THE IMPACT OF PRAGMATICS-FOCUSED INSTRUCTION IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE OF IRAQI COLLEGE STUDENTS

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اثار التدريس المركز على التداولية في تطوير الكفاية التداولية لطلبة الكليات العراقيين

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المستخلص

يُعد اكتساب الكفاءة البراغماتية أمرًا ضروريًا للتواصل الفعّال وتطوير مهارات التفكير النقدي في أي لغة. وعلى الرغم من أهميته، لا يزال دور التدريس الذي يركز على البراغماتية في تعزيز الكفاءة البراغماتية للناطقين بغيرها، وخصوصًا طلاب الجامعات العراقيين، غير مستكشف بشكل كافٍ. يسعى هذا البحث إلى سد الفجوة في الأدبيات من خلال تقديم رؤى حول كيفية مساهمة الأساليب التعليمية المستهدفة في تحسين المهارات البراغماتية لدى هذه الفئة المحددة. علاوة على ذلك، يهدف إلى تسليط الضوء على أهمية إدراج العناصر البراغماتية في المناهج اللغوية لتعزيز تنمية الكفاءة الجدلية، مما يمكّن طلاب الجامعات العراقيين من الانخراط في حوار بنّاء والتفكير النقدي في سياقات تواصلية متنوعة.تم اختيار مجموعتي الضبط (٢٥) والتجريب (٢٥) بشكل عشوائي، حيث تضمنت كل منهما أربعة عشر طالبًا من مستوى ما قبل المتوسط من خلفيات لغوية أولى متنوعة. تم استخدام تقنية تحليل الخطاب النوعي لمقارنة نتائج التعلم لدى المجموعة التجريبية مع تلك الخاصة بالمجموعة الضابطة بعد تفريغ بيانات المحاكاة اللغوية. أظهرت النتائج كيف حسّنت الاستراتيجية التدريسية الأداء البراغماتي لطلاب اللغة الثانية فيما يتعلق بفعل الكلام المستهدف. يشير ذلك إلى أن تدريس اللغة الثانية الذي يسعى إلى تزويد الطلاب بالمعرفة الميتابراغماتية، المرتبطة بفرص كبيرة لاستخدام اللغة، قد يسهم في تطوير كفاءتهم البراغماتية في اللغة الثانية.وفقًا للباحث، فإن التركيز على الكفاءة البراغماتية يشمل الرغبة في التعرف على العناصر والإجراءات التي تدخل في عملية اكتساب متعلم اللغة للمهارات البراغماتية وفهمها. ومن منظور معلم اللغة، تتمثل هذه الرغبة في تزويد الطلاب بالمعلومات والاستراتيجيات والمهارات اللازمة لنقل معانيهم المقصودة بفعالية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التدريس المرتكز على البراغماتية؛ الكفاءة في اللغة الثانية؛ طلاب الجامعات العراقيون.

Abstract

The acquisition of pragmatic competence is essential for effective communication and the development of deliberative skills in any language. Despite its importance, the role of pragmatics-focused instruction in enhancing the pragmatic competence of non-native speakers, particularly Iraqi college students, remains underexplored. This research seeks to bridge the gap in the literature by providing insights into how targeted instructional approaches can contribute to the improvement of pragmatic skills among this specific population. Furthermore, it aims to highlight the significance of incorporating pragmatic elements in language curricula to foster the development of deliberative competence, empowering Iraqi college students to engage in constructive dialogue and critical thinking in various communicative contexts. The control (25) and treatment (25) groups were randomly selected to include fourteen low-intermediate students from diverse L1s. A qualitative discourse analytic technique was utilised to compare the learning results in the treatment group to those in the control group after data from role-playing were transcribed. The results show how the instructional strategy improved L2 students' pragmatic performance of the focused speaking act. This implies that L2 instruction that tries to provide students with metapragmatic knowledge linked to significant chances for language usage may improve

students' L2 pragmatic development. According to the researcher, this emphasis on pragmatic competence includes the desire to recognize and comprehend the components and procedures that go into a language learner's acquisition of pragmatic abilities. From the standpoint of the language instructor, it is the desire to provide pupils with the information, tactics, and skills necessary for effectively conveying their intended meanings.

