

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE  
OF NATIVE AND NON-NATIVE SPEAKERS OF ENGLISH

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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE  
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## ABSTRACT

Pragmatics is a field of knowledge that can be recognized in a socio-cultural context of study in intercultural communication. The present research aimed at conducting a comparative study on the native and non-native speakers' pragmatic competence of the English language in the University of Malaya. The study mainly focused on studying the pragmatic knowledge of Malaysian Chinese on the two speech acts of apology and request in the academic level, and comparing their performance with that of the English native speakers working in University of Malaya. To do so, following a thorough review of the related literature a pilot study was done based on a previously developed Multiple-Choice Discourse Completion Test (MDCT), and then 80 Malaysian Chinese studying in University of Malaya as the Non-native speakers and 20 North American Native speakers studying or working in the academic situations at the same university received the test which mainly focused on two speech acts of request and apology. The comparison of the testees' performances on the test given firstly revealed that the participants' performance on the test was the same for the pragmatic test of apology and request. Thus it was concluded that both native and non-native speakers were able to answer the items referring to both speech acts of the study with no preference. Secondly, there was a significant difference between the performance of native and non-native learners on the MDCT of apology and request; consequently it was revealed that native speakers showed a significantly higher performance on the MDCT of apology and request. It was concluded that NNSs need to gain mastery over various speech act strategies to show they are pragmatically competent and ready to accomplish effective negotiations or communications in the real language situations at the academic level. The study findings also revealed that NNSs taking part in the study were not competent enough to perform as effectively as the NSs. This means that the NNSs need training in terms of their pragmatic competence and this point might have been neglected in the previous training of the learners of the present study. The findings of the study could be employed by ESL/ EFL teachers, policy makers, and material developers to pay more attention to teaching pragmatic competence to the learners and make them more aware of the real target language situations.

## ABSTRAK

Penguasaan memahami bahasa iaitu pragmatik boleh disifatkan sebagai kemahiran sosio-budaya di dalam kajian komunikasi antarabudaya. Kajian perbandingan yang dijalankan di Universiti Malaya bertujuan menilai tahap pemahaman terhadap makna Bahasa Inggeris di kalangan penutur asal dan bukan penutur asal. Fokus utama kajian adalah pengetahuan pemahaman pelajar warganegara Malaysia berbangsa Cina bertutur ketika memohon maaf dan membuat permintaan di peringkat akademik dan membandingkan penguasaan berbahasa Inggeris mereka dengan penutur asal yang bekerja di Universiti Malaya. Untuk itu, ulasan terperinci terhadap makalah yang berkaitan dengan kajian awal telah dijalankan berdasarkan ‘ Multiple-Choice Discourse Completion Test (MDCT)’. Seramai 80 orang pelajar Universiti Malaya warganegara Malaysia berbangsa Cina, bukan penutur asal Bahasa Inggeris dan 20 orang dari Amerika Utara samada yang belajar atau bekerja di bahagian akademik dari university yang sama menerima ujian yang fokus utamanya adalah berkenaan dua ucapan iaitu membuat permintaan atau memohon maaf. Perbandingan terhadap penguasaan peserta yang diuji pada ujian yang awal adalah tahap penguasaan dan pemahaman yang sama bagi ujian pemahaman ketika memohon maaf dan membuat permintaan. Oleh yang demikian kesimpulan pertama dapat disimpulkan bahawa kedua-dua penutur asal dan bukan penutur asal mampu memberi jawapan bagi kedua-dua ucapan yang dikaji tanpa sebarang rujukan. Kedua, terdapat perbezaan yang ketara antara tahap penguasaan penutur asal dan bukan penutur asal berkenaan ujian ‘MCDT’ tentang memohon maaf dan membuat permintaan, yang mana penutur asal menunjukkan tahap penguasaan yang lebih tinggi di dalam ‘MCDT’ tentang memohon maaf dan membuat permintaan. Kesimpulan yang dapat diputuskan adalah bukan penutur asal memerlukan tahap penguasaan di dalam pelbagai strategi bertutur yang menunjukkan mereka mampu menahami dan bersedia untuk membuat perbincangan atau berkomunikasi ketika berhadapan dengan situasi di peringkat yang sebenar. Kajian juga telah membuktikan bahawa bukan penutur asal yang menyertai kajian tidak mempamerkan kemahiran berbahasa Inggeris yang berkesan seperti penutur asal. Ini bererti bukan penutur asal perlu banyak latihan bagi menguasai pemahaman mereka dan di tahap ini ada kemungkinan latihan menguasai pemahaman tidak dititikberatkan ketika pembelajaran mereka di masa lalu. Penemuan-penemuan kajian boleh digunapakai oleh para guru, para penggubal polisi dan untuk para pereka bahan pembelajaran memberi lebih perhatian kepada pengajaran menguasai pemahaman para pelajar. Ini akan membuatkan mereka lebih peka terhadap pemahaman bahasa ketika situasi sebenar.

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## To My Beloved Family

It is because of their seeds of faith and commitment that the love of people  
becomes an important part of my life.

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## **List of Symbols and Abbreviations**

**EFL:** English as a Foreign Language

**ELT:** English Language Teaching

**ESL:** English as a Second Language

**IELTS:** International English Language Testing System

**L1:** First Language

**L2:** Second Language

**MDCT:** Multiple-Choice Discourse Completion Test

**NS:** Native Speaker

**NNS:** Non-Native Speaker

**SL:** Second Language

**SLA:** Second Language Acquisition

**TOEFL:** Test of English as a Foreign Language

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## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

#### **1.1 Overview**

Pragmatics is a field of knowledge that can be recognized in a socio-cultural context of study in intercultural communication. The present research aimed at conducting a comparative study on the native and non-native speakers' pragmatic competence of the English language in the University of Malaya. The study mainly focused on studying the pragmatic knowledge of Malaysian Chinese on the two speech acts of apology and request in the academic level, and comparing their performance with that of the English native speakers working in University of Malaya.

Kasper (1997) argues that a further aspect of students' pragmatic competence is their awareness of what is, and what is not appropriate in the given contexts. Accordingly, he has mentioned that pragmatics is a field of knowledge that makes people know how to appropriately achieve the mutual comprehension and politely face the challenges that are caused by the miscommunication and misunderstanding in international situations.

Crystal (1997) emphasizes that the pragmatics knowledge is necessary and useful in second language learning. He proposes that pragmatics is the study of language form and the point of view of users, especially of the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction, and the effects their use of language has on other participants in the act of communication.



Pragmatics is a field of knowledge that can be recognized in a socio-cultural context of study in intercultural communication. It means that pragmatics knowledge indicates that English native and non-native speakers need to have a broader focus in their English interactions, including the focuses of grammatical structures and vocabulary accuracy, the considerations of speech appropriateness, and different cultural issues present in the communication context.

Testing general language proficiency is expected to have been grounded on the learners' ability to present effective communication. Therefore, any test of language proficiency claiming to be communicative is expected to check the learners' ability in terms of their pragmatic competence (Bachman & Palmer, 2010).

As one of the most significant aspects lying in the second language teaching/learning process is to develop learners' ability to communicate appropriately in a given target language and culture, language testing services then have focused on the tests which could measure the communicative ability or better say, pragmatic competence of the learners. Therefore teaching, learning, and testing practices exclusively focusing on the features of the target-language linguistic system cannot suffice the multivariate aspects of communication. "Language learners also need to learn the social and pragmatic conventions of the target-language" (Swain, 1985, p. 235). Otherwise, inappropriate use of language can lead to pragmatic failure and those speakers who do not use pragmatically appropriate language run the risk of appearing uncooperative at the very least, or more seriously, rude or uncultured (Bardovi-Harlig, 1999).

Tests of pragmatic competence, which mainly have focused on various speech acts have been developed since 1980s in various cultural settings (Jianda, 2007). The testing system developed to accomplish the purpose is labeled as Multiple-Choice Discourse Completion Test (MDCT). Preparing MDCTs requires a thorough metapragmatic assessment of situations, scenarios, and items.

A thorough review of the related literature (Bachman, 1990; Bachman & Palmer, 2010; Birjandi & Rezaei, 2010; Cohen, 1996, 1997, 2007, 2009; Crane & Kauffman, 2004; Farhady, 1980; Farnia & Raja Rozina, 2009; House & Kasper, 1987; Hudson, Detmer, & Brown, 1995; Jalilifar, 2009; Jianda, 2006, 2007, 2010; Moradkhan & Jalayer, 2010; Roever, 2005; Rose, 2000; Shimazu, 1989; Soler & Martinez-Flor, 2008; Taghizade Mahani, 2012; Ymashita, 1996) reveals that attempts have been made to construct MDCTs in various situational contexts. Increasing reliability and validity of MDCT also has been a matter of concern for the test developers (Jianda, 2010).

In case the appropriate use of language is ignored effective communication cannot be achieved, and that is why pragmatics and pragmatic testing comes into the picture. In line with pragmatic testing research, studying the pragmatic knowledge of the learners studying in the academic situations such as Malaysian universities where English knowledge is of high importance is a new research topic.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

A lot of students studying in University of Malaya enjoy a Chinese background. These students are labeled as Malaysian Chinese and are A-level students in university of Malaya. The medium of instruction in pre-university level is either Malay or English and in some case both, meanwhile, a lot of these students find it difficult to develop a good level of English knowledge which is a must for universities overseas. Hence, a good number of Malaysian Chinese students need to know a practical and comprehensive English knowledge to be gain high scores in IELTS.

Another problem for the Malaysian Chinese students is their lack of pragmatic knowledge in the English language at the academic level; something which plays a significant role in the academic negotiations and classroom discussions, though academic pragmatic knowledge in English is not limited to the classroom context and it covers areas such as social life of campus and getting engaged in interpersonal relations as well (Farashaiyan & Amirkhiz, 2011).

Malaysian Chinese students in the University of Malaya sit for one of the high stake tests such as TOEFL and IELTS as their entry requirement for Master's Degree. These tests have been used as measures of general language proficiency since 1960s and 1970s, respectively and have been modified to be in line with the changes in the domains of language teaching and learning, meanwhile, their success in testing pragmatic competence of the second language learners of English has been a questionable issue as they have difficulty expressing themselves in real life situations (Alderson, 2004).

Annually millions of people take these two high stake tests worldwide and a great number of these individuals seek the results of the tests for academic purposes. In an attempt to enter the graduate studies in Malaysian universities, more than 5000 test takers take IELTS academic module ([www.ielts.org](http://www.ielts.org)) while a lot others take TOEFL IBT. The question is if the testees receiving high scores in IELTS and TOEFL are competent enough to behave effectively in the academic situations in the native or native like situations.

The third problem which has attracted the attention of the present researcher is the lack of a comprehensive test of pragmatic competence to check the real ability of the English learners in the real academic situations. Though high stake tests given are claimed to check the academic life of the students as well, firstly such a section is limited in those tests and cannot cover all (or a large part of ) the possible speech acts, and secondly the results of such tests, at least in the Malaysia are affected by coaching effects. This will be followed by the controversial issues of ethics, score pollution, questioning validity and reliability of the tests and the like.

The researchers' experience as an IELTS coach has revealed that this test is bound to many failures as it is apt to coaching effects and therefore it is not necessarily able to represent the true ability of the test takers. A pragmatic competence test might better show the real ability of the test takers and at least might minimize the negative facets of the present tests.

### **1.3 Purpose of the Study**

The study aims at comparing the performance of native and non-native speakers on the test of inter-language pragmatic competence focusing on the speech acts of request and apology in the academic situations. The present study also aims at testing the pragmatic competence of the Malaysian Chinese language learners in the academic situations in the University of Malaya.

More specifically, the test intends to be a test of inter-language pragmatics focusing on two speech acts of apology and request, which might be the source of conversations between the students and professors, two students, a student and a staff, and the like in the academic situations, though these two speech acts are not limited to the academic context.

#### **1.4 Significance of the Study**

As high stake tests taken for academic purposes are weak in terms of checking the learners' academic pragmatic competence, developing such tests and paying attention to their validity and reliability is of paramount importance. The present research takes significance from various aspects which are as follows:

In the first place, comparing the pragmatic competence of native and non-native speakers for the ESL learners aiming at entering university of Malaya via a pragmatic test is a new activity, which have mainly focused on speech acts in the academic situations (see Farnia & Raja Rozina, 2009; Farashaiyan & Amirkhiz, 2011; Jalilifar, 2009; Moradkhan & Jalayer, 2010; Rafieyan, et al, 2013, Taghizade Mahani, 2012), which can further minimize the ill effects of miscommunications on the part of students and academic staff such as supervisors and lecturers.

In the second place administering an MDCT in the academic level, with the main focus on the academic performances similar to real language situations is a totally novel idea (to the knowledge of the researcher) and can pave the way for the emergence of MDCTs of academic performance in the University of Malaya, which mainly focus on academic life of the prospective learners wishing to continue their studies overseas.

