






# Investigating Students' Pragmatic Deficit of Teacher-Student Interaction in a Language Classroom Discourse

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**Abstract.** Students' pragmatic deficit is closely related students' language impairment due to the lack of innate ability to interact emotionally with other. It can be found in teacher-students interaction. This study attempts to illuminate the students' pragmatic deficit in classroom discourse. The participant of this study is a male student of autism center in East Java, Indonesia. The qualitative approach is applied in this study to portray how the student carries out their pragmatic deficit in classroom discourse. The findings reveal that student encounters pragmatic deficit in language acquisition process. He gets pragmatic deficit in interacting with their teacher. In classroom discourse, the pragmatic deficit of an autistic child is impaired in his speech acts and conversational breakdowns. The findings can enrich teachers' or practitioners' knowledge in providing meaningful learning for students in classroom discourse. The further study on students' pragmatic deficit should explore on the way of overcoming students' pragmatic deficit in classroom discourse by applying appropriate interventions.

**Keywords:** Classroom Discourse, Interaction, Language Acquisition, Language Impairment, Pragmatic Deficit.

## 1 Introduction

Dealing with children who have special needs, including those who have Autism Spectrum Disorder, the problems of language acquisition such as students' pragmatic ability seem to be a greater challenge in some countries [1-6]. Autism Spectrum Disorder students face particular learning difficulties, such as pragmatic deficit. Pragmatic deficit is associated as the difficulty of using language appropriately in social communication. Since, they lack the intrinsic ability to react to others emotionally, they have a pragmatic deficit that is directly tied to their language impairment. It occurs when teachers and students interact in classroom discourse. Their ability to communicate is really limited. The students generally violate pragmatic restriction in communicating with other. Hence, it is very difficult for students to communicate their feelings through words. In fact, the ability to communicate with other serves as the foundation for social connections and enables them as speakers to build relationships that meet their individual needs. In this regard, parents and teachers' contributions are crucial to helping students overcome their pragmatic deficit.

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Numerous studies about pragmatic deficit have been reported by some scholars [2], [4], [6]. [4] attempts to explore the students' pragmatic deficit in bilingual family. The goal of this study is to examine a child with mild autism who has been identified with no speech development impairments and who is having difficulty in learning English as second language. This study highlights that one evident problem Fatima has as she ages is having pragmatic deficit. Fatima uses the English language pretty well, but she faces practical communication difficulties and still needs to catch up to other teenagers her age in terms of communicative proficiency. Her family's role and support are crucial in fostering both her language and social development. Another pragmatic deficit study has documented by [2]. This study looks into how L2 French and L3 English acquire the genericity. Participants include L1 Arabic adults who have mastered L2 French, L1 Arabic-L2 French adults who have mastered L3 English, as well as controls who speak neither French nor English. An acceptability judgment interpretation task reveals that learners are able to read well-known kind definite generics that cluster morphological, semantic, and discourse cues in a native-like way. Furthermore, in violation of the pragmatic restriction, they interpret nominals that are not clearly defined in a generic way. Hence, in the L2/L3 interlanguage, students' pragmatic deficit can provoke the semantic misinterpretation of non-generic nominals. In this regard, the transfer of L1 Arabic is the cause of the deficit.

Another relevant study by [6] looks into whether people with autism spectrum disorders communicate differently depending on their interlocutors. It adopts an observational methodology. Many linguistic phenomena, such as words, conversational turns, metaphors, similes, expressions of irony, interruptions, latches, and overlaps, are examined in this study. This study recruits six adult males with high-functioning Autism Spectrum Disorder by considering some criteria. They have graduated from high school. In addition, they have a verbal IQ of above 70, and no concurrent structural language impairments. Their ages are between 18 and 35 years. They have ability to sit and have a conversation unassisted. Participants in this study who had Autism Spectrum Disorder take part in triadic conversation sessions with either non-autistic peoples or peoples who also had Autism Spectrum Disorder. The findings highlight that some suspected pragmatic impairments in Autism Spectrum Disorder may not be as impaired as they seem based on prior studies. Several participants use different types of pragmatic language depending on who they are speaking with. For instance, all participants in this study interrupt more frequently while speaking to people with autism spectrum disorders than when speaking to non-autistic people. Their interruption rates are still much lower than amongst non-autistic peoples. In consideration of the prior studies mentioned above, there has been little reported about the study on the student's pragmatic deficit of the first language acquisition occurred in classroom discourse. In order to fill this gap, the goal of current study attempts to explore student's pragmatic deficit by using speech acts theory by [7] and conversational breakdown theory by [8]. In particular, the current study only focuses on how the student carries out their pragmatic deficit in classroom discourse

