

THE ROLE OF PRAGMATICS IN TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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Abstract: Pragmatics plays a vital role in teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) because it focuses on how language is used in real communication. While grammar and vocabulary provide the structure of a language, pragmatics explains how meaning is shaped by context, culture, and speaker intention. This paper examines the importance of pragmatic competence, its main components, the challenges teachers face, and effective pedagogical strategies. It also highlights the need for integrating pragmatics into modern communicative language teaching to help learners become more competent and confident users of English in real-life situations.

Introduction

Language learning has evolved significantly over time. Traditional approaches emphasized memorizing grammar rules and vocabulary lists. However, modern language teaching recognizes that communication involves more than just correct forms. Learners must understand how to use language appropriately in different social contexts. This ability is known as pragmatic competence. In EFL contexts, students often have limited exposure to real-life English communication. As a result, they may produce grammatically correct sentences that sound unnatural or inappropriate. For example, being too direct or too formal in certain situations can lead to misunderstanding. Therefore, teaching pragmatics is

essential for developing effective communication skills. This paper explores how pragmatics contributes to language learning and why it should be a central part of EFL instruction.

What is Pragmatics?

Pragmatics is a branch of linguistics that studies how people use language in context. It focuses on the relationship between language and its users. Unlike semantics, which deals with literal meaning, pragmatics examines implied meaning and speaker intention. Key components of pragmatics include speech acts, politeness strategies, implicature, and deixis. Speech acts refer to actions performed through language, such as requesting, apologizing, or thanking. Politeness strategies involve adjusting language to show respect and maintain social harmony. Implicature refers to indirect meanings that are not explicitly stated, while deixis involves context-dependent expressions like “this,” “that,” “here,” and “now.” Understanding these elements helps learners interpret meaning accurately and respond appropriately in communication.

Importance of Pragmatics in EFL Teaching

Pragmatics is essential for developing communicative competence. First, it helps learners use language naturally and appropriately. Without pragmatic knowledge, students may sound robotic or impolite. Second, it reduces the risk of miscommunication. Learners who rely only on literal meanings may misunderstand intentions, jokes, or indirect requests. Third, pragmatics promotes cultural awareness. Language and culture are closely connected, and understanding cultural norms is necessary for effective communication. Finally, pragmatic competence prepares students for real-life situations such as academic discussions, workplace interactions, and social conversations. It enables them to adapt their language based on context and audience.

Challenges in Teaching Pragmatics

Despite its importance, pragmatics is often neglected in EFL classrooms. One major challenge is the lack of awareness among teachers and students. Many still focus mainly

on grammar and vocabulary. Another challenge is the limited availability of teaching materials. Textbooks may not include enough authentic examples of real communication. Cultural differences also make it difficult for learners to understand appropriate language use in English. In addition, assessing pragmatic competence is complex. Unlike grammar, there are no clear right or wrong answers in many situations, which makes evaluation more subjective.

Strategies for Teaching Pragmatics

Teachers can use various strategies to develop students' pragmatic competence. Role-playing activities allow learners to practice real-life situations in a controlled environment. Authentic materials such as movies, podcasts, and conversations expose learners to natural language use. Explicit instruction is also important. Teachers should explain cultural norms and pragmatic rules clearly. Providing feedback helps students recognize and correct their mistakes. Task-based learning encourages students to use language meaningfully while focusing on communication rather than form. Combining these strategies can create a more effective and engaging learning experience.

Conclusion

In conclusion, pragmatics is a crucial aspect of language learning that should not be ignored in EFL teaching. It helps learners understand how to use language appropriately in different contexts and improves their overall communication skills.

Integrating pragmatics into the curriculum can bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical use of language. Although there are challenges, effective teaching strategies can help overcome them. By focusing on pragmatic competence, educators can prepare students to communicate successfully in the real world.

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