

METHODS USED TO TEACH PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE AND THE POSSIBILITY OF INTEGRATING HUMOUR TO DEVELOP FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS' PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE IN ELT CLASSES

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Annotation: The article discusses methods and approaches for teaching pragmatic competence. It proposes using the Humour-integrated language learning approach to develop first-year students' pragmatic competence and outlines criteria for selecting humour materials for classroom use.

Keywords: pragmatic competence, explicit method, implicit method, humour, humour-integrated language learning

Аннотация: В статье рассматриваются методы и подходы к обучению прагматической компетенции. В ней предлагается использовать подход «обучение языку с интеграцией юмора» (humour-integrated language learning) для развития прагматической компетенции студентов первого курса, а также определяются критерии выбора юмористических материалов для использования на занятиях.

Ключевые слова: прагматическая компетенция, эксплицитный метод, имплицитный метод, юмор, обучение языку с интеграцией юмора.

Annotatsiya: Ushbu maqolada pragmatik kompetensiyani o'qitish usullari va yondashuvlari muhokama qilinadi. Unda birinchi kurs talabalarining pragmatik kompetensiyasini rivojlantirish uchun "yumorni integratsiyalashgan holda til o'qitish" (humour-integrated language learning) yondashuvidan foydalanish taklif etiladi va darsda foydalaniladigan yumor materiallarini tanlash mezonlari bayon etiladi.

Kalit so'zlar: pragmatik kompetensiya, eksplit usul, implisit usul, yumor, yumorni integratsiyalashgan holda til o'qitish.

Introduction

Teaching pragmatic competence is essential in ELT classes. According to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), to master a foreign language professionally, a student should skillfully use linguistic means, be aware of socio-cultural linguistic norms, and use them pragmatically and correctly in communication. However, pragmatic competence is often overlooked when teaching in local higher education institutions (HEIs) during students' first year of studies. Pragmatic competence helps students to reach their communicative intention by appropriately using pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic elements in interaction. In local HEIs, students mostly receive notions of pragmatic competence from teachers' skills, which may lead them to imitate their teachers.

Methods and approaches to teach pragmatic competence

There are two methods for teaching pragmatic competence: the *explicit* and the *implicit* method. The logic behind the *explicit* method is that teachers directly provide metapragmatic knowledge to students during class. It means that if a teacher wants to work with students to teach them about speech acts, implicatures, or other pragmatic knowledge, the teacher explicitly explains what a speech act is, the types of speech acts or what conversational implicatures are, and how implicatures work in communication. Based on that, teachers

prepare different types of tasks using textual or audio-visual materials for students to note the speech acts or implicature types being taught.

There are different approaches to using *explicit* and *implicit* methods; both methods are beneficial in their own ways. However, Tateyama et al. (1997) found that explicit teaching of metapragmatic knowledge is more effective in developing students' pragmatic competence. Both methods can be used with inductive and deductive approaches.

When using the inductive approach, the teacher provides the rules of the pragmatic element to be taught in class, so students can understand its mechanism. For example, if a teacher wants to teach the speech act of requesting, the teacher can explain the rule for what a request is and how request speech acts function. For example, a rule may go as *a speech act is a linguistic element by which a user can induce an action on the interlocutor, hence the speech act of request, helps to request something from the interlocutor*: "Ronald, I have left my book at home; can you please lend me your book for 5 minutes so that I can copy that sentence?"

In contrast, when using the deductive approach, the teacher provides examples without any rules, so students can identify the elements in question based on the teacher's specific instructions.

There are also other approaches to teach pragmatic competence: the task-based approach, the project-based approach, and technology-enhanced pragmatic competence teaching. One of the approaches which this article explores is humour-integrated language learning. Humour-integrated language learning (HILL) (Heidari-Shahreza, 2024) encompasses *teaching with humour* or *teaching about humour*. *Teaching with humour* means using it as a pedagogical tool, helping a teacher to establish a favourable rapport with students, reduce anxiety, draw students' attention to the lesson's content, or hint at students' mistakes in a more lighthearted way. *Teaching about humour* means the teacher uses humour to teach about the target culture's humour features and customs, and habitual humour types. According to R. Nasrullah, H. Isam, A. Prayogi, A. Yuliyanto, and Sarmini (2025), humour can be used to enhance students' pragmatic competence. As they stated, humour can be used as material to provide an authentic context for learners, encouraging them to communicate naturally by hedging with jokes and humorous replicas. Besides, humour helps learners to identify implied meanings and learn social norms of the target culture.

