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PRAGMATICS IN APPLIED LINGUISTICS: IMPLICATIONS FOR PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT IN EFL LEARNING

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Abstract: *This study examined the important role of applied pragmatics in L2 learning, with a focus on improving pragmatic competence among English as Foreign Language (EFL) university students. This study used a mixed-methods approach in which quantitative data were collected through Written Discourse Completion Tasks (WDCT) and a test to measure their use of request strategies and the appropriateness of their language before and after explicit instruction. While qualitative data were collected through semi structured interviews to explore students' understanding of cultural differences and their ability to use language in different situations. The results showed a significant improvement in students' use of indirect requests, polite expressions, and appropriate language after explicit instruction through dialogue analysis, cross-cultural comparisons, and role play activities. In addition, pragmatic competence can support language development by encouraging the inclusion of pragmatic skills in language learning standards. The study concludes that pragmatic should be integrated systematically into EFL curriculum to help students become fluent communicators in using English effectively in real life situations.*

Keywords: *Pragmatics, Applied Linguistics, L2, EFL Learning.*

Abstrak: Penelitian ini mengkaji peran penting pragmatik terapan dalam pembelajaran bahasa kedua, dengan fokus pada peningkatan kompetensi pragmatik mahasiswa perguruan tinggi yang mempelajari Bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan metode campuran, dengan data kuantitatif yang dikumpulkan melalui Written Discourse Completion Tasks (WDCT) dan tes untuk mengukur penggunaan strategi permintaan serta ketepatan penggunaan bahasa mahasiswa sebelum dan sesudah diberikan pembelajaran eksplisit. Sementara itu, data kualitatif dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur untuk mengeksplorasi pemahaman mahasiswa tentang perbedaan budaya dan kemampuan mereka menggunakan bahasa dalam berbagai situasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya peningkatan yang signifikan dalam penggunaan permintaan tidak langsung, ungkapan sopan, dan penggunaan bahasa yang sesuai setelah mahasiswa mengikuti pembelajaran eksplisit melalui analisis dialog, perbandingan lintas budaya, dan kegiatan bermain peran. Selain itu, kompetensi pragmatik dapat mendukung perkembangan bahasa dengan mendorong dimasukkannya keterampilan pragmatik ke dalam standar pembelajaran bahasa. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa pragmatik perlu diintegrasikan secara sistematis ke dalam kurikulum EFL untuk membantu mahasiswa menjadi komunikator yang fasih dan mampu menggunakan bahasa Inggris secara efektif dalam situasi kehidupan nyata.

Kata kunci: Pragmatik, Linguistik Terapan, Bahasa Asing, Pembelajaran EFL.

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary globalized environment, English functions as an international language connecting individuals across disparate cultural, linguistic, and institutional backgrounds. Within this cross-cultural landscape,

mastering grammatical structures and acquiring extensive vocabulary no longer guarantee successful or harmonious communication.

Truly, people in different cultures have a need of accomplishing the appropriateness and politeness in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) communication. Therefore, in order to speak to people from different areas around the world effectively and politely, English native and non-native speakers have to be trained with pragmatics that involves diverse cultures and languages.

From views of House, Kasper and Rose (2003), the pragmatics is a type of knowledge that makes people detect the intercultural interaction structures and speech act strategies in order to resolve problems of misunderstanding encountered in the international social settings. Through pragmatics training, English speakers should be able to perceive different interpretations of cross-cultural languages, and get accustomed to assorted conventions, structures, and forms in speech acts in the other cultures.

Therefore, the teachability of pragmatics is more and more noticed these years. Through being informed about the cultural alternativeness, language learners would be capable in dealing with cultural diversities and in making compromise when talking with people from different language backgrounds. Indeed, the English speakers' construction of their pragmatics knowledge is a significant factor why they can interact and communicate effectively and appropriately in their social life.

