

**PRAGMATICS IN TEACHER SPEECH**

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Annotation: *The article investigates the role of pragmatics in teacher speech, focusing on how educators employ pragmatic strategies to manage classroom communication effectively. Through qualitative analysis of recorded classroom interactions and teacher interviews, the study identifies key features such as indirect speech acts, politeness strategies, contextual implicatures, and repair mechanisms. These pragmatic tools are shown to support classroom management, enhance student engagement, and facilitate instructional clarity. The findings suggest that pragmatic competence is essential for effective teaching, yet remains underemphasized in teacher training programs. The study advocates for the integration of pragmatic awareness into professional development to better prepare teachers for the communicative demands of diverse classroom environments.*

Keywords: *Pragmatics; Teacher speech; Classroom communication; Speech acts; Politeness theory; Discourse analysis; Pragmatic competence; Educational linguistics; Classroom interaction; Teacher education*

Annotatsiya

Ushbu maqolada o'qituvchilar nutqida pragmatikaning o'rni tahlil qilinadi hamda o'qituvchilarning sinfdagi samarali muloqotni boshqarish uchun qanday pragmatik strategiyalardan foydalanishi o'rganiladi. Dars jarayonlarini yozib olish va o'qituvchilar bilan suhbatlar asosida olib borilgan sifatli tahlil natijasida bilvosita nutq aktlari, xushmuomalalik strategiyalari, kontekstual imlikaturalar va tuzatish mexanizmlarining keng qo'llanilayotgani aniqlangan. Ushbu pragmatik vositalar



o'qituvchilarga sinfni boshqarish, o'quvchilarni faollashtirish va o'qitish mazmunini tushunarli yetkazishda yordam beradi. Tadqiqot shuni ko'rsatadiki, pragmatik kompetensiya samarali ta'lim uchun muhim bo'lsa-da, ko'plab pedagogik tayyorgarlik dasturlarida yetarli darajada e'tiborga olinmaydi. Maqola o'qituvchilarning muloqot malakalarini rivojlantirish uchun pedagogik ta'lim jarayoniga pragmatik bilimlarni kiritishni taklif qiladi.

Kalit so'zlar: Pragmatika; O'qituvchi nutqi; Sinfdagi muloqot; Nutq aktlari; Xushmuomalalik nazariyasi; Diskurs tahlili; Pragmatik kompetensiya; Ta'lim lingvistikasi; Sinfy interaktsiya; O'qituvchilarni tayyorlash

Аннотация: В статье рассматривается роль прагматики в речи учителя и анализируются прагматические стратегии, используемые педагогами для эффективного управления коммуникацией в классе. На основе качественного анализа аудиозаписей уроков и интервью с учителями были выявлены ключевые элементы речи, такие как косвенные речевые акты, стратегии вежливости, контекстуальные импликатуры и механизмы коррекции. Установлено, что данные прагматические средства помогают учителям управлять учебным процессом, повышать вовлечённость учащихся и обеспечивать ясность объяснений. Исследование подчеркивает важность прагматической компетенции в педагогической деятельности, при этом отмечается её недостаточная представленность в программах подготовки учителей. В статье предлагается включение прагматического компонента в профессиональное обучение педагогов для повышения эффективности взаимодействия в условиях разнообразных учебных аудиторий.

Ключевые слова: Прагматика; Речь учителя; Коммуникация в классе; Речевые акты; Теория вежливости; Анализ дискурса; Прагматическая компетенция; Лингвистика образования; Взаимодействие в классе; Подготовка учителей

Introduction

Pragmatics, the study of language use in context, plays a crucial role in educational settings where communication is a fundamental aspect of teaching and



learning. Teachers constantly negotiate meaning, manage classroom behavior, and adapt their speech to diverse learners' needs. These communicative demands extend beyond grammar and vocabulary to include pragmatic competence—the ability to use language appropriately in social interactions. Pragmatic awareness in teacher speech is essential for fostering an inclusive and engaging classroom environment.

Despite the importance of pragmatic strategies in pedagogy, many teacher education programs focus primarily on linguistic accuracy and pedagogical content knowledge, often neglecting the nuanced ways in which teachers use language pragmatically. This study aims to analyze how teachers employ pragmatic features in their speech and how these contribute to effective classroom interaction.