Keywords: Pragmatics-Focused Instruction; L2 competence; Iraqi Students College-Level Learners

Introduction

Language serves as a tool for exchanging ideas and experiences that we have had and facilitates interaction and communication among and between members of groups. Language can therefore be considered an essential part of human behaviour and the primer tool for interaction among people to convey feelings, thoughts and intentions to others (Ament, Vidal, & Parés, 2018). Among all the languages spoken globally in the twenty-first century, English has emerged as one of the most widely used intercultural communication (Chiesa, Sorbello, Greif, & Hodzovic, 2021). When conversing online and in person, native and non-native speakers of English utilise it as a communication tool (Brock, 2022 and Hassan, 2018).However, Derakhshan and Arabmofrad (2018) remark that there are three times as many non-native English speakers as native English speakers, while Fried, Andreas, and Klein (2018) add that non-native speakers account for more than 80% of interactions and communications in the language. Thus, it demonstrates that in this era of rapid globalisation, English has established itself as a universal language for communication amongst speakers of diverse first languages throughout the globe (De Rycker, 2014). Although it may seem fascinating that people can communicate with one another all over the world in a language like English, people's perceptions of the world and how they interpret the situations they come across are influenced by their social and cultural backgrounds, and as a result, their communication skills may vary greatly. According to Merseburger et al. (2021), speakers from diverse cultures with distinct patterns of understanding may struggle to communicate successfully verbally due to a lack of practical and linguistic expertise. Similar to this, Marii (2016) suggests that even while some speakers are proficient in a second or foreign language, they may lack pragmatic competence and be unable to develop a language acceptable for a given culture and social setting.Many academics have also examined pragmatics and its connection to politeness (Harrington, Gouda, Ezekowitz, & Mentz, 2022; Qi & Lai, 2017). For instance, according to Zhang (2022), pragmatics can be thought of as the study of language usage in contexts and is referred to in the literature by various concepts like "contextual meaning" (how contexts affect what is said and where, when, and how utterances are produced), "speaker meaning" (how speakers convey their intentions and how hearers understand them), "the expression of relative distance" (how closeness, social and physical, influences), and "the expression of relative distance" (how In other words, a person's pragmatic competence includes their knowledge of the etiquette rules of their language. As a result, to communicate effectively, language learners must be familiar with the pragmatic features of the target language. Lack of pragmatic competence can lead to speakers being unaware of how to perform speech acts in a foreign language (De Rycker, 2014), which can lead to foreign language learners using their native speaking values when using the foreign language (Merseburger et al., 2021.(According to Wang and Halenko (2019) and Majid et al. (2021), language learners' difficulties in developing communicative competence in a second or foreign language may result from differences between their cultures and languages in several facets of speech act realisation. Therefore, it is necessary for effective communication when two or more cultures come together to understand speech actions such as requesting, criticising, complementing, thanking, apologising, etc. (Greene et al., 2021)One of the spoken actions of daily life is complaining. Everybody complains at some point—whether it's because they are annoyed about something, someone, or themselves. We all encounter a variety of acts, attitudes, and situations that don't make us happy and thus cause us to grumble. In other words, a complaint might be a statement of rage, unhappiness, or discontentment about anything that calls for a particular set of speech act techniques. As a result, while voicing a complaint, the speaker becomes angry in response to things going wrong or a statement or action that negatively impacted them (Taira, Kreger, Orue, & Diamond, 2021). (Greene et al., 2021).According to Kopanczyk, Kumar, and Papadimos (2022), the speech act of complaining falls under the expressive category of speech. It contains moral judgments that express the complainer's approval and disapproval of the behaviour. These moral judgments almost always have something to do with the act of moral criticism of the blame associated with the complaining speech act. In other words, according to Tateyama (2009), complaints are illocutionary activities in which the complainer conveys his or her displeasure with the situation in the complainable and holds the complainee accountable, either directly or indirectly. Because of this, making a complaint by nature may be hurtful and seriously jeopardise the connection.

