

The Effect of Explicit Teaching of Pragmatics on the Development of Pragmatic Competence in a Group of Saudi Female Learners of English: Towards a Pragmatics Skill in EFL

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ABSTRACT:

The present research emanates from classroom observations of common pragmatic failures in EFL contexts in different teaching programs where learners of English are native speakers of Arabic. The body of research in the field of pragmatics and in the subfield of pragmatic instruction suggests that one possible solution to the pragmatic failure problem would be the raising of consciousness/awareness explicitly as per the noticing hypothesis (Schmidt, 1993). We pretend that one way of ensuring the acquisition of an L2 sociolinguistic and sociocultural awareness is the explicit teaching of pragmatics as a skill and a theory, thus allowing learners to theorize about language – pragmatic theory here – in the sense of Gopnik and Meltzoff (1997). Convinced that the development of pragmatic competence will not only remediate for the pragmatic failure but also facilitate an efficient and faster learning of L2, we undertook, in the present project, to measure the effect of the teaching of pragmatics on the acquisition of English L2 pragmatic competence in an Arabic L1 EFL context. The testing is made through the acquisition of English pragmatics of the act of request in an experimental quantitative approach. The present research also proposes a method of teaching pragmatics as an explicit skill early enough in the EFL context program and in a social interactionist approach to the EFL classroom. We believe that, considering the distance between L1 culture and L2 culture, the more distant from each other the two cultures are the more need there will be for explicit teaching of the pragmatic behavior in L2.

Key words: *Pragmatics, Interlanguage Pragmatics, Pragmatic Competence, Speech Acts, Explicit Teaching of Pragmatics.*

Introduction

Kasper (1993) defined Pragmatics as “the study of people's comprehension and production of linguistic action in context” (p. 3). This brief definition states the context and the production as the two relevant elements of pragmatics fundamental to any speech act in a language. The child

develops pragmatic competence during the earliest stages of her/his first language acquisition enabling her/him to communicate by means of some learnt and ad hoc choices and through some strategies she/he sets according to contexts of utterance (Löbner, 2013). 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. This actually is no other than the primary goal of any second/foreign language learner.

Even though one can manage to get a minimal transactional message through by means of some grammarless or grammatically encapsulated expressions from the language of the speaker and that of the addressee – like in the case of pidgins – or by means of some conventional gestures, any felicitous communicative act will require the language learners to have not only a grasp of the grammar of the language and its lexicon but also an up-to-date sound knowledge of the pragmatic aspects of the target language (Bachman, 1990). That is when the ‘Pragmatic competence’ comes into play.

Pragmatic competence can specifically be defined as “knowledge of communicative action and how to carry it out, and the ability to use language appropriately” (Kasper, 1997). Previous studies in Interlanguage Pragmatics (Kasper & Rose 2002; Cohen 2008; Ellis 1994; Kasper & Blum-Kulka, 1993) have shown that differences and similarities exist in how to carry out communicative actions between language learners and native/non-native speakers of target languages. One of the controversial questions is whether pragmatics can be taught in the language classroom, especially in an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) context. ESL (English as a Second Language) learners have a better chance of encountering adequate and abundant “comprehensible” input than EFL learners. Bardovi-Harlig & Mahan-Taylor (2003) find it difficult for learners to acquire the necessary pragmatic skills for effective communication without instruction. Kasper (1997) and Rose and Kasper (2001) extensively discuss results of previous studies on pragmatic instruction and conclude that pragmatics can indeed be taught.

Schmidt (1990) states, in the course of the noticing hypothesis, that learners noticing input is what becomes intake for learning and as a result they get aware of it. According to Cenoz (2007), in order to make the intercultural speaker competent at the pragmatic level, pragmatic awareness must be developed. Cenoz believes that although acquiring pragmatic competence is a demanding task, the intercultural speaker has to become an efficient speaker to avoid any misunderstanding or failure while interacting with native and non-native speakers of the target language. It is crucial, therefore, to raise the learners’ awareness of the pragmatic conventions so that they become expert-users of the language. The simple act of producing requests can become very challenging. The selection of the proper grammatical and lexical forms may not be sufficient to pass the intention through, i.e. to do the thing one wants to do with words in the sense of Austin (1962). Instead, the learner needs to be aware of socio-cultural conventions and contextual knowledge. In this respect, the present research explores the usefulness of explicit instruction in pragmatics and suggests an interaction based in a socializing approach for the L2

classroom. The focus of the testing and explicit teaching in the present study will be on the speech act of request. Apology will be used in one of the control groups. Our choice of requests as the speech act to test the teaching of pragmatics as a skill is akin to the importance of requests so early in the literature about pragmatics (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984 and Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper, 1989).

