MEANINGFUL LEARNING FOR FOSTERING
THE STUDENTS' PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE

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Abstract: Meaningful learning is much considerably appreciated in any learning activities. Under the background of psychology of education, Ausubel promotes his state of the art which is commonly called meaningful learning as opposed to rote memorization. It requires active and creative mind of learners' in any environmental and contextual settings, well-organized and relevant knowledge structures, emotional commitment to integrate the new with existing knowledge, and conceptual clear subject matter. This study is aimed at (1) analyzing and describing the ability of meaningful learning in fostering the students' pragmatic competence, (2) analyzing and describing the challenges and things to do for them in performing meaningful learning. The data of this study are the students' pragmatic competence realized in their performance in using language pragmatically in a diglossic situation. They are collected by employing the observation and interview, then are analyzed by using what is introduced by Yin (2011) covering five phases: 1) compiling, 2) disassembling, 3) reassembling, 4) interpreting, and 5) concluding. The result reveals that meaningful learning with its variables such as open work, motivation, environment, creativity, concept map, and curricular adaptation is able to foster the students' pragmatic competence in performing verbal communication in a diglossic situation. They pragmatically use language under the control of distant language vs close language, politeness vs camaraderie, and object language vs metalanguage. In meaningful learning practice in this study, some challenges are found such as the departmental supports, the organizational/institutional supports, the learning environment, and the corporate culture. Answering the challenges, some considerably meaningful efforts sucessfully performed such as socializing the meaningful learning program to any settings of related parties, creating the supporting environment, elaborating building-blocks of meaningful learning for fostering pragmatic competence, and re-engineering the corporate culture.

Key words: *meaningful learning, pragmatic competence, building-blocks of meaningful learning, diglossic situation*

INTRODUCTION

The development of learning theory has been dynamically performing as the real response to the radical changes of technology and its effect on human life especially on

education. What is said to be an old paradigm or a classical paradigm of learning is considerably not effective anymore due to some weaknesses in responding the stronger challenges. Many experts of education have struggled harder to develop the best approaches in learning activities, then promoting them as one of the contributions to the human education in the world. It is an obvious phenomenon that there is a shift of orientation of learning or a change of paradigm–from learning is learning towards learning is more than learning. The latter is focused on learning by understanding deeply what the beyond or learning covered with any meaningful aspects and reflections bringing forth meaningful life in any settings. Such tradition of learning inspires Ausubel to propose a learning approach which is commonly called *Meaningful Learning* (Novak, 2011)

Meaningful Learning

Meaningful learning as opposed to rote memorization is appreciated to be a learning approach whose capability in fostering the students' competence, encouraging the students in exploring knowledge, providing a freedom in developing what the students have in mind, and make them able to integrate the new with the existing knowledge or the old one. Moreover, it may drive active and creative mind of learners' in any environmental and contextual settings with well-organized and relevant knowledge structures, emotional commitment to integrate the new with existing knowledge, and conceptual clear subject matter (Novak, 2011). What Ausubel promoted is interesting to be realized in the context of language learning at the college, English Education Department, STKIP PGRI Jombang. In fact, most of the students use their English without any pragmatic consideration especially in speaking practice. This could invite any serious problems like interpersonal and/or social frictions. Such terrible problems of language use must be much more serious when the learners use English language in the cross-cultural settings (Mayer, et al., 1996).

That is why, how important the pragmatic competence in language learning (speaking). This is the main aspect in this study which makes the author interested in discussing the ability of meaningful learning in fostering the students' pragmatic competence and the challenges and things to do as well for them in performing meaningful learning.   Along his life human interacts with the surroundings and as the consequence he gets things as knowledge and/or experience which is stored in his mind. He observes something, then knows something and understands something, and in turn, does something. What he has already got or known as the existing knowledge and/or experience is used by Ausubel as a base of his great effort in formulating his learning theory, called 'meaningful learning. Ausubel perceives that deductive reasoning is the instrument in understanding concepts, principles, and ideas. In this

case, the learners are encouraged to relate new knowledge to relevant concepts and/or contexts they have already got. The interaction between the new and the existing learners' knowledge structure is occurred (Novak, 2001; 2011; Mayer, et al., 1996; Vallori, 2008; & Hakkarainen, 2011).

