

The Impact of Pragmatics-Focused Instruction on Iraqi Efl University Students' Pragmatic Competence

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Abstract:

This research aims to draw attention to the importance of including pragmatic aspects in the language curriculum to develop the trainees' deliberative competence which, in turn, allows the Iraqi college students to hold constructive dialogue and critical thinking in communicative contexts. For the control (25) and experimental (25), a total of fourteen low intermediate students, with a variety of L1s, were randomly selected. After transcribing the data on role-playing, A qualitative research design was used to compare the learning results in the treatment group with that of the control group. The results indicate that the instructional strategy positively impacted pragmatic performance of the addressed speaking act by L2 students. This implies that L2 instruction that tries to provide students with metapragmatic knowledge linked to significant chances for language usage may improve students' L2 pragmatic development. According to the researcher, this emphasis on pragmatic competence includes the desire to recognize and comprehend the components and procedures that go into a language learner's acquisition of pragmatic abilities.

Keywords: Pragmatics-Focused Instruction; L2 pragmatic competence; Iraqi College Students.

أثر التدريس المرتكز على التداولية على تنمية الكفاءة التداولية لدى طلبة الكلية العراقية

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المفص:

يُعد اكتساب الكفاءة التداولية أمرًا ضروريًا للتواصل الفعال وتطوير مهارات التفكير النقدي في أي لغة. وعلى الرغم من أهميته، لا يزال دور التدريس الذي يركز على التداولية في تعزيز الكفاءة التداولية للناطقين بغيرها، وخصوصًا طلبة الجامعات العراقية، غير مستكشف بشكل كافٍ. يسعى هذا البحث إلى سد الفجوة في الأدبيات من خلال تقديم رؤى حول كيفية مساهمة الأساليب التعليمية المستهدفة في تحسين المهارات التداولية لدى هذه الفئة المحددة. علاوة على ذلك، يهدف إلى تسليط الضوء على أهمية إدراج العناصر التداولية في المناهج اللغوية، مما يمكن طلبة الجامعات العراقية من الانخراط في حوار بناء والتفكير النقدي في سياقات تواصلية متنوعة.

تم اختيار مجموعتي الضبط (٢٥) والتجريب (٢٥) بشكل عشوائي، حيث تضمنت كل منهما أربعة عشر طالبًا من مستوى ما قبل المتوسط من خلفيات لغوية أولى متنوعة. تم استخدام تقنية تحليل الخطاب النوعي لمقارنة نتائج التعلم لدى المجموعة التجريبية مع تلك الخاصة بالمجموعة الضابطة بعد تفريغ بيانات المحاكاة اللغوية. أظهرت النتائج كيف حسنت الاستراتيجية التدريسية الأداء التداولي لطلبة اللغة الثانية فيما يتعلق بفعل الكلام المستهدف. يشير ذلك إلى أن تدريس اللغة الثانية الذي يسعى

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إلى تزويد الطلاب بالمعرفة المبتدائية، المرتبطة بفرص كبيرة لاستخدام اللغة، قد يسهم في تطوير كفاءتهم التداولية في اللغة الثانية.

وفقاً للباحث، فإن التركيز على الكفاءة التداولية يشمل الرغبة في التعرف على العناصر والإجراءات التي تدخل في عملية اكتساب متعلم اللغة للمهارات التداولية وفهمها. ومن منظور معلم اللغة، تتمثل هذه الرغبة في تزويد الطلبة بالمعلومات والاستراتيجيات والمهارات اللازمة لنقل معانيهم المقصودة بفعالية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التدريس المرتكز على التداولية؛ الكفاءة في اللغة الثانية؛ طلبة الجامعات العراقيون.

Introduction

Language functions as the conduit through which ideas and experiences we have had are exchanged and members of groups interact and communicate with one another and with other groups. Therefore, language is a crucial part of human behaviour and the key primer tool for the interaction among people to transfer their feelings, thoughts, and intentions to other people. (Ament, Vidal, & Parés, 2018). Among all the languages spoken globally in the twenty-first century, English has emerged as one of the most widely used intercultural communication (Chiesa, Sorbello, Greif, & Hodzovic, 2021).