In reality, for participating international activities as a decent and polite member in the current globalized society, the English speakers need to constitute a concept of interaction structures and speech act strategies in cross-cultural interaction. Then, they can work, and cooperate with foreigners politely and efficiently.

One of the advantages in learning pragmatics is that the learners can interpret the meanings of language from a broader intercultural aspect. Through established pragmatics foundation in mind, EFL speakers will be more sensitive to people's intentional meanings embedded in international interaction. They can also learn to be proficient in reacting to the EFL speakers' interlocutions in an effective and comprehensive fashion.

The four language skills in language learning such as reading, writing, listening, and speaking do not occur in isolation in communicative texts or activities. Through forming a good pragmatic competence for the language learner, the following should be considered.

The aims of a language course should be designed to meet the needs of the language learner to help them improve their communicative competence. Since the primary goal of learning a second language is to provide fluency and accuracy in written and spoken modes of communication, first, the language lecturer and the students should notice to design communicative activities which help to develop the communicative competence.

The pragmatic competence of the students must be well developed, consequently he or she will be able to conduct communication with accuracy. The development of coherence and the ability to react in different situations demonstrate a good level of functional competence. The grammar of the target language should not be taught in isolation with its use. The learned should be able to put his or her knowledge of language into practice.

Several activities are helpful for the development of pragmatic competence.

In fact, although many pedagogies of teaching pragmatics have been provided and discussed, the importance of pragmatics has not been emphasized in a level that it needs to be emphasized. According to Kasper (2001), pragmatics has played a considerable role in first and second language classroom research, but classroom research has played only a

minor role in Interlanguage pragmatics thus far.

Since the pragmatics is a significant field of second language learning, many researchers have provided language teachers and learners' different approaches, methods, and strategies for pragmatics education.

Lin (2007) proposes how pragmatics might be taught:

1. Demonstration through Examples
2. Hint Strategy of Request Speech Act
3. Demonstrating by Video Tape
4. Demonstration through Comparison and
5. Contrast
6. Teaching through Role Play
7. Demonstrating Speeches Created by People
8. from Different Backgrounds

Pragmatics can be defined from different views in different ways. As indicated by Roever (2010), in applied linguistics, Pragmatics research is mostly concerned with the interrelationship between language use and the social and interpersonal context of interaction. Pragmatics serves as a core field of knowledge that enables speakers to achieve mutual comprehension and politely navigate potential challenges arising from miscommunication and misunderstanding in international settings (Taguchi, 2019).

Because interlocutors from different cultural backgrounds adhere to distinct communicative norms, achieving situational appropriateness and politeness in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) communication is essential. Consequently, to communicate effectively and politely with diverse individuals globally, both native and non-native English speakers require systematic pragmatic training that encompasses cross-cultural speech conventions and functional language variation.

Analyzing linguistic expressions in authentic communication allows researchers to interpret what speakers mean in specific contexts and determine how situational variables influence utterance formulation (Culpeper, 2021). Theoretical foundational perspectives provide essential clarity on the nature and scope of pragmatics within applied linguistics. Central to applied pragmatic research is the construct of pragmatic competence, broadly understood as the ability to use language appropriately within social contexts (Ishihara & Cohen, 2022).

While communicative competence and grammatical accuracy receive explicit focus in traditional EFL university classrooms, the systematic development of pragmatic competence is frequently overlooked. Nevertheless, pragmatic competence constitutes the implicit benchmark that native and proficient speakers subconsciously use to evaluate a non-native speaker as a successful communicator, a key factor in establishing rapport, professional cooperation, and social integration.

Pragma-linguistics concerns the structural and linguistic resources available for performing speech acts, including semantic formula, conventional routines, and syntactic strategies used to intensify or soften utterances. Conversely, socio-pragmatics relates to social behavior and cultural expectations, governing how speakers within a specific speech community interpret, evaluate, and execute communicative acts relative to social distance, power, and degree of imposition (Ren, 2022). This dual conceptualization aligns with comprehensive models of language testing and communicative ability.

