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ENHANCING PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE THROUGH DISCOURSE COMPLETION TASKS

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Abstract

This paper explores the effectiveness of Discourse Completion Tasks (DCTs) in teaching pragmatic competence, focusing on their role in language acquisition and development. The study delves into the theoretical framework of pragmatics and the significance of pragmatic competence in effective communication. Through a comprehensive review of literature and empirical evidence, this article highlights the benefits of employing DCTs as a pedagogical tool in language classrooms. By integrating DCTs into language instruction, educators can enhance learners' ability to understand and produce contextually appropriate language, thereby fostering effective communication skills.

Keywords: Discourse Completion Tasks, pragmatic competence, language acquisition, effective communication, social contexts.

Effective communication involves not only linguistic proficiency but also pragmatic competence, which encompasses the ability to use language appropriately in various social contexts. Pragmatic competence has been essentially recognized as one of the factors to perceive learners' communicative competence. Many research studies on pragmatic competence have affirmed that even proficient English learners often use language inappropriately [1,21]. Therefore, pragmatic competence plays a crucial role in language acquisition and development, as it enables individuals to convey intended meanings effectively while considering the social and cultural norms of communication. The Discourse Completion Task (DCT) is probably the most widely used data collection instrument in cross-cultural pragmatics, a field of enquiry that compares different speech acts across languages, and in interlanguage pragmatics, which examines learners' pragmatic competence and development [4,229].



Pragmatic competence is essential for effective communication, particularly in cross-cultural interactions where cultural norms and social conventions vary. Individuals with pragmatic competence can adjust their language use based on situational factors, such as the relationship between interlocutors, the context of communication, and the cultural background of participants. Lack of pragmatic competence can lead to misinterpretations, misunderstandings, and communication breakdowns, undermining the effectiveness of communication.

DCTs are a widely used method in pragmatics research and language teaching. They involve presenting participants with written or spoken scenarios and asking them to complete the dialogue or respond to the situations as they would in real life. DCTs provide learners with opportunities to practice producing and interpreting contextually appropriate language in various communicative contexts. They also allow educators to assess learners' pragmatic competence and provide targeted feedback.

The DCT evolved from discourse completion exercises developed by Levenston and Blum (1978), which were designed for the study of L2 lexical acquisition. One of the advantages of these exercises was that they enabled researchers to compare the performance of learners and native speakers or learners at different proficiency levels. Participants completing the exercises were instructed to fill in a blank with one word. The provided "discourse" was designed "to restrict as far as possible the number of acceptable alternatives and consisted of one or maximally two sentences [3,16].

DCTs have been extensively used in the field of interlanguage pragmatics, which is closely related to cross-cultural pragmatics, in that interlanguage studies typically elicit three sets of data, allowing for a comparison between the native and the target language, as well as an examination of the pragmatic features of the interlanguage. Apart from examining learners' pragmatic transfer, thus documenting their difficulties in bringing across the intended illocutionary force of a given speech act, interlanguage studies using DCTs have also examined pragmatic development, albeit almost exclusively via a cross-sectional design [2,15].



Numerous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of DCTs in enhancing learners' pragmatic competence. By engaging in DCTs, learners develop awareness of pragmatic features such as speech acts, politeness strategies, and conversational implicature. They also learn to consider contextual factors when producing and interpreting language. Furthermore, DCTs facilitate authentic communication practice, enabling learners to apply pragmatic knowledge in realistic scenarios.

Educators can integrate DCTs into language instruction by designing tasks that target specific pragmatic features relevant to learners' proficiency levels and learning goals. DCTs can be incorporated into classroom activities, assessments, and role-plays to provide meaningful practice opportunities. Additionally, providing explicit instruction on pragmatic principles alongside DCTs enhances learners' understanding and application of pragmatic competence.

To sum up, Discourse Completion Tasks (DCTs) offer a valuable approach to teaching pragmatic competence in language classrooms. By engaging learners in realistic communication scenarios and prompting them to produce contextually appropriate language, DCTs facilitate the development of pragmatic awareness and skills. Educators should consider integrating DCTs into language instruction to enhance learners' ability to communicate effectively in diverse social contexts.

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