In the third place, the findings of the present research could be useful for the test developers in the academic level to give more room to the academic life and performances of the examinees in the academic modules of the tests.

Finally, the results might provide evidence for the reliability and validity of an academic MDCT test that after further investigation may be considered a feasible device to assess the pragmatic competence of the Malaya University learners who are willing to be master candidates in the academic situations of native speaking countries in near future.

### **1.5 Research Questions**

Considering the problem stated and the purpose of the study the following research questions were developed:

- 1. What is the statistically significant difference between the speech acts of pragmatic test (apology and request) in the academic level?**
- 2. What is the statistically significant difference between the performance of native and non-native learners on the MDCT of apology?**
- 3. What is the statistically significant difference between the performance of native and non-native learners on the MDCT of request?**
- 4. What is the statistically significant difference between the performances of high, mid and low proficiency groups on the MDCT of apology?**
- 5. What is the statistically significant difference between the performances of high, mid and low proficiency groups on the MDCT of request?**

### **1.6 Research Hypotheses**

Considering the research questions stated above the following research hypotheses were formulated:

- 1. There is a significant difference between the components of pragmatic test (apology and request) in the academic level.**
- 2. There is a significant difference between the performance of native and non-native learners on the MDCT of apology.**
- 3. There is a significant difference between the performance of native and non-native learners on the MDCT of request.**
- 4. There is a statistically significant difference between the performances of high, mid and low proficiency groups on the MDCT of apology.**
- 5. There is a statistically significant difference between the performances of high, mid and low proficiency groups on the MDCT of request.**

### **1.7 Definition of the Key Terms**

#### **Language proficiency**

Language proficiency could be defined as one's ability to handle second language communication in terms of speaking, reading, writing, and listening (Fulcher & Davidson, 2007). This ability could be tested for various purposes; among which one can refer to aptitude, readiness, and achievement. To test language proficiency one might need to know which features are accompanied by language proficiency. According to Glossary of Education (2012) "language proficiency is a measurement of how well an individual has mastered a language" ([www.education.com/definition/language-proficiency](http://www.education.com/definition/language-proficiency)).

This definition represents the two concepts of ‘proficiency’ and ‘language’: Proficiency is measured in terms of receptive and expressive language skills, syntax, vocabulary, semantics, and other areas that demonstrate language abilities. There are four domains to language proficiency: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Language is considered the prime means of communication employed by human beings. Language proficiency is measured for an individual by each language, such that the individual may be proficient in English and not proficient in another language.

### **MDCT**

Multiple-Choice Discourse Completion Test (MDCT) is a pragmatics instrument that requires the examinee to read a written description of a situation. Then the examinee should select what would be best to say in that situation. “It is designed to determine the extent to which participants are able to express themselves concerning the situation, via selecting the most pragmatically appropriate speech acts in response to the written situational prompts. Essentially, an MDCT functions to create a scenario to which a participant or informant must respond” (Jianda, 2010, p.4).

### **Pragmatic Awareness**

In the present study, pragmatic awareness is operationally defined as the learners’ ability to perform well on the Multiple-Choice Discourse Completion Tests. This definition is in line with the definition presented by Howard (2001), who stresses that “an awareness approach can be an effective way to teach students how to make pragmatic choices without developing stereotypes” (p.932).



### **Pragmatic Competence:**

Over the past years, different definitions of pragmatics have been proposed ; however, Bachman (1990), who provides the first comprehensive characterization of language competence, defines pragmatic competence as “the knowledge necessary, in addition to organizational competence, for appropriately producing or comprehending discourse” (p. 42). He goes on to classify pragmatic competence into two separate categories: illocutionary competence (which refers to intended meaning), and sociolinguistic competence (which deals with issues of politeness, formality, register, and culturally related aspects of language).

### **Speech Acts:**

According to Cohen (1996, p. 254), “in linguistics, an utterance defined in terms of a speaker’s intention and the effect it has on a listener is labeled as a speech act”. Speech act theory, as introduced by Oxford philosopher J.L. Austin (How to Do Things With Words, 1962, as cited in Cohen, 1996) and further developed by American philosopher J.R. Searle, considers the types of acts that utterances can be said to perform a) locutionary act, b) illocutionary act, and c) perlocutionary act. Various types of speech acts have been mentioned in the literature among which the most prominent are “apologies, complaints, compliments/ responses, requests, refusals, and thanks” (Cohen, 2007, p.14).

### **1.8 Limitations and delimitations of the study**

The following limitations and delimitations were mentioned concerning the nature of the present study:

**Limitations:**

- a. The number of participants in the present study was limited to one hundred, which in comparison to the huge numbers of test takers around the world, represents a small population. This might have affected the generalizability of the findings of the study. That is why the results might be generalized cautiously.
- b. The test takers had to take the test in a simulated situation, not a real one. Because of the limiting policies in the exam centers in Malaysia, it was not possible to use the real centers used for the purpose of the test taking. This might have partially affected the performance of the examinees as they knew they are taking a MOCK test.
- c. Testing 100 participants was hard work in its own turn and required firm programming and administrative measures. Briefing the participants also was a tough job.

**Delimitations:**

- a. The researcher has taken only two speech acts of apology and request into consideration; therefore, other speech acts have been deliberately neglected. This might have affected the results of the research.
- b. The researcher did not take demographic information of the participants into consideration. The factors such as gender, educational background, and socio-cultural features of the participants hence were ignored in the study. Other studies might be required to focus on these factors.

- c. Out of various factors affecting the development of language proficiency in the second language only speech acts have been selected and among the speech acts only two of more familiar speech acts of requests and apologies have been the main focus of the study. Hence other aspects of language pragmatics such as cultural features, background effects, degree of familiarity and the like have been intentionally left out for other research. Other speech acts such as complaints, compliments, thanking, and refusals (Cohen, 2009) could be researched further.
- d. The researcher had to confine the participant selection to the Malaysian Chinese learners in University of Malaya for the purpose of research feasibility therefore other nationalities, sub-nationalities and cultures have been ignored in the present study.
- e. The present research mainly focused on the learners' pragmatic awareness checked through a recognition test of speaking ability. Other language abilities such as writing, listening, or reading have been minimized to narrow down the scope of the research.

## Chapter Two

### Literature Review

#### 2.1 Introduction

As an underserved area of study, testing of pragmatic knowledge has not received the due attention it deserves. The concept of pragmatic proficiency was first introduced by Oller (1979) who proposed two different characteristics for this test type. Firstly, the language used in tests must be similar to the real world use of language forms in a meaningful way and not just strings of words put together. Secondly, the language used in the testing context must be linked to the meaningful and natural extra-linguistic context which is familiar to the test taker. Nevertheless, as Duran (1984) puts it, the criteria set for naturalness do not address the artificiality of the testing context. Clark (1978) considered the issue through the introduction of direct and indirect language proficiency tests. In his view, direct tests of this type should resemble authentic situations in real life. Nonetheless, he stated that these tests can only approximate real world language uses.

As Jianda (2006) suggests, testing of language learners' pragmatic competence has not received enough attention as sufficient tests have not been developed to test this significant aspect of language proficiency. "One of the reasons why such measures have not been readily available is that developing a measure of pragmatic competence in an EFL context is not an easy task" (ibid, p. 3).

The present chapter deals with covering the concepts related to pragmatics and testing pragmatic competence and the significant issues labeled as the offshoots of testing pragmatic competence.

## 2.2 Pragmatics

As a subdivision of linguistics, pragmatics differentiates between two meanings in each utterance: sentence meaning and the speaker meaning (Leech, 1983; Sperber & Wilson, 1986). In order to understand and then generate a communicative act, a type of pragmatic proficiency or competence is required (Kasper, 1997). Mey (1993) believes that overcoming utterance ambiguity is a part of pragmatic competence since meaning is connected to time, place and the manner in which that utterance takes place.

Different concepts have been developed and studies in pragmatics among which the most significant are:

- Deixis: the speakers' intention by a particular statement in a specific context
- Presupposition: the logical meaning of an utterance
- Performative: the performance of a specific action by saying an utterance.
- Implicature: the implicit meaning of an utterance not found in its ordinary use.

It is believed that certain rules are obeyed to sustain the flow of a conversation; indeed, pragmatics is interested in such principles. A number of these include:

- The Cooperative Principle: the participants contribute to help the flow of the intended speech event (Grice, 1975).
- The Politeness Principle (Leech, 1983): interlocutors respect each other's face and try to behave politely (Brown & Levinson, 1978).

Recent years have witnessed an increasing interest in pragmatics as an important branch of linguistics. Since the insufficiencies of the theoretical grammatical paradigms and previous purely formalist, abstract approaches to the study of the language became more evident. Therefore, this particular area of research known as pragmatics has aroused the interest of an increasing number of scholars over the last three decades (Mey, 1993).

According to Levinson (1983), the modern usage of the term pragmatics is attributable to the philosopher Charles Morris (1938). He was concerned to outline the general shape of a science of signs, or semiotics (or semiotic as Morris preferred). Morris differentiated between three distinct branches of inquiry within semiotics: syntactics (or syntax), referring to the study of “the formal relation between linguistic forms”, semantics, being the study of “the relation of signs to the entities in the world to which they are applicable” (their designata), and pragmatics, concerned with the study of the semiotic relationship between signs (syntax) and interpreters (sign users) (Morris, 1938).

Since only isolated linguistic forms and structures were the focus of attention by some researchers such as Saussure (1959) or Chomsky (1965), the notion of communication was not taken into consideration. Not only concepts of *langue* and *parole* which were proposed by Saussure from the paradigm of structuralism, but also the notions of competence and performance based on Chomsky’s generative-transformational grammar were merely explaining an ideal grammatical knowledge shared by native speakers of a given language.

Levinson (1983) indicated that for the same two following reasons interest in pragmatics appeared. The first would be as a reaction to Chomsky who uses language as an abstract construct and the second as a necessity to bridge the gap between accounts of linguistic

communication and prenominal linguistic theories of language. Leech (1983) introduced a new paradigm by contributing to the progress of a shift of direction towards performance and away from competence. The focus of attention in this fresh paradigm, that is to say pragmatics, was meaning in use rather than, as Chomsky pointed out, meaning in abstract. Based on Alcaraz (1990), the chief characteristics of pragmatics are referring to: (1) using language as a means of communication; (2) focusing on functions rather than on forms; (3) studying the processes that take place in communication; (4) using language authentically and in an appropriate context (5) interdisciplinary nature of pragmatics; and (6) applying linguistic theories based on the concept of communicative competence.

Afterwards a large number of definitions have been provided by various scholars (Stalnaker, 1972; Leech, 1983; Levinson, 1983; Crystal, 1985; Mey, 1993). Stalnaker (1972) defined pragmatics as “the study of linguistic acts and the contexts in which they are performed” (p.383). Compatible with that, Searle, Kiefer and Bierwisch (1980) referred to pragmatics, in their introduction to *Speech Act Theory and Pragmatics*, as being concerned with the conditions according to which speakers and hearers determine the context- and use-dependent utterance meanings. Wunderlich (1980) supported the importance of context dependence as well as he posited that “pragmatics deals with the interpretation of sentences (or utterances) in a richer context” (p.304). Pragmatics was also defined as “the study of the ability of language users to pair sentences with the contexts in which they would be appropriate” (Levinson, 1983, p.24). Pragmatics could be defined as the study of the use and meaning of utterances to their situations in Leech’s (1983) words.

Two very important characteristics can be observed from the definitions provided above. These characteristics distinguish pragmatics from all other linguistic disciplines. The first and the

most important is that peculiar attention is devoted to users of language. Also great emphasis is given to the context of users' interaction. Since meaning is regarded as a dynamic aspect, not a static one that is negotiated in the process of communication, Verschueren (1999) believes pragmatics to be the study of meaning in context.

One of the most detailed definitions of pragmatics was stated by David Crystal (1985)

The study of language from the point of view of users, especially of the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction and the effects their use of language has on other participants in the act of communication.(p.240)

This definition characterized pragmatics by the following distinguishing features that clearly show all the aspects involved in pragmatics (Kasper & Rose, 2002):

- Meaning is created in interaction with speakers and hearers.
- Context includes both linguistic and non-linguistic aspects.
- Choices made by the users of language are an important concern.
- Constraints in using language in social action (who can say what to whom) are significant.
- The effects of choices on co-participants are analyzed.

In this sense, Thomas (1995) defines pragmatics as meaning in interaction, since the process of communication pays attention on the effects of speakers' intentions on the hearers.



### **2.3 Pragmatic Competence**

According to Bachman & Palmer (1996), there are two area of pragmatic knowledge: one is functional and the other is sociolinguistic: Functional knowledge or what Bachman (1990) calls “illocutionary competence” helps us “interpret relationships between utterances or sentences and texts and the intention of language users.” (Bachman & Palmer, 2010, p. 46) It is obvious that in order to interpret a given utterance properly the language users’ prior knowledge of the language setting which includes the characteristics of the participants is needed. According to Alderson (2004), functional knowledge includes four categories of language functions such as ideational, manipulative, heuristic, and imaginative knowledge.