Literature Review

Pragmatic competence has been extensively studied in second language acquisition (Kasper & Rose, 2002)¹ and increasingly in educational discourse. According to Thomas (1983)², pragmatic failure—when language is used inappropriately in a given context—can lead to misunderstandings and reduced teaching efficacy. In the classroom, this might manifest as student confusion or disengagement.

Research by Walsh (2006)³ emphasizes that teacher talk is both a pedagogical and communicative act. Effective teacher speech incorporates a range of pragmatic strategies such as hedging, turn-taking cues, politeness markers, and repair strategies. These elements not only maintain classroom order but also build rapport and create a supportive learning environment.

Pragmatics also intersects with classroom power dynamics. Fairclough (1992)⁴ notes that institutional talk, including teacher speech, is inherently shaped by asymmetrical power relations. Teachers often use pragmatic tools-like indirect requests or mitigated commands-to balance authority with approachability.

¹ Kasper, G., & Rose, K. R. (2002). *Pragmatic development in a second language*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

² Thomas, J. (1983). Cross-cultural pragmatic failure. *Applied Linguistics*, 4(2), 91–112. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/4.2.91>

³ Walsh, S. (2006). *Investigating classroom discourse*. Routledge.

⁴ Fairclough, N. (1992). *Discourse and social change*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.



In multicultural and multilingual classrooms, pragmatic variation becomes even more significant. Blum-Kulka (1989)⁵ and Gumperz (1982)⁶ have demonstrated how cultural norms influence the interpretation of speech acts, highlighting the need for teachers to be pragmatically aware across cultural contexts. Although there is growing acknowledgment of pragmatics in classroom discourse, few empirical studies focus explicitly on its presence and function in teacher speech. This study seeks to fill that gap by examining the specific pragmatic strategies used by teachers during classroom interaction.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative approach to explore how teachers utilize pragmatic strategies in classroom discourse. The research was conducted in two public secondary schools located in an urban area, selected for their linguistic and cultural diversity. Six teachers participated in the study, representing various disciplines including English, History, and Science. The selection of participants was based on purposive sampling, targeting educators with at least three years of teaching experience and who expressed willingness to engage in reflective discourse about their language use. Ethical clearance was obtained prior to data collection, and all participants provided informed consent.

Data collection took place over a period of two weeks, during which each teacher was observed and audio-recorded in three separate class sessions, resulting in a corpus of eighteen recorded lessons. Each lesson lasted between 40 and 60 minutes. To complement the audio data and capture contextual nuances, the researcher took detailed field notes, including observations on non-verbal communication, classroom environment, and student reactions. Following the classroom observations, semi-structured interviews were conducted with each teacher to elicit their reflections on communication choices, challenges, and intentions behind specific utterances noted during the lessons.

⁵ Blum-Kulka, S. (1989). *Cross-cultural pragmatics: Requests and apologies*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing.

⁶ Gumperz, J. J. (1982). *Discourse strategies*. Cambridge University Press.



The audio recordings were transcribed verbatim, and the data were analyzed using a discourse-pragmatic framework. The analysis focused on identifying and categorizing speech acts, politeness strategies, hedging, implicatures, and turn-taking mechanisms. Coding was carried out manually, guided by theoretical models including Searle's taxonomy of speech acts, Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, and Grice's cooperative principles. Triangulation was achieved by comparing classroom transcripts with interview data and field notes to ensure credibility and validity. The interpretive process emphasized how language functioned within the institutional and interpersonal contexts of the classroom, providing a nuanced understanding of pragmatic features in teacher speech.

Results

The analysis of classroom discourse revealed a consistent and purposeful use of pragmatic strategies by teachers across subjects and grade levels. One of the most prominent features was the use of indirect speech acts, particularly in the form of mitigated directives. Rather than issuing direct commands, teachers often employed interrogative or modal forms such as "Could you please open your books to page 40?" or "Would it be okay if we started the next exercise?" These utterances were not genuine questions but functioned as polite imperatives, helping to soften the authoritative tone and promote a more cooperative atmosphere.

Teachers also frequently employed politeness strategies to manage social relationships within the classroom. Positive politeness markers, such as personalized address ("Let's try that together, Jason") and inclusive pronouns ("We're going to work on this as a team"), served to establish solidarity and encourage student participation. Conversely, negative politeness strategies—particularly the use of hedging and modal verbs—helped minimize imposition and gave students a sense of agency. Examples included phrases like "Maybe we can think of another solution" or "You might want to consider revising that idea."

