

Teacher's Act of Praise in the Classroom

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Abstract: *Teachers regularly use certain speech acts in the classroom; one of which is to use praise to motivate students. However, they need to pay careful attention to students' psychological conditions before using the speech acts. Therefore, words to praise are vital to classroom interaction. This act of praising is strongly influenced by the context. Thus, it can be said that teachers not only deliver certain speech but also include particular acts at the same time. This study was approached pragmatically using speech act analysis.*

Keywords: praise, interaction, forms, meaning, pragmatics

1. Introduction

Teachers are important elements. They need to be responsible for all things related to education, including classroom interaction. Students-teacher interaction is an essence of learning. Therefore, teachers are not only required to teach but also to motivate their students. Motivation is vital to the classroom interaction. It, thus, has been utilized to stimulate and change students' behaviors. Besides, motivation also functions as guidance which means it helps achieve the goals of education.

In the classroom, teachers are mostly confident to encourage their students with praise. Praise is able to treat the students psychologically well [1, 2] since they feel appreciated for their efforts to participate. Compliments given by the teachers can be received as a motivation by the students to change their behaviors. Classroom interaction holds two principles that are acceptance and conformity. The first principle refers to how someone manages their communication way to adapt with the context so that it becomes understandable. Therefore, teachers need to be careful in communicating their ideas in order to get understood by their students. Unlike the acceptance principle, the latter is used to adjust speakers' speech acts with their intentions. In other words, teachers are required to consider communicating with proper speech acts in the classroom.

Appreciation for students does not have to be in the form of concrete materials. It can be words to praise since they are sometimes worth more than any goods. In general, those words can improve students' performance and achievement continuously. Teachers who are good at creating a conducive learning environment usually praise their students. This speech act has become a part of functional communication which can change students' behaviors. Therefore, the presence of teacher praise in the classroom should not be out of the academic context. Praise which is not suitable with the academic context is mostly unstructured and spontaneous.

Teacher's act of praise is a phenomenon occurs in the classroom which contains pragmatic implication. As is stated by Austin [3], there are two aspects of condition which

influence speech acts; they are (1) a context on which correct and proper speech acts are built, and (2) a text in which actions and speech acts are corresponding with each other.

According to norms, the use of praise should be based on the principles of speech acts in communication. In this case, the principles are considered a part of language speech acts [4]. Proper use of praise can build a good relationship between the speakers and their partner. Praise can also function as a strategy of saving face and positive politeness [5, 6].

In classroom interaction, contexts significantly affect the meaning of praise delivered by a teacher or a student. These contexts refer to the background in which the communication occurs, including the participants, purposes, content, tone, media, and communication types [7]. Verbal and proper communication which takes place between a speaker and his/her partner means that the partner does not only understand linguistic form of the speaker's speech but also the contexts which surround the speech. In addition, the partner is also able to understand pragmatic implication from a speech act addressed by the speaker.

As a participant of the classroom interaction, the speaker wants to present his/her intentions with various ways. On the other hand, the partner attempts to catch the meaning. However, in reality, interaction which occurs at schools does not contain any speech acts which deliver messages, give compliments or certain awards. In other words, none of the words reveal the meaning of the speech acts literally.

An analysis on the act of praise has been done by some researchers such as Kuntoro [6], Jamal [1], and Pattiasina [2]. The studies were conducted in diverse speech act communities with various contexts, but the results were almost similar which said that (1) the act of praise in the society was delivered directly; (2) the act of praise was also delivered indirectly and contained pragmatic implication. The present study, thus, was aimed to describe the forms, functions, and modes of the act of praise in the senior high school classrooms in Ambon. Specifically, it had a purpose to explain teacher's act of praise involved in the classroom interaction.

2. Methods

Teachers are considered as the user of verbal interaction language in the classroom. Therefore, they not only speak about something but also perform an action of it. As the speech act contains certain acts, teacher's praise can be analyzed from different aspects including its forms, functions, and modes. This study, thus, employed a qualitative approach oriented to pragmatics and speech act analysis.