Sociolinguistic knowledge also “enables us to create or interpret language that is appropriate to a particular language use setting” (Bachman & Palmer, 2010, p. 47). This knowledge includes of different conventions that form and determine the proper use of genres, dialects, registers, natural or idiomatic expressions, cultural references, and figures of speech.

Pragmatic ability in a second or foreign language is part of a nonnative speakers (NNS) communicative competence and therefore has to be located in a model of communicative ability. In this regard, the role of pragmatic competence and assessing this underlying trait will be investigated in the following sections.

According to Cohen (2009), pragmatic competence helps us to build or interpret discourse by relating utterances or sentences and texts to their meanings. However, Elder and Harding (2011) define this competence in terms of illocutionary competence and sociolinguistic competence.

Socio-pragmatic knowledge describes knowledge of the target language community’s

social rules, appropriateness norms, discourse practices, and accepted behaviors, whereas pragmalinguistic knowledge encompasses the linguistic tools necessary to “do things with words” (Austin, 1962, in McNamara & Roever, 2006, p. 55) for example, produce comprehensible discourse, make requests, surrender a turn in a conversation, and so forth. Both components of pragmatic competence are equally necessary: language users who know target language socio-pragmatic norms but have no pragmalinguistic tools at their disposal are prevented from even participating in interaction. Conversely, users who command a range of pragmatic linguistic tools but use them unconstrained by socio-pragmatic rules may unwittingly give offense, index roles and stances they do not intend to convey, or be entirely incomprehensible. Because of the connection between socio-pragmatics and pragmatic linguistics, it is often difficult in practice to determine whether a given error was due to pragmatic linguistic or socio-pragmatic deficits.

Pragmatics tests mostly have focused on one or the other aspect of pragmatic competence and can be classified as oriented more toward the socio-pragmatic end (testing appropriateness in the context of social relationships) or the pragmatic linguistic end (testing linguistic forms necessary to achieve communicative ends). Within this scope, speech acts have attracted the researchers a lot and "there has been some assessment of implicatures, routines, and judgment of appropriateness" McNamara & Roever, 2006, p.57).

The grounds for communicative approach, having communicative competence in its core, were provided by the shift of direction towards performance and away from competence and the attempts for relating language to extra-linguistic factors and exploring the nature of communication. Therefore, communicative competence construct is particularly related to second language acquisition, since the goal in both SL and FL classes is for learners to become communicatively competent in the target language.

The term of communicative competence has had an important influence in the field of SLA, since communicative competence has been the basis for the teaching approach known as communicative language teaching. It is for this reason that different scholars have attempted to define the specific components that make up the construct of communicative competence. Among the different constituents, the pragmatic component is essential in the context of EFL, since it is very important to teach sentences not only in grammatical terms, but also in the appropriate situation or context where the utterance is taking place.

The model of communicative competence was first put forward by Canale and Swain (1980) and further developed by Canale (1983). They believe communicative competence is composed of four competencies:

- Grammatical: concerned with mastery of the language code (knowledge of lexical items and of rules of morphology, semantics, phonology, syntax and sentence-grammar)
- Sociolinguistic: rules of use; addresses the extent to which utterances are produced and understood appropriately in different sociolinguistic contexts depending on contextual factors
- Strategic: is composed of mastery of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies that may be called into action for reasons: on one hand to compensate for breakdowns due to limiting conditions in actual communication or to insufficient competence in one or more of the other areas of communicative competence; and on the other hand to enhance the effectiveness of communication

- Discourse competence: concerns mastery of how to combine grammatical forms and meanings to achieve a unified spoken or written text in different genres

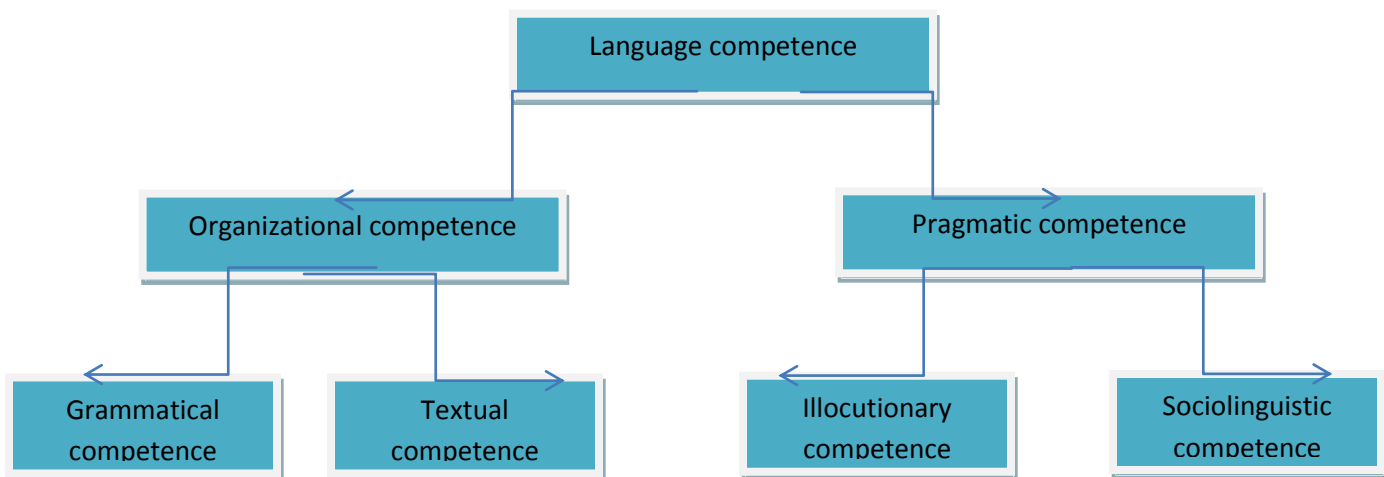
Canale (1983) established a big change in this original model. That model deals with the separation of discourse from sociolinguistic competence. While discourse competence concerns mastery of how to combine grammatical forms and meanings to attain a unified spoken or written text, the latter would only include the sociocultural rules of use (Canale, 1983). So through cohesion in form and coherence in meaning, the unity of a text is achieved.

Another model of communicative competence was also proposed by Savignon (1983, 1997). This model addresses the same four components of communicative competence previously described in the model proposed by Canale and Swain (1980) and Canale (1983); grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competencies. The most important feature about Savignon's model is the concept of interaction among the four competencies. She demonstrates that communicative competence is greater in size, according to the fact that each component has a size of itself which can be different from others, than the rest of the components, especially the grammatical competence. Savignon argues that knowledge of both strategic and sociolinguistic competencies contribute to an increase in someone's communicative competence, with no knowledge of grammatical competence. Since a person is able to communicate effectively without the use of language but through gestures or facial expressions.

Critics analyzing the models proposed so far point to the fact that there was no mention of the importance of the pragmatic component. Schachter (1990) asks whether pragmatic competence exists in Canale and Swain (1980) and Canale (1983) frameworks at all, since it was not sufficiently differentiated from the sociolinguistic one. Canale (1983) argues that he

considered pragmatics as an area within sociolinguistic competence, like Savignon (1983, 1997), but it was implicit. As a result of this chief criticism Bachman (1990) was the first one, dividing language knowledge into organizational and pragmatic competence explicitly, as shown in Figure 2.1.

**Figure2.1:** Language Competence



Bachman (1990) believes that pragmatic competence can be classified in two main types of communicative use of language: the relationships between signs and referents, the language users and the context of communication. He also believes that pragmatic competence includes two kinds of knowledge:

- Sociolinguistic knowledge
- Functional knowledge or illocutionary competence

Sociolinguistic knowledge pertains to a particular setting according to which language is created or interpreted. Knowledge of dialects and their appropriate use, idiomatic expressions, cultural orientations and figures of speech can be considered as examples of this type of knowledge. Moreover, using different registers in different situations (e.g. formal lecture vs. talking with children) embarks on the sociolinguistic competence as well.

Functional knowledge, on the other hand, is concerned with the intention of the language user behind the sentences he has used. As an example: "Do you have the time?" can be considered as a literal question with a yes/no answer; however, the intention of the speaker is most probably asking for directions.

#### **2.4 Is pragmatic Competence Teachable?**

Can pragmatic competence be taught? This question has inspired a number of research projects exploring the role of instruction in learners' pragmatic development. Kasper (1997) argues that while competence cannot be taught, students should be provided with opportunities to develop their pragmatic competence: Competence is a type of knowledge that learners possess, develop, acquire, use, or lose. "The challenge for foreign or second language teaching is whether we can arrange learning opportunities in such a way that they benefit the development of pragmatic competence in L2" (Kasper, 1997, p. 1).

L2 learners usually possess a certain amount of universal pragmatic knowledge: They might also be able to transfer some pragmatic features from their first language to the target language positively. However, the bad news is that learners do not always realize what they know or how to use what they have learned. Therefore, providing the opportunity for the learners

to activate the already known universals seems to necessitate instruction in pragmatics (Kasper, 1997; Martinez-Flor & Fukuya, 2005).

According to Akutsu (2006), pragmatic skills are supposed to be teachable to some extent as reflected in interlanguage pragmatics. Another line of investigation suggests that this type of knowledge is effectively acquired when it is taught explicitly. In addition, progress in language skills is not a sign indicating pragmatic skills improvement. Therefore, "[i]t is necessary for a language learner to have opportunities to be exposed to enough pragmatic strategies and situations and that in appropriate manners to acquire the competence" (Akutsu, 2006, p. 135).

Regarding the ILP, Kasper and Schmidt (1996) raised a number of questions, an important one of which considers the issue of teachability of pragmatic features. According to Kasper (1995), inappropriate and unsuccessful pragmatic performance of advanced L2 learners might be sufficient evidence for the necessity of pragmatic instruction. Indeed, "without some form of instruction, many aspects of pragmatic competence do not develop sufficiently" (Kasper, 1997, p. 7).

The studies concerned with the teachability of pragmatic features of language have suggested that those learners who were instructed outperformed the control group that received no instruction (Billmyer, 1990; Bouton, 1988; Morrow, 1996; Olshtain & Cohen, 1990; Wildner-Bassett, 1994). In a meta-analysis of thirteen empirical ILP studies carried out by Jeon and Kaya (2006), they reported the ILP instruction seems to be an effective way of presenting the pragmatic aspects of language. This is in line with what Norris and Ortega's (2000) suggested regarding their grammatical instruction.

The second line of pragmatic research considers the effect each of the explicit or implicit instructions might have on pragmatic proficiency of the learners (House, 1996; House & Kasper, 1981; Tateyama, Kasper, Mui, Tay, & Thananart, 1997). The results indicated that the explicitly taught group outperformed the implicitly taught one. The two aforementioned conclusions, however, should be interpreted with caution because of the limited number of studies carried out thus far.

Therefore, previous "research supports the view that pragmatic ability can indeed be systematically developed through planful classroom activities" (Kasper, 1997, p. 9). Indeed, in language classes, a great opportunity is provided for the learners to encounter different pragmatic features. For EFL learners, the language classroom might be the only place where they can practice the aforementioned features (Kasper, 1997).

A number of studies have explored how English language textbooks present speech acts (see Bardovi-Harlig, et al. (1991) on closings; Boxer and Pickering (1995) on compliments; and Edwards and Csizér (2001) on openings and closings). These studies are essential since they consider English as a Foreign Language (EFL); in EFL instruction natural input is much scarcer than it is in English as a Second Language (ESL) setting. Therefore, the role of textbooks in raising students' pragmatic awareness is more important. However, all the above-mentioned articles concluded that textbooks usually fail to provide the necessary and appropriate input in speech acts, and the material they do present often differs from real life speech.

It is difficult to give clear suggestions for improving pragmatic input in textbooks, particularly because textbooks are usually targeted to an international audience. Boxer and Pickering (1995) underline the importance of building teaching materials on spontaneous speech



and not relying on native speaker intuition, which may be misleading at times. "Enriching classroom input with real-world materials, such as recordings of native speaker conversations, radio programs, and even television soap operas, can be beneficial" (Boxer & Pickering, 1995, p. 54). To provide sufficient pragmatic input for the students "it is also important to provide the learners with supplement sources which include various types of speech acts" (Edwards & Csizér, 2001, p. 61).

## **2.5 Testing Second Language Pragmatics**

According to McNamara and Roever (2006) the assessment of pragmatic language skills is necessarily a difficult and complex challenge. Because of the nature of pragmatics, it is almost impossible to construct a standardized test that accurately captures the essence of social communication. Past attempts at doing so have resulted in tasks that actually assess underlying linguistic or cognitive skills rather than true social communicative functioning.

