied at the beginning to comprehend the literal information and intensive reading is applied to comprehend more detailed information that can be obtained by the inferential and evaluative questions based the English for specific purposes text.

In selecting the ESP text materials, we should consider the learner’s needs and level of language appropriate to the students (Cunningsworth, 1995). One of the most important contributions to the approach to ESP reading was the shift from text as a linguistic object (TALO) to text as a vehicle of information (TAVI) (Evans and John, 1998). Therefore, it can be pointed out that the suitable text for ESP students in this article is a text containing not only as a linguistic object but also as a vehicle of information which aims to increase the students’ ESP reading skill related to their specialties.

There are several important components of comprehension dealing with ESP reading skill including (1) recognizing a subject or topic, (2) determining the main idea, (3) identifying key
supporting points, (4) making inferences, and (5) understanding vocabulary in context (Langan, 1989). In addition, stated that ESP readers need to read carefully to extract meaning and the author’s attitude. Author’s attitude is particularly important (Evans and John, 1998).

In line with the statements above, it can be concluded that ESP reading skill - in this article - is defined as (1) skimming to recognize the topic and determine the main idea; (2) scanning to identify the key supporting points; and (3) intensive reading to make inferences, and predict vocabulary in context; and extract the author’s attitude based on ESP text related to Industrial Engineering.

The Conceptual Framework

Pragmatic meaning comprehension is very important for ESP readers especially when they have to comprehend pragmatic information available in ESP texts. Pragmatic information means the information which reflects the feeling, attitude or purposes written by the writer in ESP text. The ESP texts have communicative purposes which enable the writer to communicate his opinion, experience and feeling to the reader.

Furthermore, it is assumed that reading activities can be carried out based on text consisting of linguistic devices which can be interpreted by paying attention to pragmatic meaning of language. Therefore, if someone has good pragmatic meaning comprehension, it is predicted that he/she will be able to increase his/her ESP reading skill.

The term “pragmatic meaning comprehension” in this case is defined as the interpretation of meaning of English sentences that arise when sentences are used in context consisting of (1) participants; (2) topics; (3) channels; (4) pitch; (5) purposes; and (6) settings. It means by having good pragmatic meaning comprehension, the reader is not only able to comprehend the writer’s attitude in an ESP text, but also able to comprehend contextually any information available. Therefore, it is expected that pragmatic meaning comprehension can improve the reader’s ESP reading skill.

In line with the statements above, it is expected that there will be a positive relationship between pragmatic meaning comprehension and ESP reading skill. In other words, the higher the reader’s pragmatic meaning comprehension, the higher the reader’s ESP reading skill will be.

Research methodology

The writer has done a survey research with correlation study at the Industrial Engineering Faculty of Trisakti University Jakarta. It used two kinds of instrument “ESP reading skill” and “Pragmatic Meaning Comprehension” in the form of multiple choice objective tests. The sum of the samples was 100 students selected by using simple random sampling by lottery. The data analysis was done by using simple regression and simple correlation.

The result of simple regression analysis Y on X counted using SPSS for Windows Release 10.0 has obtained the regression equation \( \hat{Y} = 9.88 + 0.72X \). Then, the result of the significance and linearity test of the regression equation is described in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Variance</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>TMS</th>
<th>( F_{observed} )</th>
<th>( F_{table} )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>( \alpha = 0.05 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>44286</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regression (a)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>42849</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regression (b/a)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>727.151</td>
<td>727.151</td>
<td>100.39**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>709.649</td>
<td>7.243</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Fit</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>141.37</td>
<td>10.098</td>
<td>1.52**</td>
<td>1.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>557.80</td>
<td>6.64</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Remarks:
** : Very significant ($F_o = 100.39 > F_t = 6.90$)
ns : non significant = linear ($F_o = 1.52 < F_t = 2.30$)
df : degree of freedom
SS : Sum of Squares
TMS: Total Mean Square

Furthermore, the simple correlation analysis between pragmatic meaning comprehension (X) and ESP reading skill using SPSS for Windows Release 10.0 has resulted correlation coefficient ($r_y$) = 0.711. Then, the significance test of correlation coefficient X between Y can be seen in the following table 2.

