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THE IMPACT OF PRAGMATICALLY ORIENTED INSTRUCTION ON TRANSLATION STUDENTS' PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE

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Annotation. This study examines the impact of pragmatically oriented instruction on the professional competence of translation students. The research focused on students' ability to interpret communicative intention, implicature, presupposition, speech acts, register, and culture-specific meanings when translating authentic texts. A quasi-experimental design was employed with 60 undergraduate translation students divided equally into experimental and control groups. During a twelve-week intervention, the experimental group completed contextual analysis, role-based translation, pragmatic error correction, audience adaptation, and reflective decision-making tasks, whereas the control group followed conventional language- and equivalence-focused instruction. Data were collected through pre- and post-tests, an analytic translation rubric, classroom observations, and student reflection questionnaires. The findings indicated that pragmatically oriented instruction produced greater improvement in contextual interpretation, functional adequacy, audience awareness, strategic decision-making, and overall translation quality. The experimental group's mean professional competence score increased from 61.8 to 82.6, while the control group improved from 62.1 to 70.4. The results support systematic integration of pragmatic analysis into translator education overall effectively.

Keywords: pragmatic instruction, translation competence, professional competence, translator education, pragmatic equivalence, communicative intention, contextual interpretation, audience awareness, speech acts, implicature, translation quality, decision-making.

Introduction Professional translation requires considerably more than lexical substitution and grammatical accuracy. Translators must identify why a text was produced, what communicative effect it seeks to create, how meanings are shaped by context, and which linguistic choices are appropriate for a particular audience. Consequently, professional competence involves an integrated system of bilingual, textual, cultural, technological, interpersonal, and strategic abilities. The European Master's in Translation framework similarly presents translator competence as a multidimensional construct connecting language and culture, translation, technology, personal and interpersonal skills, and service provision.

Pragmatic competence occupies a central position within this system because meaning is not always stated explicitly. Speakers and writers regularly communicate through implicatures, presuppositions, indirect speech acts, politeness strategies, evaluative choices, and culturally conditioned conventions. A translation may therefore be grammatically correct yet professionally inadequate when it fails to reproduce the source text's intention, interpersonal force, register, or anticipated effect [7]. Such failures are particularly visible in advertisements, institutional communication, political discourse, media texts, business correspondence, and dialogue, where context and audience expectations strongly influence interpretation.

Traditional translation instruction has often prioritized vocabulary, sentence-level equivalence, and error correction.

Although these elements remain necessary, isolated linguistic practice does not fully prepare students to justify context-sensitive decisions. Pragmatically oriented instruction addresses this limitation by requiring learners to analyse the communicative situation before translating, compare alternative solutions, anticipate target-reader responses, and reflect on the consequences of their choices. It converts translation from mechanical transfer into purposeful intercultural mediation. The present study investigates whether systematic pragmatic instruction improves translation students' professional competence. It specifically examines development in contextual interpretation, pragmatic equivalence, functional adequacy, audience awareness, and translation decision-making.

The study asks whether students receiving a twelve-week pragmatics-based intervention outperform peers taught through conventional instruction and which competence dimensions demonstrate the greatest improvement. It is hypothesized that explicit work with communicative intention, speech acts, implicature, presupposition, register, politeness, and cultural adaptation will produce measurable gains in both translation quality and professional reasoning. By linking pragmatic theory with professional tasks, the research also seeks to clarify how classroom instruction can support transferable judgement rather than mastery of isolated linguistic rules in translation practice.

Literature review

Contemporary models describe translation competence as a combination of interrelated sub-competences rather than a single linguistic skill. The PACTE model emphasizes bilingual, extra-linguistic, instrumental, strategic, and translation-knowledge components, with strategic competence coordinating problem identification and solution [5]. The European Master's in Translation framework links language and culture, translation, technology, interpersonal abilities, and service provision, reflecting professional practice.

Pragmatic theory explains how translators recover meanings that depend on context and communicative intention. Grice's account of conversational implicature demonstrates that intended meaning exceeds wording, while speech-act theory highlights the actions performed through language [3]. House's functional-pragmatic approach to translation quality stresses correspondence between source and target textual functions, register, and contextual profiles [4]. Baker further shows that equivalence must be negotiated at multiple levels, including pragmatic equivalence, cohesion, and information structure [1].

Pedagogically, task-based and reflective translation activities allow students to verbalize decisions, compare alternatives, and connect linguistic form with communicative purpose. Research on intercultural competence indicates that professional translators need knowledge, attitudes, and interpretive skills for mediating between cultural contexts [8]. Nevertheless, pragmatic concepts are often taught theoretically rather than embedded systematically in translation performance. This gap supports an instructional model in which pragmatic analysis becomes a recurring stage of translation planning, production, revision, and assessment.

