

Pragmatic Competence in Pakistani English Language Learners

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Abstract : This study investigates Pakistani first year university students' perception of the role of pragmatics in their general approach to learning English. The research is triggered by National Curriculum's initiative to provide holistic opportunities to the students for language development and to equip them with competencies to use English language in academic and social contexts (New English National Curriculum for I-XII). The traditional grammar translation and examination oriented method is believed to reduce learners to silent listener (Zhang, 2008; Zhao 2009). This lead to the inability of the students to interpret discourse by relating utterances to their meaning, understanding the intentions of the users and how language is used in specific setting (Bachman & Palmer, 1996, 2010). Pragmatic competence is a neglected area as far as teaching and learning English in Pakistan is concerned. This study focuses on the different types of pragmatic knowledge, learners perception of such knowledge and learning strategies employed by different learners to process the learning in general and pragmatic in particular. This study employed three data collecting tools; a questionnaire, discourse completion task and interviews to elicit data from first year university students regarding their perception of pragmatic competence. Results showed that Pakistani first year university learners have limited pragmatic knowledge. Although they acknowledged the importance of linguistic knowledge for linguistic competence in the students but argued that insufficient English proficiency, limited knowledge of pragmatics, insufficient language material and tasks were major reasons of pragmatic failure.

Keywords : pragmatic competence, Pakistani college learners, linguistic competence

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