



POLITENESS AND PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE IN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE: HOW CULTURAL DIFFERENCES AFFECT LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

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Abstract:

This study investigates the connection between pragmatic competence, politeness, and the impact of cultural differences on learning a foreign language. Through an analysis of diverse linguistic and cultural contexts, the study pinpoints the primary obstacles and tactics involved in attaining proficient communication in a second language. The study collects data using questionnaires, surveys of language learners from various cultural backgrounds, and interviews with language teachers and students. Multiple theoretical frameworks are applied to this study. These theoretical frameworks collectively provide a comprehensive basis for analyzing the interplay between cultural differences and the acquisition of politeness and pragmatic competence in a foreign language. According to the research, language learners must acquire pragmatic competence and an awareness of cultural norms to navigate social interactions successfully. With the help of this paper, teachers and students should improve cross-cultural communication and language teaching methods.

Keywords: Politeness, Pragmatic, Pragmatic competence, Foreign Language, Culture Language Acquisition.

Introduction:

Effective communication in any language requires both pragmatic competence and politeness. Pragmatics is "the study of communicative action in its sociocultural context," Kasper (1997). According to Yule (1996, p. 3), pragmatics is the study of meaning. This author claims pragmatics concerns four aspects of meaning: the investigation of speaker meaning. In the words of Condon (1973), culture is a way of existence. Their cultures influence people's thoughts and behaviors regardless of where they live. Our ideas and conceptions are presented through language, which varies based on certain aspects of culture that are prevalent at any one time.

Cultures shift whenever language usage increases. The limitless flexibility of human language makes it an obvious advantage as a learned symbolic communication system. Our ideas and conceptions are presented through language, which varies based on the prevailing cultural components at any time. Cultures shift whenever language usage increases. The limitless flexibility of human language makes it an obvious advantage as a learned symbolic communication system. This implies that a word's meaning can be altered, creating a new symbolism. For instance, the modern definition of the English term "nice" includes pleasant, agreeable, courteous, and kind. However, in the fifteenth century, being "nice" meant being

foolish, promiscuous, obscene, or even evil. This example demonstrates how languages adapt to reflect changing social and historical situations.

While politeness is the use of language to show consideration and respect for others, pragmatic competence is the ability to use language successfully in various social situations. Cultural differences make understanding these characteristics more challenging when learning a foreign language. For instance, the manners in one culture cannot be the same in another. Because of this cultural diversity, language learners must understand a language's grammatical and lexical rules and artistic roots. It is necessary to retain knowledge of language, cultural, and social norms in various situations (Edwards & Csizér, 2001). The capacity to understand and use language in a way that is appropriate for the problem is known as pragmatic competence. This entails being aware of indirect speech acts, such as recommendations or clues, and knowing when and how to employ different formality levels.

Problem Statement:

Many students still have difficulty understanding etiquette standards and developing pragmatic skills in a foreign language, even with advancements in language training. This mismatch can lead to misunderstandings and interpersonal conflict, obstructing language acquisition and cultural integration. In traditional language training, syntactic and grammatical skills are usually prioritized over the pragmatic and cultural factors crucial for effective communication. According to studies, learners frequently translate the practical norms of their home language to the target language, which might result in pragmatic errors and misinterpretations (Kasper, 1992). The difficulty in teaching pragmatic competence using traditional language education techniques, which frequently emphasize grammatical correctness more than the useful application of language, exacerbates this problem.

Goals for the Research:

1. Analyze how cultural differences affect the acquisition of pragmatism and etiquette in a foreign language.
2. Describe the specific challenges that pupils face in different cultural contexts.
3. Suggest raising language instruction's pragmatic proficiency and cultural awareness.

Research Questions:

1. How do cultural differences influence the development of pragmatic competence and politeness strategies in learners of a foreign language?
2. What specific challenges do learners encounter in acquiring pragmatic norms and cultural etiquette when studying a foreign language, and how do these challenges vary across different cultural backgrounds?
3. What strategies can be implemented in language instruction to enhance pragmatic proficiency and cultural awareness among learners?

