

An Assessment of Teaching Second Language Pragmatic Competence in the English Department of the University of Raparin

Saman Babakir Watman

English Language Department, College of Education, University of Raparin

Saman.babakir@uor.edu.krd

Dana Ibrahim Ahmad,

English Language Department, College of Basic Education, University of Raparin

danablbas@uor.edu.krd

Aram Omar Esmaeel

English Language Department, College of Basic Education, University of Raparin

aram.omar@uor.edu.krd

Abstract

This study, titled "An Assessment of Teaching Second Language Pragmatic Competence in the English Department of the University of Raparin," investigates how pragmatic competence is taught in the department. The research focuses on EFL instructors teaching third-year Listening and Speaking courses in the College of Education at the University of Raparin. A quantitative research method was employed, with data collected through a classroom observation checklist. The findings indicate that instructors consider pragmatics an essential component of EFL teaching and integrate both explicit and implicit instructional approaches. However, students showed greater interest in linguistic aspects such as grammar and vocabulary rather than pragmatic skills, resulting in a lack of pragmatic competence. **Keywords:** Assessment, Pragmatics, Pragmatic Competence, Listening and Speaking

ملخص البحث:

تبحث هذه الدراسة ، التي تحمل عنوان "تقييم تدريس الكفاءة البراغمتية للغة الثانية في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية بجامعة رابارين" ، في كيفية تدريس الكفاءة البراغمتية في القسم. يركز البحث على مدرسي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية الذين يقومون بتدريس دورات الاستماع والتحدث في السنة الثالثة في كلية التربية بجامعة رابارين. تم استخدام طريقة بحث كمية ، مع جمع البيانات من خلال قائمة مراجعة المراقبة في الفصل الدراسي. تشير النتائج إلى أن المعلمين يعتبرون البراغمتية مكونا أساسيا في تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية ويدمجون كلا من الأساليب التعليمية الصريحة والضمنية. ومع ذلك ، أظهر الطلاب اهتماما أكبر بالجوانب اللغوية مثل القواعد والمفردات بدلا من المهارات العملية ، مما أدى إلى نقص الكفاءة العملية. الكلمات المفتاحية: التقييم ، البراغمتية ، الكفاءة العملية ، الاستماع والتحدث

بؤختي تويثينهوه

ثم تويثينهوهيه به ناوئيشاني "ههلسهنگاندني فيركردني تواناي پراگماتيكي زمانى دووم له بهشى ئينگليزى زانكوى راپارين" ليكؤلينهوه له چؤنيهتى فيركردني ليها تويوي پراگماتيكي له بهشهكهده دهكات. تويثينهوهكه تيشك دهخاته سه مامؤستايانى EFL كه خولى سئيهي گويگرتن و قسهكردن له كؤليزى پهروهده له زانكوى راپارين دهلئيهوه. شئوازيكي تويثينهوهي چهنديتي بهكارهئيرا كه داتاكان له ريگهي ليستى چاوديزى پولهوه كؤكراونهتهوه. دهرنجامهكان نهوه دهردهخن كه مامؤستايان پراگماتيكي به بيكهاتهيهكي گرنگي فيركردني EFL دادهنين و ههردو ريپازهكاني فيركارى ئاشكرا و ناديار تيكهل دهكن. لهگهل نهوهشدا، قوتايان بايهخيكي زياتريان به لايغه زمانهوانبييهكاني وهك ريزمان و وشهگهل نيشاندا نهك شارهزايي پراگماتيكي، له نهجامدا نهبووني ليها تويوي پراگماتيكي.

Introduction

Pragmatics is defined as “the study of language from the point of view of the users, especially of the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction, and the effects their use of language has on other participants in the act of communication” (Crystal, 2008, p. 379). Pragmatic competence refers to the ability to communicate effectively, encompassing knowledge beyond grammatical structures (Gross, 2009). Furthermore, Rajab et al. (2009) consider pragmatic competence one of the most challenging aspects of language learning for EFL students. To use a second language appropriately according to its cultural norms, learners must develop their pragmatic competence, which can be fostered through targeted instruction provided by teachers.

Title of the Study

This study, titled “An Assessment of Teaching Second Language Pragmatic Competence in the English Department of the University of Raparin,” examines the extent and methods of teaching pragmatic competence in the department. It argues that pragmatic competence should be explicitly and systematically taught alongside linguistic competence.

Problem Statement

Several challenges arise in teaching pragmatic competence in an EFL setting, particularly in the English department:

1. Developing and teaching pragmatic competence in the classroom requires experience, cultural knowledge, and language awareness.
2. A lack of awareness of cross-cultural pragmatic rules leads to misunderstandings and pragmatic failure, as learners often transfer first-language pragmatic rules into second-language contexts.
3. The English department lacks a standardized curriculum for teaching listening and speaking courses, which affects the consistency of pragmatic instruction.

Aims of the Study

This study aims to:

1. Investigate how pragmatic competence is taught in the English department at the University of Raparin.
2. Assess the effectiveness of the approaches instructors use in teaching pragmatic competence in their classes.

Hypotheses

This study hypothesizes the following:

1. University instructors possess pragmatic competence in English and integrate it into their language instruction.
2. University instructors employ effective methods for teaching pragmatic competence.
3. University students have limited pragmatic knowledge compared to EFL instructors.

Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent do university instructors possess knowledge of pragmatic competence and understand how to teach it?
2. What strategies and techniques do instructors use to teach pragmatic competence?
3. Do university students possess sufficient pragmatic knowledge?

Scope of the Study

This study was conducted during the 2024–2025 academic year. It is limited to assessing how and to what extent pragmatic competence is taught in *Listening and Speaking* courses for third-year students in the College of Education at the University of Raparin.