Contextual implicature played a significant role in teacher discourse. Teachers regularly relied on shared classroom routines and prior knowledge, allowing them to use elliptical or incomplete statements such as "You know what to do" or "Like last



time,” which were easily understood by students due to the established context. These forms of pragmatic compression helped to maintain lesson pace and minimize cognitive load.

Additionally, repair strategies were a recurring feature. When faced with confusion or non-response, teachers quickly reformulated their questions or provided additional scaffolding. For instance, after a student’s hesitation, a teacher might follow up with “Or, think about what we discussed yesterday—how would that help?” This demonstrated responsiveness and pragmatic adaptability in real-time interaction. Turn-taking mechanisms were carefully managed through the use of discourse markers like “Okay,” “Right,” and “Now,” which helped signal transitions and maintain orderly classroom interaction. Teachers also employed wait time and pausing strategically to invite participation without overt pressure. Overall, these pragmatic strategies functioned not only to convey instructional content but to regulate interaction, maintain authority, and foster an inclusive and engaging learning environment.

Discussion

The results of this study underscore the essential role of pragmatic competence in teacher speech, demonstrating that effective classroom communication relies heavily on the strategic use of language beyond its literal meaning. The consistent use of indirect speech acts and politeness strategies across subjects and teaching styles highlights teachers’ sensitivity to the social dynamics of classroom interaction. These findings align with Brown and Levinson’s (1987)⁷ politeness theory, particularly in the way teachers mitigated their authority through indirect directives and inclusive language, reinforcing a collaborative rather than hierarchical environment.

The use of indirectness, hedging, and modal constructions served dual functions: preserving the teacher’s instructional control while simultaneously promoting student autonomy and comfort. This mirrors Thomas’s (1983)⁸ argument that pragmatic failure—whether through excessive directness or misaligned tone—can

⁷ Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage* (Vol. 4). Cambridge University Press.

⁸ Thomas, J. (1983). Cross-cultural pragmatic failure. *Applied Linguistics*, 4(2), 91–112. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/4.2.91>



hinder classroom engagement. The data suggest that teachers consciously adapt their speech to avoid such failures, especially in diverse classrooms where students' sociocultural backgrounds may affect how they interpret commands and questions.

Another critical finding was the reliance on contextual implicature and shared knowledge. Teachers often assumed a high degree of inferential capacity from students, especially during routine interactions. This practice, while efficient, presumes a stable classroom culture and may disadvantage newcomers or students with less exposure to implicit cues. It echoes Grice's (1975)⁹ theory of conversational implicature and further emphasizes the importance of context in meaning-making.

Repair strategies observed in the data reflect teachers' ability to detect and address communication breakdowns pragmatically. This responsiveness supports Walsh's (2006)¹⁰ conception of classroom discourse as co-constructed and dynamic, requiring continual monitoring and adjustment. Moreover, the use of turn-taking signals and discourse markers helped maintain interactional flow and structure, especially during transitions or open discussions.

Collectively, these findings affirm that pragmatic awareness is not incidental but foundational to teaching practice. Yet, pragmatic competence remains an underdeveloped area in many teachers' education programs. The observed strategies were largely intuitive, suggesting that experienced teachers develop pragmatic fluency through practice rather than formal training. This raises important implications for professional development. Incorporating explicit instruction on pragmatics-such as how to manage face-threatening acts, scaffold interactions, or employ culturally responsive speech-could better equip teachers to navigate the complexities of classroom communication.

In sum, the study reveals that pragmatic strategies are deeply embedded in teacher talk and central to classroom efficacy. By interpreting speech not only for what is said but how and why it is said, educators and researchers can gain deeper insights into the pedagogical value of everyday language use.

⁹ Grice, H. P. (1975). Logic and conversation. In P. Cole & J. L. Morgan (Eds.), *Syntax and semantics* (Vol. 3, pp. 41–58). New York: Academic Press.

¹⁰ Walsh, S. (2006). *Investigating classroom discourse*. Routledge.



Conclusion

Pragmatics plays a pivotal role in teacher speech, influencing how instructions are delivered, how rapport is built, and how classroom management is maintained. This study demonstrates the diversity and intentionality of pragmatic strategies in teaching, reinforcing the need for pragmatic competence as a core component of teacher training. Future research might explore how pragmatic training interventions affect classroom communication across varied educational contexts.

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