

The Impact of Cross-Cultural Pragmatic Competence on Second Language Acquisition: A Study on Pedagogical Strategies from An Applied Linguistics Perspective

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Abstract. This study investigates whether the presence of explicit cross-cultural pragmatics instruction in L2 learners improves communicative skills. Focusing on practical pedagogy and cultural sensitivity, the study evaluates whether formalised instruction in politeness, face-saving and indirectness improves students' intercultural sensitivity. By way of an experiment, subjects were randomly assigned to an experimental group that received focused pragmatic teaching and a control group that received regular language tuition. It turns out that, in our experiments, explicit teaching did dramatically enhance the performance of the experimental group in role-play tests – suggesting an enhanced capacity to change language use to suit different cultures. From this research, it appears that explicit pragmatics training makes it possible for learners to make linguistic decisions with precision, in a way that is both linguistic and culturally correct. Giving students these tools, clear pragmatic training makes for more assured and versatile L2 speakers and hence a richer language acquisition that responds to the demands of global communication.

Keywords: cross-cultural pragmatics, second language acquisition, explicit instruction, intercultural competence, language teaching

1. Introduction

In our modern interconnected world, SLA requires not only the skills of language but also a comprehensive knowledge of cultural expectations about how language is used in social settings. Cross-cultural pragmatic competence – the capacity to communicate in a culturally and contextually appropriate manner – is now the cornerstone of effective language-mediated communication. But formal language learning often focuses on grammar and vocabulary and leaves students poorly equipped to face the cultural differences of real-world communication. This disconnect between the learned language and the communicative competence reaffirms the imperative for pragmatic instruction in the context of language learners experiencing greater intercultural communication difficulties at work and at home. It is now known that teaching explicitly pragmatics (directly teaching cultural values and pragmatic tactics) might enhance students' communicative abilities by offering them a real-life understanding of social norms in the target language. Through role-playing, discourse analysis, and formal classroom practice, children can directly apply concepts of politeness, indirect communication and face-saving [1]. This method provides learners with both a greater awareness of cultural subtleties and the ability to react in these contexts, thus improving their linguistic flexibility. We explore how explicit pragmatic instruction affects the ability of L2 students to make culturally relevant language decisions. In examining how systematic instruction impacts the learning performance in cross-cultural contexts, this study demonstrates the need to build pragmatic competence into SLA curricula. By comparing the outcomes of an experimental group given pragmatic instruction with a control group given traditional lessons, this paper illustrates the way that explicit instruction creates a linguistically and culturally appropriate strategy for language acquisition.

2. Literature Review

Pragmatic ability across cultures is now commonly acknowledged as an essential part of fluency in a foreign language. It means knowing how to talk in culturally and contextually appropriate terms, avoiding communication errors and cultural

misunderstandings. The original studies looked at linguistic ability as the key marker of language skill, but recent work has emphasized sociocultural knowledge (which encompasses both language and culture) [2]. The evolution reflects a new understanding that language acquisition involves not just vocabulary and grammar but also the subtleties of social life, which is deeply embedded in culture.

Researchers working on second-language acquisition show that learners lack practical skills when exposed to true social situations. Old-style language learning is heavy on grammar and vocabulary, but it never lays down the cultural knowledge needed for real-world communication. In this way, students may become fluent linguistically, but will not be able to mould their language into a culturally appropriate structure, potentially causing misperceptions or stereotyping in cross-cultural conversations [3]. Applied linguistics recommends addressing this deficit by integrating pragmatic learning in language education, through exercises that teach learners to read and construct language for a variety of social situations. There is a growing literature supporting formal cross-cultural pragmatics instruction, which can greatly enhance the learners' capacity to identify and implement culturally acceptable language patterns. Researchers comparing explicit and implicit teaching methods find that students respond better to more direct exposure to concrete things, including politeness, turn-taking and nondirect verbal instruction [4]. Praying games, simulations and analysing genuine discourse examples are perceived as successful teaching techniques for pragmatics because they enable students to learn to use the language in culturally appropriate ways. Despite these progresses, assessing pragmatic competence has proved challenging because it is subjective and culturally heterogenous.

3. Research Methodology

The research methodology involved a comprehensive three-part approach, focusing on the design of the study, implementation of instructional interventions, and assessment of cross-cultural pragmatic competence. Each stage was crafted to examine the impact of explicit pragmatic instruction on second language learners' ability to navigate culturally diverse social interactions.

