

# Strategies of Cultivating Students' Pragmatic Competence in Higher Vocational English Teaching

**Xiaoli Hu**

*Jiangsu Maritime Institute, Jiangsu, Nanjing 211170, China  
alexander1882@163.com*

**Abstract:** *Cultivation of students' pragmatic competence is one of the objectives of higher vocational English teaching and plays an important role in it. This paper analyzes differences between pragmatic teaching and language teaching, probes into necessity of pragmatic teaching, and puts forward several cultivation strategies of students' pragmatic competence in higher vocational English teaching: pragmatic awareness cultivation, classroom explicit teaching and creating real situations.*

**Keywords:** *classroom teaching; pragmatic competence; English language teaching; strategy*

## 1. Introduction

At present, experts and scholars generally believe that pragmatic competence refers to the ability of language users to understand and express specific intentions by combining specific contexts and using various knowledge and strategies. It not only emphasizes learners' grammatical ability, but also emphasizes learners' ability to communicate properly and appropriately. Cultivation of pragmatic competence is one of the objectives of college English curriculum. The College English Curriculum Standard for Higher Vocational Education (2021 Edition) clearly puts forward that language knowledge of college English curriculum for higher vocational education includes vocabulary, grammar, discourse and pragmatic knowledge. In April 2018, the Ministry of Education issued China English Proficiency Scale (hereinafter referred to as the Scale), which specifies English proficiency levels of Chinese English learners and users. The ability description framework includes language understanding ability, language expression ability, pragmatic ability, language knowledge, translation ability and language use strategies. These two official documents from the Ministry of Education both states that pragmatic competence is as important as language knowledge and plays an important role in English learning. However, in the process of English learning, learners focus more on vocabulary accumulation and grammar knowledge, pay more attention to language knowledge, and ignore their abilities to use language. Many learners are still unaware of proper courtesy when communicating with native English speakers, and impolite and inappropriate situations often occur [1]. Therefore, it is particularly important to cultivate students' pragmatic competence and improve their English communicative competence.

## 2. Differences between pragmatic teaching and language teaching

Pragmatic teaching is very different from traditional language teaching in teaching objectives, contents and methods. Traditional language teaching takes vocabulary, sentence patterns, grammar and other language structures as main teaching contents, and takes production of correct grammatical sentences as learning purposes. The teaching method is to pay attention to cultivation of students' reading and writing ability. Pragmatics emphasizes appropriateness of language use in context, implements teaching with the concept of pragmatics, and aims to produce appropriate language in a specific context. In higher vocational English teaching, it is difficult to teach pragmatic knowledge, such as speech act and conversational implicature. However, we can help students to cultivate pragmatic awareness in teaching and make students aware of consequences of violating pragmatic rules through typical examples.

## 3. Necessity of pragmatic teaching

At a lower level, language teaching is the basis of pragmatic teaching. However, with the

continuous increase of language knowledge, pragmatic competence may stagnate if it is not cultivated deliberately. It is necessary for teachers to cultivate students' pragmatic competence. Students' pragmatic competence may become rigid and stagnant after reaching a certain stage. They may have some pragmatic deficiencies, such as weak pragmatic awareness, insufficient speech act ability, limited mastery of idioms and so on. English teachers' teaching contents and methods affect development of students' pragmatic competence. It is suggested that teachers should strengthen explicit teaching [2].

#### **4. Strategies for cultivating students' pragmatic competence in higher vocational English teaching**

##### ***4.1 Cultivation of pragmatic awareness***

The purpose of learning language is to develop various kinds of abilities to use language. Pragmatic knowledge refers to appropriate use of language in different situations. Change of situation will affect use of language, such as differences of purpose, occasion, topic and communicator's status will affect choice of different expressions, such as formal and informal, polite and impolite, direct and euphemism. Learning and mastering some pragmatic knowledge will help to improve students' pragmatic awareness and help students communicate appropriately and effectively according to different situations. In teaching, where appropriate, teachers should create communicative language environment and workplace situation, improve students' pragmatic awareness through different typical cases, and make students realize that improvement of pragmatic competence needs long-term practice in real situations. At the level of teaching content design, it emphasizes communication and interaction in real situations. By comparing two different expressions, students can gradually form pragmatic awareness.

##### ***4.2 Classroom explicit teaching***

The theoretical basis of explicit teaching effectiveness can be explained by Schmidt's noticing hypothesis [3]. Explicit teaching plays a key role in language acquisition because classroom teaching can attract students' attention to some characteristics of language, which is more effective than learning only through contact with the language environment. Some researchers believe that it is not enough to only let learners contact the target language. Pragmatic functions and related contextual factors are usually not in a prominent position for learners and are not easy to be noticed. Therefore, explicit pragmatic teaching is needed. The effectiveness of explicit teaching provides practical basis for design and implementation of classroom teaching. Some foreign researchers believe that adding examples of target language social interaction in classroom teaching and providing opportunities for target language communication and interaction can cultivate students' pragmatic awareness. In China, Dai Weidong and Yang Xianju (2005) suggested that pragmatic teaching should pay attention to providing meta pragmatic information, providing real context, communication opportunities and timely feedback [4].

##### ***4.3 Creating real situations***

College English course of higher vocational education fully implements the government's educational policy and aims at the fundamental task of moral education. It aims to cultivate students' ability to learn and apply English and lay a good English foundation for students' continuous learning and lifelong development in the future. Foreign related communication in the workplace means that students can use English language knowledge and language skills to accurately understand and express information, views and emotions, and carry out effective oral and written communication. Foreign communication in the workplace constitutes the basic element of the core quality of English discipline. Professional English skills refer to the ability to communicate effectively in English in the workplace, including understanding skills, expression skills and interactive skills. Interactive skills refer to dialogue, discussion, debate, negotiation and other skills, specifically including the ability to use English to complete interactive activities in the workplace, such as daily business correspondence, face-to-face daily business communication and being able to use English to overcome difficulties in cross-cultural communication.

In higher vocational English teaching, we should create a real communicative language environment and workplace situation according to the actual needs of students' future jobs where appropriate, so that students can improve their language use ability by solving practical problems, improve students' pragmatic awareness through typical cases, and make students realize that the improvement of pragmatic competency needs long-term practice in the real situation. Taking tourism management as an example, when teaching "tourism" module, teachers can simulate the real working

environment of a travel agency, and let students complete a series of real tasks such as picking up guests from airports, making itinerary, accommodation and traffic arrangement, explanation of scenic spots and seeing off guests. In the process of oral practice, teachers will deliberately set up cultural barriers or complaints, so that students can use appropriate and appropriate language to solve them and improve their pragmatic competence through language use.

## 5. Conclusion

With the deepening of China's internationalization process, national and local economic development puts forward higher requirements for students' English communicative competence. As an important part of communicative competence, cultivation of students' pragmatic competence should be given more attention. Pragmatic competence will not improve with improvement of language competence. It is necessary for teachers to give targeted guidance and intervention. Firstly, in terms of classroom teaching effectiveness, explicit teaching obtains more empirical data support than implicit teaching. In addition, pragmatics is a subject that studies the meaning of dynamic discourse, and communication is a dynamic system [5]. Therefore, the design of teaching content should highlight communicative interaction. Secondly, although classroom teaching is the main learning environment for students, teachers can create more opportunities for students to practice the use of English.

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