

Cultivation of College Students' English Pragmatic Competence under the Framework of China's Standards of English Language Ability

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Abstract

The cultivation of pragmatic competence is one of the objectives of language teaching, and the implementation of pragmatic teaching is an important way to cultivate students' pragmatic competence. This paper mainly analyzes the cultivation of college students' English pragmatic competence from the perspectives of teaching methods, teaching resources, practical activities and language testing, and puts forward relevant strategies for the cultivation of pragmatic competence in order to achieve the goal of improving college students' pragmatic competence.

Keywords

Pragmatic Competence; Cultivation; China's Standards of English Language Ability.

1. Introduction

The Guidelines on College English Teaching (2017 Edition) points out that "College English teaching is guided by the actual use of English and focuses on cultivating students' English using ability" [1]. Here the students' English using ability refers to the ability to use language in a certain context, which combines language ability and language application, avoiding the separation of the two. [2] The ability to use language knowledge is pragmatic competence. By using pragmatic knowledge, language speakers can connect discourse or text with meaning, interlocutor's intention and the context where language using.[3] Pragmatic competence includes sociolinguistic competence and verbal performative competence. The former refers to the speaker's ability to use language appropriately in the context, while the latter refers to how to implement the knowledge in the acceptable communicative behaviors. [4]

The Ministry of Education and the National Language and Writing Working Committee jointly released the China's Standards of English Language Ability (hereinafter referred to as "CSE") in 2018.[5] The CSE consists of 86 sub-scales, which divides learners' English language ability into 3 stages and 9 levels. It aims to provide a standardized ability scale for English language examination, teaching and learning, and establish a scientific ability indicator system. Based on the theoretical framework of the CSE, for the first time the CSE defines the requirements of pragmatic competence, and defines it as the ability of language users (learners) to understand and express specific intentions by using various knowledge and strategies in combination with specific context.[6] Pragmatic competence consists of pragmatic comprehension ability and pragmatic expression ability. Pragmatic comprehension ability covers understanding the speaker's and understanding the author's intention. Pragmatic expression ability includes expressing speaking intention and expressing writing intention. [7]

Before the release of the CSE, English Teaching in China has never separately listed pragmatic competence as the consideration and evaluation indicator of teaching. Language teaching focused on cultivating learners' basic language skills such as listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation. The cultivation of English pragmatic competence was often ignored by

teachers and learners, resulting in learners' weak pragmatic competence and unable to adapt to pragmatic comprehension and expression based on a specific context or social and cultural background. Taking social needs as a guide to improve learners' pragmatic competence is one of the urgent issues in College English teaching in the new era.

2. Pragmatic Competence in the Cse

Guided by language use, "CSE" divides learners' English ability from low to high into "foundation, improvement and proficiency" three stages and nine levels. The CSE points out that the description framework of ability includes the description framework for language comprehension ability, language expression ability, pragmatic ability, language knowledge, translation ability and language use strategies. A multi-level indicator system is constructed under the framework of each ability, which reflects the scientificity, professionalism and authority. The CSE clearly defines and describes what language ability is and has guiding significance for all links of teaching: teachers can accurately locate or diagnose students' English ability level, organize teaching according to learners' needs, motivation and potential, formulate detailed and practical teaching objectives, and choose appropriate teaching methods.[8] According to the description of the general language ability scale in the CSE, pragmatic competence plays a very important role in students' English ability. The construction of the pragmatic competence scale is a feature and innovation of the CSE, which focuses on measuring learners' pragmatic comprehension ability and pragmatic expression ability. The description in the CSE reflects the sub abilities at all levels of pragmatic competence and their pragmatic standards.

The CSE reflects the importance attached by the Ministry of Education to language use ability and the necessity of incorporating pragmatic competence into the Teaching Guidelines in the new era. Cultivating learners' intercultural pragmatic competence will become an essential teaching objective of College English teaching. The specific indicators of the CSE provide guidance for the improvement of English pragmatic teaching methods and learners' pragmatic competence. Teachers can design teaching activities corresponding to the level to develop learners' pragmatic competence based on this; and then, assess students' learning effect through formative evaluation by referring to the CSE.

3. Strategies of Cultivating Pragmatic Competence under the Guidance of Cse

Under the guidance of the CSE, English teaching can be more purposeful in developing students' pragmatic competence. Teachers can increase the input of social and cultural information of English speaking countries, take use of the teaching resources close to the real context in the network multimedia to encourage learners' language output, conduct language communication under specific contexts to comprehensively improve learners' pragmatic competence.

