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The Role of Context in Pragmatic Understanding: A Comparative Study of Native and Non-Native Speakers

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دور السياق في الفهم العملي: دراسة مقارنة للمتحدثين الإصليين و غير الأصليين

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الملخص

تبحث الدراسة الحالية في ممارسة الطلب والاعتذار كقواعد عملية في تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية لمتعلمي الصف السادس العراقيين. يتلقى العراقيون قدرًا كبيرًا من الأساس الأكاديمي المنهجي في القواعد والمفردات، إلا أنهم يفتقرون إلى القدرة على استيعاب اللغة الإنجليزية اجتماعيًا. وحتى لو كانت جملهم صحيحة نحويا، فإن ذلك يمكن أن يخلق سوء فهم.. ولمعالجة هذه القضية، تم إجراء دراسة شبه تجريبية على ٤٠ طالباً في إحدى المدارس الحكومية ببغداد. تم إعطاء إحدى المجموعتين تعليمات محددة حول كيفية تقديم طلبات واعتذارات مهذبة باللغة الإنجليزية، بينما واصلت المجموعة الأخرى مراجعة المحادثة المنتظمة بناءً على دروس الكتب المدرسية. وقد أجرت كلتا المجموعتين اختبارًا كتابيًا قبل وبعد التدخل الذي استمر ستة أسابيع. وكان الهدف من الاختبار تقييم قدرتهم على توليد تعليقات مناسبة اجتماعيا في سياقات مختلفة. أظهر الطلاب الذين تم تدريسهم البراغماتية تحسنًا ملحوظًا في لغة قواعدهم وأدبهم. من خلال أشكال الأدب الأكثر عامية (أي الأفعال المشروطة، وروائح الدورة الشهرية) بدا أنها تبدو أكثر طبيعية واحترامًا في اللغة الإنجليزية. وعلى النقيض من ذلك، أظهرت المجموعة الضابطة تغيرًا طفيفًا. لا يعد تدريس البراغماتية أمرًا مهمًا بشكل مباشر فحسب، بل إننه فعال أيضًا للمتعلمين الصغار. سيكون من الجيد النظر في الاستخدام العملي والاجتماعي للغة كجزء من انتظام تعليم اللغة من قبل معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية ومخططي المناهج الدراسية في العراق.**الكلمات المفتاحية:** . الكفاءة العملية، التعليم الصريح، أفعال الكلام، الكفاءة التواصلية، متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية العراقيين

Abstract

The present study investigates practicing request and apology as pragmatic rules in teaching English language for Iraqi sixth-grade learners. Iraqis receive plenty of systematic academic foundation in grammar and vocabulary, however lack in the ability to appropriate English socially. Even if their sentences are grammatically correct, this can create misunderstandings.In order to tackle the issue, a quasi-experimental study with 40 students in one of public schools in Baghdad has been conducted. One group was given specific instructions of how to make polite requests and apologies in English, while the other continued regular conversational review based on textbook lessons. Both groups took a written test before and after the six-week intervention. The test was meant to assess their capacity to generate socially fitting comments in different contexts.Students that are taught pragmatics showed significant improvement in the language of both their grammar and politeness. Through the more colloquial forms of politeness (i.e. modal verbs, period-smells) they seemed to sound a lot more natural and deferential in English. By contrast, the control group exhibited minimal change.Not only is teaching pragmatics directly important, but it is also effective for young learners. It would do well to consider practical, social language use as part of the regularities of language instruction by English teachers and curriculum planners in Iraq.: Keywords: Pragmatic Competence Explicit Instruction Speech Acts Communicative Competence Iraqi EFL Learners

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Rationale

Just like any other language, becoming a good speaker involves more than having grammar and vocabulary in your bag. Users of language also need pragmatic competence, the ability to interact adeptly and effectively in social contexts. I just want to add that it is with pragmatics — the study of language use in context — that we can try at understanding how, across myriad communicative encounters, one of those potential shapes may be preferred by speakers and listeners. It moves the listener through things like implicated content and intention, and common knowledge and social convention, past mere lexical meaning into what a speaker means.Acquiring pragmatic competence is not easy for second language (L2) learners. Unlike syntactic rules, pragmatic norms are often complex and domain-dependent and contextually variable; this implies that the relationship between a linguistic form (e.g. question), its intended function in discourse (in this case, apologising) [and specific context of use is nuanced and does not have systematic one-to-one correspondence (Taguchi 2015). L2 speakers with near-native linguistic competence may make pragmatic errors and failure to use of language appropriately in social contexts, which is negatively perceived by others [9] thus being called rude demanding or impolite (Thomas, 1983). The question, then, is how we interpret things contextually—something that needs to be researched in detail.To give you a little context, context is also a multidimensional term. It projects sociological properties displayed (also as social-pragmatic context, at least what so for it is people-to-people responding) and individual cognitive environment based on how much reconfigured (interpretations, conclusions, knowledge neither presented by meaning itself nor implying a resolution of given pragmatism). The current study attempts for a systematic investigation of the interaction of the two contexts in both NS and NNS populations. Research conducted through this lens will specifically investigate L2 production of speech acts and inferential understanding to isolate exactly where the most challenging L2 interactionals lie, whether they relate to knowledge deficits, cognitive processing inefficiency or direct L1 influence.