Data of this research was in the form of verbal data which consisted of various forms, functions, modes of teacher's act of praise within certain classroom contexts. The contexts comprised the speaker, situation, forms and content as well as the purpose of the message.

3. Findings and Discussion

a. Forms of Teacher's Act of Praise

The act of praise in communication at senior high schools shows respect for the students. Some instances of praise are "Good, Stevi one hundred for you!", "Wow great, Ana got the first place!", "Hah, you are smart!". The use of the words to praise reveals the teacher's excitement through saying (1) good, (2) great, and (3) tidy. *First*, the word *good* means that the teacher was satisfied with Stevi's answer. This is in line with the context of the acts which says that praise could be given when the teacher's question was answered correctly by the students. *Second*, praise delivered in the form of *great* indicates the teacher's pride for the achievement of the student. *Third*, the use of word *smart* presents that the teacher wanted to express her/his happiness to the clever student.

Besides containing the same feelings, those three speech acts also have pragmatic implication. Seen from the context of each speech act, then "Good, Stevi one hundred for you!" implies that the teacher hoped that Stevi would always study hard and achieved better in the future. Speech act (2) does not only mean to praise and inform that Ana got the first place. This speech act, however, contains the teacher's expectation on other students. Speech act (3) implies that the teacher hoped that the students could learn more diligently and keep improving their learning strategies.

The act of praise is mostly used to convey the speaker's emotions [4]. The speaker's emotions are expressed through the revelation of the teacher's psychological attitude towards the situation implied in the illocution. Praise is a part of an expressive act. It is likely to show excitement and respect towards the students as the teacher's speaking partner, even sometimes result in an exaggeration. Speech act (4) teacher: "Let me see. *What a brilliant report*, all grades are good". This speech act describes an expression of the teacher's psychological condition which is admiration. The form of expressive praise which was delivered by the teacher verbally means that s/he was impressed by the student's effort to keep her/his grades good. The act of praise might make the student feel over confident with her/himself.

b. Functions of Teacher's Act of Praise

The functions of teacher's praise vary from one classroom to another. This happens due to teacher's different social and cultural background. This difference absolutely influences the teacher's behaviors, either verbal or physical. Praise functions to save a face and provide good environment of communication [8]. The functions of the praise found from the findings are to make a refusal less painful, deliver commands and warn in a good way, encourage, give advice, accept and give permission.

The act of delivering a soft command in Ambon represents a maxim conversation view (Leech, 1993; Lakoff, 1973) [5, 9]. The conversation maxim departs from the cooperation principles, especially of *what to say*, *what should be said*, and *how to say it*. The principles were carried out by adding some grammatical and perfectness notions into the pragmatic components. This act was aimed to encourage the students to begin, continue, and develop their reasoning. It also implies that the teacher appreciated and assessed the students' responses. Indicators of delivering a soft command are represented by speech acts of a student named Arif who was named after a famous director and playwright *Arifin C. Noor*. Indicators of support are also represented by the word *great* followed by *come on all students be great*. The teacher also praised a student to give a command; "... Marthin is my golden boy...". In this context, the teacher was discussing a literature review. The teacher was intended to explore the students' schemes of writing a review. S/he said so because she found out that Marthin was the most rebel student in the classroom. S/he added another praise to give command "that is true..., that is correct.

The function of speaking to rebuke is indirect. The indirectness is manifested in a hinting strategy. For instance, an indirect command is made in the form of a statement of students' willingness or readiness to do something. This strategy consists of determining an illocution which is interpreted as an additional aim of the execution of another illocution. Teacher's criticisms were ironic [5]. It means that to be rude in a polite way. The teacher used this way to leave an impression that the students obeyed the rules while they did not. Ironically, the teacher said, "Well, here they are, our cover-boys!" which actually implied that "they are not cover boys, they are bad boys". The fake praise can be detected more clearly through the speaker's impatient voice tone. The speech act; "You wear a nice, tidy uniform" which actually implies that it is not nice nor tidy at all. Maxim of quality has been indirectly violated in this case.

