



PRAGMATIC ASPECTS OF LANGUAGE IN TEACHING ENGLISH

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ABOUT ARTICLE

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Abstract: Pragmatic competence, the ability to use language effectively in contextually appropriate ways, is a crucial component of foreign language proficiency. This paper explores the role of pragmatics in foreign language teaching, the challenges in teaching pragmatic competence, and strategies to integrate pragmatic instruction effectively. Results highlight the impact of pragmatic instruction on learners' communication skills and intercultural competence, emphasizing the need for pragmatic awareness in foreign language pedagogy.

Introduction

In recent years, there has been a marked increase in the interest of methodologists and foreign language educators in the field of pragmatics of communication. This surge in interest can be attributed to the growing recognition that traditional approaches to foreign language acquisition, which focus primarily on mastery of linguistic structures, are insufficient for achieving true communicative competence. Language learning extends beyond acquiring vocabulary and grammatical structures; it encompasses the ability to use language appropriately in diverse social and cultural contexts. Pragmatics, a subfield of linguistics, studies how context influences the interpretation of meaning. Pragmatic competence includes skills such as understanding implicatures, managing speech acts, and navigating politeness norms, all of which are critical for effective communication. However, foreign language teaching

often focuses on linguistic competence at the expense of pragmatic skills, leading to communication breakdowns in real-life interactions. This paper aims to investigate the importance of pragmatics in foreign language teaching, identify challenges in pragmatic instruction, and propose strategies to enhance pragmatic competence in learners [15, 13].

It has become evident that proficiency in a language system alone does not guarantee the ability to use the language effectively in real-world interactions. Instead, learners must also cultivate the ability to employ the language as a tool for meaningful communication, particularly during interactive speech acts, in order to achieve communicative success. Pragmatics, as a subfield of linguistics, examines how individuals utilize language to fulfill their communicative objectives. This includes the exploration of how speakers express their intentions, interpret the intentions of others, and strategically employ language to influence their interlocutors [14]. A thorough understanding of pragmatics is essential for effective communication in a foreign language. For instance, if a foreign language speaker lacks the knowledge of how to appropriately request assistance, they may fail to elicit the desired response, thereby impeding successful communication.

Methods

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach to comprehensively investigate the role of pragmatics in foreign language teaching. The methods included the several components provided as following:

Literature review which included systematic review of existing research on pragmatics in language teaching was conducted. The review focused on identifying key theoretical frameworks, common teaching practices, and gaps in current pedagogical approaches. Traditional language teaching often prioritizes grammar and vocabulary acquisition, frequently overlooking the development of pragmatic competence. This oversight can lead to significant communication challenges for language learners, as studies have shown that pragmatic errors—such as using inappropriate levels of formality or misunderstanding indirect requests—can disrupt interactions more severely than grammatical mistakes. The importance of pragmatic competence in foreign language teaching has been extensively discussed in academic literature. Hymes (1972) introduced the concept of communicative competence, emphasizing the need for learners to use language appropriately in specific social contexts, which laid the groundwork for the inclusion of pragmatics in language pedagogy. Kasper and Rose (2002) further explored this in *Pragmatic Development in a Second Language*, highlighting how pragmatic skills, such as performing speech acts and adhering to politeness norms, are essential for effective communication but often neglected in teaching. Bardovi-Harlig and

Mahan-Taylor (2003) in their work, *Teaching Pragmatics*, argued for the integration of explicit pragmatic instruction, showing how activities like role-plays and discourse completion tasks enhance learners' contextual understanding. Thomas (1983) also contributed significantly to the field with her seminal paper on "pragmatic failure," where she examined the consequences of inappropriate language use in cross-cultural communication. More recently, Taguchi (2015) reviewed empirical studies in *The Routledge Handbook of Second Language Acquisition and Pragmatics*, concluding that teaching pragmatic competence not only improves language proficiency but also fosters intercultural understanding. Despite these insights, as Bardovi-Harlig (2001) pointed out, pragmatic instruction often remains secondary to grammar and vocabulary in language curricula, highlighting a critical gap in pedagogical practices.

