INTERLANGUAGE PRAGMATICS OF CRITICISM AMONG THE STUDENTS OF SMA 2 MEJAYAN

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Official Note on Suharno’s Thesis

Dear the Director of Post Graduate Program of Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta,

Having read, examined, corrected and revised towards the thesis of,

Name : Suharno
Student number : S 200 120 048
Study program : English Language Study
Focus on : Interlanguage Pragmatics
Title : INTERLANGUAGE PRAGMATICS OF CRITICISM AMONG THE STUDENTS OF SMA 2 MEJAYAN

I agree that the thesis is eligible to be examined by the board of examiners in the magister of Language Study Post Graduate Program of Surakarta Muhammadiyah University.

Surakarta, 8 August 2015

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Official Note on Suharno’s Thesis

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Surakarta, 13 August 2015

Dr. Anam Sutopo, M.Hum.
The purpose of this study is exploring the strategy of criticism employed by the students of SMA 2 Mejayan. This study applies descriptive qualitative research. The data in this research were collected by giving discourse completion task (DCT) to 40 students. The DCT comprises nine scenarios of situation which require the students to elicit criticism. The document containing the data of criticism strategy then analyzed based on Nguyen strategy of criticism. The result of the analysis showed some findings. First, the participants tended to employ indirect criticism. Second, the strategy of negative evaluation, request for change, advice about change, and demand for change were dominantly applied over the others in almost status levels. However, some uses of the strategies were inappropriate. This may indicate that the pragmatic competence of the students about the target language is not good enough. This could be due to the lack of exposure about the target language.

Keywords: interlanguage, pragmatics, criticism

ABSTRAK

Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk menganalisa strategi kritik yang dilakukan oleh siswa SMA Negeri 2 Mejayan. Kajian ini menggunakan metode penelitian deskriptif kualitatif. Data yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini diperoleh dengan memberikan kuesioner berupa discourse completion task (DCT) kepada 40 siswa. DCT tersebut memuat sembilan scenario yang mengharuskan siswa untuk memberikan kritik. Dokumen yang berisi data tentang strategy kritik kemudian dianalisa berdasarkan strategy kritik dari Nguyen. Hasil dari penelitian ini menunjukkan adanya beberapa temuan. Pertama, bahwa dalam mengungkapkan kritik siswa cenderung menerapkan strategi tidak langsung. Kedua, strategi negative evaluation, request for change, advice about change, dan demand for change diterapkan hampir pada seluruh tingkatan status. Namun sebagian
As an educational institution, schools have launched various strategies to speed up the mastery of English to their students such as through providing an additional allocation time to study English, establishing English extracurricular, and even schools invite a tutor or informal institution to give additional teaching for their students. Unfortunately, most of what they do is commonly focusing on getting good mark to pass the minimum standard issued by the government. As a result, the students are not able to use English appropriately in social interaction. For example, when the student is supposed to criticize unfamiliar older person, he says, “Hi, is this area your own? If not, please get rid of your car from us.” The utterance could obviously bear the hearer with bad feeling of harassment to the addressee. They may be included into bad criticism proposed by Tracy, Van Dusen, & Robinson in Young (2004) for they tended to involve particularly negative language or a harsh manner. On another case when the criticism was directed to unfamiliar person with the same status level, a student said, “What are you doing? This is female toilet. Go away from here. You are not decent”. This utterance may make the addressee feel driven away and insulted. In fact, the addressee may enter the wrong toilet inadvertently or due to the condition that he could not bear with.

According to Leech’s (1993) definition, criticism is an utterance functioning to express a psychological act toward negative condition of the hearer. Pragmatically, their above utterances are definitely illocutionary act of criticism. Both of the utterances indicate the speaker’s reaction toward the
negative condition (parking car in improper place and entering improper toilet) of the addressee. However, expressing criticism shouldn’t be realized through a language which could offend others. Otherwise, the goal of giving criticism that is to change the addressee’s negative condition to the good one may not be achieved as inappropriate choice of words or utterances may damage good interpersonal relationship.

