

Investigating the Use of Pragmatic Devices by EFL Students at Al Balqa Applied University

Dr. Mona Smadi¹ Dr. Nibal Malkawi²
^{1,2}Al Balqa Applied University

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate whether training students at Al Balqa Applied university usage of pragmatic devices will improve their performance in English language. To achieve the purpose of the study, a pre/post-test was constructed to measure students' level in English grammar. The test consisted of twenty items on English language grammar.

The sample of the study consisted of 149 first year students; (73) male students and (76) female students during the second semester of the academic year 2015/2016.

The subjects of the study were distributed into four groups (a female experimental group and control group, and a male experimental group and control group). The experimental groups were trained to use pragmatic devices while the control groups were taught using the traditional methods. The subjects were 38 male students for the experimental group and 35 male students for the control group, while the female students for the experimental and control group were 37 and 39 respectively. Those subjects were distributed into four purposefully selected sections who were studying English language at Al Balqa Applied University.

Descriptive statistical analyses were used (means and standard deviation) for the pre and post- tests of students' English language test to experimental and control groups. Comparison statistical methods were used (Two Way ANOVA) analysis of variance to make a comparison between the control and the experimental groups and gender variable (male and female).

The findings of the study indicated that there were statistically significant differences in the post- test between the control and the experimental groups in favor of the experimental group, and there was no statistically significant difference in the students' performance due to gender. There was no statistically significant difference due to the interaction between gender and group.

The researcher concluded with recommendations to enhance the effect of training students to use pragmatic devices on their performance in English language such as conducting further studies on other populations and for a longer time.

Keywords: Pragmatic devices, Students' Performance

Introduction

It was clear that native speakers and non-native speakers seem to vary not only in the method they use speech acts, but also in features of content and form. Niezgoda and Röver (2001) in his study indicate that the learning atmosphere is a vital feature with reverence to realization of proper speech acts. From an acquisitioned standpoint, inquiry provided us with evidence about the features that impact the progress of learners' pragmatic capability. Among them, convenience of input, L2 ability, length of experience, transmission and training have inspired a lot of research in factors prompting L2 developing pragmatics. In addition, they claim that considerate learning from diverse various viewpoints in the field of Second Language Acquisition have prejudiced investigation on the progress of L2 pragmatics. Teaching Pragmatics discovers the instruction of pragmatics through classes and accomplishments produced by tutors of English as a foreign language.

Pragmatics

Lately, Barron (2003) defined pragmatics as:

... the study of language from the perspective of the students, particularly of the adoptions they make, the restraints they blunder upon in using language in social associations, and the effects their use of language has on the other members in an act of communication. (p. 276)

This definition investigates pragmatics from the perspective of the students. It takes into consideration the diverse varieties that utterers are able to make when using the target language, reliant on the social interaction of their communication. The idea of select carries another feature into account beneficial to language beginners, namely, evolving the capability to make the right selections among a diversity of pragmatic components.

As for Liu (2007), Charles Morris presented the first current explanation of pragmatics, and since then numerous other experts have sustained to hypothesize this sector of linguistics. Morris initially defined

pragmatics as “the discipline that studies the associations of signs to explainers, while semantics investigates the relations of signs to the substances to which the signs are appropriate” (Liu, 2007).

Why teach pragmatics in language classes?

Teaching pragmatics is promoted because quite simply, watching of language learners shows that there is a demonstrated need for it and that instruction in pragmatics can be successful.

Learners show important differences from native speakers in the area of language use, in the implementation and comprehension of certain speech acts, in conversational functions such as greetings and leave takings, and in conversational management such as back channeling and short responses.

Without instruction, differences in pragmatics show up in the English of learners apart from their first language background or language proficiency. That is to say, a learner of high grammatical ability will not fundamentally show comparable pragmatic development. As a result, learners at the higher levels of grammatical proficiency often show a wide variety of pragmatic competence. Thus, we find that even advanced nonnative speakers are neither uniformly successful, nor uniformly unsuccessful, but the range is quite wide.