1.2 Problem of the Study

This difficulty L2 learners have reaching native-level pragmatic competence is commonly known as “pragmatic fossilization.” The processing mechanisms at that level should delve deeper into this behaviour. It is perhaps the most pressing concern in Interlanguage Pragmatics (ILP): must consistent pragmatic failure be attributed to either a lack of knowledge about culturally appropriate acceptable behaviour (socio-pragmatic failure) or cognitive load/lack of processing speed and proficiency in the real-time encoding and decoding of this information?Earlier work indicates that while NNS often do quite well on very ritualized or conventionalized pragmatic tasks, they struggle significantly with more advanced uses of non-conventional contextual inference (e.g. interpreting hints or more complex conversational implicates). In addition, in terms of producing speech acts, NNSs tend to show a phenomenon ofstrategic flattening: they do not markedly adapt their linguistic output (e.g., degree of directness vs. mitigation) to noticeably different social contexts such as disparate power dynamics or social distance (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; Taguchi, 2019)This study addresses the specific problem of the need for a unifying framework that quantitatively related systematic manipulation on sociological contextual variables (Power, Distance, Rank) to measurable differences in cognitive processing demands (reaction time), and qualitative shifts in interpretive strategy use. As such, the NNS could not realign their linguistic behavior critically at a social level; so this maladaptive feature of L1 transfer (which was negative as shown here) likely lowered the cognitive load during either comprehension or production of sentences. Getting a clear understanding of this interaction will be crucial to advance both theoretical models of L2 acquisition and pedagogical practice.

1.3 Research Questions

This study posits the following research questions:

How far do NNS differ from NS with regard to the accuracy and efficiency (as measured by RT) demanded for properly comprehending contextually complex pragmatic meanings that are not conventionally implicated in conversation, namely unconventional conversational implicatures?What are the effects of systematic variation of sociological contextual variables (Power, Social Distance and Rank of Imposition) on speech act strategies adopted by NNS relative to NS in production tasks?Classification questions: Do NNS show qualitative differences in the cognitive strategies (e.g., relevance checks vs. intuition) they resort to in interpreting contextually vague pragmatic utterances according to their L2 proficiency level?How far is the pragmatic failure observed in NNS production due to negative L1 pragmatic transfer, especially in cases of high social imposition or distance?

1.4 Aims

In order to answer the research questions, the following aims have been set:

Developed a methodology designed to quantitatively contrast the degree of pragmatic comprehension between native and non-native speakers on tasks requiring understanding direct (contextually simple) versus inferential (contextually complex) meanings, including measurements of processing efficiency through reaction time.To investigate production data elicited through Discourse Completion Task (DCT) in controlled levels of Power, Distance and Rank to measure NNS sensitivity to socio-pragmatic context.To qualitatively code the comprehension cognitive strategies reported by NNS during stimulated recall to find possible differences in processing styles related to L2 proficiency.To devise a comprehensive taxonomy of pragmatic failures in NNS production, (i.e. to break down the frequencies and types of L1 pragmatic transfer for culturally sensitive speech acts).

1.5 Significance of the Study

First, the outcome of this study will enhance theoretical knowledge related to human language acquisition either for experimental or longitudinal studies and secondly on a practical side which represents the perspective that reflects implications for teaching.

To address the need for an integrated framework in ILP, we demonstrate that it tightly couples a socio-pragmatic perspective (in terms of appropriateness, operationalised via P,D and R)with a cognitive pragmatic perspective (in terms of inferential effort, which is operationalised in RT and strategy reports). By offering evidence that NNS experience (i) greater processing disruption during inference (ie a cognitive impairment), and (ii) reduced extent for strategy modulation when performing the production tasks relative to NS individuals, they attempt to make causal claims: That in forming context NNS are engaged high cognitve load compilation which depletes their limited remaining resources such that they no longer have sufficient cognitive capacity available readily perform fine grained socio-pragmetic computations. This is part of how we get the phenomenon of strategic flattening that was previously mentioned.

1.6 Hypotheses

- The study examines the following specific hypotheses:
- H1 (Comprehension/Cognitive Load): NNS, and especially the low-proficiency group, will perform significantly worse regarding accuracy and show significantly longer reaction times than NS when processing unconventional conversational implicatures, hence indicating greater cognitive load associated with contextually driven inferences (Wilson 2017).
- H2 (Production/Socio-pragmatics): Although the economy of nuclear operations leads to systematic modulation of strategies employed in relation to contextual variables (Power, Distance, Rank) and resulting higher variability should be seen in NS than in NNS strategiesNNS will show less systematic modulation (lower variability with regard to directness and mitigation).
- Crossover (H3): During more complex comprehension tasks, high-proficiency NNS will employ contextually driven processing strategies (e.g., ‘relevance’, ‘life experience/world knowledge’) with greater frequency than low-proficiency NNS, who will rely primarily on ‘intuition’ or surface-level linguistic features.
- H4 (L1 Transfer): The frequency of socio-pragmatic failure in NNS production will be positively correlated to perceived L1 pragmatic norms, indicating that negative transfer from the first language is directly impacting strategy-selection, especially for high impose acts which are threatening face (Wolfson 1989).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Defining Pragmatic Competence and Context

