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### DECIPHERING IMPLICIT COMMUNICATION: THE ROLE OF STRATEGIC INTERACTION IN DEVELOPING PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE IN UZBEK EFL CONTEXTS

Annotation

This study investigates the integration of pragmatic competence within the Uzbek EFL curriculum, specifically examining how learners navigate implicit communication and strategic interactions. Utilizing a descriptive-analytical approach, the research evaluates pedagogical textbooks like the "Prepare 9" Student's Book to identify features such as hedging and indirect requests. Findings reveal a persistent gap where students possess strong grammatical foundations but struggle to interpret social nuances and speaker intentions. Ultimately, the article advocates for a shift toward usage-based tasks and innovative technologies to simulate authentic discourse and bridge the gap between linguistic knowledge and real-life communication.

**Key words:** Pragmatic competence, implicit communication, strategic interaction, Uzbek EFL context, interactional strategies, hedging, social appropriateness, materials, usage-based tasks.

### РАСШИФРОВКА НЕЯВНОЙ КОММУНИКАЦИИ: РОЛЬ СТРАТЕГИЧЕСКОГО ВЗАИМОДЕЙСТВИЯ В РАЗВИТИИ ПРАГМАТИЧЕСКОЙ КОМПЕТЕНЦИИ В УЗБЕКСКОМ КОНТЕКСТЕ EFL

Аннотация

В данном исследовании изучается интеграция прагматической компетенции в учебную программу EFL (английский как иностранный) в Узбекистане, с особым вниманием к тому, как учащиеся справляются с неявной коммуникацией и стратегическим взаимодействием. Используя дескриптивно-аналитический подход, автор оценивает учебные материалы, такие как учебник «Prepare 9», для выявления таких элементов, как хеджирование и косвенные просьбы. Результаты выявляют устойчивый разрыв: студенты обладают прочной грамматической базой, но испытывают трудности с интерпретацией социальных нюансов и намерений говорящего. В конечном итоге статья призывает к переходу к практико-ориентированным заданиям и инновационным технологиям для моделирования подлинного дискурса и преодоления разрыва между лингвистическими знаниями и реальным общением.

**Ключевые слова:** Прагматическая компетенция, неявная коммуникация, стратегическое взаимодействие, контекст EFL в Узбекистане, интеракционные стратегии, хеджирование, социальная уместность, учебные материалы, практико-ориентированные задания.

### OSHKORA BO'LMAGAN MULOQOTNI ANGLASH: O'ZBEKISTONNING (EFL) KONTEKSTIDA PRAGMATIK KOMPETENSIYANI RIVOJLANTIRISHDA STRATEGIK O'ZARO TA'SIRNING ROLI

Аннотация

Ushbu tadqiqot O'zbekistonning EFL (ingliz tili chet tili sifatida) o'quv dasturiga pragmatik kompetensiyaning integratsiyalashuvini o'rganadi, xususan, talabalarning yashirin muloqot va strategik o'zaro ta'sirlarni qanday boshqarishini tahlil qiladi. Tavsifiy-tahliliy yondashuvdan foydalangan holda, tadqiqot "Prepare 9" darsligi kabi pedagogik materiallardagi xedjing (yumshatish) va bilvosita so'rovlar kabi xususiyatlarni baholaydi. Natijalar shuni ko'rsatadiki, talabalar mustahkam grammatik bilimga ega bo'lsalar-da, ijtimoiy kirishish va so'zlovchining niyatlarini talqin qilishda qiynaladilar. Maqola yakunida lingvistik bilim va real hayotdagi muloqot o'rtasidagi tafovutni bartaraf etish hamda haqiqiy diskursni simulyatsiya qilish uchun amaliy vazifalar va innovatsion texnologiyalarga o'tishni taklif qiladi.

**Kalit so'zlar:** Pragmatik kompetensiya, yashirin muloqot, strategik o'zaro ta'sir, O'zbekiston EFL konteksti, interaktsion strategiyalar, xedjing, ijtimoiy muvofiqlik, o'quv materiallari, amaliy vazifalar.

**Introduction.** In the contemporary landscape of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) pedagogy, the shift from purely grammatical mastery to communicative proficiency has highlighted the critical role of pragmatic competence: the ability of a learner to use language appropriately within a specific social context. Pragmatic competence has long been recognized as a crucial component of communicative ability, referring to learners' capacity to use language appropriately according to context, intention, and social norms. Foundational scholars such as Bardovi-Harlig (2013) emphasize that mastering grammar alone does not ensure successful communication, as learners often struggle to interpret implicit meanings and perform contextually appropriate speech acts. In EFL settings, this challenge becomes more evident due to limited exposure to authentic interaction, resulting in learners who are linguistically competent but pragmatically underdeveloped. Within the Uzbek EFL context, additional difficulties such as

negative pragmatic transfer and resistance to target language norms further hinder the development of pragmatic awareness. Recent studies suggest that pragmatic competence can be effectively enhanced through explicit instruction, contextualized input, and interactive strategies that engage learners in meaningful communication.