The two examples above indicate impoliteness in a communication. Brown and Levinson (1987) pointed out, face needs to be continually attended to in the process of communication, and face threatening speech acts, therefore, need to be softened so that politeness can be achieved. (Example: *Excuse me sir, would you park your car in the park area? Your car blocks other vehicle.)*

Speech act of criticism could be employed through various strategies which provide a source to investigate pragmatics competence of the criticizers. According to Nguyen (2005), criticism could be realized through either direct strategy or indirect strategy. Direct strategy of criticism includes negative evaluation, disapproval, expression of disagreement, statement of difficulty and statement of the problem. Indirect strategy which includes; correction, indicating standard, demand for change, request for change, expression of uncertainty, advice about change, suggestion for change, and asking/presupposing.

Applying criticism could bring some impacts to the addressee (Toplak and Katz, 2000). For that reason, the choice of criticism strategy is so crucial that it doesn’t violate the relationship between the interlocutors, as described in good and bad criticism (Tracy, Dusen and Robinson, 1987). The strategies are also needed in order to have effective criticism (Wajnryb, 1993).

The choice of criticism strategy could be influenced by some factors, such like superiority (Tracy and Eisenberg, 1990), level of education and age
(Gunarwan, 2001), and lack of second language linguistic competence and fluency, lack of second language pragmatic knowledge, and the influence of first language pragmatics (Nguyen, 2005). This study tries to explore the influence of difference status level and social distance/familiarity in choosing the strategy of criticism. Nguyen’s (2005) taxonomy about the strategy of criticism is applied in this study.

Criticism has been defined as an utterance which is associated with bad habit or condition of the addressee. John L. Austin (1962) defines criticism as an act which functions to express the speaker’s negative reaction of the addressee’s bad habit. Leech (1993) defines criticism as an utterance functioning to express a psychological act toward negative condition of the hearer.

Tsui (1994) defines criticism as a kind of assessment which gives negative judgment or evaluation of certain people, events or objects toward the addressee. Similarly, Searle in Martinich (1996) states that criticism is an act which tries to express negative evaluation of the hearer’s condition. Tracy, Dusen, and Robinson (1987) define criticism as an act of “finding fault” which involves giving “a negative evaluation of a person or an act for which he or she is deemed responsible”. Nguyen (2005) defines criticizing as an illocutionary act to give negative evaluation of the hearer’s actions, choice, words, and products for which he or she may be held responsible.

In the present study criticism is defined as expression to give a negative evaluation towards the bad habit or conduct of the addressee. This act is performed by the speakers as negative reaction of the addressee’s bad habit (John L. Austin: 1962) who come from different status levels of familiarity and social distance. By the different status levels, the writer expects description about the students’ pragmatic competence through various strategies of criticism employed.
Previous studies concerning about criticism were discussed in the light of cross-cultural perspective. They compared the strategy of criticism applied by native speakers and second language learners. Tracy, Dusen, and Robinson (1987) investigated the characteristics of good and bad criticisms as perceived by people from different cultural backgrounds. They found five stylistic characteristics distinguishing “good” from “bad” criticisms. Firstly, a good criticism needs to display a positive language and manner. Secondly, the suggested items must be specific and the critic must offer to help make them possible. The reasons for criticizing must be justified and made explicit and the criticism must contain positive message. A "good" criticism also does not violate the relationship between interlocutors.

Tracy and Eissenberg (1990) explored the influence of superiority related to the preferences for message clarity and politeness in giving criticisms in a workplace context among people from different races and gender. Their finding showed that superiors tended to give more weight to message clarity than did subordinates.

The different perspective of influencing factors in determining the preferable strategy of criticism is shown by Jauhari (2010). He figures out the politeness strategy done by the people to criticize each other using Brown and Levinson theory. He views the politeness strategy of criticism in terms of superiority relationship between the interlocutors. The study was done in the governance office. The result of this study shows that people having subordinate status do the strategy of negative politeness and strategy don’t do the FTA when criticizing people having greater authority. Meanwhile those who have superior status tend to use bald on-record strategy to criticize people. This study also reveals that the most influence factor is the relative power owned by Javanese people.

Tuan (2005) observed gender differences in the responses to criticisms. A total of 252 reactions were transcribed and analyzed in terms of
five broad categories of realization strategies, Apology, Counterclaim, Contradiction, Challenge and Accusation. The result showed that although the speaker gender has little impact on the use of the five main strategies across the groups, their linguistic behavior was greatly influenced by the addressees' gender.