Significance of the Study

This study is expected to contribute to the fields of pragmatics and applied linguistics. Additionally, it will be valuable for college instructors by providing insights into effective methods for teaching English language pragmatics.

Methodology

The study employed an observation checklist as the primary data collection tool. The researchers observed *Listening and Speaking* classes in the English department at the College of Education during morning sessions. The collected data was then analyzed and discussed, followed by a presentation of the conclusions.

II. Theoretical Background and Literature Review

Numerous studies have been conducted on teaching second language pragmatic competence. This study will highlight the most relevant research in this field. Pragmatic competence is broadly defined as the ability to communicate effectively, involving knowledge that extends beyond grammatical rules (Grossi, 2009). Rajab et al. (2009) emphasize that pragmatic competence is one of the most challenging aspects of language learning for EFL students. Second language learners must develop pragmatic competence to use language appropriately within the cultural norms of the target language community, which can be achieved through explicit instruction provided by teachers.

Key Studies on Pragmatic Competence in EFL and ESL Contexts

Grossi (2009) explores the teaching of pragmatic competence in ESL classrooms, particularly among adult immigrants. His study focuses on the cross-cultural aspects of compliments and compliment responses, demonstrating how different cultures approach these linguistic functions. For example, Americans and South Africans exhibit distinct patterns in giving and responding to compliments. Grossi highlights that cross-cultural pragmatic differences can lead to misunderstandings when learners transfer pragmatic rules from their first language to a second language. To mitigate such issues, the study advocates for explicit instruction, which enhances pragmatic awareness and reduces miscommunication among ESL learners. Similarly, a study conducted by Mohammad (2012) underscores that English language instruction should go beyond grammar, vocabulary, and phonetics to encompass language use in different social contexts. The study involved two groups of Iraqi EFL learners—one receiving explicit instruction in pragmatics and the other learning without any direct instruction. The results revealed that neither group could produce speech acts in the same way as native speakers. However, those who received explicit instruction demonstrated better pragmatic awareness. The study suggests incorporating role-play activities in classrooms to help learners avoid pragmatic errors caused by first-language interference. Vu (2017) conducted a study titled *Teaching Pragmatics in English as a Foreign Language at a Vietnamese University: Teachers' Perceptions, Curricular Content, and Classroom Practices*. The research investigated teachers' perceptions of pragmatics and the extent to which pragmatic knowledge was integrated into university curricula. Vu employed multiple research tools, including questionnaires, case studies, surveys, classroom observation checklists, and interviews. The findings indicated several challenges in teaching pragmatics, such as large class sizes, inadequate teaching facilities, curriculum limitations, and a reliance on the grammar-translation method. These obstacles hindered the effective instruction of pragmatic competence in Vietnamese universities.

II. Theoretical Framework: Pragmatic Competence and Language Competence

Bachman (1990, p. 86) classifies language competence into organizational competence and pragmatic competence. Organizational competence includes morphology, syntax, vocabulary, and cohesion, while pragmatic competence consists of functional competence and sociolinguistic competence.

Bachman and Palmer (1996) further subdivide pragmatic competence into illocutionary competence and sociolinguistic competence, which Leech (1983) refers to as pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics, respectively. Illocutionary competence allows speakers to use language for a wide range of communicative functions and to interpret the intended meaning behind utterances. The appropriateness of these functions varies across different sociocultural and discourse contexts (Bachman, 1995, p. 94). Bachman and Palmer (1996) define functional competence (equivalent to illocutionary competence) as the ability to interpret relationships between utterances, sentences, and texts, as well as the communicative intentions of speakers. For instance, the utterance "Could you tell me how to get to the post office?" is more likely to function as a request for directions rather than a simple yes-or-no question. Functional competence also includes four categories of language functions: ideational, manipulative, instrumental, and imaginative (Bachman & Palmer, 1996, p. 69). Sociolinguistic competence enables speakers to interpret and produce language that is appropriate to a specific communicative setting. This competence encompasses dialectal variation, register, idiomatic expressions, cultural references, and figures of speech. For instance, it includes knowing when to use a formal register for a classroom lecture versus an informal register in a conversation with children. It also involves understanding expressions such as "beyond the pale" or "don't push my buttons," which require cultural awareness for appropriate interpretation (Bachman & Palmer, 1996, p. 70). The reviewed studies highlight the significance of explicit instruction in developing pragmatic competence among EFL and ESL learners. Research consistently shows that pragmatic failures often stem from first-language interference and a lack of awareness of cross-cultural pragmatic norms. Therefore, the inclusion of pragmatic-focused activities, such as role-plays, awareness-raising tasks, and culturally contextualized instruction, is essential in improving second language learners' communicative

competence. Additionally, Bachman and Palmer's theoretical framework provides a comprehensive model for understanding the components of pragmatic competence, reinforcing the necessity of integrating this aspect of language learning into EFL curricula.

Language Competence

Bachman (1995, p. 86) claims language competence can be classified into two classes: organizational competence and pragmatic competence. Each of these, in turn, involves several different categories such as morphology, syntax, vocabulary, and cohesion under one component as organizational competence. On the other hand, pragmatic competence is the second field of language competence that can be subdivided into two subfields, including functional competence and sociolinguistic competence. The following diagram shows the classification of language competence.

