Non-Native Speakers Understanding on Idiomatic Implicatures

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Abstract: Idiomatic expressions is treated as lexical components for decades. However, Arseneault (2014a) has argued that idioms shall be investigated via their pragmatic properties. Hence, idioms may be classified as an implicature from the point of view of pragmatics. Her argument has become the basis of our decision that idiomatic implicature is one of the sub-species of conversational implicatures. Conversational implicatures, in general, do not bring problems for native speakers but they become problematic for second language learners. Through this study, we attempt to measure and explain second language learners' comprehension on idiomatic implicatures. The inquiry covers to what extent second language learners comprehend idiomatic implicatures and what strategies the learners to interpret this type of implicatures use. To answer those questions, this research involves 110 students answering three questions containing idiomatic implicatures. The findings can help second language instructors to redesign their curriculum regarding idiomatic implicature learning in particular and English pragmatics in general.

1 PRAGMATICS AND PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE

Bachman (1990) explicitly mentions that pragmatic competence is an inevitable part of language competence to be mastered by second language learners. According to her classification, there are two competencies under language competence: (1) organizational competence and (2) pragmatic competence. The complete list of competencies can be summarized as follows.
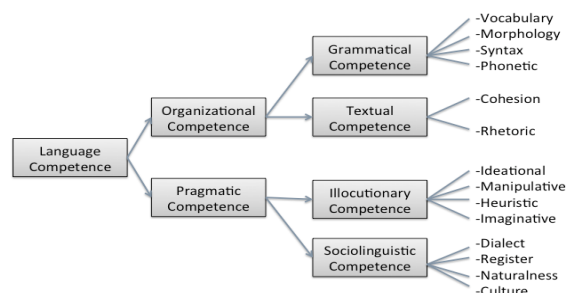

Figure 1: The Aspects of Language Competence (Bachman, 1990).

The pragmatic competence laid out by Bachman has two main strands: (1) illocutionary competence and (2) sociolinguistic competence. Bachman's model of language competence has emphasized the importance of pragmatics for second language learners. Note to be taken, it seems that the field of pragmatics is heavily related to illocutionary competence than that of sociolinguistic competence. Bachman is, in fact, the only expert who put pragmatic competence as a sub-competence in language competence. Other experts in EFL/ESL like Canale & Swain (1980) and Celce-Murcia et al. (1995) also argue that pragmatics is important for second language learners but they did not mention pragmatics explicitly and put it under different labels instead.

Although it has been established that pragmatics is an important competence for second language learners, we have our own concern that second language learners, especially in Indonesia, do not have adequate mastery of English pragmatics. In the previous study we have conducted, the learners have a considerable amount of difficulty in comprehending pragmatic features in English (Pratama et al., 2016). The study involved 141 university students coming from three different semesters: 57 freshmen, 41 sophomores, and 43 juniors. All of them are from the same English department. Fifty-one multiple-choice questions

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were fdesigned to test the students' understanding of dialogues containing pragmatic features in English. The results of the study are as follows.

Table 1: Summary of Pragmatic Test Results of Students from Different Semesters.

Participants	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Semester 2	57	35.6842	7.33669
Semester 4	41	37.1707	6.93146
Semester 6	43	39.7674	5.43287
All	141	37.3617	6.85907

Table 1 shows that second language learners in the study have failed to comprehend some items. From the 51 items, the 141 students can only answer 37.36 questions on average. If it is translated to real-life situation, there is a 25% chance that students will face communicational breakdown related with dialogues containing pragmatic features in English.

Pragmatic competence can be broken down into some important themes in pragmatics. According to Horn & Ward (2006), there are some important themes in pragmatics: (1) implicatures, (2) presuppositions, (3) speech acts, (4) reference, (5) deixis, (6) definiteness and indefiniteness, etc. Other themes like politeness and cross-cultural pragmatics can also be added to that list (Leech, 1983). However, according to Levinson (1983), only implicature has a very important role in pragmatics because it is the most typical example of how pragmatic force works.