3.1. Study Design and Participant Selection

The research was quasi-experimental and used both qualitative and quantitative design. The 150 intermediate language learners from all cultures were randomly selected through a pre-evaluation that assessed their language level and cultural awareness. The participants were randomly divided into two groups, one control group (n=75) and one experimental group (n=75). The control group was taught the usual languages—grammar and vocabulary—and the experimental group was given supplementary cross-cultural pragmatics [5]. Such an arrangement allowed both instructional strategies to be directly compared, and offered a useful insight into the importance of practical training in language acquisition.

In both populations, we began by using a baseline questionnaire that was given to all subjects to collect self-reported cross-cultural communication confidence and pragmatic knowledge. It consisted of a 5-point Likert scale in which they were asked to rate statements on how well they understood and responded to culturally varied interactions. These baseline results gave us a baseline for testing the effects of hands-on teaching during the eight-week course.

3.2. Instructional Interventions

The learning intervention for the experimental group consisted of an eight-week curriculum geared towards cross-cultural pragmatic skills. We learned a different practical skill every week: politeness techniques, indirect speech, and cultural differences between saying yes, no, and request. Sessions consisted of formal training in the properties and uses of practical components, followed by hands-on exercises that involved putting these principles into practice [6]. For instance, one of the weekly workshops involved politeness tactics in requests, where students analysed real language examples and learned to come up with polite requests in role-play scenarios. These sessions were complemented by video examples of cross-cultural interactions where students could observe and evaluate pragmatic usage in a variety of social settings. The control group, by contrast, took regular language lessons with no pragmatic or cultural components other than grammar and vocabulary [7].

3.3. Assessment of Pragmatic Competence

To assess whether the pragmatic instruction had been effective, each group underwent a two-part evaluation at the end of the eight weeks. Participants first filled out a second survey identical to the initial survey, enabling researchers to determine whether self-reported pragmatic awareness and confidence had changed. We analysed the survey data to see whether the experimental group was more pragmatically aware than the control group. Second, subjects were required to take role-play tests that mimicked actual social life in various cultural settings. These measures involved three situations: (1) polite requests in the workplace, (2) disapproval in an office discussion, and (3) compliments at a party. Each exchange was assessed by trained linguists who graded participants on cultural fit, flexibility and practical comprehension [8]. These qualitative assessments added another layer of understanding of how learners apply practical learning in real-life situations, with evaluators reporting the strengths and limitations of each group.

4. Research Results

4.1. Self-Reported Pragmatic Awareness

After the intervention, the survey indicated a significant rise in self-rated pragmatic awareness among the experimental group, as shown in Table 1. In the first, both groups had moderate confidence in their cross-cultural communication abilities – an average of 2.8 out of 5. The average score of the experimental group at eight weeks reached 4.2, representing a significant increase in perceived competence. By comparison, the control group’s average score rose just a bit to 3.1, which would indicate that traditional instruction was insufficient to increase learners’ cultural sensitivity. The survey also reported a 45 per cent reduction in communication anxiety among experimental group participants speaking to someone from a different cultural background. Many reported becoming better prepared to interpret culture and act appropriately in different contexts – a testament to the power of direct practical training to mitigate communication stress.

Table 1. Survey Results Of Pragmatic Awareness Study

Group	Initial Average Score (out of 5)	Final Average Score (out of 5)	Increase in Score	Communication Anxiety Reduction (%)	Reported Preparedness Increase (%)
Experimental	2.8	4.2	1.4	45	85
Control	2.8	3.1	0.3	10	30

4.2. Performance in Role-Play Assessments

The experimental group scored more highly than the control group in all three role-play tasks. In the professional context, as shown in Table 2, 82% of the experimental group engaged in culturally appropriate politeness behaviours, including indirect requests and toned-down language, versus only 45% of the control group. The disagreement situation had roughly the same outcomes: 78 per cent of the experimental group understood face-saving techniques, compared with 39 per cent of the control group. These role-play results demonstrate that the experimental group had the power to apply learned practical skills to actual behaviour, through approaches that were both linguistically competent and culturally responsive [9]. The control group, however, frequently used direct language forms, though technically correct, that were not culturally appropriate, and so could cause confusion. These findings show the significance of practical instruction in equipping students for practical situations requiring language proficiency and cultural competency.