More recently, Bardovi-Harlig & Vellenga (2012) have studied the effect of the teaching of pragmatics on learners' ability to produce L2 conventional expressions. In our research, we investigated the production of request expressions in different social situations in an L2 environment after the target group had received an explicit instruction about the conventions of request in English.

Pragmatic failure is a potential source of misunderstanding and eventually offence as failure to develop the pragmatic competence specific to L2 will cause negative transfer of L1-specific pragmatic behavior both in the interpretation or the production of L2 texts and utterances. In fact, L2 speakers resort to transfer because of the cognitively, socially and communicatively constraint of speaking for a reason, i.e. with an intention. In order to interpret the totality of the message which is the sum of the lexical/compositional and grammatical meaning combined to the intention of the speaker in a specific context of utterance, the L2 learner must develop an L2-specific pragmatic system.

Explicit teaching of pragmatics as a skill can remediate to the difficulty of acquiring L2-specific pragmatic system if it is carried out in a social interaction-like classroom setting. We argue that in the absence of explicit L2-specific pragmatic skill teaching, which may not be the case of the other common skills already widely taught, L1-specific pragmatic behavior inhibits the noticing of L2-specific pragmatic cues and takes over, thus resulting in interference errors and lag in the L2 learning in general given the importance of pragmatics. Our call for early explicit teaching of pragmatic cues, including prosodic markers, is warranted by the large distance between L1 (Arabic in our study) and L2 (English) in its typological, cultural, or social aspects. Our research is applied mainly to the act of request and at a secondary level to the act of apology.

The research questions below guided our study as we tried to answer them using the available literature and our research tools.

Research Questions

In order to measure the need for a pragmatic-skill teaching, we have to look at the extent of pragmatic failure and its causes, thus answering the question:

1. What causes pragmatic failure in an EFL context?

And in order to justify the call for a pragmatic-skill teaching, we have to answer a second question:

2. What is the effect of early – in the L2 learning process – L2-specific pragmatic teaching on the development of L2?
Then comes the question about the way to explicitly teach pragmatics as a skill:
3. How is pragmatic behaviour of L2 to be taught in a classroom setting?

Review of the literature

▪ Input hypotheses and the pragmatic component

As a starting point, consider, for example, Krashen's Input Hypotheses (Krashen, 1985) where the focus was primarily on the comprehensible input that language learners are exposed to. For Krashen, understanding spoken and written language input is seen as the only mechanism that results in the increase of underlying linguistic competence. What seems to be missing and overlooked is the pragmatic input. We argue that the input will never be comprehensible enough as long as it will be devoid of any pragmatic knowledge.

Many researchers advocate the view that direct instruction of pragmatics would result in the development of pragmatic awareness. According to Kasper (2001), opportunities for learning L2 pragmatics in a foreign language setting, compared to a second language environment, are much more restricted. Interventional studies (House, 1996; Wildner-Bassett, 1984 and 1986) support the idea that by metapragmatic instruction and discussion students can make significant gains in pragmatic ability in Foreign Language classrooms. In this respect, the present – interventionist – study will explore the effect of explicit metapragmatic instruction on the comprehension of Saudi EFL students.

▪ Interlanguage pragmatics

Interlanguage Pragmatics (ILP) is the study of the ways in which nonnative speakers acquire, comprehend, and use linguistic patterns – or speech acts – in a second language (Kasper, 2001).

