A PRAGMATIC PERSPECTIVE TO LEVERAGE ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES

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ABSTRACT. *Our objectives in this paper are, first, to determine how to set the stages of second language learning taking into consideration the pragmatic considerations of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR); second, to decide whether levels of L2 proficiency functioned as an indicator of pragmatic development, and third, to propose awareness-raising activities related to pragmatic aspects of ESP. In order to apply the pragmatic considerations of the CEFR indicated to help students, we focused our analysis on specific writings produced by English students at Universitat Politècnica de València. The results were highly satisfactory as students acquired information about pragmatic aspects of language. Our conclusions imply that more efforts should be made to define the pragmatic aspects to be developed in order to obtain the different levels of language proficiency and to raise pragmalinguistic awareness in the classroom. Furthermore, the CEFR should address the pragmatic implications and competences of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and, as a consequence, to be used as accurate guidelines to design language syllabuses and materials.*

KEY WORDS. *Pragmatic competences, CEFR, leveraging, ESP.*

RESUMEN. *Los objetivos en este artículo son, en primer lugar, determinar cómo establecer las etapas de la segunda lengua de aprendizaje, teniendo en cuenta las consideraciones pragmáticas del Marco Común Europeo de Referencia para las Lenguas (MCERL), en segundo lugar, decidir si los niveles de dominio de L2 funcionan como indicadores del desarrollo pragmático, y en tercer lugar, proponer actividades de sensibilización relacionadas con los aspectos pragmáticos de ESP. Con el fin de aplicar las consideraciones pragmáticas de MCERL indicadas para ayudar a los estudiantes, hemos centrado nuestro análisis en textos específicos producidos por estudiantes de inglés de la Universitat Politècnica de València. Los resultados han sido muy satisfactorios ya que los estudiantes han demostrado adquirir información sobre los aspectos pragmáticos del lenguaje. Nuestras conclusiones implican que se deben hacer más esfuerzos para definir los aspectos prácticos que se desarrollarán con el fin de obtener los diferentes niveles de*

competencia lingüística y potenciar los aspectos pragmalingüísticos en el aula. Además, el Marco Europeo de Referencia debe abordar las implicaciones pragmáticas y competencias de inglés para fines específicos (IFE) y, en consecuencia, han de usarse como directrices precisas para el diseño de planes de estudio y materiales lingüísticos.

PALABRAS CLAVE. *Competencias pragmáticas, MCERL, optimización, IFE.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The significance of foreign language levelling appears as a consequence of the important role of communication in a globalised world. When language learners acquire a foreign language they should be conscious of their linguistic and pragmatic competences in order to know their abilities and improve their skills. This way, they could enhance their language knowledge to adapt their proficiency to their professional or communicative needs. The evaluation of language proficiency provides a tool that allows learners to tailor their language acquisition.

In the introduction of the paper, first we describe the effort made by the Council of Europe (CE) to unify the levels of foreign language acquisition and define the pragmatic competence; second we explain the link between English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and pragmatic competence and, finally we set the objectives for this study.

1.1. *The CEFR and the pragmatic competence*

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe 2001, 2009) establishes a series of descriptive guidelines to help language professionals in identifying learners' proficiency in aspects of language use and in planning and leveraging language learning. The word *leveraging* is usually associated to financial communities, being a derivation of the word leverage. This term can also be defined as "the influence used to achieve a desired result" in a context of language learning (*Webster Dictionary* 2010). Leveraging is used in this paper as a token of the methodology used in the research. Teachers could influence learners to improve their English level or the language specialization needed in their profession. Students should identify their English level following the CEFR through a language portfolio and they consequently should be motivated to acquire the following level.

Although this term is not commonly used in linguistic contexts, it reflects the purpose of this research; to propose a pragmatic perspective that could help learners to achieve the desired result in ESP.

The CEFR establishes a three-stage scale of proficiency: A, B and C. These stages are in turn subdivided into levels of language competence (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1 and C2), which are a useful tool in the teaching and learning process, as well as in curriculum and assessment development.