Derakhshan and Arabmofrad mention that the number of non-native English speakers is higher than that of native speakers by about three times. Additionally, Fried, Andreas and Klein (2018) maintain that most English-language interactions now feature non-native speakers. They demonstrate that people from all over the world can communicate in English, thanks to globalization (De Rycker, 2014). Although many people speak English worldwide, an individual's social and cultural background helps explain how they interpret different situations, leading to different skills in communication. Merseburger and his colleagues (2021) propose that if people interact with different cultures and have varying cognitive ways of understanding, verbal communication during their interaction may be less successful if they do not have enough practical or language experience. Marii (2016) agrees that having good second or foreign language abilities might not prevent a person from struggling to use the tongue correctly in certain societal and cultural contexts.

Many academics have also examined pragmatics and its connection to politeness (Harrington, Gouda, Ezekowitz, & Mentz, 2022; Qi & Lai, 2017). For instance, according to Zhang (2022), pragmatics can be thought of as the study of language usage in contexts and is referred to in the literature by various concepts like "contextual meaning" (how contexts affect what is said and where, when, and how utterances are produced), "speaker meaning" (how speakers convey their intentions and how hearers understand them), "the expression of relative distance" (how closeness, social and physical, influences), and "the expression of relative distance" (how In other words, a person's pragmatic competence includes their knowledge of the etiquette rules of their language. As a result, to communicate effectively, language learners must be familiar with the pragmatic features of the target language. Lack of pragmatic competence can lead to speakers being unaware of how to perform speech acts in a foreign language (De Rycker, 2014), which can lead to foreign language learners using their native speaking values when using the foreign language (Merseburger et al., 2021).

According to Wang and Halenko (2019) and Majid et al. (2021), language learners' difficulties in developing pragmatic competence in a second or foreign language may result from differences between their cultures and languages in several facets of speech act realisation. Therefore, a major part of pragmatic competence is knowing how to appropriately perform various speech acts like requesting, criticising, complimenting, thanking and apologising etc. (Greene et al., 2021).

One of the spoken actions of daily life is complaining. Everybody complains at some point—whether it's because they are annoyed about something, someone, or themselves. People encounter a variety of acts, attitudes, and situations that don't make them happy and thus cause them to grumble. In other words, a complaint might be a statement of rage, unhappiness, or discontentment about anything that calls for a particular set of speech act techniques. As a result, while voicing a complaint, the speaker becomes angry in response to things going wrong or a statement

or action that negatively impacted them (Taira, Kreger, Orue, & Diamond, 2021). (Greene et al., 2021).

Similar to this, Stolnicu and Soslow (2022) classified complaints as one of the face-threatening activities that have a significant chance of ending the relationship. Although complaints may lead to the disintegration of social relationships (Li, Taguchi, & Tang, 2019; Nevins et al., 2022), a complainer might employ politeness to maintain a positive connection with the complainee or to lessen the intensity of their complaint and confront threat (Halenko & Jones, 2011).

People may sometimes adopt comprehensive definitions of politeness depending on their own experiences. While most individuals are confident that they understand what politeness is and who qualifies as being courteous, they often struggle to define and articulate the concept, as seen by the wide variety of definitions and many inconsistencies that result (Ahmad et al., 2021; Hollingworth, Bird, Crusz, Kirkman, & Vyas, 2022; Li et al., 2019 ; Ament, Páres, & Pérez-Vidal, 2020). They can refer to polite behaviour as appropriate, politically acceptable, or as the conduct of the well-educated.

It may be quite challenging for second or foreign language learners to be courteous in speech acts that are naturally face-threatening since what is considered polite in their native tongue may not be considered polite in the foreign or target language environment (Horiguchi, 1994). A foreign student may speak out during conversations, which may be acceptable and typical in their native environment. Still, in another setting, their speech could be seen as confrontational and disrespectful, according to Casey et al. (2022). Additionally, if they have been trained to feel that it is rude to make direct eye contact while speaking, they are inclined to avoid it (Sydorenko, 2015). The conversation might, however, result in misunderstandings if the other person has been trained to think that making direct eye contact indicates respect and reliability (Muñoz , 2018).