Nguyen (2005) compared criticism strategy used by Vietnamese learners of English and Australian native speakers. She found that the English language learners criticized in significantly different ways from the Australian native speakers in terms of their preference for realization strategies, their choice of semantic formulae, and their choice and frequent use of mitigating devices.

As the realization of criticism could be manifested in various strategies, expressing criticism may involve many other speech acts. Thus the ability of the participants in using the target language is needed to be able to communicate appropriately. The ability to use language based on particular communicative context is called pragmatics competence.

Recent language studies have viewed that pragmatic competence is very important in language learning. The studies have found that even though the language of second language learners are grammatically correct, they sometimes fail in communication because of their pragmatic competence. Brock and Nagasaka (2005) noted that pragmatic incompetence in the L2, resulting in the use of inappropriate expressions or inaccurate interpretations resulting in unsuccessful communicative events, can lead to misunderstanding and miscommunication and can even leave the native-speaking interlocutor with the perception that the L2 speaker is either ignorant or impolite.

The study about pragmatic competence of foreign language learners is associated with interlanguage pragmatics. Notions about interlanguage pragmatics are stated by some researchers among others, Kasper in Likun Cai
and Yingli Wang (2013) stated that interlanguage pragmatics is the study of nonnative speakers’ use and acquisition of second language pragmatic knowledge. Nguyen (2005) argued that interlanguage pragmatics is the study of the use and acquisition of various speech acts in the target language by second language learners. In short definition, Gass and Selinker (2001) stated that interlanguage pragmatics is the study of how people learn to speak appropriately in a second language.

The present study explores how the participant express their criticism using English as their foreign language based on a particular context. By analyzing the strategies of criticism employed by the participants, the writer expected the description of the learner’s pragmatic competence. Understanding the pragmatic competence of the students as a foreign language learner is very importance especially for the teacher and the learners themselves. It may take a role as a reference to improve the foreign language learning process.

Based on the above description, the researcher raised the following research question: What strategies are used by the students of SMA 2 Mejayan to express criticism in different social contexts?

Thus, based on the question above, the objective of this research is to describe the strategies of criticizing by the students of SMA 2 Mejayan based on different social contexts. By comprehending the strategies of criticism elicited by the participants, it is expected to provide a figure about their interlanguage pragmatic competence.

2. Method

2.1 Research Participants

This study recruited a group of students of SMA 2 Mejayan, who provided interlanguage. Learner participants consist of 40 students of grade XII who are preparing for university study. They all originate from the local
area and speak Javanese dialect as their first language. They are obviously never exposed to English native speakers.

2.2 Technique of collecting and analyzing data

The data used in this study are collected from the original source first hand. Therefore, the researcher uses primary data collection techniques. In collecting data, the researcher gives a questionnaire in the form of a discourse completion task (DCT) to the participants. The questionnaire provides nine stimuli that provide the subjects with situations which elicit a criticism. Those stimuli involved three different status levels constituting either different age or occupation level (lower, equal, higher) and three social distances or familiarities (close, familiar, unfamiliar). Then subjects are asked to write their criticism for each situation.

The DCT are summarized as follows;

a. Your close friend is very rude to his younger brother. Every time his brother makes a mistake he will shout at him “Stupid!!” (DCT1: criticism to close-equal status)

b. Your younger brother always leaves his bed in a mess. Your mother always makes his bed and room tidy. (DCT2: criticism to close-lower status):

c. Recently, your elder sister likes hanging around. She often comes home late at night that makes your family worried. (DCT3: criticism to close-higher status)

d. A familiar student of your age throws garbage in improper place. (DCT4: criticism to familiar-equal status)

e. A junior student has foods and drink but he pays no cash to the canteen cashier. He does it many times. (DCT5: criticism to familiar-lower status)
f. Your teacher always asks you to write in his/her class that makes boring. (DCT6: criticism to familiar-higher status)

g. When you are in a queue in a toilet, suddenly a boy of your age enters a toilet for girls. (DCT7: criticism to unfamiliar-equal status)

h. A boy who is about the age of a Junior High School puts the waste of his chewing gum on a bench at a bus stop. (DCT8: criticism to unfamiliar-lower status)

i. A man about fifties parks his car in such a way that it blocks the access for others. (DCT9: criticism to unfamiliar-higher status)

The interlanguage data were analyzed based on Nguyen’s (2005) strategies of criticism. Two broad categories of realizing criticism are used, direct strategy and indirect strategy. Each category includes some types of criticism strategies. Due to the characteristics of the data, the researcher proposed another category of strategy which is called combined strategy. The data which contain two or more types of strategies are classified into combined strategy. Thus there are three main categories of criticism strategy employed by the writer in analyzing and classifying the collected data, namely direct strategy, indirect strategy, and combined strategy.

