INTEGRATING INTERCULTURAL PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE INTO UNIVERSITY BUSINESS ENGLISH TEACHING: CHALLENGES AND PEDAGOGICAL DIRECTIONS

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Abstract. In today's globalized business environment, linguistic accuracy alone no longer suffices for professional success. University Business English instruction must also cultivate intercultural pragmatic competence – the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately across diverse cultural contexts. Despite this necessity, current curricula often neglect this dimension. This article investigates the extent to which Business English instruction at Ukrainian universities incorporates intercultural pragmatics. Adopting a mixed-methods approach, the study combines textbook analysis and instructor interviews to evaluate the treatment of pragmatic elements. Results reveal a consistent lack of explicit instruction, underprepared educators, and an overreliance on supplementary materials. Teachers recognize the importance of pragmatic competence but lack adequate training and institutional support. The study analyzed 45 tasks across three commonly used textbooks and interviewed ten instructors at public and private universities in Ukraine. The article concludes with pedagogical recommendations including pragmatic task integration, use of authentic discourse, and teacher development programs.

Key words: Intercultural pragmatic competence, Business English instruction, university language education, textbook analysis, language teacher perceptions, communicative competence, pragmatics in language pedagogy.

Introduction. In today's globalized economy, the ability to communicate effectively across cultures has become a critical skill for business professionals. English, as the lingua franca of international business, serves not only as a means of conveying information but also as a medium through which cultural norms, expectations, and values are negotiated. Therefore, teaching Business English at the university level must go beyond vocabulary and grammar to include intercultural pragmatic competence – the ability to use language appropriately in various cultural and professional contexts. This competence encompasses understanding speech acts (such as requests, refusals, apologies), politeness strategies, indirectness, and context-sensitive communication styles. However, research and practical experience suggest that this crucial dimension is frequently overlooked or insufficiently addressed in university curricula worldwide, including in Ukraine.

Many Business English programs remain primarily product-oriented, emphasizing correct language forms, fixed genres such as business letters or presentations, and general communication skills. While these components are necessary, they do not fully prepare learners for the subtle pragmatic demands of real-world business interactions, where success often depends on the ability to navigate implicit meanings, cultural expectations, and face-saving strategies. This gap can lead to misunderstandings, perceived rudeness, or ineffective negotiation outcomes, especially in intercultural settings.

Scholars in applied linguistics and intercultural communication (Kádár & Haugh, 2013; Bhatia, 2008; Mauranen, 2012) argue for more explicit integration of intercultural pragmatics into language education. However, existing studies reveal that Business English teaching often treats pragmatics implicitly or relegates it to informal teacher-led discussions rather than systematic curriculum con-

tent. Furthermore, instructors frequently report a lack of training and resources to effectively teach these pragmatic aspects.

This study addresses this gap by investigating the extent to which intercultural pragmatic competence is integrated into Business English instruction in Ukrainian universities. Combining qualitative content analysis of popular textbooks with semi-structured interviews of experienced instructors, the research aims to uncover current practices, challenges, and potential improvements. The findings seek to contribute both to the theoretical understanding of pragmatic competence in language education and to practical recommendations for curriculum design and teacher development. Ultimately, this study responds to the urgent need to prepare students for the communicative complexities of the international business world, equipping them not only with linguistic skills but with cultural and pragmatic awareness essential for professional success.

Research Aim and Objectives. In the context of globalization and the growing intercultural nature of professional communication, intercultural pragmatic competence has become a crucial skill for business professionals worldwide. This competence involves the ability to appropriately use language in culturally diverse settings, considering politeness norms, speech acts, indirectness, and contextual appropriateness (Kádár & Haugh, 2013: 19). Despite its importance, many university-level Business English programs focus primarily on linguistic accuracy and specific genres (e.g., emails, presentations), often neglecting the nuanced pragmatic aspects that influence successful communication in international business environments (Bhatia, 2008: 132; Mauranen, 2012: 83).