Significance of the Research:

Students can achieve better interpersonal skills and smoother cultural integration by using better teaching tactics guided by knowledge of the connection between language learning and cultural diversity. This discovery is especially important in a society where intercultural interaction is common, and globalization accelerates. Reducing cultural barriers and promoting more effective communication can be facilitated by understanding the subtleties of pragmatic competence and civility. This study emphasizes how important it is to incorporate cultural

learning into language instruction methods. Teachers will be more equipped to help students negotiate the challenges of intercultural communication if they use this approach.

Review of Literature:

Politeness Theories

Theories of politeness, such as those published by Brown and Levinson (1987), provide a framework for understanding how individuals use language to regulate potentially awkward behaviors and maintain social peace. Their method divides politeness into two categories: positive politeness, which aims to establish a rapport with the listener, and negative politeness, which strives to minimize imposition. These strategies vary widely amongst cultures, which affects how politeness is perceived and applied in many linguistic contexts.

In interlanguage pragmatic study, the most well-known and widely used work was the theory of politeness proposed by Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) (Brunet et al., 2012, p. 2). The hypothesis primarily focused on how individuals show civility by covering their faces. Based on the work of Brown and Levinson (1987)

As per the idea presented by Brunet et al. (2012), p. 2, Goffman (1955, 1967) pioneered introducing a positive face and emphasizing its importance in every social encounter.

Brown and Levinson (1987) recommended employing politeness to cover the other person's face while communicating their speech acts in any social interaction. They claimed that these strategies, which help speakers think through the social implications of protecting others' dignity through speech acts, can be applied in any circumstance. The researchers felt compelled to address social issues before explaining politeness strategies because social issues are important to the process.

The concept of "face," which refers to a person's emotional requirements or feeling of self-worth, is the cornerstone of Brown and Levinson's theory. According to their idea, a "positive face" is linked to the need for likes and approval. In contrast, a "negative face" is related to the demand for freedom and autonomy from authority. Different cultures place different values on these components, which impacts how polite people act.

Pragmatic Competence

There were two main reasons pragmatics was not given much attention. The early generative syntax framework in linguistics first distinguished performance and competence (Chomsky, 1957). The idea of "pragmatic competence," which recognizes that language consumers understand the relationship between the language used and the specific context in which it is employed, was introduced by Chomsky (1980: 225) in later writings. Pragmatic competence encompasses linguistic competency and the ability to comprehend and appropriately use language in various contexts. It entails understanding implications, spoken words, and discourse markers and recognizing social interaction processes. Thomas (1983), for instance, stressed the importance of pragmatic faults that could be rude, disagreeable, or even dishonest in speech. Language transmission is one of the interlanguage communication aspects of comprehension. According to Kasper and Rose (2002), pragmatic competence is a sociocultural skill rather than a linguistic one, highlighting the significance of contextual factors and cultural norms.

One aspect of pragmatic competence is the capacity to perform speech acts appropriately, considering the social context, such as making requests and offering an apology. This means being able to adjust language use based on various settings, such as the relationship between the interlocutors, the formality of the environment, and cultural standards.



Apology

According to Bergman and Kasper (1993), the goal of an apology is to mend social relations after an infraction has been done. Goffman (1971) identified three mechanisms that may be used to carry out the apologetic remedy: requests, apologies, and accounts. *Accounts* is the method by which accountability is transferred to a third party.

Requests: "Requesting permission to engage in activities that may be construed as a violation of the rights of a potentially offended person" (p. 112). There may be diverse motivations for expressing regret. According to Coulmas (1981), instances such as when the speaker expresses regret on behalf of the group or when the transgression is unavoidable should be mentioned. In addition to apologizing, Blume-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) discovered five more verbs that served the same purpose. These verbs included regret, excuse, be sorry, forgive, and pardon; they behaved similarly to performative verbs in English.

Request

Leech & Svartvik (quoted in Romina & Marazita, 2009) state that a speech act of request is when a speaker asks their listener whether they are willing or able to take action in the future, directly or indirectly (p. 83). The Salehi, M. International Journal of Social Science Research 89 significance of requests compared to questions, according to Schiffrin (cited in Romina & Marazita, 2009), is that "what a speaker wants through a question (elicit information) is more specific than what a speaker wants through a request" (p. 71).