Research methodology

The study employed a quasi-experimental pre-test–post-test design. Sixty second-year undergraduate translation students participated and were assigned to an experimental group and a control group, with 30 students in each. Both groups completed equivalent translation tasks before and after the intervention. The twelve-week programme provided the experimental group with explicit instruction and guided practice in communicative intention, speech acts, implicature,

presupposition, politeness, register, audience design, and cultural adaptation. Activities included authentic-text analysis, role-based briefs, comparison of alternative translations, pragmatic error correction, peer evaluation, and reflective commentaries. The control group continued conventional instruction centred on vocabulary, grammar, and semantic equivalence. Performance was evaluated through a 100-point analytic rubric covering contextual interpretation, pragmatic equivalence, functional adequacy, audience awareness, strategic decision-making, and linguistic accuracy. Two trained assessors rated anonymized scripts. Classroom observations and a post-intervention questionnaire provided supplementary qualitative evidence. Mean scores and gain differences were calculated to compare development across groups overall.

Results

Pre-test findings showed that the two groups began at a comparable level of professional competence. The experimental group obtained an overall mean of 61.8, while the control group achieved 62.1. Both groups demonstrated relatively stronger linguistic accuracy than pragmatic interpretation, suggesting that students could often produce grammatically acceptable sentences but experienced difficulty with implied meaning, interpersonal force, register, and target-audience expectations.

Following the twelve-week intervention, the experimental group's overall mean increased to 82.6, representing a gain of 20.8 points. The control group reached 70.4, a gain of 8.3 points. The largest experimental gains occurred in pragmatic equivalence, audience awareness, and strategic decision-making. Students became more successful at identifying indirect requests, preserving evaluative stance, adapting politeness levels, and selecting target-language forms appropriate to the translation brief. Improvement in linguistic accuracy was also recorded, although the difference between the groups was smaller in this dimension.

Assessor comments indicated that experimental-group translations contained fewer literal renderings of idiomatic or context-dependent expressions. Students also provided clearer justifications for additions, omissions, reformulations, and register shifts. Questionnaire responses supported the performance data: most participants reported that analysing speaker intention and anticipated reader response helped them evaluate alternatives more systematically. The comparative results are summarized below.

Table 1. Pre-test and post-test professional competence scores

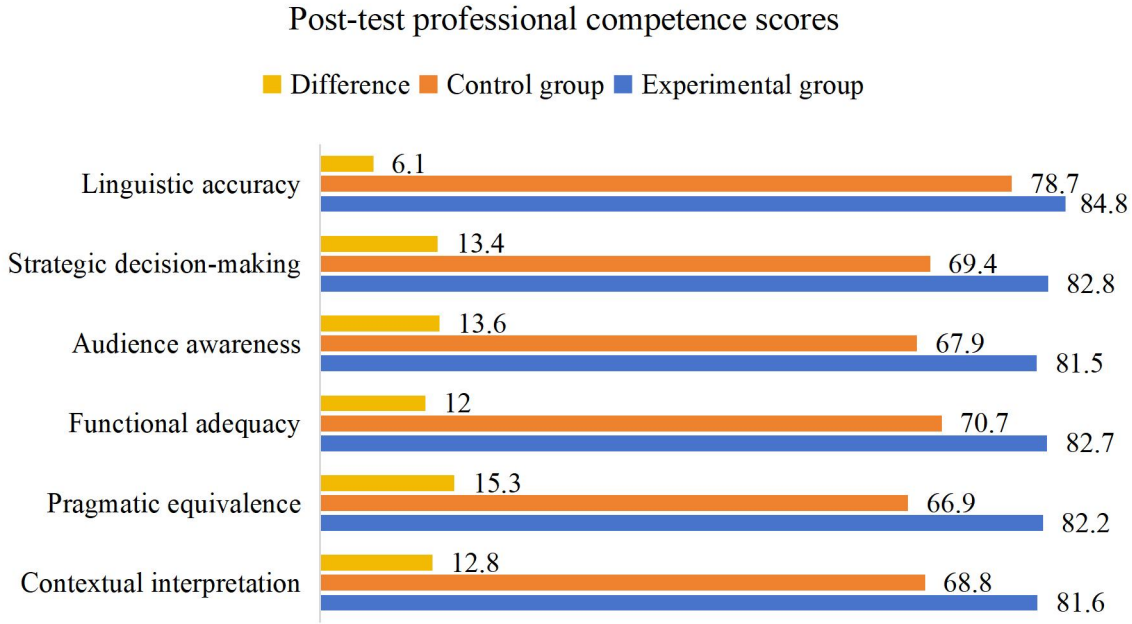
Competence dimension	Experimental pre-test	Experimental post-test	Experimental gain	Control pre-test	Control post-test	Control gain
Contextual interpretation	60.2	81.6	21.4	60.5	68.8	8.3
Pragmatic equivalence	58.7	82.2	23.5	59.0	66.9	7.9
Functional adequacy	62.0	82.7	20.7	62.4	70.7	8.3