The main aim of this study is to critically evaluate the extent to which intercultural pragmatic competence is integrated into Business English curricula at Ukrainian universities and to suggest pedagogical improvements based on empirical data and theoretical insights. This aim aligns with prior calls from applied linguistics scholars who emphasize the need for a shift from purely linguistic instruction toward pragmatic and intercultural competence development (Cogo & Dewey, 2012: 49; Spencer-Oatey, 2008: 73).

To fulfill this aim, the study articulates several interrelated objectives:

1. To examine the representation of pragmatic elements in widely used Business English textbooks. Textbooks remain foundational in shaping course content and learning experiences, as noted by Bhatia (2008: 134), who highlights how genre-based materials influence learners' discourse skills. This objective involves a detailed content analysis focusing on how textbooks handle speech acts (such as requests, refusals, and apologies), politeness strategies, and cultural variation in communication styles. For example, prior research by House (2008: 360) shows that neglecting indirectness and politeness in language teaching leads to pragmatic failures in real-life communication. Understanding textbook content will reveal whether such critical pragmatic elements are explicitly taught or merely implied, informing curriculum design needs.

2. To explore Business English instructors' perceptions and practices related to teaching intercultural pragmatic competence. As teachers mediate between curriculum and learners, their attitudes and competences heavily influence instructional quality (Canagarajah, 2006: 15). This objective involves semi-structured interviews with experienced instructors to gather qualitative data on their understanding of pragmatics, the challenges they face, and how they integrate pragmatic content into lessons. Previous studies (e.g., Jenkins, 2007: 45) emphasize that teachers often feel underprepared for addressing intercultural communication challenges, which can limit students' pragmatic competence development.

3. To identify barriers that hinder the effective teaching of intercultural pragmatics. Constraints such as insufficient materials, lack of institutional support, and limited teacher training are frequently reported in language education literature (Mauranen, 2012: 88; Spencer-Oatey, 2008: 76). By analyzing interview data and textbook content, the study aims to pinpoint specific obstacles in the Ukrainian university context. This will enable the formulation of targeted recommendations to overcome such challenges.

4. To propose pedagogical strategies for integrating intercultural pragmatic competence into Business English instruction. Drawing on findings and relevant theoretical frameworks (Halliday, 1994: 25; Kádár & Haugh, 2013: 105), the research advocates for explicit inclusion of pragmatic elements through authentic business discourse, reflective tasks, and intercultural role-plays. Teacher training is also highlighted as essential for equipping educators with practical tools and confidence to teach pragmatics (Spencer-Oatey, 2008: 80). These pedagogical directions are in line with Bhatia's (2008: 138) emphasis on contextualized, genre-aware instruction that bridges theory and practice.

In sum, these objectives are interwoven to offer a comprehensive examination of how intercultural pragmatic competence is currently addressed in Ukrainian university Business English teaching and how it can be enhanced. By focusing on both materials and instructor perspectives, the study aims to contribute to the growing field of pragmatic competence research and provide actionable recommendations for language education practitioners. This aligns with the global trend toward developing communicative competence that fully integrates linguistic, pragmatic, and intercultural dimensions, thus preparing students for effective participation in international business contexts (Cogo & Dewey, 2012: 52; Canagarajah, 2006: 18).

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design, primarily qualitative in nature, aimed at thoroughly investigating the integration of intercultural pragmatic competence within university-level Business English teaching in Ukraine. The mixed-methods approach, combining textbook content analysis and semi-structured interviews with Business English instructors, provides a comprehensive understanding of both the curriculum content and pedagogical practice. Such a design is widely recognized for its strength in triangulating data to increase validity and depth of insight (Creswell, 2014: 219–221).