## 2 Review of Literature

### 2.1 Classroom Discourse

The use of spoken and written languages by teachers and students to communicate or interact in the classroom is referred to classroom discourse. Classroom discourse covers all types of discourse that exist in the classroom, mainly both the linguistic and nonlinguistic elements of discourse. The linguistic elements of discourse consist of the language used by teacher and students and classroom interactions. Then, paralinguistic gestures, prosody, and silence are categorized as the nonlinguistic elements of discourse. The linguistic and nonlinguistic elements are viewed as the observable dimension of classroom discourse [9]. In this regard, teacher should understand about the important of discourse elements to gain successful interaction with their students in classroom. The studies of classroom discourse have outlined discourse feature, classroom routine and interactional patterns, a shared understanding during classroom interaction and teacher-student discourse in a special education classroom [10-13]. The use of tag questions by teachers to increase student engagement in their lessons is illuminated in [10]. Their study identifies the use of tag questions as a discourse feature in classroom discourse. Their study adopts the theories of polarity, position in turn, intonation and speech function in examining each tag question. Their study points out the importance of tag questions in involving students in teachers' ongoing explanations through both silent thinking and quick verbal responses or actions. In this sense, tag questions are also used by instructors to guide students' attention, confirm that they are understanding explanations, engage them in problem-solving, learn about their practical work, refresh their memories of previously learned material, and establish them as co-experts with some background in the subject matter of their chosen field. Furthermore, [11] has undertaken another relevant investigation in classroom routine and interactional patterns of Grade 5 English Language reading comprehension lessons through delineating the speech act functions of instructional discourse. In addition, this study also looks into whether the four levels of vocabulary learning opportunities have been met by the current classroom discourse. The teacher's informing, eliciting, children's bidding, teacher's nomination, children's responding, teacher's acknowledgement, teacher's informing, teacher's directing, and a dominant Initiation Response-Follow-up pattern are all evident in the classroom routine. The teacher's discourse has effectively directed the students' attention to the target vocabulary and elicited from them the meanings of those terms. Another relevant investigation by [12] emphasizes on both teachers and students in maintaining a shared understanding during classroom interaction. This study aims to understand how teachers' gestures can foster a sense of shared understanding. The main goal of this study is to capture the teachers' gestures in promoting students' contribution in classroom discourse. This study indicates that teachers use gestures to ensure they have common ground with each student who is speaking as well as to promote common ground within the classroom as a whole.

Classroom discourse study also can be found in special education classroom. [13] illuminate how opportunities for disability students to acquire the academic supports they need as well as to feel competent, related, and autonomous are facilitated by teacher-student discourse in a special education classroom. Their study provides in-

sight into how participants dealt with issues related to power, responsibility, and role during an academic project. The relationships form in this specific special education learning environment assisted the students' focus to perceive learning supports and strategies as acceptable, beneficial, and desirable. These relationships also give them the chance to enhance the self-control abilities and relatedness feelings necessary for deeply held self-determination beliefs. In summary, the classroom discourse studies contribute to the understanding of the potential role of teachers in classroom discourse.