(1) Integrating language knowledge and pragmatic knowledge in teaching

The innovative pragmatic competence scale in the CSE lets us know the importance of pragmatic knowledge. It is necessary to integrate pragmatic knowledge into the language teaching process. Simply putting grammar knowledge into a theoretical knowledge system for rigid explanation is obviously unable to meet the goal of language learning in the new era. Integrating pragmatic background, teachers can tell students the basis of using specific discourse in specific communication contexts on the basis of theoretical explanation. Especially after students have a certain grammatical foundation and language ability, they can be guided to summarize and associate on the basis of the grammatical knowledge they have learned in the past, summarize the characteristics of their register, and then combine their cultural background and other characteristics, so that students can have a deeper understanding of the

actual use of English. Language is simple, but the thought and culture it carries are complex and profound. Therefore, in the process of language use, the same discourse may be given different meanings on different contexts or occasions. Meanwhile, language as the carrier of culture has also become complex. Only by understanding the history and humanities, combining this language ability with pragmatic ability, and explaining English knowledge to students more deeply, can students' learning effect be substantially improved.

(2) Using network to tap teaching resources

In addition to traditional textbooks and learning materials, teachers can deeply tap online teaching resources. With the progress of the times, the current English classroom teaching has become more and more diversified. In the past, the main way for students to contact English original sound was tape, but now more intuitive teaching aids and audio materials, such as multimedia, Internet and variety of online teaching platforms, are integrated into English teaching. Teachers should pay attention to the use of multimedia, internet, and online teaching platforms in class. For Chinese students, it is difficult to learn and practice English in the real environment due to some limitations, so these Internet resources, visual aids and audio materials are particularly important in English learning. In addition, since the language in English movies has the characteristics of spontaneity and changeability of sentence patterns, and excellent English movies are the reflection of the culture of the specific era of the English-speaking countries, which can provide students with real language materials. Through these internet resources, multimedia pictures and video materials, students can truly understand the cultural differences and emotional experience in the English language.

(3) Providing communication opportunities to enhance intercultural pragmatic competence

While teaching pragmatic knowledge and cultural knowledge, teachers should also provide students with more opportunities for foreign exchange and intercultural practice, so as to effectively improve students' intercultural pragmatic ability and intercultural communication ability. Teachers can provide students with more real pragmatic scenes, and set specific communication contexts and communication objects in class. It make students simulate more intercultural pragmatic situations, practice pragmatic communication with people of different identities and positions on different contexts, so they can discover, discuss and correct their problems in time, and improve intercultural pragmatic competence. At the same time, foreign teachers and students from different countries and regions can be invited to communicate with students outside class, sharing cultural characteristics and experiencing cultural differences, and then students can improve the accuracy and appropriateness of using English in Intercultural communication. In addition, the cultivation of pragmatic competence should not be limited to the classroom or school, but should go out of the campus. Students can feel, practice and improve their pragmatic competence in the real context. Therefore, schools and teachers can organize and encourage students to participate in some foreign communication activities, such as participating in various international competitions, serving as volunteers in various international activities, and taking use of winter and summer vacations to experience overseas study tours. Or schools can organize students to visit foreign enterprises and communicate with foreigners or participate in some foreign business activities, experience intercultural communications in the scene of business activities, and accumulate experience for future foreign trade cooperation. Through various intercultural communication activities inside and outside the campus, students' intercultural pragmatic competence and intercultural communication ability can be improved.

(4) Focusing on pragmatic competence in English test

It is known that examinations, especially national or large-scale examinations, have always played as a role of "baton" in teaching. There is no doubt that the content and form of language testing seriously affect and restrict the content and form of language teaching, especially for those courses that hold formal examinations regularly. Therefore, only when the pragmatic

competence is included, as a conventional and necessary component, in the language test, the teaching reform, which takes the cultivation of college student's pragmatic competence as the goal in language teaching, will achieve the desired effect. Mei Deming points out, the current "time-consuming and inefficient" situation in English learning has a lot to do with the standardized question type of English tests in China.[9] The College English Test Band 4 and Band 6 is a norm standardized test. In recent years, a certain degree of reform has been carried out in CET-4 and CET-6, yet they still focus on multiple choice questions to a large extent. The standardized question type lacks effectiveness and is full of speculation. In view of this, the principles of pragmatic competence testing should be effectively implemented in the proposition of English proficiency tests, thus giving full play to the guiding role of these tests. Subjective questions and oral tests aimed at testing college students' pragmatic competence can be added to the test. For English majors, their performance of comprehensive application ability and oral expression ability must be taken as the main component to measure their English proficiency, the same is for non-English majors.

4. Conclusion

The CSE provides a unified standard for English learning, teaching and testing in China. The pragmatic competence subscale in is helpful to promote the explicit teaching of pragmatic competence in College English. College English teaching must not be limited to the teaching of vocabulary, grammar and other language knowledge, because even if students have rich vocabulary and correct grammar, they cannot guarantee an accurate understanding of the language. Nowadays, the purpose of College English teaching is not only to teach students to master the basic forms of English language, but also to enable students to correctly and appropriately use the language they have learned in different contexts. The pragmatic competence subscale in the CSE can solve this problem. Teachers should appropriately introduce speech act theory in practical English teaching. They should emphasize the importance of contextual understanding in verbal communication, let students gradually understand the pragmatic principles of the target language, constantly strengthen the cultivation of students' language ability and avoid pragmatic failures, and comprehensively develop students' communicative competence. In this way students can accurately and appropriately use English for intercultural communication, tell Chinese stories and spread Chinese voice.

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