

## AUTHENTIC MATERIALS FOR TEACHING PRAGMALINGUISTIC COMPETENCE IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS

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**Abstract:** Pragmalinguistic competence, as a core dimension of communicative competence, involves the ability to use linguistic resources appropriately to perform speech acts such as requests, refusals, apologies, and compliments. While traditional textbooks focus on grammatical and lexical accuracy, they often neglect authentic contextualized usage, leading to pragmatic failures in intercultural communication. This study investigates the role of authentic materials—real-life texts, audiovisual resources, and digital content—in enhancing learners’ pragmalinguistic competence in foreign language classrooms. Using a quasi-experimental design with university-level English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, the study compares the effectiveness of textbook-only instruction with instruction enriched by authentic materials. Data collection methods included classroom observations, pre- and post-tests on pragmatic performance, and learner interviews. Results demonstrate that authentic materials significantly improved learners’ ability to interpret and produce pragmalinguistically appropriate speech acts, particularly in contexts involving politeness and indirectness. The discussion highlights the pedagogical implications of integrating authentic resources to foster intercultural awareness and pragmatic competence. The study concludes that authentic materials are not supplementary but essential for equipping learners with the communicative tools necessary for real-world interactions. Recommendations for practice and further research are provided.

**Keywords:** pragmalinguistics, authentic materials, EFL teaching, communicative competence, speech acts

### Introduction

#### *Background of the Study*

Communicative competence, as defined by Canale and Swain (1980), comprises grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competencies. Among these, pragmalinguistic competence plays a vital role, as it determines learners’ ability to employ linguistic forms appropriately to perform speech acts in context (Kasper & Blum-Kulka, 1993). Pragmalinguistics covers the linguistic resources available for expressing pragmatic meaning, such as modal verbs in requests, formulaic expressions for apologies, and intonation patterns that convey politeness.

Language learners who acquire grammar and vocabulary without pragmalinguistic awareness often struggle to participate effectively in intercultural communication. For example, a grammatically correct but pragmatically inappropriate refusal may be perceived as rude, while an overly direct request can damage interpersonal relationships. This mismatch is frequently labeled as “pragmatic failure” (Thomas, 1983), which can cause communication breakdowns more severe than grammatical errors.

#### **Role of Authentic Materials**

Authentic materials—texts, videos, conversations, and media produced for real-life purposes rather than pedagogical simplification—offer learners opportunities to observe language in genuine contexts (Gilmore, 2007). Unlike textbook dialogues that often present sanitized and idealized interactions, authentic materials expose learners to natural discourse, including hesitation markers, indirectness, cultural norms of politeness, and speech act variation.

Previous studies (Ishihara & Cohen, 2010; Martinez-Flor & Usó-Juan, 2010) suggest that authentic input fosters pragmatic development by providing learners with models of how native and proficient speakers use language to accomplish communicative goals. However, in many EFL contexts, teaching pragmalinguistics remains marginalized, partly due to teachers' reliance on textbooks and lack of training in pragmatics pedagogy.

### Research Problem

Despite the recognized importance of pragmalinguistic competence, many language classrooms continue to prioritize structural aspects of language over pragmatic appropriateness. Learners, as a result, often enter academic or professional environments where their pragmatic insufficiency hinders effective communication. There is a need for empirical research that demonstrates the pedagogical value of authentic materials in addressing this gap.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of authentic materials on the development of pragmalinguistic competence among EFL learners. Specifically, it explores whether incorporating real-life texts and audiovisual resources into classroom instruction improves learners' ability to perform speech acts appropriately in various contexts.

### Research Questions

1. To what extent do authentic materials enhance EFL learners' pragmalinguistic competence compared to traditional textbook-based instruction?
2. Which aspects of pragmalinguistic competence (e.g., requests, apologies, refusals, compliments) show the greatest improvement through exposure to authentic input?
3. How do learners perceive the usefulness and challenges of authentic materials in learning pragmalinguistic competence?

### Methodology

#### *Research Design*

This study employed a **quasi-experimental mixed-methods design**, combining quantitative pre- and post-tests with qualitative observations and interviews. Two intact classes of university-level EFL students were selected: one serving as the experimental group (authentic-materials-based instruction) and the other as the control group (traditional textbook instruction).

### Participants

The participants were 60 undergraduate students majoring in English at a state university in Uzbekistan. They were in their second year of study, with intermediate proficiency (B1–B2 levels on the CEFR). The experimental group consisted of 30 students (17 female, 13 male), while the control group consisted of 30 students (15 female, 15 male). All participants had similar exposure to English through prior schooling but limited real-life interaction with native speakers.

### Instructional Materials

- **Control group:** Followed a standard EFL textbook emphasizing grammar, vocabulary, and simplified dialogues. Pragmatic aspects were minimally addressed.
- **Experimental group:** Received instruction enriched with authentic materials, including:
  - Video clips from films, interviews, and TV shows demonstrating speech acts in context
  - Social media posts and comments reflecting everyday communication
  - Authentic letters and emails (formal and informal)
  - News broadcasts and radio dialogues
  - Transcripts of real conversations from corpora such as MICASE (Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English)

### Procedure

Over 12 weeks, both groups received four hours of instruction per week. The experimental group's lessons integrated authentic materials through tasks such as:

- **Discourse analysis:** Identifying politeness markers, indirectness, and speech act strategies in authentic dialogues.
- **Role-plays:** Reenacting conversations from films or adapting them to local contexts.
- **Comparative tasks:** Contrasting textbook dialogues with authentic interactions to notice differences.
- **Production tasks:** Writing authentic-style emails or engaging in role-play scenarios with feedback.