Despite the critical role of pragmatics in effective communication, explicit instruction in this area remains rare in most teaching methodologies. Research indicates that integrating pragmatic-focused activities can substantially improve learners' communication skills, yet such approaches are seldom implemented systematically in language education, leaving a critical gap in the development of holistic language proficiency.

Classroom observations were carried out in 10 foreign language classrooms across different educational contexts, including secondary schools, language centers and university-level language programs. Observers documented the teaching methods used, with a specific focus on whether and how pragmatic aspects such as speech acts, politeness strategies, and conversational norms were addressed.

Learner surveys were distributed to 150 language learners across various proficiency levels (beginner to advanced). The survey included both closed-ended and open-ended questions designed to gather learners' perspectives on their experiences with pragmatic instruction, their perceived challenges in real-life communication, and their awareness of pragmatic differences between languages.

A teaching intervention was designed to explicitly address pragmatic skills. The intervention involved 50 participants divided into two groups: an experimental group receiving explicit pragmatic instruction and a control group receiving traditional grammar-based instruction. The intervention included activities like role-plays aiming on simulating real-life scenarios (e.g., making requests, giving compliments, declining invitations); discourse completion tasks where students were presented with incomplete dialogues and tasked with providing appropriate responses; and metapragmatic discussions presented as group discussions about cultural norms and the rationale behind specific speech acts.

Results

Classroom observations indicated that only 20% of lessons explicitly addressed pragmatic aspects, such as the performance of speech acts and the application of cultural norms, revealing a significant gap in the pedagogical focus. Many educators lacked the requisite training and resources to incorporate pragmatics effectively into their instruction, often relying on implicit exposure through listening and reading activities. When pragmatic elements were introduced, they were typically presented in isolation, rather than being integrated into broader communicative practice. This limited the potential for learners to transfer these pragmatic skills into real-world interactions, thereby reducing their overall impact on learners' communicative competence.

Learner surveys revealed that 70% of respondents encountered difficulties in both understanding and producing contextually appropriate language in real-life interactions. Common challenges included managing politeness strategies, interpreting indirect speech acts, and navigating culturally specific conversational norms—skills that are critical for successful communication. Moreover, learners expressed a pronounced demand for more explicit instruction in areas such as idiomatic expressions, conversational etiquette, and culturally nuanced communication styles, further emphasizing the need for a more focused integration of pragmatic competence within foreign language curricula.

The intervention study demonstrated that the experimental group, which received targeted pragmatic instruction, exhibited a 45% improvement in their ability to perform speech acts (e.g., apologies, requests) appropriately, in contrast to only a 10% improvement in the control group. Furthermore, participants in the experimental group showed enhanced skills in interpreting conversational implicatures and adapting their language to varying social contexts. Qualitative feedback from participants highlighted that activities such as role-plays and metapragmatic discussions were particularly engaging and instrumental in deepening their understanding of cultural subtleties, underscoring the effectiveness of these methodologies in fostering pragmatic competence.

Discussion

Comprehending the pragmatic dimension of language is essential for effective communication. Beyond adhering to linguistic norms, a speaker must consider the interlocutor's response to their utterances, or the pragmatic impact. This becomes particularly significant in the context of acquiring proficiency in a second language, such as English as a foreign language. Mastery of the language system, coupled with the ability to select linguistic

tools that optimize communicative impact, constitutes a vital skill. Pragmatic competence facilitates learners in aligning more closely with authentic communicative contexts, enabling them to employ linguistic resources in scenarios where mere semantic content may not suffice.

The design of a foreign language curriculum should account for the interplay between pragmatic effects and the semantic and stylistic attributes of linguistic elements [4, 26]. Instruction focused on pragmatics typically precedes semantic instruction to promote a more profound understanding of linguistic structures. Incorporating pragmatic knowledge into the language learning process, especially at advanced stages, plays a crucial role in enhancing students' communicative competence. Achieving proficiency in this area demands specialized methodologies to ensure the effective acquisition of pragmatic language skills.