Pragmatic Competence

Given these definitions of pragmatics, another significant aspect must be addressed: pragmatic competence. Pragmatic competence refers to the ability to comprehend, construct, and convey meanings that are both accurate and appropriate for the social and cultural circumstances in which communication occurs.

Speech Act of Requesting

Blum-Kulka (1991) described requests as being “pre-event” acts that intend to affect the hearer’s behavior as opposed to “post-event” acts such as apologies and complaints. According to Blum-Kulka, “The motivational, intentional source of a request is the requestive goal, which speakers strive to achieve with maximum effectiveness and politeness” (p. 257). These goals may vary from the least coercive (e.g., requests for permission, information, and goods) to the most coercive (e.g., requests for action).

The most effective way to carry out a request is to be bluntly direct (e.g., “Give me the book” or “Close the window”). However, directness can conflict with politeness..

Requests and EFL

One of the most repeatedly occurring speech acts across cultures, and one of the most researched as well, is the request. Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper (1989) devoted a large section of their edited volume to studying the pragmatics of the request speech act. Through their study, they developed a process for designing appropriate data elicitation tests and created a detailed coding manual to assist in analyzing discourse data.

In quite a different approach to researching the pragmatic progress of requesting in English, Li (2000) conducted an ethnographic case study of a female ESL learner in a workplace environment in Canada and found that her pragmatic development came about mainly through language socialization with her coworkers.

Statement of the problem

It is obvious that Jordanian students learning English language facing many problems when exposed to authentic material, so, they need a kind of training on using pragmatic Devices.

Significance of the study

Kasper & Rose (2002) claimed that research in inter language, pragmatics has predominantly been contrastive rather than acquisitioned compared to other parts in the study of foreign language learning. The contrastive studies that have been conducted for the past 20 years were very significant in founding that native speakers and language learners show alterations in their creation and understanding of contextually suitable speech, as pragmatics is a fairly new field in foreign language investigation. Meanwhile, Kasper and Rose's (1999) request for extra research into the progress of pragmatic capability, some studies that focused on acquisition have been issued, most lately those of Belz and Kinginger (2002, 2003), Achiba (2003), Barron (2003), and Schauer (2004).

However, although these and preceding inquiries have delivered visions into the progressive phases elaborated in the development of pragmatic construction, only a slightly restricted number of studies, have studied the use of pragmatic Devices in English as a foreign language.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to investigate whether training Al Balqa Applied University students to use pragmatic devices will improve their performance in English language.

Questions of the Study

- 1- Are there any statistically significant differences at ($\alpha=0.05$) among the pre-test scores of Al Balqa Applied University students due to teaching method (using pragmatic devices, traditional way), gender or interaction between gender and group?
- 2- Are there any statistically significant differences at ($\alpha=0.05$) among the post-test scores of Al Balqa Applied University students due to teaching method (using pragmatic devices, traditional way), gender or interaction between gender and group?

Limitations of the study

This study is limited to the students of first year enrolling in Al Balqa Applied University during the first semester of the academic year 2015/2016 and to any other similar sample.

Review of Related Literature

Takahashi (2001) conducted a study that provides information about how different degrees of input enhancement (explicit teaching, comparison of requests by NS-learners request comparison and reading comprehension) are set up to measure learning of target request forms by Japanese EFL learners. The study, which sheds light on the efficiency of explicit versus implicit techniques for pragmatic learning, shows that, although explicit teaching was the most effective instructional condition, several learners under implicit input conditions also noticed the target request forms and used them in the post-test. In a similar vein, Martínez Flor and Alcón (2007) used a mixture of techniques to analyse the effect of explicit and implicit teaching on the speech act of suggestion. However, in contrast to the findings in Takahashi (2001), results from this study verified that both implicit and explicit instructional treatment groups outperformed the control group in awareness and production of the speech act of suggesting. On the other hand, observational studies focus primarily on classroom processes and are theoretically motivated by a socially-oriented approach, using extensive observation and combination of observational periods and interviews as their methods of analysis.

