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THE IMPORTANCE OF TEACHING PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE IN ESL CLASSES.

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Abstract.

Pragmatic competence is an indispensable element of communicative competence. Whoever wants to communicate successfully in a foreign language wants to promote their communicative competence, as well as their pragmatic competence. This article begins with clarifying the definition of pragmatic competence by referring to other linguists' explanations. Then it discusses the importance of promoting language learners' pragmatic competence in communication, and tries to explore the necessity and feasibility of teaching pragmatic competence in ESL teaching process. Finally, the article proposes some tentative approaches to promote pragmatic competence in teaching English as a second language.

Аннотация.

Прагматическая компетентность - обязательный элемент коммуникативной компетентности. Тот, кто хочет успешно общаться на иностранном языке, хочет повысить свою коммуникативную компетенцию, а также свою прагматическую компетенцию. Эта статья начинается с разъяснения определения прагматической компетентности. Затем обсуждается важность поощрения прагматической компетентности учащихся в общении и делается попытка изучить необходимость и осуществимость обучения прагматической компетентности в процессе преподавания английского языка как иностранного. Наконец, в статье предлагаются некоторые предварительные подходы к продвижению прагматической компетентности в обучении английскому как второму языку.

Keywords: English teaching, pragmatic competence, communicative competence, pragmatic failure.

INTRODUCTION

Pragmatic competence is understood as the knowledge of the linguistic resources available in a given language for realizing particular illocutions, knowledge of the sequential aspects speech acts, and finally, knowledge of the appropriate contextual use of the particular language's linguistic resources. A speaker's 'linguistic competence' would be made up of grammatical competence ('abstract' or decontextualized knowledge of intonation, phonology, syntax, semantics, etc.) and pragmatic competence (the ability to use language effectively in order to achieve a specific purpose and to understand language in context). This parallels Leech's (1983) division of linguistics into 'grammar' (by which he means the decontextualized formal system of language) and 'pragmatics' (the use of language in a goal-oriented speech situation in which the speaker is using language in order to produce a particular effect in the mind of the hearer. Pragmatic competence is the ability to communicate your intended message with all its nuances in any socio-cultural context and to interpret the message of your interlocutor as it was intended. As critical as this ability is for communication success, it is often not given the emphasis it deserves in the teaching of a second language, with the result that second-

language speakers, who lack pragmatic competence, may produce grammatically flawless speech that nonetheless fails to achieve its communicative aims. When non-native speakers fail to hedge appropriately, they may be perceived as impolite, offensive, arrogant, or simply inappropriate. Failing to recognize a hedged utterance, they may misunderstand a native speaker's meaning. This is especially unfortunate when speakers are otherwise fluent, since people typically expect that someone who speaks their language well on the grammatical level has also mastered the pragmatic niceties.

Principles of pragmatic competences :

Intrinsic to this decision-making process are several principles that concur to define the nature of pragmatic competence. In particular, individuals make choices and build strategies based on some of the unique properties of pragmatic/communicative competence, such as:

- variability: the property of communication that defines the range of communicative possibilities, among which is formulating communicative choices;
- negotiability: the possibility of making choices based on flexible strategies;
- adaptability; the ability to modulate and regulate communicative choices in relation to the communicative context;
- salience: the degree of awareness reached by communicative choices;
- indeterminacy: the possibility to re-negotiate pragmatic choices as the interaction unfolds in order to fulfill communicative intentions;
- dynamicity: development of the communicative interaction in time.

The Relationship between Language Form and Language Function

Traditionally, teachers mainly teach language form and grammatical rules, but neglect the language function and language use. Many teachers believed that with the study of language form and grammatical rules, FL learners would gradually realize the language function and acquire the competence to use the language. However, recent research findings show that pragmatic competence could not develop spontaneously with grammatical competence. In other words, there exists a great gap between language form and language function or language use.

Theoretically, if language form always coincides with language function, the communication will be direct and easy to understand. But the actual relationship between language form and language function is hierarchical. Due to various contexts, a single language form may entail various language functions, and a single language function may be transmitted in different language forms. For example, "The door is open." at least has the following functions in different situation:

- 1) Stating or explaining the fact "the door is open";
- 2) Reminding the hearer of closing the door when he or she leaves;
- 3) Scolding the hearer of not having closed the door;
- 4) Suggesting that it is cold in the room and requesting the hearer to close the door.

The Relationship between Grammatical Rules and the Rules of Language Use

When people use their native language to communicate with each other, they conform to both the formal rules of language, that is, grammatical rules, and the functional rules of language, that is, rules of language use. But concerning with the FL learners, they may violate either of the rules or even both of them. This suggests an important point in learning foreign languages, that is, we should know both grammatical rules and rules of language use and apply them in the practice.

a) (A Uzbek principle introduced an American teacher to the staff and all the students) Ladies and gentlemen, I'm delighted to introduce to you a very pretty girl,

Miss Brown. She is a very good teacher from the USA□

b) I can't do it very good.

In the sentence a) The principle utters grammatically correct sentence, but it will make the American teacher embarrassed and uncomfortable. First, "girl" is a term for innocent and immature females in western culture, so a female over 18 would prefer to be called "woman" or "lady", and second, western people tend to objectively introduce the guests, without any partial evaluation. Contrarily, sentence b) is ungrammatical but still acceptable in certain context.

This example tells that in real communication, appropriate use of language in particular context is much more important than grammatical correctness. It also shows the importance of pragmatic competence in communication.

Pragmatic Failure

Pragmatic failure does not refer to the performance errors in language use, in making phrases and sentences. Instead, it is caused by the inappropriateness of speech, either the improper way of speaking or unidiomatic language expressions, which make it impossible to achieve the desired effect.

Take one situation as an example, H and S have just finished a meeting in an unfamiliar part of the building, and H is leaving while S is returning to her office. They come to an elevator which is located in a different part of the building from the one normally taken by H:

H to S: I can take this elevator, can I?

S to H: Yes. Please get off on the ground floor.

By the misuse of "please", S turned her confirmation into a request and violated Grice's quantity maxim by giving more information than is needed. H might get confused when hearing such a reply, so S actually made the situation an instance of pragmalinguistic failure.

Ron White concluded the situations of pragmalinguistic failure as the following:

1) conflicting signals; 2) creating tension; 3) risking offence; 4) creating confusion; 5) public embarrassment; 6) interpersonal breakdown. Only a "please" could have so many kinds of pragmatic failure, and cause a lot of problems in communication. So we should pay more attention to pragmatic competence so as to diminish pragmatic failure in communication.

CONCLUSION

This paper is devoted to discussing the hot issue of promoting FL learners' pragmatic competence. From the definition of pragmatic competence, the author includes pragmatic competence as a crucial part of communicative competence, which is the essential objective of learning a foreign language. Then the paper discussed the importance of promoting pragmatic competence, the necessity and feasibility of teaching pragmatic competence in FL teaching process. Finally, it put forward some tentative approaches to help language teachers and students to promote their pragmatic competence.

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