

Students' Pragmatic Competence in College English Education

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Keywords: Pragmatic Competence; English-Learners, College English Education Introduction.

Abstract. This article studies on the pragmatic competence of Non-English majors in College English education with the latest and influential theories to conduct an analysis of the definition, components of pragmatic competence and reveals the current situation of the pragmatic competence of English learners in College English education. It concludes that learners' pragmatic competence would develop with some improvements.

1. Introduction

Pragmatic competence is a hot topic in the study of second language acquisition, Inter-language pragmatics and foreign language teaching, which has long been the focus of research. However, what is pragmatic competence has never been a unified standard. The former theory holds that pragmatic competence belongs to the category of Knowledge [1] while other theories argue that pragmatic competence is the pragmatic behavior of language users. In recent years, with the establishment of pragmatic competence model and research by scholars at home and abroad, many new theories appear, relatively novel theory that pragmatic competence is to reconstruct or reproduce the relevant experience of language behavior, and according to Swedish scholar, Elly Ifantidou published in 2014, "pragmatic competence and relevance". In the book, the author focuses on how the hearer/reader interprets the pragmatic competence of discourse, and redefines the concept of pragmatic competence from two aspects: Discourse generation and discourse interpretation [2].

In summary of the various theories and schools above, most of the current research is from the speaker/author perspective to consider how to make pragmatic behavior or pragmatic knowledge to reproduce, however, it is the same important to pay attention to how the listener/reader to interpret the pragmatic competence of discourse. According to the "College English Teaching Guide" by Chinese Ministry of Education in 2016, it is clearly mentioned that the goal of college English teaching is "to train students' comprehensive application ability in English, especially the ability of listening and speaking, so that they can communicate effectively in English in future study, work and social intercourse, enhance their self-learning ability and improve their comprehensive cultural accomplishment to meet the needs of our social development and international exchange" [3] the use of language and the correct interpretation of language of information and behavior requiring the effective use of English for international communication, which is particularly important [4].

2. The Research Scope of Pragmatic Competence

Pragmatic competence has a very broad meaning, namely: the comprehensive use of language ability, but also has its academic definition. From a linguistic point of view, pragmatic competence is a cross-product of language acquisition and pragmatics, is also a part of communicative competence [5]. It mainly refers to the recognition of the context by the communicator, the ability to accurately understand others and to express oneself appropriately [6]. This ability is embodied in the mastery of pragmatic knowledge, which contains both the content of the pragmatic system of the communicator and the appropriate application of the knowledge of the pragmatic system [7].

According to the latest and most influential pragmatic competence theory, Elly Ifantidou proposes that pragmatic competence consists of two aspects.

- 1) Identification of relevant language indicators (language awareness);
- 2) Extracting relevant pragmatic effects (pragmatic awareness);

She cites four criteria for defining pragmatic competence:

Pragmatic competence is characterized by verbal act; communicative intention; the implied meaning or intention of the Speaker and the fact that Pragmatic competence contains a wide range of Dynamic contextual factors [2].

This paper argues that the study of pragmatic competence cannot be carried out solely from the perspective of discourse generation or discourse interpretation, but should be combined and clarify the differences and relations between language competence and pragmatic competence.

2.1 Discourse Generation

Discourse generation means that the speaker/author relies on the language ability to express thought and communicate to cultivate students' English application ability, enhance intercultural communication consciousness and communicative competence.

2.2 Discourse Interpretation

It's the listener/reader using the whole experience of natural language (language ability, ability of mental state and world knowledge) to deal with the cognitive ability of language information to cultivate students' ability of English application, and enhance their intercultural communication consciousness and communicative competence.

2.3 Language Competence and Pragmatic Competence

Chomsky (1980) believes that pragmatic competence and linguistic competence belong to human innate abilities [7]. Elly Ifantidou holds that pragmatic competence is a cognitive ability that can be characterized by linguistic behavior, which relies on linguistic competence to express ideas and communicate, and that language behavior relies not only on linguistic competence but also on pragmatic competence and the ability of cognitive reasoning to deal with and interpret discourse information [2].

3. The Present Situation of the Pragmatic Competence of College English Learners

The English pragmatic competence of Chinese college students is weak overall.