To teach pragmatic competence to students, teachers can use humour both as a pedagogical tool and as material. Humour as authentic material from the target culture helps students learn about English cultural humour and relevant pragmatic competence elements that the teacher targets for teaching during the class. Because humour is based mostly on implied meaning, teaching conversational implicatures can be appropriate when using humorous materials.

One of the examples for implementing humour, aiming to develop skills of deciphering *conversational implicatures* in the form of a sarcastic saying, can be the following activity:

Table 1.

Teaching recognising *conversational implicatures* by using sarcasm

Goal: To develop students' ability to recognise sarcasm and use it in the target language by understanding the role of the tone of the speech to convey the implied meaning.

Procedure:

1: Students in teams, by taking turns, share a sarcastic saying (e.g., "I'm so thrilled about this project!"). Students should pay attention to the tone of the saying, which should be exaggerated and delivered with a smirk, so that the intention of sarcasm is clear!

2: The student whose turn is next needs to reply with sarcasm too (e.g., "Oh, you're the king of enthusiasm, aren't you?"). The tone should remain playful.

3: Students need to identify the signs of sarcasm-voice, words, face and the gestures of the interlocutor. Also, they need to discuss what can give one away when using sarcasm?

4: Discuss: How does the tone change the meaning and the intention of the message? When is understanding the sarcasm difficult?

Pragmatic Focus: Enhancing pragmatic competence by recognising and using sarcasm cues to shift the intent playfully through *conversational implicatures*.

In Table 1 above, an example activity, the teacher can also use irony (the use of language to create indirect meaning with the intention of amusing the interlocutor/s) or understatement (the depiction of something small or unimportant with the intention of creating humour) as tools. In *explicit* teaching, the teacher needs to explain sarcasm, irony, and understatement beforehand and can provide authentic textual or audio-visual materials.

When selecting humorous materials for classes, teachers can follow the following criteria suggested by Rucynski and Prichard (2021, p.5):

1. "Are learners likely to encounter this form of humor when communicating (either face-to-face or online) in the target language?"
2. Is this form of humor likely to be challenging for students to understand (e.g., because of a relative lack of the same humor in their native culture)?
3. Does instruction on this form of humor provide value beyond just humor (e.g., insights into the target culture)?"

If all the above-given questions are answered "yes", it is suggested that the teacher can use the humorous material for the class. Also, teachers can consider the following criteria to be more effective and safer. The first criterion for material choice, which this work suggests can be the pragmatic focus, namely, what the lesson's aim is, which pragmatic competence element is going to be taught and practised (e.g., speech acts, politeness strategies). It is also important to choose humorous materials that match students' CEFR level and, at the same time, be a bit challenging, so as to elevate students' current language proficiency. Eventually, the humour materials need to undergo a content safety and cultural fit check with local context and norms, while also including cultural information that can help students develop intercultural pragmatic awareness. An example of this is not using so-called 'black humour', humour about religion, politics, or humour that may contain obscene words or episodes.

Conclusion

Pragmatic competence, a significant competence for mastering a foreign language, is often overlooked in ELT classes. There are two main methods for teaching pragmatic competence: *explicit* and *implicit*. This article explored the ways to use HILL to develop students' pragmatic competence. Using humour can be integrated in two ways: *teaching with humour* (humour as a pedagogical tool) and *teaching about humour* (humour as the object of teaching). It was also suggested that teachers follow specific criteria when selecting humorous materials for use in

class, including whether students will encounter them outside the classroom, whether they can challenge students' knowledge, and whether they can provide insights into the target language culture. Other criteria include whether the material fits to teach the intended pragmatic competence element, matches students' language proficiency level, and is safe for the classroom (does not involve 'tabu' topics in class and is not "black humour").

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