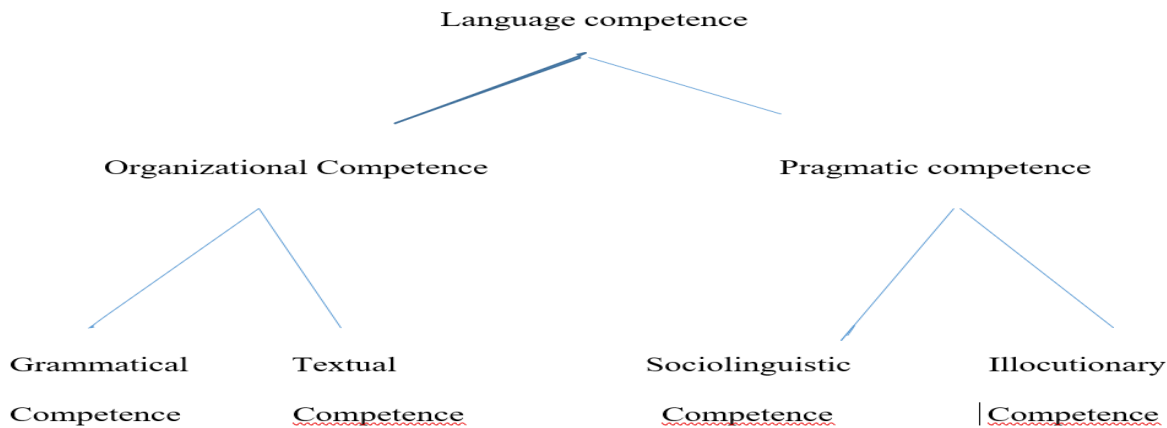


Figure (1) Bachman (1995) Components of Language Competence

The Aspects of Pragmatic Competence

According to Bachman (1990) and Bachman & Palmer (1996), pragmatic competence consists of two main components: illocutionary competence and sociolinguistic competence. Leech (1983) refers to these as pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics, respectively.

Illocutionary Competence

Bachman (1995, p. 94) defines illocutionary competence as the ability to use language for various communicative functions and to interpret the illocutionary force of utterances or discourse. The appropriateness of these functions varies depending on the socio-cultural and discourse context in which they occur.

Bachman and Palmer (1996, cited in Bachman, 1990) refer to this as functional competence, which enables speakers to interpret relationships between utterances, sentences, and texts, as well as the intentions of language users. For example, the utterance "Could you tell me how to get to the post office?" is more likely a request for directions rather than a yes-or-no question.

Functional competence encompasses four categories of language functions:

1. Ideational – expressing ideas and conveying information
2. Manipulative – influencing others' behavior
3. Instrumental – fulfilling practical needs
4. Imaginative – creating and interpreting artistic or fictional discourse

Additionally, pragmalinguistics (Leech, 1983) refers to functional competence, emphasizing a speaker's ability to perform speech acts—such as requests, apologies, and complaints—through verbal and nonverbal strategies.

Sociolinguistic Competence

Sociolinguistic competence refers to the ability to interpret and use language appropriately in specific social contexts. It involves knowledge of the conventions that govern:

- Dialects and language varieties
- Register (formal/informal speech)
- Idiomatic expressions
- Cultural references
- Figures of speech

For instance, using an appropriate register when delivering a classroom lecture versus conversing with a child demonstrates sociolinguistic awareness. Similarly, understanding expressions like "beyond the pale" or "don't push my buttons" requires cultural and contextual knowledge (Bachman & Palmer, 1996, p. 70).

Bachman (1990, p. 94) asserts that sociolinguistic competence allows speakers to control language use according to context and perform language functions appropriately within that setting.

Sociopragmatics, as Leech (2014, pp. 126-128) describes, represents the sociological aspect of pragmatics. It accounts for how speech communities interpret and perform communicative actions based on social factors such as:

- Social distance
- Power relations
- Degree of imposition

Pragmatic Notion

The term pragmatic notion broadly encompasses key aspects of pragmatics, including:

- Speech acts (requests, apologies, complaints, etc.)
- Politeness principles (strategies for maintaining social harmony)
- Cooperative principles (how speakers collaborate in conversation)

These aspects are central to the present study, which examines the role of pragmatic competence in EFL learning and instruction.

Speech Acts

Portner (2005, p. 190) states that the theory of speech acts was originally developed by the philosopher J. L. Austin, who first introduced the term "speech act" to refer to utterances that function as actions. For instance, when someone says, "*I name this ship*" or "*I now pronounce you man and wife*," these utterances create a new social and psychological reality.

Mey (2001, p. 93) defines speech acts as the basic minimal units of linguistic function. Austin, in his well-known book *How to Do Things with Words*, initially distinguished between three sets of contrasts:

1. Performative vs. Constative
2. Explicit Performative vs. Implicit Performative
3. Locutionary Act, Illocutionary Act, and Perlocutionary Act

However, Austin eventually abandoned the first two distinctions due to critical challenges and inconsistencies in their application. Instead, he focused on the third classification—locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts—which remains the foundation for analyzing speech acts today (Al-Sulaimaan, 2016, pp. 283-87).

1. Locutionary Act

A locutionary act refers to the basic act of producing a meaningful linguistic expression. It involves phonetics, phonology, syntax, and semantics—meaning that it consists of uttering certain sounds within a given linguistic system to express a particular proposition (Portner, 2005, p. 192).

Yule (1996, p. 48) defines a locutionary act as the basic act of an utterance, emphasizing its linguistic form and literal meaning. Similarly, Al-Sulaimaan (2016, p. 286, cited in Austin) describes it as the act of saying something that makes sense in a language, meaning that the speaker produces a well-formed, meaningful sentence. For instance, in the sentence:

"Tom says to Georgia that Linda."

The utterance is grammatically correct but lacks a clear proposition, showing how a locutionary act depends on meaningful linguistic expression. Huang (2007, p. 102) also defines a locutionary act as the production of a meaningful linguistic utterance.