The study of how politeness is manifested in speech actions across various cultures while talking in their L1, L2, or foreign language has

been the focus of numerous research. By examining how Iraqi learners of English behave while speaking in an academic setting at a university, this study provides new insights by looking at how Iraqi students of English act politely during academic conversations in university settings. It should be mentioned that that the researcher uses the terms "speaker" and "learners" interchangeably. This is because the study's participants are college students from different institutions who are all native English speakers from Iraq. The study also seeks to explore how metapragmatic awareness influences the way learners use language at similar levels. This study is an attempt to answer the following questions:

- 1-How does concentrating on pragmatics in instruction shape the pragmatic competence of Iraqi EFL university students?
- 2- What pragmatic strategies do students employ before and after the instructional intervention, and how do these reflect their development in pragmatic competence?

Literature Review

Studies have explored whether L2 learners are able to use language effectively to achieve different speech functions. In many of these studies (such as Lee et al., 2021), people are grouped by their level of language skills, but mainly the researchers look at whether and how well learners use strategic language in the correct circumstances (Lee et al., 2021). This area has two opinions: one says that pragmatic skills and knowledge of language are tied together, while the other disagrees and holds that brilliant language skills do not always go along with high pragmatic abilities. Belz (2007), Hernández (2021), Jeon and Kaya (2006), Nguyen et al. (2012), Yousefi and Nassaji (2019), Zhang (2022) and Ziashahabi et al. (2020) suggest that learning a language affects how people express themselves through speech such as apologies. Hernández (2021) pointed out that students with lower proficiency in Hebrew EFL relied less than those with higher proficiency on semantic patterns in making apologies. Likewise, researchers Yousefi and Nassaji (2019) noted that low-proficiency Pakistani students used less implement strategies and



interacted less when it came to trying to soften or excuse their actions. Yet, this means that although knowledge of language helps with pragmatics, pragmatic ability should also be taught separately and not solely depend on language proficiency.

In research on the degree of directness in request techniques conducted by Rose in 2005, it was shown that as L2 competency improved, Japanese ESL learners tended to utilise more direct, target-like realisation patterns. Based on TOEFL results, they classified Japanese ESL learners into three competence groups. They discovered that as language proficiency levels rose, language learners tended to move from less direct to more direct levels in their request tactics. In a different research, Zhang (2022), dealing with Japanese lower-level EFL learners, discovered that learners utilised direct tactics before switching to more traditional indirect strategies when their competence level increased. When Matsumura (2022) examined the request techniques of various proficiency groups of Danish English learners, he found similar findings. Zhang (2021) compared Japanese EFL students of three levels of English proficiency with native English speakers on how they produced requests. From his research, Lin and Wang found that the learners using these techniques with low proficiency liked to use direct requests more often than other techniques (Lin & Wang, 2022). As the language proficiency level increased, use of direct tactics decreased. The results of his research showed that L2 speakers used internal and external modifications less frequently than NSs but as their proficiency in the language increased, they used both types of change with greater frequency.

In English carrying out requests, Takimoto (2013) compared Catalan English learners at three different levels of linguistic competency and NSs. It is found, based on the study, that advanced learners' request techniques mirror those of native speakers (NSs), and there is a strong correlation between pragmatic ability and language proficiency. Williams' (2012) research on Japanese EFL learners found that proficient language learners made requests in a manner that was quite similar to English NS norms in their performance. Furthermore, high competent



learners excelled in understanding requests compared to the ones of lower proficiency. In Bataineh, Al-Qeyam, and Smadi (2017) study, the linguistic performance of Australian language learners was compared with that of Indonesian native speakers. Results of this research showed that low proficient learners of a foreign language experience the most difficulties with discourse related aspects of requests in comparison to the upper intermediate proficiency learners of a foreign language. This research found that learners' L2 pragmatic competence grew with growing L2 proficiency. In the study on the production of request by Japanese English learners at different levels of language proficiency, Alcón Soler (2005) found that the overall appropriateness of learners in making requests is influenced by L2 proficiency and learners at different levels of language proficiency produced significantly different strategies. Furthermore, Hazaymeh and Altakhaineh considered the directness of Iraqi EFL learners' requests at different levels of language competency compared to Australian NSs' requests. Results showed that pragmatic development increased with improving language skills on the way to native norms.

