

**PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE IN LANGUAGE ACQUISITION: A STUDY ON THE
ROLE OF CONTEXT IN COMMUNICATIVE PROFICIENCY****Izbosarova Xulkar Alisher qizi****INTRODUCTION**

Pragmatic competence refers to the ability to use language appropriately in different social contexts. It involves understanding not only the grammatical structure of a language but also the norms, conventions, and cultural nuances that govern how language is used in interaction. Unlike linguistic competence, which focuses on knowledge of syntax and vocabulary, pragmatic competence is about using language effectively to achieve communication goals—such as making requests, apologizing, or refusing—while adhering to social norms.

This study aims to study the development of pragmatic competence among second language learners and the factors that influence their ability to navigate social situations in the target language. Through an analysis of classroom interactions and learner output, this research seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of how pragmatic skills are acquired and the role that context plays in this process.

Literature Review

The concept of pragmatic competence was first introduced by Bachman (1990), who argued that communicative competence should not be limited to grammatical knowledge but also include the ability to use language in context. Following this, scholars such as Kasper and Blum-Kulka (1993) and Bardovi-Harlig (2001) have emphasized the importance of pragmatic awareness in second language acquisition (SLA). According to these researchers, pragmatic competence encompasses various skills, such as understanding speech acts, recognizing implicature, managing politeness, and interpreting non-verbal cues.

One of the most influential models in this field is Bachman's (1990) Communicative Language Ability (CLA), which outlines two main components of language competence: organizational competence (grammar and vocabulary) and pragmatic competence (language use in context). Within the realm of pragmatics, speech act theory, as proposed by Austin (1962) and Searle (1969), has been instrumental in highlighting how utterances perform actions—such as making requests or offering apologies—

depending on contextual cues. Learners' success in mastering such speech acts plays a crucial role in pragmatic competence.

Moreover, studies such as Bardovi-Harlig and Dornyei's (1998) research on interlanguage pragmatics suggest that learners' failure to develop pragmatic competence often leads to pragmatic failure—where a grammatically correct utterance may still cause misunderstanding due to cultural or contextual misjudgment. These scholars assert that while learners may acquire grammatical structures relatively easily, pragmatic competence develops more slowly, especially when learners are not immersed in the target culture.

Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative approach, involving a case study of second-language learners in a classroom setting. The participants include 20 intermediate-level English learners from different cultural backgrounds enrolled in a language school. Data collection consists of classroom observations, recordings of learner interactions, and a series of role-play tasks designed to elicit pragmatic behavior, such as making requests, apologizing, and refusing offers.

The methodology includes three main steps:

1. Observation: The learners' interactions in the classroom are observed and recorded over a period of four weeks to capture natural usage of pragmatically complex expressions in various social situations.

2. Role-plays: Participants engage in role-plays that simulate real-life situations requiring the use of pragmatically appropriate language, such as asking for favors or making polite refusals. These role-plays are analyzed to evaluate the learners' use of politeness strategies, speech acts, and contextual adjustments.

3. Interviews: Semi-structured interviews are conducted with learners to assess their awareness of pragmatic rules in the target language, as well as their perceptions of their own pragmatic competence.

The data is analyzed using thematic analysis, focusing on recurring patterns in learners' use of speech acts, their reliance on native language norms, and their ability to interpret contextual cues.

Findings and Discussion

Preliminary findings from the classroom observations indicate that while learners demonstrate good control over grammatical structures, their pragmatic competence varies considerably depending on the task. For instance, in the role-play tasks involving requests, learners often resort to

direct forms (e.g., “Give me the book”) rather than more polite, indirect forms common in English (e.g., “Could you give me the book, please?”). This reflects a lack of awareness of social distance and politeness norms in English, a key aspect of pragmatic competence.

Moreover, learners frequently exhibit pragmatic transfer, where they apply the norms from their native language to the target language. For example, learners from more collectivist cultures, where indirectness and deference are valued, struggled with the directness expected in some English-speaking contexts. Conversely, learners from more individualistic cultures tended to make overly direct requests, which may come across as impolite in English.

The interviews revealed that many learners are unaware of the cultural differences in language use and politeness. While they are familiar with grammar and vocabulary rules, they express difficulty in applying this knowledge in social interactions, especially in high-stakes situations such as formal requests or apologies. This highlights the need for explicit instruction in pragmatics within language classrooms.

Interestingly, learners with more exposure to English-speaking environments (through media or immersion) performed better in tasks that required pragmatic sensitivity. This supports the findings of Taguchi (2008), who emphasizes the role of exposure in developing pragmatic competence. Input from authentic interactions, either through media or real-life exposure, appears to be crucial for learners to develop an intuitive understanding of pragmatic norms.

CONCLUSION

Pragmatic competence is an essential component of communicative proficiency, yet it is often overlooked in traditional language teaching. The findings of this study underscore the importance of incorporating pragmatic instruction into language curricula, with a focus on teaching speech acts, politeness strategies, and cultural norms. As this research demonstrates, while learners may achieve grammatical accuracy, they may still struggle with effective communication if they lack the ability to use language appropriately in different social contexts.

Further research should explore how different instructional methods, such as pragmatic awareness-raising activities and the use of authentic materials, can enhance learners' pragmatic competence. Understanding how to develop these skills is crucial in producing competent language users who can navigate both linguistic and cultural dimensions of communication.



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