Teacher training and the development of pragmatic competence

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Abstract. Pragmatic competence is an essential component of communicative competence that enables language users to understand and produce language appropriately in different social and cultural contexts. Despite its importance, pragmatic competence is often overlooked in foreign language instruction, where greater emphasis is placed on grammar and vocabulary. Teachers play a crucial role in helping learners develop pragmatic awareness and communicative effectiveness. Therefore, teacher training programs must equip educators with the knowledge and skills necessary to teach pragmatics effectively. This article examines the relationship between teacher training and the development of pragmatic competence.

Keywords: pragmatic competence, teacher training, language teaching, communicative competence, professional development, applied linguistics

In today's globalized world, successful communication requires more than grammatical accuracy. Language learners must also know how to use language appropriately according to social, cultural, and situational contexts. The ability to interpret and produce language in a socially acceptable manner is known as pragmatic competence. It is a crucial aspect of communicative competence and plays an important role in effective interaction.

Many language learners possess strong grammatical knowledge but still experience communication difficulties because they lack pragmatic awareness. For example, a learner may know the correct grammatical structure for making a request but may not understand how to formulate the request politely in different social situations. Such pragmatic failures can lead to misunderstandings and communication breakdowns.

Teachers are central to the development of learners' pragmatic competence. Through classroom instruction, feedback, and exposure to authentic language use, teachers help students understand how language functions in real-life contexts. Consequently, teacher training programs should prepare educators to recognize and teach pragmatic features effectively. This article explores the significance of teacher training in promoting pragmatic competence and highlights strategies for improving pragmatic instruction in language classrooms.

Understanding Pragmatic Competence. The concept of pragmatic competence emerged from theories of communicative competence. While linguistic competence refers to knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation, pragmatic competence concerns the appropriate use of language in social interaction.

Pragmatic competence includes two major dimensions:

Pragmalinguistic Competence. Pragmalinguistic competence refers to knowledge of linguistic forms used to perform communicative functions. These include requests, apologies, compliments, refusals, invitations, and suggestions.

For example, the expressions:

"Close the window."
"Could you close the window, please?"
"Would you mind closing the window?"

all perform the same communicative function but differ in politeness and appropriateness.

Sociopragmatic Competence. Sociopragmatic competence involves understanding the social and cultural norms that influence language use. Speakers must consider factors such as age, status, social distance, and cultural expectations when choosing appropriate expressions.

A request directed to a close friend may differ significantly from one addressed to a teacher, employer, or stranger. Therefore, successful communication requires both linguistic knowledge and sociocultural awareness.

Teachers serve as important mediators between learners and authentic language use. Their role extends beyond teaching grammar and vocabulary to helping students understand how language functions in real communication.

Effective teachers provide opportunities for learners to:

- Analyze authentic conversations.
- Practice speech acts such as requests and apologies.
- Explore cultural norms of communication.
- Compare native and target-language pragmatic conventions.
- Reflect on communication strategies.

By incorporating pragmatic instruction into classroom activities, teachers can help learners develop greater communicative confidence and intercultural competence.

Research has shown that explicit instruction often enhances pragmatic development. When teachers explain pragmatic rules and provide guided practice, learners become more aware of contextual factors that influence language choice.

Conclusion. Pragmatic competence is an essential component of successful communication and should be a major objective of language education. Teachers play a fundamental role in helping learners understand how language is used appropriately in different social and cultural contexts. This article has demonstrated that teacher training significantly influences the development of pragmatic competence. Educators who possess strong pragmatic knowledge and effective instructional strategies are better able to support learners' communicative growth. However, many teacher education programs continue to devote insufficient attention to pragmatics.

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