The works of Kondo (2007), Lin and Wang (2022), and Ziashahabi et al. (2020) also report similar trends for Japanese English learners' refusal tactics. Both of these studies were invested to examine the way Japanese English learners developed pragmatic competence when rejecting in English. What they found was that the higher proficiency learners used modal adverbs to soften their refusals, and the lower proficiency learners attempted to issue a direct refusal, but without the necessary pragmatic competence of a second language learner. Derakhshan and Arabmofrad (2018) also made similar findings. Learners with low proficiency levels seldom used more than four words to produce refusals, but learners of higher proficiency levels used more words (up to 10 words) and were more productive.

As can be noted, the research mentioned above indicates that language learners who are more proficient in employing various speech actions outperform learners who are less proficient. On the other hand, contrary

research has also shown that L2 proficiency and pragmatic ability are not directly associated. These studies demonstrate that high levels of grammatical proficiency do not necessarily translate into high levels of pragmatic proficiency. Numerous investigations (Ament, Páres, et al., 2020; Halenko & Jones, 2011; Zhang, 2022b) have supported this assertion.

In their research of Hebrew English learners completing requests, Sarab and Alikhani (2016) discovered that advanced learners overused external modification. Similar to this, Zhang (2022) found that advanced learners had difficulty expressing appreciation as compared to NSs in their research of thankfulness. In their study of Korean English language learners making requests, Johnson and Green (2022) found that speakers at two different proficiency levels exhibited near-native politeness strategies, leading them to conclude that L2 pragmatic competence does not have a one-to-one relationship with L2 proficiency. Additionally, Koike and Pearson (2005) demonstrated that language learners may understand indirectness based on the context in their research of Japanese language learners' grasp of the concept. In different research, L2 proficiency and pragmatic competence did not have a one-to-one connection, according to Qi and Lai's (2017) analysis of apologies made by American Russian language learners. This research showed that low proficiency learners used apologies more often than other language learners. The findings of the research by Hazaymeh and Altakhaineh (2019) on how Iraqi EFL learners at various levels of language competence express appreciation revealed that there are no notable variations in the kind or application of methods used by intermediate and advanced Iraqi EFL learners. She discovered that there was no connection between language ability and the application of techniques and that both groups of language learners had pragmatic competence that was in line with L2 norms.

Teachability studies (Zhang, 2022a) utilize a one-group design to evaluate the impact of instruction on learners' pragmatic competence. Jones et al. (2022) investigated the efficacy of teaching apology

strategies to advanced EFL learners in Israel and found significant improvements in native-like speech act behavior, suggesting the potential of instructing speech act behavior. Bardovi-Harlig et al. (2019) showed that even beginner learners, such as American students learning German, could successfully acquire pragmatic routines through instruction. Lee Swanson (1987) explored the effects of instruction on Spanish-Catalan bilinguals' ability to perform refusals in EFL and discovered evidence supporting the positive impact of pragmatic intervention on learners' pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic knowledge. Brock (2022) reported that Australian FFL learners enhanced their small talk skills by learning to use and respond to the question "T'as passé un bon weekend?" (Did you have a good weekend?) in sociopragmatically appropriate ways. Koralus (2012) and Golding et al. (1990) analyzed the acquisition of requesting strategies by intermediate Spanish EFL learners and found improvements in the use of request modifiers and mitigation strategies, as well as indirect requests, following instructional intervention. Consistently with these findings, Merseburger et al. (2021) present the results of a pedagogical intervention on complaints and refusals that turned out to be successful also with regards to ESL learners, who still showed its effects six months after the instruction period. The impact of L2 proficiency on L2 pragmatic competence is variable, as can be noted from all of the research mentioned above, and it is still not apparent how much L2 proficiency influences L2 pragmatic competence.