It is, as the name suggests, a subfield of both interlanguage studies, which belong to the domain of second language acquisition research, and pragmatics. ILP, a subfield of pragmatics, is a relatively young area in linguistics that originated from pragmatics theory and developments in L2 pedagogy and research in the 1970s. It uses pragmatic theories, principles, and frameworks to examine how foreign/second language learners encode and decode meaning in their L2. ILP research is also heavily influenced by Hymes' (1971 and 1972) concept of *Communicative Competence* which triggered a development away from a more grammar-centered L2 pedagogy. Hymes argues that a speakers' communicative competence consists of four types of linguistic knowledge involving their ability to assess whether and to what extent an utterance is (1) formally possible, (2) feasible, (3) appropriate, and (4) done and actually performed. Hymes' model of communicative competence as well as subsequent models proposed by Canale and

Swain (1980), Canale (1983) and Bachman (1990) contributed to a shift in L2 pedagogy towards communicative language learning and teaching. In turn, the shift resulted in an increased interest in pragmatic studies focusing on language learners in the mid-1980s.

The following definition by Kasper and Rose (2002) illustrates the interdisciplinary or 'hybrid' nature (Kasper & Blum-Kulka, 1993: 3) of interlanguage pragmatics as belonging both to pragmatics and Second Language Acquisition studies:

As the study of second language use, interlanguage pragmatics examines how nonnative speakers comprehend and produce action in a target language. As the study of second language learning, interlanguage pragmatics investigates how L2 learners develop the ability to understand and perform action in a target language.

Kasper & Rose (2002: 5)

- **Speech Act Theory**

A speech act in linguistics and in the philosophy of language is an utterance that has a performative function in language and communication. A remarkable idea about speech acts put forward by del Castillo (2015) is that:

Language is something coming from the inside of the speaking subject manifest in the meaningful intentional purpose of the individual speaker. A language, on the contrary, is something coming from the outside, from the speech community, something offered to the speaking subject from the tradition in the technique of speaking. The speech act is the performance of an intuition by the subject, both individual and social. It is individual since it is creation. It is social since it is executed using the parameters and means offered to the speaker by the speech community.

Del Castillo (2015: 31)

The contemporary use of the term speech acts goes back to J. L. Austin's development of performative utterances and his theory of locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts. Speech acts are commonly taken to include such acts as promising, ordering, greeting, warning, inviting and congratulating, etc.

In this study, we used the request act to test our hypothesis concerning the teaching of pragmatic cues as a skill in the case of distant languages and cultures. We also used the apology act with one of control groups.

- **Speech act of request in the literature**

Request has always been the most researched speech act. According to Fraser (1978), there is a number of reasons that explain why this particular speech act has attracted a large amount of interest. Firstly, requests are very frequent in language use. Secondly, requests are very important to the second language learner, as they permit a wide variety of strategies for their performance, and finally they carry with them a good range of subtle implications involving politeness, deference, and mitigation.

In addition to its everyday use in common activities like buying goods, asking for services, etc., the variety of potential interlocutors that speakers may need to make a request to is rather large and may range from equal status individuals (e.g., friends) to higher status individuals (e.g. professors). Thus, speakers need to correctly judge the social distance between themselves and their hearers and then decide which linguistic forms are appropriate in each individual context before deciding on the wording of the actual request. Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989, p. 11) refer to the “high social stakes involved for both interlocutors in the choice of linguistic options” in that respect and also note that “requests are face-threatening by definition hearers can interpret requests as intrusive impingements on freedom of action, or even as a show in the exercise of power”, and this is the real challenge for L2 learners where pragmatic failure can cause offense to the hearer as well as embarrassment for the speaker (Brown & Levinson, 1978).

Examining learners’ ability to use suitable linguistic forms in their L2 when making requests can provide insights into language learners’ pragmatic skills and their ability to express themselves appropriately and sensitively in face-threatening contexts in their L2 (Schauer, 2009).

House and Kasper (1981) investigated requests by German learners of English and developed an eight-part classification scheme for request strategies. This scheme was based on previous work on request categorizations in speech act and politeness theory, such as Searle (1975), Brown and Levinson (1978) and further explored in Leech (1983) and Brown and Levinson (1987).