## 2.2 Pragmatic Deficit

The inability to use language in social communication effectively is known as pragmatic deficit. Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder have a pragmatic deficit because to their inability to emotionally respond to others, which is closely related to their language impairment. In particular, students with Autism Spectrum Disorder often associated with students who have the characteristic of using social language (pragmatic) that is abnormal [14]. The students' pragmatic deficit can be examined by pragmatic modes of engagement. Speech act is categorized as one of pragmatic modes of engagement [15]. It is viewed as any action that can be carried out through the use of utterances and is frequently labeled with a more particular term, such as: an invitation, complaint, compliment, apology, promise, or request [16]. Searle's classification of speech acts include representative, directive, commissive, expressive and declaration [7]. By using representative speech act, a speaker can express his belief in the truth of a certain proposition. Speaker can applies directive speech act to get the listener to take certain action. While, commissive speech act can be used to convey what the speaker means. Speaker can express to state what the speaker feels by using expressive speech act and to utter declaration by using declaration speech act.

Besides by using speech act theory, students' pragmatic deficit also can be explored by conversational breakdown theory. Conversational breakdown is often associated as problematic utterance. [8] identify eight types of conversational breakdown, namely: a) reduced volume. The children speak too quietly to be heard by the listeners. b) phonological errors. The children's speech sounds are substituted, distorted, or omitted. c) lexical errors. When children speak, the listener may misunderstand or doubt the word or phrase the children use. d) content rejection. The children give the inaccurate or questionable information of children's utterance. e) pragmatic errors. the children say something by using an underspecified pronoun, unmarked topic change, or ambiguous utterance. f) nonverbal. The children have unknown or misunderstood gestures. g) incomplete utterances. The children do not finish an utterance. g) other. None of the other categories refer to the breakdown's source.

## 3 Method

This study adopted qualitative approach to look into students' pragmatic deficit in classroom discourse. Participant in this study was an autism student who engaged in classroom discourse. This study mainly focused on a single case. A male student at an autistic center in East Java, Indonesia, took part in this study as the participant. He is

6 -7 years old. He was categorized as mild-autism student with speech impairment. Furthermore, the consent form was filled out by the teacher and the parents of participant before the study started. In this study, the data were gained by non-participant observation and videotaping the teaching learning process. The time of observation and videotaping were chosen by the researcher and teacher. It runs about 80 minutes in each meeting. The videotaping data were transcribed and analyzed by applying theory of [7] and theory of [8].

## 4 Findings and Discussion

### 4.1 Student's Speech Act in Classroom Discourse

Representative (Asertif)

A : *Dah ngantuk*  
 T : *Dah ngantuk, bubuk jam berapa tadi malam, hmhm ...*  
 A : *Diam-diam merayap datang seekor nyamuk hap lalu ditangkap*  
 T : *Lagu apa itu?*

Data (1) occurs during the speech therapy process in the therapy room, between an autistic child and a therapist. On the sidelines of the therapy process, A suddenly said "*Dah ngantuk*", even though the therapy process had not yet been completed. The A's utterances above can be categorized as representative (assertive) speech acts in the form of complaining with the speech marker "*Dah ngantuk*". After A said "*Dah ngantuk*" the therapist then continued with a question "*bubuk jam berapa tadi malam*", but A answered with a fragment of the song "*Diam-diam merayap datang seekor nyamuk hap lalu ditangkap*". The answers from the A is a speech relevance deficit, due to imperfections/misinterpretation or understanding of the meaning of the speech partner's speech so that the answers given are not in accordance with what the hearer wants.

T : *A mau main?*  
 A : *Enggak, enggak mau main*  
 T : *Mau main pasang lego, meronce manik. Meronce apa pasang lego, mau yang mana... mau yang mana..., mau meronce?*  
 A : *Enggak*  
 T : *pasang lego*  
 A : *Enggak*  
 T : *pasang bombik*  
 A : *Enggak*  
 T : *Ya sudah, duduk aja. Mau baca ini, dibaca yang keras A*  
 A : *Mewarnai ... mewarnai*

In data (2) with a context situation that is not much different from data (1), the therapist asks A about toys. The therapist says "*A mau main?*", which was then answered directly by A by saying "*Enggak, enggak mau main*". By using the expression "*Enggak*", indicating the type of representative (assertive) speech act in the form of refusing. In the speech context above A does not want to play (lego, meronce manik, pasang bombik) as offered by the therapist, but A wants to coloring.