Similar to this, Stolnicu and Soslow (2022) classified complaints as one of the face-threatening activities that have a significant chance of ending the relationship. Although complaints may lead to the disintegration of social relationships (Li, Taguchi, & Tang, 2019; Nevins et al., 2022), a complainer might employ politeness to maintain a positive connection with the complainee or to lessen the intensity of their complaint and confront threat (Halenko & Jones, 2011).We all encounter politeness daily, and although its goal is to make people feel at ease and relaxed in conversation, varied culturally and socially defined standards may lead to misunderstandings between speakers of various first languages (Ament, Páres, & Pérez-Vidal, 2020). People may sometimes adopt comprehensive definitions of politeness depending on their own experiences. While most individuals are confident that they understand what politeness is and who qualifies as being courteous, they often struggle to define and articulate the concept, as seen by the wide variety of definitions and many inconsistencies that result (Ahmad et al., 2021; Hollingworth, Bird, Crusz, Kirkman, & Vyas, 2022; Li et al., 2019). They can refer to polite behaviour as appropriate, politically acceptable, or as the conduct of the well-educated.It may be quite challenging for second or foreign language learners to be courteous in speech acts that are naturally face-threatening since what is considered polite in their native tongue may not be considered polite in the foreign or target language environment (Horiguchi, 1994). A foreign student may speak out during conversations, which may be acceptable and typical in their native environment. Still, in another setting, their speech could be seen as confrontational and disrespectful, according to Casey et al. (2022). Additionally, if they have been trained to feel that it is rude to make direct eye contact while speaking, they are inclined to avoid it (Sydorenko, 2015). The conversation might, however, result in misunderstandings if the other person has been trained to think that making direct eye contact indicates respect and reliability (Muoz, 2018).The study of how politeness is manifested in speech actions across various cultures while talking in their L1, L2, or foreign language has been the focus of numerous research. By examining how Iraqi learners of English behave while speaking in an academic setting at a university, this research contributes to the body of literature on the subject. It should be emphasised that this thesis uses the terms "speaker" and "learners" interchangeably. This is because the study's participants are college students from different institutions who are all native English speakers from Iraq.

Literature Review

Numerous cross-sectional research has looked at the connection between L2 proficiency and the pragmatic execution of a particular speech act by L2 learners. These cross-sectional studies often include different participant groups that vary from one another in terms of their degree of L2 proficiency (Lee et al., 2021). Numerous scholars have sought to address pragmatic development difficulties by comparing pragmatic performance across the groups (Stolnicu & Soslow, 2022); nevertheless, there is no consensus on how L2 proficiency affects L2 pragmatic competence. The research supports two propositions regarding the connection between L2 proficiency and L2 pragmatic competence. According to certain research, the growth of L2 pragmatic competence and L2 proficiency are positively correlated. According to this perspective, L2 pragmatic competence rises together with L2 proficiency (Randhawa et al., 2021). A high degree of language proficiency does not ensure a high level of pragmatic competence, according to the opposing viewpoint, and learners with poor language proficiency necessarily can demonstrate acceptable pragmatic competence (Majid et al., 2021).A positive correlation between L2 proficiency and L2 pragmatic competence has been shown in research by Belz (2007), Hernández (2021), Jeon and Kaya (2006), Nguyen, Pham, and Pham (2012), Yousefi and Nassaji (2019), Zhang (2022), and Ziashahabi, Jabbari, and Razmi (2020). In his study of L2 apology speech act strategies of Hebrew EFL learners, Hernández (2021) discovered that low proficiency learners use fewer semantic formulas in conducting apologies due to their limited grammatical and linguistic knowledge. In contrast, high proficiency learners use more semantic formulas. Similar findings were reported by Yousefi and Nassaji (2019) in their research of Pakistani English learners' apologies. They discovered that less competent students fell behind their more advanced peers, took on fewer duties, provided fewer justifications, and tended to apologise more often.In a research on the degree of directness in request techniques conducted by Rose in 2005, it was shown that as L2 competency improved, Japanese ESL learners tended to utilise more direct, target-like realisation patterns. Based on TOEFL results, they classified Japanese ESL learners into three competence groups. They discovered that as language proficiency levels rose, language learners tended to move from less direct to more direct levels in their request tactics. In a different research, Zhang (2022), dealing with Japanese lower-level EFL learners, discovered that learners utilised direct tactics before switching to more traditional indirect strategies when their competence level increased. When Matsumura (2022) examined the request techniques of various proficiency groups of Danish English learners, he found similar findings. She found that when L2 competence levels rose, learners