Direct strategy refers to the strategy of criticism which are realized explicitly and directly pointing out to the problems being criticized. This category includes the strategies of:

a. Negative evaluation (usually expressed via evaluative adjectives with negative meaning or evaluative adjective with positive meaning plus negation)

b. Disapproval (the speaker’s attitude towards the hearer’s problem)

c. Expression of disagreement (usually realized by means of negation word “No” or “I don’t agree” or “I disagree” or via arguments against hearer)
d. Statement of the problem (stating errors or problems)
e. Statement of difficulty (usually expressed by means of such structures as “I find it difficult to understand . . .”, “It’s difficult to understand”)
f. Consequences (giving warning about negative consequences of the conduct)

Indirect strategies refer to those which were expressed by implying the problems, just to raise the awareness of the inappropriateness.

This category includes the strategies of;

a. Correction (fixing errors by asserting specific alternatives).
b. Indicating standard (a rule which the speaker thinks is commonly agreed upon and applied to all).
c. Demand for change (usually expressed via such structures as “you have to”, “you must”, “it is obligatory that” or “you are required” or “you need”, “it is necessary”).
d. Request for change (usually expressed via such structures as “will you . . .?”, “can you . . .?”, “would you . . .?” or imperatives, or want-statement)
e. Advice about change (usually expressed via the performative “I advise you . . .”, or structures with “should”)
f. Suggestion for change (usually expressed via the performative “I suggest that . . .” or such structures as “you can”, “you could”, “it would be better if” or “why don’t you” etc.)
g. Expression of uncertainty (to raise the awareness about the inappropriateness).
h. Asking / presupposing (rhetorical questions to raise the awareness about the inappropriateness).
Combined strategy includes inter-combination strategy and intra-combination strategy. Meanwhile, intra-combination refers to the combination among two or more strategies existing in the same category of strategy, direct strategy or indirect strategy.

a. Inter-combination

Inter-combination strategy refers to the combination among two or more strategies existing in different category of strategy, direct strategy on one hand and indirect strategy on the other hand.

b. Intra-combination

Intra-combination refers to the combination among two or more strategies existing in the same category of strategy, direct strategy or indirect strategy.

3. Finding and Discussion

In accordance to the research question, the present study shows the following results,

3.1 The participants tend to use indirect strategy in expressing their criticism

Based on data analysis, in expressing criticism the students applied indirect strategy the most frequently. While combined strategy was used the second frequently, direct strategy was used the least.
As indicated in chart 1, indirect strategy of criticism is the major choice of the participants. Out of 360 data, 60% was identified to be the indirect strategy of criticism. Meanwhile, combined strategy was the second most frequently applied (26.4% of 360 data), and direct strategies was the least frequently (13.6% of 360 data). The figure seems in contrast to the result shown in the study of preliminary ethno pragmatic by Gunarwan (2001) which stated that younger Javanese were more straightforward than older Javanese in criticizing. However, as the result of the analysis shows, the students who are supposed to be young participants tend to apply indirect strategies in their criticism.

Despite their choice of the indirect strategies, some of their criticisms elicited by the participants do not sound softer. Some even sound rude and offensive. For example,

\(~\quad \text{What are you doing? This is female toilet. Go away from here. You are not decent.} \) (DCT8)

\(~\quad \text{Hi, is this area your own? If not please get rid of your car from us.} \) (DCT9)

The above examples of criticism could bear the hearer with bad feeling. They may be included into bad criticism proposed by Tracy, Van Dusen, & Robinson in Young (2004) for they tended to involve particularly negative language or a harsh manner. The expression of “Go away from here” in the first utterance may make the addressee feel driven away and insulted. He may enter the wrong toilet inadvertently or due to the condition that he could not bear with. Meanwhile, the use of “get rid of “in the second utterance may bring the feeling of harassment to the addressee. Such of the above examples may reflect the failure of the participants in employing the politeness strategy in their interaction.
The criticism strategies applied by the participants could be seen in the following chart,

![Chart 2: Criticism Strategies applied by the participants](image)

Note: The blue color represents direct strategies, the yellow color represents indirect strategies, while the green color represents combined strategy.