House and Kasper’s (House & Kasper, 1981; Kasper, 1981) original taxonomy for requests was later slightly modified by the two researchers themselves as well as by other researchers in subsequent papers (House & Kasper, 1987). That work, together with Blum-Kulka and Olshtain’s research (Blum-Kulka 1982, 1987; Blum-Kulka and Olshtain, 1984) formed the basis for the classification scheme subsequently used in the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project, hence CCSARP (Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper 1989). The categorization system of request strategies into direct request, conventionally indirect requests and non-conventionally indirect requests has been frequently employed in subsequent request research on the topic.

A second request strategy framework which has also had a considerable impact on studies examining L2 learners’ and native speakers’ request strategies use was developed by Trosborg (1995).

In addition to the individual request strategies that speakers can use to formulate their requests, a considerable amount of research has also been conducted on L2 learners' ability to further modify the illocutionary force of the utterance with *internal* and *external modifiers*. The CCSARP's coding manual contains a classification scheme for internal and external request modification that was based on earlier work by the researchers involved in the project (e.g. Blum-Kulka, 1987; Blum-Kulka and Olshtain, 1984; House and Kasper, 1981, 1987; Kasper, 1981) and was also partly influenced by the literature on speech acts and politeness (e.g. Brown and Levinson, 1978; Lakoff, 1973).

- **Requests in the English of native speakers of Arabic**

The speech act of request is probably one of the most researched acts in the context of native speakers of Arabic learning/using English as a foreign/second language. Umar (2004) investigated request strategies used by native speakers of Arabic in English and compared them to the production of native speakers of English. Al-Momani (2009) investigated request in English by speakers of Jordanian Arabic.

- **Apology strategies**

The speech act of apology is not the target of the present research but it is used in one of the control groups to try to eliminate the priming effect of the explicit teaching of request cues to the target group. We expect this control group to succeed in the pragmatic tasks about requests because their awareness of the pragmatic cues in general augmented. Bergman and Kasper (1993: 82) defined an apology as a "compensatory action to an offense in the doing of which S [the speaker] was casually involved and which is costly to H [the hearer]". The cost can be situated at the level of losing face or even result in a severe misunderstanding. There is no doubt that different cultures have different degrees in perceiving how costly such an offense is, and therefore how necessary an apology is. An action, in Bergman and Kasper's terminology, that is considered very serious in one culture, may not require an apology at all in another culture. Also, the severity of such a face-threatening act seems to be in direct relationship with the type of apology chosen to defend face. Brown and Levinson (1987) claimed that all speakers choose the same strategy under the same conditions. The researchers tried to demonstrate that by looking at three different languages, namely English, Tzeltal (a Mayan language), and South Indian Tamil. However, this theory has been challenged by several researchers who claim that different individual factors are involved in both considering an act as face threatening and the strategy used in apologizing (Trosborg, 1987). According to Trosborg these factors are determined by one's social and cultural patterns and by the behavioral norms of one's culture. This leads to the assumption that not only do speakers of different languages perceive the necessity of an apology differently, but also use different ways of apologizing.

Differences in apology strategy use have been demonstrated to be correlated with cross-cultural differences by both interlanguage studies and studies that looked at the way speakers of different languages apologize in their own languages. Such studies seem to give a clearer view of the relationship between speech acts and cultural factors (Barnlund and Yoshioka, 1990; Suszczynska, 1999). The choice of apology strategies is also determined by social differences such as sex, age, and social status. Holmes (1993) has shown in a study on New Zealanders that there are significant differences in the distribution of apologies between men and women and also that women apologize more than men. A definition that limits very much the concept of an apology is the one given by Owen (1983). According to Owen, apologies are remedial moves that follow what he called a priming move on the part of the person who expects the apology, which is a move that triggers the apology.

- **Explicit teaching of pragmatics**

Bardovi-Harlig (2001) nicely puts the pragmatic side of language as the “secret rules of languages” and urges for the instruction of pragmatics in the classroom. According to Yates (2004), the secret rules of language are the “the norms of interaction which experienced members of a speech community follow as they use language in their day-to-day business” and how much these can be a frustration to learners who have already developed a good deal of all other aspects of language to during discover they are still misunderstood.