In Bardovi-Harlig and Griffin (2005), the researchers used a pragmatic awareness activity before giving the ESL learners formal instruction in pragmatics. Their purpose was to recognize the kind of infelicities which learners could recognize and their ability to correct such errors. Five intact classes consisting of 43 students from language backgrounds took part in the study. Participants were shown some video-taped scenarios and they worked in pairs to identify the pragmatic errors and then performed short role plays to repair those errors. The results revealed that in general, learners are able to recognize a pragmatic infelicity such as a missing speech act, but the content of their repairs is different from that of native speakers. Such inappropriacy of content can be a good indicator of what to teach learners in the field of pragmatics.

In Schauer's (2006) study titled "Pragmatic Awareness in ESL and EFL Contexts: Contrast and Development," two research questions were addressed: a) Do learners in English as a foreign language (EFL) and English as a second language (ESL) contexts display differences in their recognition and rating of pragmatic and grammatical competence? b) Do ESL learners increase their pragmatic awareness during an extended stay in the target environment? As many as 53 participants, 16 German students studying at a British university, 17 German students studying in a higher education institution in Germany, and 20 native British English speaking controls took part in the study. Data was gathered using Bardovi-Harlig and Dönyei's video and questionnaire instrument. Findings revealed that German EFL participants have the least awareness of pragmatic errors and the ESL participant increased their level of pragmatic comparison during their stay in the Britain.

Salmani Nodoushan (2008) investigated the speech act request in Persian. The results indicated that, in general, native speakers of Persian prefer conventionally indirect strategies when issuing requests.

Design and Methodology

Variables of the study

- The independent variables:
 - 1- The strategy for teaching pragmatics (requests) (i.e. training students on pragmatics (making requests) by using combined video-and-questionnaire instrument developed by Bardovi- Harlig and Do'nyei (1998).
 - 2- Gender; male and female
- The dependent variable: The students' performance on the questionnaire

Population of the study

The population of the study consisted of:

All the students of second year enrolling in Al Balqa Applied University during the second semester of the academic year 2015/2016. They are (825) female students and (773) male students.

Sample of the study

The subjects of the study consisted of (149) students who were distributed on three sections, which were selected purposefully. The first section was exposed to a film excerpt with a focus on requests. The excerpts included direct requests, conventionally indirect and nonconventional indirect requests. The second section was also exposed to a film excerpt with a focus on requests but in a different situation. The last section which is the control group didn't receive any type of treatment. Table (1) shows the distribution of the subjects of the study according to group and gender variables.

Table (1): Distribution of the participants of the Study according to Group and Gender Variables

			GROUP		Total
			Experimental	Control	
SEX	Male	Count	38	35	73
		%	50.7%	47.3%	49.0%
	Female	Count	37	39	76
		%	49.3%	52.7%	51.0%
Total		Count	75	74	149
		%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The experimental group consisted of (38) male students and (37) female students while the control group consisted of (35) male students and (39) female students.

Design of the study

This study was carried out to follow the equivalent pre /post-test two-group design. The experiment consisted of two levels: The participants of the experimental groups were exposed to a film excerpt with a focus on requests for eight weeks in different situations for each of the experimental groups. However, the subjects of the control group didn't watch any films for the same period. A pre-test was given before the training to all groups to make sure they are equivalent and the same test was administered as a post-test after applying the instrument of the study to see whether the techniques had any influence on the groups and which way will have more influence on the subjects than the other.

Instrument of the Study

Data for the present study was elicited with the combined video-and-questionnaire instrument developed by Bardovi- Harlig and Do'rnyci (1998). The video contained 8 scenarios featuring interactions that students are familiar with and experience on a regular basis in a university context. They will show either Fatima, a female student, or Ahmad, a male student, interacting with fellow students, teachers, or other members of staff. Three of the scenarios were pragmatically inappropriate but grammatically correct, three were grammatically incorrect but pragmatically appropriate, and two were appropriate and grammatically correct (controls).

The scenarios were arranged in a random sequence in four blocks of two, with each block containing two scenarios featuring a pragmatic infelicity, two scenarios containing a grammatical violation, and one control scenario. The 8 situations were based on actual observed interactions or data elicited with Discourse Completion Tasks and includes the speech act: requests.

