A Study on the Current Situation of College Students' English Pragmatic Competence Based on the CSE

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Abstract: China's Standards of English Language Ability describes in detail the English level and language orientation of students in all learning stages, elaborates on the indicator system at all levels from different aspects, and defines the relevant requirements of level 5 and 6 at the undergraduate stage. However, the English pragmatic competence of college students in China has been concerned by all aspects. This paper investigates the English pragmatic competence of college students with reference to Professor He Ziran's English pragmatic competence test questionnaire, and analyzes the types and causes of pragmatic failure in combination with the real teaching practice.

1. Introduction

The College English Teaching Guide (2017 Edition) states clearly that "goal of College English teaching is to cultivate students' English language ability, enhance theircross-cultural communication awareness and communication ability... so that they can effectively use English in their study, life, social communication and future work" [1]. The *China's Standards of English Language Ability*, released and implemented in 2018, also has a detailed description and definition of English pragmatic competence. Yetactually, China' higher education does not pay enough attention to the cultivation of college students' English pragmatic competence. Coupled with the lack of immersive language environment in students' learning, college students themselves have also ignored the acquisition and improvement of pragmatic competence. With the development of times and the deepening of the opening-up policy, it is particularly important to cultivate college students' pragmatic competence in the new era. Therefore, it is of great practical significance to investigate college students' English pragmatic competence, and analyze the factors affecting the cultivation of English pragmatic competence.

2. Research design

Pragmatic competence refers to the ability of language learners and users to understand and express specific communication intentions by using various knowledge and strategies in the specific context [2]. In short, it is the ability to use language for appropriate communication. [3] In order to make language expression appropriate, language learners must understand the general patterns and principles of language communication. [4]

2.1 Research Subjects

This survey selects freshmen in their second semester as the test subjects, with a total of 120 students. These students are divided into three categories, including 40 art majors, with weak English application ability; 40 engineering students, with average English proficiency; And 40 liberal arts and business students with good English application ability. Choosing students with different language skills and levels as the test subjects can make the test results more scientific and objective.

2.2 Research Instrument

This survey adopts a test paper of a set of 25 questions, with reference to the survey of English pragmatic competence by Professor He Ziran, amaster of pragmaticsin China, and combined with the common English pragmatic situations in daily communication. Multiple choice questions are selected to test students. Each question has four utters. If students answer correctly, they will get one point, and if they give the wrong answer, they will get no point. The total score is 25 points.

At the beginning of the test paper, there is a text prompt for the students participating in the pragmatic competence test. It says this is a questionnaire and they have enough time to complete the questionnaire. If they encounter words they don't understand, they can refer to the dictionary before answering. Students can complete the test paper without mental pressure, so as to ensure that the test results can truly reflect the students' pragmatic competence and the reliability of the test data.

3. Analysis

3.1 Situation of the students' English Pragmatic Competence

120 test questionnaires were distributed and collected in the survey, of which 111 were valid. The results and scores of the test questionnaire are sorted, counted and analyzed. The English pragmatic competence of the tested students is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Results of the English pragmatic competence test

N	Valid	111
	Invalid	9
Mean		11.532
Std. Error of Mean		0.2684
Median		11
Mode		12
Std. Deviation		2.8278
Variance		7.9967
Range		0.185
Skewness		0.0523
Area		13
Minimum		5
Maximum		18
Sum		1280
Observations		111
Confidence (95.0%)		0.5319

As can be seen from table 1, the scores of students participating in the test are not ideal. The total score of the questionnaire is 25 points.The highest score among the tested students is 18 points and

the lowest is 5 points.The average score of all the tested students is 11.532 points. Generally speaking, when the student gets 60% of the total score, he/she is considered passing the test; When the student gets more than 85% or 90% of the total score, he/she can be regarded as gettingA grade. From the results of this questionnaire, there is no student who has achieved A grade.The average score is 11.532, which is only 46.128% of the total score, far below the 60% passing line. On the other hand, the standard deviation of the total score of the college students' English pragmatic competence is 2.8278, which shows that the gap between the students' English pragmatic competence is not big. The median is 11 and the mode is 12. It can be seen that the scores of students are concentrated. The distribution of college students' scoresof pragmatic competence shows that 17 students who got more than 15 points are considered passing the test, accounting for 15.3% of the total. In other words, of the 111 students whose test questionnaires were valid, 94 students,accounting 84.7%, failed. This shows that the college students' general English pragmatic competence is at a relatively low level.