2. Illocutionary Act

According to Huang (2012, p. 102), an illocutionary act refers to the action that a speaker intends to perform by uttering a linguistic expression, which carries a conventional force. It represents the function or purpose of the utterance within communication.

Portner (2005, p. 192) similarly describes an illocutionary act as a communicative action, in which the speaker intends to convey a particular meaning that the hearer is expected to recognize. This act determines whether the speaker is making a request, offering a promise, issuing a command, or performing another type of speech act.

3. Perlocutionary Act

Leech (2014, p. 199) states that a perlocutionary act refers to the effect an utterance has on the thoughts, feelings, or actions of the listener. Unlike illocutionary acts, which focus on the speaker's intent, perlocutionary acts are concerned with how the hearer responds to the utterance.

According to Austin (as cited in Sadock, 2004, p. 55), perlocutionary acts involve producing effects on the addressee, such as:

- Convincing the listener of the truth of a statement
- Encouraging the listener to take a specific action
- Causing an emotional reaction in the listener

For example, consider the utterance:

(1) "I have just made some coffee."

- Locutionary act: The sentence is a grammatically well-formed statement describing an action.
- Illocutionary act: The speaker may intend to offer coffee, inform someone, or make an explanation.
- Perlocutionary act: The utterance might prompt the hearer to smell the coffee, drink some, or feel tempted by the offer.

The speech act theory provides a framework for understanding how language functions as an action. Austin's classification of locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts remains foundational in linguistic and pragmatic studies, helping to analyze how meaning, intention, and effect interact in communication.

Politeness

Leech (1983, p. 130) defines politeness as a relationship between two participants referred to as *self* and *other*. In conversation, the *self* is typically identified with the speaker, while the *other* is identified with the hearer.

Leech (2014, p. 6) further explains politeness in terms of valuing the other person in interaction. He argues that attributing high value to the other party (or minimizing one's value) is perceived as polite, whereas attributing high value to oneself (or lowering the value of the other) is perceived as impolite. From Leech's perspective, the primary function of politeness is to minimize expressions of impolite beliefs while maximizing expressions of polite beliefs.

Leech's Politeness Maxims

Leech introduced six maxims of politeness, which regulate conversational interactions to maintain social harmony. Below are some key maxims along with examples.

1. The Tact Maxim

The tact maxim focuses on minimizing the cost to others and maximizing their benefit. It is particularly relevant to requests and commands.

- (a) Minimize cost to the other.
- (b) Maximize benefit to the other.

Examples:

- (2) *You will peel these potatoes.* (Less polite)
- (3) *Won't you sit down?* (More polite)

2. The Generosity Maxim

This maxim emphasizes reducing benefit to oneself while increasing cost to oneself, commonly seen in offers and invitations.

- (a) Minimize benefit to self.
- (b) Maximize cost to self.

Examples:

- (4) *I can lend you my car.*
- (5) *You must come and have dinner with us.*

3. The Approbation Maxim

This maxim concerns praise and avoiding criticism. It encourages speakers to avoid saying anything negative about others and to maximize expressions of admiration.

- (a) Minimize dispraise of the other.
- (b) Maximize praise of the other.

Examples:

- (6) *What a marvelous meal you cooked!*
- (7)
- A: *Her performance was outstanding.*
- B: *Yes, wasn't it?*

4. The Modesty Maxim

This maxim promotes humility by downplaying one's achievements or contributions.

- (a) Minimize praise of self.
- (b) Maximize dispraise of self.

Examples:

- (8)
 - A: *They were so kind to us.*
 - B: *Yes, they were, weren't they?*
- (9) *Please accept this small gift as a token of our esteem. (This is more polite than "Please accept this large gift as a token of our esteem.")*

5. The Agreement Maxim

This maxim encourages speakers to emphasize agreement and reduce disagreement in conversation.

- (a) Maximize agreement between the self and the other.
- (b) Limit disagreement between the self and the other.

Example:

- A: *English is difficult to learn.*
- B: *True, but the grammar is quite easy.*

Leech's politeness principles serve as guidelines for maintaining courteous and harmonious communication. By minimizing conflict and enhancing social rapport, these maxims help shape polite and effective interactions across different cultural and linguistic contexts.

The Cooperative Principle

Al-Sulaimaan (2016, p. 308) claims that the Cooperative Principle was developed by philosopher Paul Grice, who proposed that people naturally cooperate in communication to reduce misunderstandings.

Grice (1974, p. 47) defines the principle as follows: "*Make your contribution as required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged*" (Mey, cited in Grice, 1974, p. 47).

From the perspective of the Cooperative Principle, speakers are expected to cooperate behaviorally, emotionally, and verbally to facilitate effective communication. This cooperation includes avoiding class-based language barriers as well as taboo words that might cause discomfort.

To ensure smooth communication, Grice introduced four maxims that guide conversational interactions (Leech, 1983, p. 332; Mey, 2001, p. 72; Levinson, 1983, pp. 101-102; Yule, 1996; Al-Sulaimaan, 2016, p. 309). These maxims help speakers convey meaning effectively and avoid confusion in discourse.

Grice's Four Maxims

1. The Maxim of Quantity

Speakers should provide the right amount of information—neither too much nor too little.

- (a) Make your contribution as informative as required.
- (b) Do not provide more information than is necessary.

2. The Maxim of Quality

Speakers should aim for truthfulness in their contributions.

- (a) Do not say what you believe to be false.
- (b) Do not say anything for which you lack sufficient evidence.

3. The Maxim of Relevance

- Be relevant-ensure that what you say is directly related to the conversation.

4. The Maxim of Manner

Speakers should express themselves clearly and orderly to prevent misunderstandings.

- (a) Avoid obscure expressions.
- (b) Avoid ambiguity.
- (c) Be brief.
- (d) Be orderly.

