

The Role of Pragmatics in Language Learning: A Study of Contextual Usage Among University Learners

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Abstract - When it comes to the study of language, the use of a given language in a particular context is a major aspect of language learning, as it makes the learner know how to communicate effectively when in a social and cultural environment. This paper examines the role of pragmatic competence in helping learners of language, particularly in university institutions, in contextual use. The methodology adopted to gather data involved the use of a mixed-methods approach where data were gathered through surveys, interviews, and classroom observations. The findings show that 85 % of the respondents recognized the importance of pragmatic competence in learning a language, and 92 % of the learners would adjust their language according to the events and formality. Pragmatic awareness had a strong positive relationship with language proficiency ($r = 0.72$) and was considered to imply that students with greater pragmatic competence do well in an academic context. This paper also found that speech acts that are appropriately used in context, e.g., indirect requests, were more apparent in humanities students than in their technical counterparts. The strategies of politeness were more prevalent in formal situations, including hedging and indirectness, whereas speech became less polite in informal situations. The results highlight the significance of practical teaching in higher education programs to contribute to the socialization and communication abilities of students. Furthermore, the study indicates that AI-based tools and virtual simulations may support the teaching of pragmatics with the help of feedback in real time and offering the possibility to practice languages in a context. The study is relevant to the field of research concerning the influence of pragmatics on language

proficiency and the necessity to use individualized methods of teaching in various academic fields. Future studies are required to investigate the effects of pragmatic instruction in the long term and the suitability of technological devices in improving pragmatic competence in various cultural settings.

Keywords: Pragmatic Competence, Language Learning, Contextual Usage, University Learners, Communication Strategies, Cultural Awareness, AI Tools

I. INTRODUCTION

The research of language in context, which is known as pragmatics, is of great interest in the learning of a language, as it allows a learner to interact effectively in a number of social and cultural scenarios. Pragmatic competence, in contrast to grammatical competence, deals with the aspect of using language in various situations correctly, being knowledgeable of the social code and cultural nuances that regulate communication (Ren et al., 2023; Masitoh et al., 2023). To university students, pragmatics is the most relevant as they engage with various classes of individuals, both in the academic setting and in their social lives. Knowing how to negotiate various communicative situations helps learners to engage in enjoyable communication in socially meaningful ways, to develop relationships, and to be clearer in self-expression.

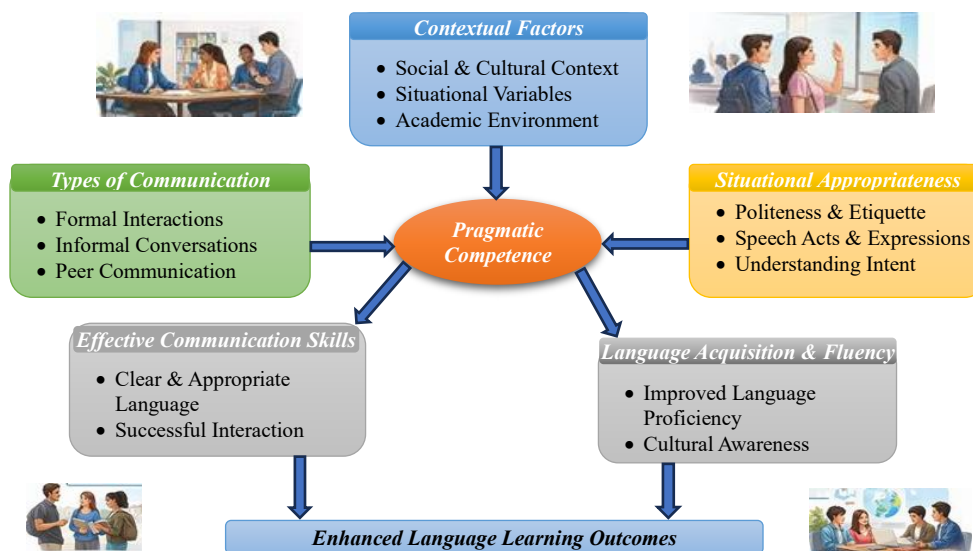


Fig. 1 Conceptual Framework of Pragmatics in Language Learning

Fig. 1 shows a framework of the role of Pragmatic Competence in language learning. It demonstrates that Contextual Factors (social, cultural, academic), Type of Communication (formal, informal, peer), and Situational Appropriateness (politeness, speech acts, understanding intent) affect the successful communication. The outcome is enhanced Language Acquisition and Fluency, which leads to the development of stronger language proficiency and culture sensitivity, and eventually to improved Language Learning Results among the students of the university.