Directive

T : *Sapa dulu dong, hallo Bu Laila...hallo Bu Laila!*  
 A : *Bu Laila, hallo*

- T : *Hallo (Jawab Bu Laila)*  
 T : *Apa kabar Bu Laila?*  
 A : *Baik*  
 T : *Kamu yang tanya dek... Bu Laila apa kabar, tanya. Bu Laila, bu Laila, bu Laila*  
 A : *Bu Laila*  
 T : *Apa kabar?*  
 A : *Baik*  
 T : *Dhafa tanya, apa kabar, apa ...?*  
 A : *kabar*  
 T : *Baik, namanya siapa? (Jawab Bu Laila)*  
 A : *Namanya A*

The example in data (3) includes the category of directive speech acts, the commanding category, using speech markers “*Sapa dulu dong*”, and category give advice with the marker “*Kamu yang tanya dek*”.

- T : *Dhafa mau apa?*  
 A : *Mau minum*  
 T : *Oh iya, silahkan. Bismillah dulu dong ...*  
 A : *Minum*  
 T : *Alhamdulillah ...*  
 A : *Lillah*  
 T : *hirobbil alamin. Sudah, ditutup dulu nak.*  
 A : *(Menutup botol minum dan menyerahkan botol minumnya ke terapis)*

From the data above (4) its include directive speech acts category give advice with the marker “*Bismillah dulu dong*” and “*ditutup dulu nak*”.

#### Commissive

- T : *Ini aja yang dibaca, mau baca yang mana, yang ini, ya sudah dibaca. Fa...dibaca dulu dong, dibaca dulu dong. Lihat, mau baca yang mana, yang ini. Bu hawa aja yang milih.*  
 A : *Sudah*  
 T : *Sudah? Belum dibaca, dibaca dulu*  
 A : *Sudah*  
 T : *Sudah, kalau begitu cerita aja wes dari gambar ini. Cerita dulu, ceritakan. Ini hewan apa fa?*  
 A : *Rusa*  
 T : *Rusa, rusanya diapakan?*  
 A : *ditembak...ditembak*

Commissive aims to convey something that is tied to an action in the future, for example, promise, offer. Based on the example data above (5), this data include commissive speech acts category offering with the marker “*kalau begitu*”. Based on the data (5), The therapist asking A to read the story but A said “*sudah*” (I have read it), although A haven’t read it yet. Because there is a rejection from A, so the therapist giving offering to A by saying “*kalau begitu cerita aja wes dari gambar ini*”. A prefer to telling the story based n the picture given than read the story.

#### Expressive

- T : *Jarinya ada lima, bukak dulu lima*  
 A : *Membuka lima jari*

- T : *Dikurangi dua*  
 A : *Satu, dua*  
 T : *Tinggal berapa?*  
 A : *Tiga*  
 T : *Selanjutnya*  
 A : *dua, lima dikurangi tiga*  
 T : *Jarinya lima*  
 A : *lima dikurangi tiga*  
 T : *berapa*  
 A : *dua, tiga*  
 T : *tinggal berapa?*  
 A : *dua*  
 T : *oke, pandai. Selanjutnya (Data 6)*

- T : ini, ini dulu, belum, ini nanti.  
 A : Habis ini, ini (menunjuk gambar uang)  
 T : iya, habis ini, ini. Ini dulu, ini dulu berapa?  
 A : Dua puluh ribu  
 T : Sepuluh ribu  
 A : Sepuluh ribu  
 T : Oke, ganti ini. Berapa ini fa?  
 A : Dua...Dua puluh ribu  
 T : Lima puluh ribu, berapa  
 A : Lima puluh ribu  
 T : Oke, jempol. Berapa fa  
 A : Sepuluh ribu  
 T : Oke, jempol. Yang ini  
 A : Dua...dua ribu (data 7)