As chart 2 shows, the direct strategy includes; negative evaluation, disapproval, statement of the problem, and consequences. Expression of disagreement and statement of difficulty were not applied by the students. Indirect strategy includes; correction, indicating standard, demand for change, request for change, advice about change, suggestion for change, and asking/presupposing. Meanwhile expression of uncertainty was not applied. Combined strategy was split into two categories, inter-combination and intra-combination.

In the category of direct strategy, negative evaluation is the main choice to express criticism. Out of 360 data, 8.3% was categorized into negative evaluation strategy. The rest of the direct strategies were not significantly applied by the participants. The tendency of using negative evaluation may indicate that the
participants prefer judging negatively over something that they think incorrect.

Meanwhile in the category of indirect strategy, there are two dominant strategies applied, namely request for change (25% of 360 data) and advice about change (20.3% of 360 data). Demand for change, even though it was not so significant, was the third most frequently applied by the participants. 7.8% of 360 data was indicated as the strategy of demand for change.

The use of negative evaluation, request for change, advice about change, and demand for change in all status levels could be seen in the following chart,

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Chart 3 indicates that the direct strategy negative evaluation was applied mainly when criticizing familiar people with higher status level (30%).

The indirect strategy of advice about change was applied mainly when criticizing close people with lower status level (40%) and significantly applied when criticizing close people with the same status level (30%), close people with higher status level (22.5%), and criticizing unfamiliar people with equal status level (25%).
The indirect strategy request for change was applied mainly when criticizing familiar people with equal status level (42.5%). It was also applied significantly when criticizing unfamiliar people with higher status level (32.5%), criticizing familiar people with lower status level (32.5%), criticizing familiar people with lower status level (25%), and criticizing close people with higher status level (20%).

The indirect strategy demand for change was applied insignificantly in all status levels, but it was mainly applied in lower close level or when criticizing close people with lower status level (20%).

3.2 Some inappropriate application

In writer’s point of view there are some inappropriateness I applying the strategies. According to Brown & Levinson (1978) and Thomas (1995) in Taguchi (2006) the level of directness is determined by contextual factors such as power and social distance between the interlocutors, and the degree of imposition involved. In a more formal situation, a speech act involves a high-degree of imposition and is addressed to a person who has more power. In such a situation, the greater degree of indirectness is required to protect the face of the interlocutor. In contrast, when the speech act involves a low-degree of imposition and is produced for a person in equal relationship, the degree of required indirectness is smaller.

Some data indicated that even in a formal situation when criticizing superior/senior, the participants apply direct strategy. For example;

~ Excuse me, I think writing it is not effective. (DCT6)
I am sorry sister, but go home late at night not good for woman. (DCT3)

Even though the participants made use of supportive move ("Excuse me "and “I am sorry sister") to make the utterances less of the imposition, it doesn’t necessarily mean protecting the face of the interlocutor. The addressee may response the criticism by saying “How dare you say like that. Who are you, small boy?”

Second, some use of request for change are still inappropriate because they imply rudeness or impoliteness. For example,

~ Please get rid of your car. (DCT9)

~ Park it in place already set. (DCT9)

The above sentences are addressed to unfamiliar with higher status level. The choice of the word ‘get rid of ‘and type of command in this situation implies that the speaker shows a low respect to the addressee.

~ What are you doing? This is female toilet. Go away from here. You are not decent. (DCT7)

This sentence is employed to unfamiliar person with equal status level. Regardless of the equality, the use of command which implies the meaning of extrusion for unfamiliar person may contradict with the politeness principles.

~ You make mother worried. Don’t back home very night. (DCT.3)

~ Do not make us anxious because sister go home late and it is not good for woman. (DCT.3)

The two sentences are directed to close person with higher status level. In fact, both sentences don’t imply that the status level of the speaker is lower than that of the addressee at all. Indeed, they indicate the superiority of the speaker. In such case the participants
have failed in applying the pragmatic competence of the target language.