Assessment of L2 pragmatics tests language use in social settings, but unlike oral proficiency tests, it does not necessarily focus on conversation or extracting speech samples. Because of its highly contextualized nature, assessment of pragmatics leads to significant tension between the construction of authentic assessment tasks and practicality: Social context must be established and learner responses are often productive, so simulations of real world situations and scoring by human raters would be ideal, but they are also very costly. It is indicative of these difficulties that only few tests are available in this area.

Considering pragmatics as the study of language use in a social context one can argue that language users' pragmatic competence is their "ability to act and interact by means of language" (Kasper & Roever, 2005 in McNamara & Roever, 2006, p.54). In order to assess the

pragmatic knowledge of language, the test developers first should know what they want to test and try to give a thorough definition which includes different dimensions of this aspect of language.

As learners' ability in everyday conversation is the major focus of pragmatics ((McNamara & Roever, 2006), testing the social aspects of utterances received a considerable attention. Testing learner's communicative ability or construct through oral proficiency interviews and via employing various contexts were introduced to the field of language testing as they could be found in one form or another in the TOEFL and IELTS examinations nowadays. One of the controversial issues reported in the literature (Brown, 2001, 2003 in McNamara & Roever, 2006) is the role of interlocutor in the tests of proficiency through interviewing. One could argue that it is not surprising that candidates achieve better scores with the interviewer whose style seems designed to facilitate candidate performance (p. 50).

According to McNamara & Roever (2006) testing one's pragmatic knowledge is a tough job. Assessment of L2 pragmatics tests language use in social settings, but unlike oral proficiency tests, it does not necessarily focus on conversation or extracting speech samples. Because of its highly contextualized nature, assessment of pragmatics leads to significant tension between the construction of authentic assessment tasks and practicality: Social context must be established and learner responses are often productive, so simulations of real world situations and scoring by human raters would be ideal, but they are also very costly. It is indicative of these difficulties that only few tests are available in this area.

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## **2.6 Tests of Inter-language pragmatics**

In spite of the significance of pragmatics, testing its knowledge in second language has recently received the due attention it deserves (e.g. Bachman, 2000; Hudson et al., 1995; Roever, 2001). Leech (1983) states that pragmatic knowledge in L1 or L2 includes two types of knowledge: pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic. Clark (1979) contends that pragmalinguistic part includes conventions of means (i.e., strategies for realizing communicative intentions) and convention of forms (I.e., the linguistic tokens necessary to implement these strategies in communication). According to Fraser et al. (1981), the sociopragmatic component is concerned with knowledge of social norms such as mutual rights, obligations, power differential, social distance and etc. In order to communicate effectively regarding the pragmatic aspect of communication, learners must be able to draw on these two types of knowledge simultaneously.

The sociopragmatic element of pragmatics cannot be carried out without a situational context; thus, tests of pragmatic competence must provide the learners with sufficient context. Nevertheless, there exists no such consensus on the amount of provided context. For example, Billmyer and Varghese (2000) proposed using detailed prompts; however, their length made them impractical. Video prompts were also suggested as good options but the cost of creation and administration raised the issue of practicality another time. Indeed, Bachman and Palmer (1996) consider the ratio between the available and the needed resources as the practicality of a test. The second issue of concern is item difficulty in tests of pragmatic competence. Similar to any other test, test items must be relevant to the level of examinees in order to obtain valid scores across the ability spectrum. As a result, the major challenge in designing tests of interlanguage pragmatics is to address the need for an accurate assessment tool on the one hand, and approximating task difficulty on the other.

In line with the tension in the literature of pragmatic tests, Hudson, Detmer, & Brown (1995) developed a test of English as a second language (ESL) socio-pragmatics which could be referred to as a seminal endeavor. According to Bachman & Palmer (2010) this test enjoyed both high reliability and validity. Covering Hudson, Detmer, & Brown (1995) one comes to know that identifying the nature of instruments and determining the variables to be examined are of paramount importance. The process of identifying classifications of test types resulted in the three types of indirect measures, semi-direct measures, and self-assessment measures.

These measures are defined as follows: *The indirect measures* that were identified for use were a free response discourse completion test (OCT) and a cued response multiple-choice OCT. *The semi-direct measures* were to involve a more cued response language laboratory OCT spoken sample and a *free response face-to-face*, structured interview. *The self-assessment measures* include a cued response rating scale of how the subjects believed they would perform in situations depicted in the DCT and a freer response scale for the subjects to evaluate their performance in a taped interview setting.

According to the introduction of Hudson et al (1995) the framework employed in the project run had not included formats that were a totally "cued" semi-direct format, such as a multiple-choice language laboratory DCT, because this format did not appear to be a meaningful or productive test type. Likewise, the framework did not include a completely "free response self assessment format. Such a format would not provide interpretable data. Consequently, the formats are viewed as being on a scale of more to less free/cued responses.

Hudson, Detmer & Brown (1995) report that the process of determining which variables to include in the tests "resulted in the selection of power (p), social distance (D), and degree of imposition(R) (p.4). They confirm that DCT was developed and adopted as the motivator for the development of the other test instruments.

## **2.7 Analyzing NS and NNS**

Following the development and analysis of pilot open – ended DCT, the available data were analyzed based on a coding scheme relying on the combination of both *cross- cultural variables* and *avoidance strategies*. The result showed that NNS heavily make use of compensatory and deviant strategies to keep the track of conversation and convey the meaning.

The last phase of this pragmatic test development deals with changing the specific items or parts of them to increase their potential of eliciting more realistic and appropriate test-taker generated responses.

## **2.8 Context Internal Situations**

A truly interesting point in the final phase of the DCT reported by Hudson et al (1995) is that all situations assumed are context internal: for example, if the roles of the interlocutors are project leader to project worker, the context of the speech event should be at work place rather than at another asocial setting. This specifies that the social distance variable is guaranteed.

Yamashita (1996) has replicated Hudson et al's (1995) study and has translated the items developed by Hudson et al and has come to similar results. This not only asserts the reliability of the pragmatic items developed by Hudson, Detmer, and Brown but indicates that pragmatic knowledge is language specific in to high extent.

## **2.9 Testing Target language Socialization and Culture**

Another point that must be kept in mind in foreign language classrooms is that even in situations where one might socialize students into a specific culture as they teach language, it will likely not be possible to replicate the native classroom conditions in the target language classroom except possibly in very closely related cultures due to cultural, institutional and legal constraints. Soler & Martinez-Flor (2008) report a case from Indonesia in which the learner is as shocked when one of his instructors returns their examinations in order by grade from highest to lowest, reading out the names and the grades as he does so. This does not occur in every class there; nevertheless one's grade in Indonesia does not have the same legal privacy protection it does in America. In America, one's grade can only be conveyed to the student who earned it.

## **2.10 Constituents of a Test of Interlanguage Pragmatics**

In a web-based test of language pragmatics, Roever (2005) selected three constituents to measure: speech acts, implicatures, and pragmatic routines. He made an attempt to draw out which practices were widely accepted in the community rather than the individual preference of test takers. The validation framework proposed by Messick (1989) was utilized to exemplify the comprehensiveness of the test items.

### **2.10.1 Speech acts**

Various studies have focused on speech acts in the history of pragmatic testing (Beebe et al., 1990; House & Kasper, 1987; Kasper, 1989; Olshtain & Weinbach, 1987; Trosborg, 1995). Among these studies, the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP) carried out by Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) was a major step as it focused on requests and apologies cross-culturally. In addition, a large number of coding categories were proposed for naming realization

of the target speech acts. The results of this extensive study established speech acts as unique items for measuring pragmatic ability.

In another study, Yamashita (1996) focused on different measures of assessing the knowledge of speech acts: DCTs, multiple-choice tests, self-assessment and role-plays. The speech acts under investigation included requests, apologies, and refusals. These measures turned out as valid and reliable testing instruments except for the multiple-choice test.

### **2.10.2 Conversational Implicatures**

Grice (1975) was the first one who talked about conversational implicature with the notion of Cooperative Principle. This principle which refers to the contribution made to the conversation by the participants to be informative (quantity), truthful (quality), relevant (relation), and clear (manner). In a study, Bouton (1988) investigated the way implicature is understood by ESL learners, EFL learners, and NSs of English. He observed differences in interpreting implicatures among the participant groups. He also studied the same participants over time and came to the conclusion that it takes a long time to be proficient with respect to implicatures.

### **2.10.3 Pragmatic Routines**

Pragmatic routines are expressions that are appropriate to a certain situation or specific communicative ends (Coulmas, 1981). Although many routines are universal (e.g. greetings), some variations are sometimes misunderstanding (ibid). Coulmas (1981) states that mastering these routines leads to natural communication and solution to recurrent problems. In addition, more time is provided for the speaker to prepare the next conversational move (ibid).



Roever (2005) makes a distinction between situational and functional routines. The former is specified to situational conditions such as an institutional routine. Functional routines, on the other hand, can appear in different forms depending on the context. In an empirical study, Roever observed that EFL learners performed significantly worse on situational routines, while ESL learners performed perfectly on the situational routines in the same tests.

### **2.11 Scoring in Tests of Inter-language-Pragmatics**

In tests of pragmatic competence, scoring the results is of paramount importance as the development of appropriate multiple-choice DCTs is highly dependent on raters' decision about the best answer and the most appropriate distracters. In other words, building on the responses provided by both the NSs and NNSs to the DCT scenarios, a multiple-choice pragmatics comprehension test is developed to measure the effectiveness of metapragmatic instruction on the pragmatic awareness of learners. The most frequent responses given by the NSs are used as the accurate as well as appropriate option for the pragmatic awareness test and the other alternatives for each item are selected from among the sociopragmatically inappropriate or pragmalinguistically inaccurate responses given by NNSs to each item (Mirzaei & Esmaili, 2013).

As the evaluation of open ended responses might be biased by the subjectivity of a rater, usually more than one raters are included in a single study. In Mirzaei and Esmaili's (2013) study, the inappropriateness or inaccuracy of the distracters was checked by two native-speaker and two Iranian academics. In addition, the test was administered to 20 students in the US to make sure the correct option and the distracters were functioning as intended. For scoring the responses, the sociopragmatically appropriate and pragmalinguistically accurate responses in

this test received one point. The speech act required for each situation was first subdivided into its pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic components and then scoring the produced pragmatic data was achieved through the use of a two-fold scoring scale specifically drawing on (a) the metapragmatic information on the speech act patterns, rules, and strategies and (b) the 30 NSs' utterances made as responses to the same situations. The four differentially frequent strategies used by NSs and the sociopragmatic elements of each strategy were extracted. Accordingly, (a) the most frequently used strategy or formula was assigned a total credit of 2 points, (b) the second most frequently used strategy or formula received a credit of 1.5 points, (c) the third most frequently used strategy was assigned 1 point, and (d) the least frequently used strategy received a 0.5 point. This gradation was based on the frequency of the occurrence of one strategy or sociopragmatic formula in a given situation by individuals living in a speech community. As to the pragmalinguistic accuracy of the responses, a binary (i.e., either accurate or inaccurate) subsystem was used for scoring the pragmalinguistic accuracy of the responses which received an additional credit of 1 point. Finally, the sum of the two scores was obtained and intended as the ultimate score for each item.

To avoid any effect on ratings due to poor handwriting, the answers to the WDCT test paper given by the test takers are sometimes entered into the computer without any changes. In Jianda's (2006) study, the typewritten scripts were ordered alphabetically according to the test takers' surnames and then presented to two raters using the rubrics developed by Hudson, Detmer, and Brown (1995). The raters were given clear directions as to how the test papers should be rated and had a preliminary training on the rating. The final scores of the WDCT test were the mean scores of the two raters. For the MDCT, one correct answer equaled to five points while a wrong answer got 0 point. For the DSAT, the test takers' self-rating was the final score.

## **2.12 Previous Research**

### **2.12.1 International Research**

Olshtain and Cohen (1990) concentrated on the speech act of apology in English. Such elements as: choice of semantic formula; appropriate length of realization patterns; use of intensifiers; judgment of appropriacy and students' preferences for certain teaching techniques were investigated. The training study was carried out with 18 adult learners of English, speakers of Hebrew. The study consisted of: a) a pre-teaching questionnaire aimed at assessing the subjects' use of apologies; b) a teaching materials packet covering three classroom sessions and c) a post-teaching questionnaire. The findings suggested that although clear cut quantitative improvement of the learners' speech act behavior after the given training program cannot be presented, an obvious qualitative approximation of native like speech act behavior with respect to types of intensification and downgrading, choice of strategy and awareness of situational factors.

Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei (1998) explored the extent to which instructed L2 learners of English are aware of differences in learners' and target-language production in grammar, which addresses the accuracy of utterances, and pragmatics, which addresses the appropriateness of utterances given specific situations, speakers, and content. A videotape with 20 scenarios to test 543 learners and their teachers (N = 53) in two countries (Hungary and the U.S.) as well as a secondary sample of 112 EFL speakers in Italy were utilized. The results showed that whereas EFL learners and their teachers consistently identified and ranked grammatical errors as more serious than pragmatic errors, ESL learners and their teachers showed the opposite pattern, ranking pragmatic errors as more serious than grammatical errors.