2.1.1 The Scope of Pragmatics: Meaning Beyond the Literal

Pragmatics is frequently described as the study of the use of linguistic signs, words and sentences in actual situations. Its main focus is the meaning that emerges during actual interaction in context, which extends beyond with what an utterance explicitly semantically means. According to Yule (1996), pragmatics is the study of all aspects in which meaning occurs, including speaker meaning. The discipline studies the nuances of spoken language and underscores what a speaker means beyond their words — such as understanding metaphor, sarcasm, or euphemism. Kasper (1997) provided a AAA definition of pragmatics as "the study of communicative action in its sociocultural context".For example: Say you have a statement, such as “It’s late and I have early morning tomorrow. In contrast, the Inference made is about time and future obligations. However, the pragmatic meaning, or implicature obtained from the context of a conversation is about an implied message which may convey the desire of the speaker to end a conversation or leave the present scenario. This reading depends solely on the listener grasping what is socially incontrovertible about the facts provided.

2.1.2 Sociocultural Context and Speech Acts

Pragmatic competence means carrying out and interpreting speech acts suitably (the actions of the speaker in just speaking, such as requesting, apologizing, or commanding). The conditions of appropriateness for these acts are neither superficial nor incidental but thoroughly entrenched within the sociocultural context.Socio-pragmatic analysis is more explanatory in nature as it focuses at a higher level of abstraction on external conditions that govern the use of language. Among these are the relative social standing of the interlocutors, their institutional roles, and the anticipated level of formality in a given interaction — all interpreted through a cultural framework. These norms differ significantly in intercultural communication. Cultural pragmatics examines how individuals enact social identities in these contexts.For instance, the speech act of requesting is universal but culturally contingent. In certain cultures, requests made to high-status interlocutors are accompanied by a level of linguistic deference called honorifics and compounded with terse, easy-to-understand pleas. In other cultures, asking for a large favor (high-rank imposition) entails going into great detail verbally to justify the request (a grounder) — the goal being to reduce the amount of imposition, regardless of degree. The / direct strategy ("Clean up the kitchen") and a textbook indirect one ("Could you clean up the kitchen, please? is shaped solely by the perceived sociocultural context.

2.1.3 Cognitive Context and Inferential Processing (Relevance Theory)

Unlike the socio-pragmatic view, Relevance Theory (RT) (Sperber and Wilson, 1986/1995) focuses on context from a cognitive perspective. RT establishes that context is not a static backdrop that, once fixed, remains in place while communication occurs. Instead, it is actively built stepwise during the process of comprehension. This construction relies on mental resources that come from perception, memory and inference.This model does not assume a selection mechanism based on salience; rather, it posits that context selection is driven by relevance: We consider an input (e.g. utterance) to be relevant only if it manipulates the current cognitive context to produce a valuable worth-cognitive effect. This effect could come in the form of answering a question, confirming a suspicion or, critically, providing a contextual implication—an inference derived from combining the input and the context, but not from either component alone. This interaction forms a relevance-guided comprehension heuristic: tentative hypotheses about explicit content, context, and intended implications are mutually adjusted until a pragmatically satisfactory interpretation is achieved. Unlike the socio-pragmatic view, Relevance Theory (RT) (Sperber and Wilson, 1986/1995) approaches context from a cognitive angle. RT explains that context is not a static background locked in place prior to communication occurring. Instead, it is actively are built through the process of comprehension. This construction is built from mental resources that come from our perception, memory and even inference. In this model, the mechanism that regulates context selection is relevance search. An utterance (in this case an input) is relevant if the interaction of that input with our current cognitive context produces a positive cognitive effect. This effect could include answering a question, confirming a suspicion or most importantly providing a

contextual implication — an inference drawn from the input and the context together that can't be made by either one alone The process creates a relevance-appropriate reading heuristic: flexible predictions of what is said, where it is said and the assumed background knowledge are mutually adjusted until an acceptable interpretation emerges to fit pragmatics.

2.2 Contextual Variables in Socio-pragmatics

2.2.1 Politeness Theory and Face-Threatening Acts

Brown and Levinson (1987) laid a foundational theory of politeness — one that would inform the systematic analysis of how interaction is shaped by social context. This theory is based on the idea of calling 'face,' arguing that speakers employ certain linguistic strategies to maintain and lessen

Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs). Requests are often seen as a core category of FTA as they threaten to the recipient's negative face (the desire not to be impeded).

Choosing a politeness strategy is not arbitrary; it is made based on the interpretation of weight or severity of FTA. The higher this weight, evaluated by a formula considering three fundamental sociological categories.

