Pragmatic competence and speech act instruction in foreign language learning

Lyutsiya SHAMSUTDINOVA[1]

Uzbek State World Languages University

ABSTRACT

Improving pragmatic competence is one of the most essential goals in foreign language instruction, as it ensures the use of appropriate linguistic means in various communicative and sociocultural contexts. This article explores the importance of teaching speech acts as a means of developing pragmatic competence. Based on the theory of speech acts and intercultural pragmatics, the article focuses on the contrastive analysis of the speech act of advising in English and Russian. It examines the differences in pragmalinguistic structures and sociopragmatic norms between the two languages, illustrating how inappropriate pragmatic transfer can lead to communication breakdowns. The study reveals that effective teaching of speech acts, particularly advice, should integrate both form and function, while accounting for sociocultural norms of native speakers. Recommendations are given for teaching strategies aimed at minimizing pragmatic failure in learners of English as a foreign language.

Chet tilini o'rganishda pragmatik kompetensiya va nutq aktlarini o'qitish

ANNOTATSIYA

Pragmatik kompetensiyani rivojlantirish chet tilini o'qitishning eng muhim maqsadlaridan biridir, chunki bu turli kommunikativ va ijtimoiy-madaniy kontekstlarda til vositalaridan to'g'ri foydalanishni ta'minlaydi. Ushbu maqolada pragmatik kompetensiyani shakllantirish vositasi sifatida nutq aktlarini o'rgatish muhimligi yoritiladi. Nutq aktlari nazariyasi

[1] Doctor of Philosophy of Pedagogical Sciences, Uzbek State World Languages University. E-mail: Liya_r15@mail.ru

va madaniyatlararo pragmatika asosida ingliz va rus tillarida "maslahat" nutq aktining kontrastiv tahlili amalga oshiriladi. Tahlil davomida ikki til oʻrtasidagi pragmalingvistik tuzilmalar va sotsiopragmatik meʼyorlar farqlari koʻrsatilgan, notoʻgʻri pragmatik transfer qanday qilib muloqotdagi uzilishlarga olib kelishi mumkinligi tushuntirilgan. Maqolada nutq aktlarini oʻrgatishda nafaqat shakl va mazmun, balki ona tilida soʻzlashuvchilarning sotsiomadaniy meʼyorlarini hisobga olish kerakligi taʼkidlanadi. Ingliz tilini oʻrganuvchilarda pragmatik xatolarni kamaytirish boʻyicha tavsiyalar beriladi.

Прагматическая компетенция и обучение речевым актам в изучении иностранного языка

Ключевые слова:
прагматическая компетенция, речевые акты, совет, прагмалингвистический перенос, социопрагматические нормы, межкультурная прагматика.

АННОТАЦИЯ

Совершенствование прагматической компетенции является одной из важнейших целей в обучении иностранным языкам, так как обеспечивает адекватное использование языковых средств в различных коммуникативных и социокультурных контекстах. В статье рассматривается значимость обучения речевым актам как способу развития прагматической компетенции. На основе теории речевых актов и межкультурной прагматики проводится контрастивный анализ речевого акта «совет» в английском и русском языках. Показаны различия в прагмалингвистических структурах и социопрагматических нормах, а также объясняется, как неправильный прагматический перенос может привести к коммуникативным неудачам. Делается вывод о необходимости обучения речевым актам с учетом как формы, так и функции, а также социокультурных норм носителей языка. Предлагаются рекомендации по методике преподавания для снижения прагматических ошибок.

INTRODUCTION

Improving pragmatic competence is one of the most crucial tasks in foreign language teaching. It enables learners to apply appropriate linguistic means in various communicative and social contexts. It is essential to consider both the formal and functional aspects of the target language to achieve communicative acceptability. We fully support the hypothesis proposed by S.V. Pavlova, which states that the teacher's task during a lesson should be directed at integrating the image of the "Other" into the learner's consciousness – a person who speaks another language, in different situations, and within a new sociocultural context, with different views on the appropriateness and acceptability of speech acts [7,154]. Such an approach fosters intercultural awareness, helping learners build not only linguistic accuracy but also cultural sensitivity. This awareness significantly contributes to avoiding miscommunication and supports learners in developing a holistic understanding of the target language. As a result, we believe that this approach has a positive impact on the accurate perception of the target language and contributes to the overall development of pragmatic competence.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Solving the problems raised by linguistic pragmatics opens new possibilities for understanding the nature of the formation and functioning of language units in speech, and therefore their adequate interpretation. Among the issues studied by pragmatics are problems related to the speaker, the listener, the strategy and tactics of speech behavior; forms of speech communication, relationships between communicators, speech interpretation, and performative utterances are also examined [5,16]. In recent years, increasing attention has been paid to the influence of sociocultural factors on language structure and lexical usage. This reflects the understanding that language cannot be separated from culture, just as form in language cannot be separated from meaning [1,150]. Thus, we believe that the list of key factors in pragmatic studies should also include the influence of sociocultural elements.

Mastering pragmatics allows foreign language users to navigate through various business and personal communication situations (greetings, introductions, farewells, receiving guests, phone conversations, etc.) and use appropriate linguistic norms, both lexical and grammatical, in a pragmatically accurate, context-appropriate way. The ability to consider all these variable factors and adapt to them constitutes pragmatic competence [2,55]. Pragmatic competence helps both the speaker and the listener ensure an adequate interpretation of speech acts by taking into account situational context, sociocultural background, mentality, age, education level, and social status of the speakers, as well as the appropriateness and effectiveness of speech conventions. This competence is undoubtedly relevant in today's context of intercultural dialogue [8,153].