2 PRAGMATICS FOR NON-NATIVE SPEAKERS

At the early times when pragmatics was developed, the pragmaticians focus their concepts of pragmatics in monocultural society and the subjects are native speakers of the language in that (Brown and Levinson, 1987; Grice, 1975a; Sperber and Wilson, 1986a). In particular, the what-so-called monoculture society is in fact Anglosaxonic culture (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1985) . The paradigm was slowly shifting and later on in 1980s there were some pragmatics experts who raised their objections on that narrow limitation of pragmatics. The experts started to think that pragmatic research dealing with

Anglo speakers context cannot be generalized universally for other research which involves different types of speakers coming from different cultural backgrounds (Kádár and Mills, 2011; Wierzbicka, 2003). As parts of that movement, a new generation pragmaticians have started pragmatics competence research on non-native speakers (Bardovi-Harlig, 2010; Kasper and Rose, 1999). The realm of foreign language learners pragmatics has then become a denser body of knowledge in 1990s and the field has been popularly called interlanguage pragmatics (Leech, 2014). As the domination of English as lingua franca in many places around the world (Canagarajah, 1999), interlanguage pragmatics' subjects have been dominated by non-native speakers of English (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989a; Schauer, 2009a). Research in interlanguage pragmatics covers a number of subthemes which are explored by different researchers around the world (Bardovi-Harlig, 1999). Those subthemes include the following subjects but not limited to pragmatics development, pragmatics teaching, speech acts, speech situation, pragmatics strategies, pragmatics resistance, pragmatic research methodology, politeness and implicatures. Among those subthemes, there is a theme which is already overdiscussed namely 'speech acts' (Bataller, 2010; Bella, 2012a; Lee, 2011a; Nadar, 1998; Nguyen, 2008a; Schauer, 2009b; Wijayanto et al., 2013). Speech acts have become particularly popular because in 1980, Blum-Kulka et al. (1989a) has created a speech act realization taxonomy which worked well among academics and most researchers in pragmatics that time are more willing to use their taxonomy. The taxonomy has been well-documented in a project called Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP). In their publication, Blum-Kulka et al.(1989b) have made an invitation and challenge for researchers around the world to conduct speech acts realization codification in their own countries. The invitation and challenge have been received well by pragmaticians around the world. Thus, other subthemes other than speech acts are still worthwhile to be discussed and gaps are still available to fill.

One out of some subthemes that needs more attention and discussion in research is non-native speakers' implicature. Studies taking the theme of non-native speakers' implicature are still rare and some improvements in the current theories and findings are still welcome.

The last time research on non-native speakers' implicature has been conducted thoroughly. It was

through studies administered by (Bouton, 1994) and (Rover, 2005). Until then, detailed discussions regarding non-native speakers' implicatures are almost nonexistent. In Indonesia, there is one study conducted by (Chandra, 2001a) dealing with non-native speakers' implicatures but the study only involves ten respondents and the approach used was very limited. We personally think that opportunities to conduct research on non-native speakers implicatures are still wide open.

Pragmatics skills of non-native speakers may come in two forms: receptive skills and productive skills. Receptive skills include listening and reading while productive skills include speaking and writing. Previous studies in non-native speakers pragmatics mostly focus on productive skills and less in receptive ones (Bouton, 1994; Chandra, 2001a; Kubota, 1995; Lee, 2012a; Murray, 2011; Rover, 2005; Soler, 2005). This gap provides a good reason for the researchers in this study to conduct a research on receptive skills.

This research mainly deals with receptive strategies of non-native speakers in comprehending conversational implicatures in English. Most of the studies available are dealing with productive strategies (Bada, 2010; Chen, 2015; Nguyen, 2008b) and only a few are discussing the receptive strategies (Chandra, 2001a; Lee, 2012a). Lee (2012b) uses Language Processing Model by Bialystok (1993a) and Chandra (2001b) uses the theory from (Sperber and Wilson, 1986b). Other than (Bialystok, 1993b) and (Sperber and Wilson, 1986b) receptive strategies are still open for other theories to be adapted to explain the phenomena.