Tanck (2002) investigated the differences between native and non-native English speakers' production of refusals and complaints to provide a more broad understanding of the discrepancies that can exist between native and non-native complaints and refusals. Consequently, more general patterns of pragmatic failure as produced by a group of subjects from varying first language backgrounds were detected which might be helpful in providing examples that English teachers can use to illuminate situations in which students may fail pragmatically.

Da Silva (2003) investigated whether relatively explicit instruction may be facilitative for L2 pragmatic development, and the most appropriate and effective ways to deliver the pragmatic information to L2 learners. Adopting a pre-test/post-test design with treatment and control groups, it incorporated metapragmatic awareness into task-based methodological principles in its instructional treatment in order to teach the sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic components of the speech act of refusals. Fourteen low-intermediate learners from various L1s (Japanese, Chinese, Taiwanese, Serbian, and Portuguese) were randomly assigned to both control (7) and treatment (7) groups. Data, collected by means of role-play, were transcribed, and a qualitative discourse analytic approach was used to examine the learning outcomes in the treatment group as compared to the control group. The findings illustrated that the instructional approach enhanced the L2 pragmatic ability of performing the speech act in focus.

Cohen and Ishihara (2005) focused on the benefits of fine-tuning strategy training for pragmatic use of a foreign language, drawing on a federally-funded curricular material development and research project. The project involved the development of self-access, web-based instructional units for five speech acts in Japanese: apologies, compliments/responses to compliments, requests, refusals, and thanks. Twenty-two third year intermediate Japanese

learners participated in a one-semester study to determine the impact of these self-access web-based materials on the learning of Japanese speech acts and the viability of fine-tuned web-based strategy training. The materials were found to have at least some impact, especially for those students who demonstrated more limited ability in speech act performance at the outset. In addition, the strategies-based approach to speech acts was for the most part perceived by learners to be beneficial. Averaged pre- and post-measure ratings of speech act performance tended to vary according to speech act, with the Request unit appearing to be the most effective. A speech-act by speech-act analysis revealed that clusters of strategies were found to contribute to effective learning and performance of the respective speech act.

Jie (2005) carried out a comparative study on how appropriately Chinese college EFL learners perform in two face-threatening speech acts, requests and refusals, in the two different pragmatic tests - written discourse completion test (WDCT) and multiple-choice discourse completion test (MDCT). The subjects were 66 second-year students divided into two groups: high-proficiency group and low-proficiency group. Data were collected mainly via a WDCT and an MDCT and retrospective interviews carried out on three subjects from each group. The politeness strategies used in 396 tokens of request and 396 tokens of refusal elicited in the WDCT, and 396 tokens of request and 396 tokens of refusal elicited in the MDCT were then analyzed in terms of directness level, internal modification and external modification. The findings indicated that 1. In both tests, learners preferred indirectness and made use of a wide range of supportive moves in both requests and refusals. The use of internal modifications was infrequent and lacked complexity and variety. 2. Contextual variables, notably the social distance and relative power, had some effects on learners' strategy choices, which demonstrated the learners' awareness of the context. Yet in the WDCT, it was found that learners seemed unable

to skillfully select socially and contextually appropriate strategies in low-high situations where the hearer had power over the speaker. On the contrary, learners made more appropriate choices in low-high situations in the MDCT. The results pointed to learners' inability to always choose socially and contextually appropriate politeness strategies on one hand and their consciousness of different strategies in different contexts on the other hand. 3. Proficiency had little effect on the performance of the two groups. In the two tests, the two groups did not show any significant differences in their overall use of politeness strategies including levels of directness, internal modification and external modification. Besides, contextual variables did not show different effects on the strategy use by the two groups. 4. The written discourse completion test (WDCT) was shown to be capable of testing students' speech production, and the multiple-choice discourse completion test (MDCT) could test students' receptive knowledge. In the study, the findings showed that there was a gap between the students' productive competence and receptive knowledge in the same context. The researcher suggested that consciousness-raising and systematic instruction should be adopted to improve the pragmatic competence of Chinese EFL learners, especially their ability to choose appropriate politeness strategies in speech act performance.

Jianda (2006) showed that interlanguage pragmatic knowledge is teachable. The researcher tried to explore ways to assess Chinese EFL learners' pragmatic competence and meanwhile investigate whether learners of different EFL proficiency levels perform differently in pragmatics tests. Results showed that the test methods were reliable and valid in assessing Chinese EFL Learners' interlanguage pragmatic knowledge. It was suggested that a combination of elicitation through both native speakers and non-native speakers should be a better and more practical way to construct interlanguage pragmatic test items. The two proficiency groups in this

study were shown to differ significantly in terms of their English proficiency, but not on two of the three pragmatics tests, which indicated that the Chinese EFL learners' interlanguage pragmatic knowledge did not seem to increase substantially with their language proficiency. The findings reconfirmed the importance of teaching pragmatic knowledge to Chinese EFL learners in classrooms. Jianda suggests that EFL teachers should teach pragmatic knowledge in class and include interlanguage pragmatic knowledge in large-scale tests.

Taguchi (2006) evaluated 59 Japanese college students of English at two different proficiency levels for their ability to produce a speech act of request in a spoken role play task. Learners' production was analyzed quantitatively by rating performance on a six-point scale for overall appropriateness, as well as qualitatively by identifying the directness levels of the linguistic expressions used to produce requests. Results revealed a significant L2 proficiency influence on overall appropriateness, but only a marginal difference in the types of linguistic expressions used between the two proficiency groups. Moreover, grammatical and discourse control encoded in the rating scale seemed to have affected the quality of speech acts.

In another study, Jianda (2007) developed a multiple-choice discourse completion test (MDCT) to assess the pragmatic knowledge of Chinese EFL learners in relation to the speech act of apology. The development involved several stages. First, students in China were asked to identify situations in which apologies might be required and to report how likely the situations were to occur in their daily lives. Next, metapragmatic assessment involving both Chinese and North American students was used to ascertain the social variables which applied in each scenario. This was followed by studies to validate the scenarios and to develop multiple-choice options for each scenario. Finally, a pilot test was conducted with 105 Chinese university students. The results provided evidence for the reliability and validity of the test, and suggested

that after further investigation it may be feasible to assess the pragmatic competence of Chinese learners by means of a MDCT in the future.

Kreutel (2007) analyzed the devices used by learners of English as a Second Language (ESL) in order to perform the speech act of disagreement in their L2. Data from 27 ESL learners were gathered by means of Discourse Completion Tests and compared to baseline data from 27 native speakers of American English. It was found that non-native speakers use mitigation devices such as hedges or explanations less frequently than native speakers, but often resort to undesirable features such as the "blunt opposite" or message abandonment. Moreover, three additional features of target-like disagreement expression were identified, namely, suggestions, exclamations, and a "sandwich pattern of mitigation." The data suggest that high lexico-grammatical proficiency does not necessarily imply high pragmatic competence.

Karatza (2009) attempted the design and application of a task-specific rating scale for the measurement of C1 Kratiko Pistopiitiko Glossomathias (KPG) candidates' pragmatic competence. After textual analysis of authentic texts and validation of results by expert judges, a task-specific rating scale was devised on the basis of an Index of Pragmatic Performance (IPP). The devised scale was deployed for the assessment of candidates' pragmatic performance in a total of 42 excellent and medium C1 level KPG scripts. The analysis of the findings followed a qualitative approach combined with occasional reference to quantitative data. After the examination of data, it was revealed that KPG candidates' pragmatic performance can range from poor to excellent. In addition, all the pragmatic genre-specific features of school newspaper opinion articles were detected in C1 KPG scripts. Pragmatic deficiencies were traced in both excellent and medium KPG scripts. A strong positive correlation was detected between pragmatic performance scores (PPS) and language performance scores (LPS).



Ogiermann (2009) provided some (more) insights into cross-cultural variation in speech act realization by analyzing English, German, Polish and Russian requests. The researcher aimed to show that the relationship between indirectness and politeness is interpreted differently across cultures. Hence, the analysis focused on the difference between direct requests, which have been said to play a central role in Polish and Russian, and conventionally indirect requests, which are the most frequent request type in English and German. The requests analyzed in the study were elicited by means of a discourse completion task and constitute responses to a scenario frequently used in previous request studies. The strong agreement among languages on the use of conventional indirectness in this scenario allowed for testing the restricted applicability of interrogative constructions claimed for the two Slavic languages.

Abed (2011) dealt with pragmatic transfer of Iraqi EFL learners' refusal strategies as reflected by their responses to a modified version of 12- items written discourse completion task. The task consisted of three requests, three offers, three suggestions, and three invitations. Each one of these situations included one refusal to a person of higher status, one to a person of equal status, and one to a person of lower status. Data analyzed according to frequency types of refusal strategies and interlocutor's social status. It was found that the frequency of use of refusals by Iraqi EFL learners was different from that of Americans, though they shared some similarities. Iraqi EFL learners were apt to express refusals with care and/or caution represented by using more statements of reason/explanation, statements of regret, wish and refusal adjuncts in their refusals than Americans. Americans were more sensitive to their interlocutor's higher and equal status, whereas Iraqi EFL learners to lower status. Evidences proved the existence of little difference between IEFL males and females in refusal frequency and refusal adjuncts.

Khamyod and Aksornjarung (2011) compared the pragmatic competence in performing speech act of apologies and thanks of 16 high and 14 low English proficiency learners. A multiple-rejoinder discourse completion task (multiple-rejoinder DCT) consisting of 24 scenarios was employed for data collection. Three native English speakers rated the data based on the scoring criteria adapted from the Cohen and Olshtain Communicative Ability Scales and a modified version by Pinyo, Aksornjarung, and Laohawiriyanon, 2010. A series of t-tests revealed significant differences in the pragmatic competence performed by the two subject groups. Participants with high English proficiency showed high pragmatic ability and vice versa. Findings also suggested that linguistic competence is necessary for L2 learners in acquiring pragmatic competence.

Al-Shboul et al. (2012) investigated the similarities and differences of the speech act of refusals in English between Jordanian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and Malay English as a Second Language (ESL) postgraduate students. Data were collected using a modified version of the Discourse Completion Test (DCT). To obtain responses as natural as real-life communication, an interviewer audiotaped and read the situations aloud to both groups in English to enable the participants to respond verbally to situations. Next, the audiotaped responses obtained from both groups of participants were transcribed with broad transcription convention. Data were analyzed in terms of semantic formulaic sequences and were categorized by four trained coders based on the classification of refusal strategies established by Beebe et al. (1990). Results revealed that both groups used almost similar strategies with similar frequency in performing refusals. For example, the most frequently used refusal strategies by the Jordanian and Malay participants were excuse, reason, explanation, and expressing statement of regret. However, they differed in the use and frequency count of indirect strategies with the Malays

using less indirect strategies than the Jordanians. In addition, the results indicated that the Jordanian participants expressed 'gratitude' less frequently than the Malay participants when refusing invitations by equal and lower status person. Similar results were found when performing refusal in all request situations.

The purpose of Brubæk's (2012) study was to investigate whether Norwegian EFL students would be familiar with and show awareness of English politeness norms and pragmatic conventions when having to communicate in English and also adapt their language, choice of strategy and level of formality to the contextual demands when making requests in a second language. Forty students answered a simplified version of a discourse completion test (DCT) consisting of four different situations in which the students had to make requests. The results indicated that most of the students were at one of the beginning stages of English pragmatic development. Their language use was characterized by first language (L1) transfer and overuse of familiar and informal expressions. When faced with more formal and demanding situations, they fell short and clearly lacked the knowledge and competence that would allow them to communicate successfully.

Ravetto (2012) compared Italian and German compliment responses given in informal situations, among university students and friends. The findings revealed that both Italian and German native speakers frequently accept compliments. Compliment rejections were rare in both Italian and German interactions and the two language and cultural groups differed in the frequency of the single compliment response strategies. Italians preferred to reply to compliments thanking the interlocutor, while the German corpus analyzed included many samples, in which the complimented person tested the truthfulness of the speech act and the sincerity of the compliment giver by means of direct questions. Furthermore, in both participant

groups, the selection of the compliment response type was influenced by the complimented attribute. In Italian data compliments on physical appearance and possessions were often directly accepted, whereas positive evaluations of character traits and skills favored the displaying of Limited Acceptance or Non-Acceptance responses. In contrast, in the German corpus, compliments on character aspects were accepted more frequently than the ones on appearance, possessions or personal abilities.