The pervasiveness of pragmatics to every domain that requires human communication gave birth to the study of pragmatic strategies outside the realm of the academic learning of languages. Bardovi-Harlig, Mossman, & Vellenga (2015) explored the effect of instruction on academic discussions. Waugh (2013) reported the teaching of pragmatics and intercultural communication where a program for the instruction of pragmatic skills to internationally educated professionals communicate efficiently at the work place was developed.

Rose and Kasper (2001) call for classroom teaching of pragmatics. Poole (1992), Falsgraf and Majors (1995) and Lim (1996) advocate that classroom instruction of pragmatic cues should be delivered implicitly or explicitly through socialization in the classroom by means of interaction with the learners. We believe that Explicit and not necessarily implicit teaching of pragmatic behaviour would be more felicitous especially in the case of a large distance between L1 and L2 (Corder 1978 and Wierzbicka, 1985 and 1991) as is the case of Arabic and English.

Explicit teaching of pragmatics as a skill would no doubt shed light on the relationship between the intuitive politeness necessary on the part of the author of the illocutionary act – in order for him/her to get the intended message through in an efficient and unambiguous way that will ensure its felicity – and the pragmalinguistic strategies and socio-pragmatics factors. The speaker will hence avoid conflict and show regard for the addressee (Leech 2014). Finally Rose (2005)

put forward a review of the literature on the effects of instruction in L2 pragmatics and looked at the issue of teachability of pragmatics.

- **Awareness of pragmatic cues and the felicity of the speech acts**

Schmidt (1993) attributes a certain role to conscious awareness as it plays in the development of pragmatic competence making it a necessary condition. At a more general level, linguistic awareness is a precursor of language learning and linguistic production. Assuming that we are language-ready even before birth, our brain architecture provides for language processing as it does for other cognitive processes. We know that languages other than the mother tongue may help raise our consciousness of language as a tool for communication even though we have been communicating perfectly in our own language but without necessarily being so conscious about the fundamental role language plays in our life. It seems that we are so plunged in our similarities inside the language community that we couldn't notice language. It is the differences with the incoming languages of the others that provoked more consciousness our own language, the self.

Being aware of the extra-linguistic side of language, if one can call pragmatics this way, is another challenge. The intertwining of language and everyday behavior and the excess of empathy makes us believe that speakers of other languages behave just the same way to express themselves and that the difference is only lexical and grammatical. One can manage to live – and behave – a lifelong in France without much involvement in French as a language. How can we do that?

It is probably the extra-linguistic behavior, i.e. pragmatics, that gives us a hand to survive in a language community without using the language of that community or any other natural language by resorting to gestures and the inferences people we come in contact with make out of the context and the situations of daily life common to both parties. And that is probably the way we managed as language-less children to communicate and as older persons to get our messages through with less language than pragmatic cues. It looks like pragmatics has a primacy of the order of a language in its own respect which is later – in the process of acquiring a language – mixed with language proper. The latter cannot function without the pragmatic language.

Given the above mentioned importance of the pragmatic side of linguistic communication one cannot but call for an explicit teaching of pragmatics as a skill. In order to go beyond this call as a plea, one has to measure the effects of such a move in the teaching of languages.

- **Motivating the study**

Effective communication of intentions through language uses both the linguistic tool, language, and an extralinguistic strategy that is thought of as a universal human trait available for the

speaker whatever the language of communication is. The speaker of a foreign/second language struggles to get a good grasp of the foreign/second language and just uses it, believing that the strategic part of the communication will be normally available since it is an interaction between two human beings.

When the speaker of L2 thinks the message is getting to the addressee but the reaction of the latter shows the opposite, the sender of the message is disappointed, and even frustrated, and usually blames his/her level of linguistic competence. No one suspects the pragmatic side of the communication act to be involved in the failure.

Speakers are not necessarily aware of the existence of that extralinguistic side of communication as language proper seems to say it all and carry out the job for them. Pragmatics is that side of the communication process that is felt to exist but speakers never feel the need to be aware of it. It is not as tangible as words and sentences. We have much faith in our linguistic production. Then comes the failure.