Scaffolding as an instructional technique

As a technique of instruction, scaffolding can lend on learners with the required support and guidance to incrementally harness their pragmatic abilities in a variety of communicative domains. Teaching pragmatics can be improved by demonstrating proper language choices, using role-plays supported by a guide and giving examples of dialogues that relate to pragmatic concepts. Using think-aloud, teachers can guide students in gaining awareness of unstated pragmatic standards. They can then assist students in learning these standards before letting them use these skills



alone. Thanks to these teaching strategies, learners can begin to use pragmatic forms on their own. Moreover, including scaffolding in lesson plans lets teachers make clear connections between practical parts and wider syllabus topics, improving how students learn language (Bardovi-Harlig et al., 2015) Moreover, scaffolding can facilitate the transition from decontextualized grammar lessons to more authentic and contextually rich pragmatic learning situations, which are essential for promoting real-world language use and comprehension (Kim, 2017). Moreover, the growing consensus on the necessity of incorporating pragmatics-related language instruction in foreign and second language classrooms is evident in the increasing number of publications advocating diverse approaches (Bardovi-Harlig et al., 2015). However, despite the fact that pragmatics has been traditionally taught within communicative language teaching frameworks like Content-Based Instruction (CBI) and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), mainstream approaches often involve merely adding "spots on pragmatics" without creating explicit connections to other topics in syllabi or simply integrating pragmatics instruction into grammar lessons in decontextualized settings (Kim, 2017). As a result, there is a need to emphasize the role of scaffolding as an instructional technique in effectively incorporating pragmatics training into course curricula and individual lessons.

Optimizing Pragmatics through Classroom Instruction

In recent years a body of research is increasing and indicating the importance and the effectiveness of pragmatic instruction in language education, which has encouraged practitioners to use it and have motivated researchers to study into particular aspects of pragmatic instruction methodology. The results of this study are consistent with instructed second language acquisition, which suggests that guided second language acquisition is better than self-instructional process (Zhang, 2022). This evidence supports Schmidt's (1993) Noticing Hypothesis and shows the need to adopt linguistic solutions to



pragmatics in SLA as these languages differ in their instantiations of many communication strategies.

This is due to the need to examine in detail the pedagogical focus of studies on pragmatics in order to trace back areas that may have been left unexplored or have a proven resistance to instruction. A qualitative analyses that is one such is the study of German learners of English who were taught conversational routines (Hernández, 2021). Improvements were observed in the initiating moves like initiating with gambits and utilizing interpersonally focused discourse strategies; however, there were no significant improvements in students' performance with respect to the responsive moves. Therefore, I determined that this finding can be attributed to foreign language processing difficulties and to the pressure that the first pair part constrains in providing the response moves which are perceived to be more difficult than the producing the initiating moves.

Although these insights into learners' acquisition of conversational routines should not lead us to conclude that responsive speech acts are not teachable, Matsumura (2022) urges that there are still ways in which language teachers can provide systematic practice in this area. Merseburger et al. (2021) also do a closer inspection of the 14 week communication course used in house's study and report an extensive coverage of conversational phenomena such as conversational management, manipulation of the turn taking mechanisms, use of gambits, strategic preparation, post-hoc support for various communicative purposes, opening and closing talk, creating conversational bonds, and performing diverse speech acts. Such breadth may have resulted in learners becoming cognitively overloaded, resulting in an easier improvement of the parts of the course that are less cognitively demanding (Hosseinpur & Nevisi, 2018). It follows that increasing the length of the instructional period or emphasizing responsive speech acts more intensely could possibly moderate the evident imbalance.



