The Correlation between Iraqi EFL University Students' Pragmatic Competence and Speaking Performance

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العلاقة بين الكفاءة التداولية لدى طلبة الجامعة العراقيين دارسي اللغة الإنكليزية لغة أجنبية
والأداء الكلامي
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Abstract

From one generation to the next and from one nation to another, language is a means of thought and culture transmission. One of the main communication skills is speaking. It is a basic form of human communication used to communicate messages, share experiences, and communicate with each other. Language mastery requires more just than linguistic knowledge; it also involves pragmatic proficiency, which involves effectively communicating meaning beyond linguistic conventions and using language resources in diverse contexts. Learners often engage in novel communication settings, which demands developing communicative competency and acquiring essential language skills like speaking ability, both inside and outside the classroom. The aim of the current study is to look into the relationship between speaking ability and pragmatic competence among students at Iraqi EFL universities. A random sample of 400 students was selected from three Iraqi universities (Kirkuk, Babylon, and Thi-Qar), Colleges of Education / Departments of English for the academic year 2022–2023. Two test are utilized to gather the data: a test to investigate pragmatic competence and a speaking test to evaluate the students' English speaking abilities. A correlational analysis is used to look at the connection between speaking performance and pragmatic competence. According to the statistics, Iraqi EFL university students

exhibit a moderate degree of pragmatic competence and a weak degree of speaking performance. Having looked at this relationship between PC and SP, the findings affirm a statistically significant correlation.

Key Words: Pragmatic Competence (PC), Speaking Performance (SP), Foreign Language (FL).

الملخص:

تعد اللغة وسيلة للتواصل ونقل الثقافة والمعرفة بين الأجيال والبلدان ويتطلب اتقان اللغة المزيد من المعرفة اللغوية. وتعتبر وسيلة التحدث من وسائل اللغة الرئيسية لتبادل الرسائل والخبرات. إن امتلاك مهارات المعرفة اللغوية وحدها لا يكون كافيا لإتقان اللغة، بل من الضروري أيضا النظر في الدور الذي تلعبه الكفاءة التداولية. عند التواصل، قد يواجه دارسي اللغة الإنكليزية في كثير من الأحيان مواقف جديدة عن طريق ممارسة انشطتهم داخل وخارج الصف والتي تتطلب امتلاكهم كفاءة تستلزم معرفة كيفية انشاء الكلام بشكل مناسب، وكيفية توظيف الموارد اللغوية في سياقات مختلفة، وبهذا فان الكفاءة التداولية تعد من العوامل التي تؤثر في العملية التواصلية عن طريق استعمال المهارات اللغوية.

وان الدراسة الحالية تسعى لأيجاد مستوى الكفاءة التداولية ومستوى الأداء الكلامي وتحديد مستوى الارتباط بين الكفاءة التداولية والأداء الكلامي لدى دارسي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. هذه الدراسة عبارة عن بحث ارتباطي. تكونت عينة البحث من (400) طالب وطالبة من طلبة الصف الرابع من ثلاثة اقسام للغة الانكليزية/ من كليات التربية للعلوم الإنسانية / جامعة بابل (150) ، ذي قار(150) وكركوك (100). من اجل تحقيق اهداف الدراسة ، تم جمع البيانات باستخدام اختبارين احدهما لقياس الكفاءة التداولية ، والأخر لتقييم الأداء الكلامي . وقد أظهرت نتائج البحث ان طلبة عينة الدراسة لديهم مستوى متوسط من الكفاءة التداولية ، ومستوى ضعيف في الأداء الكلامي، وكذلك وجود علاقة ذات دلالة احصائية بين الكفاءة التداولية والأداء الكلامي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الكفاءة التداولية، الأداء الكلامي، لغة أجنبية.