The communicative language competence as described in the CEFR comprises several components, which have to be mastered by second language students: linguistic,

sociolinguistic and pragmatic. Each of these consists of knowledge, know-how and skills, following long-lasting learner-centred pragmatic proposals. The CEFR considers aspects such as grammar or lexis secondary in language teaching, and focuses mainly on communicative and interactive language practice. One of the pillars of this approach is pragmatics. Indeed, pragmatic competence is recognized as a vital component of the communicative approach (Bachman 1990; Eslami-Rasekh 2005). Also, grammar proficiency and discourse management have traditionally been considered essential for language teaching (McCarthy 1991; Celce-Murcia 2001).

In this paper we focus on the pragmatic competence, which consists in the CEFR of knowledge of speech acts and speech functions, and sociolinguistic competence. Sociolinguistic competence entails the capacity to use language appropriately according to context (Eslami-Rasekh 2005). The pragmatic competences are defined by Bardovi-Harlig (1996: 22) in terms of:

> The functional use of linguistic resources (production of language functions, speech acts), are drawing on scenarios or scripts of interactional exchanges. Pragmatics also concerns the mastery of discourse, cohesion and coherence, the identification of text types and forms, irony, and parody.

From a pragmatic perspective, language learning means paying attention to linguistic and extra-linguistic characteristics of language in action (Bouchet 2010: 139; Gibbs 2010: 33; Schank 2010: 157). The pragmatic competence of a language considers the relations between what is learnt and what is to be learnt, and pays therefore much attention to the context of reference and the role of the user in communication. Bouchet (2010: 139) mentions: "The current trend toward globalization of communication and human relationships calls for a better understanding of the factors acting upon this specific, global kind of communication". Pragmatic competence must play an influential role in teaching a foreign language, in order to teach language in context, and achieve communication. Thus, as postulated by Lave and Wenger (1998) learning is necessarily situated and in order to enter a language community, new members must participate and interact with it. There must be a process of legitimate peripheral participation. Language in interaction permanently transforms linguistic patterns into something new and this fact should be reflected in Pragmatics, as this discipline focuses on practical rather than exclusively truth-functional modalities.

Pragmatic competence should be considered relevant when leveraging language learning as Ifantidou (2011), Björkman (2011) and Xu, Case and Wang (2009) explain in their studies. They analyse the effect of using pragmatic strategies to improve competence in foreign language learning and their conclusions reveal very positive results.

Learners are expected to complete different communicative acts, such as requests, apologies or complaints depending on contextual features. For this, language proficiency is accomplished not only by means of knowledge of grammar and text organization. All the opposite; second language teaching must help students identify "when and for what purposes it is appropriate to make a speech act, and which expressions would be

appropriate in a particular situation" (Crandall and Basturkmen 2004: 39). If this is not stressed, learners may fail to achieve their communicative goals. Hence, learners must be aware of all the components entailed communication in a second language from a pragmatic perspective as research by Kasper (2001a), Takahashi (2005) and Alcón Soler and Martínez-Flor, (2008) shows.

Second language teaching must focus on the importance of pragmatic competence, as Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989: 10) stated two decades ago: "Even fairly advanced language learners' communicative acts regularly contain pragmatic errors, or deficits, in that they fail to convey or comprehend the intended illocutionary force or politeness value".

Quoting the consideration of the CEFR on the pragmatic competence, (Council of Europe 2001: 13): "For this component, it is hardly necessary to stress the major impact of interactions and cultural environments in which such abilities are constructed." The setting in which the CEFR is implemented (a second language taught in a foreign country) involves the teaching of languages outside a native social context. It seems clear that functions should not be taught separately from the contexts in which they are used. Thus, we will need to take into account the actual possibilities for developing L2 pragmatic ability in the classroom. To this effect, we can rely upon Kasper and Rose's (2001: 4-5) words; it seems that there are some universal features that help the implementation of the pragmatic component:

> [...] current theory and research suggest a number of universal features in discourse and pragmatics. Conversational organization through turn taking and sequencing of contributions is a universal property of spoken interactive discourse, much as cultural and contextual implementations may vary. Basic orientations to the effectiveness and social cohesiveness of communicative action, such as the Cooperative Principle (Grice, 1975) and politeness (Brown and Levinson, 1987) regulate communicative action and interaction throughout communities [...].