There is also an overly used instrument in interlanguage pragmatics and the instrument is called discourse completion task (DCT) (Bella, 2012b; Lee, 2011b; Rose, 2009). This is a quite strange phenomenon because there are a number of alternatives available. Pragmatics research might use role play (Félix-Brasdefer, 2007), discussion (Nguyen, 2008b), verbal protocol (Lee, 2012a), comprehension tests (Soler, 2005), in-depth interview (Yates and Major, 2015), questionnaire (Nguyen, 2008b)story telling (Bada, 2010) and natural data recording (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2013). DCT is an instrument that represents 40% of interlanguage pragmatics studies.

3 IMPLICATURES AND IDIOMATIC IMPLICATURES

An implicature is a pragmatic phenomenon in which a speaker uses a coded utterance to deliver his intent without explicitly mentioning it in his utterance (Grice, 1975b). Using a method of inference and common background knowledge, a hearer or more are able to comprehend the message. The following is the example of a dialogue containing an implicature.

> Alan   : *Are you going to Paul's party?*
> Barb   : *I have to work.*
> (Davis, 2014)

Alan asks a question to Barb. The question is straightforward and Barb is supposed to say yes or no. However, in this instance, Barb chooses to answer using non-straightforward fashion. Her answer implies that she would not come to the party. Alan, using a method of inference and certain background knowledge can interpret a particular message that Barb would not come to the party.

From our previous research (Pratama et al., 2017), we have classified ten types of implicatures according to the classifications established by (Grice, 1975b), (Bouton, 1994) and (Arseneault, 2014b). Those ten types of implicatures are POPE-Q, Indirect Criticism, Sequential, Minimum Requirement Rule, Scalar, Idiomatic, Quantity, Quality, Manner and Relevance. The full taxonomy can be illustrated in the Figure 2.
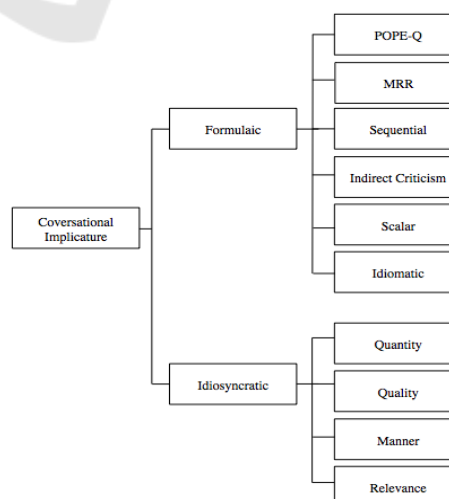
Figure 2: The Taxonomy of Implicatures for Second Language Learners.

Among other works related to implicatures, the work by (Arseneault, 2014b) mainly attracts our attention. She argues that idiomatic expressions may work as implicatures as well. Idiomatic expressions have given clue to an utterance that the utterance itself may contain an implicit message. This pattern suits the definition of an implicature.

In order to understand the nature of the implicatures taxonomy, the following table provides the implicatures division, definition, and example.

Table 2: Implicatures' division, definition, and example (Pratama et al., 2017).

