

Teaching Pragmatic Competence in Business English Courses

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ABSTRACT

Students' needs in the 21 century are different from those ten or twenty years ago. They need more instruction and practice in sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence. Therefore the syllabi for business English courses at the tertiary level of education need to be revised and adjusted to the changing needs of students – future employees of global companies operating in a highly competitive business environment. The aim of the paper is to present these needs, assess and discuss the results of a research study into students' self assessment of their competence and to give some recommendations on teaching the pragmatics of language use. Pragmatic competence is considered to be even more important now than ever before yet business English courses seem to offer very limited, if any, instruction on the most important pragmatic skills. Firstly, the paper gives examples of typical business situations in which pragmatic competence matters a lot, then it discusses the results of a study into students' self assessment of their pragmatic competence, and finally it discusses the rationale of teaching pragmatic competence and suggests the ways of teaching it in business English courses at universities. It is hoped that the paper will contribute to increased awareness of the importance of teaching and learning the pragmatic skills in business English courses for adults.