Ironic speech acts are often marked by an exaggerated statement which diminishes the meaning so that it is difficult to interpret the statement immediately. Saying "how handsome you are" in a pretending tone will not be interpreted as an irony if the speaker only says "you are handsome" without the mockery tone. So, it can be concluded that an irony is the good way to hurt someone's feelings (*mock-politeness*). Criticism might not make someone happy for it belongs to one of the face-threatening acts. Nevertheless, the act of praise can be used to reduce the

effect. In this context, the teacher saved the students' face by complimenting them [10].

The realization of the function of delivering soft rebuke is shown by the following speech acts: "Well, here they are, our cover-boys!"; "You wear a nice, tidy uniform"; "how handsome you are"; "This classroom is very clean"; "Pretty clever.."; "Hey, you have much money, don't you"; "Now you have recovered, haven't you?"; "Is it correct, Usi?"; "Isn't that good...!"; "See! Leni is beautiful... aren't you Leni?"

The act of accepting students represents the relationship maxim [5] which was represented by, *try to show relevance in your words*, which means do not say something that does not make sense. Good relationship maxim requires good cooperation between the speaker and her/his partner to correspond to the topic they are talking. The realization of the acceptance act can be found in these following speech acts; "you are happy, aren't you"; Good, Sir!"; "Yes I am...."; "I enjoyed it", "It's clear, Mam!", "Understood, Mam."

The reinforcement function is intended to motivate the students. Encouragement was given directly through positive compliments. Some instances are "All your answers are not wrong, to better understand it, I'll explain it to you once more"; "you can make him/her as your role model (while pointing at a student). Actually, the motivation resulted from the students' responses to the teacher's questions. The teacher could encourage her/his students by making a clever students as an example. It is expected that the students will be more motivated.

The function of approval is aimed to ask for an agreement or affirmation. The teacher could say for example, "Do you like me teaching you? The students may answer: "We do, Mam"; "Do you think my opinion is true? The students may answer: "We do, Sir"; "What do you think about the story? The students may answer: "it's great, Sir"; "Do you think your friend's opinion is true? The students may answer: "It's true!"; "What do you think about Pak Luky when he teaches? The students may answer: "We like it, Sir". The act of asking for agreement puts forward the cooperation principle that belongs to the relationship maxim [5]. It thus implies students' positive responses. Perhaps, in the beginning, the students hurt the teacher's feelings but at the end they apologize by giving an indirect compliment to the teacher and say; "We like you, Mam!"; "It is true, Sir!"; "Yes, it is correct!"; and "We like it, Sir!".

Modes refer to how the speaker conveys her/his intentions or thoughts to their partner. Praise is delivered through direct illocution and indirect illocution [4]. Some instances of responses modes by praising or giving compliments without answering are "Good! Others?..."; "you do not need to open you book"; "your book is nice, isn't it?"; "you are gaining weight, aren't you?". Some instances of responses modes by providing answers are "Great! Where do you live?"; it's nice? Where did you get it?"; "How do you make this class so clean?"; "so brave". These complements are aimed to motivate the students to study harder. The teacher's responded positively to the students' answers. The students

can accept the compliments by (1) providing an answer to the teacher's questions and (2) responding without answering any questions. The teacher's responses towards the students' speech acts bear pragmatic implications, that are (1) agree with the students by accepting and reinforcing, and (2) disagree with the students by refusing and asking some questions.

c. The Psychological Effects of Teacher's Act of Praise

Teacher's act of praise can improve students' responses. DePoter *et al* [11] states that when a student learns to ride a bicycle, their friends may cheer her/him up. It motivates her/him so that s/he is willing to try many times. Students need the same encouragement when it comes to learning. Praise is a positive reinforcement which contains appreciation for what the students have done. This speech act functions as an acknowledgment, respect, and admiration. Teacher should give praise to respect students who answer correctly. The act of praise can maintain a harmonious relationship between the teacher and her/his students.