Not only will we discover that there is more to communication than words, but we will also discover that the L2 doesn't seem to have that exactly same extralinguistic process as our native language. We know get to know that because we notice that our message would have been through in our L1. So we look around to find out how L2 native speakers do things. What are the forms they use when asking for something as simple as requesting something, thanking someone, apologizing, etc.?

Methodology

▪ Introduction

In order to measure the effect of the explicit teaching of L2-specific pragmatic cues for written text and spoken utterances on the proficiency of the learner in L2, the present research is carried in a quantitative approach. We consider that possible significant differences are a viable way of generalization and predictions. Results and conclusions can help change the way programs are designed and help instructors obtain better results and reach the learning outcomes set by course descriptions. In order to measure and avoid different types of biases, the researched groups must be homogenous at the level of the social and educational backgrounds as well as the gender and age levels. Our choice fell on a group of female Saudi students enrolled in a Teaching assistants programme meant to prepare them for an IELTS exam for them to pursue graduate studies in English-medium universities abroad.

▪ Population and Study Sample

In order to provide some empirical grounding for our claims, our research on the explicit teaching of a pragmatic skill targeted a population a group of 30 female Saudi students preparing for the IELTS proficiency test. The age of the participants ranged from 25 to 30 years and they

were all holders of BAs in different fields of study and were preparing to enroll in some MA programs mainly in the United States of America and Great Britain. In order to choose a homogenous sample, a proficiency test of English was administered and we selected the 20 highly performing candidates in order to ensure an onset of some pragmatic competence in L2. Since exposure to the target language is an important factor in developing pragmatic awareness (Matsumura, 2003), we selected the highest performing 20 students as a sample. The sample was then divided into four sub-groups of 5.

The first subgroup received an explicit classroom instruction of pragmatic cues for requests in English. The second sub-group received an explicit classroom instruction of pragmatic cues for apology in English. The third sub-group underwent an explicit classroom instruction of general pragmatic cues in English. The last sub-group received no explicit classroom instruction of pragmatics at all. The four sub-groups were then tested for their proficiency in English.

The pragmatics sessions consisted of three separate lessons. Each lesson started with a short PowerPoint/video presentation of the pragmatic acts of request, apology, and general pragmatics with no insistence on a specific act. The presentation was followed by a guided discussion of the ways the acts were performed and the participants were asked for their judgements of/feelings about the ways the acts were performed and suggestions of proper/adequate ways were made by the instructor according to the pragmatics of an English environment. Being adults and having been acting in their own environment and language the participants intuitively thought the different acts were easy to carry out but, when confronted with the differences presented by the new language, they were adamant to discover and learn proper ways/strategies of performing pragmatic acts in their foreign language. By the end of the three sessions we felt the students who underwent an explicit pragmatic teaching were, to a certain extent, more confident in their ordinary classrooms. But that is not a scientific measurement and we need to measure the performance of our 4 groups on a test in order to evaluate the effect of the explicit teaching of pragmatics as a skill.

▪ **Data collection and analysis**

The pragmatic test we used to elicit the request production is a written Discourse Completion Task (Bardovi-Harlig, 2012). The DCT was designed and distributed to the 4 groups for answer. The DCT is divided into three sections with three subtitles evoking life in England and putting the respondents in a specific probable situation they can live as they are preparing to live abroad for their MA. The situations were grouped in three sections according to the degree of familiarity with the interlocutor. The first sections represent situations where there is no familiarity with the interlocutor but the situations are of those common places where we expect to find vendors, employees, cab drivers, and talk to them. The second section puts the respondents in front of their professors, which represents a more formal situation. There is another type of familiarity

since it is combined to a certain degree of formality. The third set of situations are linked to high degree of familiarity as the participants are supposed to face close friends and family members.

The DCT was set in a way it could elicit pragmalinguistic strategies like directness and indirectness and sociopragmatic factors like the status and familiarity following Leech (1983) and Thomas (1983). It was also administered three weeks after the end of the intensive lessons on pragmatics in general, request, and apology in order to allow for the noticing to take place and the presupposed raised awareness of pragmatic cues and strategies to work in the respondents' academic environment which has English as a means.