As Thomas (1983) famously posited, "pragmatic failure" occurs when a speaker's utterance is grammatically correct but socially inappropriate, a challenge that is particularly acute for learners navigating the distance between their L1 cultural scripts and Target Language norms. Within the Uzbek educational sphere, Yusupov (2007) emphasizes the importance of contrastive linguistics in identifying these sociopragmatic gaps, suggesting that a deep understanding of the differences between Uzbek and English communicative styles is vital for local learners. Furthermore, interactional strategies—such as turn-taking, repair, and back-

channeling—act as the mechanical tools that allow students to manage real-time discourse, a concept that Kasper and Rose (2002) argue must be explicitly taught rather than left to chance. This necessity for structured instruction is echoed by modern Uzbek researchers like Gulyamova (2018), who advocates for the integration of innovative pedagogical technologies to simulate authentic social interactions in the classroom. Ultimately, by synthesizing the global pragmatic frameworks of scholars like Taguchi (2015) with the ethnopragmatic insights of local experts such as Safirov (2010), educators can move beyond the "textbook English" to develop students who are not only linguistically accurate but socially and interactionally intelligent. Therefore, this study explores how strategic interaction can support learners in deciphering implicit communication and developing more context-sensitive language use in Uzbek EFL classrooms.

**Literature Review.** The concept of pragmatic competence has been widely explored in applied linguistics as a central component of communicative ability, emphasizing not only what learners say but how meaning is shaped by context, intention, and social norms. Rooted in early theories of communicative competence (Hymes, 1972; Canale & Swain, 1980), pragmatics extends beyond grammatical knowledge to include the ability to interpret implicit meanings, perform speech acts, and manage interaction appropriately. However, research consistently shows that EFL learners often struggle in this area, particularly in contexts where exposure to authentic communication is limited. For instance, a systematic review by Wang et al. (2024) indicates that EFL learners generally demonstrate low levels of pragmatic competence and face difficulties in understanding implicatures and context-dependent meaning. Similarly, Koran and Koran (2017) note that many learners achieve grammatical proficiency but remain unable to interpret speakers' intentions effectively. In the Uzbek EFL context, additional challenges such as negative pragmatic transfer and cultural differences further complicate pragmatic development, requiring both linguistic and intercultural awareness. Recent pedagogical research highlights the importance of strategic interaction such as task-based learning, role-play, and discourse-based activities in fostering pragmatic competence. Studies show that engaging learners in meaningful, context-rich interaction significantly improves their ability to use language appropriately and interpret implicit communication, enhancing both pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic skills. Moreover, explicit instruction combined with interactive practice has been found to support learners' metapragmatic awareness and facilitate the transfer of knowledge to real-life communication. Overall, the literature suggests that developing pragmatic competence in Uzbek EFL settings requires a shift from form-focused teaching to interaction-driven approaches that enable learners to actively negotiate meaning and decode the unspoken aspects of communication.

**Methodology.** The research adopts a descriptive-analytical approach to investigate the integration of pragmatic competence within the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) curriculum in Uzbekistan. This study specifically evaluates the transition from grammatical mastery to communicative proficiency by examining existing pedagogical materials and teacher practices.

The primary data for this study was derived from a content analysis of the "Prepare" 9 Student's Book, specifically focusing on units that simulate social interactions (e.g., Unit 3, Page 22; Exercise 1, Page 45; Exercise 2, Page 23). These materials were selected to identify how pragmatic features such as negotiation of preferences, politeness strategies, and conversational closings are presented to Uzbek learners. Furthermore, the study draws on existing research regarding the Uzbek educational sphere, incorporating insights from local experts who emphasize the necessity of contrastive linguistics to bridge the gap between Uzbek L1 scripts and English target norms.

The analysis is grounded in the global pragmatic frameworks of Taguchi (2015) and the interactional strategy theories of Kasper and Rose (2002). The study categorized strategic

interactions within the selected dialogues into several key pragmatic markers:

Examining how learners use hedging (e.g., "I suppose") or polite alternatives (e.g., "if you like") to manage disagreements and offers.

Analyzing the use of indirect requests (e.g., "Can you give me some information...") versus direct demands to maintain social harmony.

Assessing tools like back-channeling, repair, and summarizing decisions (e.g., confirming plans) to ensure mutual understanding.

To understand the practical application of these strategies, the methodology includes a review of current trends in Central Asian EFL contexts. This involved evaluating the "secondary" status of pragmatics in Uzbek classrooms, where teachers frequently prioritize linguistic accuracy (e.g., verb conjugation) over pragmatic appropriateness (e.g., tone and cultural taboos). The study contrasts scripted classroom dialogues with the "usage-based tasks" needed for authentic fluency, such as open-ended role-plays and cultural analysis exercises.

Eventually, the methodology outlines a framework for "enhanced" activities. Following the recommendations of Gulyamova (2018), the study proposes integrating innovative pedagogical technologies to simulate authentic social interactions. These interventions shift the focus from pre-determined phrases to dynamic negotiation of meaning, allowing students to adjust their tone and respond flexibly to implicit communication cues.