Reliability of the instrument

To confirm the test reliability, the researcher followed test/retest method. The researcher directed it to a pilot sample of (20) students outside the study sample in the same university from which the pupils were selected with a two-week period between the two times of application. The reliability of the tool was verified using correlation coefficient and found to be 0.87. This is suitable for applying this research.

Validity of the instrument

The researcher built the test tool and denoted it by referring to two English Language Professors teaching at Jordan University and two Professors at Al Balqa Applied University. The researcher followed the commendations of the arbitrators and made adjustments accordingly. When making the last form of the test, the comments and commendations of these English Language specialists were taken into consideration.

Procedures of the study

All participants in the study were enrolled in two sections designed to examine the development of

students' performance to use pragmatic devices.

Class 1: Students were exposed to a film excerpt with a focus on requests. The excerpts included direct requests, conventionally indirect and nonconventionally indirect requests. The students were then provided with a scripted version of the episode and were asked to identify the phrases used to ask people to do something and why they think particular linguistic formulae are used. The aim of this task is to measure learners' awareness and metapragmatic awareness of requests in a pre-test.

Classes 2- 13: During these lessons the control group did not receive any instruction on the use of requests. Presentation of the video was followed by comprehension questions and self-correction. In contrast, the treatment group (two sections on Mutah university who are studying English 101) received an instruction accompanied by specific tasks focused on awareness and production of requests in different situations. The instructional treatment for the explicit group adopted a sequential method consisting of the following material: (a) the presentation of the selected excerpts from the series (*English 101*); (b) the scripted versions of the excerpts; (c) a set of explicit consciousness-raising tasks and discourse completion tests elaborated on the basis of the type of requests presented in the video. Finally, the answers to the tasks, together with written metapragmatic explanations on the use of requests, were given for learners to self-correct. The same extracts from the series (*English 101*) that was presented to the explicit group was also employed for the implicit treatment group. However, the request strategies appeared in bold in the scripts, and the socio pragmatic factors which were involved in each excerpt appeared in capital letters and in bold. Regarding the tasks, students were provided with a set of implicit consciousness-raising tasks elaborated on the basis of the type of request presented in the video.

The Video-and-Questionnaire Task Prior to watching the video, the researcher provided the participants with detailed instructions about the task in their L1. The same instructions were then repeated in English in the video and on the questionnaire cover sheet. Each of the scenarios was shown twice. The targeted utterance that the participants needed to evaluate was introduced by a flashing exclamation mark in the video and it was also highlighted by an exclamation mark in the questionnaire. This sentence always constituted the last utterance in the scenario. The participants will be asked to just watch and listen when they are first shown the scenario. After having watched it for the second time, they filled in the questionnaire.

The participants first indicated whether the targeted utterance is appropriate/correct by either ticking the box for "yes" or for "no." If they mark the box for yes, they then simply waited for the next scenario to begin. If they tick the box for no, they subsequently rate the severity of the problem on the lines of a 6-point scale ranging from "not bad at all" to "very bad." To aid the participants' recollection of the individual scenarios during the interview, the researcher included the sentence that precede the targeted utterance in the questionnaire and also indicated who the interlocutor is.

Data analysis

Means, standard deviation and (Two-Way ANOVA) analysis of variance were used to analyze data on the pre-test and the post-test. In order to determine the equivalency of the two groups on pre-test, the means and the standard deviation were computed.

Findings of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate whether training Jordanian university students in using pragmatic devices will improve their performance in English language.

The researcher followed the equivalent pre /post test two group designs. Therefore, the means, standard deviations and Two-Way ANOVA analysis of variance were used to analyze data. The results will be displayed based on the questions of the research.

To answer the first question: Are there any statistically significant differences at ($\alpha=0.05$) among the pre-test scores of the Jordanian university students due to teaching method (using pragmatic devices, traditional way), sex or interaction between sex and group?