Implicature	Remarks	Example
POPE-Q	Implicature using rhetoric question	John: Would you like to go to the beach? Arthur: Is the Pope Catholic?
Minimum Requirement Rule (MRR)	Number mentioned by the speaker implicitly means the minimum number	John: I need a place with fifty seats for my son's birthday party. Arthur: McDonald's has fifty seats.
Sequential	Implicature indicating the order of events	Skeeter: OK, how about we just take walks in the park and go to the war museum? Wendy: Now you're talking.
Indirect Criticism	Implicature indicating criticism without being to explicit	Mr. Ray: Have you finished with Mark's term paper yet? Mr. Moore: Yeah, I read it last night. Mr. Ray: What did you think of it? Mr. Moore: Well, I thought it was well typed.
Scalar	Implicature using modality	Dan: Oh really? Does he like them? Gretta : She. Yes, she seems
		to.
Idiomatic	Implicature using idioms and/or idiomatic expressions	John: I think I am still buying the house for us although it's next to a toxic waste dump. Kelly: Have you lost your mind?
Quantity	Implicature relying on manipulation of quantity maxim	Tim: So what do you do? Mary: I'm a reader at a publisher. Tim: No! Do you read for a living?
Quality	Implicature relying on manipulation of quality maxim	Chuck: Hey! For the record, every time I laughed at one of your jokes, I was faking it. Larry: You're a monster!
Manner	Implicature relying on manipulation of manner maxim	Griffin: Would you marry me? Stephanie: Look, Griffin, I know it shouldn't bother me that you're a zookeeper, but it kind of does. And when we first started dating, I just assumed that you would turn into the guy that I'd always dreamed of being with. But... (the implicature is "no")
Relevance	Implicature relying on manipulation of relevance maxim	Mr. Andrew: Where is my box of chocolate? Mrs Andrew: The children were in your room this morning.

4 METHODS

This research is designed to answer two questions: (1) to what extent second language learners comprehend idiomatic implicatures? and (2) what strategies are used by the learners to comprehend this type of implicatures? In order to answer those questions systematically, three dialogues containing idiomatic implicatures to be tested to our respondents are prepared. The following are the three items included in our instruments.

Item 1
Context: John and Kelly are engaged. They are talking about their future.

John: I think I'm still buying this house although it's next to a toxic waste dump.
Kelly: Have you lost your mind?

Question: What does Kelly's statement mean?
a. Kelly disagrees with John's idea.
b. Kelly agrees with John's idea.
c. Kelly asks John if he is crazy.

Item 2
Context : Johnson is Angela's best friend. Angela is a psychologist. Johnson takes his friend, Charlie, to consult with Angela.

Johnson: Nice to see you. Charlie, this is Angela. Angela, this is Charlie. He's my college roommate.
Angela: Nice to meet you, Charlie.
Johnson: Well, thanks for seeing us on such short notice.
Angela : Why don't you guys come in and make yourselves comfortable?

Question: What does Angela's last statement mean?
a. Angela does not let Johnson and Charlie in.
b. Angela is surprised by Johnson's and Charlie's appearance.
c. Angela invites Johnson and Charlie to sit down.

Item 3
Context : Sonny and Julian are father and son. Because of a particular reason, Sonny confiscated Julian's toy.
Sonny: Give me that!
Julian: You just killed me.
Sonny: So what? Relax, you'll play later.

Julian: You can't tell me what to do. (Yelling)

Question: What does Julian's last statement mean?
a. Julian thinks that his father does not have the right to give an order.
b. Julian thinks that his father does not have any ability to give an order.
c. Julian is not in the mood to relax.

Those three items were tested to 110 respondents. There are 40 respondents from English department, 32 respondents from international class majoring in Law and Engineering, and 38 respondents from regular Economics major. The students coming from English department are taught in English and they study English as their major. The students from international classes are Indonesians who are taught in English but their major is not English. The students from regular class are taught in Indonesian. One week after they did the test, the researchers recalled 18 students to be interviewed using Think Aloud Protocol (TAP). TAP is a method of interview, which allows the respondents to say out loud, what their minds currently say (Ericsson and Simon, 1993). TAP is conducted to answer the second question of this study.

To codify the data, the researchers utilize the taxonomy of strategies by (Vandergrift, 1997). However, because the fact that Vandergrift's taxonomy is mainly related with listening, only some aspects of the strategies are fitted in this study. The possible strategies used by the learners are:

(1) Inference: using the available information in the dialogue to guess the part the learner does not understand.
  a. Linguistic Inference: using the words he knows to guess on the words he does not know.
  b. Extralinguistic Inference: using the relationship of the speakers, other parts of the question, or other concrete situation to guess the part that he does not understand.
  c. Inter-part Inference: using markers that show the relationships between utterances and then guessing the meaning of the utterance using those relationships.
(2) Elaboration: using the knowledge outside the dialogue and relate it with the knowledge within the dialogue in order to know the meaning of the exchange.
  a. Personal elaboration: using personal experience.

b. World elaboration: using general knowledge around us.

c. Academic elaboration: using knowledge gain from academic situation.

d. Question elaboration: using chain questions to guess the answer

e. Creative Elaboration: creating stories or unique point of view to guess the meaning.

f. Imagery: using picture or mental visuals to represent information coded to separate category

(3) Summarization: making mental or written summary of the information in the dialogue

(4) Translation: translating the target language to the mother language word by word.

