# INTEGRATING PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE TO ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSES

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**Abstract:** *In the pedagogy of language education, the importance of teaching English pragmatic competence has received considerable attention lately. As an attempt to contribute to the literature in this field, this study investigated the importance of teaching pragmatic competence in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. It explored the extent to which Uzbek EFL teachers implement pragmatic competence features in their daily classroom practice. It also identified the difficulties they encounter during classroom procedures and practices. In order to achieve the study objectives, a mixed pragmatic competence and other types of competence.*

**Keywords:** *pragmatic competence, pragmatics teaching, EFL, interlanguage, pragmatic failure, L1, L2*

Pragmatic competence is a broad concept that has been looked at differently according to the perspective of various researchers as shown in the preceding models. One of the earliest and widely cited definitions of pragmatic competence is that of Thomas (1983). She defines pragmatic competence as: "the ability to use language effectively in order to achieve a specific purpose and understand language in context" (Thomas, 1983: 92). This ability is reflected in two aspects: pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic. The former is related to the knowledge of the pragmatic force of linguistic items, and the latter refers to appropriate use of language in different social contexts. Leech (1983: 10-11) describes sociopragmatics as 'sociological interface of pragmatics' and pragmalinguistics as being related to 'the more linguistic end of pragmatics'. These two aspects are mirrored in Barron's (2003: 10) definition of pragmatic competence as: "knowledge of linguistic resources available in a given language for realizing particular illocutions, knowledge of the sequential aspects of speech acts and finally, knowledge of the appropriate contextual use of particular languages' linguistic resources". A similar definition is provided by Murray (2009: 239): "Pragmatic competence can be defined as an understanding of the relationship between form and context that enables us, accurately and appropriately, to express and interpret intended meaning". Likewise, Fraser (2010: 15) defines pragmatic competence as "the ability to communicate your intended message with all its nuances in any society".

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## SECOND-LANGUAGE LEARNERS AND PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE

Research clearly shows that cultural differences lead to pragmatic differences among learners from different language backgrounds (Olshtain and Weinbach 1993; Murphy and Neu 1996). Even advanced learners tend to transfer pragmatics from their first language and culture to their L2. For example, when comparing the complaints of native and non-native speakers of Hebrew, Olshtain and Weinbach (1993) found that non-native learners tended to give longer and less severe complaints, while native speakers' complaints were shorter, more direct, and more severe. Although pragmatic differences can result in positive transfer if the speech act is similar in the first and second languages, it can also result in negative transfer if there are cultural and pragmatic differences between the two languages. For example, when Russians and Moroccans were asked to react to the idea of someone stealing their parking space in a parking lot, the Russians responded with warnings and threats, while the Moroccans either opted not to complain or used much softer strategies. The Russians felt that people should "play fair" in a parking lot, while the Moroccans felt that it was not serious.

## THE SPEECH ACT OF COMPLAINING

Speech acts are the most basic unit of communication, with each speech act accomplishing a different communicative function. This article focuses on developing L2 students' pragmatic competence for the speech act of complaining, which is used to express the speaker's dissatisfaction. Speech acts can be broken down into smaller components, or strategies, that speakers use to accomplish the communicative function. For example, Murphy and Neu (1996, 199–203) identify four strategies that can be used in the speech act of complaining. The speaker first initiates the conversation and explains the purpose, then makes a complaint. This is followed by a justification or explanation for complaint and request to rectify the situation, as shown in Strategy Example 1. Initiation and explanation of purpose "Excuse me, professor, but I wanted to talk to you about my grade." 2. A complaint "My grade's too low." 3. A justification "I come to every class, and I study hard. I just didn't do well on one test." 4. A request "Can I do an extra credit assignment to improve my grade?" Table 1. Four strategies for complaining (adapted from Murphy and Neu 1996, 199–203)

## ESL STUDENTS' PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE FOR COMPLAINTS

To determine the pragmatic competence of my own ESL students, we recorded the complaints of 27 students completing a role play in pairs. The students were allowed to choose from three scenarios: complaining to a server at a restaurant, complaining to a neighbor about a noisy party, and complaining to a teacher about a grade. The students' videos were analyzed for the speech act of complaining and then compared to videos of six native-speaking English teachers completing the same tasks. Finally, the overall pragmatic appropriateness of the L2 learners was judged by a native speaker to determine whether the students were able to complain successfully in their L2. Results for all three complaint role plays, the native speakers followed the same format, including an initiation, a statement of the complaint, a justification or explanation of the complaint, and a request. In contrast, the L2

students did not always include all four strategies in their complaints. Although all students included a clearly stated complaint in their role plays, some did not include an initiation, a justification or explanation of their complaint, or a request. To many English speakers, leaving out an initiation or justification makes the student appear rude or impolite, while not including a request could mean that the student will not receive a satisfactory resolution to the complaint. Students can watch a video based on pragmatic competence

Problem Example from Video Aggressive Complaint "Is there something wrong with me? Why do you hate me?" "It's not fair. Everyone in the class gets A, A. Just me. It's not fair."

Criticism of Teacher "And you put me low grade. And you, you didn't grade me that well."

Distrust of Teacher "I have my American friend; he always helps me. So, I'm sure 100 percent of my answers, they are correct. So don't tell me it's wrong or something, because, I'm sure". "But when you check and you write on the blackboard, are you sure this is my name? You put my grades in my name, you don't put somebody else? Because you have some guys, you know, they are lower grade, but you put for them A".

Threat "I will gonna go to the office and complain about you. I will wait till tomorrow. If nothing change, I will gonna go to the office and complain. I don't want to do that, but ..." Pragmatically inappropriate complaint to a teacher by an L2 student.

Discussion of speech act According to Limberg (2015), class discussions that compare students' native language (L1) and culture with the target language and culture help raise students' pragmatic awareness of cultural norms. Students discuss the questions in small groups

### Activity 1. Discussion Questions for Complaining

1. What is a complaint? What are some situations in which you might complain to someone? 2. What do people say to express a complaint in your first language? How is it different from what people say to express a complaint in English? 3. Is it common to complain about bad service in your country? Is it common to complain to a parent, a boss, or a teacher? Why or why not? 4. Would you complain differently to a friend, a server, and a teacher? Why or why not?

### Activity 2.

Instructions: Imagine you are complaining to someone in your first language. Write down what you would say for the three situations in the chart below, and then translate them directly to English without changing anything. How does the English version sound? Your First Language English Situation 1: Your classmate always comes late to group meetings and is not helping at all with your group's presentation. Complain to that classmate. Situation 2: Your son was supposed to clean his room and take out the trash. He has not done either of these chores. Complain to your son. Situation 3: Your supervisor has been giving you a lot of extra work and projects, but your coworkers are not busy. Complain to your supervisor.

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