Grice's Cooperative Principle plays a crucial role in shaping effective communication. By adhering to these maxims, speakers can convey their messages more efficiently, minimize misunderstandings, and enhance conversational coherence. However, in everyday interactions, speakers sometimes intentionally violate or flout these maxims for rhetorical or humorous effects, a concept explored further in implicature theory.

Approaches to Teaching Pragmatics

Regarding explicit instruction, an empirical study conducted by Mohammad (2012) on Iraqi EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students' pragmatic competence, particularly focusing on speech acts such as requests and refusals, found that explicit teaching of pragmatic competence was more effective. Students who received

explicit instruction performed better than those who were taught implicitly. The study concluded that a significant majority of second language learners developed pragmatic skills more effectively through explicit teaching. In contrast, Arghashi and Gorjian (2018) found that pragmatic competence could also be developed through implicit instruction, though it was more limited in comparison. The study indicated that explicit instruction was particularly effective in teaching speech acts like compliance. Rajabia et al. (2015) emphasized the importance of second language learners developing pragmatic competence to use language appropriately according to the socio-cultural norms of the target language community. They argued that explicit instruction in the classroom is a facilitative tool to help learners develop this competence. While implicit instruction can still affect learners' pragmatic competence, its impact is often less significant. According to Aufa (2011, p. 40-41), although implicit instruction may be beneficial, it may not be as effective as explicit instruction in developing pragmatic competence. Taguchi, as cited in Kasper and Rose (2001), defines explicit instruction as a direct, one-way explanation of the target pragmatic features by instructors or researchers. In contrast, implicit instruction does not provide such direct explanations. Instead, it encourages learners to deduce or reflect on pragmatic rules on their own. Ishihara and Cohen (2010, p. 103) found that explicit teaching of pragmatics was more effective than implicit teaching. Metapragmatic information, which includes contextual information such as social status and psychological distance, is particularly important in explicit instruction. Implicit teaching, on the other hand, may not lead to rapid pragmatic development, and the learning process may be slower. Explicit teaching appears to heighten learners' attention to specific linguistic features and enhance their understanding of how these features relate to contextual factors. Explicit instruction seems to offer a more direct and efficient path for the development of pragmatic competence in second language learners.

III. Methodology

A. Sample and Participants

The participants in this study included EFL (English as a Foreign Language) instructors and college students. The researchers observed third-year students from the Department of English Language at the College of Education, University of Raparin.

B. Data Collection Tool

The primary tool for data collection in this study was a classroom observation checklist, which was employed to investigate the study's objectives and answer the research questions. The researchers began observing the Listening and Speaking classes on January 25th, 2024 and concluded their observations on March 1st, 2024. The observation process typically lasts for about one month, though it can sometimes extend over several months (Dawson, 2002, p. 32).

The observation checklist was the key instrument for data collection. Researchers visited the classrooms regularly and completed the checklist during each observation of the Listening and Speaking sessions. This tool allowed the researchers to gain deeper insights into the behaviors and attitudes of the participants.

The checklist was designed to assess the teaching of pragmatic competence, including elements such as speech acts, politeness, and cooperative principles, in addition to evaluating the methods used to teach English as a Foreign Language. The checklist consisted of 15 items, each rated on a five-point scale of frequency:

- **Never (1) = 0%**
- **Rarely (2) = 20%**
- **Sometimes (3) = 50%**
- **Often (4) = 70%**
- **Always (5) = 90%** (Yasin, 2016).

The researchers primarily relied on these frequency levels to ensure reliable data.

C. Data Analysis Method

The data were analyzed using SPSS version 25.

IV. Data Analysis and Discussion

Introduction

This section presents an analysis of the data collected through the classroom observation checklist. The data were analyzed using SPSS, and the Likert scale in the checklist was coded as follows:

- **1 = Never**
- **2 = Rarely**
- **3 = Sometimes**
- **4 = Often**

- 5 = Always

Based on these codes, the interpretation of the mean values was as follows:

- Mean < 2.5: Negative value
- Mean = 2.5: Neutral value
- Mean > 2.5: Positive value

Three research questions were addressed in this study, and the analysis provides answers to these questions. For example, the first research question, which corresponds to seven items in the checklist, is: "To what extent do the university instructors have knowledge of pragmatic competence and know how to teach it?" The second research question explores the strategies and techniques that instructors use to teach pragmatic competence. The third research question examines whether university students possess pragmatic competence.

Analyzing the Classroom Observation Checklist

First Research Question: To what extent do the university instructors have knowledge of pragmatic competence and know how to teach it?

The university instructors seem to have a partial understanding of pragmatic competence. They demonstrate knowledge of pragmatics in appropriate contexts and integrate it into their teaching methods. This enables them to create learning environments where students can effectively understand and apply pragmatic concepts through contextual and communicative practices. By emphasizing real-world scenarios and context-dependent language use, instructors bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. As a result, students are better equipped to navigate diverse communicative situations, cultivating cultural and contextual awareness.

Table (1)

Item 1: The instructor begins the class by greeting the students.				
	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	St. deviation
Sometimes	1	5.3	4.33	5.94
Often	10	52.6		
Always	7	36.8		
Total	18	94.7		
Missing	1	5.3		
Total	19	100.0		

The mean of this output is 4.33, which shows a positive acknowledgment. The instructors often greet the students when they enter the classes. **Table (2)**

Item 2: During the class period, the instructor devotes time to teaching the cultural norms and values of the target language, such as customs and morals.				
	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	St. deviation
Never	1	5.3	2.89	.758
Rarely	3	15.8		
Sometimes	11	57.9		
Often	3	15.8		
Total	18	94.7		
Missing	1	5.3		
Total	19	100.0		

The mean of this item is 2.89, so it can be regarded as a low positive value. The instructors sometimes allotted time in the class for teaching the target cultural norms and values concerning what is appropriate and inappropriate. The EFL instructors seemed to have added some phrasal verbs and proverbs in addition to making a comparison between the local culture and the target culture to raise students' cultural awareness. **Table (3)**

Item 3: The instructor invites native speakers to the class to raise students' pragmatic and cultural awareness.