In most cases, students have to practise some language structures that they have previously acquired in their mother tongue. When they learn a second language, these abilities could be transferred from L1 to the target language. However, apart from these universal pragmatic features, other aspects should be considered, as Escandell Vidal (2004: 363) points out:

> Acquiring communicative competence in a foreign language would involve resetting the social categorisation mechanisms and generating a new set of norms, according to the cultural standards of a different community.

This idea rephrases Bialystok's (1993) suggestions, in the sense that adult learners possess certain pragmatic abilities in their first language which can be reused in their second. This *resetting* would then imply the re-processing of already available knowledge. According to this, second language learners tend to use the same linguistic

structures that they use in their mother tongue, but in the learning process the speakers incorporate the new conventions of the target language through pragmatic competence.

Early interlanguage studies have "[…] focused on language use rather than pragmatic development" (Kasper 2001b: 34). Most studies explore the opportunities for conversational practice. Kasper reviews some of these works, carried out by Long and Porter (1985), House (1986) and Kasper (1985). Later studies introduce other factors such as socialisation or interaction (Kanagy, 1999), and cross-cultural issues (Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper 1989). This entire set of factors should be included in order to leverage foreign language learners.

Based on the communicative approach, proficiency for pragmatics in the CEFR is stated in terms of competence. Although language skills are associated to general competence, we should be conscious that students enrolled in Higher Education are expected to acquire certain pragmatic competence related to ESP when learning a second language. Since the CEFR does not include specificity for ESP, second language teachers are expected to adapt the descriptions of the different levels of the CEFR to the needs of the future professions the students might have, as Weir (2005) points out.

1.2. *ESP and pragmatic competence*

The different manifestations of ESP should be incorporated to the descriptors of the CEFR language levels in order to provide a real pragmatic approach to second language learning, as authors such as Bhatia (1993), Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) and Alcaraz Varó (2000) propose. Nevertheless, ESP is not an outstanding concern for the CEFR, as it is merely timidly mentioned in some of appendixes provided by the CEFR (Council of Europe 2009: 245). The pragmatic approach to language learning is therefore barely hinted in the content descriptors, whereas the different kinds of texts, the functions that might be expected in the response and general topics are repeatedly mentioned.

The birth of ESP research can be traced back to the publications of Herbert (1965), Swales (1971), Mackay and Mountford (1978), Trimble (1985) and Hutchinson and Waters (1987). They introduced this discipline to draw attention to the different manifestations of language in specific situations. All the genres share the same language principles, although use varies depending on the audience. Specialized domains require specific language manifestations. Therefore, a pragmatic approach should include the specific manifestations of language.

ESP is recognized as an important research area in international journals (e.g. *ESP Journal*, *Journal of English for Academic Purposes, System*, etc.); emerging forcefully as a multidisciplinary field of study, and has been consolidated in the last twenty years from the point of view of both research and teaching methodology, as the studies of well known researchers like Swales (1990), Jordan (1997), Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998), Alcaraz Varó (2000), Duque García (2000), Cortese and Riley (2002), Basturkmen (2005) or Ashuja'a (2011) have shown.

ESP includes not only knowledge of the language, but also competence in the skills required to use this language, and sufficient understanding of the contexts within which it is situated. Considering this, it is important for students to face genre-based instruction (in this case the writing of summaries) in order to be successful in their academic writing. In Dudley-Evans' (1994: 219) words:

> In ESP we are interested, often for pedagogical reasons, in exploring established but not necessarily codified conventions in certain key genres about style of presentation of content, the order of presentation of that content and all the myriad rhetorical factors that affect the plausibility for readers of the argument presented.

It seems clear that focusing on a particular discipline might imply a different teaching methodology. Apart from this, it is also specific in that it is aimed at adult learners, at a tertiary level instruction or in a professional work situation, with an intermediate or advanced level of language knowledge (Dudley-Evans and St. John 1998). As Widdowson (1998: 4) explains in his article about pragmatics and ESP: "It is only when it is referred to context, to shared knowledge, to communicative purpose, that it becomes realised as pragmatically specific and takes on significance as discourse."