The link between the concepts may be a complementary to create a meaningful knowledge transferred to the long memory of the learners'. The new integrated into the old or existing knowledge structure is really meaningful to extend and develop what the learners already had. In fine, meaningful learning requires well-organized and relevant knowledge structures, emotional commitment to integrate the new with existing knowledge, and conceptual clear subject matter.

Pragmatic Competence

Pragmatics discusses about interaction of meanings. Pragmatics perceives that people use a language like wearing a dress. It may be a formal, informal, casual one and the like. The forms are not the central issue in such language use especially at the formal or casual settings (Thomas, 1996; Jumanto, 2011). The efforts of studying meaning has been conducted since de Saussure & Peirce in the early 1900, Bühler (1918), Malinowski (1923), & Morris (1933), and has been undertaken to do by the search of form since Bloomfield (1930), Fries (1940), & Chomsky (1950). Lately, it is also done by Austin (1957) with his speech acts theory and then enormously developed by his student, Searle (1965).

Pragmatics is the study of language use within contexts. Language use or spoken/written communication is a discourse (Richards, 1985; Mey, 2001; CoBuild, 2003; Jumanto, 2011). Pragmatics is thus the study of meaning on using language in communication between the speaker and the hearer, within contexts, i.e. linguistic context and context of situation, in a particular speech society (Jumanto, 2011). Pragmatics regards communication as interaction of meanings, not interaction of forms. However, form or text is important as the vehicle of meaning. Without the form or text, language use or communication or discourse never happens, as there is nothing to be perceived or there is no text (cf. Jumanto, 2011).

Related to pragmatic competence, there are some aspects to be inevitably considered by the learners in using language pragmatically such as distance language vs close language, politeness vs camaraderie, object language and metalanguage (Jumanto, 2011).

Distant language vs close language refers to socialdistance. In other words, it may be a formal, informal, direct, indirect, literal, and non-literal language. This regards a diglossic situation of a speech society as having two variants of language. Politeness vs camaraderie is also a crucial aspect in pragmatics. Many theories of politeness

proposed by the experts such as Leech (1983); Brown & Levinson (1987); Fraser (1990); Spencer-Oatey (1992); Lakoff (1990); Fraser & Nolen (1981); YueguoGu.(1990); Ide (1989); Blum-Kulka (1992); Arndt & Janney (1985). They define and discuss politeness under different contextual settings. In this case, the notion of *face* becomes a central attention which is developed by Brown & Levinson (1987) by stepping on the Goffman's shoulder, considered as the grand theory: positive face and negative face. The other aspect of pragmatics is object language and metalanguage. The former refers to denotative level and the latter refers to connotative level. Understanding and performing such language should be required by the learners through the so-called 'meaningful learning'.

METHODOLOGY

This research is an experimental research to learning activities of English Speaking. The population of this research is all of the students of English Department of STKIP PGRI Jombang, and the sample is the students who take Speaking 3, year 2013. The number of the sample is 95 students divided into three classes. The teachers are given teaching and learning manuals of meaningful learning to employ during the semester. The data are the students' pragmatic competence realized in their performance in using language pragmatically in a diglossic situation. They are collected by employing the observation and interview, then are analyzed by using what is introduced by Yin (2011) covering five phases: 1) compiling, 2) disassembling, 3) reassembling, 4) interpreting, and 5) concluding.

MEANINGFUL LEARNING AND PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE

Meaningful learning practice in the classroom of English Speaking class of the students of STKIP PGRI Jombang is performed based on the Novak's concept developed under the learning theory of Ausubel's. The meaningful learning variables analyzed for fostering the students' pragmatic competence are (1) open work, enabling the students work together; (2) motivation, improving the classroom atmosphere and making the students be interested in the activities; (3) environment, making a connection between what the students learn with what surrounds them; (4) creativity, fostering the students' imagination and intelligence; (5) concept map, connecting concepts; and (6) curricular adaptation, providing for the students with educational needs (Novak, 2001; 2011).