	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	St. deviation
Never	18	100	1.00	.000
Total	18	100.0		

As the above output shows, the mean of this item is 1.00, which represents a low negative value. So, it seems that the EFL instructors hardly invite English native speakers to their classes to interact with and raise students' pragmatic as well as cultural awareness. **Table (4)**

Item 4: The instructor follows the communicative method of teaching in preference to the traditional one.				
	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	St. deviation
Rarely	5	26.3	3.11	.900
Sometimes	7	36.8		
Often	5	26.3		
Always	1	5.3		
Total	18	94.7		
Missing	1	5.3		
Total	19	100.0		

This item shows a relatively low positive value because the mean of this item is 3.11. During the class period, various communicative functions concerning the different social situations were sometimes taught by the EFL instructors and they mostly managed to employ communicative methods of teaching rather than the traditional ones. **Table (5)**

Item 5: The instructor calls students' attention to the use of such speech acts as inviting, requesting, refusing, agreeing, etc.				
	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	St. Deviation
Never	1	5.3	2.67	.907
Rarely	8	42.1		
Sometimes	5	26.3		
Often	4	21.1		
Total	18	94.7		
Missing	1	5.3		
Total	19	100.0		

The mean of this item is 2.67, which shows a low positive value. During the class period, teaching students' speech acts through real communication was not given sufficient attention by the EFL instructors in the conversation class which could affect the student's ability to use speech acts in real-life situations. **Table (6)**

Item 6: Discourse completion tasks are used by the instructor, for example, role-play, to develop students' pragmatic competence.				
	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	St. deviation
Never	6	31.6		

Rarely	8	42.1	1.94	.873
Sometimes	3	15.8		
Often	1	5.3		
Total	18	94.7		
Missing	1	5.3		
Total	19	100.0		

The mean is 1.94, which indicates that this item has a negative value. This implies that discourse completion tasks were rarely used by the instructor in the class. In other words, they seem to have failed to develop students' pragmatic competence through using discourse completion tasks as class activities. **Table (7)**

Item 7: The instructor avoids and encourages students to avoid using abusive and taboo words, which may cause cultural shock to others.				
	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	St. Deviation
Sometimes	4	21.1	3.94	.639
Often	11	57.9		
Always	3	15.8		
Total	18	94.7		
Missing	1	5.3		
Total	19	100.0		

The mean of this item is 3.94, which shows a high positive value. According to the result of this item, most of the time, the instructors do their best to avoid using abusive as well as taboo words so as not to cause a cultural shock to the students. It also highlights the importance of understanding the diverse backgrounds of students to promote effective communication and minimize misunderstandings.

Second Research Question: What are the strategies and techniques that the instructors use to teach pragmatic competence?

The university instructors appear to be employing effective techniques in class to teach pragmatic aspects to raise students' awareness and assist them in successfully communicating in appropriate contexts. These strategies include interactive activities and role-playing exercises that encourage students to practice language use in various social situations. **Table (8)**

Item 8: The instructor uses effective techniques to correct students' pragmatic errors.				
	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	St. deviation
Never	1	5.3	2.61	.778
Rarely	7	36.8		
Sometimes	8	42.1		
Often	2	10.5		
Total	18	94.7		
Missing	1	5.3		
Total	19	100.0		

The mean of this item is 2.61, so it shows a low positive value. The result indicates that the instructors only sometimes correct the students' pragmatic errors. To be precise, the instructors rarely used effective techniques for the correction of students' pragmatic errors. **Table (9)**

Item 9: The instructor emphasizes teaching English for communication rather than teaching grammatical and vocabulary items.				
	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	St. deviation
Never	1	5.3	3.78	1.008
Sometimes	5	26.3		
Often	8	42.1		
Always	4	21.1		
Total	18	94.7		

Missing	1	5.3		
Total	19	100.0		

The mean of 3.78 is an indication that the above item has a high positive value. As the result reveals, the instructors seem to abide by the main aim of the subject of advanced conversation which is to teach English for communication through contextualizing every topic in the class rather than teaching grammar and vocabulary items. **Table (10)**

Item 10: The instructor uses audio and audio-visual aids to raise students' pragmatic awareness.				
	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	St. deviation
Never	1	5.3	3.28	.958
Rarely	2	10.5		
Sometimes	7	36.8		
Often	7	36.8		
Always	1	5.3		
Total	18	94.7		
Missing	1	5.3		
Total	19	100.0		

The mean of this item is 3.28, which indicates a high positive value. The instructors use various audio- and audio-visual aids in their classes, including the whiteboard, data show projector, textbook, and audio and video clips of native speakers to raise students' pragmatic awareness. **Table (11)**

Item 11: The instructor uses polite language in their communication.				
	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	St. deviation
Sometimes	4	21.1	3.94	.639
Often	11	57.9		
Always	3	15.8		
Total	18	94.7		
Missing	1	5.3		
Total	19	100.0		

The mean of this item is 3.94, which shows a high positive value. So, the result shows that the instructors generally use polite language while communicating with students to encourage them and increase their interest in learning the language.

Third Research Question: Do university students possess pragmatic knowledge?