This is in full consistency with the CEFR that in its description of abilities delimits the types of specific texts that students need to be able to write. Students need to be as competent in the written as in the oral skills, having to face their academic and professional tasks successfully. In other words, they not only need to write, but also write in a particular field of knowledge (ESP).

In her work, Järvinen (2004) explains the importance of detecting the actual level of proficiency of students, and assumes an A2 Level for secondary school, and upper levels for upper secondary school in Finland. She relates types of activities and strategies, tasks and competences appropriate to the different levels. In her view, the pragmatic competences linked to summarising are related to text types: narrative/expository or text design. The levels and descriptors of the CEFR are an important effort to establish levels to measure second language proficiency, although the detection of these levels is a harder task as Weir (2005) and the document itself establish within the aims and objectives of Council of Europe language policy (CEFR: 2). Another attempt to relate language levels to pragmatics was described by Matsumura (2003), although he focused on applying structural equation modelling, not on the effect of pragmatic activities on learners' levels of proficiency.

1.3. *Objectives of the research*

The objectives set in this article are, first, to determine how to leverage language learning taking into consideration the CEFR pragmatic descriptors, which seem too general to be useful to teach English for Specific Purposes.

Second, to find out whether levels of L2 proficiency function as indicators of pragmatic development. Evidence seems to indicate that between B1 and B2 levels of

proficiency there is scarce difference in terms of pragmatic awareness, as will be shown in the results section.

Third, to propose awareness-raising activities related to pragmatic aspects of language for specific domains. These can be found in the methodology section, and can prove to be useful to other teachers in similar contexts.

2. Methodology

2.1. *Material*

We selected a group of thirty students who were enrolled in the Industrial Engineering degree at Universitat Politècnica de València and had previously passed a test that established their levels of proficiency. We selected the students who had a B1 or a B2 level following the CEFR descriptors. In order to distinguish both levels we followed the guidelines related to overall written production specified in the *Manual* (Council of Europe 2009: 138) for a B1 level ("Can write straightforward connected texts on a range of familiar subjects within his/her field of interest, by linking a series of shorter discrete elements into a linear sequence"); and for a B2 level ("Can write clear, detailed texts on a variety of subjects related to his/her field of interest, synthesising and evaluating information and arguments from a number of sources" (ibid)). A further description of B1 and B2 levels can be seen in Appendix 1. The students were not divided into two groups but worked together in the same class.

2.2. *Method*

The methodology of this research was based on the studies of Dörnyei (2001, 2007). Following Dörnyei (2007), the mixed methods research, which combines qualitative and quantitative analyses, was considered optimal for the research. Dörnyei (2007: 20) describes this kind of research as: "a new and vigorously growing branch of research methodology, involving the combined use of qualitative and quantitative methods with the hope of offering the best of both worlds".

Nevertheless, contrary to Dörnyei (2007) we emphasize the bottom-up approach (writing is a higher level of focus although it views language as a total entity) instead of the top-to-bottom methodology (i.e. listening-speaking-reading-writing). This bottom-up approach is based on motivation seen as central to language learning and its most beneficial aspect is that it provides full autonomy for language learners.

We followed the considerations proposed by Dörnyei (2007) in the setting of the study stages and in the later analysis of the data. First, we set the scene, second we generate motivation and third we encouraged positive self-evaluation.

The steps followed in our research were the following: Firstly, *setting the scene*, in a first session students were asked to observe examples in websites and printed examples of how to write a summary. In a second session they were asked to summarise and

discuss in groups of three the most outstanding characteristics of summarising. In a third session, they were asked to write a specific summary about a technical topic related to their degree (sources of energy, electricity, motors, etc.) of around 150 words. They could not use dictionaries or the documents that they had elaborated in the previous session. Teachers collected the thirty summaries and classified them depending on the initial level of proficiency detected in the students.

Secondly, *generate motivation*, students were asked to repeat the same procedure but related to formal letter writing. They were encouraged to act creatively. At the end of the four sessions, the formal letters were collected and divided into two groups depending on their initial level.