1. Introduction

1.1 The Problem and Its Significance

Based on Brock and Nagasaka (2005) perception, PC is perceived as the capacity of a speaker to use language for various tasks (such as greeting, requesting, informing, demanding, and so forth) and the capacity of the speaker to modify or adapt language in accordance with the requirements or expectations listener expectations or circumstances. Knowing a language entails being able to speak it since speech is looked at it as the

one of the most fundamental form of human communication (Lazaraton, 2001). To communicate with others in FL, one must pay close attention to the accurate aspects of that language as using the most appropriate words and precise grammar to express meaning accurately and organizing their speech to make sense of them (Cameron, 2001). In situations when the speaker must complete tasks orally, there is limited time for them to prepare what they want to say and how they want to deliver it. (Kahlil, 2010). In addition, the speaker might not be able to manage PC to foster grammatical competence, which might result in a violation of the social norms of the target language (Leech, 1983).

Accordingly, it is suggested that this PC plays a critical role in determining how well students perform in speaking. Looking through the literature, it appears that no research has explored the connection between PC usage and speaking proficiency among Iraqi EFL University students. Effective filling of this gap is the aim of the current investigation.

1.2 Research Questions

1- What are Iraqi EFL university students' level in PC, and SP ?

2. Is there a correlation between the students' level of PC with that of SP?

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Concept of Pragmatic Competence

Pragmatic competence was early defined by the eminent figure Chomsky (1980) who appoints that PC is the "knowledge of conditions and manner of appropriate use (of the language), in conformity with various purposes" (p.224). According to Thomas (1983), it is seen as 'the ability to use language effectively in order to achieve a specific purpose and to understand language in context'. Similarly, Bachman (1990) asserts that PC is the ability to use language in an effort to express a wide diverse of functions and concurrently it is the ability to grasp and understand the effect of what is being said in keeping with the socio-cultural context in which the utterances are performed. She (1983) adds that PC is composed of three crucial sets of information: a. lexical knowledge: lexical: understanding the meaning of words and their potential metaphorical applications; b. functional knowledge: understanding the complex interactions between utterances and speakers' actual communication intentions, and c. sociolinguistic knowledge: Understanding the different pertinent social settings in which utterances emerge. LoCastro (2003) claims that PC is the capacity of a speaker or listener to produce the desired effects or to communicate the intended meanings during communicative contact. However, more recently, Ifantidou (2014), regards PC as a sort of

cognitive function which communicates with other human cognitive systems such as understanding of logical principles and the ability to infer the intents or beliefs of others, interpreting of one another behaviour, and other types of background information, including understanding of social circumstances. PC can be plainly manifested in instances of language performance, namely the creation and interpretation of verbal utterances. Kamil (2016) claims that the rules of speech vary depending on the culture, hence the cultural context is essential to accurately expressing meaning.

2.1.2 Pragmatic Competence in Language Teaching

Although there has been a great interest concerning the value of PC, there is still some deficiencies in terms of including pragmatics instruction in language education (Eisenchlas, 2011). In FL learning, the notion of pragmatics still lags far behind as it is a neglected area of study receiving no focus in the classroom which has been considered as a poor input environment for developing pragmatic ability. In addition, very few textbooks go beyond the most common pragmatic meanings In a few specific situations, such as greetings, requests, and, at most, compliments. This means that FL learning environments are defined by limited practice and input (Cook, 2001). Consequently, the usefulness of FL classrooms should depend on various factors, for instance, on the classroom setup and activities, as well as the different roles that teachers and students play during these activities where the teachers show the students how to accomplish tasks in a way that is efficient and successful (Kasper & Rose 2002). As one of the most careful arts, teachers must take part in a wide range of interactions so as to effectively implement well run learning activities (Iwanicki, 1983, as cited in Aliakbari & Hasson, 2022).

In relation to the acquisition of PC, the conditions which affect the acquisition of PC are three: the input, output and the feedback hypotheses. For Schmidt (2001) exposure to input, to the communicative information coming from the surroundings that transforms into noticed intake, is one of the indispensable conditions that affects FL PC learning. The second factor is the target-language output which is the language which the students generate (Swain,1985). Finally, in order to foster the growth of their students' language systems, teachers in classroom settings are expected to offer corrective feedback (Lightbown & Spada, 2006).

2.1.3 Conditions of Pragmatic Competence Teaching

The acquisition of PC focusing on the importance of input, output, feedback and finally the intellectual teaching.