Sampling and Data Sources

The materials for textbook analysis were selected based on a preliminary survey of Business English instructors from various Ukrainian universities. Three widely used textbooks were chosen for this purpose: *Market Leader (Intermediate)*, *Business Result (Upper-Intermediate)*, and *Intelligent Business (Advanced)*. These textbooks represent the predominant teaching resources in Ukrainian higher education Business English courses. A total of 45 tasks and exercises related to communicative competence were analyzed, with particular focus on those targeting pragmatic skills such as speech acts, politeness strategies, and cultural communication variations.

The interview sample comprised ten Business English instructors with at least five years of teaching experience, drawn purposively from both public and private universities to ensure a diversity of institutional contexts and pedagogical styles. Semi-structured interviews allowed for in-depth exploration of instructors' perceptions regarding the role of pragmatics in their courses, their instructional methods, textbook utilization, and the challenges they face in teaching intercultural pragmatic competence.

Data Collection Procedures

Content analysis was applied to textbook materials using a qualitative approach to examine not only the frequency but also the depth and contextualization of pragmatic elements embedded in learning tasks (Krippendorff, 2013: 24–29). A coding scheme was developed based on established frameworks by Kádár and Haugh (2013: 65–73) and Spencer-Oatey (2008: 112–117), categorizing speech acts, politeness phenomena, and cultural strategies present in the textbook content.

Interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent, transcribed verbatim, and subjected to thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006: 79–81) six-phase process. This approach enabled identification of patterns and themes related to pragmatic teaching practices, perceived importance, and encountered obstacles. Data triangulation through cross-comparison of interview findings and textbook analysis enhanced the reliability and richness of the study's conclusions (Denzin, 1978: 307–311).

Data Analysis

Quantitative descriptors such as the percentage of textbook tasks containing pragmatic components were calculated to provide an overview of content emphasis. Qualitative data were analyzed both deductively, using predetermined thematic categories related to intercultural pragmatics, and inductively, allowing novel themes to emerge from the data (Thomas, 2006: 238). Basic descriptive statistics were employed to characterize the teaching sample, including years of experience and frequency of textbook use, with correlation analyses conducted to explore relationships between variables such as instructor experience and pragmatic content utilization.

Ethical Considerations

The research received ethical approval from the university's institutional review board. Participants provided informed consent and were assured anonymity and confidentiality. All interview data were securely stored in encrypted digital files accessible only to the research team. Participants retained the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Textbook Analysis Results

The qualitative content analysis of the three widely used Business English textbooks – *Market Leader* (Intermediate), *Business Result* (Upper-Intermediate), and *Intelligent Business* (Advanced) – revealed a consistent pattern of limited and implicit treatment of intercultural pragmatic competence. Despite the recognized importance of pragmatic awareness in professional communication (Kádár & Haugh, 2013: 19), the textbooks primarily emphasize linguistic accuracy, vocabulary building, and fixed discourse genres such as emails, reports, and presentations, often at the expense of pragmatic skills essential for effective intercultural interaction.

Among the 45 communicative tasks examined, only six (13.3%) explicitly engaged learners in pragmatic reflection or practice. For example, in *Market Leader,* the section on business meetings includes role-play simulations designed to practice negotiating strategies. However, these activities focus on the transactional content rather than the pragmatic nuances of politeness, indirectness, or face-saving strategies critical in cross-cultural negotiation contexts (Bhatia, 2008: 132). Similarly, *Business Result* offers guidelines on email etiquette, but these are culturally neutral and lack explicit discussion of pragmatic variation, such as differences in directness or mitigating language between English and other cultures (Mauranen, 2012: 85).

Intelligent Business, while providing advanced vocabulary and complex financial terminology, seldom addresses intercultural pragmatic misunderstandings, which are frequently reported as a major challenge in global business communication (Cogo & Dewey, 2012: 49). The analysis showed that pragmatic features such as speech acts (requests, refusals, apologies), politeness markers, and indirectness strategies are mostly implicit or absent. For instance, tasks requiring refusal of a request are scripted in a direct manner, ignoring culturally appropriate mitigation or softening strategies recommended in intercultural pragmatics literature (Spencer-Oatey, 2008: 61).

