

STRENGTHENING PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE IN UZBEK LEARNERS OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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Abstract

Pragmatic competence represents a core element of communicative competence and is essential for effective interaction in a foreign language environment. This paper investigates the importance of developing pragmatic competence among Uzbek learners of English within an EFL context. It identifies key challenges, including cultural differences, insufficient exposure to authentic language use, and the limited incorporation of pragmatics in teaching materials. In addition, the study suggests practical strategies for embedding pragmatic instruction into English language teaching, such as explicit instruction, role-playing techniques, and the integration of authentic resources. The results indicate that improving learners' pragmatic awareness significantly enhances their communicative abilities and reduces instances of pragmatic failure in intercultural communication.

Keywords: *pragmatic competence, EFL learners, Uzbek context, communicative competence, language teaching, pragmatic instruction.*

Pragmatic competence refers to the ability to use language appropriately in various social and cultural contexts. It involves not only linguistic knowledge but also an understanding of how language functions in real-life communication. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), this competence is particularly important, as learners must navigate differences between their native culture and the target language culture. In modern language education, communicative competence is considered incomplete without pragmatic competence, as effective communication requires more than grammatical accuracy.

For Uzbek learners, these differences often create significant challenges. While Uzbek communication norms emphasize politeness, indirectness, and respect, English communication may require more direct or context-dependent expressions. For instance, in Uzbek culture, indirect requests are often used to show politeness, whereas in English, overly indirect expressions may cause confusion or misunderstanding. As a result, learners may produce grammatically correct sentences that are pragmatically inappropriate, which can negatively affect communication.

One common issue is pragmatic failure, which occurs when learners misunderstand or misuse language in social interaction. Pragmatic failure can be divided into two types: pragmatic failure and sociodramas failure. The first relates to incorrect use of linguistic forms, while the second involves misunderstanding social norms and cultural expectations. Both types can lead to communication breakdown and may even result in unintended offense. Therefore, developing pragmatic competence should be a priority in EFL instruction, especially in contexts where learners have limited exposure to native speakers.

Another important factor influencing pragmatic competence is the lack of authentic language exposure. In many Uzbek classrooms, English is taught primarily through textbooks that focus on grammar and vocabulary. While these elements are important, they do not fully prepare learners for real-life communication. Authentic materials, such as films, TV shows, podcasts, and real-life conversations, provide valuable insights into how language is used in

natural contexts. These materials expose learners to different speech acts, intonation patterns, and cultural nuances that are often absent in traditional teaching resources². To address these challenges, teachers can implement several effective strategies. First, explicit instruction plays a crucial role in developing pragmatic competence. Teachers should clearly explain how language is used in different contexts, including politeness strategies, speech acts (such as requesting, apologizing, and refusing), and levels of formality. Research shows that explicit teaching of pragmatics significantly improves learners' ability to use language appropriately.

Second, the use of authentic materials is highly beneficial. By exposing learners to real-life language use, teachers can help them understand how native speakers communicate in various situations. For example, analyzing dialogues from movies or TV shows can help students identify appropriate expressions and understand cultural differences in communication.¹

In addition, role-play and simulation activities provide valuable opportunities for practice. These activities allow learners to engage in realistic scenarios, such as making requests, participating in job interviews, or resolving conflicts. Through repeated practice, students develop confidence and improve their pragmatic performance. Role-play also encourages interactive learning, which is essential for developing communicative competence.

Another important approach is raising learners' awareness of cultural differences. Teachers can present examples of appropriate and inappropriate language use and encourage students to analyze them critically. For instance, comparing how requests are made in Uzbek and English can help learners understand the importance of context and cultural norms. This awareness helps learners avoid pragmatic errors and communicate more effectively.

Furthermore, feedback and reflection are essential components of pragmatic development. Constructive feedback enables learners to recognize their mistakes and improve their communication skills. Reflection activities, such as discussing communication strategies or analyzing personal experiences, encourage learners to think critically about their language use. Over time, this leads to greater self-awareness and improved pragmatic competence.

