

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF DEVELOPING PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE IN LANGUAGE CLASSES AT THE VOCATIONAL EDUCATION SYSTEM IN UZBEKISTAN

Khurramova Feruza Murod qizi

Post-Graduate Student

Institute for the Development of Professional Education

Abstract

This article examines the theoretical and methodological foundations of pragmatic competence development in language classes within the vocational education system of Uzbekistan. The study analyzes key theoretical frameworks underpinning pragmatic competence, including speech act theory, sociocultural theory, and communicative language teaching. The article explores how these theories can be applied to the specific conditions of Uzbekistan's vocational education environment, where students must master professional communication for real workplace contexts.

Keywords: Pragmatic competence, vocational education, language teaching, communicative competence, speech acts, sociocultural theory, professional communication, intercultural pragmatics, language register.

Introduction

In the context of global economic integration and the rapid modernization of Uzbekistan's labor market, the preparation of vocationally competent graduates who can communicate effectively in professional environments has become a central priority of national educational policy. Language education, in this regard, extends far beyond grammatical accuracy and lexical breadth. What contemporary workplaces increasingly demand is the ability to use language appropriately, strategically, and contextually the defining attributes of pragmatic competence.

The Presidential Decree of the Republic of Uzbekistan № PD-158 dated October 16, 2024, "On measures to further improve the system of training qualified

personnel in vocational education and to introduce international educational programs” [1], alongside Resolution № PR-4623 dated February 27, 2020, “On measures to further develop the field of pedagogical education” [2], have established a firm institutional basis for rethinking the objectives of language instruction within vocational training. These documents underscore the need to align educational outcomes with international professional standards and to equip learners with communicative skills that transcend the classroom.

Despite significant reforms in Uzbekistan’s vocational education system, pragmatic competence remains an undertheorized and underimplemented dimension of language teaching. Most language curricula continue to prioritize grammatical form over communicative function, leaving graduates ill-equipped to navigate the pragmatic demands of authentic professional interaction. This gap between linguistic knowledge and communicative performance has been well documented in second language acquisition research and represents a critical challenge for vocational language educators [3].

Analysis and discussion

According to leech, pragmatic competence refers to the ability to use language appropriately and effectively in context to select the right words, register, and communicative strategy for a given social situation, interlocutor, and communicative purpose [4]. It is widely distinguished from grammatical competence, which concerns knowledge of linguistic rules, and from sociolinguistic competence, which relates to sensitivity to social norms. Pragmatic competence encompasses both the ability to understand and produce speech acts (illocutionary competence) and the ability to organize discourse cohesively across longer stretches of communication (discourse competence) [5]. In the seminal framework of Canale and Swain, communicative competence was originally conceptualized as comprising grammatical, sociolinguistic, and strategic competences [6]. Subsequent revisions by Bachman extended this model to include pragmatic competence as a distinct and foundational component [5]. Today, there is broad consensus in applied linguistics that pragmatic competence cannot be reduced to knowledge of grammar or vocabulary it involves a complex, dynamic interplay of linguistic, social, cultural, and cognitive knowledge that speakers deploy in real time.



For vocational learners, pragmatic competence is of particular salience. The professional environments they are being prepared for whether in medicine, law, engineering, education, trade, or construction require nuanced command of communicative registers, the ability to perform complex speech acts such as negotiation, persuasion, refusal, and complaint, and the capacity to interpret and produce discourse in accordance with institutional norms and expectations [7].

Uzbekistan's vocational education system has undergone substantial structural reform over the past decade, driven by national policy imperatives to align training outcomes with labor market needs and international standards. The Institute for the Development of Professional Education (IDPE) has played a leading role in this transformation, developing new curricula, teaching standards, and assessment frameworks across vocational disciplines. Language education within this system, however, has lagged behind other curricular reforms, with many institutions still relying on traditional, grammar-focused approaches that inadequately address communicative and pragmatic learning outcomes.