According to Takimoto (2013), research has found that pragmatic instruction appears to be better at developing pragmatic competence than simply exposure. Inspired by the previous few studies on ILP development, Ament, Barón-Parés & Pérez-Vidal (2020), studied the functions of routine formulae devised by Turkish-German learners, of eight years and beyond, in an environment of a language without any formal L2 instruction. What they found is that learners greatly reduced the number of linguistic forms, while at the same time, increasing the number of discourse functions they used. However, Rehbein's study did not make comparisons between the instructed group and the group that went through mere exposure, but the findings imply that there is no guarantee that pragmatic acquisition is learned despite other exposure. The prevailing view is that pragmatic functions and relevant contextual factors often remain inconspicuous to learners, making it unlikely for them to be noticed despite extended exposure (Ament, Barón-Parés, et al., 2020).

Method

This study aimed to investigate the impact of explicit instruction on the development of ESL learners' pragmatic competence in the production of disagreement and refusals over a one-semester instructional period. The primary focus was on assessing learners' competence in applying the targeted strategies after receiving explicit instruction. The teaching material was created to outline the language structure, culture background and methods of talking during these two interactions. During 45-minute lessons, different strategies were used such as explaining grammar, performing awareness-raising tasks and examining model dialogues. Students studied how refusals and disagreements can be used differently depending on the distance between people, the differences in power and the level of what is being refused. To measure instructional effectiveness, the research methodology concentrated on examining students' linguistic competence as a result of the explicit instruction.



In this study, a single quasi-experimental group underwent explicit instruction over one semester. Pre-test and post-test data were collected before and after the intervention, using speech act data in a longitudinal design. Data elicitation methods included discourse completion tasks (DCTs) and role plays. Additionally, information on students' perceptions of the pragmatics instruction was gathered through a Course Feedback Questionnaire administered immediately after the course and a Reflective Essay written during their subsequent study abroad experience. To collect data from an adequately large sample size, the study conducted two rounds of instruction and data collection: one in the summer semester and another in the following winter semester. A total of 50 college students participated in the L2 class.

The test began with the listening section, which was subdivided into three task types: (A) 30 short conversations between two people, (B) two longer conversations between two people, and (C) three passages from university lectures. Following each conversation or lecture, the participants had to answer a set of multiple-choice questions by selecting one out of four possible answer choices for each question. The listening section covered a total of 30 minutes. The second section, grammar, consisted of a total of 40 questions and had to be completed in 20 minutes. The third and final section, reading comprehension, contained three short passages, each accompanied by ten comprehension questions, and the students had 20 minutes to complete this section. Overall, the test consisted of 120 multiple-choice items worth one point each, i.e., a maximum score of 120 points. The participants' test scores were equal to the number of correct answers given out of these 120 maximum points, and for easier representation and comparison of the individual learners' performances, these scores were converted into percentages.

In the present study, a DCT questionnaire contained 14 scenarios, six of which were designed to prompt disagreement, another six aimed to elicit refusals, and two were added as distractor items (Jernigan, 2012; Lin & Wang, 2022; Sarab & Alikhani, 2016). The study's research design required the creation of a total of three different DCT questionnaire

versions, namely one to be completed by the native speakers, one to be completed by the learners prior to instruction (at T1), and one to be completed by the learners following the pragmatic intervention.

Results and Discussion

In addition to the DCTs, learner speech data was elicited employing role plays to achieve data triangulation. A role play is "a social . . . activity in which participants 'take on' and 'act out' specified 'roles,' often within a predefined social framework or situational blueprint (a 'scenario')" (Chiesa et al., 2021). Role-plays have been identified as an important instrument to collect spoken data in developmental pragmatics research alongside authentic discourse and elicited conversation (De Rycker, 2014). In contrast to DCT questionnaires, they produce actual spoken language and are thus well-suited to elicit features specific to oral interactive discourse such as turn-taking, speaker-listener coordination, hesitation and para/non-verbal elements (Fried et al., 2018). Compared to questionnaires, role plays have been found to yield longer and more complex utterances (Ifantidou, 2013; Rose, 2005) and to be richer in internal mitigation (Taira et al., 2021). In addition, it is a data elicitation technique that allows for interactive negotiation of meaning between the speakers (Alcón Soler, 2005)