Moreover, the lack of reflection prompts and explicit teaching materials means learners rarely engage in metapragmatic awareness – an essential step for developing intercultural pragmatic competence (House, 2008: 360). This absence suggests a gap between current pedagogical materials and the demands of real-world business communication where pragmatic competence determines the success of interactions (Jenkins, 2007: 54).

In sum, the textbook analysis confirms prior research emphasizing the need for pragmatic-focused pedagogical approaches in Business English (Kádár & Haugh, 2013; Bhatia, 2008). The limited inclusion of pragmatic content reflects a broader tendency within language teaching to prioritize grammatical accuracy and genre conventions over the socio-pragmatic skills necessary for authentic international business communication (Canagarajah, 2006: 12).

Instructor Interview Results

The semi-structured interviews with ten Business English instructors from various Ukrainian universities revealed a strong awareness of the importance of intercultural pragmatic competence in professional communication, alongside significant challenges in its effective integration into teaching practices.

Lack of Explicit Teaching Materials

A dominant theme was the instructors' perception of insufficient and inadequate textbook support for pragmatic instruction. Many participants reported that the textbooks used in their courses focus predominantly on grammar and vocabulary, providing limited or no guidance on pragmatic aspects such as politeness strategies, speech act variation, or cultural norms of communication. As one instructor noted:

"The books cover grammar and business vocabulary well, but there is no clear instruction on how to handle indirect refusals or polite disagreement in different cultures. We have to create these lessons ourselves." (Instructor 3)

This observation aligns with findings from the textbook analysis and resonates with prior studies emphasizing the scarcity of pragmatic content in Business English materials (Mauranen, 2012: 86; Kádár & Haugh, 2013: 21).

Reliance on Supplementary and Authentic Materials

Due to these gaps, instructors frequently resorted to supplementing textbooks with authentic materials such as real business emails, recorded video calls, and role-play scenarios designed from their own professional experience or sourced online. This approach was viewed as crucial for exposing students to the pragmatic realities of international business communication. For instance, one instructor shared:

"I bring in emails from my own workplace and show videos of meetings from global companies. It helps students understand how tone and indirectness work in real contexts, which textbooks don't show." (Instructor 7)

Such practice echoes Canagarajah's (2006: 15) argument for the importance of authentic materials in teaching pragmatic competence, especially in diverse intercultural settings.

Challenges in Teacher Training and Confidence

Another significant issue highlighted was the lack of formal training in intercultural pragmatics among instructors themselves. Despite recognizing the importance of pragmatic skills, many felt underprepared to teach this area systematically. One participant admitted:

"I'm confident teaching grammar and vocabulary, but when it comes to teaching politeness conventions or indirectness across cultures, I feel I lack the knowledge and resources." (Instructor 1)

This sentiment is consistent with the broader literature that identifies teacher readiness as a major barrier to effective pragmatics instruction (Cogo & Dewey, 2012: 53; Spencer-Oatey, 2008: 65).

Student Pragmatic Failures and Learning Needs

Instructors also reported frequent pragmatic failures among students, particularly in oral presentations and simulated business interactions. Such failures included inappropriate directness, lack of hedging or softening language, and unawareness of cultural norms around disagreement or refusal. As one teacher recalled:

"A student once bluntly told a guest speaker 'That's not true' without realizing how rude it sounded. These are the mistakes we see regularly." (Instructor 5)

This highlights a gap between students' linguistic knowledge and pragmatic competence, emphasizing the need for explicit instruction and practice in intercultural communication skills (House, 2008: 360).

Demand for Curriculum Reform and Teacher Development

Finally, participants expressed a strong demand for curriculum reforms that incorporate explicit pragmatic instruction, including tasks that promote pragmatic awareness and intercultural sensitivity. They also advocated for professional development programs to enhance teachers' knowledge and confidence in this area:

"We need systematic teacher training on intercultural pragmatics and better materials that include pragmatic reflection tasks and authentic business communication examples" (Instructor 9).

