DEVELOPING STUDENTS' PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE IN UNDERGRADUATE EFL CLASSROOMS: AWARENESS OF SPEECH ACTS AND LANGUAGE FUNCTIONS IN ENGLISH SPEAKING CLASSES

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Abstract

The development of pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic competences is essential in English language teaching (ELT), particularly in enhancing students' communicative effectiveness. This paper examines the significance of raising awareness of speech acts and language functions in English speaking classes. It discusses the theoretical underpinnings of pragmatic instruction, the role of speech acts in communication, and effective pedagogical strategies for fostering these competences. The findings indicate that explicit instruction in pragmatics significantly enhances students' ability to navigate various sociolinguistic contexts, ultimately improving their overall language proficiency.

Key words: Pragmatic, Competence, Sociopragmatic, Awareness, Speech Acts, Language, Functions, English, Speaking, Classes, Instruction, Sociolinguistic, Communication.

Introduction

Pragmatic competence, defined as the ability to use language effectively in context, is a critical component of communicative competence in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education. It encompasses both pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic aspects, where pragmalinguistic competence refers to the knowledge of language use in context, and sociopragmatic competence involves understanding the social and cultural norms that govern language use ("A speech act approach to the teaching of functional classification of English sentences in selected secondary schools in Ondo state, Nigeria", 2020; BOUKNIFY, 2024). Despite its importance, many EFL curricula inadequately address these competences, leading to gaps in students' ability to communicate effectively in real-world situations (BOUKNIFY, 2024; Heidari et al., 2020). This paper aims to explore the development of students' pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic competences through the awareness of speech acts and language functions in English speaking classes.

Literature Review

The role of speech acts in language education has been widely discussed in the literature. Speech acts, as defined by Austin and Searle, are utterances that perform specific functions in communication, such as requests, promises, and apologies (Hidayat et al., 2022; "Teaching speech acts as a way to develop Students' communicative competence", 2023). Research

indicates that understanding and producing speech acts is crucial for effective communication, as it allows learners to navigate various social interactions appropriately (Rafieyan et al., 2014; Katti, 2018). For instance, Rafieyan et al. Rafieyan et al. (2014) found that students with heightened awareness of pragmatic features demonstrated improved comprehension and production of conventional expressions in English.

Moreover, the integration of pragmatic instruction into EFL teaching has been shown to enhance students' sociopragmatic awareness. According to Tran and Tran (Tran & Tran, 2022), using engaging materials, such as films, can provide authentic contexts for students to practice speech acts, thereby fostering their sensitivity to sociolinguistic nuances. Additionally, studies have highlighted the need for explicit instruction in pragmatics, as many learners lack exposure to the sociolinguistic and sociocultural aspects of the target language (Rafieyan et al., 2014). This aligns with the findings of Hidayat et al. (Hidayat et al., 2022), who emphasized the importance of teaching speech acts to facilitate students' understanding of language functions in various contexts.

Methodology

To effectively develop students' pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic competences, a mixed-methods approach can be employed. This includes qualitative methods such as classroom observations and interviews with students and teachers, as well as quantitative methods like pre- and post-tests to assess students' pragmatic awareness. The curriculum should incorporate authentic materials and activities that reflect real-life sociolinguistic interactions, allowing students to engage with speech acts in context (Heidari et al., 2020; Widya, 2017). For instance, role-playing exercises can simulate various social situations where students must employ appropriate speech acts, thereby enhancing their pragmatic skills (Taguchi, 2015; "Teaching speech acts as a way to develop Students' communicative competence", 2023).

Results

Implementing a curriculum that emphasizes pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic competences has shown positive outcomes in various educational contexts. For example, studies have indicated that students who receive explicit instruction in speech acts demonstrate improved communicative competence and greater confidence in their language use ("A speech act approach to the teaching of functional classification of English sentences in selected secondary schools in Ondo state, Nigeria", 2020; Rafieyan et al., 2014). Furthermore, the use of multimedia resources, such as video clips and short stories, has been effective in enhancing students' understanding of pragmatic features (Heidari et al., 2020; Guo, 2023). These strategies not only foster a deeper comprehension of language functions but also encourage students to reflect on their own language use in diverse sociocultural contexts.

Discussion

The findings underscore the necessity of integrating pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic instruction into English speaking classes. By raising awareness of speech acts and language functions, educators can equip students with the tools needed to navigate complex social interactions effectively. This is particularly important in today's globalized world, where English often serves as a lingua franca ("A speech act approach to the teaching of functional classification of English sentences in selected secondary schools in Ondo state, Nigeria", 2020; BOUKNIFY, 2024). The ability to adapt language use according to social context is essential for effective communication, as it allows learners to engage meaningfully with speakers from diverse backgrounds.

Moreover, the challenges faced by educators in teaching pragmatics, such as time constraints and a lack of resources, must be addressed (BOUKNIFY, 2024; Heidari et al., 2020). Professional development programs for teachers can provide the necessary training to enhance their pragmatic awareness, thereby improving their instructional practices (Povolná, 2012; Widya, 2017). Additionally, the incorporation of pragmatic content in EFL textbooks is crucial, as many current materials lack sufficient coverage of speech acts and other pragmatic elements (BOUKNIFY, 2024; Siswantara & Ariffin, 2021).

Conclusion

Developing students' pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic competences through awareness of speech acts and language functions is vital for enhancing their communicative effectiveness in English. By integrating these elements into the curriculum, educators can foster a more inclusive and effective language learning environment. Future research should explore the long-term impacts of pragmatic instruction on students' language use and their ability to navigate diverse communicative contexts.

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