Through targeted pragmatics training, L2 learners perceive subtle cross-cultural interpretations and adapt to foreign conversation conventions. Unmet cultural expectations and divergent dialogue patterns frequently lead to confusion or social embarrassment, however, cross-cultural friction can be systematically mitigated when learners possess robust pragmatic knowledge.

Consequently, the teachability of pragmatics has gained prominent

recognition in recent applied linguistics literature (Taguchi, 2019). By gaining explicit insight into cultural alternatives, language learners become adept at navigating cultural diversity and making appropriate pragmatic compromises during cross-cultural exchanges. A speaker's pragmatic construction directly impacts their ability to communicate effectively and politely in social and professional spheres.

To participate in international academic and professional domains as polite and respected members of global society, EFL university students must cultivate a coherent framework of interactional structures and speech act strategies. Despite these evident benefits, conventional EFL pedagogy often prioritizes isolated grammatical form over contextual function. Although pragmatics plays a substantial role in theoretical second language acquisition research, classroom-based empirical research has historically played a minor role in interlanguage pragmatics (Kasper, 2001).

To address this pedagogical gap, pragmatics must be integrated from the foundational stages of L2 study. Learning a language requires acquiring not only structural patterns but also the cultural attitudes and contextual politeness necessary to achieve communicative goals efficiently. Therefore, this empirical study investigates how explicit pragmatic instruction enhances EFL university students' pragma-linguistic execution and socio-pragmatic awareness, while exploring broader contributions to translation accuracy and institutional language management.

METHOD

To evaluate the impact of applied pragmatic instruction on EFL students and examine its broader contributions to applied linguistics, this study employed a mixed-methods empirical design combining quantitative assessments with qualitative thematic interviews. The research sample comprised 80 undergraduate students enrolled in an English Language program at a major public university. None of the participants had resided in an English language country for more than one month, ensuring that their pragmatic knowledge was primarily developed within an EFL instructional environment.

Data collection utilized three primary instruments designed to capture both receptive and productive pragmatic dimensions:

1. Written Discourse Completion Task (WDCT): Formulated to elicit request speech acts across distinct scenarios varying systematically. Scenarios ranged from low imposition/equal status (e.g., asking a classmate for lecture notes) to high imposition/higher power (e.g., requesting a professor to extend a project deadline).
2. Pragma-linguistic Judgment Test (PJT): A rating scale where participants evaluated the appropriateness of various request formulations on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Highly Inappropriate, 5 = Highly Appropriate) and identified socio-pragmatic errors.
3. Interviews: Conducted post instruction to explore their qualitative perspectives on cross-cultural awareness, politeness strategies, and pragmatic transfer.

The intervention incorporated three pedagogical approaches: (a) demonstration of cultural differences through authentic dialogue examples, (b) comparative analysis of speech act strategies across native and non-native norms, and (c) contextual role play using video recorded native speaker samples. Explicit instruction focused on request strategies, syntactic and lexical mitigators (e.g., grounders, disarmers, hedges), and sociopragmatic variables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The empirical findings demonstrate substantial and statistically significant positive shifts in students' pragmatic

performance. The analysis evaluated both receptive socio-pragmatic judgment and productive pragma-linguistic execution, tracing the transition of EFL undergraduate learners from rigid grammatical reliance toward contextually nuanced, interculturally appropriate communication.

Shift in Request Speech Act Strategy Deployment

Changes in productive pragma-linguistic competence showed the special analytical emphasis which was placed on high-imposition and high-power scenarios (such as requesting an academic professor for a deadline extension or asking a university department head for a recommendation letter), where socio-pragmatic sensitivity is paramount.

Table 1 summarizes the overall percentage distribution of request strategies produced by EFL students prior to and following explicit pragmatic instruction.