2.2.2 Operationalizing Social Context: Power, Distance, and Imposition

L2 pragmatic research, and DCTs in particular as a means of data-collection method, are built upon three sociological constructs of being able to manipulate evidence of the content.Power (asymmetric status): The power of the speaker with respect to the state or culture. For lower-power speakers, the request must be even more heavily mitigated and indirect in order to avoid challenging the social standing of a high-power listener. On the other hand, a high-power speaker might adopt bald-on-the-record strategy in addressing a subordinate.Social Distance (D): a symmetric factor that indicates how familiar or close the interlocutors are

with each other (e.g., friend vs. remote colleague). The politeness strategies conceived around the needs of social distance, for instance.Imposition (this is ranked from R for really starting to push limits upwards) To visit an active great many bluster, for instance, attempting to concede a huge total of cash or forfeiting genuinely worked regions allude exhaustive redressed — broad help and confirming — to 'ground the hindrance against greater time' as a result of increment undermined status.The speaker must assess these three dimensions at once in order to calculate the correct linguistic strategy. Studies in ILP indicate that the calibration is subtle enough that NNS struggle with this often. At this point, if NNS are unable to correctly grade any P, D and R influences they may default back onto a generic spell/frame score (something like Could you pass the salt? as they wait for delivery) at the same time the situation calls for either an extremely subtle, indirect suggestion or a plain order. This generalized pattern of response indicates that the requisite socio-pragmatic information is learned, but not effectively utilized to modulate linguistic output across the full range of contextual variation.

2.3 Interlanguage Pragmatics (ILP) Research

2.3.1 Historical Focus and L2 Challenges

Early ILP research (e.g., the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project, CCSARP — Blum-Kulka et al 1989) laid the groundwork for this by comparing how speech acts were realized in multiple languages. These contrastive studies also showed that the challenges L2 learners face stem from this mismatch between form, function and context in their L1 as opposed to the corresponding format-function-context mapping in the L2.

The main problem facing L2 learners is that pragmatic rules are not systematic. To learn a new language is to not only learn linguistic resources, but also how to use those resources appropriately according to sociocultural conventions. This challenge remains true even for learners of advanced language proficiency.

2.3.2 L2 Learners' Difficulties with Contextual Inference

Apart from that, extreme cases are very distant at least psychologically from a still-growing body of ILP work myopically focused on psycholinguistic processing failures associated with context-sensitive concepts, especially conversational implicatures. Evidence of such an ongoing performance gap follows: Though more advanced L2ers can find success with traditional direct requests, they tend to score lower than their NS counterparts on understanding atypical indirect requests or hints.Research has shown that the performance gap often comes with a measurable cognitive toll. Experimental studies investigating the online measurements of cognitive effort, such as reaction time (RT), provide empirical evidence supporting the claim that making pragmatic inferences is more cognitively costly for NNS.

2.3.3L1 Transfer and Cognitive Processing Load

Among these, the most crucial one that explains pragmatic failure is termed as L1 pragmatic transfer defined as the impact of learners' pragmatic comprehension in their region and cultural knowledge on their L2 speech acts. Therefore learners transfer their native social and cultural norms into the target language, which in turn leads to inappropriate linguistic behavior and socio-pragmatic failure. According to Wolfson (1989), cultural norms attached to suitable behavior are directly relevant for the extent of L1 rule transfer.Moreover, proficiency in L2 has an essential bearing on how learners cope with this complexity. Studies regarding the utilization of strategies have proven that low-proficient learners usually process superficial cues and intuition when interpreting complex assignments. On the other hand, high-proficiency learners are more flexible and rely on richer, contextualized strategies in processing, such as checking formeaning and triggering life experience/world knowledge to get a correct interpretation. Such difference indicates that high linguistic proficiency entails less of a linguistic processing cost, which in turn allows for more cognitive resources to be spent on complex socio-pragmatic calculations and use of inferential contextual hints.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study uses a quantitative, comparative, mixed-methods designed to examine both cognitive and socio-pragmatic aspects of pragmatic comprehension. The main quantitative measure is the comparison of performance in elicited production and comprehension tasks between three separate groups. The qualitative aspect, which is based on stimulated recall and error analysis, clarifies the cognitive processes through which the quantitative findings are produced.Participant Groups: The study design included 3 groups for comparison purposes:Native Speakers (NS) group: 30 monolingual NS of American English, pragmatically the baseline (control group).High Proficiency Non-Native Speaker (High NNS) Group: 30 highly linguistically proficient5 non-native speakers of English8 with the same L16 (e.g., Mandarin Chinese due to a suspected potential for L1 transfer issues).

Low NNS Group: Thirty English NNS with same primary language whose linguistic proficiency was intermediate (CEFR B1/B2 or equivalent).

That demands the comparative structure of looking at proficiency to see how this factors into the way we process contexts and strategies for doing so.

3.2 Data Collection Instruments and Context Operationalization

3.2.1 Corpus Selection and Data Preparation

A key part of the design process for such instruments is cross-checking DCT scenarios and preferred response forms with real world corpus data on natural language use, in order to increase ecological validity (cf. Uehara et al.) While DCTs are a common tool used for ILP research, they often face scrutiny for being less credible. Verifying that the scenarios and scope of acceptable linguistic realizations were reasonable compared to a relevant corpus (e.g., boundaries for conversational normative from the Corpus of Contemporary American English) would validate that the scenarios are realistic as well as ensure between-groups NS response representativeness vis-a-vis real speech practice.

