

An Analysis of the Role of Pragmatics in Language Learning and Teaching

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ABSTRACT

This descriptive qualitative research analyzes the role of pragmatics in language learning and teaching. The data for this study were obtained from the literature. The data sources for this research were journals, books, and articles on pragmatics. Pragmatics is crucial in language learning because it teaches learners to use language effectively in real-world contexts, going beyond grammar to convey and understand intended meanings, politeness, and cultural nuances, preventing misunderstandings and enabling successful intercultural communication. It bridges the gap between literal words and their actual meanings. Pragmatics plays a role in contextual understanding, avoiding misunderstandings, enhancing intercultural communication, developing communicative competence, and improving social confidence. Developing pragmatics in the teaching and learning process can avoid misunderstandings in transferring ideas, thoughts, expressions, feelings, and manner. Teaching English is not just about making sentences that are grammatically correct but also about using them appropriately in social contexts. In teaching pragmatics, teachers can adapt fun activities in the classroom, such as role-play, discourse completion tasks, and pragmalinguistics. This can make students feel secure and have good manners when interacting with the community.

Keywords: Role, Pragmatics, Pragmalinguistics

I. INTRODUCTION

For many years, learning another language has been limited to learning its grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation (Mohammad-bagheri, 2015). Over the years, however, language instructors and linguists have realized that learning a language requires more than being competent in its grammar rules or vocabulary and includes the aspect of using the language in its social context (Almegren, 2022).

Pragmatics is a branch of linguistics that plays a dynamic role in English Language Teaching (ELT) by enhancing learners' communicative competence and allowing them to navigate the convolutions of real world interactions. Pragmatics as a subfield, focuses on how context influences the interpretation of meaning in language use. This understanding is critical for language learners, particularly in a globalized world where English serves as a lingua franca among interlocutors from diverse cultural background (Estremera, 2025). Pragmatics examines how language is used in social, cultural, and cognitive contexts and how people produce and understand meaning through language. Pragmatics is often studied in terms of communicative acts or sequences of speech acts (i.e., apologizing, saying thank you, making a request, saying goodbye, and so on) (Sailuddin, 2025).

As humans are social beings, the process of communication is inseparable from daily life. People need to interact with their community in their lives, as they cannot live by themselves. Through the communication process, people can change their minds, thoughts, and intentions, instead of only delivering messages and transferring ideas to others. They also need the media to express their thoughts and messages. Therefore, language is the medium in which they produce utterances that are appropriate in a social context.

In good communication, the message must be delivered in an appropriate context. The context is related to language itself. To connect context to language, we must understand pragmatics, which can be defined as how language is used in communication (Triyono & Dirham, 2023). Pragmatic competence is an essential aspect of foreign language teaching. Weak pragmatic competence can result in communication failure.

Pragmatics is essential in language learning and teaching because it enables learners to use language appropriately, contextually, and effectively, moving beyond mere grammatical accuracy to true communicative competence. It helps students navigate cultural nuances, avoid misunderstandings, and understand implicit meanings, ensuring that they know what to say, when, and to whom.

Despite its importance, pragmatic competence is often overlooked in traditional language teaching, which prioritizes grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. However, as communication in English increasingly takes place in multicultural, global contexts, the ability to navigate the complexities of pragmatics has become essential for learners to engage in successful interactions.

Therefore, researchers have explored the role of pragmatics in English language learning. This highlights the role of pragmatics in enhancing learners' ability to communicate effectively, understand social cues, and interact appropriately in a wide range of situations.

Based on the background of the problem, the following research questions are formulated:

1. What is the role of pragmatic in language learning?
2. What are the activities of teaching pragmatic in the classroom?

II. METHODS

This study used a qualitative research method with a descriptive analysis approach. Qualitative research is a method used to explore and understand the meaning that individuals or groups relate to a social human problem. Qualitative methods consist of five different types: phenomenological research, grounded theory, ethnography, case studies, and narrative research (Creswell, 2012).

The data for this study were obtained from literature on the role of pragmatics in language learning. The data sources were journals, books, and articles.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. The Role of Pragmatic in Language Learning

Effective communication is at the heart of language learning, and mastering a language goes beyond understanding vocabulary and grammar. One crucial aspect that often determines the success of communication is pragmatics, which is the study of how context influences the interpretation and use of language. In English, as in any language, the way words are used can vary significantly depending on factors such as the speaker's intentions, the relationship between interlocutors, the social context, and cultural norms (Harahap et al., 2024).

Pragmatic competence enables learners to shift between different language registers, enhancing their ability to communicate with ease and precision across various social settings. Without this flexibility, learners might inadvertently use language inappropriately, which could hinder communication flow or lead to misinterpretations (Holmes, 2013).

