

# Chinese College Students' Pragmatic Awareness in English Learning

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**Abstract-**This paper aims to explore Chinese college students' pragmatic awareness in English learning. The pragmatics is analyzed in terms of the amount of pragmatic knowledge Chinese college students believed to have and receive from their teachers, peers, course book and exams. Results shows that although Chinese college students are aware of the importance of pragmatics, they do not get enough pragmatic knowledge; additionally, peers do not care enough pragmatics and course book and exams do not cover enough pragmatic information.

**Keywords:** Chinese College Students, Pragmatic Awareness, English Learning

## I. INTRODUCTION

Before Pragmatics came into being, Chinese college students was mostly obsessed by aspects of English such as vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation and sentence patterns, with little attention on methods which were necessary to help students to communicate appropriately in real language situation. In 1980 Canale and Swain highlighted pragmatic competence as a subset of sociolinguistic competence. In 1990, Bachman defined pragmatic competence as an unorganizational competence.

Yet in China, despite its important role in real circumstances, pragmatics has got received enough attention in Chinese college students' English learning. Therefore, after years of English learning, students had still struggled with communicative aspects of English. Without an appropriate pragmatic awareness in English communication there obviously existed huge obstacles in Chinese college students. This paper attempts to investigate the influential factors which contribute Chinese college students' pragmatics awareness and find out some methods to overcome students' pragmatic deficiencies.

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Pragmatics is the study of language from the point of view of users, especially of the choices they make, the constraint they encounter in using the language in social interaction and the effects their use of language has on other participants in the act of communication (Rose & Kasper, 2001). And it encompasses many aspects: speech acts, conversational structure, conversational implicatures, conversational management, discourse organization, and sociolinguistics aspects of language use such as choice of address forms (Bardovi-Harlig & Taylor, 2003).

The necessity of teaching pragmatics to language

students comes from the severe reality in which communication have seriously affected by students' lack of the pragmatics (Murray, 2009). A grammatical competent student does not develop his concordant pragmatic competence and makes constant errors, if pragmatics is not taught as an obligation. Even though some aspects of English pragmatics are common in Chinese, still other aspects, for Chinese college students, are not acquired without the benefit of instruction or they are learned slowly. In such circumstances, pedagogical invention in pragmatics leads to more effective learning among Chinese college students in the process of putting their English into the use. According to Schmidt's Noticing Hypothesis, the more apparent the pragmatic aspects are, the better the students acquire; for the lea apparent aspects there surely adds the instructions. So far many studies and researches have been carried on to measure the efficacy of each method and the possible superiority to others, through which there demonstrates that the groups receiving instructions perform much better than the groups receiving no instruction.

In the field of pragmatic instruction a further comparison exists between explicit and implicit approaches of teaching pragmatics in language teaching process. However, based on the provision of metapragmatic information designed to make the target features more outstanding, most researchers confirmed the advantages of explicit instruction of pragmatics.

While more focuses have been shifted to students' communicative ability, along with their pragmatic awareness, how to assess students' pragmatic competence becomes a prominent question. Although different scholars hold different attitudes toward the way to collect the objective data, the most popular pragmatic tests developed so far are written discourse completion task (WDCT), multiple-choice discourse completion task (MDCT), oral discourse completion task (ODCT), discourse role-play task (DRPT), discourse self-assessment task (DSAT), and role-play self-assessments (RPSA). Honestly, no single test can draw the complete picture of students' pragmatic competence and the combination of different methods can gain a clearer understanding.

In language teaching context, the current trend has been confirmed to incorporate pragmatics into the classroom curriculum. In EFL context in China, textbooks are the main source of teaching (Kim & Hall, 2002). This does not mean that teachers can depend on the textbook to cultivate students' pragmatic competence. On the contrary,

a knowledgeable teacher should adopt the materials from the textbook and shape them into operable source to foster pragmatic ability of the students.

After the above brief literature review on “What is pragmatics?”, “Why pragmatics should be connected with language learners?”, “The choices between explicit and implicit methods to teach pragmatics”, “Various tests of pragmatic competence” and “Textbook’s role”, the present research sheds the light on the status of the pragmatic awareness of Chinese college students during their English learning way.

### III. THE STUDY DESIGN

#### A. Study Question

The primary purpose of the current study was to investigate the status of pragmatic awareness of Chinese college students in their English learning process and what is the amount of pragmatic knowledge they receive from teachers, classmates, course book and exams?

#### B. Participants and Study Process

68 participants (42 males and 26 females) were recruited from China West Normal University. They were sophomores from the same class in the department of Chinese Language and Literature, all of whom had passed the CET-4, 35 of whom had passed the CET-6, which proved their intermediate and advanced levels of English proficiency.