Third, in general, advice is mostly used in criticizing closed people. Giving personal advice and making suggestions implies a close relationship and trust. Some data showed the inappropriateness.

For example,

~ Sorry sir, you should not do it because it is obstacle other transportation. (DCT9: to unfamiliar person with higher status level)

~ Friend you should enter toilet boy not toilet girl. (DCT7: to unfamiliar person with equal status level)

As Nguyen (2007) stated giving advice was not always desirable according to native speaker norms. Advice gives potentially threatens the self-image of the advice receiver (Locher, 2006), so advice givers may use discourse strategies to reduce this threat and make their advice acceptable to the recipient.

3.3 Based Adjemin’s concept in Fauziati (2009), three of four characteristics of interlanguage are identified in this research, namely;

a. Systematically

The data showed internal consistency in applying type of prohibition in expressing criticism. This indicates one of interlanguage characteristics called systematically, a consistency in interlanguage such as an organized set of rules and basic elements (lexical items, phonological units, grammatical categories, etc.), as in;

Student 8
~ *Should you don't* saying rude like that to your brother because your brother was a little boy doesn’t know anything. *(DCT1)*

~ *Hey sis, you don’t* often leave the house and come home late at night. Our family at home worrying about you. They fear you see why out there. *(DCT3)*

~ *Hi friend, you don’t* waste in the litter because it would be a disaster and plague for us. *(DCT4)*

This student seems to express a type of suggestion (DCT1) and prohibition (DCT3 and DCT4); in Bahasa Indonesia it is similar to ‘kamu jangan …’. In his interlanguage he consistently uses construction of ‘you don’t …’ which is not common in the target language. It is commonly expressed via ‘you shouldn’t …’(DCT1), and via ‘Don’t …’ (DCT3 and DCT4).

b. Permeability,

This means that interlanguages are susceptible to infiltration by the first language and the second language rules or forms.

Student 17

~ *Should you don’t snap at your brother. (DCT1)*

(Interference of the first language ‘Seharusnya kamu jangan …’. It must be ‘You should not …’.)

~ *You must can smoothing self your bed. (DCT2)*

(Interference of the first language ‘Kamu harus dapat …’. It must be ‘You must be able to …’.)

Student 18

~ *You don’t do it again. Next time you do it and now you should not do it again. It is not good for you and seller. (DCT5)*

(Interference of the first language ‘Kamu jangan mengulanginya lagi’. It must be ‘Don’t do it anymore’)

Student 25
You do not throw the litter. You should be able to give an example for others. (DCT4)

(Interference of the first language ‘Kamu jangan membuang sampah sembarangan’. It must be ‘Don’t litter’)

c. Dynamicity,

Dynamicity means that the system of rules which learners have in their minds changes frequently, resulting in a succession of interim grammar. For examples;

Student 6

~ **You must cleaning your bedroom before you leave it. Can you do it?** (DCT2)
~ **Don’t throw away the rubbish in random. You must throw the rubbish at trashcan.** (DCT4)

Student 7

~ **You should be said to your brother with kindly sentence.** (DCT1)
~ **Hi boy, I want to advise you. You should throw bubble gum in the littering. Not in the halt. It is so disgusting.** (DCT8)

Student 13

~ **Don’t said it to your younger brother. You should said well to him.** (DCT1)
~ **Excuse me sir, please don’t park the car carelessly as blocking other vehicles.** (DCT9)

4 Conclusion

Expressing criticism may be realized through different strategies. This study show thated negative evaluation was applied mainly when criticizing familiar people with higher status level. The indirect strategy request for change was applied mainly when criticizing familiar people with equal status
level. The strategy advice about change was applied mainly when criticizing close people with lower status level.

This study may be worth of concern for the English teachers of SMA 2 Mejayan. Without putting aside the role of learning language pattern, pragmatic competence in language mastery must be exposed to the students as much as possible. Deda (2013) stated that pragmatic competence of the learner must be well developed so that he or she will be able to conduct communication with accuracy. In addition, a good comprehension about students’ pragmatic competence may help the teacher in deciding a right teaching material for students as well as learning and teaching method, by which the teaching and learning activities may be improved.

References