Means and standard deviation of the students' achievement on the pre-test were calculated due to group (experimental and control) and sex (male and female) variables in table 2.

Table 2: Means and Standard Deviations of the students' Achievement on the Pretest due to group and gender variables

GROUP	Gender	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Experimental	Male	69.37	11.95	38
	Female	69.30	9.76	37
	Total	69.33	10.85	75
Control	Male	70.40	10.63	35
	Female	68.51	11.08	39
	Total	69.41	10.84	74
Total	Male	69.86	11.27	73
	Female	68.89	10.40	76
	Total	69.37	10.81	149

Table 2 indicates that there are slight differences in the means of the pre-achievement test due to group and gender variables. To find out whether there are statistically significant differences in these means TWO WAY ANOVA was conducted as shown in table 3.

Table 3: Two way ANOVA results for the effect of group and sex and interaction between them on pre test achievement.

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
GROUP	.568	1	.568	.005	.945
GENDER	35.656	1	35.656	.300	.585
GROUP * SEX	30.664	1	30.664	.258	.612
Error	17226.715	145	118.805		
Corrected Total	17292.698	148			

Table 3 shows the following:

- There are no statistically significant differences ($\alpha=0.05$) due to method variable
- There are no statistically significant differences ($\alpha=0.05$) due to sex variable.
- There are no statistically significant differences ($\alpha=0.05$) due to the interaction between sex and group variables.

This result indicates that the groups are equivalent according to group, sex and interaction between sex and group variables

To answer the second question: Are there any statistically significant differences at ($\alpha=0,05$) among the post-test scores of the Jordanian university students due to teaching method (using pragmatic devices, traditional way), gender or interaction between sex and method?

Means and standard deviation of the students' achievement on the post-test were calculated due to group (experimental and control) and sex (male and female) variables in table 4.

Table 4: Mean and Standard Deviations of the Achievement of Male and Female Groups on the Posttest.

GROUP	GENDER	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Experimental	Male	82.05	8.33	38
	Female	81.95	8.89	37
	Total	82.00	8.56	75
Control	Male	78.74	9.73	35
	Female	77.77	11.37	39
	Total	78.23	10.57	74
Total	Male	80.47	9.12	73
	Female	79.80	10.38	76
	Total	80.13	9.76	149

Table 4 indicates that there are slight differences in the means of the Post-achievement test due to group

and sex variables. To find out whether there are statistically significant differences in these means TWO WAY ANOVA was conducted as shown in table 5.

Table 5: Two way ANOVA results for the effect of group and sex and interaction between them on post test achievement.

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
GROUP	521.104	1	521.104	5.577	.020
SEX	10.851	1	10.851	.116	.734
GROUP * SEX	6.988	1	6.988	.075	.785
Error	13547.395	145	93.430		
Corrected Total	14094.577	148			

Table 5 shows the following:

- There are statistically significant differences ($\alpha=0.05$) due to method variable, in favor of experimental group.
- There are no statistically significant differences ($\alpha=0.05$) due to sex variable.
- There are no statistically significant differences ($\alpha=0.05$) due to the interaction between sex and group variables.

Table 5 shows that there is a statistically significant difference between the experimental group and the control group on the posttest, was significantly better than that of the control group. However, the information indicates that there was no significant difference attributed to gender or the interaction between the treatment and gender.

To sum up, the researcher believes that the difference in the achievement of the second year students was attributed to the training of students on using pragmatic devices. The experimental group subjects managed to significantly improve English Language ability they already have in a period of 8 weeks. By comparing the results achieved by the two groups, the researcher reached the conclusion that the improvement achieved by the experimental group may have been attributed to the way she rendered instruction; using pragmatic devices.

As a result of this experience, the researcher concluded that students were more engaged in learning when they were given a chance to watch real situation using requests, i.e. expose them to authentic material.

Conclusion

The results of the study revealed that training students on using pragmatic devices has a positive effect on their achievement. The findings of the study indicated that there were no statistically significant differences in the pre-test scores between the experimental and control groups. There was also no statistically significant difference in students' scores due to their gender. This indicated that the experimental and the control groups were equivalent before treatment.