Finally, make *positive self-evaluation*. The students were able to assess their written production in the light of the pragmatic aspects that had been proposed for study. Thus, as a result of the activities proposed to raise pragmatic awareness in the language classroom, students improved their knowledge of pragmatic aspects essential for successful writing.

As explained as part of the experience described in the present document, some of these were often ignored and went unnoticed by the learners unless asked directly about them. The aim of the entire activity was to expose students to pragmatic aspects of language and provide them with tools that could allow them to establish their own pragmalinguistic rules when writing in a second language. We encouraged students to set their own evaluation and leveraged their language learning. Students were asked several questions in this respect such as:

1. Enumerate the aspects related to writing summaries that you did not know before the activities.
2. Enumerate the aspects related to writing formal letters that you did not know before the activities.
3. Which are the specific aspects of language writing?
4. Enumerate the differences between the native and target language writing.
5. Have you improved your knowledge of specific writing and letter writing?
6. Would you include further activities?

The letters and summaries written were analysed in order to evaluate the learners' pragmatic awareness and assess whether the activities had been useful to them. Such aspects as use of connectors, parts of the writings, use of formal aspects, specific terminology command and cultural matters were considered relevant in this study. Finally, we gathered the results of both groups concerning summaries and letter writing and contrasted the pragmatic aspects of students included initially in the B1 and B2 groups. We evaluated their awareness of the linguistic aspects related to pragmatic and, consequently, specific communication. This experience was reported as a very fruitful one by students, who insisted on the importance of setting questions related to pragmatics in learning a second language and leveraging foreign language learning.

3. RESULTS

The results section is divided into different subsections; each of which describes the kind of activity proposed to students in the specific pragmatic awareness-raising activities. The first part deals with the development of pragmatic competence phase, the second part with the motivation phase, the third part with the analysis and detection of pragmatic awareness phase, and the fourth part with the leveraging phase.

3.1. *Development of pragmatic competence phase (set the scene)*

In this phase, students were suggested several activities useful for pragmatic development. They were asked to look for websites or textbooks which included information about summarising and formal letter writing. Some specific websites that could be useful to obtain specific knowledge on engineering topics were also recommended. In this phase we did not separate students with different entry levels. They worked together looking for information related to their specific domain, engineering.

Through these activities, students developed understanding about how language forms are appropriately used in context. They developed pragmatic awareness of their specific domain and communicative practice. The results were quite satisfactory at this stage, as they became conscious of the way they can look for information and apply this in interaction with other students, working in groups and discussing if the texts that they found were relevant or not. This was also the base for some metalinguistic teamwork, which is unusual in the ESP setting. Then, students decided how to organise and plan their learning activities. Pragmatic awareness was raised with the student-discovery technique in which students obtain information through observation (Kasper 1997).

3.2. *Motivation phase (generate motivation)*

Motivation is a key aspect to be considered in language learning methodologies (Dörnyei 2001). Students need to be motivated in understanding the importance of pragmatic awareness. Based on existing and past University curricula, students have traditionally been taught to learn grammatical aspects of language or different oral and written skills (Kassim and Ali 2010), but pragmatics is a new concept for engineering students as can be observed in most of ESP handbooks for Higher Education. Their interest had to be gained and their attention focused on the activities in order to obtain optimal results.

Students were asked to look for information related to summarising and letters in different websites through web search engines. This was not always an easy task as the Internet offers quite a significant amount of information but most of the web addresses are just companies which offer their services to translate letters or summaries or to correct the writings of second language speakers. In this phase, the role of the teacher is essential to stimulate students. We prepared some websites that offered relevant information and we just presented some key words in order to help them. The purpose

of this was not to discourage students, but to help them become autonomous in their learning, and to carry out some self-learning activities, which would allow future work.

Next, we presented examples of cross-cultural misunderstandings and use examples of potentially problematic interactions that evidence some pragmatic peculiarities. Students were asked to discuss these cultural differences and were trained to be good observers. From the summaries collected in this class, and from our class experience as teachers, it was obvious that Spanish students tend to write too long summaries and this conception was discussed in groups. Opinions were divided; they did not consider their sentence or paragraph writing was too long. After that, some examples were shown by the teachers to prove the contrary.