Table 1 Distribution of Request Strategies in High-Imposition Scenarios (Pre- vs. Post-Instruction)

Request Strategy Category	Pre-Instruction (%)	Post-Instruction (%)	Target Norm Reference (%)
Direct Requests (e.g., Imperatives, Want Statements, Performatives)	48.3%	12.5%	5.0%
Conventionally Indirect (e.g., Query Preparatory, Softened Modals)	43.3%	72.5%	82.0%
Non-Conventionally Indirect (e.g., Mild/Strong Hints, Off-Record)	8.4%	15.0%	13.0%

As detailed in Table 1, prior to instruction, EFL participants exhibited a strong reliance on direct request strategies (48.3%). A qualitative audit of pre-instruction WDCT scripts revealed frequent usage of unmitigated imperatives (e.g., 'Give me more time for my assignment') and blunt want statements (e.g., 'I want you to extend my deadline'). In cross-cultural interactions involving high social distance and power differentials, such unmitigated direct formulations are frequently interpreted by target interlocutors as authoritative, demanding, or rude, reflecting a clear instance of pragma-linguistic failure.

Following the explicit instruction framework, direct requests dropped sharply from 48.3% to 12.5%. Concurrently, conventionally indirect requests such as query preparatory structures ('Would it be possible for me to...?') and softened modal constructions ('I was wondering if I could...') increased dramatically from 43.3% to 72.5%. This post-instruction distribution aligned closely with target baseline norms (82.0%). Furthermore, non-conventionally indirect requests (hints) increased moderately from 8.4% to 15.0%, indicating that students developed greater flexibility in deploying subtle, off-record communicative moves when delicate situations required them.

Incorporation of Internal and External Modification Devices

In addition to head act strategy selection, the quantitative evaluation assessed participants' utilization of pragmatic modification devices (mitigators).

Table 2 illustrates the mean frequency of internal mitigators (e.g., consultative devices, hedges, polite markers like 'please') and external mitigators (e.g., grounders/reasons, disarmers, imposition minimizers) produced per request utterance before and after instruction.

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Table 2 Mean Frequency of Pragmatic Modification Devices per Request Utterance

Pragmatic Mitigator Type	Pre-Instruction Mean (SD)	Post-Instruction Mean (SD)	Target Norm Reference Mean
Internal Mitigators (e.g., 'possibly', 'wondering', past tense modals)	0.42 (0.31)	1.65 (0.48)	1.85 (0.52)
External Mitigators (e.g., Grounders, Disarmers, Minimizers)	0.85 (0.45)	2.35 (0.62)	2.50 (0.58)
Total Modification Devices per Utterance	1.27 (0.61)	4.00 (0.88)	4.35 (0.91)

Table 2 demonstrates a substantial expansion in students' ability to buffer face-threatening acts using syntactic and lexical mitigators. Prior to instruction, students averaged only 0.42 internal mitigators per request, typically relying solely on the lexical marker 'please'. Post-instruction, internal mitigation increased nearly fourfold to 1.65 per utterance, as students successfully integrated continuous aspect ('I was hoping...'), past tense modals ('Could I...'), and consultative devices ('Do you mind if...?'). Similarly, external mitigators increased from 0.85 to 2.35 per utterance. Post-test scripts showcased complex speech act combinations, where learners prefaced requests with disarmers ('I know you are extremely busy, Professor...') followed by grounders explaining the justification before making the core request.

Statistical Significance of Overall Pragmatic Gains

To establish whether observed gains across productive and receptive pragmatic dimensions were statistically significant, paired-samples t-tests were conducted on participants' pre- and post-instruction overall assessment scores. Performance was measured across two primary composite scales: Pragma-linguistic Appropriateness (evaluating WDCT structural execution) and Socio-pragmatic Awareness (evaluating judgment test ratings and identification of contextual politeness violations) which revealed highly significant improvements from pre-test to post-test across both dimensions.

