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The Influence of Shaping Meaning through Context on EFL College Students' Metapragmatic Awareness

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Abstract

The current study aims at finding out the influence of shaping meaning through context on students' metapragmatic awareness. The sample of this study consists of (70) third stage students at University of Tikrit, College of Education for Women, Department of English, for the academic year 2024-2025. The instrument of this study is test that is used to collect data. The instrument of the study has been validated, and different statistical means have been used to analyze the obtained data. The results obtained have shown the efficiency of shaping meaning through context in improving students' metapragmatic awareness. Finally, some conclusions are put forward in the light of the results obtained.

Keywords: Context, Meaning, Metapragmatic awareness, College Students.

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تأثير تشكيل المعنى من خلال السياق على الوعي ما وراء التداولي لدى طلبة الجامعات دارسي اللغة الانجليزية لغة اجنبية

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الملخص

تهدف الدراسة الحالية لمعرفة تأثير تشكيل المعنى من خلال السياق على الوعي ما وراء التداولي لدى طلبة الجامعات دارسي اللغة الانجليزية لغة اجنبية. تكونت عينة الدراسة من (70) طالبة من طالبات المرحلة الثالثة بقسم اللغة الإنكليزية في كلية التربية للبنات / جامعة تكريت، للعام الدراسي (2025/2024). كما تم استخدام وسائل إحصائية مختلفة لتحليل البيانات التي تم الحصول عليها و لقد أظهرت النتائج المستخلصة كفاءة تشكيل المعنى من خلال السياق في تطوير الوعي ما وراء التداولي لدى الطلبة. تم تقديم بعض الاستنتاجات بناء على النتائج المستخلصة في الدراسة الحالية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: السياق، المعنى، الوعي ما وراء التداولي، طلبة الجامعات.

1. Introduction

1.1 The problem of the study

According to Cook (1992), pragmatic principles and theories are important in language teaching and learning due to the fact that people generally tend to learn another language because they want to increase their opportunities of communication. There is more to communication than knowledge of language. Usually, the linguistic meaning of an utterance deeply is insufficient to specify the meaning or message conveyed by that utterance. Thus, even though the capability to produce grammatically well-formed utterances with comprehensible linguistic meanings in a particular language is a crucial prerequisite for successful communication, it is definitely not adequate. As pragmatics is a discipline which explores the diverse aspects of the complex link between the linguistic meaning and contextual interpretation, it must play a main role in learning and teaching a new language. This means that the discrepancy of function and form means that we cannot depend on teaching only form. Therefore, this study is conducted to implement contextual factors in shaping meaning to enhance students' metapragmatic awareness.

1.2 Aim of the study

The current study aims at:

- Finding out the influence of shaping meaning through context on EFL college students' metapragmatic awareness.

1.3 Hypothesis of the Study

To conduct the study and fulfill its aims, it is hypothesized that:

- There is no statistical significant difference between the mean score of the experimental group performance and that of control group in the posttest.

1.4 Value of the Study

The current study is estimated to be valuable to EFL university instructors to concentrate on enhancing students' abilities in communicating through improving their metapragmatic awareness and implementing the instruction strategy of shaping meaning through context not just focusing on the linguistic skills.

1.5 Limits of the Study

It is limited to implementing a strategy of meaning constructing through context to the third stage university students at Department of English / College of Education for Women / University of Tikrit during the academic year (2024-2025).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Background

This section introduces a theoretical background and sheds light on the main variables of this study.

2.1.1 Overview of Pragmatics

According to Stadler (2002), pragmatics is the discipline that focuses on studying language in context and it seeks to discover utterance meaning based on the social and situational context in which it is entrenched. Linguistic knowledge, for example, knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, is one of the many concerns of the field of pragmatics. However, this knowledge

alone is inadequate for interacting across cultures. Therefore, pragmatics asserts that an utterance meaning cannot always be interpreted in a literal manner, but rests on the context in

which it happens. In this way, sociopragmatic knowledge must be acquired by any speaker from different background in order to enable him /her to deduce the meaning that is intended by others.

Conversational inference signifies the capability to extract the intended meaning from the literal message. Oatey and Franklin stated that (2009, quoting Thomas, 1995), ‘people do not always or even usually say what they mean.’ This means that the intended meaning often can be hidden and cannot expressed obviously. In this sense, the listener’s capacity to read between the lines and appeal the hidden meaning from the speaker’s utterance represents conversational inference.

