



The Development of Pragmatic Competence in EFL Learners

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Abstract

Pragmatic competence is a key component of effective communication in English as a Foreign Language (EFL). It refers to the ability to use language appropriately according to social and cultural contexts. This thesis examines how pragmatic competence develops in EFL learners and why it is important in modern language education. The study focuses on the role of instruction, cultural awareness, and interaction in developing pragmatic skills. The findings suggest that many learners face difficulties due to limited exposure to authentic communication. Therefore, it is necessary to integrate pragmatic instruction into language teaching to help learners communicate more naturally and effectively.

Keywords: pragmatic competence, EFL learners, communication, language teaching, culture

Introduction

Learning a language is not only about grammar and vocabulary. To communicate successfully, learners must understand how to use language appropriately in different situations. This ability is called pragmatic competence. It includes skills such as making polite requests, giving suggestions, apologizing, and understanding indirect meanings.

Many EFL learners have strong grammatical knowledge but still face communication problems. This is because they may not understand cultural norms or social rules of language use. For example, a sentence may be grammatically correct but still sound rude or inappropriate in a real conversation. Bardovi-Harlig (2017) explains that pragmatic competence is an essential part of communicative competence and should be taught together with other language skills. However, in many classrooms, pragmatic aspects are not given enough attention.



This thesis aims to explore how pragmatic competence develops in EFL learners and what factors can improve this process, including teaching methods, cultural understanding, and interaction.

Literature Review

Pragmatic competence has become an important topic in applied linguistics. It focuses on how language is used in real-life situations and how meaning is influenced by context. Taguchi (2015) states that pragmatic competence does not develop automatically and requires explicit instruction. This means that teachers need to teach learners how to use language appropriately, not just correctly.

Another important aspect is the relationship between language and culture. Pragmatic competence is closely connected to cultural knowledge because different cultures have different communication styles. For example, what is considered polite in one culture may not be polite in another. Research also shows that learners need exposure to authentic communication. Without real-life examples, it is difficult to understand how language works in practice (Ishihara & Cohen, 2022).

In addition, studies indicate that pragmatic instruction has a positive effect on learners' communication skills (Nguyen & Pham, 2018). Learners who receive such instruction perform better in real-life communication tasks. Overall, the literature shows that pragmatic competence is essential but often underdeveloped in EFL contexts.

Methodology

This thesis uses a qualitative research approach based on the analysis of existing studies and theoretical materials. The purpose is to understand how pragmatic competence develops and what factors influence it.

The analysis focuses on three main areas:

- The role of classroom instruction
- The importance of cultural awareness
- The impact of interaction and practice

Different academic sources published after 2015 were reviewed to identify key findings. This approach allows a deeper understanding of the topic without collecting primary data. The study also examines common problems faced by EFL learners and suggests possible solutions for improving pragmatic competence.

Analysis and Discussion

The analysis shows that the development of pragmatic competence depends on several important factors.



First, instruction plays a major role. In many EFL classrooms, teachers focus mainly on grammar and vocabulary. As a result, learners may know how to form correct sentences but not how to use them appropriately. Teaching should include activities such as role-plays, dialogues, and real-life scenarios to help learners practice pragmatic skills.

Second, cultural awareness is essential. Language is closely connected to culture, and understanding cultural norms helps learners communicate more effectively. For example, making a request in English often requires indirect language to sound polite. Without this knowledge, learners may appear rude even if they do not intend to.

Third, interaction is necessary for development. Learners need opportunities to use language in real situations. This can include classroom discussions, group work, or communication with native speakers. Practice helps learners understand how language works in different contexts.

However, there are challenges. Many learners do not have enough exposure to authentic communication, especially in foreign language environments. In addition, teachers may not always be trained to teach pragmatic skills effectively. Despite these challenges, it is clear that pragmatic competence is crucial for successful communication. Learners who develop this skill can interact more confidently and appropriately in different situations.

Conclusion

In conclusion, pragmatic competence is an important part of language learning that helps learners use language effectively in real-life situations. This thesis shows that many EFL learners struggle with pragmatic skills due to limited instruction, lack of cultural awareness, and insufficient interaction.

To improve this situation, language teaching should include more focus on pragmatic competence. Teachers should provide real-life communication tasks, explain cultural differences, and create opportunities for interaction. Developing pragmatic competence will help learners become more confident and successful communicators in English.



References

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