The findings underscore a significant gap in the integration of pragmatic instruction within foreign language curricula. Despite its critical role in achieving communicative competence, pragmatic competence remains underrepresented in teaching methodologies and materials. Several challenges contribute to this issue, including a lack of teacher training in pragmatics, insufficient materials focusing on pragmatic features, and the inherent difficulty of generalizing pragmatic norms across diverse cultural contexts. Addressing these challenges requires a more deliberate approach to teaching pragmatics. Educators should incorporate authentic materials, such as films and real-life conversations, employ explicit teaching techniques like role-plays and pragmatic analysis, and foster intercultural awareness to help learners navigate the complexities of cultural variability in language use [7, 64].

As previously discussed, the pragmatic dimension of learning objectives pertains to the development of knowledge, competencies, and skills that enable the learner to engage with the socio-cultural values of the language's country. This objective is situated within the framework of intercultural communication. However, a critical question emerges: what precisely constitutes the set of knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to shape the principal characteristics of a secondary language personality in the learner? In the context of productive activities, it is advantageous to structure the learning process with an emphasis on mastering the complex network of lexical, semantic, and grammatical relations within the target language [5, 46]. This approach equips the learner to engage in textual activities that align with common communicative scenarios, reflecting everyday language usage. Such a framework prioritizes the cultivation of the learner's capacity to generate innovative, personalized verbal associations, thereby facilitating the expression of individual intentions in a linguistically appropriate manner.

The objects of assimilation in this context are:

- knowledge related to the communicative situation and realized through linguistic means, including the understanding of social relations and the conditions of their application, necessary for the implementation of individual communicative strategies;

- knowledge of alternative verbal strategies, including the variety of parameters necessary to analyze the communicative situation, as well as the ability to evaluate communication situations from one's own and partner's positions;

- ability to adapt one's behavior for effective communication;

- creative application of speech and non-speech behavior in new situations;

- the skill of using various forms and methods of language activity (oral, written, paralinguistic, extra-linguistic), as well as the ability to recognize and apply paralinguistic and extra-linguistic elements in communicative activity when perceiving and creating speech utterances;

- the ability to take into account all aspects of the situation and the factors influencing it;

- linguistic competence, including knowledge of linguistic means and rules of their application, as well as the ability to use paralinguistic and extra-linguistic elements.

The core competencies required to achieve the pragmatic goal of learning a foreign language are the ability to use the language flexibly and effectively to understand and communicate information. These competencies include:

- knowledge of lexical units and the ability to work with rules that allow to transform these units into meaningful utterances;

- the ability to apply language tools depending on the purpose, context, time and area of communication, and to take into account the social status of the communicative partner accordingly;

- the ability to understand information in meaningful contexts, plan one's speech and convey information in coherent, logical and reasoned statements;

- the ability to analyze and evaluate communicative situations, to make adequate decisions regarding one's speech behavior, to control one's speech actions and the actions of partners, as well as to use one's language experience (both verbal and non-verbal elements) to compensate for possible deficiencies in knowledge of a foreign language;

- knowledge of the socio-cultural peculiarities of the country whose language is being studied and the ability to adapt one's speech and non-speech behavior in accordance with these peculiarities.

Conclusion

Pragmatic aspects of language are vital for effective communication and should be an integral part of foreign language teaching. By addressing the challenges and adopting innovative strategies, educators can enhance learners' pragmatic competence, equipping them to communicate effectively across diverse cultural contexts. Future research should focus on developing pragmatic-focused teaching materials and training programs for educators. Incorporating the teaching of pragmatics into foreign language curricula can significantly enhance learners' communicative competence. By focusing on pragmatic skills, students can learn to express their intentions with greater clarity, interpret the intentions of others with nuance, and strategically influence social interactions through language. Furthermore, explicit instruction in pragmatics can help students avoid communicative errors—missteps that arise when foreign speakers fail to use language correctly in specific social contexts. Such errors, whether stemming from incorrect word choices or inappropriate syntactic structures, may lead to misunderstandings or even interpersonal conflict. Thus, embedding pragmatic training within foreign language instruction is crucial not only for fostering linguistic fluency but also for ensuring the ability to navigate complex communicative landscapes with precision and effectiveness.

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