In addition, inference is described by Gumperz (1992,233) as “hypothesis-like tentative assessments of communicative intent, that is, the listener’s interpretation of what the speaker seeks to carry.” So, listeners need to depend on background assumptions and extralinguistic which represents ‘knowledge of the world’. This knowledge is taken from usual ways of being in social situations as Scollon and Scollon (2001) suggested. In this way, conversational inference is not a procedure of conscious reflection and analysis, but more a habitual response to the social situations we are used to meeting depending on the background in a certain cultural and social setting because what speakers say, how they say it, and how what is said is interpreted and affected by the cultural background of speakers and listeners that it tends to be beyond our direct awareness. Therefore, pragmatics and culture are inseparably tangled, creating the study of pragmatics essentially related for cross-cultural consideration.

2.1.2 The Concept of Context

Widdowson (1996) defined context as a schematic construct in the mind and it is one of the aspects the circumstances of language use that are related to the meaning. He also concentrated that it is a schematic construct that is used to achieve pragmatic meaning by relating linguistic elements of the code with the schematic elements of the context. Here, the external relationship between semantic and pragmatic is highlighted. This definition determines that context is one of the factors that relates two linguistic analysis levels.

According to Cook (1999), in the narrow sense Context is the knowledge of the world about the factors beyond the text but in the broad sense it represents the knowledge of the world about

these factors and other parts of the text under consideration or co-text. While Yule(2006) defined it as the physical environment in which a specific word is used.

For Requejo (2007), context is not some extra data that we use when bare semantic is not sufficient because in real uses it comes first before the interpretation of a given linguistic unit. The reason is that before the linguistic meaning construction some pieces of information had already been accessible for the participants that can guide them to construct meaning.

Other scholars like Song (2010) regarded that it represents the environment or circumstances factors in which discourse appears.

Nordquist (2018) also said that it refers to the words and sentence that surround any part of discourse which implies the meaning of a given discourse. This type is called linguistic or co-text context. This implies that word derives the meaning from their fellow words based on the context in which they are used “beyond the lexical meaning of the words”.

In sum, the concept of context has various dimensions and it is defined differently depending on its roles and functions it plays. So, it is necessary to classify it in order to get a clear idea about its terminology.

2.2 Context Classification

Requejo (2007), stated that context is classified into two types: the one that includes the morphological, phonetic, syntactic and textual materials surrounding the word is called linguistic context. While the one that includes anything that has to with the immediate environment and the socio cultural background in which the linguistic event occurs is called the situational context. Also, Requejo indicated that individual experience and participants’ beliefs, perceptions and intentions should be taken into account not only the objective situational context because of their effect on the way in which the meaning is constructed in language events. Since 1987, the integration of context to meaning has stayed one advocacy in cognitive linguistics. Furthermore, he clarified that word meaning in the proper context determines the way in which the meaning of specific utterance goes beyond the meaning of its parts and the interpretation of the whole is before the meaning of each word.

In addition, context is classified into three: linguistic, situational and cultural context by Song (2010) who governs its main roles: eliminating vagueness, determining referents and detecting conversational implicature. Therefore, she clarifies that it clears the structural, phonetic and

lexical ambiguities that arise because of polysemy and homonymy in phrases, clauses and sentences.

2.3 Shaping Meaning through Context

According to Yus (2011), shaping meaning through context is the first aspect to the contextual knowledge that asserts that communication does not appear in vacuity which means that people cannot communicate with each other without a situational or social context. It is shaped and created by context in which it takes place. In addition, the certainty that language cannot be analyzed out of context in which it is used and interpreted, is the main contribution of pragmatics. That means that meaning is not innate in the message but it is consciously derived and shaped contextually.

The following example is illustrated by Holmes to indicate that politeness is not inherent or instinctive in utterance :

“ Do you think it would be possible for you to call Jean today?”

On the surface, this utterance may appear to be polite but the context, the voice tone and intonation that define the politeness and meaning content of its message. Its meaning can be a request to replace the tire or a request for a lift depending on the circumstances, addressee and the setting in which it takes place (Holmes,2013).

Deriving meaning from context is regarded as challenging matter for many people because contextual cues can be interpreted differently from one culture to another. Therefore, it is important to make interactional practices investigations in their local cultural context to get the validity on a cross-comparative level. Error-free communication is rare because the message meaning that is intended by the speaker and the correct interpretation on the part of the addressee are required in to make a successful communication. So, in addition to the difficulty of message meaning interpretation, producing a culturally and socially suitable utterance is difficult too in many contexts(Dattner,2004).