In comparison to authentic discourse data, on the other hand, role plays have the disadvantage of being merely "simulations of communicative encounters" (Lin & Wang, 2022). The researcher stages them for research purposes, which results in the fact that the speakers are usually asked to carry out fictitious conversations. Depending on the type of role play, they may also be asked to take on social roles and identities that are not their own. In other words, role play encounters do not arise out of real situations but portray artificially elicited conversations requiring the interactants to imagine the respective situation and its context (Sarab & Alikhani, 2016). Role play data is, therefore, to a certain extent tainted by the interactants' acting capabilities and affective factors such as risk-taking or performance anxiety (Hosseinpur & Nevisi, 2018).



Additionally, role play interactants are constantly aware that they are being observed, and it can thus not be assumed that role play data is fully representative of what the speakers would say or do in more relaxed natural situations (Zhang, 2022b). Lastly, the authenticity of role play data may be compromised by the fact that the interactions have no real-life consequences for the speakers, especially as far as impolite behavior is concerned (Eslami et al., 2015), and they often display "very little emotional involvement by the participants" (Kondo, 2007).

Despite these drawbacks, however, role plays are nevertheless a viable alternative to naturally occurring speech and have proven to yield valuable pragmatic interaction data (Ament, Páres, et al., 2020; Bardovi-Harlig et al., 2019; Eslami et al., 2015; Halenko & Jones, 2011; Hosseinpour & Nevisi, 2018; Maričić, 2016; Molodychenko, 2019; Shirinbakhsh et al., 2018; Zhang, 2022a, 2022b). Their greatest advantage over the use of authentic data is their immediate availability and replicability (Kondo, 2007) as well as a comparatively high degree of control that the researcher can exert in terms of topic, speech acts, speaker constellations, and situational variables (Williams, 2012; Zhang, 2021). Role plays thus allow the elicitation of ample amounts of data that contain the pragmatic and linguistic features in question in a relatively short amount of time while manipulating the context variables as needed for the respective research goals (Alcón Soler, 2005; Bataineh et al., 2017). As Takimoto (2008) notes, role plays "approximate 'real' verbal behavior" in that the language learners directly experience the "unpredictability of language use," i.e., they cannot know beforehand how the other speaker is going to react. Similarly, Lin and Wang, (2022) points out, "one of the main advantages of using role-play data is that they permit the analysis of speech act strategies across the interaction," i.e., their evolution and negotiation over various turns quite similar to authentic data. As these considerations show, role play data is "the closest to what we might expect to reflect naturally occurring speech events" (Kondo, 2008) and thus suited to the research purposes of the present study.



Role plays have been categorised in terms of the extent of the interaction and the degree of the participants' freedom to control the conversation (Koike & Pearson, 2005; Kondo, 2008; Takahashi, 2010). The most widely used distinction in ILP is that between open and closed role plays. Often equated with oral DCTs (Hernández, 2021; Kim, 2017), closed role plays are characterized by no or very little interaction since they usually elicit only single turns by requiring the respondent to react to a standardized initiation (Harrington et al., 2022). Open role plays, on the other hand, also specify the initial situation along with the interlocutors' roles, but they do not impose any limitations on the length, complexity and outcome of the interaction. Hence, open role plays are less strongly controlled (Joury, Faaborg-Andersen, Quintana, daSilva-deAbreu, & Nativi-Nicolau, 2022) and produce more conversational turns (Ament et al., 2018). They thus "have the advantage that they allow examination of speech act behavior in its full discourse context" (Bardovi-Harlig, Mossman, & Su, 2017; Lee Swanson, 1987). Because of this interactive character and the suitability to elicit multiple-turn negotiations, the study used open role plays to complement the written DCTs, which elicited only single-turn responses.

