

---

## Enhancing Public Speaking in English: The Role of Explicit Pragmatics Instruction for Thai ESL Undergraduate Students

Dr. Sam Mafi\*<sup>1</sup>

\*<sup>1</sup>English Lecturer, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Nakhon Ratchasima Rajabhat University, Nakhon Ratchasima, Thailand

---

### ABSTRACT

This study explores the impact of explicit pragmatics instruction on enhancing public speaking skills among Thai undergraduate students learning English as a Second Language (ESL). Pragmatic competence, often overlooked in traditional ESL curricula, plays a crucial role in effective communication. The research adopts a quasi-experimental design, involving two groups of undergraduate students: an experimental group receiving explicit pragmatics instruction and a control group following a standard communicative approach. Over 16 weeks, participants in the experimental group demonstrated significant improvement in their ability to employ contextually appropriate language, manage speech acts, and navigate audience interaction effectively. These findings underscore the importance of integrating pragmatics-focused teaching methods to address specific communicative challenges faced by Thai ESL students in public speaking contexts. This study contributes to pedagogical practices by offering a framework for embedding pragmatic instruction into ESL courses, fostering more confident and competent speakers.

**Keywords:** Pragmatics, Public Speaking, ESL, Thai Undergraduate Students, Explicit Instruction, Communicative Competence, Linguistics.

---

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Public speaking in English is a significant challenge for many Thai undergraduate students, primarily due to a lack of pragmatic competence. While fluency and grammatical accuracy are often emphasized in English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction, pragmatic competence—the ability to use language appropriately in various social and cultural contexts—is frequently neglected. This gap poses a barrier to effective communication, particularly in formal settings where public speaking is required.

Research highlights that explicit pragmatics instruction can bridge this gap by equipping learners with the skills to interpret and produce contextually appropriate language. For Thai students, who often rely on rote memorization, this instructional approach offers a pathway to more dynamic and impactful communication. However, few studies have systematically investigated the role of pragmatics instruction in enhancing public speaking performance among this demographic.

This study aims to address this gap by examining the effects of explicit pragmatics instruction on Thai undergraduate students' public speaking skills. Through a structured and systematic intervention, the research evaluates how targeted teaching methods can enhance students' ability to navigate the nuanced demands of public speaking in English, thereby contributing to their overall communicative competence and confidence.

### 2. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a quasi-experimental design to investigate the impact of explicit pragmatics instruction on public speaking skills among Thai undergraduate students. The participants consisted of 240 students enrolled in an intermediate-level ESL course at a Thai university, divided equally into an experimental group and a control group.

#### 2.1 Participants

The experimental group received 16 weeks of explicit pragmatics instruction focusing on key speech acts, conversational implicatures, and strategies for managing audience interaction. The control group followed the standard communicative curriculum, which emphasized general speaking fluency without specific pragmatics training.

#### 2.2 Instructional Design

The instructional materials for the experimental group included role-plays, authentic dialogues, and pragmatics-focused exercises aimed at developing contextually appropriate language use. Weekly sessions were structured to cover specific topics, such as using formal language in presentations, managing question-and-answer segments, and handling cultural nuances in speech delivery.

#### 2.3 Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected using pre- and post-intervention assessments of public speaking performance, evaluated through video-recorded speeches scored on a pragmatics-focused rubric. The rubric assessed elements such as appropriateness of language use, effectiveness of speech acts, and interactional competence. Statistical analyses, including paired t-tests

and ANOVA, were conducted to determine the significance of the instructional intervention on the experimental group compared to the control group.

### 3. MODELING AND ANALYSIS

This section elaborates on the theoretical and analytical frameworks underpinning the study, alongside the statistical models employed to examine the effects of explicit pragmatics instruction on public speaking skills.

#### 3.1 Theoretical Framework

The study is grounded in Speech Act Theory and Grice's Cooperative Principle, which form the basis for understanding how language is used effectively in context. These theories inform the instructional design by focusing on the appropriateness of language use in various communicative scenarios, particularly those pertinent to public speaking.

#### 3.2 Hypotheses

- H1: Explicit pragmatics instruction significantly improves Thai ESL students' ability to manage speech acts in public speaking contexts.
- H2: Explicit instruction enhances audience engagement skills more effectively than a standard communicative approach.

#### 3.3 Instructional Modeling

The instructional model integrates task-based learning strategies, including role-playing, peer feedback, and analysis of authentic dialogues. Weekly modules address key areas such as formal language use, managing interactive segments, and handling cultural nuances.

#### 3.4 Statistical Analysis

The impact of the instructional intervention was evaluated through statistical models. A paired t-test was used to compare pre- and post-intervention scores within each group, while an ANOVA assessed between-group differences. Effect sizes were calculated to determine the practical significance of the observed improvements.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study reveal a marked improvement in public speaking performance among the experimental group compared to the control group. Participants who underwent explicit pragmatics instruction demonstrated significant gains in their ability to employ contextually appropriate language, manage audience interaction, and execute effective speech acts. These improvements were evident in their post-intervention assessments, with mean scores showing a statistically significant difference ( $p < 0.05$ ) between the two groups.

**Table 1.** Comparison of Pre- and Post-Intervention Public Speaking Scores.

Group	Mean Pre-Intervention Score	Mean Post-Intervention Score	Improvement (%)
Experimental Group	56.4	82.3	45.9%
Control Group	54.8	61.2	11.7%

Qualitative observations further supported these findings. Video recordings of student speeches via Microsoft Teams by university revealed enhanced confidence, better structuring of arguments, and increased adaptability to audience cues in the experimental group. In contrast, the control group exhibited minimal progress, often struggling with pragmatic nuances and audience engagement.

## 5. CONCLUSION

These findings underscore the efficacy of explicit pragmatics instruction in addressing specific communicative challenges faced by Thai ESL students. By equipping learners with the tools to navigate complex communicative scenarios, this approach fosters not only linguistic competence but also intercultural sensitivity and audience awareness. The discussion highlights the practical implications of these results, advocating for the integration of pragmatics-focused methods into ESL curricula to better prepare students for real-world communication demands.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to express their gratitude to the professors, peers, and family members whose support was invaluable to the success of this research. Special thanks are extended to the participating students and educators at the Thai university for their active involvement and cooperation throughout the study.

## 6. REFERENCES

- [1] Bachman, L. F. (1990). *Fundamental Considerations in Language Testing*. Oxford University Press.

- 
- [2] Grice, H. P. (1975). Logic and conversation. In Cole, P., & Morgan, J. L. (Eds.), *Syntax and Semantics* (pp. 41-58). Academic Press.
- [3] Kasper, G., & Rose, K. R. (2001). Pragmatics in language teaching. In *Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language* (pp. 213-228). Cambridge University Press.
- [4] Thomas, J. (1983). Cross-cultural pragmatic failure. *Applied Linguistics*, 4(2), 91-112.
- [5] Taguchi, N. (2011). Teaching pragmatics: Trends and issues. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 31, 289-310.
- [6] Cohen, A. D. (2018). *Strategies in learning and using a second language*. Routledge.