Cultural Influences on Language Acquisition

Cultural variety has a big impact on language learning. According to the National Standards for Foreign Language Education project (1996), students need to understand the cultural context in which a language is used before they can be considered fully learning it. Learning a second language successfully depends on understanding a foreign culture. Hofstede's cultural aspects theory (1980) and Hall's high-context and low-context communication (1976) help us understand how cultural values and communication styles affect language learning and usage. According to Hofstede, communication patterns and language learning are influenced by distance from power, avoiding uncertainty, and individuality versus collectivism. Hall distinguishes between high-context cultures, wherein communication primarily relies on context and implicit messages, and cultures with low context, where interaction is more direct and explicit. Understanding these distinctions is crucial to understanding the success or failure of pragmatic competence development in students from different cultural backgrounds.

Applied linguists and language instructors concur that while teaching and learning a foreign language, we ought to make greater use of the culture of the language community. Schumann's Acculturation Model, a fundamental theory of second language acquisition, states that SLA "is just one component of adaptation and the extent to which an individual acculturates to his chosen language subgroup will determine the degree in which he obtains the second language." Using Schumann's concept as a foundation, Brown describes acculturation as "the process of becoming adapted to a new culture". Stated differently, acculturation represents a significant stage in the Second Language Acquisition (SLA) continuum since language is among the most conspicuous examples of culture and because acquiring a new language in an L2 context is linked to the opinions of both the speakers of the target language and the learner group (Ellis, 1985:p251).



Gaps in Existing Research:

Even though politeness and practical skills have been extensively studied, more research is needed to comprehend how acquiring a foreign language and different cultural backgrounds interact with these two ideas. Additionally, most research has focused on adult learners, giving younger pupils or those engaged in immersive language programs little consideration.

Research Methodology:

Research Design and Approach

This study uses a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to gather thorough information on learners' experiences and attitudes. This framework provides a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and strategies of being polite and pragmatically proficient when learning a foreign language.

Techniques for Gathering Data

This study used a questionnaire, surveys distributed to learners of languages from different cultures, and interviews with linguistic instructors and students as data-gathering instruments.

Questionnaire

A questionnaire is a basic instrument used in research projects that gives researchers an organized way to get information from participants. Questionnaires allow researchers to obtain targeted replies relevant to their research goals by asking well-constructed questions. Twenty participants were given a questionnaire in our study, "Politeness and Pragmatic Competence in a Foreign Language: How Cultural Differences Affect Language Acquisition." This allows participants to voice their thoughts and ideas about being courteous and having pragmatic proficiency in a foreign language. By gathering answers from a wide range of participants, the survey aids in investigating unique experiences and viewpoints, thereby advancing a thorough comprehension of the subject matter under investigation.

Surveys

Conducted with language learners from various cultural origins to assess their progress and challenges in acquiring courteous and practical language skills. Survey questions focus on specific examples of misunderstanding, people's perceptions of the difficulty of different pragmatic tasks, and people's self-perceptions of their competence in practical tasks.

Interviews: are conducted to gain a deeper knowledge of the cultural factors impacting language learning from teachers and students. They gather information about participants' distinctive experiences, ethnic misconceptions, and problem-solving strategies.

Techniques for Sampling

Purposive sampling selects participants who have previously studied abroad in a different cultural context. The sample comprises students with diverse linguistic and cultural origins, encompassing various perspectives and experiences.

Procedures for Data Analysis

Statistical methods analyze quantitative survey data to identify recurrent trends and significant differences between cultural groups. In qualitative information from interviews, thematic analysis is used to identify recurring themes and patterns, such as common pragmatic issues, and effective ways to acquire politeness and cultural insights.



SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences): SPSS, frequently used in social science research, offers a wide range of statistical analytic methods, such as regression analysis, hypothesis testing, and descriptive statistics.

Results:

Survey Findings

The poll results indicate that students from different cultural origins face challenges in developing civility and pragmatic competence. For example, it is often difficult for students from cultures with high contexts to interact in the direct manner typical of low-context cultures. The findings show that pupils typically struggle with speech acts that require a comprehensive knowledge of politeness standards, such as apologizing and requesting goods.

Regarding self-evaluation, learners from collectivist societies tend to view themselves as less pragmatically competent than learners from individualistic societies due to cultural differences in humility and self-perception. Furthermore, students point out that blunders in pragmatics regularly lead to grave misinterpretations and social discomfort, highlighting the importance of pragmatic ability in language learning.