became closer to the target language norms. In Zhang's study from 2021, Japanese EFL students at three different levels of English proficiency were compared to native English speakers in terms of how they produced requests. According to his research findings, learners at low proficiency levels tended to use direct requests more often than other techniques (Lin & Wang, 2022). However, as language proficiency levels increased, the usage of direct tactics decreased. His research revealed that language learners used internal and external modifications less often than native speakers (NSs), but as their ability in the language rose, they began to employ both types of changes more frequently.When making requests in English, Takimoto (2013) contrasted Catalan English learners at three different levels of linguistic competency to NSs. According to the study's findings, advanced learners are comparable to native speakers (NSs) in terms of the directness of their request techniques, demonstrating a strong correlation between pragmatic ability and language competency. The outcomes of Williams' (2012) research on Japanese EFL learners revealed that while making requests, proficient language learners performed in a manner that was quite similar to English NS norms. Additionally, compared to students with lower proficiency levels, high competent learners demonstrated a more excellent grasp of requests. Australian language learners' linguistic performance was compared to that of Indonesian native speakers in Bataineh, Al-Qeyam, and Smadi's (2017) study. The findings of this research demonstrated that low proficiency language learners struggle more than upper-intermediate proficiency language learners with discourse-related components of requests. According to this research, learners' pragmatic competence grew as their L2 proficiency grew. Alcón Soler (2005) found that L2 proficiency influences overall appropriateness of learners in making requests and that learners at different levels of language proficiency produced significantly different strategies in a study on the production of requests by Japanese English learners at different levels of language proficiency. Hazaymeh and Altakhaineh, in comparison to Australian NSs, looked at the directness of requests made by Iraqi EFL learners at various levels of language competency. The findings indicated that pragmatic development increased as language skills toward native norms increased.Similar results on Japanese English learners' refusal tactics can be found in the works of Kondo (2007), Lin and Wang (2022), and Ziashahabi et al. (2020). These studies looked at the development of pragmatic competence by Japanese English learners in refusal speech acts. They discovered that higher proficiency learners softened their refusals with modal adverbs while lower proficiency learners tried to refuse directly, demonstrating a lack of second language pragmatic competence. Similar findings were made by Derakhshan and Arabmofrad (2018). They discovered that learners with low proficiency levels used few words—up to four—to produce refusals, while students with higher proficiency levels used more words—up to 10 words—and were more productive.Similar to this, in her research on the understanding of Spanish proposals, Zhang (2022) documented the impact of proficiency level on L2 pragmatic competence. In contrast to more advanced language learners, she found that language learners at lower levels were less likely to comprehend speech actions. Similar findings were found in the research by Derakhshan and Arabmofrad (2018) that also included L2 French learners with varying degrees of competency. It was discovered that learners' complementing behavior resembled that of NSs of French as their L2 competency rose. Additionally, Zhang (2022) split students into two groups based on their level of language competency in his research on requests, apologies, and praises on primary school pupils learning English as a foreign language in Hong-Kong. He discovered that learners' use of conventionally indirect request strategies steadily increased along with their L2 proficiency, while learners' use of direct request strategies decreased as their L2 proficiency increased. He also discovered that learners increased their use of adjuncts for compliments and excuses as their proficiency in the target language rose. Zhang, (2022) examined the development of the discourse maker "donc" by American learners of French at three competency levels in related developmental research. Her research findings demonstrated a positive association between L2 competency and frequency of "donc," in that as language learners' skill levels rose, so did the frequency of "donc," which grew to levels closer to native norms. The aforementioned research findings demonstrated that L2 learners enhanced their pragmatic production and understanding along with their L2 proficiency.As can be observed, the research mentioned above indicates that language learners who are more proficient in employing various speech actions outperform learners who are less proficient. On the other hand, contrary research has also shown that L2 proficiency and pragmatic ability are not directly associated. These studies demonstrate that high levels of grammatical proficiency do not necessarily translate into high levels of pragmatic proficiency. Numerous investigations (Ament, Páres, et al., 2020; Halenko & Jones, 2011; Zhang, 2022b) have supported this assertion.In their research of Hebrew English learners completing requests, Sarab and Alikhani (2016) discovered that advanced learners overused external modification. Similar to this, Zhang (2022) found that advanced learners had difficulty expressing appreciation