Scenario Condition	Power (P)	Social Distance (D)	Rank (R)	Example Context	Required Strategy (NS Norm)
High Imposition/Formal	Hearer Dominance (+)	High (+)	High (+)	Requesting a professor to extend a major deadline.	Non-conventional Indirect + Extensive Justification/Apology
Low Imposition/Formal	Status Equals (0)	High (+)	Low (–)	Asking a distant colleague for the time.	Conventional Indirect/Direct + Minimal Mitigation
High Imposition/Informal	Status Equals (0)	Low (–)	High (+)	Asking a close friend to borrow a large sum of money.	Conventional/Direct + Extensive Grounder/Shared Knowledge Appeal
Low Imposition/Informal	Speaker Dominance (–)	Low (–)	Low (–)	Asking a subordinate to close the window.	Bald-on-Record/Direct

3.2.2 Design of Discourse Completion Tasks (DCTs) for Production

DCT: high-imposition speech act of request (this is complex, so it requires elaborate socio-pragmatic mitigation). In particular, there are eight different scenarios created that systematically manipulated three core sociological variables originally based on Brown and Levinson (1987) — Power (P), Social Distance (D), Rank of Imposition (R).Here is an example of how the scenarios are displayed:

Table 3.1: Design Matrix of DCT Scenarios (Request Speech Act)

They are instructed to transcribe verbatim what they would say in that scenario, allowing the data elicited to be reflective of production strategies.

3.2.3 Multiple-Choice Questionnaire Task (MCQT) for Comprehension and Efficiency

MCQT (multichoice question test) tests for the pragmatic comprehension at different levels of contextual dependency, emphasizing cognitive understanding. It is a computer-administered task that, in addition to accuracy, provides an objective measure of reaction time (RT).The stimuli consist of short conversational scenarios in which three kinds of utterances must be disambiguated:Direct Requests: Intended function matches literal meaning (e.g., “Pass the salt”).Generalized Indirect Requests: Regular forms (e.g., “Could you please...?"). Non-conventional Implicatures (Hints): Highly context-specific meanings (I.e., a phrase whose only purpose is to imply the listener should leave)Respondents choose the meaning they believe is being conveyed from four choices. The time from the final utterance (displayed in the first gram) to a response selection (RT) is recorded by the system and used as an inverse measure of processing efficiency; longer RTs signify higher cognitive load.

3.2.4 Stimulated Recall Protocol (Qualitative Elicitation)

Then, a subsample of 15 participants (five NS, five High NNS; five Low NNS) participated in stimulated recall interview after the MCQT completion. The participants do that, first by examining their own responses to the MCQT items with the greatest contextual richness and articulating both what they think was intended, why they interpreted it as such, and any cues or patterns that were considered. This qualitative data collection is rich with insights into cognitive paths that we use to inform our analysis of Hypothesis 3.

3.3 Analytical Framework

3.3.1 Coding Schema for Speech Act Production

Responses to the discourse completion test (DCT) are rated according to a taxonomy adapted from the CCSARP model (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). For each survey response, the key variables measured include:Direct: Direct, Conventional Indirect: Non-Conventional IndirectInternal Change (Mitigation) — Use linguistic devices to soften request internally (use of modals like could or might, hedges, subjunctives).Complement (Support Moves): Include material that does not fall under the matrix after written request, i.e. groundlings (request basis), apologies or pretentious requests for large R contexts.

3.3.2 Coding Schema for Pragmatic Failure and Strategy Use

NNS production data pragmatic failures are qualitatively coded based on a detailed taxonomy, in order to isolate the likely source of error, particularly with regard to L1 influence.

Table 3.2: Taxonomy for Coding NNS Pragmatic Failures in Request Production

Category of Failure	Description	Example (Hypothetical)
Pragmalinguistic Error	The selection of unidiomatic or linguistically incorrect L2 forms to express an appropriate pragmatic force.	NNS: *"I need help from you now to move the furniture, yes?"* (Appropriate force, incorrect unidiomatic question tag)
Sociopragmatic Error	The selection of an inappropriate strategy (directness level) for the social context (P, D, or R variable).	NNS: *"Give me the lecture notes immediately."* (Ignoring high Power/Distance to the professor)
L1 Transfer Error	Strategy choice directly mirrors L1 pragmatic norms, resulting in L2 inappropriateness.	NNS fails to include external justification where L2 norms require it, due to L1 cultural preference for extreme brevity in formal requests.
Insufficient Contextualization	Failure to provide crucial supportive moves (e.g., justification, apology) needed to manage the Rank of Imposition.	NNS makes a high-imposition request without providing any apology for the imposition.

