

## THE CULTIVATION METHODS OF CHINESE PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE TO BULGARIAN COLLEGE STUDENTS

**Juling HE**

Xi'an Technological University  
CHINA

**Abstract:** Pragmatic competence is an important measure of the effectiveness of Chinese teaching and is also a decisive factor in the strength of intercultural communication. From different aspects which are culturists of pragmatic competence, pragmatic teaching contents, Chinese context construction and evaluation system, the paper proposes four cultivating methods about Chinese pragmatic competence to Bulgarian college students, which are improving the intercultural pragmatic competence of teachers, choosing appropriate textbooks and adding pragmatic contents, Strengthening the construction of contexts in and out of class, integrating pragmatic competence assessment into the evaluation system.

**Keywords:** *pragmatic competence, intercultural communication, context, evaluation system*

### 1. Introduction

Pragmatic competence is a decisive factor in the success of cross-cultural communication. To put it simply, pragmatic competence is the ability to use language properly in a particular context. This ability includes three aspects: identifying contexts, understanding accurately, and expressing oneself properly. Pragmatic competence, especially intercultural pragmatic competence, is not only an important measure of the teaching effect of foreign language, but also an important factor in determining the strength of cross-cultural communication. Bulgaria is a country which has an earlier and more experienced teaching experience in Chinese teaching, thus the level of the college students' Chinese knowledge is not bad, but their Chinese pragmatic competence is not satisfied as thought. According to incomplete statistics, more than 90 percent of college students in Bulgaria have problems in terms of Chinese pragmatics, which is embodied in inappropriate speech ACTS, e.g. abrupt rejection, inappropriate requests, strange response, excessive compliments, and awkward apologies. They would say something like following sentence:

Teacher : *Tom, come and taste the mooncakes.*

Student: *I do not want to eat.*

This is the wrong way to refuse, although there is no grammatical error in the sentence. In addition, almost all Bulgarian students have poor pragmatic competence in written Chinese, such as Chinese letters writing. Some students do not make many grammatical mistakes, but they have problems with the appropriateness of their written Chinese. Based on rich Chinese teaching experience of writer, the paper will discuss the cultivation methods of Chinese Pragmatic competence to Bulgarian college students.

## **2. To improve teachers ' Chinese pragmatic competence**

As the instructor and evaluator of students' learning of second language, teachers play an irreplaceable role in the cultivation of students' pragmatic ability. Therefore, the cultivation of students' pragmatic ability should start from the improvement of teachers' intercultural pragmatic ability, which is also the case for Chinese teaching in Bulgaria.

### **2.1. Teachers should fully grasp Chinese culture and Chinese pragmatic knowledge.**

There are two types of Chinese teachers in Bulgarian universities: native Bulgarian teachers and Chinese teachers. Chinese teachers must pass assessment and selection before taking the post. They are relatively solid and reliable in both language teaching ability and Chinese culture. Even so, it is possible to encounter unexpected problems about Chinese culture asked by Bulgarian students. Therefore, Chinese dispatched teachers should have a comprehensive and systematic understanding of Chinese culture. To native Bulgarian Chinese teachers, it is not easy to fully understand Chinese culture, and is even more difficult to have systematic Chinese cultural and Chinese pragmatic knowledge. For example, most of native Chinese teachers are not familiar with the special cultural connotations of some Chinese words, such as some common sayings and proverbs in Chinese. They are not very clear about the special use of Chinese modal words with strong pragmatic functions e.g *le*, *ne*, *a*, *ya*, *ma*, *ba*. They do not master accurately about the expressions of some speech ACTS in Chinese. In addition, they do not pay much attention about the difference of cognitive modes. Some teachers do not realize the necessary connection between language teaching and the mastery of pragmatic cultural knowledge, so they do not pay attention to pragmatic cultural teaching in their minds, nor do they improve their own Chinese cultural attainment and master their Chinese pragmatic knowledge consciously.

### **2.2. Teachers should have higher intercultural pragmatic competence.**

As the cultivation of students' Chinese pragmatic ability, both native

teachers and Chinese teachers must have considerable intercultural pragmatic ability. Bachman (1990) has pointed out that pragmatic competence is not equal to grammatical knowledge or textual knowledge, but a kind of knowledge and ability interacting with linguistic knowledge such as grammar. Native Chinese teachers may not be able to use Chinese properly even if they are good at Chinese grammar, vocabulary and listening. For example, they would reply with thanks in following way:

——*Thanks for caring!*

——*Yeah, ok*

Therefore, even with high language proficiency, native Chinese teachers still need to improve their Chinese pragmatic competence consciously. It requires all of Chinese teachers not only to master rich Chinese cultural knowledge, but also to be very familiar with the similarities and differences between Chinese and Bulgarian culture, so as to reduce pragmatic failures and ensure the smooth progress of cross-cultural communication. Native Bulgarian teachers can take advantage of the opportunities offered by the government and universities to go to China for further study, to put themselves in the Chinese cultural environment and get a more accurate understanding of the connotation of Chinese culture and its differences with Bulgarian culture, so as to improve their intercultural pragmatic ability. For Chinese teachers in Bulgaria, they need to have some understanding of Bulgarian culture and be familiar with the differences and similarities between the two cultures. For example, Bulgarian people are used to shaking their head to indicate *Yes* and nodding to indicate *No*. In this way, they may view problems in Chinese language communication from the perspective of Chinese students.