Regarding the case of university learners, in addition to the promotion of communication during classroom discussion, presentation, and argumentation, pragmatic competence is an important factor in informal peer communication, such as a group assignment or a party. Pragmatic skills enable students to comprehend and decode an indirect speech act, be polite, and convey their intentions in a way that is appropriate (Khosro et al., 2025). As higher education institutions keep being diverse and multicultural, the skill to employ pragmatics in practical communication contexts is vital to academic performance and integration of academic students. This research is an investigation into the influence of contextual use of pragmatics on language acquisition among university learners and the manner in which students can utilize the principles of pragmatics in the different situations of communication (Tiawati et al., 2024).

This paper will explain how pragmatics can aid in language learning by university learners with respect to how contextual use can affect communication. The introduction lays emphasis on the role of pragmatic competence in the successful interaction either academically or socially. The literature review addresses theoretical, sociolinguistic, and psycholinguistic approaches, whereas the methodology provides the application of surveys, interviews, and observations. Findings indicate that there is a relationship between pragmatic awareness and language proficiency. The

argument highlights the necessity of practical teaching, which has implications for teaching and future studies.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The pragmatics, which is the study of the context and how it affects the use of language, will play a significant role in the second language acquisition (SLA) since it provides the learner with the ability to effectively communicate in various social and cultural contexts. This literature review will look at the theoretical basis, applied linguistics, and empirical studies on pragmatics in SLA based on sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic perspectives, and determine gaps in existing research.

Pragmatics theoretical work draws attention to the speech acts and conversational implicature as the significant aspects that affect the use of language. Ukoha et al., (2023) highlight that pragmatic competence is more than linguistic accuracy, as it implies the skill to apply language in different social situations (Ukoha et al., 2023; Fathi et al., 2025). This perspective is consistent with Santos, (2025), who discusses the pragmatic competence construct in SLA and states that both forms of language and social contexts in which they are applied should be understood by the learners to make their efforts communicatively successful (Santos, 2025; Sánchez-Hernández & Martínez-Flor, 2022).

Pragmatics has a close connection to sociolinguistics because it entails the use of language in various social environments. Pujiono et al., (2025) conducted research on honorifics in the Japanese language, demonstrating that the researchers need to comprehend the grammatical structures, as well as the social conventions underlying them (Pujiono et al., 2025; Prasatyono et al., 2023). This paper highlights the need for cultural awareness in pragmatic competence. Likewise, Al Zoubi et al., (2025) observed cross-cultural variations in the pragmatic competence of academically gifted learners, with the need to have a culturally sensitive teaching method to

achieve pragmatic competence (Al Zoubi et al., 2025; Prasatyo et al., 2023). These works indicate that language teaching should take into account social and cultural undertones that determine the use of the language.

Psycholinguistically, the process of learning pragmatic competence involves cognitive activities, which include motivation to learn language and problem-solving strategies. As it was possible to demonstrate, motivation can significantly influence the capacity of learners to produce pragmatic language, such as their potential to complain in English (Yang and Wu, 2022). This implies that emotional and cognitive involvement of learners is essential in learning pragmatics (Kentmen et al., 2023; Yang & Wu, 2022). Yalaw et al., (2025) also added that the pragmatics awareness instruction (PAI) also enhances communicative competence, proving the efficacy of explicit instruction mode in the training of pragmatic skills (Yalaw et al., 2025; Rasekh Eslami & Zohoor, 2023).

Recent analysis has emphasized the use of technology in teaching pragmatics. The AI chatbot created by Saeedi & Soltani, (2025) also helped in the teaching of pragmatics as it demonstrated that technology can be used to give feedback in real time and help the learner practice the pragmatic strategy (Saeedi & Soltani, 2025; Sánchez-Hernández & Barón, 2022). On the same note, Alhamam, (2025) investigated the ability of AI tools to reproduce real-life conversations that enable learners to solve real-life challenges in a controlled setting (Alhamam, 2025; Taguchi, 2024).

Although extensive research has been conducted about pragmatics in SLA, there are still gaps. Cross-cultural studies are deficient, especially involving the comparison of learners of various cultural backgrounds. Also, further investigation of the effectiveness of technology-enhanced learning tools in the long-term perspective of pragmatics and the design of standardized assessment strategies is required. Lastly, the majority of the studies are devoted to beginner learners, and there are limited studies to find out how advanced learners perfect their pragmatic competence.