The control group engaged in parallel activities but exclusively used textbook materials.

### Data Collection Instruments

1. **Pragmatic pre- and post-tests:** Students completed Discourse Completion Tests (DCTs) requiring them to respond to hypothetical situations involving requests, refusals, apologies, and compliments. Responses were rated for pragmalinguistic appropriateness by three trained raters.
2. **Observations:** Classroom interactions were observed to assess engagement and strategy use.
3. **Semi-structured interviews:** Conducted with 10 randomly selected students from each group to capture perceptions of learning pragmatics.

### Data Analysis

Quantitative data (test scores) were analyzed using paired-sample t-tests and ANOVA to determine improvements. Qualitative data (observations and interviews) were coded thematically to identify patterns in learner perceptions and behaviors.

### Results

#### Quantitative Findings

##### 1. Overall Improvement

- The experimental group's mean post-test score increased by 32%, compared to a 10% increase in the control group.
- Statistical analysis revealed a significant difference between groups ( $p < 0.01$ ), indicating that authentic materials had a substantial effect on pragmalinguistic competence.

##### 2. Speech Act Performance

- **Requests:** Experimental group improved by 40%, especially in using indirect strategies ("Could you possibly...?").
- **Apologies:** Increased use of formulaic expressions ("I'm terribly sorry") and mitigation devices.
- **Refusals:** Learners adopted culturally appropriate indirect refusals rather than blunt "No."
- **Compliments/Responses:** Experimental group displayed greater variety and appropriateness in compliment exchanges.

##### 3. Control Group Results

- Improvements were limited to grammatical accuracy of responses rather than pragmatic appropriateness. Learners often produced direct, literal speech acts without considering politeness norms.

#### Qualitative Findings

##### 1. Learner Engagement

- Observations showed higher engagement in the experimental group, with students reporting enjoyment in analyzing movie dialogues and social media texts.

##### 2. Perceptions of Authentic Materials

- Most learners in the experimental group stated that authentic materials were more motivating and relevant to real-life communication.

○ Some noted challenges in understanding fast speech and cultural references, but they viewed these as learning opportunities.

### 3. Teacher Perspective

○ Instructors observed that authentic materials encouraged learners to notice subtle features of language use often overlooked in textbooks.

### Discussion

#### *Interpretation of Findings*

The findings confirm that authentic materials significantly enhance learners' pragmalinguistic competence. The experimental group not only achieved higher scores in pragmatic performance but also demonstrated a broader range of speech act strategies. This aligns with Gilmore (2007), who argued that authentic input exposes learners to discourse features absent from textbooks.

The improvement in requests and refusals reflects learners' increased awareness of indirectness—a key dimension of pragmalinguistics in English. For instance, learners shifted from "Give me your notes" to "I wonder if you could share your notes with me," demonstrating awareness of politeness and face-saving strategies.

### Theoretical Implications

The study supports Schmidt's (1990) **Noticing Hypothesis**, suggesting that exposure to authentic input raises learners' awareness of pragmalinguistic forms. Authentic materials act as "noticing triggers" that highlight linguistic choices embedded in context.

Furthermore, the findings reinforce the view of pragmatics as teachable rather than naturally acquired, particularly in EFL contexts where learners have limited access to real-life communication.

### Pedagogical Implications

1. **Curriculum Design:** Authentic materials should not be seen as supplementary but integrated into the core curriculum.

2. **Teacher Training:** Teachers require preparation to select, adapt, and exploit authentic resources effectively.

3. **Task Design:** Activities should combine analysis (awareness-raising) with practice (role-plays, writing tasks) to ensure pragmatic transfer.

4. **Technology Integration:** Online platforms and corpora provide abundant authentic input and should be systematically used.

### Limitations

- The study was limited to one institution and a relatively small sample size.
- The duration (12 weeks) may not capture long-term pragmatic development.
- Cultural bias in selecting authentic materials (mostly Anglo-American) may limit transferability to other intercultural contexts.

### Suggestions for Future Research

- Longitudinal studies examining sustained pragmatic growth through authentic input.
- Comparative studies across different languages and cultural contexts.
- Investigation of digital authentic materials (e.g., TikTok, YouTube, online forums) in teaching pragmalinguistics.

### Conclusion

This study demonstrates that authentic materials significantly enhance EFL learners' pragmalinguistic competence, enabling them to perform speech acts more appropriately in intercultural communication. Learners exposed to authentic input improved their use of indirectness, politeness markers, and formulaic expressions, whereas textbook-only learners showed limited pragmatic growth. Authentic resources provide learners with rich input that

mirrors real-life discourse, thereby bridging the gap between classroom learning and actual communication.

The findings underscore the pedagogical necessity of integrating authentic materials into language teaching. Teachers should be encouraged to adopt film dialogues, social media texts, and real correspondence as regular teaching tools. Ultimately, fostering pragmalinguistic competence through authentic input equips learners not only with linguistic accuracy but also with communicative appropriateness—an essential skill for global citizenship.

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