Beltrán (2013) assessed pragmatic awareness and production of 104 nonnative speakers of English of two different proficiency levels (intermediate and advanced). The findings confirmed that proficiency level has effects on the awareness and production of appropriate and correct request acts and request act modifiers. Statistical analyses showed that advanced learners produced more appropriate and accurate requests than intermediate participants, which was also the case for most internal request modifiers. Advanced learners also appeared to be better at assessing pragmatic and grammatical failure of some types of request strategies.

Hong and shih (2013) investigated the productions and perceptions of complaints of English learners at different proficiency levels in Taiwan. In addition, the interaction between the subjects' use of complaint strategies and two variables – status and social distance— was examined. One hundred undergraduates participated in this study, and they were divided into high- and low-proficiency learners. A written discourse completion task (DCT) and a multiple-choice task were employed to elicit the subjects' complaints. The strategy categories used for coding written DCT data and designing options of the multiple-choice task included opting out, hints, disapproval, requests for repair, explicit complaints, and accusations, with the severity level increasing from hints to accusations (excluding opting out). The results indicated that in the two tasks, the two groups both used requests for repair most often among the six complaint

strategies. However, the low achievers' severity was higher than that of their high-proficiency counterparts, possibly as a result of limited English competence or the negative L1 transfer. Moreover, the two social variables, status and social distance, influenced the learners' productions and perceptions of complaints, and the two groups showed similar patterns when the two variables were involved.

Çapar (2014) investigated the refusal strategy use of female EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners at a Discourse Completion Task (DCT). 82 EFL learners participated in the study, and 62 of the participants completed the English DCT and were B1.2 (intermediate level) learners. 20 of the participant completed the Turkish DCT and were A2 (beginner level) learners. The DCTs were completed during class time. After the DCT, follow-up interviews were conducted with randomly selected 10 participants who completed the English DCT. The data were analyzed qualitatively and in frequency bases. The data were coded by two coders for reliability. The findings showed that stating reason and regret were the most preferred strategies while refusing and the participants who completed the English DCT used more various strategies than the participants who completed the Turkish DCT. Power was another consideration in deciding on the refusal strategy use. When compared, both data sets presented both similar and different semantic formulas in refusing the given situations. At the end of the study, it is suggested that more attention should be paid in teaching pragmatic knowledge to EFL learners and authentic material and DCT activities can be used for enhancing pragmatic awareness for language learner.

Halupka-Rešetar (2014) explored the types and frequency of usage of internal and external request modifications in the production of ESP learners in an attempt to provide a fuller picture of their request performance. The devices under scrutiny included both lexical and

syntactic downgraders, upgraders and both mitigating and aggravating supportive moves. The research participants were 37 ESP students, aged 20-22, whose level of general linguistic competence was intermediate (B1 or B2 according to CEFR). Performance data were elicited using a modified version of the written discourse completion test (WDCT) including six situations in which the variables of social power and degree of imposition were varied. The results of the research supported the initial hypothesis, which was that the request production of intermediate ESP learners will show very limited variation both with respect to the type of modifications (both external and internal) and the frequency of their usage. The pragmatic production of the intermediate ESP learners who participated in the research was shown to be the result of pedagogical instruction and was clearly at a significantly lower level than their linguistic development.

Zangoei et al. (2014) aimed to investigate the relative effectiveness of consciousness-raising (C-R) listening prompts on the development of the speech act of apology on 64 (34 male and 30 female ranging in age from 17 to 27) upper-intermediate Persian learners of English who were randomly assigned to two groups of 32. While the experimental group took advantages of listening prompts with C-R or input enhancement activities, the control group received the same listening prompts without any C-R activities. The two groups were then exposed to 20 conversation extracts during 10 sessions of instruction including different apology situations taken from Interchange Series, Tactics for Listening Series, American Headway, and Top Notch. The results of the multiple-choice discourse completion task (MDCT) indicated that learners in the experimental group benefited more from C-R activities via listening prompts and outperformed the control group. In addition, the results revealed that male and female learners' development in this pragmatic aspect of language did differ significantly.

Jalilifar's (2009) study was a cross-sectional investigation into the request strategies used by Iranian learners of English as a Foreign Language and Australian native speakers of English. The sample involved 96 BA and MA Persian students and 10 native speakers of English. A Discourse Completion Test (DCT) was used to generate data related to the request strategies used by each group. Selection of request situations in DCT was based on two social factors of relative power and social distance. Although results revealed pragmatic development, particularly in the movement from direct to conventionally indirect strategies on the part of EFL learners, learners with higher proficiency displayed overuse of indirect type of requesting; whereas the native group was characterized by the more balanced use of this strategy. The lower proficiency learners, on the other hand, overused the most direct strategy type. In terms of the influence of the social variables, the findings of this research revealed that as far as social power is concerned EFL learners display closer performance to native speakers. But considering social distance, it seemed that Iranian EFL learners had not acquired sufficient sociopragmatic knowledge to display proper social behavior.

Shariati and Chamani (2010) investigated the frequency, combination, and sequential position of apology strategies in Persian. The investigation was based on a corpus of 500 naturally-occurring apology exchanges, collected through an ethnographic method of observation. The results revealed that (1) explicit expression of apology with a request for forgiveness (*bebaxš'id*) was the most common apology strategy in Persian. (2) The aforementioned strategy together with acknowledgement of responsibility formed the most frequent combination of apology strategies in this language. (3) The same set of apology strategies used in other investigated languages was common in Persian; however, preferences for using these strategies appeared to be culture-specific.

Behnam and Niroomand (2011) investigated the ways power relations influence politeness strategies in disagreement. In order to determine whether and to what extent the realization of the speech act of disagreeing and the of appropriate politeness strategies by Iranian EFL learners, in a university setting, across different proficiency levels (intermediate and upper-intermediate) differ in relation to people with different power status a Discourse Completion Test (DCT) was completed by 40 Iranian EFL learners who were placed at two different levels based on their scores on a proficiency test. The DTC consists of five scenarios in which the subjects are expected to disagree with two higher statuses, two with peers and one with a lower status. The selection of disagreement situations in DCT, borrowed from studies by Takahashi and Beebe (1993) and Liang Guodong and Han Jing (2005), were based on relative power and status of people. The taxonomy from Muntigl and Turnbull (1995) was employed for counting and analyzing the utterances of disagreement from the responses. The findings of this study provide some evidences for the relation between the learners' level of language proficiency and type and frequency of disagreement and choice of politeness strategies associated with people with different power status. In conclusion, it was argued that the results can be closely related to learning contexts and textbook contents. Finally some suggestions such as making learners aware of second language pragmatic rules and socio-cultural constraints on speech acts as well as grammatical rules in order to have a successful communication were put forward regarding the issue.

Pishghadam and Sharafadini (2011) intended to investigate how Iranian EFL learners utilize suggestion speech act. To this end, 150 Iranian English learners took part in this research and completed a DCT (Discourse Completion Task) consisting of 6 situations in which learners' suggestion act was explored. Percentage and Chi-square were employed to analyze the data.



The findings were compared with those of Jiang (2006) in order to find out the similarities and differences between Persian and English suggestion strategies. The study results indicated discrepancy in three types of suggestion samples between natives and non-natives. Moreover, gender and language proficiency were found to play a significant role in the production of suggestion strategies.

Faashaiyan and Hua (2012) investigated the relationship between pragmatic knowledge and language proficiency, i.e. whether the learners with different proficiency levels perform differently in a pragmatic test. Secondly, the study aimed at exploring the relationship between gender and language proficiency and pragmatic knowledge. 120 university students including 60 freshmen and 60 seniors majoring in English Translation were selected randomly. The participants were placed in the beginning, intermediate and advanced levels based on the results of the proficiency (TOEFL) test. Then, a pragmatic competence test (MDCT) was used to determine the extent of participants' pragmatic knowledge. The calculated data were analyzed through an inferential statistic and the findings of the study indicated that a) there was no significant relationship between pragmatic knowledge and language proficiency. In other words, the learners with different proficiency levels did not perform differently in the pragmatic test; b) female participants performed better in pragmatic and proficiency tests.

Niroomand (2012) examined the ways power relations influenced politeness strategies in disagreement. The study was an attempt to find out whether different power status of people influence the choice of appropriate politeness strategies and speech act of disagreement by Iranian EFL learners, in a university setting. A Discourse Completion Test (DCT) was utilized to elicit the required data. The sample included 20 Iranian upper-intermediate EFL learners who were selected based on their scores on a proficiency test. The DCT consists of five scenarios in

which the subjects are expected to disagree with two higher statuses and two with peers and one with a lower status. Selection of disagreement situations in DCT was based on relative power and status of people. The main frameworks used for analyzing data were the taxonomy from Muntigl and Turnbull (1995) for counting and analyzing the utterances of disagreement and Brown and Levinson' (1987) theory of politeness. It was found that EFL learners employ different kind of politeness strategies in performing this face threatening speech act. When performing the speech act of disagreement, they used more direct and bald on record strategies. The findings of this study provided some evidences for the relation between the type and frequency of disagreement and choice of politeness strategies associated with people with different power status.

Arghami and Sadighi (2013) investigated if proficiency level and metalinguistic knowledge affect Iranian EFL learners' degree of pragmatic competence. Participants included 92 junior students at Shiraz Azad University. The elicitation instruments used for data collection were a) Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT) used to measure the testees' proficiency level; b) a Grammaticality Judgment Test (GJT), to show their metalinguistic knowledge; and c) the Discourse Completion Test (DCT) developed by Beebe, Takahashi, and Uliss-Weltz (1990), to investigate their level of pragmatic competence. Based on their scores on the OQPT, the participants were divided into three groups of high, mid, and low proficiency. The data collected from the administration of the above mentioned three tests were then analyzed by the descriptive statistics, Repeated Measures ANOVA and correlation. The results revealed that proficiency level was not the factor which determines the students' degree of pragmatic competence as there was no significant relationship between the students' proficiency level at different groups and

their performance on the DCT. However, it was observed that the students' pragmatic competence was significantly affected by their metalinguistic knowledge.

Mirzaei and Esmaeili (2013) evaluated the impact of explicit instruction on EFL learner's awareness and production of three speech acts of request, apology, and complaint. They also probed whether learners' language proficiency played any role in incorporating pragmatic instruction into the L2 classroom. The instruction lasted for about 12 weeks. Achievement in L2 pragmatics was assessed based on a pretest-posttest plan using Multiple-Choice Discourse Comprehension Test (MDCT) and Written Discourse Completion Test (WDCT). The significant gains made by the experimental groups receiving instruction supported the claim that explicit instruction does facilitate the development of pragmatically appropriate use of language. However, learners' level of language proficiency had no significant role in the incorporation of the instruction.

Rasouli Khorshidi (2013) examined the development of proficiency in politeness over time in the Iranian intermediate English language learners in a study abroad program in India. A group of 72 learners were given a Discourse Completion Task (DCT) with 16 scenarios for request and 10 situations for apology at three times interval (at the beginning of the program as pre-test, after three months as post-test 1, and finally after six months as post-test 2). A quantitative analysis of the elicited data indicated a degree of improvement in politeness across the three tests. The findings supported that, length of stay in abroad has a positive impact on learners' achievement in L2 norms of politeness regarding the illocutionary domain of speech acts namely, requests and apologies.

Salehi (2013) examined the effect of explicit and implicit teaching of the speech acts of apologies and requests. The participants who were 40 university students were given a discourse completion test (DCT) which was designed and validated by the researcher. The students came up with situations that embodied apologies and requests. After exemplar generation and likelihood investigation some 20 items were retained and used with the students. The participants of the study consisted of two groups of implicit and explicit instruction. To investigate the relationship between grammatical competence and pragmatic competence, students' scores on the DCT and their midterm test were correlated. The correlation was expectedly negative. T-test results revealed that instruction was effective regardless of assignment of the students into the two groups. However, the explicit group was not necessarily superior to the implicit one. On the other hand the implicit group slightly outperformed the explicit one.

Sadeghi and Zarei (2013) investigated how Iranian EFL students make use of compliments in Persian and English. To that end, 50 students majoring in English as a foreign language from Isfahan and Tehran, and Sheikhbahaee universities were asked to respond to a Discourse Completion Test consisting of six situations in both English and Persian. They were asked to put themselves in those situations and respond to the compliments made on them. The results of the study showed that in addition to pre-existing categories of compliment responses, Iranians made use of other strategies not included in the pre-existing categories of compliments. Furthermore, in both English and Persian languages, students made use of compliments in the same order: accept, evade and reject strategies.

Ashoorpour and Azari (2014) investigated the relationship between grammatical knowledge and pragmatic knowledge of speech act of request among Iranian EFL learners. The total data were obtained from 90 university students majoring in English Translation in Rasht

Azad University. The researchers first administered an OPT test; this test was supposed to determine the degree of language proficiency of each individual. After that the researchers divided the learners into 3 groups of pre-intermediate, intermediate and advanced group. Then for measuring grammatical knowledge of these selected subjects a validated 30 items grammar test was administered. A discourse completion test (DCT) as a pragmatic test was also taken by the participants. The findings of the study indicated that there is significant relationship between grammatical knowledge and pragmatic competence in pre-intermediate and intermediate level students. But those who were in advanced level and had more grammatical knowledge performed better both in grammatical knowledge and pragmatic competence.