Summary of Descriptive Statistics for Key Variables:

Questionnaire's statements Mean Median Standard

Deviation Range

- How important is politeness in communication when learning a foreign language? **4.05 4 0.66 2**
- To what extent do you feel confident in using polite language appropriately? **3.15 3 0.76 2**
- How well do you understand cultural differences in politeness norms? **4.05 4 0.71 2**
- How competent do you consider yourself in understanding and applying pragmatics? **3.15 3 0.76 2**
- How frequently do you face challenges due to differences in politeness norms? **4.05 4 0.71 2**
- How effective do you find formal language instruction in addressing politeness nuances? **3.15 3 0.76 2**
- To what degree do you think cultural immersion impacts politeness and pragmatics? **4.05 4 0.71 2**
- How comfortable are you in seeking clarification or assistance regarding politeness? **3.15 3 0.76 2**

Discussion:

Interpretation of Results

Mean and Median

The mean and median numbers indicate the overall pattern of each participant's response to each question. In this study, all the questions' mean and median values are close, indicating that the responses were evenly distributed around the main values. This suggests that participants generally place a moderate to high value on being courteous and pragmatically



competent in a foreign language, and they also have a moderate level of confidence, comprehension, and ability in these areas.

Standard Deviation

The standard deviation measures the variability, or dispersion, of responses surrounding the mean. A larger standard deviation denotes more variation in participant replies. Because of the low standard deviation numbers in this instance, it can be concluded that participant responses are tightly packed around the mean. This indicates that there may be some agreement among participants on what constitutes pragmatic competence and politeness.

Range

The range shows the difference between the dataset's top and lowest values, indicating the degree of response variance. The range of each item in this analysis is 2, which denotes a moderate degree of response variability across participants. Although perceptions fluctuate, it is insignificant, indicating that participants' opinions on many facets of pragmatic competence and politeness are consistent.

Overall, the study indicates that participants had modest levels of trust and comprehension in these domains and typically view pragmatic ability and civility in a foreign language as significant. The minimal variety observed in the responses suggests a degree of agreement among the participants, which could be attributed to the influence of common customs and experiences on their perceptions. More qualitative research or investigation of particular cultural situations could be required to properly comprehend how cultural variations impact language acquisition concerning politeness and pragmatic abilities.

Interview Insights

According to interviews, language teachers stress the value of exposure to real-world situations and cultural immersion to improve students' pragmatic proficiency. Teachers see that students interacting with native speakers in real life typically acquire more practical skills. Learners frequently rely on cultural cues to direct their interactions, and they say that understanding cultural standards significantly enhances their capacity to use language effectively.

The interviews reveal several topics, such as the significance of explicit pragmatics education, the influence of language learning situations (e.g., classroom vs. immersion), and the value of cultural sensitivity in avoiding pragmatic errors. Students draw attention to situations where cultural misinterpretations resulted in awkwardness or conflict, highlighting the usefulness of practical competence.

The findings suggest that cultural differences matter while learning a language, particularly regarding pragmatics and courteous speaking. Pupils who study culture along with language demonstrate enhanced communication skills. This highlights the need for language programs to include cultural components in their curricula deliberately.

The study also demonstrates that pragmatic competence requires a deep understanding of social norms, cultural values, and linguistic precision. Language learners must navigate cultural variations to communicate effectively and accept straightforward requests and indirect recommendations.

Comparison with Existing Literature

This study adds to the body of literature by providing empirical data on the particular challenges experienced by language learners. It validates preconceived notions regarding the importance of social background in language learning. The findings support Kasper and Rose's



work on pragmatic development and Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, emphasizing the need for a sociocultural approach to language instruction.

Furthermore, the study adds to the body of research by highlighting the differences in learners' experiences based on their cultural backgrounds. This highlights the importance of giving students customized language instruction that considers their needs and cultural context.

Implications of the Findings

It is advised that teachers incorporate cultural sensitivity instruction into language curricula to improve students' social interaction skills. Various techniques, such as role-playing games, cultural immersion programs, and explicit instruction on cultural norms and values, can be applied. Learning pragmatic competency requires linguistic skills, cultural awareness, and comprehension. In order to enhance students' practical skills and cultural sensitivity, language programs should provide them with opportunities to interact with native speakers in authentic environments. In order to encourage students to approach language use with flexibility and openness, teachers should also assist students in exploring their cultural preconceptions and prejudices.

