Importance of Pragmatic Competence in ESL Learners

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ABSTRACT

The main aim of the paper is to make out a case for the inclusion of pragmatics in the curriculum. It is important to find ways to develop pragmatic competence in addition to linguistic, communicative and strategic competence. The student today violates Grice's co-operative principles of quality, quantity, relation and manner when he is unable to comprehend how short a précis must be or write a personal /official letter. He speaks as he writes and for him there is no difference between speech and writing. Jokes are beyond his comprehension because he is unaware of the presuppositions underlying them. Learners should be able to understand and produce language appropriate to the context- not merely grammatically correct language. The three definitions of Pragmatics that we might look into are:

• Pragmatics is the study of language from the point of view of users, specially of the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction and the effects their use of language has on other participants in the act of communication.

• Pragmatics is the study of implicature, presupposition, speech acts and aspects of discourse structure.

• The study of intended speaker meaning is called pragmatics.

Pragmatics competence subsumes the three competencies needed to master a language, namely Linguistic competence, Communicative competence and Strategic competence. We cannot really understand the nature of language itself unless we understand pragmatics: how language is used in communication.

The ESL learners do not sound like the native speakers mainly because they lack pragmatic competence. But then linguists believe that neither linguistic nor pragmatic competence is teachable. But they agree that it can be learnt through exposure to the language, eliciting examples and experiencing through role play exercises. This paper will also explore the strategies that will help the students to develop pragmatic competence.