Table 2. The Result of Analysis of Significance Test of Correlation Coefficient between X and Y

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N</th>
<th>$r_y$</th>
<th>$r_y^2$</th>
<th>$t_{observed}$</th>
<th>$t_{table}$</th>
<th>$t_{table}$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100</td>
<td>0.711</td>
<td>0.5055</td>
<td>14.23**</td>
<td>1.66</td>
<td>2.37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Remarks:
** : Very significant ($t_o = 14.23 > t_t = 2.37$)

$r_y$ = Correlation coefficient between X and Y

The result of significance test in the table above shows that the correlation coefficient between pragmatic meaning comprehension and ESP reading skill is very significant.

Therefore, the research finding proves that there is a positive relationship between pragmatic meaning comprehension and ESP reading skill. It means the higher the pragmatic meaning comprehension the better the ESP reading skill will be. The strength of correlation between pragmatic meaning and ESP reading skill is stated by the coefficient of determination ($r_y^2 = (0.711)^2 = 0.5055$). It means that 50.55% of ESP reading skill is determined by pragmatic meaning comprehension. In other words, pragmatic meaning comprehension gives a contribution of 50.55% to ESP reading skill.

**Conclusion**

In line with the research finding above it is concluded that the increasing of pragmatic meaning comprehension implies for the increasing of ESP reading skill. Therefore, the implication toward teaching strategies as the efforts to increase pragmatic meaning comprehension should be systematically undertaken in teaching ESP reading skill as it proves to be very significant in improving students’ ESP reading skill.

**Implication**

In line with the conclusion above some implications toward teaching strategies as the efforts to increase pragmatic meaning comprehension should be systematically undertaken in teaching ESP reading skill as follows:

**V.1 Pre-Reading Activities**

We should undertake an effort that aims at giving exercises in pragmatic meaning comprehension that has been formulated such as interpreting the sentences based on the context of (1) participants, (2) topics, (3) channels, (4) pitches, (5) purposes, and (6) settings. Let’s start with the following exercises. Examples.....

**V.1.1. The Context of Participants**

Example: Before starting the monthly meeting, the manager said “it’s very hot in here”. From the context, you can interpret that the manager is .......................
A. Asking his staff to turn on the Air Condition.
B. Just expressing the real situation in the room
C. Asking his staff to go out
D. Complaining the meeting room

V.1.2. The Context of Topics

Example: On the flight to Bangkok your friend was sitting next to a foreigner from USA. In their conversation you heard, “By the way, what do you do in USA? I am an industrial engineer”, said the foreigner. From the context, you can interpret that the topic of their conversation is about

A. Occupation
B. Asking directions
C. Expressing opinion
D. Introduction

V.1.3. The Context of Channels

Example: When your friend calling Linda, the voice on the phone said, “Speaking, who’s calling?”. From the context, you can interpret that

A. Linda can’t answer the phone
B. Linda is on the phone
C. Linda’s friend is on the phone
D. Linda is calling someone else

V.1.4. The Context of Pitches

Example: One employee accidently met his new manager in one morning. He was greeting his manager loudly, “Morning, Mr Manager, how is your work today?”. From the context, you can interpret that the employee is

A. loyal
B. good
C. educated
D. rude

V.1.5. The Context of Purposes

Example: While entering his secretary room, the manager said, “Listen! The phone is ringing”. From the context, you can interpret the purpose of the manager enter his secretary room is to

A. Entertain the secretary
B. Ask for a help
C. Invite the secretary
D. Persuade the secretary

V.1.6. The Context of Settings

Example: “Good, you are beautiful, dear!”, said mother to her daughter when looking at her daughter coming home late in the afternoon. From the context, you can interpret that

A. Her mother was happy to see her daughter
B. Her daughter looked beautiful that afternoon
C. Her mother spoiled her daughter
D. Her mother was getting mad to her daughter

V.2. While Reading Activities

We should undertake an effort that aims at interpreting the meaning based on the context in ESP text. Let’s do the following exercise!