After treatment, the experimental group got higher mean scores than the control group. The study also showed that there was a statistically significant difference in the post-test between the control group and the experimental group in favor of the experimental group and this means that training students on using pragmatic devices by using film scripts is better than using the traditional strategy in developing students' achievement. It is evident that the experimental group performed much better on the post-test than the control group. Thus, it could be concluded that the students who were trained on using pragmatic devices using film scripts scored significantly higher in the post-test than the students who were taught by traditional way at ($\alpha=0.05$). The findings of the study indicated that there was a statistically significant difference in the students' achievement due to their gender.

Recommendations

The researcher recommends the following for further research:

If this study is to be replicated to bring further significance, some changes should be made

- Perform the experiment over a longer period of time so that students have adequate time to shake off current habits of traditional learning and become more familiar with the new way of learning pragmatic devices such as requests.
- Conducting other studies to investigate whether training Jordanian university students in using pragmatic devices will improve their performance in English Language.

References

- Achiba, M. (2003). Learning to request in a second language. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Bardovi-Harlig, K., & Griffin. (2005). Congruence in native and nonnative conversations: Status balance in the academic advising session. *Language Learning*, 40, 467–501.
- Barron, Anne. (2003). *Acquisition in Interlanguage Pragmatics. Learning how to do things with words in a study abroad context*. Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Belz, J. A., & Kinginger, C. (2002). The cross-linguistic development of address form use in telecollaborative language learning: Two case studies. *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 59(2), 189–214.
- Belz, J. A., & Kinginger, C. (2003). Discourse options and the development of pragmatic competence by classroom learners of German: The case of address forms. *Language Learning*, 53(4), 591–647.
- Blum-Kulka, S. (1991). Learning how to say what you mean in a second language: A study of the speech act performance of learners of Hebrew as a second language. *Applied Linguistics*, 3, 29–59.
- Blum-Kulka, House, J. and Kasper, G. (1989). *Cross-Cultural Pragmatics; requests and Apologies*. Norwood, N.J. Ablex.
- Kasper, G., & Rose, K. R. (1999). Pragmatics and SLA. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 19, 81–104.
- Kasper, G., & Rose, K. R. (2002). Pragmatic development in a second language. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Li, D. (2000). The pragmatics of making requests in the L2 workplace: A case study of language socialization. *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 57(1), 58-87.
- Liu, C. P. (2007). Three types of input enhancement treatments for EFL students' learning of collocations. *Hwa Kang Journal of English Language & Literature*, 13, 59-82. NSC 92-2411-H-034-007-
- Martínez-Flor, A. 2007. 'Analysing request modification devices in films: implications for pragmatic learning in instructed foreign language contexts' in E. Alcón and P. Safont (eds.). *Intercultural Language Use and Language Learning*. The Netherlands: Springer.
- Niezgoda, Kimberly and Carsten Röver (2001). Pragmatic and grammatical awareness. In *Pragmatics in Language Teaching*, Kenneth R. Rose and Gabriele Kasper (eds.), 63–79. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Salmani, Nodoushan, M. A. (2008). Conversational Strategies in Farsi Complaints: The Case of Iranian Complainees. *International Journal of Language Studies*, 2(2), 187-214.
- Schauer, G. A. (2004). May you speak louder maybe? Interlanguage pragmatic development in requests. In S. Foster-Cohen & M. Sharwood Smith (Eds.), *EUROSLA Yearbook* (Vol. 4). Amsterdam: Benjamins.
- Schauer, G. A. (2006). The development of ESL learners' pragmatic competence: A longitudinal investigation of awareness and production. In K. Bardovi-Harlig, C. Felix-Brasdefer & A. Omar (Eds.), *Pragmatics and Language Learning* (pp. 135-163). Manoa, HI: Second Language teaching and Curriculum Center University of Hawaii.
- Takahashi, Satomi (2001). The role of input enhancement in developing pragmatic competence. In *Pragmatics in Language Teaching*, Kenneth R. Rose and Gabriele Kasper (eds.), 171–199. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.