Some domestic scholars gathered the college non-English majors together in the limited context of the pragmatic proficiency test, finding that the pragmatic failure of students is very obvious. From the three constituent dimensions of pragmatic competence--cultural knowledge, relevance and verbal behavior knowledge, students have the best grasp of cultural knowledge, and secondly, the appropriateness and the relevance, the poorest part of students is the application of Speech Act Knowledge, and Speech Act as the core of pragmatic competence should be the concentrated embodiment of pragmatic competence [8].

It is gratifying to find that in a large number of students know well in investigation of English cultural knowledge (Here the culture is mainly customs, etiquette, basic necessities of the popular Cultural knowledge in the narrow sense), the results show that the college students, and it can be seen that our English teaching in the training of College English, which emphasizes the dissemination of the culture in which it is carried.

It is learnt that many colleges and universities begin the specific courses in the British and American National Society and Culture, British and American literature and other courses, which played an active role in fostering students' pragmatic competence.

4. Strategies for Improving Learners' Pragmatic Competence in College English

4.1 The Comprehension of Figurative Utterances

From aspect of the discourse interpretation, pragmatic competence requires learners to pay attention to coherent discourse structure, dynamic contextual effect and the degree of information processing effort, and also pay attention to the lexical cognitive processing markers, such as

rhetoical discourse (figurative utterances). These rhetorical words not only help to understand the meaning of discourse, but also can evaluate whether the information of communication is trustworthy [8].

In college English class, it is very feasible for the teachers to choose some rhetorical discourse such as metaphor and irony in the editorial and news discourse as examples to discuss how they contribute to pragmatic inference.

4.2 Syntax Clarification

In college English class, it is very vital to clear that grammatical knowledge, such as some concepts and programmed words, which can predict the meta-pragmatic consciousness of second language learners, such as the understanding of modality, discourse connectives, expression, active-passive structure and rhetorical discourse.

4.3 Situational Teaching

The Chinese scholar He early in 1997 put forward “English study must hold in an English context, the practice language is the main factor for mastering a foreign language” [6]. But more than 2 decades later, the students who learned English are still study without of context. This shows that English educators should provide students with more opportunities to use English, infiltrate English into daily life and study, combine explicit teaching with stealth teaching, and not only regard it as the “official” language of class but also a language in our daily life [9].

In this paper, we recommend the use of situational approach in college English teaching, which is one of the most effective teaching methods in the course reform, which caters to the cheerful and open-hearted, enthusiastic college students, which are the psychological characteristics of their own, and with the integration with English teaching materials, which conforms to the requirements of the standard of college English instruction, students would learn English in a more effective way because this method emphasizes the combination of teaching and the establishment of comprehensive practical activities, using various teaching forms, such as game, performance, multimedia and so on, to comprehend and practice English in the experience, and to apply knowledge to practice [10,11].

4.4 Mastery of Profound Cultural Knowledge

As mentioned above, the survey results show that the mastery of cultural-related pragmatic competence in Chinese college students ‘ pragmatic competence is the best compared with the other two criteria, but it is still not enough for college English educators to understand that students only possess these chivalrous cultural knowledge [9].

While learning a language, you should also know how to learn this language Social background, history, religion and culture, in which include both current mass culture and deep culture and high-level culture.

5. Conclusion

With the emphasis on the cultivation of students’ communicative competence in college English education, the study of pragmatic competence has been paid more and more attention. It is the knowledge of the pragmatic system and the proper use of the pragmatic system in the foreign language learners, including the ability of verbal and social linguistics, which is regarded as an important part of the social interaction, and is paid more and more attention as a key component of communicative competence. Pragmatic competence is a complicated cognitive inference process, which requires the participation of grammatical ability and language ability, so learners should understand the grammatical rules at the pragmatic language level in college English education. On the pragmatic level, we should pay attention to cultural differences, to look for similarity, to understand the restriction of attitude and behavior at the level of psychological cognition, and to combine the limitations of context.

Acknowledgement

This project is funded by China West Normal University' Talents Studying Project "A Cross-cultural Contrastive Study of Students' extracurricular Reading in Canada" (Project number 17YC064).

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