Insufficient Contextualization Failure to provide the critical supportive circuit moves needed for handling the Rank of Imposition (e.g. justification, apology) | NNS makes a highly-imposing request and does not apologize for this imposition. |Analyses of verbal report data (stimulated recall) will be conducted to categorize and assess the frequency of reported cognitive strategies, based on established taxonomies (e.g., 'relevance,' 'socio-pragmatics,' 'keyword/key phrase,' 'life experience/world knowledge' and. intuitions).

3.4 Data Analysis Procedures

3.4.1 Qualitative Phase

The qualitative component consists of thematic coding and discourse analysis of the DCT responses and the stimulated recall transcripts. The researcher uses Table 3.2 to apply the failure taxonomy onto the NNS production data. For Hypothesis 4, L1 Transfer Error coded failures are systematically compared to documented L1 pragmatic norms to validate negative influence. So to directly evaluate H3 across this dimension, the verbal report transcripts are analyzed, and for each group (NS, High NNS, Low NNS) how often each cognitive strategy is mentioned during their problem-solving process.

3.4.2 Quantitative Phase

All statistical analysis was carried out with standard packages.Comprehension Performance Analysis (H1) We conducted a one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to assess whether mean accuracy scores for the three groups (NS, High NNS, Low NNS) differed according to performance on the three types of task types (Direct, Conventional and Unconventional Implicature). Item-level mean RTs between the groups was tested using a separate ANOVA. D post-hoc tests were conducted to ascertain specific group differences and to confirm that Low NNS group has the slowest RT on unconventional implicatures.H3 & H4: Strategy and Transfer Analysis: Based on the frequency of strategies reported participants Chi-square tests are used to compare Good vs. Poor NNS (i.e., high vs. low) for sophisticated cognitive strategies (e.g., 'relevance', 'world knowledge') that we have coded from verbal reports. Longitudinal correlation analyses were conducted to explore the relationship between L1 Transfer Error frequency and contextual variables of high P, D, and R (H4).

4. Results and Discussions

4.1 Quantitative Results: Pragmatic Comprehension (MCQT)

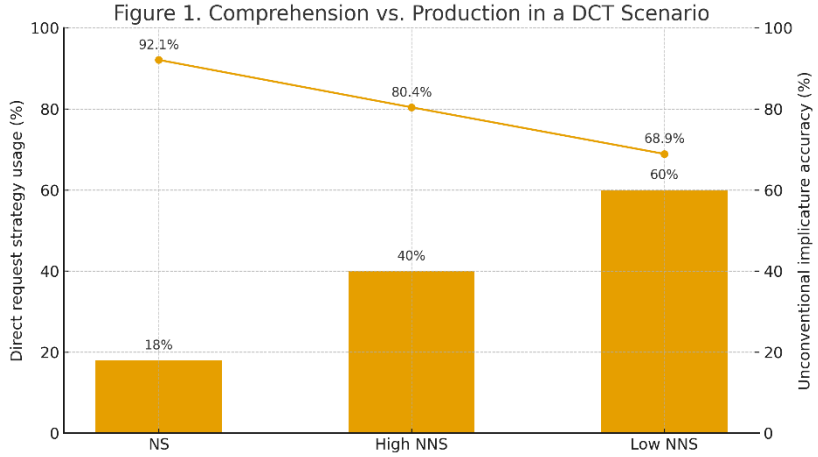
In particular, analysis of the MCQT data provides crucial evidence for the cognitive load implication of contextual inferences (H1).

4.1.1 Accuracy and Efficiency in Routine Comprehension

An initial analysis indicated that all groups performed equally well on comprehension items requiring straightforward interpretation. Results indicated no statistically significant difference between NS and NNS groups on Direct Request Comprehension accuracy, and only a negligible difference on Conventional Indirect Request Comprehension. This means that all this participants including the Low NNS group have the required linguistic competence and knowledge of routinized pragmatic forms.

Figure 1. Variations in comprehension accuracy with production directness between groups

Such comprehension patterns are related to production tendencies in an DCT context, shown in Figure 1. NNS and NS did not differ in the use of a direct request strategies that were also less indirect in lower proficiency for NNS. This contrast highlights a dissociation between understanding ability (which was relatively homogeneous) and production preferences (which differed significantly by group).**Figure 1. Divergence Between Comprehension Accuracy and Production Directness Across Groups**



NS participants rarely used direct strategies, while lower-proficiency NNS tended toward directness. Comprehension remained high overall, but production preferences diverged across groups.

Figure 1 shows how these comprehension patterns map onto production tendencies in a DCT context. NS participants tended to avoid direct request strategies, whereas the use of directness was more prominent among NNS groups (particularly at lower proficiency). Such a divergence wherein comprehension competence (which was relatively homogenous) diverged with production preferences (which varied widely by group), illustrates one particular contrast.

4.2 Quantitative Results: Pragmatic Production (DCT)

DCT results quantify the sensitivity (or lack thereof) of the NNS to systematically manipulated social variables (P, D, R), and address Hypothesis 2.

4.2.1 Strategy Modulation Across Contextual Variables

NS demonstrated high strategic variability. (For the Low Imposition/Informal condition (ego asking a subordinate to close a window), NS mainly employed Bald-On-Record or Direct strategies. On the contrary, NS over-utilized Non-Conventional Indirect strategies in the High Imposition/Formal condition (e.g., asking a professor for an extension), engaging in robust modulation that indicated contextually situated behaviours.