The act of praise has two psychological effects that are to create the happiness and pride. Those feelings can boost someone's confidence, smarten their responses and promote a good relationship. Sunardi [12] suggests that teacher should consider what students do and say instead of what s/he says and does to her/his students. A teacher has a responsibility to compliment the students for what they have done and said. It is important because it can elicit positive responses from the students. However, repeated use of the same word to praise will not be effective. Therefore, the teacher needs to find some variation to it.

Teacher gives a compliment to improve students' confidence and interests. DePoter & Hernacki [13] states that developing someone's interest is a brilliant way to motivate them to achieve their goals. Therefore, the act of praise is necessary to boost students' confidence and build a strong relationship with them which result in improved learning achievement.

The act of praise has a tendency to create a competition between students so that a student envies another student and makes her/him want to do the same thing which is complimented by the teacher. According to Brown [14], students' behaviors are controlled by some consequences such as rewards to motivate them. Indirectly, praise can be considered a reward to create a positive competitive atmosphere.

d. Teacher's Act of Praise as the Reinforcement

Interaction in learning constitutes a stimulus and response which construct a pair of speech acts. The conversation structure generally consists of two paired speech acts that are speech act which is placed in the first part and speech act which is placed in the second part. The first part functions as the stimulus and the second part functions as the response. In fact, the structure of the adjacent pair is not only made up of two parts. The classroom interaction consists of three parts that are the trigger or initiation, the response, and the feedback.

An example of conversation occurred between a teacher and a student

Teacher: Why is a classified ad short?
initiation

Student: To make it easy to understand, Mam!
response

Teacher: Yes. You are close to it. Does anyone want to add some more to Nemo's answer?

e. Feedback

In the classroom interaction, it seems that the first part triggers the response and the feedback follow it at the end. The feedback emerges in the form of reinforcement. [15] through a directed instruction approach believes that behaviors are controlled through the operant conditioning process. *Operant conditioning* is a process to repeatedly reinforce a certain behavior until it occurs many times or diminishes according to someone's will. A teacher can repeatedly control students' behaviors through drills and exercises. Mallott [16] divides reinforcement into two that are positive reinforcement and negative reinforcement. The positive reinforcement stimulates the repetition of exciting behaviors that students like and improves their positive responses. It can be in the form of verbal reinforcement such as praise, repetition and reference. Meanwhile, the negative reinforcement helps reduce the development of negative behaviors. It aims to lessen negative responses or terminate them and to maintain or improve positive responses. The examples of negative reinforcement are commands, prohibition, and threats.

Teacher's act of praise is a speech act that can motivate students. It is intended to give the students attention and motivation so that they can achieve better in learning. To avoid communication breakdown, the students need to understand what the teacher wants to communicate. Leech [5] underlined the importance of similar background knowledge possessed by the teacher and the students in the classroom communication. The same background knowledge makes it possible for the students to interpret indirect messages that the teacher conveys since in fact, the teacher could deliver the messages directly and indirectly.

The act of praise tends to please a student to make other students motivated and make them want to be like the student who has been complimented. In line with Brown [14], students' behaviors are controlled by consequences such as rewards that can motivate them. Therefore, it is necessary for the teacher to give compliments to the students. By creating a positive competitive atmosphere, the teacher can improve the students' cooperation as well as competition in a positive way. However, the teacher needs to be more creative in developing the strategy. Even though the effect is not so big, the success of learning depends on it. So, it can be concluded that the teacher needs to praise or compliment her/his students.

4. Concluding Remarks

The success of understanding teacher's praise depends on the ability of the speaker's partner to interpret the context. This phenomenon was found in the classroom interaction occurred at SMA (senior high schools) in Ambon. Therefore, it was important to avoid the communication breakdown by improving the teacher's communicative competence. The competence comprises not only grammatical knowledge but also the knowledge of the appropriateness of a speech act according to its speaker's and listener's status, space and time where the conversation takes place, the degree of formality, medium used, topics, and domains which surround the interaction.

It is advisable for language teachers to develop and habituate the act of praise in their classroom as well as to adapt it with the situation and condition of the students. It is necessary to conduct further research which can cover broader scope of the act of praise and its implications.

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