The distinctive characteristics of the vocational education context impose specific demands on pragmatic competence development. First, learners in vocational programs are typically adults or young adults with immediate professional goals; their motivation to acquire language competence is instrumentally oriented, making relevance and authenticity of learning tasks particularly important [8]. Second, vocational learners across disciplines whether training as healthcare workers, legal assistants, accountants, IT specialists, or construction technicians require domain-specific pragmatic knowledge that reflects the communicative norms and conventions of their respective professional communities. Third, Uzbekistan's multilingual context, in which students may operate across Uzbek, Russian, and English in professional settings, adds an intercultural dimension to pragmatic development that must be explicitly addressed in language instruction. Recent research on language education in Central Asian vocational settings underscores the importance of integrating pragmatic instruction with content-specific materials and real-world communicative tasks [9]. Studies conducted in analogous post-Soviet educational contexts have found that learners demonstrate higher pragmatic gains when instruction is embedded in meaningful professional scenarios rather than decontextualized language exercises [10].

Drawing on the theoretical frameworks discussed above and on the specific conditions of Uzbekistan's vocational education system, a four-dimensional

theoretical model for pragmatic competence development in vocational language classes can be proposed. This model integrates speech act competence, sociopragmatic awareness, discourse competence, and intercultural pragmatic sensitivity as its core components, each of which corresponds to distinct instructional goals and pedagogical strategies.

The first dimension, speech act competence, involves the ability to perform and interpret core workplace speech acts requesting, refusing, persuading, negotiating, apologizing, instructing, and evaluating in a manner appropriate to the professional context. Instruction in this dimension should draw on authentic workplace discourse, role-play simulations, and metapragmatic reflection on the social functions of language [11].

The second dimension, sociopragmatic awareness, encompasses sensitivity to the social variables that govern language choice including power relations, social distance, formality levels, and institutional roles. In vocational settings, this means understanding how to address supervisors versus peers, how to communicate with clients versus colleagues, and how to calibrate one's language according to the formality of the communicative context [6].

The third dimension, discourse competence, involves the ability to organize extended communication coherently and cohesively, in both spoken and written modes. This includes the structuring of professional reports, the management of spoken meetings and discussions, the maintenance of topic coherence in extended interactions, and the appropriate use of discourse markers and connective devices [12].

The fourth dimension, intercultural pragmatic sensitivity, is especially relevant in Uzbekistan's multilingual and multicultural professional landscape. It encompasses awareness of how pragmatic norms vary across languages and cultures, and the ability to adjust one's communicative behavior accordingly. This dimension is of growing importance as Uzbek professionals increasingly operate in international business, diplomatic, and academic contexts.

The table below summarizes the four dimensions of the proposed model, together with their key competencies and associated pedagogical approaches:

Dimension	Key Competencies	Pedagogical Approaches
Speech Act Competence	Performing and interpreting professional speech acts; expressing communicative intentions appropriately	Role-play, authentic workplace discourse analysis, speech act drilling, metapragmatic discussion
Sociopragmatic Awareness	Sensitivity to power, formality, and social distance; register selection; workplace politeness norms	Register comparison exercises, case studies, analysis of authentic professional texts
Discourse Competence	Coherent spoken and written professional communication; genre knowledge; cohesive devices	Report writing tasks, meeting simulations, genre analysis, corpus-based instruction
Intercultural Pragmatic Sensitivity	Cross-cultural awareness of pragmatic variation; adaptability in multilingual professional settings	Intercultural communication training, comparative pragmatics analysis, international case studies

The successful implementation of this theoretical model in Uzbekistan's vocational language classrooms depends on several interconnected conditions. Drawing on the research of Knapp, Hall, and Horgan and the pedagogical frameworks of Ellis, the following implementation conditions are identified as essential:

Authentic learning materials: Language instruction should be grounded in authentic professional texts real workplace documents, recorded interactions, and professional communication samples from the relevant vocational field. This ensures that pragmatic instruction is ecologically valid and immediately transferable to professional practice.

Explicit metapragmatic instruction: Learners benefit significantly from explicit explanation of pragmatic norms and conventions, not merely implicit exposure. Teachers should name and analyze communicative strategies, discuss the social implications of linguistic choices, and provide systematic feedback on pragmatic appropriateness.