It is also important to consider the role of teachers in developing pragmatic competence. Teachers should act as facilitators who guide learners in understanding and practicing appropriate language use. They should create a supportive classroom environment where students feel comfortable experimenting with language and making mistakes. Additionally, teacher training programs should include components on pragmatics to ensure that educators are well-equipped to teach this aspect of language learning.

Moreover, integrating pragmatics into the curriculum requires a shift from traditional teaching methods to more communicative and learner-centered approaches. Task-based learning, group discussions, and interactive activities can significantly enhance learners' pragmatic skills. These methods encourage active participation and provide opportunities for meaningful communication.

Overall, integrating pragmatics into EFL teaching significantly enhances learners' communicative competence. It enables them to use English more effectively and appropriately in real-life situations. Without pragmatic competence, even advanced learners may struggle to

¹Bachman. (1990). *Fundamental considerations in language testing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. P55-58

communicate successfully, despite having strong grammatical knowledge. Therefore, developing pragmatic competence should be considered a fundamental goal of language education.

aspects of language learning simultaneously.

One of the key elements of pragmatic competence is the ability to perform speech acts appropriately. Speech acts such as requests, apologies, compliments, and refusals vary significantly across cultures. For instance, in English-speaking cultures, requests are often softened using modal verbs (e.g., could, would) or indirect forms, while in Uzbek, politeness may be conveyed through tone and context rather than specific linguistic forms. This difference may cause Uzbek learners to transfer their native language patterns into English, resulting in pragmatic errors.

Another important aspect is politeness strategies. According to Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, communication involves maintaining the “face” of both the speaker and the listener. English speakers often use negative politeness strategies, which emphasize respect for personal space and independence. In contrast, Uzbek culture tends to emphasize positive politeness, focusing on solidarity and closeness. Understanding these differences is crucial for learners to communicate appropriately in intercultural contexts².

In addition to speech acts and politeness, discourse competence also plays a role in pragmatics. Learners must understand how to organize conversations, take turns, and respond appropriately. For example, backchanneling (e.g., “uh-huh,” “I see”) is commonly used in English to show active listening, but it may not be used in the same way in Uzbek communication. Teaching such features can significantly improve learners' interaction skills.

Technology can also be a powerful tool in developing pragmatic competence. Online platforms, language learning applications, and virtual exchanges provide learners with opportunities to interact with native speakers and observe authentic language use. For example, participating in online discussions or watching YouTube videos can expose learners to different communication styles and cultural norms. These tools help bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-world communication.

Another effective approach is task-based language teaching (TBLT), which focuses on meaningful communication through tasks. In this approach, learners engage in activities that require them to use language for real purposes, such as solving problems or completing projects. This method naturally integrates pragmatic competence, as learners must consider context, audience, and purpose when communicating.

Assessment of pragmatic competence is also an important issue. Traditional language tests often focus on grammar and vocabulary, neglecting pragmatic skills. However, new assessment methods, such as role-plays, discourse completion tasks (DCTs), and self-assessment, can provide more accurate insights into learners' pragmatic abilities. Including such assessments in language education can encourage both teachers and students to pay more attention to pragmatics.

Furthermore, motivation and learner attitudes play a significant role in acquiring pragmatic competence. Learners who are interested in the target culture and motivated to

²Canale, M., & Swain, M. (1980). Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing. *Applied Linguistics*, 1, 1–47.

communicate are more likely to develop pragmatic awareness. Teachers can foster this motivation by incorporating cultural topics, interactive activities, and real-life communication tasks into their lessons .

It is also worth noting that pragmatic competence develops over time and requires continuous practice. Unlike grammar, which can be learned through rules and exercises, pragmatics is context-dependent and dynamic. Therefore, learners need repeated exposure and opportunities to practice in various situations. Teachers should provide ongoing support and create opportunities for authentic communication.³

In conclusion, developing pragmatic competence among Uzbek EFL learners requires a comprehensive approach that includes explicit instruction, cultural awareness, authentic materials, and interactive teaching methods. By addressing these factors, educators can help learners become more effective communicators in English. This not only improves language proficiency but also enhances intercultural understanding, which is essential in today's globalized world.

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