Audience awareness	59.4	81.5	22.1	59.8	67.9	8.1
Strategic decision-making	60.8	82.8	22.0	61.1	69.4	8.3
Linguistic accuracy	69.7	84.8	15.1	69.8	78.7	8.9
Overall mean	**61.8**	**82.6**	**20.8**	**62.1**	**70.4**	**8.3**

The dimension-level comparison demonstrates that the intervention affected both interpretive and productive aspects of translation competence. In contextual interpretation, the experimental group improved by 21.4 points, compared with 8.3 points in the control group. This difference reflects students' increased attention to situational background, participant relations, genre, and purpose before beginning translation. Pragmatic equivalence showed the greatest experimental gain, rising by 23.5 points, whereas the control group gained 7.9 points.

Audience awareness also developed substantially. Experimental-group students increasingly adjusted formality, politeness, explicitation, and culture-specific references to match the stated readership. Their 22.1-point increase exceeded the control group's 8.1-point improvement. Strategic decision-making rose by 22.0 points in the experimental group, indicating greater ability to identify problems, generate alternatives, justify solutions, and revise texts according to the translation brief.

Functional adequacy and linguistic accuracy improved in both groups, but the experimental group retained a clear advantage. This pattern suggests that pragmatic instruction did not weaken attention to language form; instead, it situated accuracy within communicative purpose. Observation records further showed that experimental participants asked more purposeful questions about context and defended choices using concepts such as intention, effect, register, and reader expectation. The bar chart presents post-test performance across the six assessed dimensions.



Discussion

The findings suggest that pragmatically oriented instruction can make a substantial contribution to the professional competence of translation students. The experimental group's stronger post-test performance supports the view that translation competence develops through coordinated linguistic, strategic, cultural, and contextual abilities rather than through language knowledge alone. This result is consistent with multidimensional competence models proposed by PACTE and the European Master's in Translation framework [6].

The largest gains in pragmatic equivalence and audience awareness are particularly significant. Students who explicitly analysed implicature, presupposition, speech acts, politeness, and register were better able to move beyond surface-level correspondence. They treated translation as communicative action and evaluated solutions according to purpose, participants, genre, and likely reader response. This orientation also explains the improvement in strategic decision-making: pragmatic analysis supplied students with criteria for identifying problems, comparing alternatives, and defending interventions.

The findings additionally support House's functional-pragmatic emphasis on textual function and contextual correspondence. Higher-quality translations did not necessarily reproduce every linguistic form directly; rather, they recreated relevant meanings and relationships in ways appropriate to the target situation. The improvement in linguistic accuracy indicates that pragmatic work complements, rather than replaces, attention to grammar and lexis.

Nevertheless, the study has limitations. The sample was restricted to one educational setting, the intervention lasted twelve weeks, and the assessment focused primarily on written translation. Longer studies should examine retention, different language pairs, specialized genres, interpreting, and technology-mediated translation. Future research could also use process data, interviews, and professional-client evaluation to clarify how pragmatic reasoning develops over time.

Conclusion

This study demonstrated that pragmatically oriented instruction can strengthen translation students' professional competence. Compared with conventional language- and equivalence-centred teaching, the twelve-week intervention produced greater gains in contextual interpretation, pragmatic equivalence, functional adequacy, audience awareness, strategic decision-making, and overall translation quality. Improvement occurred when students learned to identify communicative intention, infer unstated meaning, evaluate interpersonal relations, and adapt target texts to genre and readership.

The results indicate that pragmatics should not remain an isolated theoretical topic in translator education. It should function as a framework throughout task preparation, translation production, revision, peer assessment, and reflective evaluation. Authentic texts, professional briefs, alternative-solution comparison, role-based tasks, and pragmatic error analysis can help students connect linguistic decisions with communicative consequences.

Translator-training curricula should therefore integrate pragmatic objectives into learning outcomes and assessment. Such integration can prepare students to produce translations that are not only linguistically accurate but also contextually appropriate, functionally effective, culturally responsive, and professionally defensible. Further research is required to confirm these findings across institutions, language pairs, text types, and professional environments.

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