Task-based and problem-based learning: Instructional tasks should simulate authentic workplace communicative challenges — negotiating a contract, managing a difficult client interaction, writing a professional report under

realistic constraints. Problem-based scenarios activate pragmatic knowledge in contextually meaningful ways.

Reflective practice and self-monitoring: Learners should be encouraged to reflect critically on their own communicative performance, to identify pragmatic strengths and gaps, and to set goals for pragmatic development. Video recording and peer feedback are particularly valuable tools for developing pragmatic self-awareness.

Teacher professional development: Vocational language teachers require targeted professional development in pragmatics-focused instruction. Many teachers are themselves unaware of the systematic nature of pragmatic variation and may inadvertently reinforce inappropriate communicative habits in their learners.

Integration with vocational content: Pragmatic instruction is most effective when fully integrated into vocational content learning rather than treated as a separate language lesson. Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) models provide a productive framework for this integration.

The implementation of these conditions requires sustained institutional commitment from curriculum designers, institutional administrators, and language teachers alike. Crucially, it also requires a shift in assessment culture: if pragmatic competence is to be genuinely developed, it must also be systematically assessed. Current assessment practices in Uzbekistan's vocational education system remain largely oriented toward grammatical accuracy and vocabulary breadth, and do not adequately capture pragmatic performance. The development of pragmatically sensitive assessment tools including communicative performance tasks, discourse completion tests, and situational judgment scenarios is therefore an urgent pedagogical priority.

Conclusion

Pragmatic competence represents a theoretically grounded and practically indispensable dimension of language education in Uzbekistan's vocational education system. Drawing on speech act theory, sociocultural theory, communicative language teaching, and interlanguage pragmatics, a four-dimensional model of pragmatic competence encompassing speech act competence, sociopragmatic awareness, discourse competence, and intercultural pragmatic sensitivity has been proposed as a framework for guiding instructional design and curriculum development in vocational language classes.



The distinctive conditions of the vocational education context in Uzbekistan including the instrumental motivations of learners, the domain-specific communicative demands of different vocational fields, and the multilingual character of the professional environment make a theoretically informed approach to pragmatic instruction both necessary and timely. The national educational reforms currently underway provide an important policy window for integrating pragmatic competence development into vocational language curricula at scale.

Systematic attention to pragmatic competence development in vocational language classes has the potential not only to improve graduates' communicative effectiveness in the workplace but to contribute to broader social and economic development goals by producing professionals who can engage confidently, appropriately, and successfully in diverse professional and intercultural communicative contexts. Future empirical research should investigate the pragmatic development of vocational learners under different instructional conditions, with a view to refining and validating the theoretical model proposed in this article.

References

1. Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan № PD-158 dated October 16, 2024. “On measures to further improve the system of training qualified personnel in vocational education and to introduce international educational programs.”
2. Resolution of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan № PR-4623 dated February 27, 2020. “On measures to further develop the field of pedagogical education.”
3. Kasper G., Rose K. R. *Pragmatic Development in a Second Language*. – Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002. – 292 p.
4. Leech G. *The Pragmatics of Politeness*. – Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. – 343 p.
5. Bachman L. F., Palmer A. S. *Language Assessment in Practice*. – Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010. – 408 p.
6. Brown P., Levinson S. C. *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage*. – Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. – 345 p.



7. Koester A. Workplace Discourse. – London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010. – 240 p.
8. Dörnyei Z., Ushioda E. Teaching and Researching Motivation. 3rd ed. – London: Routledge, 2021. – 456 p.
9. Seidlhofer B. Understanding English as a Lingua Franca. – Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. – 240 p.
10. Ishihara N., Cohen A. D. Teaching and Learning Pragmatics: Where Language and Culture Meet. – Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2010. – 384 p.
11. Bardovi-Harlig K. Developing L2 Pragmatics // Language Learning. – 2013. – Vol. 63. – No. 1. – P. 68–86.
12. Halliday M. A. K., Matthiessen C. M. I. M. Halliday's Introduction to Functional Grammar. 4th ed. – London: Routledge, 2014. – 808 p.