One of the chief functions of pragmatics in ELT is facilitating effective communication. Language is not merely a collection of grammatical rules and vocabulary; it is also about how these elements are used in social settings (Estremera, 2025). For instance, understanding politeness strategies, such as using indirect requests or appropriate greetings, helps learners interact effectively and successfully in various contexts. This aspect of pragmatics allows students to grasp not only what is being said but also the underlying intentions and social norms associated with different communicative acts.

The role of pragmatic in language learning are :

- **Contextual Understanding:** Helps interpret indirect meanings, humor, sarcasm, and formality, which are not always explicit in words.
- **Avoids Misunderstandings:** Understanding conversational norms (such as Gricean maxims) prevents pragmatic failure, which is a breakdown in communication due to inappropriate language use. (See figure 1).
- **Enhances Intercultural Communication:** Crucial for navigating diverse global contexts and achieving smooth interactions in multicultural environments.
- **Develops Communicative Competence:** Moves learners beyond grammatical correctness to the ability to use language appropriately and effectively in various social situations.
- **Improves Social Confidence:** Builds confidence by teaching learners how to act and speak appropriately in different social roles, encouraging more engaged expression.

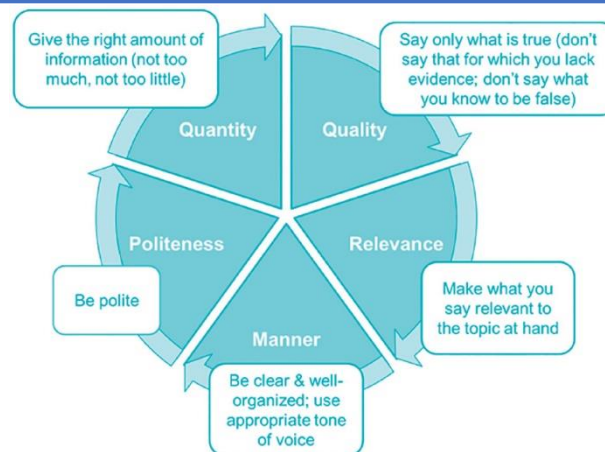


Figure 1 Gricean maxims

There are four gricean maxims in pragmatics (Triyono & Dirham, 2023). The use of maxims are to :

- Ensures Cooperative Communication: It can encourage participants to be truthful, relevant, and clear, and provide enough but not too much information, fostering understanding.
- Facilitates Implicature: When speakers flout (intentionally violate) a maxim, listeners understand that they are not being literal, prompting them to infer deeper meanings (implicatures), which is crucial for indirect communication and humor.
- Improves Teaching & Learning: AI can help teachers deliver clear material and encourage student participation, creating effective learning environments.
- Reduces Misunderstandings: By promoting clarity (Manner) and truthfulness (Quality), they can help avoid confusion and ambiguity, which are essential in both formal and informal settings.

1. The Maxim of Quality means the speaker has to tell the truth or be truthful.

Aunt: "What were you doing in there?"

Niece: "Nothing."

Aunt: "Nothing! Look at your hands. And look at your mouth! What is that stuck?"

Niece: "I don't know, Aunt."

Aunt: "Well, I know. It is jam – that's what it is. Forty times I have said off you did not let that jam alone skin you."

In the above conversation, the aunt is asking her niece, and she finally says, "I've said off you didn't let that jam alone skin you." Her niece does not tell the truth about her condition because she is afraid to say what is going on. The evidence shows that her hands and mouth are full of jam. This conversation violates this maxim because the niece is not being truthful and lacks evidence.

2. The Maxim of Quantity means the speaker does not contribute more or less than he or she needs to.

Mark: "What did you have for lunch today?"

Diana: "Baked beans on toast." (1st Answer gives a normal answer)

Diana: "Food." (2nd Answer gives not enough information)

Diana: "I had 87 warmed-up baked beans (although eight of them were slightly crushed) served on a slice of toast measuring 12.7 cm. by 10.3 cm. which had been unevenly toasted..." (3rd answer gives too much information).

In the conversation between Mark and Diana, Diana's 2nd and 3rd answer violate this maxim because Diana does not contribute as much as she needs to. She provides too much information to Mark for the 3rd answer, and for the 2nd answer, she provides insufficient information. Only the 1st answer does not violate this maxim.

3. The Maxim of Relevance means the speaker has to be relevant in answering the question.

Ann: "Have you seen Mary today?"

Brad: "I'm eating."

In the conversation between Ann and Brad, Brad's answer violates this maxim because it is not relevant to the question. This situation might be because Brad does not want Ann to ask where Mary is, and he ignores the question.

4. The Maxim of Manner means the speaker has to be clear, brief, avoid ambiguity, and orderly.

Interviewer: “Mr. Peres, if we can get down to concrete facts....” “The interviewer is asking about the situation that is being raised and hoping that Mr. Peres will give a clear, brief answer about the situation happening, also avoid ambiguity and it is an orderly answer.