Many students face challenges in mastering the pragmatic aspects, which are important for effective communication. However, linguistic competence alone restricts students' overall language ability. Thus, pragmatic knowledge, such as understanding politeness and communication functions enables them to be competent communicators. EFL students do not have as much second language pragmatic knowledge as the instructors do. **Table (12)**

Item 12: The students are competent in using speech acts. Such as making invitations, refusing/accepting offers, agreeing/disagreeing, etc.				
	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	St. deviation
Rarely	14	73.7	2.22	4.28
Sometimes	4	21.1		
Total	18	94.7		
Missing	1	5.3		
Total	19	100.0		

The mean of this item is 2.22, which shows a negative value. The result of this item reveals that the students rarely use such speech acts as making suggestions, accepting offers, requests, etc. among themselves and with the instructor because the instructor did not seem to have paid enough attention to the usage of speech acts; as a result, the students were not able to use them appropriately. **Table (13)**

Item 13: The students use polite language in their communication.				
	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	St. deviation
Never	1	5.3	2.89	.900
Rarely	4	21.1		
Sometimes	10	52.6		
Often	2	10.5		
Always	1	5.3		
Total	18	94.7		
Missing	1	5.3		
Total	19	100.0		

This item shows a low positive value because the mean is 2.89, which represents that the students sometimes use polite language among themselves as well as with the instructors in the class. **Table (14)**

Item 14: The students are competent in distinguishing between formal and informal styles of language.				
	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	St. deviation
Never	1	5.6	3.22	0.878
Rarely	2	11.1		
Sometimes	7	38.9		
Often	8	44.4		
Total	18	100		

This item has a relatively high positive value because the mean is 3.22. As the result reveals, formal and informal styles of language were often used appropriately by the students in the class among themselves and with instructors. **Table (15)**

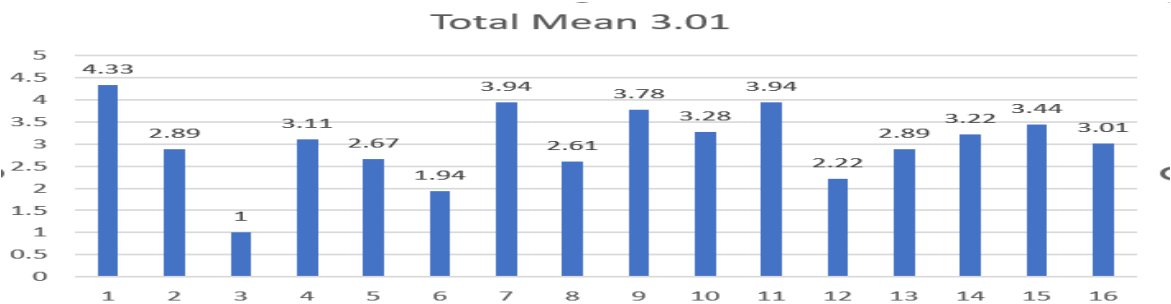
Item 15: The students take turns in conversation among themselves and with their instructor.				
	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	St. deviation
Never	1	5.3	3.44	1.042
Rarely	1	5.3		
Sometimes	8	42.1		
Often	5	26.3		
Always	3	15.8		
Total	18	94.7		
Missing	1	5.3		
Total	19	100.0		

The indication of the above output is a sign of the acceptance of the item positively, which has a value of 3.44. Regarding communication with students and instructors, they generally take turns while communicating with each other.

The Results and Discussion of Classroom Observation Checklist

The total mean of the classroom observation checklist is 3.01, which confirms a positive value. The subsequent chart is the statistical analysis of all the items of the classroom observation checklist.

Chart 1 The Results of the Classroom Observation Checklist



Data Analysis and Discussion

Introduction

The analysis of the data collected from the classroom observation checklist reveals important insights regarding the pragmatic competence of both instructors and students. The overall average mean of all items is 3.01, which indicates a positive value. Below is a detailed discussion of the findings in response to the three research questions.

First Research Question: To what extent do the university instructors have knowledge of pragmatic competence and know how to teach it?

The results for items one to seven indicate that the instructors possess a solid understanding of pragmatic competence and integrate pragmatic aspects alongside language skills in their teaching. Specifically:

- Item 1 shows a high positive value, indicating that instructors often greet students as they enter the class and allot time to discuss cultural norms about both the target and local cultures (Item 2).
- Item 3 shows a very negative value, reflecting that the EFL instructors have never invited native English speakers to their classes, which could limit opportunities for students to experience authentic language use.
- Item 4 indicates a positive value, suggesting that instructors use a communicative approach, prioritizing communication over strict grammar and vocabulary instruction.
- Item 5 shows a low positive value, implying that instructors do not focus sufficiently on the use of speech acts such as requests or agreements, which limits students' ability to use these aspects appropriately.
- Items 6 and 7 show high positive values, revealing that instructors use discourse completion tasks to help develop students' pragmatic competence and actively encourage them to avoid the use of taboo words.

Second Research Question: What strategies and techniques do the instructors use to teach pragmatic competence?

The results for items eight to eleven indicate that the instructors employ effective methods to teach pragmatic competence:

- Item 8 shows a low positive value, indicating that instructors sometimes correct students' pragmatic errors, but there is room for more consistent correction.
- Item 9 reveals a high positive value, suggesting that instructors focus on using effective communication methods rather than solely emphasizing grammar and vocabulary.
- Item 10 indicates that instructors use authentic materials, such as audio-visual aids, to raise students' awareness of pragmatics, which is rated positively.
- Item 11 also shows a high positive value, indicating that the instructors consistently use polite language in their communication with students.

Third Research Question: Do university students possess pragmatic competence?