### **3. To choose appropriate Chinese pragmatic teaching materials and increase pragmatic contents**

#### **3.1. To select appropriate Chinese pragmatic teaching materials**

According to the survey, most Chinese textbooks used in Bulgaria universities are determined by teachers, such like textbooks published by Beijing language and culture university press e.g. *Chinese Course* (Ed. Yang Jizhou) *Spoken Chinese Crash Course* (Ed. Ma Jianfei) *Chinese Writing Course* (Ed. Zhao Jianhua) *Chinese Listening Course* (Ed. Yang Xuemei) *Ancient Chinese Textbook* (Ed. Xu Zongcai) *Bridge— Practical Chinese Tutorial* (Ed. Chen Zhuo), and books published by publishing house of Peking University e.g. *Practical Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language* (Ed. Xu Ziliang & Wu Renfu), *Boya Chinese* (Ed. Li Xiaoqi & Zhang Mingying). There are some other literary and cultural teaching

materials, such as *Introduction to the history of Chinese characters* and *General Theory of Chinese Literature*. According to the use of these textbooks and students' feedback, these textbooks are not a very reliable source of pragmatic input as many other second language textbooks. There are three reasons for it: 1) There is too little pragmatic information in the textbook. 2) Lack of explicit discussion of pragmatic knowledge. 3) Example sentences are based more on the writer's intuition and experience than on real words.

For a long time, our teaching materials for Chinese as a foreign language have been relatively formal and official, with a certain distance from the real daily Chinese. In view of this situation, teachers are suggested to choose textbooks that contain more pragmatic knowledge of Chinese. For example in listening and speaking class, teachers had better choose some dialogues which are widely covered and close to the true Chinese life. These dialogues can be gained from audio-visual materials like videos, films and televisions with the aid of network, reflecting true Chinese life and culture, eg. *Home With Kids*, *A Bite of China*, etc.

### 3.2. To increase pragmatic teaching contents

If there is no or insufficient pragmatic knowledge, it is necessary to add the contents of pragmatic knowledge to the textbooks. For example, in phonetic teaching, teachers should tell students that the difference of accent pause tone would affect the semantics. For example, in the sentence *You look well*, the meaning would be different when you put accent on *look* or on *well*.

For the listening teaching material, teachers should not only choose standard, formal Chinese pronunciation material, but also provide different language variants, such as northern and southern accents Chinese, and Chinese spoken by people with different ages, sexes, occupations. In this way, students can feel the living language at the beginning, and then gradually adapt to various phonetic variations. **In the teaching** of vocabulary, teachers should not only explain the lexical, grammatical and grammatical functions of a word, but also introduce the cultural connotation of words. That is, *to broaden students' horizons and enrich students' cultural knowledge by analyzing the different cultural connotations of vocabulary, which is often called situational teaching method.* (Xie Yuancai, 2006) For example, the word "*SuiBian*(casual)" corresponds not only to "It's up to you." but also contains the tones of being angry, relaxed and casual. It can teach students to choose the right words according to the different contexts. Teachers can also add some Chinese proverbs to help students understand Chinese culture, e.g. *To talk of the devil and the devil comes*, *Three cobblers equal Zuge Liang—the mastermind* and *Never go to the temple for nothing*. And In writing class, besides teaching writing

skills, teachers should also help students find out mistakes in their own and other's compositions, especially Chinese pragmatic failure, and analyze the causes of these errors. Afterwards students make a self assessment and try their best to reduce pragmatic failures in the later.

#### **4. To enhance the Chinese context in and out of class**

According to the author's observation, students who have been to study in China have higher Chinese pragmatic competence than those who have not. One of the most important reasons is that students who have studied abroad in China acquire a relatively adequate target language context. During the year when they study in China, they are in the Chinese language context almost every day. They not only improve their language ability, but also have more understanding to China's culture, history, social life, customs, and other aspects than other students. Therefore, the lack of Chinese context is another important reason for the students' low Chinese pragmatic ability.