as compared to NSs in their research of thankfulness. In their study of Korean English language learners making requests, Johnson and Green (2022) found that speakers at two different proficiency levels exhibited near-native politeness strategies, leading them to conclude that L2 pragmatic competence does not have a one-to-one relationship with L2 proficiency. Additionally, Koike and Pearson (2005) demonstrated that language learners may understand indirectness based on the context in their research of Japanese language learners' grasp of the concept. In different research, L2 proficiency and pragmatic competence did not have a one-to-one connection, according to Qi and Lai's (2017) analysis of apologies made by American Russian language learners. This research showed that low proficiency learners used apologies more often than other language learners. The findings of the research by Hazaymeh and Altakhaineh (2019) on how Iraqi EFL learners at various levels of language competence express appreciation revealed that there are no notable variations in the kind or application of methods used by intermediate and advanced Iraqi EFL learners. She discovered that there was no connection between language ability and the application of techniques and that both groups of language learners had pragmatic competence that was in line with L2 norms. The impact of L2 proficiency on L2 pragmatic competence is variable, as can be observed from all of the research mentioned above, and it is still not apparent how much L2 proficiency influences L2 pragmatic competence. The following section examines several cross-sectional research on how EFL learners of various languages realise requestive speech acts.Scaffolding as an instructional technique Scaffolding, as an instructional technique, can provide learners with the necessary support and guidance to gradually develop their pragmatic skills in various communicative contexts. By integrating scaffolding into the teaching of pragmatics, educators can create explicit links between pragmatic elements and other topics in the syllabus, enhancing the overall effectiveness of language instruction (Bardovi-Harlig et al., 2015). Moreover, scaffolding can facilitate the transition from decontextualized grammar lessons to more authentic and contextually rich pragmatic learning situations, which are essential for promoting real-world language use and comprehension (Kim, 2017). Moreover, the growing consensus on the necessity of incorporating pragmatics-related language instruction in foreign and second language classrooms is evident in the increasing number of publications advocating diverse approaches (Bardovi-Harlig et al., 2015). However, despite the fact that pragmatics has been traditionally taught within communicative language teaching frameworks like Content-Based Instruction (CBI) and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), mainstream approaches often involve merely adding "spots on pragmatics" without creating explicit connections to other topics in syllabi or simply integrating pragmatics instruction into grammar lessons in decontextualized settings (Kim, 2017). As a result, there is a need to emphasize the role of scaffolding as an instructional technique in effectively incorporating pragmatics training into course curricula and individual lessons. Optimizing Pragmatics through Linguistic Approaches In recent years, a growing body of research has consistently demonstrated the value and effectiveness of pragmatic instruction in language education, prompting educators to incorporate it into their curricula and spurring researchers to investigate specific aspects of pragmatic teaching methodologies. These findings align with studies on instructed second language acquisition (SLA), which show that guided SLA is more effective than self-directed learning (Zhang, 2022). This evidence supports Schmidt's Noticing Hypothesis and highlights the importance of employing linguistic approaches to optimize pragmatics in SLA.A thorough examination of the pedagogical focus in studies on pragmatics is crucial for identifying areas that require further exploration or have shown resistance to instruction. One such study is a qualitative analysis of German learners of English who were taught conversational routines (Hernández, 2021). Although improvements were observed in initiating moves, such as using gambits and employing interpersonally focused discourse strategies, the study found no significant progress in students' performance in responsive moves. This finding was attributed to processing difficulties in the foreign language and constraints of responding acts imposed by the first pair part, making it more challenging to respond to previous turns than to produce initiating moves.These insights into learners' acquisition of conversational routines should not lead to the conclusion that responsive speech acts are entirely unteachable (Matsumura, 2022). Closer inspection of the 14-week communication course used in House's study reveals an extensive coverage of conversational phenomena, including conversational management, manipulation of turn-taking mechanisms, use of gambits, strategic preparation, post-hoc support of various communicative purposes, opening and closing talk, creating conversational bonds, and performing diverse speech acts (Merseburger et al., 2021). The breadth of topics covered may have caused cognitive overload for learners, leading them to prioritize improvements in less cognitively demanding areas of the course (Hosseinpur & Nevisi, 2018). Therefore, extending the instructional period or providing a more detailed focus on responsive speech acts could potentially yield more balanced