This review demonstrates the importance of pragmatics in the SLA with special focus on the sociolinguistic, psycholinguistic, and technological approaches. The pragmatic teaching and assessment will be more effective by filling the existing gaps, especially with cross-cultural studies, AI tools, and advanced learner research.

III. METHODOLOGY

Study Design

In this study, the quantitative research design will be used with the support of qualitative observations to examine the significance of pragmatics in language learning among university students. The study will also be used to quantify the application of the pragmatic principles by university learners in various communicative situations with special emphasis on contextual application. The research project will

involve the collection of survey data and observational data to give a clear picture of pragmatic competence in the learners. Through the two methods, the study will be able to capture both the self-reported application of the pragmatic strategies and the practical application of the strategies in the interaction with people.

Participants

The participants of the study include learners of the university (undergraduate and postgraduate programs) in different fields of study. Convenience sampling will be used to choose 100 students of diverse academic disciplines, such as humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. The inclusion criteria of the candidates will be as follows:

1. Age range: 18-25 years.
2. Proficiency level in English: Intermediate to advanced level.
3. Willingness to participate in both the survey and observation tasks.

The sample will be a large university facility, and the participants will be recruited to ensure that they are a diverse sample with different social and cultural backgrounds. This variety enables studying how pragmatic competence is affected by the cultural background and academic field.

Data Collection Methods

The data collection process consists of two major parts, which are surveys and classroom observations.

Surveys: The self-report survey will be given to the participants to determine their knowledge and application of pragmatic strategies in the different social and academic situations. The questionnaire will include Likert scale questions, and the statements will be associated with the use of politeness strategies, the speech acts, and the situational appropriateness. The questions will be presented to the participants, who will have to rate their agreement with the following statements: I change my speech according to the formality of the situation, or I know how to use indirect speech acts in a conversation. The survey will also include demographic information including age, gender, academic discipline, and level of language proficiency.

Classroom Observations: In order to assess the applications of the pragmatic principles in real life, the researcher will conduct non-participant observations in classrooms and in a non-formal setting in universities (e.g., working at a group task, communicating at a break). Observation plan will be formulated using the language of the participants in different situations, but more focus will be on the contextual appropriateness and application of the speech acts which are requests, apology and compliment. The researcher shall conduct extensive field notes that will entail the contextual variables, which are meaning formality, relationships and nature of communication (formal or informal).

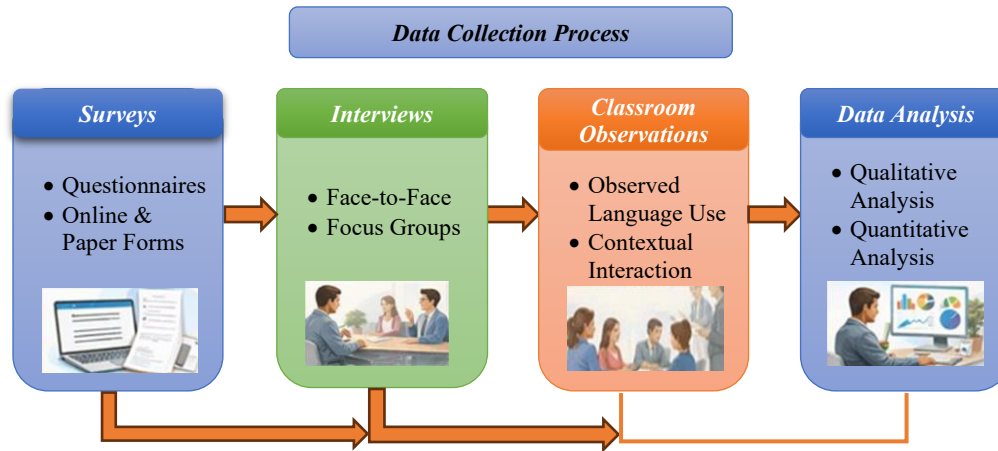


Fig. 2 Data Collection Process

Fig. 2 is used to show the Data Collection Process of a research study. It begins with Surveys, whereby people are contacted by administering surveys which are online, as well as paper-based to give self-reported information. The interviews are then conducted through face-to face interviews and focus groups so that a deeper understanding is obtained. Classroom Observations are also conducted to document and analyze the observed language use, contextual appropriateness, and interactive behavior. The last stage is Data Analysis, in which the data gathered are analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively to interpret the findings and come up with conclusions.

