

DEVELOPING PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE AS A SUBCOMPONENT OF COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING

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Abstract

In contemporary foreign language pedagogy, communicative competence is regarded as the ultimate goal of instruction. Among its subcomponents, pragmatic competence plays a central role in enabling learners to use language appropriately in diverse social and cultural contexts. Despite its importance, pragmatic competence often remains underdeveloped in foreign language classrooms, where grammatical accuracy is frequently prioritized over contextual appropriateness. This paper provides a comprehensive analysis of pragmatic competence as a subcomponent of communicative competence, explores its internal structure, identifies challenges in its development, and proposes pedagogical strategies for its effective integration into language teaching. The study argues that explicit instruction, authentic input, and intercultural awareness are essential for fostering pragmatic competence in learners.

Keywords. Pragmatic competence, communicative competence, foreign language teaching, speech acts, intercultural communication, pragmatics, language pedagogy.

Introduction

The evolution of foreign language teaching methodologies has led to a paradigm shift from form-focused instruction to communication-oriented approaches. In this context, communicative competence has become the primary objective of language education. However, achieving communicative competence requires more than grammatical knowledge; it involves the ability to use language appropriately according to context, intention, and cultural norms.

One of the most critical yet often neglected components of communicative competence is pragmatic competence. Learners frequently encounter difficulties in real-life communication not because they lack vocabulary or grammar, but because they fail to use language appropriately in specific situations. For instance, a grammatically correct request may still be perceived as impolite or inappropriate if it does not conform to sociocultural norms.

This paper aims to provide an in-depth exploration of pragmatic competence, its role within communicative competence, and effective strategies for its development in foreign language teaching.

Theoretical Background

The concept of communicative competence was first introduced as a response to purely structural views of language. It emphasizes that knowing a language involves not only mastering its grammatical system but also understanding how to use it in social interaction. Subsequent



models expanded this concept by identifying multiple interrelated components, including grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competences.

Pragmatic competence emerges within this framework as a crucial element that connects linguistic knowledge with actual language use. It refers to the ability to interpret meaning beyond the literal level and to produce language that is appropriate for specific communicative situations. This includes understanding speaker intentions, managing politeness, interpreting indirect meanings, and adapting language to different social contexts.

The theoretical foundations of pragmatic competence are rooted in several key linguistic and philosophical traditions. Speech Act Theory explains how utterances perform actions such as requesting, apologizing, or promising. The Cooperative Principle and conversational maxims describe how speakers convey meaning implicitly through shared assumptions. Politeness theory further explains how social relationships influence language choices, particularly in terms of respect, distance, and power.

From a second language acquisition perspective, pragmatic competence is not automatically acquired alongside grammar. Research indicates that even advanced learners may experience pragmatic failure, especially in intercultural communication. This suggests that pragmatic competence requires focused attention, explicit instruction, and sufficient exposure to authentic language use.

Structure and components of pragmatic competence. Pragmatic competence is generally understood as consisting of two interrelated dimensions:

Pragmalinguistic competence. Pragmalinguistic competence involves the linguistic means used to perform communicative acts. It includes knowledge of grammatical structures, lexical choices, and conventional expressions associated with specific functions such as requests, refusals, apologies, and compliments. For example, the difference between “Close the window” and “Could you possibly close the window?” reflects varying degrees of politeness and formality.

Sociopragmatic competence. Sociopragmatic competence refers to the understanding of social norms and cultural expectations that govern language use. It includes sensitivity to factors such as age, social status, gender, and cultural background. Learners must understand when to use formal or informal language, how to show politeness, and how to interpret indirect meanings in different contexts.

These two components are closely interconnected, and effective communication requires their integration.

Importance of pragmatic competence in language learning.

Pragmatic competence is essential for successful communication, particularly in intercultural contexts. Without it, learners may produce grammatically correct but socially inappropriate utterances, leading to misunderstandings or communication breakdowns.

Moreover, pragmatic competence contributes to:

Intercultural communicative competence

Improved conversational skills

Effective participation in real-life interactions

Development of critical thinking and interpretive abilities

In professional and academic settings, pragmatic competence is especially important, as inappropriate language use may negatively affect relationships and opportunities.



Discussion

The development of pragmatic competence requires a holistic approach that integrates linguistic, social, and cultural dimensions of language. It cannot be achieved through isolated grammar instruction alone. Instead, it requires meaningful interaction, contextualized practice, and awareness of sociocultural norms.

Modern language teaching methodologies increasingly recognize the importance of pragmatics, yet its implementation remains inconsistent. Bridging this gap requires curriculum reform, teacher training, and the incorporation of innovative teaching tools.

Conclusion. Pragmatic competence is an essential subcomponent of communicative competence and a key factor in successful language use. Its development should be a central objective in foreign language teaching. By combining explicit instruction, authentic input, and interactive learning methods, educators can significantly enhance learners' ability to communicate effectively and appropriately.

Future research should focus on digital tools, intercultural communication, and assessment methods for pragmatic competence.

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