2.1.3.1 Input Hypothesis

As a pioneer in the field of SL acquisition, Krashen (1985) emphasizes that the status of input hypothesis is a requisite factor for language acquisition, asserting that all other factors promote language development only if they help comprehensible input. Ellis (1994) argues that in many theories, an input function is viewed as being a highly urgent factor in engaging with the language and it is given a supportive role in learning process. Koike and Pearson (2005) find that students' interactions with learning material are influenced by explicit and implicit approaches, with various kinds of construction having different impacts on various areas of competence. In this line, Patten and Benati (2010) have noted that input language serves as a significant information source for the students' language to build their language proficiency depending on the embedded samples in the input information.

2.1.3.2 Output Hypothesis

In this regard, Swain (1985) states that the target language output is an essential ingredient for FL acquisition that can promote the fluency of the language expression in FL learners. For VanPatten (2003), an output product is an important part of learning FL which shows what has been learnt. Looking at the students' output, instructors assess their students' "knowledge" or understanding of a subject. Hence, Krashen's (1985) theory is insufficient since it focuses on the input, FL learners also need to produce coherent and understandable language, i.e. output (Nation, 2007). An output provides the students with the feedback and the act of observing encourages them to focus on language strategies, bridging the gap between syntactic language processing and basic knowledge by enabling the students to reflect on their language acquisition (Swain, 2005).

2.1.3.3 Feedback Hypothesis

Together with the input and output hypotheses, a feedback hypothesis is also a prime aspect to build up PC in an EFL context. Feedback is a necessary factor for language learning success in a classroom, enabling learners to make adjustments when they struggle to understand specific target characteristics effectively (Geyskens et al., 2012). In this context, there has been two types of feedback: direct and indirect. The first one is a simple, straightforward way to discuss someone's performance. So, the teachers directly correct the students' errors (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012). In the second one, the teacher uses special codes to indicate the type of error, which encourages the students to identify, seek out, and correct it (Brown, 2004). Good feedback not only enhances students' learning but also aids

teachers in shaping their teaching methods to enhance and improve their students' learning (Yorke, 2003).

2.1.3.4. Intercultural Teaching

It is an educational method that recognizes, values and incorporates cultural differences of learners to help them think in a way that is proper for cultural exchanges that occur between cultural groups (Hammer et al., 2003). This concept concerns with knowing how to communicate suitably and successfully with individuals from various cultural origins to perceive our and their cultures (Jin & Cortazzi, 2013). To comprehend intercultural language teaching, it is essential to understand the leading conceptions within this perspective. Basically, intercultural language teaching is concerned with specific conceptions of "language" and "culture" and how they relate and connect to one another (Liddicoat, 2004). By emphasizing the importance of teaching languages across cultural boundaries, urging students to observe, contrast, and reflect on language and culture norms can understand and facilitate communication (Soler & Jorda , 2007).

2.2 The Concept of Speaking Skill

Speaking is "an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing and receiving and processing information" (Florez, 1999, as cited in Obeid & krebet, 2023). Speaking activity is one of the crucial abilities that students should master so as to communicate properly and smoothly in English. Among the four language skills, speaking is the one that takes the longest for students to acquire as it is the most challenge skill which requires interaction with one or more listeners for reciprocal influence (Noaman, 2013).

Cameron (2001) restricts that speaking ability refers to the active use of language to convey meanings exactly using the most appropriate words and precise grammar in order that other people may understand them when communicating in FL. According to Nunan (2003) speaking activity is a two-way process between the speaker and the listener which requires both the receptive skill of comprehending as well as the production oral skill of speaking involving creates language expressions appropriately to convey message and share one's beliefs, feelings, ideas, etc. during social contact. Due to its feature, speaking is a social, multimodal speaking event with an unpredictable topic. It is sociological in the sense that it fosters empathy, create common ground, modifies cultural identity, and necessitates communication skills   (Thornbury & Slade, 2006, as cited in Al-Noori & AbdulRidha, 2021).