Results and discussion

▪ Results

The results yielded no surprises and confirmed our hypothesis as the performances of the four groups showed significant differences. In order to obtain statistical differences, the answers were then assigned a scoring in a scale ranging from 2 to 6 with 4 as the middle value. Score 6 was assigned to category (a), a score of 4 was assigned to the category (b) and performances of the (b) category were given a score of 2. The three categories to be explicated below.

The pragmatic performances on the DCT were classified into three categories using the descriptors of felicity – for the general pragmatic success – and appropriateness – for the choice of the right, native like expressions.

- a. Pragmatically felicitous and locutionary appropriate (equivalent though not necessarily literally similar to native performance, as we believe that non-native expressing of meaning in a slightly different manner than the native speaker is as appropriate and can pave the way to a local English and very performing, for example)
- b. Pragmatically felicitous and locutionary inappropriate
- c. Pragmatically infelicitous and locutionary inappropriate

The categories were set using idealized answers as would be those produced in the same situations and under the same conditions by native speakers of English. The scale has allowed us to statistically compare the performances of the four groups. The following table shows that the group (A), which underwent a crash course in explicit pragmatics outperformed all the other groups. Its performance was significant only when compared to the performance of group (D), members of which have not undergone any explicit presentation/training in pragmatics. On the other hand, group (B), which members were made aware of the pragmatics of apology fell in the second category together with group (C), which members underwent a general explicit pragmatic crash course. The performance of groups (B and C) were pragmatically felicitous, as they carried out the illocutionary act with felicity although their expressions were not totally idiomatic.

	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4
Respondent 1	15	13	13	5
Respondent 2	13	12	12	7
Respondent 3	15	14	14	8
Respondent 4	14	13	12	7
Respondent 5	14	12	12	8
Total group score	71	65	63	35

Table 1: Total score of performance in questionnaire depending on the explicit pragmatics course

By falling under the category (c), group (D) members could not carry out the illocutionary act of request and failed to provide even alternative – not idiomatic per native performance judgment – expressions. It seems like the felicity of the illocutionary act can guarantee the search for proper ways of expressing the act even when no idiomatic expressions are totally involved.

▪ Discussion

The first group, which took the course on the request speech act prior to the filling in the DCT outperformed all other three groups. It slightly outperformed the second and third groups while the fourth group had no chance of carrying out a felicitous speech act and probably used common sense and whatever is universal and, in a certain way, common to English and Arabic – the native language of the respondents.

The difference between group one and group two is probably due to the focus on a different speech act for each group. While the difference between the first group and the third one, that of the students who received a general explicit course on pragmatics as a skill, is one that could be explained by the general character of the course and the lack of exercise on a specific act. The slight difference between the second and third group is attributable to the same latter difference.

What is common between the three highly performing groups is the awareness of speech acts in general and the felicity of linguistic interaction between speakers which is constrained by the degrees of difference of status of the participants in the speech act and the degree of familiarity of the producer of the act with the counterpart.

The criterion of status, when it was equal, helped the fourth group use common sense with no need for elaborated strategies and that is where the group could have most of its felicitous performances. We think it is due to the frequency of the situations. The performance was successful especially when the familiarity with the interlocutor was at its highest in this group.

Status and familiarity, when adequate, facilitated the performance of the illocutionary act in all groups. The pragmatic awareness and the specific speech act knowledge made the difference.

▪ **Conclusion**

The present study looked at speech acts as the domain where pragmatic awareness and linguistic knowledge combine in the mind of the speaker for the sake of interacting properly with others and provoking through a locution and an illocutionary force, a perlocutionary result on the part of the interlocutor. After examining the performance of a group learners of English as a foreign language in Saudi Arabia, we came to the conclusion that pragmatic awareness and knowledge allows for the felicity of communication. Speakers are thus aware of the fact that there is no locutionary – strictly linguistic – act that is not encapsulated, for the sake of communication, in a way that allows the interlocutor to receive the proper message with no need for a guessing game at the isolated lexical semantic level.