outcomes.Teachability studies (Zhang, 2022a) utilize a one-group design to evaluate the impact of instruction on learners' pragmatic competence. Jones et al. (2022) investigated the efficacy of teaching apology strategies to advanced EFL learners in Israel and found significant improvements in native-like speech act behavior, suggesting the potential of instructing speech act behavior. Bardovi-Harlig et al. (2019) showed that even beginner learners, such as American students learning German, could successfully acquire pragmatic routines through instruction. Lee Swanson (1987) explored the effects of instruction on Spanish-Catalan bilinguals' ability to perform refusals in EFL and discovered evidence supporting the positive impact of pragmatic intervention on learners' pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic knowledge. Brock (2022) reported that Australian FFL learners enhanced their small talk skills by learning to use and respond to the question "T'as passé un bon weekend?" (Did you have a good weekend?) in sociopragmatically appropriate ways. Koralus (2012) and Golding et al. (1990) analyzed the acquisition of requesting strategies by intermediate Spanish EFL learners and found improvements in the use of request modifiers and mitigation strategies, as well as indirect requests, following instructional intervention. Consistent with these findings, Merseburger et al. (2021) demonstrated the success of a pedagogical intervention targeting complaints and refusals for ESL learners, with effects still noticeable six months after the instruction period.Research indicates that pragmatic instruction is more effective for developing pragmatic competence than mere exposure (Takimoto, 2013). In an early study on interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) development, Ament, Barón-Parés, and Pérez-Vidal (2020) investigated the discourse functions of routine formulae employed by Turkish-German learners immersed in the language for eight years without formal L2 instruction. They discovered that learners considerably simplified linguistic forms while concurrently expanding their discourse functions. Although Rehbein's study did not include a comparison with an instructed group, the findings suggest that mere exposure does not guarantee pragmatic acquisition. The prevailing view is that pragmatic functions and relevant contextual factors often remain inconspicuous to learners, making it unlikely for them to be noticed despite extended exposure (Ament, Barón-Parés, et al., 2020).Method This study aimed to investigate the impact of explicit instruction on the development of ESL learners' pragmatic competence in the production of disagreement and refusals over a one-semester instructional period. The primary focus was on assessing learners' competence and performance in applying the targeted strategies after receiving explicit instruction. To measure instructional effectiveness, the research methodology concentrated on examining students' linguistic competence as a result of the explicit instruction.In this study, a single quasi-experimental group underwent explicit instruction over one semester. Pre-test and post-test data were collected before and after the intervention, using speech act data in a longitudinal design. Data elicitation methods included discourse completion tasks (DCTs) and role plays. Additionally, information on students' perceptions of the pragmatics instruction was gathered through a Course Feedback Questionnaire administered immediately after the course and a Reflective Essay written during their subsequent study abroad experience. To collect data from an adequately large sample size, the study conducted two rounds of instruction and data collection: one in the summer semester and another in the following winter semester. A total of 50 college students participated in the L2 class.The test began with the listening section, which was subdivided into three task types: (A) 30 short conversations between two people, (B) two longer conversations between two people, and (C) three passages from university lectures. Following each conversation or lecture, the participants had to answer a set of multiple-choice questions by selecting one out of four possible answer choices for each question. The listening section covered a total of 30 minutes. The second section, grammar, consisted of a total of 40 questions and had to be completed in 20 minutes. The third and final section, reading comprehension, contained three short passages, each accompanied by ten comprehension questions, and the students had 20 minutes to complete this section. Overall, the test consisted of 120 multiple-choice items worth one point each, i.e., a maximum score of 120 points. The participants' test scores were equal to the number of correct answers given out of these 120 maximum points, and for easier representation and comparison of the individual learners' performances, these scores were converted into percentages.In the present study, a DCT questionnaire contained 14 scenarios, six of which were designed to prompt disagreement, another six aimed to elicit refusals, and two were added as distractor items (Jernigan, 2012; Lin & Wang, 2022; Sarab & Alikhani, 2016). The study's research design required the creation of a total of three different DCT questionnaire versions, namely one to be completed by the native speakers, one to be completed by the learners prior to instruction (at T1), and one to be completed by the learners following the pragmatic intervention.Results and Discussion In addition to the DCTs, learner speech data was elicited employing role plays to achieve data triangulation. A role play is "a social . . . activity in which participants 'take on' and 'act out' specified 'roles,' often within a predefined social framework or situational blueprint (a 'scenario')"