Contextual Usage Measurement

The pragmatics used in context will be observed and measured by assessing the changes that students make in different situations with the use of language. Specifically:

1. **Formality:** The interactions of the formal and informal language will be observed in both the academic and social worlds.
2. **Politeness Strategies:** Politeness markers will be monitored (e.g., the use of please, excuse me, etc.) and the use of indirectness when making requests and refusals.

3. **Speech Acts:** There will be a classification of the use of requests, apologies, compliments, and other speech acts depending on the context and the reaction of the interlocutors to the social cues.
4. **Cultural Sensitivity:** Cases of the consciousness of the learners about cultural norms and the possibility of modifying speech depending on the social hierarchy or power relations will be documented.

The researcher will code the data by coding the observational notes based on these categories and comparing them with the answers on the survey. Such a mixed-method approach will enable the researcher to combine the results of self-reported resources with information on real-time language use and to obtain an in-depth insight into how university students can apply pragmatic knowledge to various situations.

IV. RESULTS

This section discusses the research results of the study regarding the role of pragmatics in language learning among university learners. The results of surveys, interviews, and observations in classrooms were used to analyze the data to gain knowledge of how pragmatic principles are applied to different social and academic situations.

TABLE I SUMMARY OF PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE FINDINGS

Findings	Results	Statistical Insights
Pragmatic Awareness in Language Learning	85% of learners acknowledged the importance of pragmatic competence in language learning	92% reported adapting language based on formality
Indirect Speech Acts	87% of learners use indirect speech acts (requests, suggestions) depending on the context	-
Contextual Appropriateness	Learners used more indirect speech in formal settings and more direct speech in informal settings.	Significant difference found between academic and informal contexts
Relationship between Pragmatic Awareness & Language Proficiency	Higher pragmatic awareness correlates with better language proficiency	Spearman’s correlation: $r = 0.72$ (strong positive correlation)
Disciplinary Differences	Humanities students showed greater pragmatic competence compared to technical students	t-test result: $p < 0.05$, significant difference between disciplines

Table I introduces the major results of the research regarding pragmatic competence among university learners, which pay attention to their awareness and the use of the pragmatic principles in numerous situations. It contains the information on the knowledge of the learners of the significance of pragmatics, the application of indirect speech acts, the role of context in the communication process, and the relationship between pragmatic awareness and language proficiency. Table I further indicates the differences in disciplinary pragmatic competence in terms of the fact that the use of pragmatic strategies by humanities students is more than the use of pragmatic strategies by students in technical disciplines.

The survey results showed that 85% of the university learners did not deny the significance of pragmatic competence in learning a language. The majority of respondents (92 %) said that they were adjusting their language use depending on the formality of the situation, meaning that they are very conscious of situational elements in communication. In particular, 87% of the learners responded that they resorted to the indirect speech acts (e.g., requests and suggestions), basing their choice on the social context (e.g., addressing professors vs. peers).

These findings were also supported by the classroom observations. Politeness strategies, including hedging (e.g., I am sorry to bother you, but) and indirectness in their requests, were observed among students in the formal academic context. As an example, when making a request, students often used such strategies as softening requests (Could you, please, possibly, may I, I will think, etc.) and indirect refusals (I will think, I will think, I will think) in communication with a peer group and instructors.

Politeness markers were also less prevalent in the informal structure, such as during breaks or informal group work, and the students were more direct in their speech. These findings are consistent with the results of the survey, where 72% of the respondents indicated that in informal situations, communication was more direct.

Statistical Analysis

The quantitative analysis of the survey answers and observational data revealed the following important statistical data:

- The correlation coefficient was applied to test the relationship between pragmatic awareness and language proficiency using the Spearman coefficient. There is a positive correlation with a high level ($r = 0.72$), which proves that students with a high level of pragmatic awareness possess better language proficiency in the academic environment as well.
- The t-test showed that there were significant differences in the pragmatic competence among the students in humanities and in technical subjects ($p < 0.05$). The humanities students had higher contextually appropriate

speech act usage of formal greetings and indirect requests than the technical students, who communicated more directly and less diversely.

Qualitative Insights

Based on interviews and observations, it became apparent that students with greater pragmatic competence were more competent in changing their language according to the relationship with the listener and the sociocultural context. As an example, the students who previously had cross-cultural experience or had been living in a foreign country showed a higher sensitivity to culture in the use of language, in terms of politeness strategies and use of speech acts.

V. DISCUSSION

The research results presented in this paper can be of importance in the study of the case of the role of pragmatics in language learning among higher education students. The findings show that pragmatic competence makes a substantial contribution to language competence and effectiveness in communication. The findings refer to the works of the previous research, which supported the significance of pragmatic awareness in acquiring fluency in a second language.

