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语用能力

外语教学的瓶颈

PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE:
THE BOTTLENECK OF FL/EFL TEACHING

彭庆华◎著

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Foreword

The purpose of the research in this book is to adopt a cognitive approach to the construct of pragmatic competence in the FL/EFL context. What has propelled the writer to undertake the research is: 1. The concept of communicative competence has been one of the most influential theoretical developments in second or foreign language education. It has helped redefine the instructional objectives, the target language proficiency and the criteria for assessing second or foreign language learning for the past over 30 years. Various models have appeared for interpreting the components of communicative competence. A brief literature review has revealed that the cause for the variation and controversy of the components of communicative competence lies in the different interpretations of pragmatic competence, which is one of two core components of communicative competence (the other being linguistic competence). 2. In recent studies on foreign language teaching, researchers (Swender and Duncan 1999, Swaffar, Kramsch, Schulz, et al. 2006; Liu Runqin & Liu Si, 2005; Dai Weidong, 2008; Kuang Fangtao, 2010; et al.) maintain that since educators and practitioners fail to fully recognize the meaning and the nature of communicative competence, foreign language teaching and learning “consumes much time, but produces little effect”. This in fact has proved to contribute to an incomplete interpretation of pragmatic competence. 3. Pragmatic competence, one of the core components of

communicative competence, which is not only related to every level of verbal communication, but also affects the ultimate attainment of L2 language proficiency, plays a critical role in successful learning of a second or foreign language. Pragmatic acquisition and development is one of the most serious challenges confronting current foreign language education, and therefore, the first and foremost task in meeting this challenge is to explore a systematic interpretation and specification of pragmatic competence.

Having conducted an intensive investigation into the pragmatic components in various models of communicative competence and the interpretations of language proficiency in applied linguistics and SLA, the research presented in the book addresses the construct of pragmatic competence using a cognitive approach which is based on Kecskes's (2010) socio-cognitive approach to pragmatics (SCA). SCA, an integration of the pragmatic view and the cognitive view of language production and comprehension, reflects the current trend toward the exploration of pragmatics from the perspective of cognitive linguistics in contemporary linguistics. As Lu Guoqiang (2008) says in his research, we do not intend to challenge any traditional models, but what we attempt to do is to reconsider the components of pragmatic competence from a different angle. We attempt to provide a more describable and decomposable model of pragmatic construct with a view to gaining a better understanding of communicative competence so that it can effectively serve as a theoretical guide in defining the objectives, content and materials of FL/EFL language education.

The research of this book is composed of the following main parts: 1. Historical development and issues of pragmatic competence in second or foreign language education. 2. Research on pragmatic competence in various formulations of communicative competence and interpretations of L2 language proficiency. 3. Theoretical analysis and explanation for the cognitive approach to the construct of pragmatic competence. 4. Empirical evidence for

further supporting this cognitive approach to the construct of pragmatic competence.

An overview of the historical development of pragmatic competence in second or foreign language education shows that the issue of pragmatic competence has shifted from the periphery to the core of applied linguistics and SLA in the last twenty years or more. The evidence in supporting this proposition sheds light on the research of interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) which is concerned with L2 learners' use and acquisition of pragmatic knowledge of their target language. However, in spite of the more-than-two-decades-long central concern of pragmatic competence in second or foreign language education, a comprehensive understanding of L2 pragmatic competence is still lacking due to the fact that most of the studies have centered only on oral communication skills, oral speech proficiency, and conversational implicature in disregard of written work or written discourse, or on comparisons of L2 learners' acquisition and development of pragmatic competence in their home country versus that in the target country, or on L2 learners' pragmatic learning and training in SLA context. Studies on teaching and learning of pragmatics in FL/EFL context are relatively inadequate. Thus, it is easy for us to see that the issue of pragmatic competence is, to some extent, the cause for time-consuming and ineffective foreign language teaching.

In light of the findings from the present research, it seems that there has been a conflict or gap between traditional models of communicative competence and recent interpretations of L2 language proficiency, that is, the construct of pragmatic competence in the models of communicative competence is formulated by relying mainly on pragmatic theories. On the contrary, there is a great expectation for the cognitive concern in the interpretations of L2 language proficiency. Coincidentally, the solution to the conflict can find the theoretical support in the current pragmatics, where there is a trend of approaching pragmatics from cognition and cognitive linguistics. Then, an ex-

tended construct of pragmatic competence containing not only discourse competence, illocutionary competence, sociolinguistic competence, but also contextualized competence, intercultural competence, and metaphorical competence is assumed to be theoretically grounded in the cognitive view of context and the model of meaning value of words in Kecskes's SCA.