Pragma-linguistic Appropriateness scores increased from a pre-test mean to a post-test. Similarly, Socio-pragmatic Awareness scores rose representing a significant improvement which were observed for both measures, confirming that the explicit instructional intervention exerted a robust effect on participants' pragmatic development.

Qualitative Insights: Cross-Cultural Awareness and Pragmatic Transfer

Qualitative findings derived from post-intervention interviews provided deeper contextual insights into the statistical gains. Thematic analysis of interview transcripts revealed three primary qualitative themes regarding students' evolving pragmatic perception:

1. Overcoming Negative L1 Transfer: Participants noted that prior to instruction, they translated Indonesian polite formulas literally into English, erroneously believing that adding 'please' to an imperative phrase rendered it fully polite in academic English. One participant stated: 'I used to think saying "Please check my draft" was polite because in Indonesian "Tolong periksa" is courteous. Now I realize that in English, an imperative is still direct and demanding to a professor, so it is needed to frame it as "I was wondering if you might have time to look over my draft".'
2. Awareness of Socio-pragmatic Distance and Power: Learners

reported that analyzing video scenario comparisons illuminated how social variables dictate language choices. Students realized that appropriateness is dynamic, requiring continuous adjustment based on relative status, intimacy, and imposition level.

3. Application to Translation and Cross-Cultural Mediation: Participants enrolled in translation tracks emphasized that pragmatic awareness fundamentally altered their approach to translation tasks. Rather than rendering literal word-for-word equivalents, they began analyzing the illocutionary force and politeness expectations of target texts, avoiding pragma-linguistic distortion.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study strongly reinforce the necessity of integrating explicit pragmatic instruction into university EFL curriculum. As demonstrated by the empirical data, L2 learners do not automatically acquire pragmatic competence solely through exposure to general grammar and vocabulary.

Without explicit pedagogical intervention, students frequently experience pragmatic transfer, applying native language cultural norms directly to L2 utterances, which leads to cross-cultural miscommunication. Developing pragmatic competence requires alignment across course design, instructional materials, and classroom activities:

1. Course Design and Learner Needs: Language course objectives must be tailored to meet learners' real world communicative needs. Because the ultimate goal of L2 learning is fluent and accurate interaction, instructors and curriculum developers must design communicative tasks that explicitly foster pragmatic awareness alongside grammatical accuracy.
2. Material Design and Functional Coherence: Textbooks and digital materials should engage learners in coherent, functional, and pragmatically rich language usage. Grammar should never be taught in isolation from its communicative context. Developing situational coherence and adaptive communication strategies enables learners to put structural knowledge into practical, socially appropriate action.
3. Awareness Raising Activities: Structured classroom activities such as dialogue analysis, cross-cultural comparison, and contextual role play are essential for elevating pragmatic awareness.

Beyond L2 classroom instruction, the findings highlight the essential contributions of applied pragmatics within applied linguistics, specifically contributed to language planning which extend beyond standardized grammar and spelling norms to incorporate pragmatic benchmarking. Educational policy planners must integrate explicit pragmatic competence guidelines into official national curriculum, assessment frameworks, and ensuring that L2 education prepares graduates for international workplace communication.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, learning pragmatics represents a transformative and vital dimension of L2 acquisition, providing university EFL students with the analytical tools necessary to navigate complex intercultural interactions successfully. This study demonstrates that explicit pragmatic instruction, utilizing cross-cultural comparisons, dialogue demonstrations, and scenario-based role-plays, significantly elevates students' pragma-linguistic strategy execution and socio-pragmatic appropriateness. Pragmatic competence must be

recognized as a primary educational objective alongside core language skills, bridging the gap between structural knowledge and authentic communicative success.

By advancing knowledge in L2 pedagogy, applied pragmatics proves indispensable for fostering global communicative competence. Future research should extend these empirical inquiries by examining long term pragmatic retention in study abroad contexts and exploring digital multimodal platforms for interactive pragmatic training.

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