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## PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE: THE HIDDEN SKILL IN MASTERING A LANGUAGE

**Feruza Mansurovna Vakhobova**

*PhD student*

*Tashkent Institute of Irrigation and agricultural  
Mechanization Engineers National Research University*

*E-mail: [vaxobovaferuza@gmail.com](mailto:vaxobovaferuza@gmail.com)*

*Tashkent, Uzbekistan*

### ABOUT ARTICLE

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**Abstract:** This article analyses pragmatic competence and its role in teaching EFL students. Pragmatics is a study of the communicative action in its sociocultural context. Thus, it can be said that individuals have some sort of pragmatic competence which allows them to use language in different and concrete situations, in varying contexts. Therefore, pragmatic competence is mainly studied at the social level within the limits of speech acts and social acts, interactions or at the interactional level.

### Introduction

Kasper employed the phrase linguistic action, which characterizes the learner's ability to generate an utterance. He also highlighted the importance of both comprehension and production, a distinction that is especially significant for the daily experiences of second language learners. This definition analyzes pragmatics from the perspective of the users. It

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takes into account the different choices that speakers are able to make when using the target language, depending on the social interaction of their communication. The notion of choice leads to another aspect into consideration useful to language learners, namely, developing the ability to make the right choices among a variety of pragmatic elements. Crystal[ Crystal, D. (1986). *Lexical Semantics*. Cambridge University Press] considered pragmatics as the study of the communicative action in its sociocultural context. Thus, it can be said that individuals have some sort of pragmatic competence which allows them to use language in different and concrete situations, in varying contexts. Therefore, pragmatic competence is mainly studied at the social level within the limits of speech acts and social acts, interactions or at the interactional level.

Methods. Sociolinguistic Competence: Sociolinguistic competence is the ability to interpret the social meaning of a linguistic item and to decide and use language in an appropriate social meaning for communicative purposes. As Savignon mentions, “Sociolinguistic competence is the knowledge of socio-cultural rules of discourse and language. It requires ‘an understanding of the social context in which language is used: the roles of participants, the information they share, and the function of interacting.” As Erton further explains in his article *Applied Pragmatics and Competence Relations in Language Learning and Teaching*, the sociolinguistic information which the speakers convey to each other share a pragmatic competence which helps them to interpret and act in different situations by making use of different contextual clues. There are also included components like: ‘culture’ and ‘interaction’, which reflect the fundamental concepts of verbal and non-verbal communication.

Results. Communicative Competence: H.G. Widdowson[ Widdowson, H. G. 1989. “Knowledge of Language and Ability for Use.” *Applied Linguistics* 10. p.135] described the communicative competence, “. . . communicative competence is not a matter of knowing rules for the composition of sentences and being able to employ such rules to assemble expressions from scratch as and when occasion requires. It is much more a matter of knowing a stock of partially pre-assembled patterns, formulaic frameworks, and a kit of rules, so to speak, and

being able to apply the rules to make whatever adjustments are necessary according to contextual demands. Communicative competence in this view is essentially a matter of adaptation, and rules are not generative but regulative and subservient.” Thus, as Widdowson said, communicative competence is the ability to put language for communicative purposes. The communicative competence considers language as a tool used for communication. This competence focuses on the development of four language skills, and on the correlation between the skills. Canale and Swain[ Canale, M. and Swain, M. 1980. Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching

and testing. Applied Linguistics ] considered the term communicative competence as a mediator which refers to the relationship between grammatical competence (the knowledge of the rules of language) and the sociolinguistic competence (the knowledge of the rules of language use).

Strategic Competence. Canale and Swain[ the same] defined strategic competence as an ability which deals with the knowledge of language and the ability to use this knowledge effectively and appropriate to purpose in order to take an active part in communicative interaction. As Erton[ Erton, ø. 2007. Applied Pragmatics and Competence Relations in Language Learning and Teaching, Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies, Vol.3, No.1, April 2007 p.64] further clarifies, “... the strategic competence is the link that ties ‘everything’ together. A typical example for this case can be: if you are late to a meeting and if you need to find a good excuse, the white lie that you utter at that time is a product of your strategic competence which reflects a criteria of the competence types that the language user has. However, under the title strategic competence the critical and the creative aspects of the human mind can also be considered as well.” Thus, under such speaking terms, there is accordance between strategic competence and critical thinking. Richards[ Richards, Jack C 2001. Communicative Language Teaching Today. New York: Cambridge University Press. p.98] says, “Critical reflection refers to an activity or process in which experience is recalled, considered and evaluated, usually in relation to a broader purpose. It is a response to a past experience and

involves conscious recall and examination of the experience as the basis for the evaluation and the decision-making and as a source for planning and action.” As Richards mentioned as well, critical thinking is part of an evaluation of language and information, both being based on experience and knowledge. There might be included other factors such as: accuracy, coherence, unity. As such, this process can be considered as a strategy between questions and answers, stimulating critical thinking.