The decision to use open role plays in addition to written DCTs to achieve sound data triangulation was further motivated by the fact that role plays are generally assumed to tap the speaker's online language planning skills (Takimoto, 2008), i.e., real-time language processing and production, as opposed to the offline planning processes promoted by the DCT. Naturally, in completing the DCTs the learners can take some time to process the input and plan their utterances much more carefully and deliberately than during the role plays' real-time interaction, where they have to make "impromptu planning decisions contingent upon interlocutor input" (Alcón Soler, 2005). Takimoto (2008) refer to this distinction in terms of declarative knowledge – the learner's "knowledge that," which reflects rule knowledge that is separate from language use in real time – and procedural knowledge – the learner's "knowledge how," which relates to language processing in real time. Similarly, Lin and

Wang, (2022) differentiate between knowledge and ability, with knowledge roughly corresponding to declarative knowledge and ability to procedural knowledge.

Pragmatic knowledge is one facet of a learner's overall language ability and "can be thought of as a domain of information in memory that is available for use by the metacognitive strategies in creating and interpreting discourse in language use" Lin and Wang, (2022), which is suggestive of the distinction between socio pragmatic knowledge and pragmalinguistic ability discussed earlier. Following this line of thought, Takahash (2010) points out that offline elicitation tests such as DCTs tend to target the learners' existing knowledge, while "online performance shows what students can actually do with the language and gives a more realistic impression of how they would perform in the target situation" (p. 298). Accordingly, by combining the two methods, it is possible to assess the learners' language production based on their (declarative) knowledge, i.e., when given some planning time as in the DCTs, as well as their pragmatic ability, or procedural knowledge, of the speech acts via the role plays, which require the students to show their "performance fluency" and "automatic control" (Fukuya & Martínez-Flor, 2008). In the study at hand, every learner interacted with a native speaker of English to offset some of the drawbacks of role-play data mentioned above.

Firstly, this procedure was meant to ensure that the interaction partner's input was as target-like and authentic as possible under the circumstances. Secondly, it prevented the danger of learner L1 speech behaviors reinforcing each other as might have been the case if two learners had interacted in the role plays. Thirdly, based on the selection of role play scenarios described in detail below, this procedure ensured that no learner had to take on a social identity grossly different from their own. Since the PD-high roles, with which the students had only limited experience (boss, professor etc.), were performed by the native speakers, the learners could act in their familiar roles as student, friend, young employee, etc. throughout the role plays.

Every role play pair enacted three situations per speech act and thus a total of six situations. This number was considered a reasonable compromise between collecting enough data and not overtaxing the participants. Acting out twelve different scenes to match the number of DCT scenarios was not only considered too time-consuming and demanding for the participants, but it was also feared that carrying out the same two speech acts so frequently in such a quick succession might distort the results due to learning effects and/or fatigue. In addition, the participants may have started to develop a personal relationship of their own, which can subsequently influence their role play performance, as Yousefi and Nassaji, (2019) observed in her pilot test of twelve successive role play scenarios: "The number of situations created a cumulative effect and in this particular case the informants ended up being unco-operative with each other and finally arguing" (p. 65). The six scenarios were thus considered suitable for eliciting sufficient data material, not least since open role plays allow for negotiation between the speakers and a virtually unlimited number of turns (Alcón-Soler, 2015; Derakhshan & Arabmofrad, 2018)

Conclusion

This study investigated Iraqi English learners' requestive features of three language proficiency levels. findings of this study were that language learners at various levels of proficiency overutilized direct strategies, external modifiers, and alerter; although, the use of these strategies among learners decreased as their language proficiency level increased until the linguistics were approximately the same as those of native norms. Moreover, the results indicated that all Iraqi learners substantially under used conventionally indirect strategies and internal modifications. The increase in language proficiency, however, correlated to a use of these same strategies toward native norms. Results proved that high level of overall L2 proficiency means high level of pragmatic competence; higher the overall L2 proficiency, higher pragmatics. The data compelled by the interlanguage pragmatic competence of Iraqi advanced learners



revealed that, Iraqi advanced learners were aware of all strategies for making request in English and they are able to understand linguistic forms of the most strategies. The development is pragmatic with increase in language proficiency levels. Thus the current research adds to the current body of research investigating the impact of proficiency in L2 on L2 pragmatics with respect to the requestive speech act. In short, the study indicated that language competently native speakers are models for Iraqi language learners of English.

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