3.2 Statistics of the first-level dimensions of pragmatic competence in CSE

Table 2 shows thetested students' results of first-level dimensions of pragmatic competence in CSE, that is, pragmatic comprehension ability and pragmatic expression ability. There are nine questions about pragmatic comprehension ability and 16 questions about pragmatic expression ability in the test questionnaire. As can be seen from the table below, the average score of the students' pragmatic comprehension ability is 4.02, accounting for 44.6% of the total 9 points; The average of the pragmatic expression ability is 7.51, accounting for 47.0% of its total scores. Generally, if 60% of the score is used to measure whether the students meet the requirements or not, both the tested students' pragmatic comprehension ability and pragmatic expression ability do not reach the pragmatic competent level 5 in CSE. The students' pragmatic comprehension ability and pragmatic expression ability are weak. The standard deviation of pragmatic comprehension ability is 1.40118, which is smaller than the standard deviation of pragmatic expression ability of 2.264. It can be understood that the gap in the dimension of pragmatic comprehension ability among the tested students is smaller than that in the dimension of pragmatic expression ability.

Table 2: Results of first-level dimensions of pragmatic competence

	Pragmatic comprehension ability	Pragmatic expression ability
Average	4.02	7.51
Std. error	0.13299	0.215
Std. deviation	1.40118	2.264
variance	1.9633	5.125
median	4	7
Mode	5	7
minimum	1	2
Maximum	7	13
Scoring rate	44.6%	47.0%
Observations	111	111

3.3 Analysis of Students' Failure of English Pragmatic Competence

3.3.1 Failure of Pragmatic Comprehension

3.3.1.1 Pragmatic Comprehension Failure in Formula Expressions

Question 1 of the test questionnaire tested whether the college students "can understand the attitude expressed by each other in common social occasions" and express their views appropriately, but only 32.43% of the tested students chose the correct option "A. it doesn't matter". Although formula words such as "It doesn't matter" and "Never mind" have appeared in middle school textbooks as early as now, many students still can't understand and distinguish their use contexts. Question 7 is to examine whether the test takers can express the feeling of surprise when encountering a friend he/she has not seen for many years.While most of the tested students failed in understanding and distinguishing the options"Oh!"and "Hey!",as a result, only 40.54% of the students chose the correct option.

3.3.1.2 Pragmatic Comprehension Failure in Attitude Expressions

In English, when people express their approval attitude towards someone or something, there are two ways: positive expression and negative expression. Question 12 tests that students can understand the speaker's attitude in a specific context. Bob and David are old classmates. Bob tells David that he has got a job. David answers "You haven't!". This question requires students to understand the attitude expressed in"you haven't!". However, only 29.73% students chose the correct choice, and most of the students failed in the pragmatic comprehension of the attitude"You haven't!"expressed.

3.3.1.3 Pragmatic Comprehension Failure in Request Expressions

There is such a situation in the test questionnaire: at dinner, A asks "May I have the biscuits?", Actually, in the social occasion provided, when A said "May I have the biscuits?",A is not asking whether he/she can eat cookies or not, but expressing his/her request. However, of the 111 students who participated in the test, only 25 chose the correct option"Yes. Help yourself.", 26 chose"Yes, of course." and 51 misunderstood it as asking.

3.3.2 Failure of Pragmatic Expression

3.3.2.1 Pragmatic Expression Failure of Greeting

Greeting is a way to express politeness and friendliness in daily social life. Questions 9, 14, 16 and 24 in the test questionnaire examine the expression of greeting. For example, in question 9, on the way to the school cinema, Li saw Professor Blake walking in the same direction. What should he say. This is a typical greeting scene in daily social communication. Appropriate greeting words can promote further communication, and inappropriate greeting words will destroy interpersonal relationships. However, 42.34% of the students chose the wrong greeting words. In western countries, such privacy related questions, like "Are you going to the film?", "You're going to the film, aren't you?" and "Where are you going?", are only answered to one's close friends and family. Generally, only greetings or greetings plus appellation are used to greet in daily social communication. In addition, the pragmatic failure of appellation when students say hello is also very common. For example, in question 14, only 21.62% of the students can choose the correct expression "Hi, Dr Johns", 49.55% and 9% of the students use "Hello, teacher" and "Good morning, teacher Johns". This Chinese pragmatic transfer of the tested students will make many foreigners feel confused.

3.3.2.2 Pragmatic Expression Failure of Apology

Apology is an expression used when doing something that should not be done or harming the interest of the other people or party. It is common that Chinese students have the pragmatic expressionfailure of apology. The first reason is that there are two pragmatic expressions of apology in English: "I am sorry" and "Excuse me". The two kinds of apology expressions are different in use contexts and functional meanings. Students are easy to make mistakes based on Chinese expression habits. Secondly, it is also easy to make mistakes in specific social context. For example, in question 2, when you want to apologize for disturbing your boss, you should use "I am sorry to trouble you, Mr. Smith."; In question 4,a student forgot to return the books and apologizes to the professor when he/she see him, the student should say"I'm sorry. I forgot it." In fact, only 38.74% and 45.95% respectively of the tested students chose the correct options of these two questions.

3.3.2.3 Pragmatic Expression Failure of Refusal

Refusal is the act of refusing to accept something that is offered, which is an indirect negation of the wishes of others. Therefore, we should consider not to express our words too abruptly. When Westerners are rejected, they usually hope that the other party can give reasons for the rejection. For example, question 6 examines how to politely refuse the food provided by a friend's mother. It should be "No, thanks. I have just had lunch." However, only 36 of the 111 students chose the correct answer, accounting for only 32.43%.