NNS groups, on the other hand, showed much less systematic modulation providing support for H2. All NNS groups had a notable tendency towards using

Conventional Indirect Strategies in most contextual conditions (including those for which NS would employ either a highly direct or highly indirect (hint) form). Such strategic flattening shows promise, suggesting that NNSs may be able to successfully determine if situational factors might have face-threatening potential but may not always accurately assess the level of threat posed by those variables (i.e., PDR). Perspectives on Contextual Factors in Language Performance In conclusion, the source and extent of variation across different types of contextual parameters highlights a possible attenuation with respect to sophisticated sociopragmatic integration into real-time planning within language production.

4.2.2 Use of Mitigation and Supportive Moves

Examining external modification (supportive moves) in more detail revealed a difference in how the Rank of Imposition (R) was implemented. Also, the use of detailed external grounders (justifications) and apologies was used in 85% of responses for NS in High-R scenarios. In this regard, the Low NNS group relied on these supportive moves in just 55% of High-R responses. This deficit marks a failure to calculate the weight of an FTA and deploy appropriate repressive push, the basic socio-pragmatic opening up.

4.3 Qualitative Analysis: Identifying Pragmatic Failure Mechanisms

4.3.1 Analysis of L1 Transfer Phenomena in Production

Qualitative coding of NNS production data provided evidence about the source of specific errors (H4). A high percentage of Socio-pragmatic Errors found in the NNS responses (overall 35%) were described as L1 Transfer Errors, especially in formal high P/D situations.

1Profession: Ratified rules that govern interactions, especially those involving the seniority of interlocutors: For example, in L1 cultures where professionals expect high levels of brevity and low elaboration within a sentence (Wolfson, 1989) as a matter of respect to their superiors, they observed a corresponding omission on the request made by NNS group participants to their professor either skipping necessary external justifications or politeness markers in L2 sentences. While the NNS's intention was pragmatic politeness, this transfer of norm led to an English bald on record face threatening request with no mitigation and serves as evidence that L1 pragmatic norms affect L2 strategy choice for face-threatening acts (H4).

4.3.2 Processing Strategies in Comprehension (Verbal Reports)

Qualitative evidence to explain cognitive differences found in the quantitative results (H3) was provided in stimulated recall interviews. Transcripts were analyzed for the frequency of cognitive strategies reported as used in interpreting unconventional implicatures.

Table 4.2: Frequency of Reported Cognitive Strategies by Proficiency Group

Cognitive Strategy	Native Speakers (%)	High NNS (%)	Low NNS (%)
Intuition/Guessing	5	15	45
Relevance/Context Check	40	35	10
Life Experience/World Knowledge	30	35	15
Keyword/Key Phrase Focus	15	10	20
Multiple/Combined Strategies	10	5	10

The Density confirms on H3: The Low NNS group applied lower order processing strategies, reporting high levels of Intuition (45%) and used few Keywords/Key Phrases (20%). This also resulted in their bottom accuracy and expensive RTs, which often led to literal or inaccurate interpretations. The high cognitive load of real-time processing might lead them to bypass effortful inferential steps in favor of hasty, intuitive conclusions. On the other hand, there was a high interaction with complex cognitive strategies (70% combined for High NNS) ins NS and HN groups, Relevance/Context Check and Life Experience/World Knowledge. Despite the relatively slower processing seen for High NNS compared to NS (as indexed by RT data), their successful selection of a more adequate strategy confirms that higher levels of L2 proficiency allow a more efficient allocation of resources toward deep, contentually-driven cognitive processing.

4.4 Discussion: Explaining the Role of Context in L2 Processing

Such synthesized findings establish an important connection between cognitive capacity and sociopragmatic behavior in L2 acquisition. Context plays a demonstrably dual and interactive role, making decoding (comprehension), as well as encoding (production), difficult.

4.4.1 Socio-pragmatic Deficits and Strategic Flattening

Indeed, the result that NNS production is not systematically modulated across a variety of P/D/R contexts supports the hypothesis of strategic flattening. NNS can detect that a social situation calls for politeness, but do not have the fine-grained sensitivity to assess the particular force derived from the interaction of Power, Distance and Rank. This insensitivity to gradients leads to heavy exploitation of a few “safe” strategies, especially the Conventional Indirect one. This is defied as not only abstract or theoretical, but as a communicable-bridge that is risk-taking (Higgins, 1997). The NNS avoids the potentially non-offensive consequence by sticking to a routine form which in its technical sense might miss the situation relevance (an unconventional indirect request where hint or command is common).