Discussion. Erton [Erton, Ø. 2007. Applied Pragmatics and Competence Relations in Language Learning and Teaching, Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies, Vol.3, No.1, April 2007 p.64] says “... discourse competence deals with the ability to arrange sentences into cohesive structures. In Discourse Analysis, the term discourse competence is studied within the limits of conversational interaction where language is considered a tool for successful communication. Such interactional patterns can be of great variety.” As Akmajian [Akmajian, A. and Demers R. A., et.al. 1997. Linguistics: An Introduction to Language and Communication. Massachusetts: The MIT Press. p.369] exemplifies, “There are many forms of discourse and many forms of talk exchange. Letters, jokes, stories, lectures, sermons, speeches, and so on are all categories of discourse; arguments, interviews, business dealings, instruction, and conversations are categories of talk exchanges. Conversations (and talk-exchanges in general) are usually structured consequences of expressions by more than a single speaker.” Therefore, the development of discourse competence helps the language learner to gain insight by experiencing different interactional patterns in varying socio-cultural and physical contexts.

The importance of pragmatic competence has been articulated both in theory and practice. On theoretical grounds, in the 1980s and 1990s, drawing on Hymes’ (1972) notion of communicative competence, theoretical models of L2 communicative competence emerged in the field (Bachman 1990; Bachman and Palmer 1996; Canale and Swain 1980). More recently, interactional competence (Young and He 1998; Young 2000) and “symbolic competence” (Kramsch and Whiteside 2008), which focus on the dialogic aspect of communication, have been proposed as an alternative notion to the models of communicative competence. These

theoretical models have advanced the field by situating pragmatic and sociolinguistic competence as a distinct, indispensable component within L2 proficiency. At the same time, the models have served as a guiding framework for the empirical investigation of said competence. Ability to perform language functions and knowledge of socially appropriate language use had to be operationalized in some way as a measurable construct, and specific tasks, instruments, and analytical methods were explored to elicit and examine this construct. A bulk of L2 pragmatics research produced in the last few decades exemplifies diverse methodological options, ranging from ethnographic studies that involve observation of naturalistic interaction to descriptive-quantitative studies that use construct-eliciting instruments. Correspondingly, these models of communicative competence have been applied to practice in second language pedagogy and assessment. Communicative Language Teaching, the Notional-Functional approach, and task-based instruction all include pragmatic and sociocultural aspects as important objectives of instruction (see Richards and Rodgers 2001 for review). Standardized assessment measures such as ACTFL (American Council of Teachers of Foreign Languages, 1999), the Common European Framework (Council of Europe 2001), and the Canadian Language Benchmarks (Pawlikowska-Smith 2002) have also designated pragmatic competence as the target construct of measurement. These trends have fortified the claim that pragmatic competence should be analyzed, taught, and assessed in the course of L2 development. In response to these theoretical, empirical, and practical interests, a number of books and special issues on second language pragmatics have been published over the last few decades. Some are research monographs that document pragmatic performance of particular individuals and groups (Barron 2002; Gass and Neu 1996). Others are edited volumes with specific themes, including: cross-cultural pragmatics (Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper 1989; Gass and Houck 1999; Kasper and Blum-Kulka 1993; Spencer-Oatey 2000), pragmatic development (Barron and Wurga 2007; Kasper and Rose 2002), pragmatics in instructional contexts (BardoviHarlig and Mahan-Taylor 2003; Ishihara and Cohen 2008; LoCastro 2003; Martínez Flor, et al. 2003; Rose and Kasper 2001; Yoshimi and Wang 2007), pragmatic testing, (Hudson, Detmer, and

Brown 1994; Röver 2005; Trosborg 1995; Yamashita 1996), and pragmatics in institutional discourse (Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford 2005). Only a few volumes have focused on pragmatics in an L2 other than English (Kasper 1992, 1995; MárquezReiter and Placencia 2004).

Conclusion. When thinking about learning materials for observation (awareness), one can suggest various resources, for example, monologues and dialogues extracted from non-fiction films, feature films or business English textbooks and accompanying resources (Market Leader , Business Result , The Business ). An understanding of how to design tasks to practice pragmatic competence can be obtained from the Teaching Pragmatics website of the US Department of State's Resource center of American English, and from specialist literature such as Teaching pragmatics by Kathleen Bardovi-Harlig and Rebecca Mahan-Taylor (Teaching Pragmatics. Kathleen Bardovi-Harlig and Rebecca Mahan-Taylor) ; Pragmatics: Teaching Speech Acts (Tesol Classroom Practice Series) , Pragmatics: Teaching Natural Conversation (Classroom Practice Series) . Currently, the goal of an English teacher at university is to develop curricula that include pragmatic competence, tasks and exercises for its practice, as well as materials for testing mastery of pragmatic competence.

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