After capturing students' curiosity, the next step involved collecting and analysing the summaries and letters produced by students in order to analyse and discuss with them pragmatic conceptions.

3.3. *Analysis and detection of pragmatic awareness phase*

The thirty summaries and thirty letters were collected in order to evaluate the pragmatic awareness of their authors and their recognition of the pragmatic dimensions of the speech act being studied. First, the teachers analysed the letters and summaries considering the use of connectors, parts of the writings, use of formal aspects, command of specific terminology and cultural matters. As one of the purposes of this paper was to raise pragmatic awareness with the activities, we decided that students should also participate in this phase. In an extra session, students and teachers discussed the use of the different aspects mentioned above.

The results were contrasted and most students proved to have improved their pragmatic awareness and language competence. After considering the final results, we observed that there was no difference between the participants. All learners had been exposed to the same language strategy and even when their language proficiency was not the same, they produced similar writings in terms of pragmatics. They were in contact with real texts from the Internet and this fact encouraged them to use some structures that they had never used before. They planned the structure of the text in the summary, were conscious of the importance of specific vocabulary and of the formal aspects of letter writing. Some cultural aspects were also discussed in the analysis of the texts, for example, the use of present continuous tense or future tenses in the summaries or even the inclusion of aspects that were not relevant in the formal letters. Students were aware of the standard norms of language writing, some of them also pointed out that not all English learners wish to behave pragmatically like native speakers of the target language.

3.4. *Leveraging phase (positive self-evaluation)*

The final aspect considered in this research was to determine whether there were any differences in the pragmatic development of students after their exposure to

awareness-raising activities. We analysed if the influence of teachers used to achieve foreign language acquisition had succeeded or not.

The descriptors of the CERF distinguish between B1 level and B2 level of language proficiency and differentiate them clearly. Nevertheless, after the analysis of the summaries and letters, we discovered that there was similar pragmatic competence in the students initially divided in two levels (B1 and B2). In this way, the levelling of students who learn English for specific domains cannot be so clearly differentiated, as it depends on the learning strategies used. Indeed, in terms of grammar, errors produced by students with a B1 level of proficiency, were more numerous. However, students developed pragmatic abilities similarly, disregarding their initial level of proficiency, and were able to produce and analyse the texts from the pragmatic perspective proposed.

4. DISCUSSION

Initially two groups were set following the CEFR descriptors but, after leveraging language learning using pragmatic strategies that improved competence, students could be positioned in the same level of proficiency. Language awareness activities proved to be an excellent pragmatic tool to leveraging language learning.

Although pragmatic awareness is relevant to develop language proficiency in second language learners, it would be advisable that teachers also respect learners' individuality and freedom of choice. Each human being has got an individual and unique way to express emotions and feelings; furthermore, language is the communicative path that shows this variation. The pragmatic components of language could be used by learners in different ways and, so, teachers should encourage students to learn how to choose the adequate language expressions to show opinion, feelings and emotions.

Therefore, it might be advisable to propose students different types of activities, so that they can discover the most appropriate for their individual learning. Observing native speaker pragmatic norms is useful to develop awareness-raising activities, but their role should not be considered crucial to master a second language. Grammatical and textual proficiency is certainly crucial to communicate, although speakers can express pragmatic competence in various ways. This is the reason why leveraging language learning exploiting pragmatic competence activities can entail further aspects, for example, cultural implications and awareness raising.

It should be stressed that a general development of pragmatic awareness in our students can help them confront the pragmatic meaning of the texts they encounter in everyday situations. Students need to develop pragmatic awareness of English language norms in specific domains in order to communicate efficiently with speakers with different cultural backgrounds.

In the previous section, we have already underlined that leveraging language learning taking into consideration the CEFR pragmatic descriptors is not an easy task, as pragmatic aspects can be learnt by students with similar levels. On the contrary, it can be correlated that students with similar levels of L2 proficiency can improve their

pragmatic competence in the same way, as they can communicate correctly, so pragmatic issues are not difficult for them. A further aspect related to language for specific domains is that teachers should propose awareness-raising activities in the language classroom. They may help students to increase autonomous learning and become aware of the pragmatic meaning of texts. In this way, students could be able to communicate in various ways or interpret the different representations of language.