Farina and Sattar (2014) examined speech act of advice realized by Malay university students. To this end, the data were collected by an open-ended questionnaire in the form of Discourse Completion Test (DCT) and a Multiple Choice Questionnaire (MCQ) from thirty Malay university students at Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Malaysia. The data were then analyzed based on Hinkel's (1997) taxonomy of speech act of advice. The findings showed that DCT and MCQ yielded quite different responses with regard to the use of direct and indirect advice acts among Malay university students.

Masouleh et al. (2014) dealt with the application of the pragmatics research to EFL teaching. The study intended to enhance EFL learners' awareness of request speech act by teaching the materials used for speech acts. To achieve the aim, the teacher used some sorts of educational activities such as teacher-fronted discussions; role plays, cooperative grouping, and other pragmatically oriented tasks were used to increase the learning of speech acts. Discourse Completion Test was developed as a pretest and posttest to measure the effects of instruction on

the pragmatic awareness of the students. The results revealed a significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores of the use of request speech act in experimental group.

Zamani Roodsari et al. (2014) explored the effect of task-based and input-based language teaching on learning English request on Iranian EFL learners. Eighty one pre-intermediate students who registered in ILI (Iran Language Institute) in Tehran with an age range of 18 to 22 years old participated in the study. They were randomly divided into two homogenous groups, one of which received task-based approach for teaching English requests and the other one took advantage of input-based language teaching for the same requests. Both groups received nine sessions of instruction by the researcher. Multiple Choice Discourse Completion Test (MCDCT) of request speech act was used for the both pre- and posttests. Data analysis indicated that there was a significant difference between the task-based and input-based language teaching in learning English requests from pre-intermediate Iranian EFL learners. In other words, task-based approach led to better learning of the English requests than input-based one.

### **2.12.2 Malaysian Context**

In the Malaysian context, Farashaiyan and Amirkhiz (2011) ran a descriptive-comparative analysis of apology strategies focusing on both Iranian EFL and Malaysian ESL university students and came to know that both groups of students in two different situations enjoy similar competences.

Rafieyan, et al (2014) studied the relationship between cultural distance and pragmatic comprehension via employing pragmatic comprehension tests and have come to know that “a shorter distance from the culture of the target language community led to a higher level of pragmatic comprehension”. (p.103)

Rafieyan, et al (2013) studied the relationship between attitude toward target language culture instruction and pragmatic comprehension development and found that that “a positive attitude toward learning target language culture leads to a higher level of pragmatic comprehension”.(p.125)

None of the studies conducted (to the knowledge of the researcher) have focused on the value of the pragmatic academic test of language proficiency and this novel domain is left to be researched, though in the infancy.

## **2.14 Summary**

Considering the fact that pragmatics is understood as language use in social settings, tests would necessarily have to construct such social settings. It is not just contextual variables that would have to be established: Speech acts are carried out over various turns and their exact shape takes into account interlocutor reactions. In addition, the utilization of these features in the academic setting is also of paramount importance. Thus, there must be ways to develop tests of academic pragmatic proficiency which can determine to what levels students have been able to achieve the pragmatic norms required in those settings. From another perspective, the studies focusing on academic pragmatic settings have considered a very limited number of speech acts. The present research is aimed at bridging the gap in the literature and focuses on a test of pragmatic competence in the academic level in University of Malaya including two speech acts of acts of request and apology in a single measure.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Methodology**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

An outlook to the study accompanied by some explanations on the characteristic features of it is presented in the following section. The present chapter then deals with explaining the participants, data collection and data analyses instruments, validity and reliability of the instrument used, design, and the procedure employed to conduct the study.

#### **3.2 Participants**

The participants of the study in general were 100 individuals who answered a piloted version of Multiple-Choice Discourse Completion Test (MDCT) on speech acts of apology and request in the academic domain. The participants were comprised of eighty (80) Malaysian Chinese as Non Native Speakers (NNSs) of English, who were studying various majors at the B.A. /B.S. levels in the University of Malaya. These participants were randomly selected from a population pool of 2000 students studying in the aforementioned university. Therefore the sample population for the present study for the NNSs of English was about 1/20<sup>th</sup> of the whole population available. Also 20 Native Speakers (NSs) of English took part in the study. These NSs were also randomly selected from among the native speakers of English working in the academic positions in the University of Malaya. These individuals were mainly educated North Americans and surely familiar with both native and nonnative situations of language use in the English language and hence trustable informants for the present research which was being conducted in an academic level.



The participants were both males and females and above 20, though “age” was not considered a significant factor in the present study. It is worth mentioning that gender, previous background, living in the native speaking countries, and other demographic features of the examinees were not taken into consideration as effective variables in the present study.

These participants of the study received a valid and reliable version of a test of academic pragmatic ability, namely Multiple-Choice Discourse Completion Test (MDCT), constructed and validated by Birjandi and Rezaei (2010) and a standard IELTS test (Academic Module) for the measure of their language proficiency.

### **3.3 Instrumentation**

The first data collection instrument which was employed in the present study was a standard copy of IELTS Academic Module for the purpose of finding the general proficiency level of the learners taking part in the study and to see how the knowledge of speech acts of apology and request might correlated with the learners’ proficiency level. This test was administered at the beginning of the study.

The second instrument employed in the present study was an MDCT which had been already constructed and validated by Birjandi and Rezaei (2010). The test covers two speech acts of apology and request at the academic level through 20 items (10 items are devoted to the request speech act and the other 10 items focus on the speech act of apology). All the situations considered are academic situations and discourses presented in the form of scenarios in which an interaction or negotiation is being conducted between a professor and a student, or two students, and in some cases between the staff and a student.

The situations referred to are native like situations which might take place at various academic settings almost anywhere. An example will be clarifying here and now:

Situation 4 from Birjandi and Rezaei (2010)

*Your teacher is giving a lecture on an important topic. You have a related question to that part of his lecture. How do you interrupt your teacher?*

**The Teacher:** ...constructivist views are very important for..... (interruption)

**You**.....

- a. I don't understand what you are talking about.
- b. Sorry but I really don't understand what are you saying!
- c. I'm sorry to ask but could you explain a little more?**

### 3.3.1 Reliability of the MCDT Instrument

The test used to collect the data for the present study was reported to enjoy .72 reliability index based on KR-21(Birjandi & Rezaei, 2010). The pilot study was also done in the University of Malaya with 10 NSs and 10 NNSs of English meanwhile revealed that based on KR-21 the reliability for the apology speech act was .64 while the very index for the speech act of request was .39. These low indices were due to the fact that the pilot study included only 10 items for each speech act and only 10 people had answered them. The final data analysis with 20 native speakers and 80 Malaysian Chinese as the nonnative speakers, however, presented a highly reliable reliability index.

Table 3.1 below best represents the reliability of the whole test as well as its parts. Based on the table, the KR-21 reliability indices for the speech acts of apology and request were .81 and .86 respectively.

Table 3.1: Descriptive Statistics and KR-21 Reliability Indices

	N	Mean	Variance	KR-21
Apology	100	21.11	28.696	.81
Request	100	21.96	35.062	.86

To ensure the reliability of the test more specifically, an item analysis was also run accompanied by a Cronbach's alpha reliability. This index for the apology speech act items was .77 (Table 3.2).

Table 3.2: Reliability Statistics; Apology

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.776	10

Following the item run for the test, the Cronbach's alpha reliability for the request speech act items was .81 (Table 3.3).

Table 3.3: Reliability Statistics; Request

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.814	10

The results of the item analysis indicated that the exclusion of none of the items change the reliability indices of the test to a great extent. The most important finding was that the exclusion of none of the items increased the reliability indices either. The reliability issue has been discussed in details in chapter four.

### 3.3.2 Construct Validity

#### 3.3.2.1 Piloting Phase

Construct validity of the test was also taken into consideration at the piloting phase and it was revealed that the test enjoyed acceptable construct validity as the results of the factor analysis run to explore underlying construct of the apology and request tests loaded on a single factor. This single factor model accounted for 62.23 percent of the total variance. Table 3.4 below best presents the construct validity of the test in the piloting phase:

Table 3.4: Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	1.245	62.238	62.238	1.245	62.238	62.238
2	.755	37.762	100.000			

#### 3.3.2.2 Construct Validity of Apology Items (Main Study Phase)

A factor analysis through the varimax rotation was run to probe the construct validity of the ten items of the apology speech act. Before discussing the results it should be mentioned that the present sample size was enough for running the factor analysis ( $KMO = .67 > .60$ ) (Table 3.5)

*Table 3.5: KMO and Bartlett's Test*

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.672
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	314.833
	Df	45
	Sig.	.000

In addition to sampling adequacy, the correlation matrix used to extract factors should not suffer from multi-collinearity - too high or too low correlations among all variables. The significant chi-square value of 314.83 ( $p < .05$ ) (3.5) indicated that the correlation matrix was appropriate for running the factor analysis.

### **3.3.2.3 Construct Validity of Request Items (Main Study Phase)**

Another factor analysis through the varimax rotation was run to probe the construct validity of the ten items of the request speech act. Before discussing the results it should be mentioned that the present sample size was enough for running the factor analysis ( $KMO = .72 > .60$ ) (Table 3.6)

*Table 3.6: KMO and Bartlett's Test*

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.729
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	384.516
	Df	45
	Sig.	.000

Besides sampling adequacy, the correlation matrix used to extract factors should not suffer from multi-collinearity, too high or too low correlations among all variables. The significant Chi-square value of 384.51 ( $p < .05$ ) (Table 3.6) indicated that the correlation matrix was appropriate for running the factor analysis.

### **3.4 Data gathering Procedure**

To run the study, at first a pilot study was done in which ten NSs and 10 NNSs took part and answered the Multiple-Choice Discourse Completion Test (MDCT) suitable for the academic level developed by Birjandi and Rezaei (2010). The results revealed that the test enjoyed acceptable reliability and validity and could be used in the Malaysian Context.

In the second phase of the study, which was the main study, eighty B.S. and B.A. Malaysian Chinese students studying various majors in different faculties of University of Malaya were randomly selected to take the instruments of the study.

At first all the participants received a standard IELTS academic module and based on its results they were signified as the three low, mid, and high in terms of their general language proficiency. Then the participants received a piloted version of Multiple-Choice Discourse Completion Test (MDCT). These participants shaped the NNSs of the study. Twenty NSs of English working at the UM were also asked to take part in the study to collect the data required to run the study. The eighty Malaysian Chinese learners from the University of Malaya were randomly selected to shape the representative sample of the study and were briefed about the purpose of the research and then they received a valid and reliable version of the test of pragmatic ability, namely Multiple-Choice Discourse Completion Test (MDCT).

The North American native speakers taking part in the study also took the test and then the results of the participants' performances on the test were put into statistical processes via employing paired sample t-test, and independent t-tests and the results were checked against the research questions and reported.

### **3.5 Data Analysis**

To analyze the data the following measures were taken into consideration:

Firstly, testing assumptions were run to assume normality of the data and calculate the the ratios of skewness and kurtosis over to see if their respective standard errors were within the ranges of +/- 1.96 (Field, 2009).

Secondly, a paired-samples t-test was run to compare the mean scores of the subjects on pragmatic tests of apology and request and answer the first research question.

Thirdly, an independent t-test was run in order to compare the native and non-native groups' means on the MDCT of apology in order to investigate the second research question.

Fourthly, an independent t-test was run in order to compare the native and non-native groups' means on the MDCT of request in order to investigate the third research question.

In the fifth place, based on the subjects' mean score on the IEFLTS test ( $M = 62.88$ ) plus and minus half a standard deviation, the subjects were divided into three groups of high, mid and low proficiency groups in order to probe the fourth and fifth research questions.

In the sixth place, a one-way ANOVA was run to compare the high, mid and low proficiency groups' means on the MDCT apology in order to probe the fourth research question.

In the seventh place, another one-way ANOVA was run to compare the high, mid and low proficiency groups' means on the MDCT request in order to probe the fifth research question.

In the eighth place the post-hoc Scheffe's tests were run to compare the groups two by two and find the whereabouts of the differences.

### **3.6 Design**

**Considering the research type**, the present study is a developmental one as it is trying to expand the research domain in a specific field (pragmatic testing) (Mackey & Gass, 2005). Based on Hatch and Lazaraton (1991), the present study enjoys an **Ex post Facto Design** as there is no treatment involved in the study, nor is the study concerned with the leaning process the participants might have gone through as a significant factor. No control is implemented over the effect of **independent variable of the study** (MDCT) on the **dependent variable** (general language proficiency). None of the variables of the study are manipulated to cause changes, either. What is of paramount importance then is the type and strength of the connection between variables of the study; therefore an Ex Post Facto Design is the appropriate design for the accomplishment of the purpose of the study (Field, 2009).