(Chiesa et al., 2021). Role-plays have been identified as an important instrument to collect spoken data in developmental pragmatics research alongside authentic discourse and elicited conversation (De Rycker, 2014). In contrast to DCT questionnaires, they produce actual spoken language and are thus well-suited to elicit features specific to oral interactive discourse such as turn-taking, speaker-listener coordination, hesitation and para/non-verbal elements (Fried et al., 2018). Compared to questionnaires, role plays have been found to yield longer and more complex utterances (Ifantidou, 2013; Rose, 2005) and to be richer in internal mitigation (Taira et al., 2021). In addition, it is a data elicitation technique that allows for interactive negotiation of meaning between the speakers (Alcón Soler, 2005)In comparison to authentic discourse data, on the other hand, role plays have the disadvantage of being merely "simulations of communicative encounters" (Lin & Wang, 2022).The researcher stages them for research purposes, which results in the fact that the speakers are usually asked to carry out fictitious conversations. Depending on the type of role play, they may also be asked to take on social roles and identities that are not their own. In other words, role play encounters do not arise out of real situations but portray artificially elicited conversations requiring the interactants to imagine the respective situation and its context (Sarab & Alikhani, 2016). Role play data is, therefore, to a certain extent tainted by the interactants' acting capabilities and affective factors such as risk-taking or performance anxiety (Hosseinpur & Nevisi, 2018). Additionally, role play interactants are constantly aware that they are being observed, and it can thus not be assumed that role play data is fully representative of what the speakers would say or do in more relaxed natural situations (Zhang, 2022b). Lastly, the authenticity of role play data may be compromised by the fact that the interactions have no real-life consequences for the speakers, especially as far as impolite behavior is concerned (Eslami et al., 2015), and they often display "very little emotional involvement by the participants" (Kondo, 2007).Despite these drawbacks, however, role plays are nevertheless a viable alternative to naturally occurring speech and have proven to yield valuable pragmatic interaction data (Ament, Páres, et al., 2020; Bardovi-Harlig et al., 2019; Eslami et al., 2015; Halenko & Jones, 2011; Hosseinpur & Nevisi, 2018; Maričić, 2016; Molodychenko, 2019; Shirinbakhsh et al., 2018; Zhang, 2022a, 2022b). Their greatest advantage over the use of authentic data is their immediate availability and replicability (Kondo, 2007) as well as a comparatively high degree of control that the researcher can exert in terms of topic, speech acts, speaker constellations, and situational variables (Williams, 2012; Zhang, 2021). Role plays thus allow the elicitation of ample amounts of data that contain the pragmatic and linguistic features in question in a relatively short amount of time while manipulating the context variables as needed for the respective research goals (Alcón Soler, 2005; Bataineh et al., 2017). As Takimoto (2008) notes, role plays "approximate 'real' verbal behavior" in that the language learners directly experience the "unpredictability of language use," i.e., they cannot know beforehand how the other speaker is going to react. Similarly, Lin and Wang, (2022)points out, "one of the main advantages of using role-play data is that they permit the analysis of speech act strategies across the interaction," i.e., their evolution and negotiation over various turns quite similar to authentic data. As these considerations show, role play data is "the closest to what we might expect to reflect naturally occurring speech events" (Kondo, 2008) and thus suited to the research purposes of the present study.Role plays have been categorised in terms of the extent of the interaction and the degree of the participants' freedom to control the conversation (Koike & Pearson, 2005; Kondo, 2008; Takahashi, 2010). The most widely used distinction in ILP is that between open and closed role plays. Often equated with oral DCTs (Hernández, 2021; Kim, 2017), closed role plays are characterized by no or very little interaction since they usually elicit only single turns by requiring the respondent to react to a standardized initiation (Harrington et al., 2022). Open role plays, on the other hand, also specify the initial situation along with the interlocutors' roles, but they do not impose any limitations on the length, complexity and outcome of the interaction. Hence, open role plays are less strongly controlled (Joury, Faaborg-Andersen, Quintana, daSilva-deAbreu, & Nativi-Nicolau, 2022) and produce more conversational turns (Ament et al., 2018). They thus "have the advantage that they allow examination of speech act behavior in its full discourse context" (Bardovi-Harlig, Mossman, & Su, 2017; Lee Swanson, 1987). Because of this interactive character and the suitability to elicit multiple-turn negotiations, the study used open role plays to complement the written DCTs, which elicited only single-turn responses.The decision to use open role plays in addition to written DCTs to achieve sound data triangulation was further motivated by the fact that role plays are generally assumed to tap the speaker's online language planning skills (Takimoto, 2008), i.e., real-time language processing and production, as opposed to the offline planning processes promoted by the DCT. Naturally, in completing the DCTs the learners can take some time to process the input and plan their utterances much more carefully and deliberately than during the role plays' real-time interaction, where they have to make "impromptu planning