2.5 The Relation between the Contextual Factors and Meaning Construction and Interpretation in Communication

Meaning is the push of both pragmatics and semantics. It is regarded as a cornerstone of language because everyone communicates principally to convey specific meanings. It can be found in context. They are interdependent because meaning cannot be conveyed without context and context cannot be established without meaning. The pioneer work which is written about context and meaning is Firth's work(1935). He considered that the entire word meaning is

contextual which means that every meaning is contextual beyond the lexical or literal meaning of the words. This implies that the context in which the word occur determines its meaning(Firth,1935).

In 1970s, a special attention paid to context in linguistics. Johnson and Bransford (1972) were among the scholars who make notable studies focused on context. They argued that the understanding of any utterance depends on the knowledge of the world in addition to the knowledge of the language in use. Language is used in context or in various ones as well as meaning which is derived from what is said or written from context and lexical, literal, etymological or ordinary meaning of words. The participants in a given discourse may come from various linguistic backgrounds and differ from each other socially, ethically, philosophically, and contextually. These variations may include accent, behavior, worldview, culture and perception. Also, the kind of context is affected and shaped by the participants involved in(Nonye,2022).

Doyle(2007) stated that meaning can be determined by context. Context importance can occur in the significant role it plays within various fields especially the lead fields such as philosophy, Anthropology, Artificial Intelligence, Research and linguistics. Other than linguistics, in other fields in, the scholars are concerned and preoccupied with context, meaning, semantics and pragmatics.

So, Context is one of the major concerns in linguistics as it is considered where it belongs and what meaning entails. It is important to note that the a language user should make certain choices to select possible senses in constructing and interpreting the linguistic units specifically utterances. In this situation, context plays a significant role, so that a linguistic unit is allowed to receive a sense and to be produced and interpreted without changing the whole category in the organization of the prototypical categories which means making new relations or links of existing senses in the category. Simply, context is what makes us identify, govern, locate and use auxiliaries to support or replace lexical verbs, pronouns to replace nouns, and adverbs to make adverbial phrases. Therefore, it plays an important role in indicating referents. One should pay

attention to the implied meanings of words, sentences and other structures which are deduced from the context of the speaker's speech and differ from their ordinary grammatical or lexical meanings. This indicates that the speaker implies another meaning other than what is said so that the deduced meaning is contextual which means that the context detects the conversation or the construction and is regarded as conversational implicature (Grice,1972,Song,2010,Requejo,2007).

2.10 Metapragmatic Awareness

According to Adaptation theory, adaptation and negotiation in verbal communication are important aspects that affect the generation and interpretation of senses. People need to choose from different languages when uttering a word or a sentence. These free choices take place in the language users' awareness consciously or unconsciously. Thus, the whole process occurs in the mind which belongs to realization or consciousness. Verschueren (2000) called this process as "metapragmatic awareness" because it is prior to linguistic choices.

2.11 Principles of Metapragmatic Awareness

There are three main principles of metapragmatic awareness which are:

1-Salience: according to Verschueren, in the process of adaptation, language users make various choices consciously or unconsciously under various degree of metaprgmatic awareness after adjustment and negotiation. This is done on the scale of explicit and implicit markedness. High degree indicates that prototype, position, the storage of knowledge, schemata frame, social representation and draft are activated actively and frequently. Therefore, the speaker can employ some pragmatic strategies to accomplish the communicative intention quickly such as humors and parenthesis in the adaption in morphology, phonetics and sentences.

2- Reflexivity: the difference between metapragmatic awareness and other consciousness is that metapragmatic awareness can reflect the speaker's way of saying and his/her observation of how to say it. According to Verschueren (2000), all linguistic choices are under a certain degree of awareness and some of these choices are self-reflected. This kind of reflexivity refers to the fact that the natural language can describe itself. In this way, the communicators not only concentrate on the content of communication but also focusing on the communication itself by describing, defining and commenting on the communication itself. "In Summary", for instance, represents an sign of summarizing the entire text or using (she/he) said to imply that the following sentence is not his/her.

3-Self-monitoring: it is the highest level on the markedness scale of metapragmatic awareness. People monitor the words and the ways of their forming. The most observable indicators of this process are hesitation and error correcting. Language users can plan in advance or consider the strategy and the form, monitor and control their discourse process in the communicative situation. The type of self- monitoring is shown through ,for example,"I think so", "That is to say...."," what do you mean by?" in a text (Verschueren 2000).

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This section is concerned with presenting the main procedures used to achieve the objectives and verify the hypotheses of the current study.

“Posttest only for Two Equivalent Groups Design” is used in this study. Thus, the two groups of the third stage college students are chosen randomly and divided into control group which is taught according to the conventional methods as well experimental group which is taught according to meaning shaping through context strategy. The experimental design of the study has been illustrated in table1.