However, in cases where this competence is underdeveloped, a speaker of a foreign language may fail to achieve a communicative goal or may face several communication failures [10,24]. Such failures, though seemingly minor, can undermine mutual understanding and hinder social interaction, especially in multicultural settings where communication norms differ significantly.

Ignoring the pragmatic aspect of communication often results in students learning language structures without aligning them with specific communicative tasks in given situations [7,2]. A. Trosborg argues that successful communication requires knowledge of social norms, values, status characteristics, and communication registers. Pragmatic competence determines the correct interpretation of the interlocutor's communicative intention and attitude, especially when this interpretation is not clear from the literal meaning of linguistic forms or nonverbal cues [3,57].

Students often subconsciously transfer pragmatic norms of their native language and culture to the target language. Different linguistic and cultural backgrounds of communicators can result in misunderstandings and pragmatic errors [2,55]. The problem lies in the fact that what seems natural and normal to one party (the speaker) may be perceived as inappropriate and abnormal by the other party (the listener). Such violations often imply deviations from communicative expectations [7,3].

It is well known that transfer occurs at all linguistic levels: phonological, semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic. In the case of pragmatic failures, the consequences may be socially significant, as they can negatively influence the perception of the speaker. The speaker may be seen as impolite, ill-mannered, uncooperative, dishonest, or insincere [7,3]. As is known, speech act theory forms the core of pragmatics, and the speech act is rightly regarded as the fundamental minimal unit of communication [9,25].

A speech act is a basic unit of communication, with each one performing a particular communicative function, such as greeting, requesting, apologizing, saying goodbye, etc. Speech acts appear as a specific set of speech options or strategies employed by the speaker to perform a communicative function.

Teaching these sets of strategies can be a practical tool for educators aiming to introduce elements of pragmatics into the classroom. When presented as models, these strategies help students not only understand the linguistic forms but also the underlying cultural values. Instruction in these speech act strategies can be effectively used by teachers who seek to enhance pragmatic awareness during lessons [1,55].

RESEARCH METHOD

When using different speech acts, learners often encounter two types of pragmatic transfer – sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic. Sociopragmatic transfer results from the inability to assess the situation correctly and refers to misconceptions about social norms. Sociopragmatic errors arise from misunderstandings of which communicative actions are mandatory, acceptable, or appropriate in a given cultural context. Pragmalinguistic transfer involves errors that stem from the inability to correctly identify or express the intended meaning and relates to incorrect assumptions about the language [7,4]. Let us consider, for example, how the speech act of "advice" is expressed in English and Russian from a pragmalinguistic perspective. When offering advice, English speakers tend to use modal and interrogative constructions, while imperative sentences are used less frequently. In contrast, Russian speakers tend to prefer imperative constructions, with modals used less often and interrogatives almost never appearing.

Furthermore, English modal constructions typically convey the meaning of suggestion *(e.g., you should, you ought to)*, while Russian constructions often imply obligation *(e.g., ты должен, тебе надо)*. As a result, the phrase *"You probably need to go and see the dentist"* in English differs significantly in grammatical structure from its Russian equivalent *"Ты обязательно должен пойти к врачу".* English informants tend to soften their influence on the addressee using modal expressions *(e.g., I think you should go to the dentist)*, while Russian informants, on the contrary, tend to intensify it *(ты обязательно должен, тебе срочно надо)* [6,258].

Sociopragmatics studies interactive speech activity in different social contexts and situations, including the participation of representatives from various social groups and communities [4,3]. Therefore, sociopragmatic errors stem from incorrect assumptions about which communicative actions are necessary or appropriate in a particular culture [8,154]. For example, in the case of the speech act of giving advice, English communication culture perceives unsolicited advice less favorably than Russian culture. In English-speaking countries, advice is rarely given unless explicitly requested, as it is often viewed as an invasion of privacy. Native speakers explain this preference by a desire not to seem rude, overconfident, or impolite. Hence, learners must be taught to conform to the communicative norms of English culture to achieve communicative success. This includes not only knowing what to say but understanding when and how to say it. In contrast, Russian speakers generally view advice as a helpful gesture rather than an intrusion. It is often offered with good intentions and readily accepted by the listener [6,254].

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

As a result of the analysis, we can suggest that differences in the linguistic strategies for expressing advice in English and Russian involve various grammar structures, which in turn affect lexical choice. Failure to observe these strategies often

leads to a communicative gap between interlocutors. It is important to note that not only grammatical and lexical structures but also sociopragmatic norms often serve as sources of communicative failure. Thus, understanding and teaching these differences is crucial for developing cross-cultural communication competence. It helps learners recognize potential pitfalls and fosters respectful and effective communication. The aforementioned discussion confirms that pragmatic difficulties are mainly associated with the incorrect transfer of pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic norms from the native language to the target language. These deviations are observed in speech, and speech is reflected in speech acts.

CONCLUSION

Thus, based on the analysis presented above, we can conclude that teaching speech acts should be an essential component of foreign language instruction. It is not enough to teach only grammar and vocabulary; educators must ensure that students are also familiar with the cultural and pragmatic rules of communication. This approach not only helps avoid misunderstandings but also fosters genuine and effective intercultural communication.

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