(5) Transfer: using the knowledge of the mother language to facilitate the understanding of target language.

(6) Repetition: reading aloud the dialogue to understand the meaning.

(7) Grouping: to call information based on other information with similar attribute.

(8) Deduction/Induction: Consciously applying rules that have been learnt or developed by himself to understand the dialogue.

All responses from the TAP are recorded and then interpreted using Vandergrift's taxonomy above. The following transcript can illustrate the technique of data reading and analysis.

Context: *Johnson is a good friend of Angela. Angela is a psychologist. Johnson brought his friend Charlie to consult with Angela.*

Johnson: Nice to see you. Charlie, this is Angela. Angela, this is Charlie. He's my college roommate.

Angela: Nice to meet you, Charlie.

Johnson: Well, thanks for seeing us on such short notice.

Angela: Why do not you guys come in and make yourselves comfortable?

Question: *What is Angela's final say?*

a. Angela does not allow Johnson and Charlie to enter.

b. Angela was surprised by Johnson and Charlie

c. Angela invites Johnson and Charlie to sit down.

(Instrument A Problem 16)

ATOP1 : Because of Angela's statement "..come in make yourselves comfortable?"

It means she let them in

INT : do you think we that phrase in Bahasa ?

ATOP1 : anggap rumah sendiri (come in, make yourself at home)

(Respondent ATOP1 Data 16)

According to the responses by respondent ATOP1 and elicitation questions given by the interviewers, there is a strong possibility that the respondent uses the knowledge from Bahasa Indonesia and the knowledge is being transferred to English. Evidently, ATOP1 recognizes Indonesian expression 'anggap rumah sendiri' as similar with the English expression of 'make yourselves comfortable". This type of technique is called 'transfer' according to Vandergrift's strategy categorization.

All data were treated the same way as the example above so that all strategies used by all 18 respondents can be recapped and analyzed.

5 LEARNERS' COMPREHENSION OF IDIOMATIC IMPLICATURES

The number for correct implicature items answered by the respondents represents comprehension of idiomatic implicatures in this study. After the respondents' works are checked for the correctness of the answers and then recapped, the following data can be presented here.
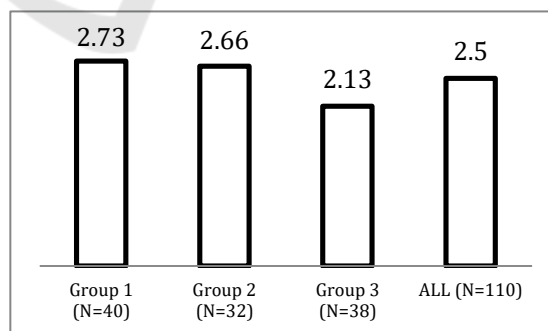

Figure 3: The summary of respondents' results on idiomatic implicatures.

There are three items of idiomatic implicatures presented to 110 students; three is the maximum point and zero is the minimum point. According to the results, all students on average can answer 2.5

items correctly. The group from English department got the best result with 2.73 on average. The group from international classes achieves a slightly different result with 2.66 on average. The group from regular Economics class suffers the most. They got only 2.13 on average. There are two points to be taken from those results. First, target language exposure in formal classrooms is possible to be an important factor for the learners to be successful in comprehending idiomatic implicature. Second, compared with other types of implicatures such as POPE-Q (Pratama, 2017a) and Indirect Criticism (Pratama, 2017b), idiomatic implicatures can be categorized as relatively easy implicature to comprehend by second language learners. In the previous studies, POPE-Q implicatures recorded 2.02 on average and indirect criticism recorded 1.61 on average. All indexes are based on three as maximum score.