Table (1)

Experimental design

Group	Pretest	Independent Variable (Treatment)	Dependent Variable	Questionnaire of metapragmatic awareness	Posttests
Experimental	Students' Achievement in Metapragmatic test	The integration of Context shaping meaning and language shaping context	Metapragmatic Awareness	Students' Metapragmatic awareness	Students' Achievement in metapragmatic test
Control		Conventional method			

3.2 Experimental Design

3.3 Sample of the study

The sample represents a set of objects, events or individuals chosen for a study from a specific population to represent the larger group from which they are chosen (Aray et al,2018). Richard and Schmidt (2010) states that it refers to a subgroup of the target population that is chosen to be evaluated to generalize the population.

The sample of the current study consists of seventy 3rd stage students, It includes only female who are selected from morning studies ,Department of English at College of Education for Women , University of Tikrit for the academic year 2024-2025. As shown in table 2.

Table (2)

The Sample of the Study

Group	Number	Total
Experimental	35	70
Control	35	

3.4 Instrument of the study

The instrument that is used in this study is test in order to collect data and assess students' metapragmatic awareness. It includes two objective questions and two subjective questions. Question number one and number question two (section A) are objective and question number two (section B) is semi-objective. While the third and fourth questions are subjective .As shown in table 3 below:

Table (3)

Categories of the first Post Test

Question N.	Type	No. of item	Category	Total Score
1.	Multiple-choice	5	Objective	20
2. A	Listening and choosing the correct emotion expression	5	Objective	15
2.B	Reading & Writing	3	Semi-objective	15
3.	Writing	3	Subjective	18
4.A	Listen and make a conversation	1	Subjective	16
4.B	Listen and make a conversation	1	Subjective	16

3.5 Face Validity

A jury of lecturers and specialists in ELT and linguistics, have been requested to agree upon the face validity of the posttest. They have approved the items and the scoring schemes. All the notes and adaptations specified by jurors have been considered

3.6 Content Validity

The content validity of the tests of this study is accomplished throughout the construction of the table of specification based on “Bloom’s Taxonomy” of cognitive objectives to ensure the content analysis.

3.7 Statistical Means

-T-test for Two Independent Samples is used to find out the significance between the two groups in the equalization of age. It is also used to find out the significance of differences between the two groups in the posttest.

4. Analysis of the Results

This section is assigned to the statistical analysis of the collected data and the discussion of the results in order to verify the hypothesis of the study.

5. Comparison between the Mean Scores of the Experimental Group and that of Control Group in The Metapragmatic Awareness Posttest

To analyze the data related to the first hypothesis specifically: There are no statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental group which is taught according to shaping meaning through context strategy and that of the control group which is taught according to the conventional method in the metapragmatic awareness posttest, the independent sample test has been used. Therefore, the aim of the study namely: Finding out the influence of shaping meaning through context on college students’ metapragmatic awareness in the posttest, is achieved. According to the following results in table 4, the mean scores of the experimental group is 70.685 and standard deviation is 10.529. While the mean scores of the control group is 60.685 and the standard deviation is 12.390. The calculated t-value 3.638 is higher than the tabulated t-value 2.00 with a degree of freedom 68 at a level of significance 0.05. Observing the values of T-calculated above, it is found that the calculated T-value 3.638 is much greater than the tabulated T-value of the field 2.00, and from this it can be concluded that

there are statistically differences between the mean scores of the experimental group which is taught according to shaping meaning through context and that of the control group which is taught according to the conventional method in the metapragmatic awareness posttest, for the benefit of experimental group. So, the hypothesis is rejected.

Table (4)

Means, Standard Deviation, and t-Values of the Two Groups at the Achievement Posttest

Group	N.	Mean	S.D.	T-Value		DF	Level of Sig.
				Calculated	Tabulated		
Experimental	35	70.685	10.529	3.638	2.00	68	0.05
Control	35	60.685	12.390				

6. Discussion of the Results

The results show that the experimental strategy, through which meaning is shaped through context is taught explicitly, is more effective than conventional teaching methods in fostering metapragmatic awareness among students. This finding aligns with existing literature that emphasizes the importance of contextual factors in language learning and pragmatics. The higher mean score of the experimental group indicates that students were better able to understand and apply metapragmatic concepts when taught using the proposed strategy. The significant differences between the two groups underscore the need for educators to consider innovative instructional strategies that incorporate contextual elements.

6. Conclusion

The enhancement in metapragmatic awareness could have important implications for educational practices, particularly in fields that rely heavily on pragmatic understanding and communication skills. It suggests that structured interventions can lead to measurable improvements in students' abilities to navigate and understand pragmatic cues in communication.

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