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2.2.1 The Significance of Speaking

Speaking has always had a "peculiar position" when it comes to deciding on which language skills to be taught in an EFL program (Abdulrazzaq, 2023). Speaking is probably the most desirable language ability. It serves to be the main objective of the entire process of learning FL, mainly because it enables people to communicate with others. Owing to its importance, it is claimed that people who are linguistically proficient are referred to as "speakers" of that language, as though speaking encompasses all other forms of knowing (Ur, 2012). Speaking has long been seen as an essential ability to learn a new language. The majority of educators utilize it to appraise how well their students could acquire and use FL appropriately. Most of the students have obviously struggled to meet the standards of this domain as they are learning the language because of its necessity in spoken communication (Nunan, 2003).

Moreover, learners study English to improve their speaking ability because it makes up a big portion of the world's language. The outcome of English proficiency is evaluated by assessing their level of speaking competence or effectiveness of oral communication (Richards, 2008).

One of the many advantages for students who are skilled in speaking the target language is the greater opportunity to pursue further education, find employment, and travel abroad. Currently, speaking is the skill that FL teachers place the most emphasis on. However, it is also acknowledged as being the most challenging domain to be developed in educational settings (Dakowska , 2011).

To assist the students in overcoming their difficulties with the English language speaking, it is observed that the use of conversations, which can be regarded as the most crucial activity for practicing grammatical, lexical, and phonological components is the most significant approach which has to be focused on in learning environments (Krebet, 2017).

2.2.2 The Aspects of Speaking Skill

Depending on Brown's (2004) view, there are a variety of linguistic factors that influence the output quality of FL, including:

- Grammar

As Harmer (2001) indicates, a language's grammar outlines the various ways by which words can be taken on various forms and be utilized to form sentences providing a set of rules that allow individuals to group those words into more complex units. It is a vital component of communication as it allows individuals to precisely and efficiently express meaning and serves to avoid misunderstanding constructions.

- Vocabulary

Vocabulary can admittedly refer to as a collection or a list of lexemes that includes single words, complex words, and terminologies (Richards and Schmidt, 2002). Vocabulary is a decisive part for effective second language usage since without it students can't put the structures and functions they may have learned for understandable communicative use. In a language, vocabulary refers to as the proper diction or the most crucial aspect to express their thoughts, feelings, and ideas both verbally and in writing (Turk, 2003).

- Comprehension

Comprehension is known as the ability to identfy and interpret discourse spans and to construct representations of the sentence explanation. Since understanding in FL is not observable directly, it must be ideduced from overt verbal and nonverbal cues, through artificial tools, or from the teacher's or researcher's intuition. To prevent information from being misunderstood, the term "comprehension" refers to the speakers' comprehension of the message they are trying to deliver to the listeners (Cohen et al., 2005).

- Fluency

Fluency is the capacity to speak precisely, fluently and confidently without a lot of pauses and stops, i.e. the ability to speak freely and continuously. In learning process, the teacher may ask the students to speak freely and without interruption to help them talk clearly and easily as speaking fluently is the main target that the teachers aim to accomplish when teaching productive ability (Pollard, 2008).

- Pronunciation

Pronunciation is the way by which the words in a particular language are pronounced clearly, where the stress is placed, how the pitch and intonation are used to convey the feelings and thoughts when individuals speak (Harmer, 2004). However, mastering sounds list or single words is not enough to perfect pronunciation. Alternatively, it essentially involves studying as well as practising the method of English of constructing a speaker's thoughts easier to comprehend (Gilbert, 2008).

3. Methodology

In any research, one of the researcher's jobs is setting the most appropriate fitting method for his / her purpose of study as a strategy for answering the questions of the research empirically (Wilkinson & Birmingham, 2003). The kind of study design guided in the current study is a correlational one in which it is likely designed to investigate the

correlations between two or more variables and examine their relation in the sense of cause and effect (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2009).

3.1 Population and Sampling

A population is any recognizable collection of people or nonhuman objects, institutions, times, units, etc. that are gathered together (Johnson and Christensen, 2019).The study's population consists of (603) EFL students in education colleges through the educational year (2022-2023).