Pragmatics, in this sense, seems to be a precursor to language and not the opposite. In acquisition studies, the pragmatic skills are last to be noticed in the child but that does not mean they are acquired at a later age. We know that the infant cries for food and other needs before he/she develops speech and guides the adults' attention using the arms and the eyes. We pretend that language is pragmatic, a speech act, before being speech per se. The development of pragmatics can then be seen as the raising awareness of the existence of that ability/skill in humans and its tremendous power of communication.

Learners of a foreign language are so focused on the lexical side of language and the combinatorial role of grammar that they overlook the ingredient of felicity in a foreign language, i.e. the pragmatic skill. Which brings us the answer to the second research question about the effectiveness of the teaching of pragmatics as a skill early enough in the process of teaching a foreign language.

Foreign language syllabus should raise the awareness of the role of pragmatics in language teaching and learning. The pragmatic skill should be taught only in scripts and situations which mimic first language scenarios as in real life. The classroom should be a place for speech acting if we want ease the burden on learners. Speech acts are more universal than languages but learners don't know it. As the teaching of pragmatics as a skill has clearly improved the performance of our respondent when compared to the group of students who did not receive any explicit pragmatic training.

▪ **Ethics and Human Subjects Issues**

Permissions to carry out the research in the TAP (Teaching Assistants Programme) were obtained from the Deanship of Educational Services. Participants consent was also obtained.

▪ Strengths and Weaknesses of the Study

In addition to the differences in prominence, stress placement and intonation patterns the language pair (Arabic L1 and English L2) was the first strength of the present study since the distance between the two language reflects also sociocultural gap and thus a behavioral difference in the use of pragmatic cues. We also believe that another strength of the study was its experimental character through the use a DCT which tried to elicit performance in a natural-like setting. Given their career goals and given the IELTS test they were preparing to sit for the participants in the present research represented a population of serious students who were willing to take the intensive teaching of the intensive course about requests, apology, and pragmatics in general.

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APPENDIX I

The DCT

Dear Participants,

You will be put in situations where you have to use English instead of your mother tongue. These situations require you to request something or some service from people you and people you don't know. There is no right or wrong answer. You just have to act to the situation.

Please try to speak as normally and fluently as possible to act in the different situations. Your answers are confidential and no mention of your name or any personal info will be disclosed.

Academic info:

(Equal status no familiarity)

Section I: Living in London

Situation One

You are in a situation where you have to buy a baguette from a bakery in London, the vendor asks: How may I help you, Madam? You answer?

.....

Situation Two

You hail a cab in a London street. Once seated, you say to the driver:

.....

Situation Three

You are at the post office in London to send a Parcel back home. When your turn comes, you say to the employee:

.....

Situation Four

You cannot find your way to the train station and ask a passerby to help you. You say:

.....

Situation Five

On the airplane, you are sitting in the aisle and ask would like to see the sky from the window. You say to the passenger next to the window:

.....

(Higher Status/ no familiarity)

Section II: Talking to professors

Situation One

You address your teacher to ask for a remedial exam because you couldn't attend the last exam. You say:

.....

Situation Two

During a lesson, you couldn't understand a part and ask your professor for clarifications. You say?

.....

Situation Three

You meet with the program director to ask for an extension. You say:

.....

Situation Four

You talk to a professor who is not your teacher to help you with a choice of topic for your next assignment. You say:

.....

Situation Five

You ask your professor about the reasons you got a lower mark on the exam. You say:

.....

(Equal Status/familiarity)

Section III: Family and friends

Situation One

11. You ask your sister to lend you some money for a short period of time. You say:

.....

Situation Two

Your best friend is paying you a visit so you ask her to buy you a small good you can't find in your neighborhood. You say:

.....

Situation Three

You ask your brother to drive you to university because you're too late to arrive in time by metro. You say:

.....

Situation Four

It has been a long time you haven't been to the movies. You ask two of your friends to go with you. You say:

.....

Situation Five

You ask your sister to help your best classmate to help you with proofreading a text you want to submit to your teacher. You say:

.....

Thank you for time and effort.