Table 2. Role-Play Assessment Results Of Pragmatic Skills

Role-Play Task	Experimental Group (%)	Control Group (%)	Description
Professional Context	82	45	Engagement in culturally appropriate politeness behaviours
Disagreement Situation	78	39	Understanding and using face-saving techniques

4.3. Observed Behavioral Changes in Communicative Strategies

The data in table 3 were gathered through systematic classroom observations and recorded conversational analyses conducted over the eight-week intervention period. Over the course of the intervention, classroom observation and recording of conversations provided qualitative information about behavioural shifts in communicative strategies. In the experimental group, participants exhibited an increasing shift from simple, literal language usage to subtler, more culturally specific linguistic habits. For instance, when they answered questions or requests, students increasingly used hedging terms, indirect quotations and other face-saving tactics that demonstrate increased cultural sensitivity [10]. Across eight weeks, learners in the experimental group were far more likely to use these adaptive strategies reliably and demonstrated a clear improvement in their ability to negotiate social relationships in the target language. This flexibility was not so evident in the control group, which still used direct translation from their native language structures into the target language, and thus tended to yield pragmatically inconvenient responses. Such findings underscore the benefit of practical instruction to students’ ability to interpret and employ cultural signals in speaking, which is a fundamental skill for the effective use of language across cultural boundaries [11].

Table 3. Observed Behavioral Changes In Communicative Strategies

Behavioral Aspect	Experimental Group Improvement (%)	Control Group Improvement (%)	Description
Use of Hedging Terms	75	20	Increase in use of hedging terms to soften responses
Use of Indirect Quotations	68	15	Increase in use of indirect quotations for politeness
Application of Face-Saving Tactics	82	25	Greater use of face-saving tactics to navigate social interactions

5. Discussion

The findings of this study reveal significant insights into the role of cross-cultural pragmatic competence in second language acquisition and underscore the effectiveness of explicit instructional strategies in fostering this competence.

5.1. Significance of Cross-Cultural Pragmatic Competence in SLA

These findings make clear that pragmatic competence across cultures is an important factor in communicating effectively in a second language – beyond mere language fluency. Though grammar and vocabulary have long been central to SLA models, as this research has shown, pragmatic skills — such as cultural literacy and flexibility — are equally important. The experimental group's higher self-confidence, and their greater performance in culturally diverse role-playing situations, illustrate that cross-cultural pragmatic skill has a direct impact on learners' communicative performance. It turns out that a closer look at participants' self-reports reveals that many students feel poorly prepared to work across cultural boundaries even if they are confident in their grammar and vocabulary skills [12]. The conclusion is that, without the presence of culture and pragmatics, learning languages may expose students to confusion and mistranslation in situations of politeness, disagreeing or back-and-forth. The experimental group's anxiety reduction underscores the idea that pragmatic training is not only about imparting practical knowledge but also boosting learners' confidence, thus removing the psychological hurdles that sometimes arise in intercultural communication. So, our research reinforces the need to make cross-cultural pragmatics an essential component of SLA curricula, because it creates a fuller and more effective language education.

5.2. Effectiveness of Explicit Pragmatic Instruction

The study protocol involved explicit teaching of pragmatic norms and techniques, which had the impressive effect of enhancing students' cross-cultural ability. The experimental group's adoption of politeness, face-saving and indirect words in role-play tests suggests that formal pragmatic training equips students to practise these skills successfully in the real world. These results indicate that explicit teaching, or teaching pragmatic aspects and culture explicitly, provides students with a better grasp of appropriate usage of language in the situation than does implicit instruction. Plainly taught pragmatics provides a logical platform within which students can actively identify and experiment with cultural accents in language [13]. When instructors teach practical skills face-to-face, they provide students with the means to discover how politeness, formality and indirectness differ across cultures. This experimental group's greater role-play performance in different contexts illustrates how explicit instruction assists learners to make informed decisions that are in tune with the target language's cultural demands. Furthermore, structured exercises like roleplay and discourse analysis encourage students to learn these skills at home, translating theoretical knowledge into skills they can apply in the real world. This, in turn, provides a template for pragmatic language teaching to ensure students can manage social relationships as well as language systems.

6. Conclusion

This research highlights the importance of cross-cultural pragmatic teaching in second language learning and illustrates that blatant instruction in pragmatic norms teaches learners skills beyond a mere linguistic understanding. It is clear from the experimental group's success in role-playing that formal training in politeness, indirectness and face-saving behaviour improves learners' proficiency in language translation across cultures. Reprising them with activities helps students become flexible communicators, able to make language decisions that are socially expected in the language being spoken. This research points towards pragmatic teaching as an essential part of the education of language, especially in the globalised world in which intercultural communication is now ubiquitous. It also invites educators to include direct pragmatic training as part of classroom practice, using examples from the real world and discourse analysis to enact cultural inculcation. The research could expand upon these findings to consider how pragmatic competence was assessed, and whether such instruction has long-term effects on communicative performance. All in all, this research bolsters the theory that a holistic language education entails linguistic accuracy but also cultural fluency, resulting in L2 speakers who can successfully speak across cultural differences.

Authors' Contributions

Yi Zhang and Yuanchen Li contributed equally to this paper.

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