A sample is made up of collection of people, things, or occasions chosen to represent the characteristics of the larger group from which it is selected (Mills & Gay, 2018). 400 participants who are 4th-year students in the English Departments of the Colleges of Education for Human Sciences / Universities of Babylon (150 students), Thi-Qar (150 students), and Kirkuk (100 students) represent the selective sample.

3.2 Instrumentation

Instrumentation means the means by which investigators attempt to measure variables or items of interest. It is related not only to instrument design but also to conditions under which the instruments are administered (Given, 2008). To collect the required data, the instruments proposed in the present study are two measures: a test for determining PC level , and an interview for assessing SP.

3.2.1 The PC Test and its Rating Scale

The first instrument utilized in the current study is the PC and its rating scale. The specific method to investigate the students' PC is a test consisting of twenty situations which reflect different settings in everyday life , i.e. the speech acts of everyday communication. Following each one, there is a blank for respondents to fill in with what they consider to be appropriate answer. The twenty situations are adapted from Reiter (2000). As for the PC scale, it comprises (5) items adopted from Taguchi (2006), with (5) points ranging between (1 very poor to 5 excellent). Thus, the higher score that cab be got by the students is (100) and the lower score is (0), with a theoretical mean of (60).

3.2.2 The Speaking Performance Test and its Rating Scale

The instrument employed in this study which belongs to the SP test and its rating scale. To make an evaluation of level of students which concerns with SP, an interview is constructed on account that interviewing is the most familiar test style of assessing speaking performance in which the interviewees communicate with the interviewer and their oral achievement is assessed (Fulcher, 2010). In the interview each student is given a set of different topics which he/she has to choose one of them.

These topics have already got the jurors' approval. The scoring scheme used consists of five rubrics which are (Grammar, Vocabulary, Comprehension, Fluency, and Pronunciation). The grading scale is adopted from Brown (2004) with some adjustments. The last rubric "task" is skipped in accord with the guidance of the panel members. Each rubric has a five-level scoring ranging from (1-5). On the test, the highest score that can be obtained by the students is (25) and the lowest point is (5). The mean score for the test is (15).

3.3 Validity and Reliability

Validity refers to subjective evaluations of how the measurement tool is presented to determine if the items in the instrument seem to be related, rational, and clear (Oluwatayo, 2012). The instruments were displayed to a panel of 23 academic specialists with backgrounds in linguistics and English language teaching. The study validity instruments on their face and the appropriateness of the applied scoring systems are determined by the jury. With the exception of a few linguistic changes that are taken into consideration, the specialists have approved the scoring system, the entire tools, and their components. The elemental qualities of an instrument is reliability which refers to the consistency or stability of scores values that an instrument yields, i.e., the degree to which the test scores are consistent across different assessments (Gay et al., 2010,). Cronbach Alpha is used to determine the reliability of PC and SP, and the results show that all reliability coefficients are satisfactory.

3.4 The Application of the Instruments

Once the instruments of validity and reliability have been confirmed, the two instruments of the current are applied in various ways. In accordance with their responses, the students' answers are assigned scores in line with their responses. Preceding the test application, the students have been told that the test is merely for research purposes as well as they are given a full explanation of the PC test's items and the interview as a SP test before handing the test sheets.

Saving time and effort, they are friendly instructed to answer on the same piece of paper. Moreover, they are requested to pose any question that they may have about any unclear topic and to write their names and serial numbers on each test sheet. For the test's scoring system, the researcher uses the scoring systems mentioned in the earlier sections to conduct the test scoring technique.

4. Results

To accomplish the study's first aim, which relates to the students' level of PC and SP, the two tests are employed to the study's sample. In terms of the PC proficiency of EFL students, the computed results confirm that the mean score reaches to (60. 440) with a standard deviation of (12. 444). For realizing the significance of differences between the mean score and the theoretical mean which reaches to (60), a t-test for one independent sample has been utilized.