Military awards have long been considered symbolic of royalty, and thus when the United States was a young nation just finished with revolution and eager to distance itself from anything line tasting of monarchy, there was strong sentiment against military decoration. For a century, from the end of the Revolutionary War until the Civil War, the United States awarded no military honors. The institution of honor in 1861 was a source of great discussion and concern. From the
Civil War until World War I, the medal of honor was the only military award given by the United States government, and today it is awarded only in the most extreme cases of heroism. Although the United States is still somewhat wary of granting military awards, several awards have been instituted since World War I. (Source: Longman TOEFL TEST, P. 310)

V.2.1 The tone of the passage is
(A) angered
(B) humorous
(C) outraged
(D) informational

V.2.2. The author’s purpose in this passage is to
(A) describe the history of military awards from the Revolutionary war to the Civil war
(B) demonstrate an effect of America’s attitude toward royalty
(C) give in opinion of military awards
(D) outline various historical symbols of royalty

V.2.3. The passage would probably be assigned reading in a course on
(A) general science
(B) psychology
(C) American history
(D) interior decoration

V.3. Post Reading Activities

We should undertake an effort that should be aimed at measuring the ESP reading Skill based on the concepts of ESP reading skill namely (1) recognizing the topic, (2) determining the main idea, (3) identifying the key supporting points, (4) making inferences, (5) predicting vocabulary in context, and (6) extracting the author’s attitude.

The invention of the electric telegraph gave birth to the communications industry. Although Samuel B. Morse succeeded in making the invention useful in 1837, it was not until 1843 that the first telegraph line of consequence was constructed. By 1860 more than 50,000 miles of lines connected people east of the Rockies. The following year, San Francisco was added to the network. The national telegraph network fortified the ties between east and west and contributed to the rapid expansion of the railroads by providing an efficient means to monitor schedules and routes. Furthermore, the extension of the telegraph, combined with the invention of the steam-driven rotary printing press by Richard M. Hoe in 1846, revolutionised the world of journalism. Where the business of news gathering had been dependent upon the mail and on hand-operated presses, the telegraph expanded the amount of information a newspaper could supply and allowed for more timely reporting. The establishment of the Associated Press as a central wire service in 1846 marked the advent of a new era in journalism. (Source: TOEFL Reading Flash, p. 95)

V.3.1. What is probably the most suitable topic of the passage?
A. The History of Journalism
B. The Origin of the National Telegraph
C. How the Telegraph Network Contributed to the Expansion of Railroads
D. The Contributions and Development of the Telegraph Network

V.3.2. The main idea of the first paragraph is...
A. The national telegraph network
B. The communications industry
C. The invention of the electric telegraph
D. The first telegraph line

V.3.3. According the passage, how did the telegraph enhance the business of news gathering?
A. By adding San Francisco to the network
B. By allowing for more timely reporting
C. By expanding the railroads
D. By monitoring schedules and routes for the railroads
V.3.4. The world “revolutionised” in the passage is closest in meaning to......
A. Transformed  C. Revolved
B. Gathered  D. Destroyed

V.3.5. It can be inferred from the passage that...
A. Samuel Morse did not make a significant contribution to the communication industry
B. Morse’s invention did not immediately achieve its full potential
C. The extension of the telegraph was more important than its invention
D. Journalists have the Associated Press to thank

V.3.6. The author’s attitude in this passage is ......
A. To compare the invention of the telegraph with the invention of the steam-driven rotary press
B. To propose new ways to develop the communications industry
C. To show how the electric telegraph affected the communications industry
D. To criticise Samuel B. Morse

Suggestions

It is suggested that ESP lecturers design a teaching program of ESP reading skill integrated with increasing pragmatic meaning comprehension. It is also suggested that the academic researchers conduct any relevant research on ESP reading skill or pragmatic meaning comprehension with other variables by using other methodologies.

References