The function of this illocutionary is to reveal or convey the speaker's psychological attitude towards the circumstances implied in the illocutionary, for example, thanking, congratulating, apologizing, criticizing, praising, condoling, and so on. Based on the example data (6 and 7) above, both of those data are categories in praising expressive speech acts with the markers "*oke, pandai, jempol*". In data (6) with the context of a situation the therapist teaches A to learn to count. With the subtraction expression "*lima dikurangi tiga*" which is then answered by A "dua". A gave the correct answer, so the therapist gave praising by saying "*oke, pandai*". For the data (7) The therapist teaches A to read currency using banknote images as media. While the therapist asking question and show the image of banknotes "*Berapa ini fa?*" and A said "*Dua...Dua puluh ribu*" than corrected by the therapist "*Lima puluh ribu, berapa?*", A said "*Lima puluh ribu*". Because of the correct answer from A, so the therapist giving praising expressive by saying "*Oke, jempol*".

**Table 4.1** Student's Speech Act in Classroom Discourse

No	Kinds of Speech Acts	Findings
1.	Representative (Asertif)	a. Mengeluh (Dah ngantuk) b. Menolak (Enggak)
2.	directive	a. Memerintah (Sapa dulu dong)

No	Kinds of Speech Acts	Findings
3.	commissive	b. Memberi nasehat (Kamu yang tanya dek, Bismillah dulu dong, ditutup dulu Nak) a. Menawarkan (kalau begitu)
4.	expressive	a. Memuji (Ok, Pandai, Jempol, Tos, He'em, He'eh) b. Maaf (Minta maaf) c. Mengucapkan terima kasih (berterima ...kasih)
5.	declarative	-

#### 4.2 Student's Conversational Breakdown in Classroom Discourse

There are some conversational breakdown types produced by the student with Autism Spectrum Disorder. The first type of conversational breakdown is reduced volume, as shown in the following data.

T : A mau menggambar

A : *Mau menggambar*

T : Menggambar apa?

A : *Menggambar, menggambar, menggambar mata*

The student speaks by using flat intonation and toneless voice in each his utterance. The student's voices are too quiet for the therapist to hear his utterance.

The second conversational breakdown type is phonological error. The student often substitutes and omits some words in his utterances, as shown in the following data.

T : A disini Ibu punya buku cerita yang judulnya Rusa Kencana. Nah, A mau baca yang mana.

A : Yang ini

T : Oke, dibaca yang keras

A : Rusa *kencanda*

T : Kencana

A : Kencana *ada* seekor rusa

T : *Adalah*

A : Adalah seekor *luca*

T : Rusa

A : Rusa *cantan*

T : Jantan

A : Rusa jantan yang sangat istimewa dan

T : badannya

A : badannya *tehat*

T : Sehat

In the first word, the student substitutes the word from "kencana" to be "kencanda". The student also changes the word from "rusa" to be "luca" in the second word. Then, the student replaces the word "jantan" with the word "cantan" and the word "sehat" with the word "tehat" in his utterances. Furthermore, the student also omits the word from "adalah" to be "ada".

The third student's conversational breakdown type is lexical error. It occurs when the student's word or phrase lead the misunderstanding of the listener as shown in the following data.



- T : Gambar apa?  
 A : *Gambar* hantu  
 T : Hantu, A ndak takut. A... A berani. Terus, sudah  
 A : *Menggambar*

In the first utterance, the student says “gambar” as noun, but he says “menggambar” as a verb in the next utterance. It is considered as lexical error, because the student uses the word that makes the therapist misunderstand to his utterances.

Content rejection is categorized as the fourth conversational breakdown type produced by student. In this type, student produces the inaccurate or questionable information of his utterance as in the data below.

- T : A coba ceritakan ya sambil di tulis. Tadi A baca apa? Baca cerita apa tadi. Ini di tulis dulu, ini. Di tulis dulu A, sini  
 A : Menulis  
 T : A mau menulis apa?  
 A : *Mau menulis mobil*

T : *Mobil?*, A ini mau menceritakan rusa kencana, rusa kencana trus apa lagi

In this data, the student provides the therapist with incorrect information. The student's answer does not match the therapist's question. The therapist asks the student to write down the story, but the student says that he wants to write down car.