At the beginning of the study, all the students received multiple-choice questionnaire. It started with a number of general questions about students’ personal information, including years of experience in English learning, the books they studied, and whether or not they had the experience of communication with the foreigners. Following that, there was a short introduction for the nature of the pragmatics as intended in this study. The questionnaire had 4 items including students, English teachers, classmates and Institutes, course books and exams.

For the first item – students, the researcher wanted to examine students’ pragmatic knowledge and awareness. For the second item – English teachers, the researcher sought to determine the amount of care given to pragmatics by teachers for their respective students, either in teaching English in the classroom or the homework assigned at home. “The classmates and institutes” item attempted to reveal the extent of pragmatic feedback students received from peers and their respective departments. The final item, course books and exams, aimed to investigate course books’ and exams’ pragmatic quality from students’ point of view.

Before distributing the questionnaire, the participants were told that the purpose of the questionnaire was for research and could finish the questions at home, which added the reliability of the questionnaires, up to 0.86.

### IV. RESULTS

As mentioned, the distributed questionnaires consisted of 4 components, each of them concentrating on the status of pragmatic awareness among Chinese college English-

learners from one dimension. The language learner component had 5 items with the purpose to inspect college students’ own knowledge of and their attitude toward the concept of pragmatics, such as: “I am familiar with the concept of pragmatics in English learning”, “Pragmatic competence is important for me as an English learner”, “I evaluate my own pragmatic competence as very good”, “Pragmatics is an important aspect of English learning”, “The measurement of English learners’ pragmatic competence should be part of an effective testing program”. In the second component, English teacher, 4 items were utilized to explore students’ attitude about the status of pragmatic awareness among their English teachers and the knowledge they received from their teachers, such as “Our English teacher makes us aware of the significance of pragmatic competence in English learning”, “Our English teacher assesses our pragmatic competence”, “Our English teacher pays attention to our pragmatic errors”, “Our English teacher cares about pragmatic competence in evaluating our classroom activities”. The third component, named classmates and institute, included 4 items which investigated the value given to pragmatics by their peers and their department, such as “My classmates and I discuss the issues related to pragmatic competence”, “My classmates comment on my pragmatic ability and appropriateness”, “My classmates and I discuss the need to pay attention to pragmatic features in the English communication”, “My classmates consider my pragmatic competence as feature of my success in English learning”. And the last component, course book and exam, had 5 items that revealed college students’ attitude about the status in book and exam, such as “Activities in the course book include features related to pragmatic competence”, “Activities in the course book are sufficient for improving our pragmatic competence”, “There are supplementary materials at this institute to teach pragmatic competence”, “There are questions in the institute’s exams to assess our pragmatic competence”, and “The institute’s exams encourage us to focus on pragmatic features in our course book”.

After collecting all the data and analyzing them, the minimum, maximum, mean and standard deviation of each component of the questionnaire and the total questionnaire. The results showed that the means for components 1 and 2 of the questionnaire were 3.66 and 3.19 respectively. It means that the participants had a high degree of pragmatic awareness. In components 3 and 4 of the questionnaire, however, the participants achieved average means; 2.62 for component 3 and 2.89 for component 4. It can be concluded that English learners in college of China perceived an average status for pragmatics among their classmates and institutes, as well as, in course book and exam. Taking into account the 4 components of pragmatic awareness together, the obtained mean score was 3.09, which demonstrated an average status for pragmatic awareness among Chinese college students in the way to learn English.

### V. DISCUSSION

Through data analysis it is very evident that Chinese

college student had established a relatively high level of pragmatic awareness which guaranteed their appropriate communication in English.

Unfortunately, such awareness did not ensure them the complete knowledge and competence in pragmatics. In the following personal interviews with the participants, some students admitted that they did not obtain sufficient pragmatic competence. When asked about the teachers' level of pragmatic awareness and the amount of pragmatic knowledge transferred to them, they assigned teachers a high degree of pragmatic knowledge. But students could not talk about the methods English teacher employed in the classroom except the error correction, which revealed the lack of explicit ways in the English teaching.

The third focus of this study lied on the status of pragmatic awareness among students' classmates. Based on the interviews, it was demonstrated that some classmates still did not consider pragmatics an important element in English learning, so they did not show enough interest in this aspect and ignore its importance in the communication.

The last component in the questionnaire was related to the course book and exam. Although most of them agreed there existed such books and exams in their leaning life, when asked to point out some details to support their judges, they could not fulfill this request. Some of them frankly admitted that the parts related to pragmatics were not common and hoped to add more contents to enhance the pragmatic usage.

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