There are three items are tested in this study. Each item has its own level of difficulty reflected by the respondent scores.

Table 3: Item difficulty based on respondents' scores

Item ID	Percentage of respondents who answer correctly
Item 1	75%
Item 2	90%
Item 3	85%

Item 1 contains the idiom 'have you lost your mind?'. Item 2 contains the idiom 'make yourself comfortable'. Item number 3 contains the idiomatic expression 'you can't tell me what to do'. According to the data, the most difficult idiomatic implicature to interpret is 'have you lost your mind?'. and the easiest idiomatic implicature is 'make yourself comfortable'. There are some possible answers to explain this phenomenon. The first possibility is that for Indonesian students 'make yourself comfortable' is more salient and frequent than 'have you lost your mind'. This explanation is adapted from the input and attention theory such as that of (Schmidt, 1995). Second explanation is that the lexical and grammatical components of item 1 have consumed more mental capacity than those of item 2. This explanation owes its credit to relevance theory (Sperber and Wilson, 1986b). Both explanations have not been tested empirically and follow up research needs to be conducted to provide a more accurate explanation.

6 LEARNERS' STRATEGIES TO COMPREHEND IDIOMATIC IMPLICATURES

In an effort to understand the strategies used by the learners in comprehending idiomatic implicatures, the researchers have utilized a Think Aloud Protocol to 18 respondents. Nine respondents come from the high proficiency group and the other nine are from the low proficiency. Using this arrangement, it is able to contrast the strategies used by high proficiency group and low proficiency group. The following is the recapitulation of strategies used by both groups.

Table 4: Recapitulation of strategies.

Strategies	High Profi Ciency	Low Profi ciency
Linguistic Inference	3	5
Extralinguistic Inference	3	2
Between parts inferencing	1	0
Personal Elaboration	0	0
World Elaboration	2	0
Academic Elaboration	0	0
Questioning Elaboration	1	0
Creative Elaboration	5	1
Imagery	0	0
Summarization	0	0
Translation	6	6
Transfer	6	2
Repetition	1	0
Grouping	0	0
Deduction/Induction	15	7
*Random Guessing		6

It can be seen from the table above that high proficiency students are willing to try different types of strategies. The high proficiency group tries nine out of fifteen strategies possible while the low proficiency only utilizes six of them. Deduction/ induction has been the favorite strategy for both high proficiency or low proficiency group with obvious differences. Deduction/induction in high proficiency

group often leads to correct answers while the same strategy used by low proficiency leads to wrong answers. There are some strategies that are never utilized by both groups: personal elaboration, academic elaboration, imagery, summarization and grouping.

There is a new strategy coming up during the TAP session and it only applies to the low proficiency group. This strategy involves random guessing. This strategy never appears in high proficiency group. It seems that it is easier for the low proficiency group to frustrate and give up. Even when the interviewer tries very hard to convince the respondent to state their strategies, they choose to give up and admit that they just guess the answer randomly. Such feature never takes place in high proficiency group.

7 CONCLUSIONS

This research revolves around two main questions since the very beginning. The first question is to what extent second language learners comprehend idiomatic implicatures. Based on the findings, second language learners with high exposure to English in the classroom can interpret idiomatic implicatures easier than those from low exposure classrooms. Compared with other types of implicatures, idiomatic implicatures are considered relatively easy. The second question of the research is what strategies used by the learners to comprehend this type of implicatures. The findings show that high proficiency group learners are more likely to try more various types of strategies (9 out of 15) compared with the low proficiency group (6 out of 15). Furthermore, there is an emergent strategy coming up only in the low proficiency group namely random guessing.

The implications of this study put the burden to language teachers to use English as language of instructions as consistent as possible. We can safely say that, at least from this study, exposure in the formal classroom plays an important role to improve the learners understanding of English implicature. Attention shall be given to students with low proficiency because they are prone to frustration and have a tendency to give in their efforts to comprehend implicatures.

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