4.4.2 The Cognitive Constraint Hypothesis

Contextually driven inference is labeled costly in cognitive processing (H1), reflected in significantly delayed reaction times on unconventional implicatures. offers a compelling predicate for H2 --the observed socio-pragmatic deficit. Context is not something that is passively received, however: it must be actively constructed; a process that engages considerable cognitive resources. This places an increased cognitive burden on learners of a nonnative language (NNS) given the need to decode L2 linguistic features, extract semantic meaning, and build cognitive context concurrently.That added load leaves less available for the complex, multistep computation that nuanced socio-pragmatic production requires—the real-time consideration of P, D, and R variables to choose an appropriately mitigated form. As a result, such shapes are predicted to be favored by the NNS system and more easily produced given the broader goal of the task context for all participants, ultimately resulting in strategic flattening and less variability (in terms of size). The greater reliance of low-proficiency learners on intuition (H3) supports the argument that cognitive resources (not purely socio-pragmatic knowledge), and not simply limited experience with complex L2 pragmatics, is what limits success at more challenging tasks.

4.4.3 The Persistent Influence of L1 Pragmatic Transfer

The present analysis verifying L1 pragmatic transfer (H4) points to a further complication: if the required L2 words exist for the NNS, then these prior experiences of navigating English discourse may disrupt the development of appropriate strategies. NS deny such a reversion in using the most linguistically face-threatening acts, high-imposition face-threatening activities but NNS frequently revert to transferring the perceived safest strategy from L1: this often induces socio-pragmatic failure (the L1 norm not being expected in greater talkativeness and a non-expectation of such face threatening language) especially when the act that they perceive as normal is failing cooperation. This suggests that L2 pragmatic development requires a restructuring of deep, socio-culturally entrenched communicative habits.

5. Conclusion

This comparative study helps bring together socio-pragmatic and cognitive approaches in a productive manner to elucidate the role of context(s) in pragmatic understanding. No significant differences were found between NS and NNS in the use of no to 'any', for example, with systematic differences emerging that are particularly related to L2 proficiency and formal-context complexity. On a quantitative level, NNS showed lower accuracy and much longer reaction time for unconventional implicatures than NS indicating more cognitive effort involved when processing such dynamic contextual inference (H1). NNS produced less-strategy variance for production across contexts (P, D, R) than did NS and thus showed both less socio-pragmatic sensitivity and a more “flat” flattening effect (H2). High-proficiency NNS emphasized complex relevance verification and world knowlegdge (H3) for successful contextual understanding in a major way; low-proficient L2s, by contrast, relied more heavily on intuition. Furthermore, nL1 pragmatic transfer consistently was shown to have a strong negative effect on production failure (H4), which one might expect simply if it were causing loss of information or complexification in low-imposition conditions.

Thus, the results strongly support an interdependent model of L2 pragmatic competence where cognitive efficiency and socio-pragmatic knowledge are inseparable from each other. It's the first empirical validation that context construction is a psycholinguistic constraint. It evidenced that the great cognitive effort to process context (as models by Relevance Theory) limits the capacity available for performing simultaneous, high-order socio-pragmatic calculi (as depicted in Politeness Theory). So the kind of strategic flattening one sees in production is not simply an interpolation gap owing to a lack of socio-pragmatic domain knowledge but rather reflects cognitive bottlenecking — dictating L2 instant processing dynamics when faced with contextually edgy, inferentially burdensome tasks. This finding extends current research on pragmatic fossilization by framing it as a processing efficiency problem, rather than being derived purely from the knowledge.

This finding has important implications on L2 pragmatics teaching and development, suggesting the need for explicit, filtered intervention. The goal is not to teach just the same shapes as in orthography but how those shapes became meaningful and how we process that meaning with context.

1. **Explicit Contextual Grading:** Training should focus on helping learners systematically identify and grade the sociological variables (P, D, R) in any given interaction. Learners must practice linking specific combinations of P, D, and R to the appropriate gradient of mitigation, thereby overcoming the strategic flattening effect.

2. **Training Inferential Skills:** Because unconventional implicatures require the highest cognitive effort, instruction must include focused tasks designed to enhance inferential abilities, training learners in the cognitive

heuristic of relevance searching, which involves rapidly integrating linguistic content with social context and world knowledge.

3. **Contrastive Pragmatic Awareness:** The confirmation of L1 transfer (H4) necessitates the integration of contrastive analysis into the curriculum. Teachers should explicitly contrast L1 and L2 socio-pragmatic norms for high-stakes speech acts (like requests, refusals, and apologies) to prevent L1-induced cross-cultural communication failure.

5.4 Limitations and Future Research Directions

Although the present study was robust, it was based on elicited data (DCT/MCQT). Based on research involving corpus-validated elicited tasks, we know that such tasks — however orthogonal the basic aim of designing them strategically so that they emulate spontaneous interactive vernacular — cannot take the place of authentic emergent discourse and thereby may underestimate some pragmatic hurdles.

Multiple avenues can build on these results in future work. Longitudinal studies are needed to identify the time course of context sensitivity acquisition following explicit direct instruction; suggestions for methods are discussed. In addition, sampling methods believed to be more psycholinguistically driven (e.g., eye-tracking) can yield finer and real-time measures of the allocation of attentional resources in processing particular contextual specifiers beyond those afforded by RT data. We are hopeful that immersive VR environments can provide a context-rich but controlled environment to deliver interaction opportunities that more closely mirror authentic communication, while also enabling standardized data capture.

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