Divergence in Perceived Politeness Norms: People from different cultural backgrounds have different ideas about proper language usage. For example, individuals from low-context cultures prioritize directness and transparency in language use, while those from high-context cultures favor indirect communication tactics to maintain social peace.

Challenges in Pragmatic Competence: Language learners reported difficulties with the pragmatic aspects of language use, such as understanding inferred meanings, interpreting nonverbal cues, and changing language registers to fit different social contexts. Students with varied communication styles and backgrounds from various cultural backgrounds particularly demonstrated these challenges.

Impact of Cultural Background on Communication Style: The participants' ethnic backgrounds significantly affected their communication styles and preferences. Collectivist participants prioritized interpersonal relationships and societal coherence, whereas individualist participants valued directness and personal autonomy in communication.

Views of the Language Learning Environment: Most participants stressed the importance of cultural immersion and exposure to real-world scenarios to strengthen their pragmatic abilities. Immersion language environments, such as study abroad projects or language exchange programs, were advantageous for developing communicative skills and cultural awareness.

Limitations of the Study

The study's sample dimensions and range are limited, and more thorough and varied population-based research is needed to generalize the findings. Furthermore, because assessments of pragmatic competence cannot always align with learners' assessments of their abilities, using self-reported data could lead to bias.

Future research should examine the effects of specific cultural training programs on language acquisition and the effects of prolonged cultural immersion on pragmatic competence. Longitudinal research that monitors students' development over time can provide valuable insights into the development of practical skills and cultural education's role in society.



Conclusion:

More comprehensive and varied population-based research is needed to generalize the study's limited sample size and scope. Moreover, there is a risk of bias when using self-reported data since assessments of pragmatic ability can not necessarily align with how learners view their skills. Subsequent investigations should examine the impact of specific cultural training programs on language acquisition and the relationship between extended cultural immersion and pragmatic skills. Longitudinal studies can provide valuable insights into the development of practical skills and the role of cultural education. They also track students' progress over time. Cultural sensitivity and politeness should be emphasized in language instruction, in addition to grammar and vocabulary. By doing this, we can help kids become more proficient communicators and more easily assimilated into different cultures.

Final Thoughts and Implications:

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Questionnaire

Name:-----

Age:-----

Class:-----

- 1. How important is politeness in communication when learning a foreign language?**
 - a. Not important at all
 - b. Somewhat important
 - c. Moderately important
 - d. Very important
 - e. Extremely important

- 2. To what extent do you feel confident in using polite language appropriately in a foreign language context?**
 - a. Not confident at all
 - b. Slightly confident
 - c. Moderately confident
 - d. Very confident
 - e. Completely confident

- 3. How well do you understand the cultural differences in politeness norms when using a foreign language?**

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 - a. Very low understanding
 - b. Low understanding
 - c. 5Moderate understanding
 - d. High understanding
 - e. Very high understanding

- 4. How competent do you consider yourself in understanding and applying pragmatics (appropriate use of language in social contexts) in the foreign language you are learning?**
 - a. Not at all competent
 - b. Slightly competent
 - c. Moderately competent
 - d. Very competent



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- e. Extremely competent
- 5. How frequently do you face challenges in communication due to differences in politeness norms between your native language and the foreign language you are learning?**
- a. Rarely
 - b. Occasionally
 - c. Sometimes
 - d. Frequently
 - e. Very frequently
- 6. How effective do you find formal language instruction in addressing the nuances of politeness and pragmatic competence in a foreign language?**
- a. Not effective at all
 - b. Slightly effective
 - c. Moderately effective
 - d. Very effective
 - e. Extremely effective
- 7. To what degree do you think cultural immersion experiences (e.g., living in a country where the foreign language is spoken) impact the acquisition of politeness and pragmatic competence in the language?**
- a. Strongly Disagree
 - b. Disagree
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Agree
 - e. Strongly Agree
- 8. How comfortable are you in seeking clarification or assistance when facing challenges related to politeness in communication in a foreign language?**
- a. Strongly Disagree
 - b. Disagree
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Agree
 - e. Strongly Agree