Usually, traditional pragmatic theories overemphasize the societal and externalist context in language production and comprehension disregarding the individual's prior context and internalist context. They stress the context-dependence of language use (Wang Chuming, 2003; Kecskes, 2008). Kecskes argues for a comprehensive view of context where a holistic interpretation of an utterance can be achieved. He focuses mainly on the internalist view of context, i. e., the description of prior knowledge or experience embedded in lexical units in meaning construction. His formulation of context not only makes a contribution to the theory of context, but also lays the theoretical foundations to the model of the meaning value of words. In his opinion, words and linguistic expressions have word-specific semantic properties and culture-specific conceptual properties, and they function as the interface between the conceptual and the linguistic level in the relationship between the meaning construction system and the prompting construction system. The meanings of words are rooted in human cognitive experience, i. e., the experience of cultural, social, mental and physical worlds. They form conceptual knowledge and conceptual systems that conversely restrain the appropriate use of language. Kecskes's views of context, meaning value of words, and conceptual system have been demonstrated as theoretical and practical approaches to the extended pragmatic constructs of contextualized competence, intercultural competence and metaphorical competence. They have proved that the expanded pragmatic constructs are the difficult but important points in advanced foreign language learning.

In order to be further confirmatory of the assumption and the approach

in this research, a questionnaire and a test have been designed for an experimental test of the cognitive factors in the extended constructs of pragmatic competence based on Ran Yongping (2006) and Hwang's (2009) studies, and the views of internal context, meaning value of words adopted in this study. The test was administered to university-level English majors and first-year English major postgraduates at the end of the second semester of the school year in that the freshmen would have one year of university study experience. The data and results of the test show that the problems aforementioned exist in current Chinese EFL teaching, and provide the implications for solving the problems.

As one of the core components of communicative competence, pragmatic competence is more complicated to interpret and describe compared with linguistic or grammatical competence, and even more difficult to teach in FL/EFL context as the title of the book suggests. The author believes that there are many faults and loopholes in the accomplishment of such a complex research, and any criticism and comment will be precious helpful to him in the further enquiry of this area. The author is hoping this preliminary finding in the book may throw light on the reform of EFL teaching which scholars and researchers consider needs to redefine and reevaluate the instructional objectives, course curriculum and assessing criteria.

As the study in the book is an interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary program and its complexities are a great challenge to the author, the accomplishment is attributed to help and support from a large number of people to whom the author would like to express his sincerest gratitude. First of all, the author is very grateful to his Ph. D. supervisor, Professor Yu Liming, whose insightful guidance, brainstorming discussions, and suggestions have helped him through the challenging and tedious work of the research. Secondly, the author would also like to extend his appreciation to Ms. Joan Boulerice for her precious help of proofreading the earlier version of the man-

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Peng Qinghua

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Chapter One Introduction

It is assumed in this research that, of various issues existing in current Chinese EFL teaching, a comprehensive construct of pragmatic competence in communicative competence is a matter of very grave concern to the success of English learning and the ultimate attainment of English proficiency. The assumption comes from the fact that although the concept of communicative competence has been introduced into second or foreign language teaching and research serving as guiding constructs for the design of communicative competence as the overall goal of language teaching and assessment (Rose and Kasper, 2001: 1) over the past 30 years, there are still full of controversies and different interpretations about its componential constituents. Of these various interpretations, there exist inadequate or misleading understandings of communicative competence in the current second or foreign language teaching and research according to Swender & Duncan (1999), Swaffar, Kramsch, Schulz, et al. (2006), which greatly impacts the establishment of the instructional objectives and the practical teaching of the target language. The assumption of the research also stems from the difficulty of imparting pragmatic knowledge to the students in EFL context because EFL teaching is largely at a disadvantage in pragmatic acquisition and development as compared to ESL teaching (Hwang, 2009: 22). Then, the assumption holds that teaching pragmatic competence not only increases students' target lan-

guage proficiency, but also relates to the improvement of their cognitive ability and critical thinking as it can be considered a way of promoting students to have a better knowledge of western and Chinese culture, and a way of helping students to cultivate thinking pattern of the target language. With the assumption, we attempt to make an exploration of pragmatic competence based on the recent research achievements of contemporary linguistics and applied linguistics. This research is seeking to adopt a cognitive approach to the construct of pragmatic competence in FL/EFL context in order to provide some implications for the theoretical and practical foundations in Chinese EFL teaching and research.

1.1 Research background

Having studied the present topic over the past 4 years, we have found that many researchers and scholars (Liu Shaozhong, 1997; Wang Chuming, 2003; Liu Runqin & Liu Si, 2005; Liu Jianda, 2007; Dai Weidong, 2008; Zhang Chong, 2010; Kuang Fangtao, 2010; Huang Yuanshen, 2010; Judd, 1999; Swender & Duncan, 1999; Rose & Kasper, 2001; Kasper & Rose, 2002; Barron, 2003; Swaffar, Kramersch, & Schulz, 2006; Soler & Martinez-Flor, 2008; Hwang, 2009; et al.) both at home and abroad believe, to a large extent, that pragmatic competence, as one of the two core components in language or communicative competence, not only runs a close parallel to linguistic competence, but also takes the top level of second or foreign language (L2/FL) learners' communicative competence. The role of pragmatic competence in conceptualizing communicative competence and in mastering a L2/FL language exhibits a clear contrast to its practice and effect in actual L2/FL language education. With the strong tradition of memorization and test-driven language education, what the Chinese EFL teaching has been ig-