3.3.2.4 Pragmatic Expression Failure of Introduction

Self-introduction is a way to show oneself to others in daily communication. It is directly related to the first impression of the speaker and whether the communication is smooth or not. Chinese people are gentle and modest when introducing themselves. They often start with "Please allow me to introduce myself...", but people in western countries are generally more simple and clear, so they usually say "Hi, I'm...". In question 10, about self-introduction, the majority of the tested students did not "notice the differences in cultural customs". [5] Only 14of the tested students, accounting for 12.61%, chose the correct answer. 78of the students, about 70.27%, chose "May I introduce myself to you and at the same time I make your acquaintance?"

3.3.2.5 Pragmatic Expression Failure of Request

In daily communication, request is a kind of communicative expression that is used frequently. It is that the speaker asks the listener to do something for himself from the perspective of his own interests. The passenger in question 19 wants to take a taxi to the airport.He just needs to say to the taxi driver "Would you please take me to the airport?". Such expression is both direct and polite. However, about 37% of the tested students chose "Excuse me, I wonder if you mind taking me to the airport?" This kind of complex expression is not suitable for communication contexts where there is a short-term employment relationship and is used to ask or request the other party to perform their job responsibilities.

4. Reasons for College Students' Pragmatic Failure

Based on the above analysis, it can be seen that the types of pragmatic failure of college students are diverse and the situation of pragmatic failure is relatively serious. Analyzing the causes of college students' English pragmatic failure is conducive to improving their English pragmatic awareness and effectively avoiding pragmatic failure. The causes of college students' pragmatic failure include many aspects, including the following main points:

4.1 Students' Pragmatic and Cultural Negative Transfer

Due to the current situation of China's basic education, students are almost completely separated from the real language environment in the process of English learning, and rarely have the opportunity to use the language their learn in class to communicate with others. Moreover, their English language knowledge and skillare almost obtained by mechanical means. The defect of knowledge structure and lack of knowledge mastery easily lead to students' mistakes when using English pragmatic rules.That is, they do not consider the differences between their mother tongue and the target language, directly applying the pragmatic rules of their familiar mother tongue to the context of the target language. In addition, due to the social and cultural differences between China and the west, there must be some differences in the expression between Chinese and English in the face of the same communication occasions and contexts. Vast majority of the college students are born and grow up in China, and Chinese culture and values have long been deeply rooted in them. Therefore, it is easy to use their own culture and values to guide communication activities in daily communication, resulting in English pragmatic failure in communication.

4.2 Teachers' Weak Awareness of Pragmatic Teaching

In order to adapt to the development of the new era, the *Teaching Guide* emphasizes the cultivation of students' English application ability and the enhancement of cross-cultural communication awareness and communication ability [1]. At the same time, the China's Standards of English Language Ability also creatively constructs the English pragmatic competence standards. Yet at present college English teachers' learning of pragmatic competence standards is insufficient and their awareness of cultivating students' pragmatic competence is still weak. English teachers still take the acquisition of knowledge and skills as the main learning objective in classroom teaching, such as familiarity with certain new words, phrases and sentence patterns; For emotional and attitude objectives such as pragmatic ability training, it is rare to see that there are specific design links or presentation steps for the development of pragmatic ability when carrying out teaching design. The classroom is also dominated by teaching activities such as grammar analysis for key sentences, sentence translation and listening and reading exercises. It is undeniable that these teaching activities can promote the construction of English knowledge system, but they have little to do with the cultivation of English pragmatic competence, and are not conducive to the cultivation and improvement of students' English pragmatic competence and cross-cultural communicative competence.

4.3 Impact of Education Management Departments

More than three years have passed since the release and implementation of the China's Standards of English Language Ability in 2018, but many college teachers still do not know its existence.Some college teachers know its existence but have not learned it in detail. The implementation of China's Standards of English Language Ability will help promote the integration of China's language assessment with the world, and will also help improve theEnglish teachers' language assessment literacy and teaching methods. The construction of the pragmatic competence standards is a major feature and innovation of the China's Standards of English Language Ability. The inadequate publicity and organization of the relevant education management departments affect its role in promoting the teaching and evaluation of pragmatic competence to a certain extent.

5. Conclusion

With the development of knowledge economy, the society has higher requirements for the

quality and literacy of contemporary college students. Colleges and universities should give full play to their role in talent training, organize English teachers to learn the spirit of China's Standards of English Language Ability, and make full use of the classroom, inside and outside, to cultivate students' pragmatic competence and communicative competence. While explaining the cultural background and social customs of English speaking countries to students, English teachers should also strengthen college students' mastery and understanding of their own culture and customs, so that students can use English to "tell Chinese stories and spread Chinese voice".[6]

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