##### **4.1. To carry out class practice**

The context of the target language can be divided into two types: in-class context and out-of-class context. The Chinese teaching in Bulgaria universities follows the traditional teaching method of Chinese as a foreign language, paying more attention to the teaching of language knowledge than the teaching of pragmatic knowledge and the cultivation of pragmatic competence. The class teaching is dominated by traditional teacher teaching, and the main contents is the explanation of Chinese language elements, but there are few pragmatic elements about Chinese social culture and few conversational communicative scenes in the class. Thus students are short of understanding and mastering verbal behaviors. For example, they don't really know how to ask and refuse, how to compliment and thank how to blame and apologize properly etc. Many scholars believe that pragmatic competence can be taught. The meta-analysis from Jeon&Kaya also discovers that pragmatic teaching helps to acquire certain features of second language pragmatics better, while the features are difficult to acquire only through simple contact, especially in the foreign language environment, where second language pragmatic teaching is more important. Therefore, we suggest that class teaching methods should be changed appropriately. Teachers can use network multimedia to bring Chinese social and cultural elements into class teaching consciously and systematically, and can design conversations and communicative occasions in various situations; so that students can be exposed to a large number of speeches ACTS in different contexts and situations. e.g. teachers can carry out in class practice, through the form of pragmatic task and social simulation under the guidance of TBLT and simulation.

To teach "request" this kind of speech ACTS, for example, the teacher can tell the students that sentence category can implement indirect speech act, that means a kind of action is expected to achieve by the another kind of behavior. E.g. "It's very cold in the room." "It's really very cold in the room!" "Don't you feel cold? The three sentences are affirmative, exclamatory, and interrogative, but all can achieve the function of "you close the window". Then, the teacher provides real context with the use of video or small clips, and reminds students to pay attention to the **request** of the speech ACTS expressed in different ways to improve the students' sensitivity of Chinese language and culture. The next step is to provide communication opportunities, so that students can experience different feelings brought to each other by different sentence types of mood through roles play, such as the request between the teacher and students, the parents and children, the boss and the subordinate. Next, the students are asked to discuss the subtle meanings of different tone auxiliary words in Chinese in groups, and to understand their pragmatic functions in different contexts. Finally, the teacher gives a clear summary or correction to the student's understanding.

#### **4.2 .To enhance the extracurricular contexts**

As for the construction of extracurricular context, it is also very necessary for Bulgarian college students. It is difficult for students to improve their Chinese pragmatic ability by only limited Chinese teaching in class in such a learning environment away from China. This is one of the reasons for their poor pragmatic Chinese. Therefore, teachers should create more extracurricular Chinese contexts actively and consciously, so these contexts can be cooperated with the context in the class to cultivate students' awareness of Chinese context more effectively. In addition to textbooks, students can learn about the features of Chinese culture through Chinese newspapers, magazines and picture books. It is also a good idea to invite some famous Chinese scholars to give lectures on Chinese. Through some special lectures on Chinese language, such as *Chinese character culture*, *Chinese character history*, *Chinese folk custom*, *Chinese education* etc. students can have a direct impression on Chinese culture, and also improve their cultural sensitivity

In addition, teachers can also create a variety of realistic contexts and truly combine culture and pragmatics with the use of online practice tools, communication software, Chinese corner, association of teachers and students, dining, shopping, film and television performance etc. For example, students can go shopping in Chinese supermarket or mall or have dinner in the Chinese restaurant in Bulgaria for language practice after class teaching. Different from the simulated context in the classroom, this practice is in a completely real communication environment. Students need to use the Chinese language knowledge learned in the class to complete practical

communication tasks. It not only strengthens the language knowledge, but also exercises students' intercultural pragmatic competence in the process of practical communication. In the case of film and television performance, teachers can choose some film and television works with appropriate length and difficulty together with students. Students can first understand them in advance and ask teachers questions. Then, they play roles into rehearsals and performances under the guidance of the teacher. Finally, the teacher made comments and pointed out the deficiencies of the students. This way is a kind of exercise for students' language expression ability, contextual understanding ability and performance ability. By this way, students can not only greatly mobilize their enthusiasm to learn Chinese, but also enable them to experience the charm of Chinese and Chinese cultural connotation in their roles. In short, the purpose of using all methods is to create a real and dynamic Chinese context outside the classroom, so that students can actively adapt to the realistic context and solidify the effect of extending the classroom pragmatic teaching.

### **5.ToIntegrate pragmatic competence into evaluation system**

Similar to language teaching assessment methods in china, the assessment methods of Bulgarian Chinese students are also traditional language proficiency tests. In the credit examination, what are mainly tested are the language ability of students' in listening, reading, speaking, writing and other aspects, while the investigation of Chinese pragmatic competence is rarely involved. Due to the lack of Chinese pragmatics assessment, the students' emphasis on Chinese pragmatics is not enough, which is one of the reasons for their poor pragmatic competence.