The next conversational breakdown type is pragmatic error. It refers to the use of underspecified pronoun, unmarked topic change, or ambiguous utterance produced by student as in the data below.

- T : A mau main?  
 A : Enggak, enggak mau main *itu*  
 T : Mau main pasang lego, meronce manik. Meronce apa pasang lego, mau yang mana. mau yang mana, mau meronce  
 A : Enggak  
 T : pasang lego  
 A : Enggak  
 T : pasang bombik  
 A : Enggak  
 T : Ya sudah, duduk aja. Mau baca ini, dibaaca yang keras A  
 A : mewarnai... mewarnai  
 T : ohh... tidak, jika Dhafa mau mewarnai Dhafa gambar sendiri disini. Gambar sendiri ya, inikan bukunya sekolah, dipinjami sekolah tidak boleh dicoret. Kalau Dhafa mau warna Dhafa gambar dulu.

The word “itu” contains some meanings. The word “itu” can refer to “pasang lego, pasang bombik, meronce manik or other”. In fact, the student only wants to color a picture.

The sixth type of student conversational breakdown is nonverbal. In this sense, the student has unknown or misunderstood gesture as in the data below.

- T : Gambar apa itu, Ibu kan maunya mobil. Sini, gambar mobil sini. Endak dua mobil dulu.  
 A mau apa, mau apa, mau apa, mau apa  
 A : Bukunya rusak  
 T : Endak rusak, A mau gambar apa ini. A bilang dulu mau gambar apa  
 A : rusak buku (the student cries)  
 T : A mau gambar apa?  
 A : rusak buku (the student cries)  
 T : tidak rusak bukunya  
 A : rusak buku (the student cries)

T : bukunya tidak rusak, coba lihat kan tidak rusak.

The data contains misunderstood gesture, namely: crying. The student suddenly cries after saying the words "rusak buku". The therapist tries to convince the student that the book is not damaged.

The last conversational breakdown type is incomplete utterances. It refers to the incomplete utterance produced by student.

T : Iya sayang, ceritakan dong nak tentang apa itu?

A : Ini singa,

T : Terus?

A : Singa itu makanannya daging

T : Iya

A : *Dia makanannya daging tapi dia*

T : Terus apa lagi, rumahnya dimana singa itu

A : Punya kaki empat, ada rambut tajam

T : Rambutnya tajam

A : ya lebat, berwarna coklat

The utterance "Dia makanannya daging tapi dia" is categorized as incomplete utterance. Because the student's utterance needs the next information or sentence.

Based on the findings, the student with autism spectrum disorder produces seven types of conversational breakdown as proposed by [8]. They are: reduced volume, phonological errors, lexical errors, content rejection, pragmatic errors, nonverbal and incomplete utterances. In fact, speaking too quietly is identified as one of language impairment that outlined by [17]. It can be called as the characteristic of student with Autism Spectrum Disorder. In addition, the other characteristics of student with Autism Spectrum Disorder are having phonological errors, lexical errors, content rejection, pragmatic errors, nonverbal and incomplete utterances.

## 5 Conclusion

The findings show that pragmatic deficits are encountered by Autism Spectrum Disorder student during the first language acquisition process. The speech acts and conversational breakdowns of a student with autism spectrum disorder are evident in classroom discourse. The student only applies four speech act types, namely: representative, directive, commissive, and expressive. Furthermore, he also has conversational breakdowns, such as: reduced volume, phonological errors, lexical errors, content rejection, pragmatic errors, nonverbal and incomplete utterances. In addition, the findings may assist teachers and other professionals better understand how to engage students in meaningful learning in the classroom. They must clearly understand the classroom interactions that lead to the accomplishment of those interventions' goals. The future research on students' pragmatic deficits should look at how to use the right interventions to help students overcome their pragmatic deficits in classroom discourse.

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