The results for items twelve to fifteen indicate that the students lack pragmatic competence and struggle to master key aspects of pragmatics:

- Item 12 shows a negative value, as students fail to use speech acts such as making invitations, refusals, accepting offers, and making requests appropriately in the classroom. This suggests that the instructors may not have emphasized the proper use of these speech acts.
- Items 13 and 14 are rated positively, indicating that students can use polite language and distinguish between formal and informal uses of language.
- Item 15 shows a positive value, meaning that students generally take turns while communicating with one another.

The data analysis shows that while the instructors have a decent understanding of pragmatic competence and use effective methods in teaching it, there is a gap in ensuring that students master the practical aspects of pragmatics. The study highlights the importance of explicit instruction in speech acts and cultural norms to enhance students' pragmatic competence.

VI. Conclusion

1. **Instructors' Focus on Pragmatic Competence:**
The instructors generally prioritize teaching pragmatic notions such as cultural knowledge, appropriacy, and politeness to help students use the foreign language effectively in various social situations. As a result, the

instructors tend to focus more on correcting students' pragmatic errors than on addressing grammatical errors. This approach demonstrates a commitment to enhancing students' pragmatic competence.

2. Effective Teaching Approach: The instructors adopt communicative language teaching (CLT) as an effective method for teaching both sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic skills. Although this approach is suitable for teaching pragmatic competence, the instructors have not fully managed to implement it efficiently in their classes. This suggests that while the approach is theoretically sound, its practical application in the classroom needs improvement.

3. Pragmatics vs. Linguistic Knowledge: While the instructors have integrated both explicit and implicit approaches to teaching pragmatic knowledge, students are more interested in learning linguistic aspects such as grammar and vocabulary. This preference has led to a lack of focus on developing pragmatic skills, leaving students with insufficient pragmatic knowledge, despite the instructors' efforts.

4. Confirmation of Hypothesis (Pragmatic Knowledge): The first hypothesis, which posits that EFL instructors possess pragmatic knowledge and teach it alongside other language skills, has been confirmed. The instructors effectively teach pragmatic concepts like cultural knowledge, appropriacy, and politeness, aiming to improve students' pragmatic competence. However, they focus more on correcting pragmatic errors than on grammatical ones, reinforcing the idea that pragmatic competence is seen as equally important in the learning process.

5. Confirmation of Hypothesis (Teaching Approach): The second hypothesis, which suggested that instructors use an effective approach to teach pragmatic competence, is partially confirmed. While communicative language teaching is adopted as an appropriate method for teaching pragmatic skills, the instructors have not fully implemented this approach in practice. This indicates that although the method is suitable, there are challenges in its application within the classroom setting.

References

- Aufa, F. (2011) Explicit Pragmatic Instruction in Teaching English as a Foreign Language. *UII Journal of English and Education*, 5(1), pp.37-44.
- Austin, J.L. (1975) How to do things with words. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Al Sulaiman (2016) Semantics and Pragmatics. Erbil: Lebanese French University.
- Arghashi, T. and Gorjian, B., 2018. The impact of teaching pragmatic functions to high school learners. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Language Learning*, 4(3), pp.49-58.
- Bachman, L.F., 1990. *Fundamental considerations in language testing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bachman, L.F. and Palmer, A.S., 1996. *Language testing in practice: Designing and developing useful language tests* (Vol. 1): Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Crystal, D. (2008) A dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics. 6thed. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Dawson, C., 2002. *Practical research methods: A user-friendly guide to mastering research techniques and projects*. Oxford: British Library Cataloguing.
- Grossi, V., 2009. Teaching pragmatic competence: Compliments and compliment responses in the ESL classroom. Available at: http://www.ameprc.mq.edu.au/docs/prospect_journal/volume_24_no_2/Vittoria_Grossi.pdf. Accessed 6 Apr. 2023.
- Huang, Y. (2012) *The Oxford dictionary of pragmatics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ishihara, N. and Cohen, A.D. (2010) *Teaching and learning pragmatics: Where language and culture meet*. Edinburgh: Longman Applied linguistics.
- Kasper, G. and Rose, K.R. (2001) *Pragmatics in language teaching*. Edinburgh: Cambridge University Press.
- Leech, G.N., 2014. *The Pragmatics of Politeness*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Leech, G. (1983) Principles of Pragmatics. New York: Longman.
- Levinson, S.C. (1983) Pragmatics. Cambridge textbooks in linguistics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mohammed, M.M., 2012. Teachability of Pragmatic Competence: The Impact of Explicit Instruction on the Development of Iraqi Freshmen EFL Learners' Pragmatic Competence. *The Arab Gulf*, 15(3-4), pp.21-48.
- Mey, J. (2001) Pragmatics. 2nd ed. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Portner, P.H. (2005) What is Meaning: Fundamentals of Formal Semantics (Fundamentals in Linguistics). Oxford: Blackwell.

Rajabia, S., Azizifara, A. and Gowhary, H., 2015. The effect of explicit instruction on pragmatic competence development; teaching requests to EFL learners of English. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 199, pp.231-239.

Sadock, J. (2004) *Speech acts: Handbook of pragmatics. Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub.*

Vu, N.M., 2017. Teaching pragmatics in English as a Foreign Language at a Vietnamese university: Teachers' perceptions, curricular content, and classroom practices. Faculty of Educational and Social Work: University of Sydney. Available at: https://ses.library.usyd.edu.au/bitstream/2123/16157/1/vu_mn_thesis.pdf. Accessed 6 Apr. 2024

Yule, G., 1996. *Pragmatics*. Hong Kong: Oxford University Press.

Yasin, A. H., 2016. An Assessment of the Implementation of the Classroom Interaction Procedures in Teaching and Learning English at English Departments at Universities in Hawler City. Unpublished Thesis: Salahaddin University.