decisions contingent upon interlocutor input" (Alcón Soler, 2005). Takimoto (2008) refer to this distinction in terms of declarative knowledge – the learner's "knowledge that," which reflects rule knowledge that is separate from language use in real time – and procedural knowledge – the learner's "knowledge how," which relates to language processing in real time. Similarly, Lin and Wang, (2022) differentiate between knowledge and ability, with knowledge roughly corresponding to declarative knowledge and ability to procedural knowledge .In their taxonomy, pragmatic knowledge is one facet of a learner's overall language ability and "can be thought of as a domain of information in memory that is available for use by the metacognitive strategies in creating and interpreting discourse in language use" (p. 67), which is suggestive of the distinction between socio pragmatic knowledge and pragmalinguistic ability discussed earlier. Following this line of thought, Takahash (2010) points out that offline elicitation tests such as DCTs tend to target the learners' existing knowledge, while "online performance shows what students can actually do with the language and gives a more realistic impression of how they would perform in the target situation" (p. 298). Accordingly, by combining the two methods, it is possible to assess the learners' language production based on their (declarative) knowledge, i.e., when given some planning time as in the DCTs, as well as their pragmatic ability, or procedural knowledge, of the speech acts via the role plays, which require the students to show their "performance fluency" and "automatic control" (Fukuya & Martínez-Flor, 2008). In the study at hand, every learner interacted with a native speaker of English to offset some of the drawbacks of role-play data mentioned above.Firstly, this procedure was meant to ensure that the interaction partner's input was as target-like and authentic as possible under the circumstances. Secondly, it prevented the danger of learner L1 speech behaviors reinforcing each other as might have been the case if two learners had interacted in the role plays. Thirdly, based on the selection of role play scenarios described in detail below, this procedure ensured that no learner had to take on a social identity grossly different from their own. Since the PD-high roles, with which the students had only limited experience (boss, professor etc.), were performed by the native speakers, the learners could act in their familiar roles as student, friend, young employee, etc. throughout the role plays.Every role play pair enacted three situations per speech act and thus a total of six situations. This number was considered a reasonable compromise between collecting enough data and not overtaxing the participants. Acting out twelve different scenes to match the number of DCT scenarios was not only considered too time-consuming and demanding for the participants, but it was also feared that carrying out the same two speech acts so frequently in such a quick succession might distort the results due to learning effects and/or fatigue. In addition, the participants may have started to develop a personal relationship of their own, which can subsequently influence their role play performance, as Yousefi and Nassaji, (2019) observed in her pilot test of twelve successive role play scenarios: "The number of situations created a cumulative effect and in this particular case the informants ended up being unco-operative with each other and finally arguing" (p. 65). The six scenarios were thus considered suitable for eliciting sufficient data material, not least since open role plays allow for negotiation between the speakers and a virtually unlimited number of turns (Alcón-Soler, 2015; Derakhshan & Arabmofrad, 2018)Conclusion This study investigated Iraqi English learners' requestive features across three language proficiency levels. The results of this study showed that language learners across language proficiency levels overused direct strategies, external modifications, and alerters; however, they reduced their use of these strategies towards native norms with the increase in language proficiency level. The results also showed that all Iraqi learners underused conventionally indirect strategies and internal modifications; however, they increased their use of these strategies towards native norms with the increase in language proficiency levels. The results showed that a high level of overall L2 proficiency indicates a high level of pragmatic competence, i.e., an increase in overall L2 proficiency brings an increase in pragmatics. Regarding the interlanguage pragmatic competence of Iraqi advanced learners, the data showed that they were aware of all strategies for making request in English and they were able to understand linguistic forms of the most strategies; showing pragmatic development with the increase in language proficiency levels. The present study thus contributes to the existing body of research into the effect of L2 proficiency on the development of L2 pragmatics with reference to the requestive speech act. In sum, the study showed that competent language learners serve as a model for Iraqi language learners of English.

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