Pragmatics is crucial in language learning because it teaches learners to use language effectively in real-world contexts, going beyond grammar to convey and understand intended meanings, politeness, and cultural nuances, preventing misunderstandings and enabling successful intercultural communication. It bridges the gap between literal words and actual meaning, allowing learners to navigate social situations, choose appropriate speech acts (such as requests or apologies), and achieve their communicative goals in diverse settings, ultimately fostering true communicative competence. It focuses on meaning and to whom you are talking.

Pragmatic competencies include:

First, the ability of the speaker to use language for different purposes;

Second, the ability of the listener to pass through language and understand the speaker's true intentions, for example, actions of indirect speech, irony, and sarcasm.

Third, the order of the rules by which greetings gather to create discourse. This definition involves the knowledge of various speech acts, which is the ability to use language for different purposes; the knowledge of implicature, which is the ability to understand a speaker's real intentions; and the knowledge of conversation structure, which is the command of the rules by which utterances are strung together to create discourse (Triyono & Dirham, 2023).

Recent research, including Taguchi's studies highlights the importance of pragmatic competence in real-world language use. Learners who are not only fluent in vocabulary and grammar but also possess a strong understanding of pragmatic principles are better equipped to function in professional and social settings, where context and subtlety play a significant role. This competence also extends to understanding humor, sarcasm, and figurative language, all of which are essential for participating in more advanced conversations in the target language. Learners who master these skills can engage in interactions with greater fluency, adapt to new contexts, and avoid common pitfalls that may arise from cultural or social missteps (Taguchi, 2020).

Therefore, another recent study by Kecskes defined that teaching pragmatic strategies, such as how to make requests, offer apologies, or express disagreement, can lead to significant improvements in real-world communication. These strategies help learners better align their speech with social expectations and improve their interactions with native speakers. The ability to adjust language use according to the social context not only enhances learners' communication skills but also strengthens their ability to build relationships and navigate complex social dynamics. Pragmatics is an essential component of language learning that cannot be overlooked if learners are to communicate effectively in English (Kecskes, 2013).

2. The Activities of Teaching Pragmatic in the Classroom

Some activities to teach pragmatic in classroom are :

1. Role play with discussion

Role plays are a great way for students to practice completing speech acts in a variety of situations. Students can be asked to create realistic situations (job interview, doctor's visit, asking a friend) for them to act out. They can provide context cards with details such as age, relationship, and setting to guide language choices (e.g., how to apologize to a teacher vs. a friend). This is shown in Table 1.

<p>Situation Your next-door neighbor is having a loud party.</p> <p>Complaint Music too loud</p> <p>Request Turn it down</p>	<p>Situation You are a teacher, and your student always comes late to class.</p> <p>Complaint Late to class</p> <p>Request Arrive on time</p>	<p>Situation You are at a restaurant, and the server brought the wrong order.</p> <p>Complaint Ordered tea, not coffee</p> <p>Request A cup of tea</p>	<p>Situation You are a student, and you think you should have gotten a higher grade on your last English presentation.</p> <p>Complaint Low grade on presentation</p> <p>Request Explain why the grade is so low</p>
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Table 1 Role play Cards Sample (Hilliard, 2017)

2. Discourse Completion Tasks

A Discourse Completion Task (DCT) is a tool used to ask participants to write or say what they would respond with to study how people use language (speech acts) in different contexts, such as making requests or giving apologies. In adapting DCT, we can use clips from movies, TV shows, or songs to discuss character intentions, tones, and non-verbal cues (body language, facial expressions) or analyze dialogues to understand implicit meanings and cultural nuances. It is shown in table 2.

<p>Discourse Completion Task</p> <p>Instructions: Your classmate always comes late to group meetings and is not helping at all with your group’s presentation. Complain to that classmate and answer his question:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">You:</p> <p>Classmate: Are you serious? I think I have done quite a lot. Do the other members of the group agree with you?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">You:</p>
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Table 2 Discourse Completion Task (DCT) Sample (Hilliard, 2017)

3. Developing pragmalinguistics through grammar and vocabulary instruction

Students will feel more comfortable complaining when they understand pragmalinguistics. Complaining is not a problem if it is used appropriately. Students can easily express their feelings and thoughts.

Step 1: Saying you have a Complaint

1. Excuse me, but I'd like to make a complaint.
2. I apologize for the inconvenience, but I believe there is an issue with
3. I am afraid I have got a bit of a problem. You see,
4. I'm sorry to have to say this, but there's a slight problem with
5. Excuse me, but there appears/seems to be a problem with

(Adapted from www.teach-this.com/images/resources/complaining-and-apologizing-useful-language.pdf)

Step 2: Stating the Problem

1. My students don't turn in their homework on time.
2. Children spend too much time playing video games.

Complaints can also be statements reacting to a condition. Examples:

1. The office is too hot.
2. This city has too much air pollution.
3. Rent is too expensive in this neighborhood.

(Adapted from: www.teach-this.com/images/resources/complaints-apologies-and-requests.pdf)

Step 3: Making a Request

Requests usually follow complaints. Use "please," "I would be grateful," or "I would appreciate it" to make a request more polite. Examples:

1. Could/Can you please ... [turn in your homework at the beginning of the class]?
2. I would be grateful if you could/would ... [please come to class on time].
3. I would appreciate it if you could/would ... [clean up your room].