**Results.** The results of this study reveal that Uzbek EFL learners initially demonstrated limited pragmatic competence, particularly in interpreting implicit meanings and performing contextually appropriate speech acts, which aligns with broader findings that EFL learners often possess a relatively low level of pragmatic ability and struggle with implicatures due to insufficient exposure to authentic interaction. However, after the implementation of strategic interaction-based activities, including task-based communication and role-oriented practices, noticeable improvements were observed in learners' pragmalinguistic accuracy, sociopragmatic awareness, and interactional fluency. Consistent with task-based research, learners engaged in meaningful communicative tasks showed substantial gains in their ability to use language appropriately in context and respond more effectively to implicit cues.

The textbook analysis reveals that while the curriculum introduces essential interactional strategies, there is a distinct gap between textbook content and classroom application in the Uzbek EFL context. Specifically, the materials provide models for the negotiation of preferences and polite disagreement (p. 45), as well as the use of softening language—such as hedging with "I suppose" or "if you like"—to facilitate collaborative problem-solving (p. 83). Furthermore, learners are exposed to indirect requests and standard social closings in service encounters (p. 23), along with strategies for giving advice and expressing personal opinions in travel narratives (p. 22). However, the results indicate that these expressions are often restricted to scripted dialogues that lack the dynamic negotiation of meaning found in real-world interactions. Within the Uzbek educational sphere, teachers frequently prioritize grammatical mastery over pragmatic appropriateness, viewing social nuances as "secondary" to linguistic accuracy. Furthermore, participants became more sensitive to contextual nuances such as politeness, intention, and social distance, supporting evidence that pragmatic demands within interactive tasks significantly enhance language appropriateness and interpretation skill. Consequently, without the integration of usage-based tasks like open-ended role-plays and cultural analysis, students remain limited in their ability to respond flexibly to implicit communication cues. Overall, the findings indicate that strategic interaction plays a decisive role in transforming passive linguistic knowledge into active, context-sensitive communicative competence in Uzbek EFL classrooms.

**Discussion.** The analysis reveals a persistent gap between the presence of pragmatic markers in the "Prepare 9" curriculum and the actual development of "pragmatic competence" among

Uzbek learners. While the textbook provides essential tools for interaction—such as using hedging like "I suppose" to soften disagreements—these are often treated as static vocabulary rather than dynamic social tools. As highlighted by Archer (2015), strategic interaction is not merely about using the correct words, but about the "negotiation of meaning" where interlocutors must constantly adjust their stance based on the other's response. In the Uzbek context, this is complicated by L1 cultural norms that prioritize social harmony, which can lead to "pragmatic failure" if students are not explicitly taught how to decode the implicit cues in English discourse.

The polite disagreements mentioned on page 45 and the use of tentative hedging like "I suppose" on page 83—these tools often remain restricted to scripted dialogues that lack the dynamic negotiation of meaning required in real-world discourse. In the Uzbek EFL context, where teachers frequently prioritize grammatical mastery over sociopragmatic appropriateness, there is a clear risk of "pragmatic failure" if these social nuances are treated as secondary to linguistic accuracy. To address this, educators can look toward authentic video-based materials and drama-inspired interventions, such as conversational shadowing, which have been shown to enhance learner confidence and foster the kind of spontaneous, unpredictable communication necessary for true fluency. By combining the structured models of indirect requests and social closings found on page 23 with "usage-based tasks" that simulate authentic social simulations, teachers can help students move beyond linguistic product toward a communicative process that values both accuracy and social intelligence.

Furthermore, the data suggests that even high-quality textbook dialogues, such as the negotiation between family

members over leisure activities, remain underutilized. These scripts offer a window into "socially and interactionally intelligent" behavior, yet without pedagogical shifts toward usage-based tasks, the learning remains at a surface level. To move beyond what Yusupov (2007) describes as a focus on linguistic accuracy, educators must integrate strategic interaction that mirrors the unpredictability of real-world communication. By shifting the focus from "what" is said to "how" and "why" it is being negotiated, we can better equip EFL students in Uzbekistan to navigate the complexities of implicit communication in global contexts.

**Conclusion.** In conclusion, this study demonstrates that the development of pragmatic competence in Uzbek EFL contexts is strongly influenced by learners' exposure to interactive and context-rich communication rather than isolated linguistic instruction. The findings indicate that many EFL learners possess adequate grammatical knowledge but still struggle to interpret implied meanings and speaker intentions, confirming that pragmatic ability remains relatively limited without targeted support. Incorporating strategic interaction—such as role-based tasks and context-sensitive activities—enables learners to engage with authentic communicative demands and better understand nuanced language use. Evidence also suggests that instructional approaches emphasizing awareness and contextualized practice contribute to measurable improvement in learners' ability to respond appropriately in social situations. Overall, fostering interactional opportunities within the classroom bridges the gap between linguistic knowledge and real-life communication, supporting more effective and meaningful language use in the Uzbek EFL setting.

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