Such calls mirror recommendations in applied linguistics advocating for integration of pragmatic competence into Business English curricula and teacher education (Kádár & Haugh, 2013; Bhatia, 2008).

Discussion. The findings from both the textbook analysis and instructor interviews converge to reveal a critical gap in the current approach to teaching Business English at the university level in Ukraine – namely, the insufficient integration of intercultural pragmatic competence. This gap has important implications for preparing students for effective communication in global professional contexts.

Limited and Implicit Pragmatic Content in Textbooks

The textbook analysis demonstrated that while commercial Business English materials often include relevant communicative situations (e.g., meetings, emails, negotiations), they rarely provide explicit instruction on the pragmatic aspects of these interactions. This aligns with Mauranen's (2012: 86) observation that traditional ELT materials tend to focus on linguistic form and fixed genres, neglecting the pragmatic variability essential for intercultural communication. As Kádár and Haugh (2013: 21) emphasize, pragmatic competence involves not only knowing what to say but how to say it appropriately depending on cultural context, something largely absent in the textbooks analyzed.

Such implicit treatment of pragmatics leads to missed opportunities for learners to develop critical skills such as recognizing politeness strategies, adjusting speech acts according to the interlocutor's cultural background, or understanding indirectness and hedging in business communication (Cogo & Dewey, 2012: 49). This is problematic given that pragmatic failures in real-world settings can result in misunderstandings, loss of face, or damaged professional relationships (House, 2008: 360).

Teacher Adaptation and Supplementary Materials

The interviews confirm that instructors recognize this shortfall and attempt to compensate by introducing authentic materials and creating their own activities. This finding supports Canagarajah's (2006: 15) call for incorporating authentic discourse in TESOL to better prepare learners for real communicative demands. However, reliance on teacher-generated supplementary content presents challenges in terms of consistency, resource availability, and the instructors' own pragmatic knowledge.

Need for Enhanced Teacher Training

The lack of formal training in intercultural pragmatics reported by instructors underscores a systemic issue. As Spencer-Oatey (2008: 65) notes, teacher preparedness is crucial for effective pragmatic instruction, yet many educators feel ill-equipped to teach these nuanced aspects without dedicated professional development. This gap hinders the development of learner competence and points to the need for integrated teacher training programs focusing on intercultural communication skills and pragmatic theory.

Pragmatic Failures Reflect Learning Gaps

The pragmatic failures recounted by instructors – such as inappropriate directness or failure to hedge–highlight the discrepancy between learners' linguistic proficiency and their pragmatic awareness. These errors not only undermine effective communication but also reflect a lack of exposure to pragmatic norms embedded in specific business cultures (House, 2008: 360). Addressing these gaps requires deliberate instructional design that moves beyond linguistic accuracy to include pragmatic competence as a core learning outcome.

Pedagogical Implications and Curriculum Reform

The study's findings strongly advocate for curriculum reforms that explicitly incorporate intercultural pragmatic competence. This can be achieved through several pedagogical strategies:

Inclusion of Pragmatic-Focused Tasks: Activities such as role-plays, simulations, and analysis of authentic business interactions should foreground pragmatic elements like politeness strategies, indirect speech, and cultural variation in communication (Bhatia, 2008: 136).

Use of Authentic Materials: Incorporating real business emails, recorded meetings, and video calls can enhance learners' exposure to genuine pragmatic usage, fostering better understanding of context and tone (Canagarajah, 2006: 20).

Pragmatic Reflection and Metapragmatic Awareness: Structured opportunities for learners to reflect on the appropriateness of different communicative strategies across cultures can deepen pragmatic competence (Kádár & Haugh, 2013: 35).

