

Practical significance of linguo-pragmatic competence in English language classes

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Received: 18 January 2025; **Accepted:** 19 February 2025; **Published:** 17 March 2025

Abstract: This paper examines the crucial role that linguo-pragmatic competence plays in English language teaching and learning contexts. By analyzing current theoretical frameworks and empirical research, this study highlights the practical applications and significance of developing students' pragmatic awareness and abilities in formal educational settings. The research demonstrates that explicit attention to pragmatic features of language leads to enhanced communicative abilities, reduced cross-cultural misunderstandings, and greater overall language proficiency. Pedagogical implications and practical classroom strategies are discussed, with recommendations for integrating pragmatic competence development into English language curricula.

Keywords: Linguo-pragmatic competence, English language teaching, communicative competence, pragmatic awareness, language education.

Introduction: The teaching of English as a foreign or second language has undergone significant paradigm shifts over recent decades, moving from grammar-translation methods toward more communicative approaches. Within this evolution, increasing attention has been paid to the development of pragmatic competence—the ability to understand and produce language appropriately according to social and contextual variables. As Kasper (1997) notes, "Pragmatic competence in interlanguage pragmatics is understood as the ability to understand and produce pragmatic meanings appropriate to social and situational contexts."

While grammatical competence remains essential, research consistently demonstrates that linguistic accuracy alone does not ensure successful communication. Students with excellent grammatical knowledge may still experience communication breakdowns or inadvertently cause offense when they lack the pragmatic skills necessary to navigate real-world interactions. This phenomenon, which Thomas (1983) termed "pragmatic failure," occurs when "H [hearer] perceives the force of S's [speaker's] utterance as other than S intended."

Defining Linguo-pragmatic Competence

Linguo-pragmatic competence encompasses the knowledge and skills required to use language appropriately in various social contexts. According to Bachman's (1990) influential model of communicative language ability, pragmatic competence comprises both illocutionary competence (understanding the communicative intent behind utterances) and sociolinguistic competence (knowing how to use language appropriately in different contexts).

Building on this foundation, Bardovi-Harlig (2013, p. 68) defines pragmatic competence as "knowledge of how to use language in context, including the relationship between the speaker and hearer, the time and place, and the participants' assumptions about that knowledge." This definition highlights the inherently contextual nature of pragmatic knowledge, positioning it as essential for genuine communicative ability.

One of the most significant practical applications of pragmatic competence lies in preventing what Thomas (1983) termed "pragmatic failure"—instances where communication breaks down due to misunderstandings of intended meaning or inappropriate language use. Thomas distinguished between pragmalinguistic failure (using linguistic forms that do not convey the intended pragmatic force) and

sociopragmatic failure (misunderstanding social conditions governing language use).

The consequences of pragmatic failure can be severe, particularly in high-stakes situations such as job interviews, business negotiations, or academic interactions. As Spencer-Oatey and Žegarac (2018) note, "Pragmatic failure can have significant consequences, including the formation of negative impressions, the attribution of personality flaws, and even the breakdown of relationships."

Empirical research supports this concern. Takahashi and Beebe (1987) found that higher-proficiency English learners often made pragmatic errors that native speakers perceived more negatively than grammatical errors, precisely because such learners were expected to know better. Their study revealed that pragmatic errors made by advanced learners were often attributed to personality rather than language competence.

Instructional Approaches for Developing Pragmatic Competence

Based on the research reviewed, several instructional approaches emerge as particularly effective for developing students' pragmatic competence:

Explicit instruction: Direct explanation of pragmatic rules and norms, including metapragmatic discussions about how language functions in different contexts. Explicit teaching with metapragmatic information seems to be particularly beneficial in EFL settings, where opportunities for input and interaction are limited.

Awareness-raising activities: Tasks designed to help students notice pragmatic features in authentic language samples. According to Schmidt's (1993) noticing hypothesis, "subliminal language learning is impossible, and noticing is the necessary and sufficient condition for converting input to intake."

Authentic input: Exposure to real-world language use through videos, recordings, corpora, and other authentic materials. Bardovi-Harlig et al. (2015) argue that "authentic input is essential for pragmatic learning because it provides learners with the linguistic forms, functional meanings, and the relevant contextual features."

Interactive practice: Opportunities for students to produce and receive feedback on pragmatically appropriate language through role-plays, simulations, and communicative tasks. Kasper and Rose (2002) emphasize that "pragmatic ability must be practiced in interaction in order to develop fully."

Cross-cultural comparisons: Activities that encourage students to analyze differences between L1 and L2

pragmatic norms. Ishihara and Cohen (2010) suggest that "cross-cultural analyses can help learners become more aware of pragmatic features and develop the ability to make informed choices."

Practical Classroom Activities

Translating theoretical principles into practical classroom activities is essential for effective pragmatic instruction. The following activities, based on empirical research, offer concrete ways to develop students' pragmatic competence:

Discourse completion tasks (DCTs): Students complete dialogues or respond to scenarios requiring particular speech acts. Kasper and Dahl (1991) found that DCTs effectively raise awareness of pragmatic choices and provide opportunities for targeted feedback.

Pragmatic consciousness-raising tasks: Students analyze authentic language samples to identify pragmatic features and discuss their functions. Rose and Ng Kwai-fun (2001) demonstrated that such tasks enhance students' understanding of pragmatic norms.

Role-plays with debriefing: Students enact scenarios requiring specific pragmatic skills, followed by reflection and discussion. Houck and Tatsuki (2011) found that debriefing sessions significantly enhanced the effectiveness of role-play activities for pragmatic development.

Corpus-based activities: Students analyze corpora to identify patterns of language use in different contexts. Bardovi-Harlig et al. (2015) showed that corpus-based instruction helps students recognize authentic pragmatic patterns.

Pragmatic feature analysis: Students examine authentic texts or recordings to identify specific pragmatic features (hedges, intensifiers, address terms, etc.). Vellenga (2004) demonstrated that such analysis enhances students' ability to notice and interpret pragmatic features.

CONCLUSION

The practical significance of linguo-pragmatic competence in English language teaching cannot be overstated. As this review of theoretical frameworks and empirical research demonstrates, pragmatic abilities are essential for successful communication in real-world contexts. Students who develop strong pragmatic competence are better equipped to navigate cross-cultural interactions, avoid pragmatic failure, and achieve their academic and professional goals.

The research reviewed provides compelling evidence that pragmatic features can and should be explicitly taught in English language classrooms. Effective approaches include explicit instruction, awareness-raising activities, authentic input, interactive practice,

and cross-cultural comparisons. By implementing these approaches, teachers can help students develop the pragmatic skills necessary for successful communication in diverse contexts.

As English continues to serve as a global lingua franca, the need for pragmatic competence becomes increasingly important. Language educators must recognize that grammatical knowledge alone is insufficient for communicative success and that pragmatic abilities deserve explicit attention in language curricula. By integrating pragmatic instruction into their teaching practices, educators can better prepare students for the complex communicative demands they will face in real-world English-language interactions.

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