Must and/or *insist* make a request stronger

1. You must ... [turn in your homework at the beginning of class].
2. I must insist that you ... [come to class on time].

(Adapted from: www.teach-this.com/images/resources/complaints-apologies-and-requests.pdf)

Practice:

Make a complaint for the following situation: You are eating at a restaurant, but the service has been slow, the server brought the wrong order, and the silverware is dirty. Use the vocabulary above to complain to the server and make a request.

Table 3 Pragmalinguistics *Sample* (Hilliard, 2017)

Developing pragmatics in the teaching and learning process can avoid misunderstandings in transferring ideas, thoughts, expressions, feelings, and manner. Teaching English is not just about making sentences that are grammatically correct but also about using them appropriately in social contexts. In teaching pragmatics, teachers can adapt fun activities in the classroom, such as role-play, discourse completion tasks, and pragmalinguistics. This can make students feel secure and have good manners when interacting with the community.

Discussion

Pragmatic knowledge or competence play a vital role in language acquisition and learning. The ability and facility to use linguistic competence in a contextually appropriate manner depend not only on grammatical competence but also on pragmatic knowledge or pragmatic competence. A lack of pragmatic knowledge may lead to pragmatic failure, that is the inability to understand what the speaker means with his words in linguistic communication (Triyono & Dirham, 2023).

Essentially, pragmatic competence is essential for learners aiming to achieve English fluency. It encompasses various competencies, including sociolinguistic awareness (understanding the social context), discourse competence (organizing language coherently), and strategic competence (using communication strategies effectively). These components collectively contribute to a learner's ability to communicate successfully across different contexts (Kasper & Roever, 2005).

Pragmatic knowledge, often used interchangeably with pragmatic competence, refers to the knowledge that a speaker has about the different ways in which language is used in different settings and for different purposes, as well as the ways individuals communicate meaning and produce contextually appropriate utterances, sentences, or texts.

One of the chief functions of pragmatics in ELT is facilitating effective communication. The role of pragmatics in language learning is as follows:

- Contextual Understanding: Helps interpret indirect meanings, humor, sarcasm, and formality, which are not always explicit in words.
- Avoids Misunderstandings: Understanding conversational norms (such as Gricean maxims) prevents pragmatic failure, a breakdown in communication due to inappropriate language use. (See figure 1).
- Enhances Intercultural Communication: Crucial for navigating diverse global contexts and achieving smooth interactions in multicultural environments.
- Develops Communicative Competence: Moves learners beyond grammatical correctness to the ability to use language appropriately and effectively in various social situations.
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Developing pragmatics in the teaching and learning process can avoid misunderstandings in transferring ideas, thoughts, expressions, feelings, and manner. Teaching English is not just about making sentences that are grammatically correct but also about using them appropriately in social contexts. In teaching pragmatics, teachers can adapt fun activities in the classroom, such as role-play, discourse completion tasks, and pragmalinguistics. It can make students feel secure and have a good manner to interact with the community.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

1. Pragmatics focuses on the message, meaning, and the person with whom one is speaking. As human beings, people need to interact politely in the community. Language is not just about the language structure but also about how messages can be interpreted effectively. Pragmatism is crucial and important in life. It can manage and develop a person's manner. Negative utterances can break the messages that have been delivered. Pragmatic competence is essential for learners who aim to achieve social awareness. A lack of pragmatic knowledge may lead to pragmatic failure, such as the inability to understand what the speaker means and build impolite generation. In conclusion, the role of pragmatics in English Language Teaching is multifaceted and indispensable. By emphasizing the importance of context and social interaction in language use, educators can equip learners with the necessary skills to navigate diverse communicative situations effectively and appropriately.
2. In teaching pragmatics, teachers can adapt fun activities in the classroom, such as role-play, discourse completion tasks, and pragmalinguistics. This can make students feel secure and have good manners when interacting with the community. Role plays are a great way for students to practice completing speech acts in a variety of situations. A Discourse Completion Task (DCT) is a tool for asking participants to write or say what they would respond with, to study how people use language (speech acts) in different contexts, such as making requests or giving apologies. Therefore, pragmalinguistics can make students feel more comfortable complaining when they comprehend pragmalinguistics. Complaining will not be a problem if it is used appropriately. Students can easily express their feelings and thoughts

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