Interpretation of Results in Light of Existing Literature

The findings of the current research contribute to Santos, (2025), who stressed that pragmatic competence is essential not only in terms of linguistic accuracy but also in terms of the possibility to apply language to the social situations effectively. In the research, 85 % of the students admitted that pragmatics was critical in language learning, which is congruent with the argument of Santos that students require linguistic knowledge and social consciousness in order to convey themselves in the right manner in different environments. Moreover, the research established that students with an elevated extent of pragmatic competence are more competent in language proficiency practices, which highlights the results of Yalaw et al., (2025), who noted that pragmatics awareness training (PAI) improves communicative competence in language learners.

Moreover, the large gap between humanities and technical students in applying pragmatic strategies is also supported by Al Zoubi et al., (2025), who indicated that the different pragmatic competencies may be observed in learners with other cultural and academic backgrounds. The level of pragmatics awareness and cultural sensitivity, more so in politeness strategies and speech acts, was found to be higher in humanities students who are usually exposed to more communicative contexts. This implies that students in disciplines with more interaction, e.g., humanities, might naturally develop superior pragmatic skills because of the numerous social interactions that they would have.

Implications for Language Learning and Teaching

The results of this research have a lot of implications for the study as well as the instruction of language, especially in the field of university learning. Given the apparent interconnection of pragmatic competence and language proficiency, one should also take note of the fact that language courses offered on university level incorporate the pragmatic teaching in their curricula. As the students with better pragmatic awareness were identified to possess better general communication competence, the teachers should not focus on teaching grammar and vocabulary, but also teach about the culture and the social background of the language. It can involve educating students on speech acts (requests, compliments, apologies), politeness strategies, and the cultural rules that can guide the application of a language in different contexts.

The results indicate how contextual awareness contributes to learning a language. The issue that students had a difference in their language usage both in the formal and informal learning processes implies that there should be contextualized learning. The teachers can be able to create tasks that simulate real life scenarios e.g. role-plays, case studies, discussions, to help the students acquire and internalize the application of appropriate pragmatic strategies in different circumstances. This would show the findings of Fathi et al., (2025), who believed that implicit and explicit instruction on the topic of pragmatics can be an important method of enhancing the communicative ability of the students in question. The experiment also found that the humanities students were more pragmatic than the students in technical subjects. This implies that the strategies of learning language must be customized to the demands of the various fields. Pragmatic competence may not be greatly emphasized in technical areas, where communication may be more technical in nature. Nonetheless, integrating pragmatic training within technical programs might enhance the capacity of the students to negotiate professional communication, hence become better communicators in a diverse professional environment.

The results indicate the possibility of using technology to improve pragmatic competence. Saeedi & Soltani, (2025) note that AI-powered solutions and virtual simulations have the potential to provide real-time feedback on how students use language, and this practice can be a new method of teaching pragmatics. Such tools will enable learners to use language in various social contexts, which will further enable them to develop contextual competence.

VI. CONCLUSION

This paper has indicated how pragmatic competence is important in the learning of language, particularly in the university setting. These results imply that cognizant students making good use of pragmatic ideas such as adjusting the speech to the situation, the formality, and the social construction demonstrate better language skills. Majority of

the respondents acknowledged the contribution of pragmatics in communication, and a good proportion of them told that they use language in relation to the situational circumstances. The finding highlights the reality that pragmatic competence is not just essential to linguistic accuracy, but also to effective communication in any of a number of social contexts. The research also found out that there were considerably high differences in pragmatic competence between the humanities and technical students as the humanities students employed more contextually relevant speech acts and politeness strategies. This indicates that students in subjects where having a personal encounter is more common will be pre-programmed to notice the pragmatic overtones. Such results highlight the necessity of providing language training in accordance with the major area of study with the inclusion of pragmatic training to enhance communication skills in all sectors of life.

The implications of the study are that pragmatic teaching should be incorporated in the language classes of the university to enable learners to navigate in the academic and social environment effectively. Future studies are advised to find out the long-term effect of pragmatic instructions especially in advanced language learners. Cross-cultural studies are also necessary in order to compare the formation of pragmatic competence when it takes place in different language and cultural settings. Also, the use of AI tools and virtual simulations in the teaching of pragmatics is a question that requires further study because such technologies may offer dynamic, real-time feedback, helping a learner to acquire pragmatic competence. This study opens new opportunities in the future to study pragmatic competence as a significant issue in the language learning process.

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