Teacher's Professional Development: Continuous training focused on intercultural pragmatics will enable teachers to confidently deliver this content and model effective pragmatic behavior (Spencer-Oatey, 2008: 67).

Institutional support is also critical to ensure these reforms are sustainable and effective. Investment in teacher training, curriculum redesign, and resource development is necessary to equip students with the pragmatic skills vital for *international business success.*

Implications for Curriculum Development and Teacher Training

The findings of this study have important implications for both curriculum designers and teacher training programs in Ukraine and comparable educational contexts. Given the underrepresentation of intercultural pragmatic competence in existing textbooks and the self-reported lack of preparedness among instructors, targeted curricular interventions and professional development are urgently needed.

First, Business English syllabi at Ukrainian universities should explicitly incorporate intercultural pragmatics as a core learning outcome. This entails designing course modules that go beyond linguistic accuracy to foster learners' ability to interpret and produce contextually appropriate communication across cultures. Curriculum planners should consider embedding pragmatic reflection tasks, contrastive discourse analysis, and intercultural case studies throughout the course progression.

Second, the development of supplementary teaching materials – such as pragmatics-focused worksheets, annotated transcripts of business interactions, and video-based discussion prompts – would help bridge the gap between textbook content and real-world communicative demands. Collaboration between textbook publishers, applied linguists, and experienced instructors can ensure that such materials are both pedagogically sound and practically applicable.

Third, teacher training programs must be restructured to include dedicated modules on intercultural pragmatics. These should provide instructors with a robust theoretical foundation in speech act theory, politeness theory, and discourse analysis, alongside practical strategies for classroom implementation. Workshops and continuous professional development sessions can further support teachers in diagnosing pragmatic breakdowns, facilitating reflective discussions, and assessing intercultural communicative competence.

Overall, for Business English education to remain relevant in a globalized economy, systematic curricular reform and sustained investment in teacher preparedness are essential. These efforts will not only enhance students' communicative competence but also foster more respectful, effective international collaboration.

Future Research Directions. Future studies should evaluate the impact of these pedagogical interventions on learner outcomes longitudinally to determine best practices for pragmatic competence development. Research could also explore teacher perceptions and challenges in other cultural contexts to build a broader understanding of pragmatics teaching in Business English (Mauranen, 2012: 95).

Conclusion. This study has clearly shown that current Business English teaching practices at Ukrainian universities inadequately address the development of intercultural pragmatic competence, a vital skill for effective global professional communication. The combined analysis of widely used textbooks and instructor interviews revealed that pragmatic elements are generally implicit, superficial, or missing altogether from teaching materials, leaving a significant pedagogical gap.

While instructors are aware of this deficiency and strive to compensate through supplementary authentic materials and ad hoc activities, they consistently report a lack of formal training and institutional support. This situation places both teachers and learners at a disadvantage: students may achieve linguistic accuracy but frequently fail to navigate the subtle pragmatic nuances required in intercultural business interactions. These pragmatic failures risk misunderstandings, strained professional relationships, and reduced communicative effectiveness in real-world contexts.

To bridge this gap, the study advocates for comprehensive curriculum reforms that explicitly integrate pragmatic-focused tasks, authentic discourse, and opportunities for reflective learning. Moreover, embedding systematic teacher training on intercultural pragmatics is essential to empower educators to confidently and effectively teach these complex skills. Such changes demand institutional commitment to resource allocation, curriculum development, and ongoing professional development.

Future research should focus on assessing the practical impact of these pedagogical innovations through longitudinal studies, exploring how students' pragmatic competence evolves over time and transfers into workplace success. Additionally, cross-cultural investigations of Business English teaching practices will enrich understanding of the diverse challenges and solutions in pragmatic competence development worldwide.

Ultimately, equipping Business English learners with robust intercultural pragmatic competence is not optional but essential in today's globalized economy. By recognizing and addressing the current shortcomings, educators and institutions can better prepare students to engage confidently, appropriately, and successfully in the international business arena.

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