Through open work, the teacher encourages the students to work together in doing the learning tasks, discussing, and practicing Speaking skill under pragmatic control. The teacher observes and evaluates them in performing pragmatic competence in speaking practice. Such competence consists of using distant language and close language, performing politeness and camaraderie, and using object language and

metalanguage in any contextual settings. First of all, the teacher identifies the students existing knowledge by observing and testing them orally before providing them with new knowledge and having them to explore the new one from any sources. The classroom atmosphere is created as good as possible based on the teacher's creativity to motivate the students and make them interested in and enjoy learning process. The pragmatic issues and contexts considered as the surroundings should be correlated with speaking ability to build a pragmatically speaking command at any level of communication, as a diglossic situation in which they use spoken language.

The other important variable is creativity in meaningful learning practice. It contains imagination, inventiveness, and divergence. The students are encouraged to be creative by giving them a wide chance and freedom to speak and to do things as long as all is done under pragmatic control, and develop their pragmatic competence by practicing with speaking partners and cross-cultural partners. The teacher also encourages them to connect their knowledge and skill on language to the pragmatic aspects as the new knowledge in using spoken language at a particular level of language or a diglossic situation. One of the English programs conducted is excursion study under cooperation with tourism information service providing the students with cross-cultural partners for practicing spoken language in informal settings. By doing this, the concept map variable can be achieved in learning. The last is curricular adaptation. It is done for educational needs based on the shift of environment and needs. It is inevitable that in meaningful learning curricular may be adapted under consideration of needs and the environmental changes. Because pragmatic competence is needed in language use for the appropriateness, effectiveness, and efficiency of communication, it is necessary to accommodate in curricular formulation.

In meaningful learning practice in this study, some challenges are found such as (1) the learning environment and (2) the corporate culture. English language learning (speaking) facilitated with meaningful learning got less supports from the environment where the learning activities are conducted. Those are the students' mindset of learning, perception, and tradition. They perceive partners who actively and creatively practice speaking as strange figures whose arrogant behavior, and in turn, it makes them down in doing more efforts. The students are still tied with old tradition of learning which keeps them studying as what they have, not more than what they have. The other ironical environment is the English teachers' tradition that does not create and encourage them to practice Speaking pragmatically. It means that they are speaking their mother-tongue in English rather than speaking English with English taste in a particular and appropriate context. The second, the corporate culture is considerably blurred, not obviously identified as a supporting factor in enhancing meaningful learning practice. The tradition of developing and enhancing learning to be much more

than today going on is not felt and not designed as a central issue in the case of English educational performance. Such tradition makes the meaningful learning practice a little bit strange for those whose fanatic mindset of traditional one.

There are things to do to response the above challenges such as socializing the meaningful learning approach to any settings of related parties, creating the supporting environment, elaborating building-blocks of meaningful learning for fostering pragmatic competence, and re-engineering the corporate culture. Some activities like workshop and discussion on meaningful learning are prepared for socializing and encouraging the related parties, the students, the teachers to apply meaningful learning in language teaching and learning, the building-blocks of meaningful learning is constructed as the guidance of practicing meaningful learning in teaching and learning English language. As an effort of re-engineering the corporate culture, some items of optional idea are proposed and discussed with the administrators of the college related to the enhancement of the students' pragmatic competence with meaningful learning.

CONCLUSION

Meaningful learning promoted by Ausubel is considerably meaningful in fostering the students' pragmatic competence in learning English (speaking). Meaningful learning variables such as (1) open work, enabling the students work together; (2) motivation, improving the classroom atmosphere and making the students be interested in the activities; (3) environment, making a connection between what the students learn with what surrounds them; (4) creativity, fostering the students' imagination and intelligence; (5) concept map, connecting concepts; and (6) curricular adaptation, providing for the students with educational needs are able to foster the students' pragmatic competence. They are able to use spoken English language pragmatically in case of using distant language and close language, performing politeness and camaraderie, and using object language and metalanguage with a particular and appropriate context in a diglossic situation.

In meaningful learning practice in this study, some challenges are found such as (1) the learning environment and (2) the corporate culture. There are things to do to response the above challenges such as socializing the meaningful learning program to any settings of related parties, creating the supporting environment, elaborating building-blocks of meaningful learning for fostering pragmatic competence, and re-engineering the corporate culture.

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