In order to cultivate the Chinese pragmatic ability of Bulgarian college students, the study of pragmatic ability should be included in the evaluation system. Then how to evaluate students' Chinese pragmatic competence? As we know, pragmatic competence includes three parts: pragmatic knowledge, pragmatic expression and pragmatic awareness, which are also three indicators of pragmatic competence. It is not scientific to examine these indicators separately, since these three indicators are often integrated. Then, the study of pragmatic competence can be combined with the study of listening, reading, speaking and writing, adding pragmatic components to these linguistic skills.

Taking the oral Chinese test as an example, a specific situation e.g having dining or the job interview can be set, and students are required to complete the task of Chinese intercultural communication in a prescribed situation, and then the teacher can give students the score of speaking ability according to their performance in the task. In this situation, students should not only use the language knowledge, but also use the pragmatic knowledge related to the verbal behaviors such as *greeting, request, reply* and *refusal*.

All are properly investigated such as whether the phonetic, vocabulary and grammar are correct, whether students can understand others, whether the speech ACTS are conducted appropriately. Another example is the writing test. Students would be asked to write a letter of thanks to their Chinese teachers or friends. The letter can not only show the students' mastery of Chinese letter writing, but also reflect their written and pragmatic ability to express gratitude. All these assessments, in fact, show the students' internal regulation of speech ACTS. The so-called **internal adjustment of speech ACTS** refers to *the speaker's subtle adjustment of the sentence on the word choice when performing a speech act, namely the ability to use vocabulary, grammar and other means to adjust the speech act.* And the means of internal regulation can effectively avoid the mistakes in the implementation of speech ACTS, such as the use of parenthesis *you think, by the way*, additional interrogative words *ok? , may I? -* and the use of modal words *a, ya, ma, ba* etc. Therefore, it is a very effective way to judge the students' pragmatic awareness and degree of pragmatic knowledge through the pragmatic performance integrated in the test of language skills.

### Conclusions

As an eastern European country on One Belt And One Road, Bulgaria has a long history of Chinese teaching, but the previous Chinese teaching mainly focuses on the teaching of Chinese language knowledge and pays little attention to intercultural pragmatic competence. On the basis of abundant teaching experience of Chinese as a foreign language and referring to some relevant research achievements in the academic world, this paper proposes four training strategies from the aspects of the construction of Chinese context in pragmatic teaching contents of the pragmatic teaching contents to Bulgarian college students, aiming at the intercultural Chinese pragmatic competence of Bulgarian college students. The first step is to improve the intercultural pragmatic competence of teachers so as to ensure that the evaluators of the pragmatic competence have sufficient qualifications. The second is to choose more practical intercultural Chinese teaching materials to increase the contents of Chinese pragmatic teaching. Thirdly, strengthen the construction of the in-class and extra-curricular contexts and improve the intercultural sensitivity of students, including changing the class teaching methods, and creating the dynamic Chinese context through various ways, such as the use of online practice tools, communication software, Chinese corner, association of teachers and students, dining, shopping, film and television performance etc. Finally, the assessment of pragmatic competence should be included in the assessment system. All these discussions are to provide some ideas and methods for the cultivation of pragmatic competence to Bulgarian college students from the perspective of intercultural communication.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bachman, L.F. *Fundamental Considerations in Language Teaching*, London: Oxford, 1990.
- Fan Xiangjuan and Liu Jianda. "A preliminary Study on the Measurement Method of Chinese Interlanguage Pragmatic Competence of Foreign Students". *Language Teaching and Linguistic Studies*, 2017(6), p. 9—19.
- He Ziran. *Pragmatics and English Learning*, Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 1997.
- He Chunyan. Foreign Studies on Second Language Pragmatic Competence Based on Corpus Are Reviewed. *Journal of PLA Foreign Language University*, 2012 (6), p. 53-57.
- JEON E H and KAYA T. "Effects of L2 Instruction on Interlanguage Pragmatic Development". *Research on Language Learning and Teaching*, Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2006.
- Leech, G. *Principles of Pragmatics*, London: Longman, 1983.
- Lu Jiawei. "Cognitive Context and Pragmatic Competence". *Journal of Luoyang Teachers College*, 2014 (1), p. 34-37.
- Thomas, J. "Cross-culture Pragmatic Failure". *Applied Linguistics*, 1983 (4), p. 91-112.
- Xie Yuancai. "An Analysis of Intercultural Pragmatic Competence". *Journal of Guangxi University for Nationalities*, 2006 (6), p. 134-137.
- Xu Jingning. "The Appropriateness of Chinese as a Second Language Teaching — From the Perspective of Linguistic Pragmatic Competence". *Research on International Chinese Teaching*, 2016 (4), p. 36-43.