The CEFR offers descriptors and recommendations for specific domains in the use of the language, but not for the teaching of ESP. Several studies have been carried out in this regard, as the ACPEL Portfolio described by Durán et al. (2009). In it, "The academic and professional bank of descriptors arranged by communicative skills" is proposed to help in this sense. These are thought to help students in their self-assessment for the four skills. An example of one such descriptor for writing could be: "I can write simple instructions and safety advise related to my vocational field, which are clearly intelligible". It can be seen that there is a slightly different approach, more focused on the specificity of language than the descriptor offered by the CEFR (Council of Europe 2009: 9, 21) for the same level of proficiency: "I can write simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. I can write personal letters describing experiences and impressions". In this sense, the CEFR (Council of Europe 2009: 9, 21) level descriptors are too general and poorly defined to be useful for Spanish teachers of ESP who need a further development of pragmatic competence.

A pragmatic approach should be used in these learning environments in order to stimulate students that have to be professionally and linguistically competent in an increasingly international job market. We consider that the CEFR has been the beginning of a long way to define language levels and descriptors. This should be further developed and determine the linguistic implications of these levels in order to provide a common path to teach students.

5. CONCLUSION

First, we concluded that the CEFR does not detail the way in which the pragmatic competence of students at Higher Education could be improved in the language classroom. In this sense, leveraging language learning becomes a hard task in second language learning, even more in an ESP environment. Second, we observed, after our study, that the L2 levels established by the CEFR do not reflect the pragmatic development of students as their pragmatic competence varied after some awareness raising activities. Third, we propose the inclusion of pragmatic activities in Higher Education handbooks that could improve language competence and language awareness in ESP. Maybe all competence levels are not necessarily interconnected, and proficiency can be improved at a different rate than other abilities, or some students can know a lot of grammar, but have no pragmatic awareness.

The CEFR was initiated as a highly important attempt to level foreign language learning. Nevertheless, in this moment a further development of the descriptors is

needed in order to adapt the general descriptors to specific needs. Students are expected to be competent in pragmatic communication and be able to know the particularities of ESP, but no hint is given to ESP teachers as to how to prepare students to fulfil their future foreign language needs.

All the advancements in technology, globalization and the worldwide use of English for communication seem to indicate that leveraging language learning needs to consider more implicit aspects in discourse than grammatical competence and textual competence.

We are conscious that pragmatic competence is just one aspect to be considered and that further studies should be carried out in order to improve the leveraging of language learning, focusing on grammatical aspects of pragmatic awareness and how students can increase their grammatical competence through pragmatic awareness.

Notes

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APPENDIX 1

COMPETENCES (as defined in the CEFR (Council of Europe 2009).

B1 I can write very brief reports, which pass on routine factual information and state reasons for actions.
B1 I can write personal letters describing experiences, feelings and events in detail.
B1 I can describe basic details of unpredictable occurrences, e.g., an accident.
B1 I can describe dreams, hopes and ambitions.
B1 I can take messages describing enquiries, problems, etc.
B1 I can describe the plot of a book or film and describe my reactions.
B1 I can briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions, plans and actions.

B2 I can evaluate different ideas and solutions to a problem.
B2 I can synthesize information and arguments from a number of sources.
B2 I can construct a chain of reasoned argument.
B2 I can speculate about causes, consequences and hypothetical situations.

TEST RESULTS (as defined in the CEFR).

B1. Your test result suggests that you are at level B1 in writing on the Council of Europe scale. At this level people can write simple texts on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. They can write personal letters describing experiences and impressions.

B2. Your test result suggests that you are at level B2 in writing on the Council of Europe scale. At this level people can write clear detailed texts on a wide range of subjects related to their interests. They can write an essay or report, passing on information and presenting some arguments for or against a particular point of view. They can write letters highlighting the personal significance of events and experiences.