The result shows that the obtained t-value is (0.707) which is lower than the critical t- vale (1.96) at a significance level (0.05) and level of freedom (399). Consequently, it is not statistically significant and the study's sample has a moderate of achieving PC, as it displayed in table (1) and figure (1) below:

Table (1)

The Mean Score, Standard Deviation and T-Value of the PC Scale

Variable	Sample Size	Arithmetic Mean	S.D	Theoretical Mean	T-Value		Significance 0.05
					Computed	Critical	
PC	400	60.440	12.444	60	0.707	1.96	Not Significant

Figure (1)

The Arithmetic and Theoretical Means of PC Test
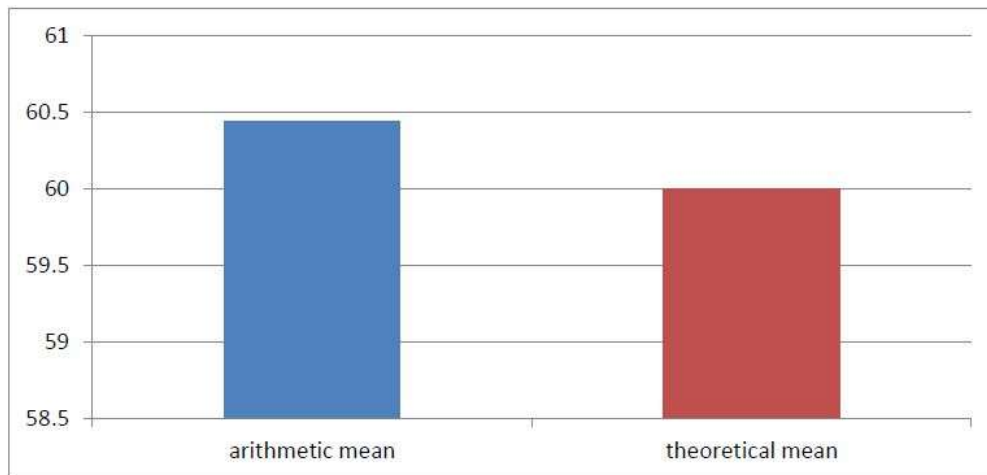
For examining the students' level of speaking proficiency, a SP test (interview) is conducted to the study's sample. Following marking the students' responses of the students by using an assessment scale, the findings indicate that the mean score of the sample responses is (13.637) whose a standard deviation of (4.034) whereas the theoretical mean is (15). The calculated t-value is (6.754), which is statistically significant as it exceeds the critical value (1.96) at a level of significance (0.05) and a degree of freedom (399), indicating that the sample's study has a weak degree at SP level, as stood up in the table (2) below:

Table (2)

The Theoretical Mean, Standard Deviation, and T-Value for the SP

Variable	Sample Size	Arithmetic Mean	S.D	Theoretical Mean	T-Value		Significance 0.05
					Computed	Critical	
SP	400	13.637	4.034	15	6.754	1.96	Significant

To investigate the correlation between the two variables ،the students ' responses of both tests) PC and SP (are analyzed using Pearson correlation coefficient and the findings are tabulated in the table below:

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Table (3)
The Correlation between PC and SP

Variable	Sample	Correlation Coefficient between PC & SP	T-Value		Significance (0.05)
			Computed	Critical	
SP	400	0.525	12.500	1.96	Significant

The results, as shown in table (5) above, detail the following:

The purposed correlation coefficient value between PC and SP is seen to be (0.525). For showing the significance of the correlation, a t-test for one sample has been managed. The findings report that the computed t-value reaches (12.500), which is greater than the critical value (1.96) at the level of significance (0.05) and a degree of freedom (398). Having looked at this relationship between PC and SP, it affirms that it signals a statistically significant correlation.

5. Conclusions

The conclusions drawn through the data analysis and interpretation pertaining to the study's aims conclude with the following:

1. It has been brought to an end that EFL students possess a moderate level of PC. As for the English language SP, the study reveals that those students have a weak level of SP.
2. It has been found that the research sample is affected differently by the language SP and the PC variables.
3. Examining the relation between PC and SP confirms that there is a statically significant correlation.

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