## Chapter Four

### Data Analysis and Results

#### 4.1 Introduction

The present chapter deals with data analyses and explaining the results. Therefore figures and tables as well as their analyses will be presented.

#### 4.2 Testing Assumptions

This study is entitled “Comparative Study of Native and Non-native Speakers’ Pragmatic Competence in Making Request and Apology” and aims at investigating any significant differences between native and non-native speakers’ use of the speech acts of apology and request. The data were analyzed through the independent t-test and paired-samples t-test which assume normality of the data. As displayed in Table 4.1 the present data enjoyed normal distribution. The ratios of skewness and kurtosis over their respective standard errors were within the ranges of +/- 1.96.

Table 4.1: Normality Test Descriptive Statistics

Group		N	Skewness			Kurtosis		
		Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Ratio	Statistic	Std. Error	Ratio
Native	Apology	20	-.742	.512	-1.45	.804	.992	0.81
	Request	20	-.747	.512	-1.46	1.007	.992	1.02
Non-Native	Apology	80	-.332	.269	-1.23	.164	.532	0.31
	Request	80	-.289	.269	-1.07	.253	.532	0.48

The assumption of homogeneity of variances will be reported when presenting the main results.

### 4.3: Research Question 1

#### What is the statistically significant difference between the speech acts of pragmatic test (apology and request) in the academic level?

A paired samples t-test was run to compare the respondents' means on the pragmatic tests of apology and request. As displayed in Table 4.2 the subjects performed better on the request (M = 22.05, SD = 5.62) than apology (M = 21.11, SD = 5.24).

*Table 4.2: Descriptive Statistics; Speech Acts of Request and Apology*

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Request	22.05	100	5.622	.562
Apology	21.11	100	5.245	.525

The results of the paired-samples t-test ( $t(99) = 13.27$ ,  $P < .05$ ,  $r = .80$ , representing a large effect size) (Table 4.3) indicated that there was a significant difference between subjects' means on the pragmatic tests of apology and request. Thus it was concluded that **the first null-hypothesis** as "there is a significant difference between the components of pragmatic test (apology and request) in the academic level" **was accepted**. The subjects significantly performed better on the speech act of request.

Table 4.3: Paired Samples Test; Speech Acts of Request and Apology

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
SPA	Request – Apology	.940	.708	.071	.799	1.081	13.27	99	.000

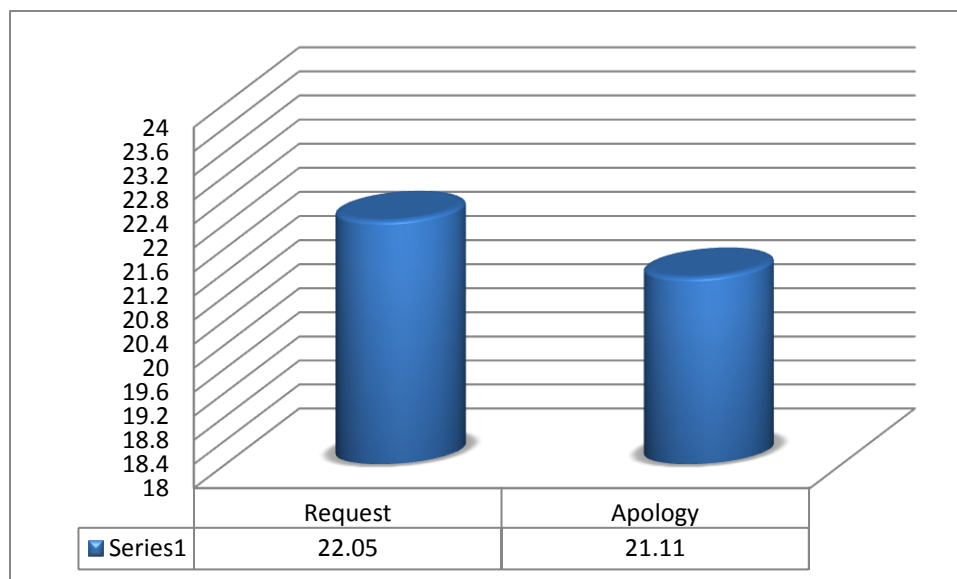


Figure 4.1: Speech Acts of Request and Apology

#### 4.4: Research Question 2

**What is the statistically significant difference between the performance of native and non-native learners on the MDCT of apology?**

An independent t-test was run in order to compare the native and non-native groups' means on the MDCT of apology in order to investigate the second research question. As displayed in Table 4.4 the native speakers (M = 25.45, SD = 5.14) showed a higher mean than the non-native group (M = 20.03, SD = 4.70) on the MDCT of apology.

*Table 4.4: Descriptive Statistics, MDCT of Apology by Groups*

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Apology	Native	20	25.45	5.145	1.150
	Non-Native	80	20.03	4.707	.526

The results of the independent t-test ( $t(98) = 4.52, P < .05, r = .41$ , representing a moderate to large effect size) (Table 4.5) indicate that there was a significant difference between two groups' means on the MDCT of apology. Thus it was concluded that **the second null-hypothesis** as “there is a significant difference between the performance of native and non-native learners on the MDCT of apology” **was accepted**. The native speakers showed a significantly higher mean on the MDCT of apology.

*Table 4.5: Independent Samples Test, MDCT of Apology by Groups*

---

Levene's Test for	
Equality	of t-test for Equality of Means
Variances	

---

		95% Confidence									
		F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Interval of the Difference		
										Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed		.458	.500	4.526	98	.000	5.425	1.199	3.046	7.804	
Equal variances not assumed				4.288	27.492	.000	5.425	1.265	2.831	8.019	

It should be noted that; a) the assumption of homogeneity of variances was met (Levene's  $F = .45, P > .05$ ). That is why the first row of Table 4.5, i.e. "Equal variances assumed" was reported.

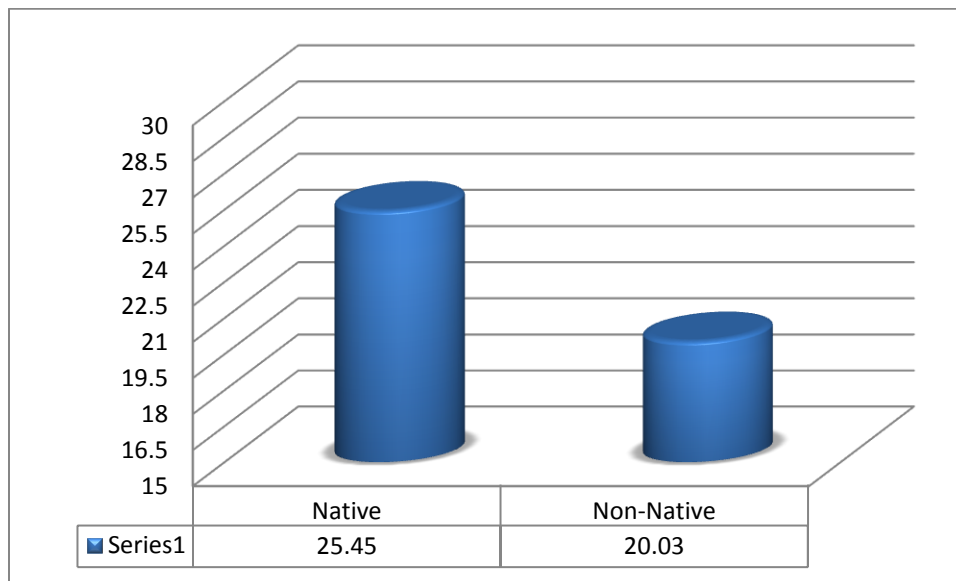


Figure 4.2: MDCT of Apology by Groups

#### 4.5: .Research Question 3

**What is the statistically significant difference between the performance of native and non-native learners on the MDCT of request?**

An independent t-test was run in order to compare the native and non-native groups' means on the MDCT of request in order to investigate the third research question. As displayed in Table 4.6 the native speakers (M = 26.65, SD = 5.55) showed a higher mean than the non-native group (M = 20.90, SD = 5.04) on the MDCT of request.

*Table 4.6: Descriptive Statistics, MDCT of Request by Groups*

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Request	Native	20	26.65	5.556	1.242
	Non-Native	80	20.90	5.048	.564

The results of the independent t-test ( $t(98) = 4.46$ ,  $P < .05$ ,  $r = .41$ , representing a moderate to large effect size) (Table 4.7) indicate that there was a significant difference between two groups' means on the MDCT of request. Thus it was concluded that **the third null-hypothesis** as “there is a significant difference between the performance of native and non-native learners on the MDCT of request” **was accepted**. The native speakers showed a significantly higher mean on the MDCT of request.

*Table 4.7: Independent Samples Test, MDCT of Request by Groups*

Levene's Test for	
Equality of Variances	of t-test for Equality of Means

		95% Confidence									
		F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Interval of the Difference		
										Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed		.751	.388	4.466	98	.000	5.750	1.288	3.195	8.305	
Equal variances not assumed				4.214	27.371	.000	5.750	1.365	2.952	8.548	

It should be noted that; a) the assumption of homogeneity of variances was met (Levene's  $F = .75, P > .05$ ). That is why the first row of Table 4.7, i.e. "Equal variances assumed" was reported.

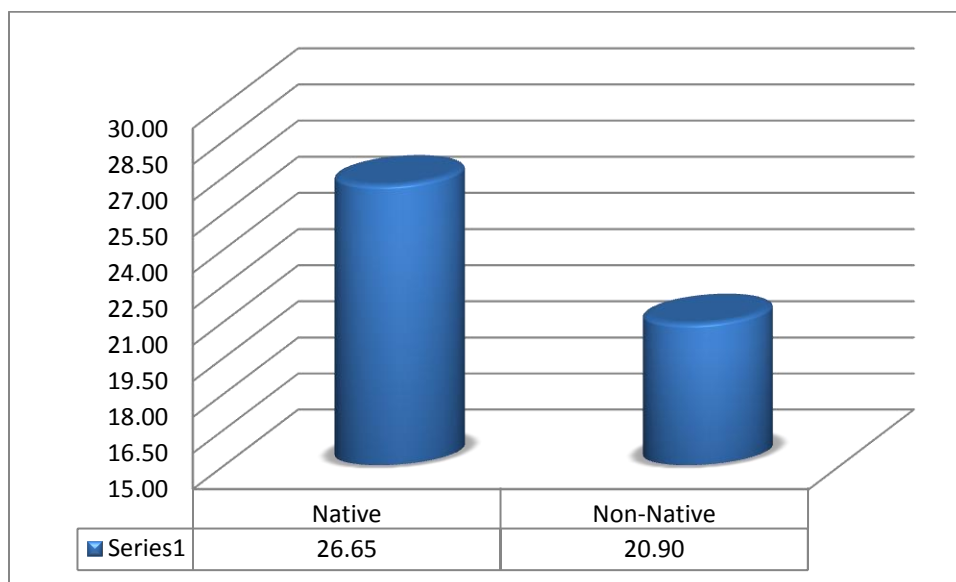


Figure 4.3: MDCT of Request by Groups

#### 4.6: Research Question 4

**What is the statistically significant difference between the performance of high, mid and low proficiency groups on the MDCT of apology?**

Based on the subjects' mean score on the IELTS test ( $M = 62.88$ ) plus and minus half a standard deviation, the subjects were divided into three groups of high, mid and low proficiency groups in order to probe the fourth and fifth research questions. It should be noted that the KR-21 reliability for the IELTS test was .80.

*Table 4.8: Descriptive Statistics; IELTS*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	KR-21
IELTS	100	35	93	62.88	10.645	.80

A one-way ANOVA was run to compare the high, mid and low proficiency groups' means on the MDCT apology in order to probe the fourth research question. As displayed in Table 4.9; the high proficiency group ( $M = 25.19$ ,  $SD = 5.12$ ) showed the highest mean on the apology. It was followed by the mid ( $M = 21.47$ ,  $SD = 1.53$ ) and low ( $M = 16.93$ ,  $SD = 5.76$ ) proficiency groups.

*Table 4.9: Descriptive Statistics; MDCT Apology by Groups*

95% Confidence								
N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound			
Low	30	16.93	5.765	1.053	14.78	19.09	7	27
Mid	43	21.47	1.533	.234	20.99	21.94	19	24
High	27	25.19	5.129	.987	23.16	27.21	17	33
Total	100	21.11	5.245	.525	20.07	22.15	7	33



The results of one-way ANOVA ( $F(2, 97) = 27.13, p < .05, \omega^2 = .34$ , representing a large effect size) (Table 4.10) indicated that there were significant between the three groups' means on the MDCT apology. Thus it was concluded that **the fourth null-hypothesis** as “there is a statistically significant difference between the performances of high, mid and low proficiency groups on the MDCT of apology” **was accepted**.

*Table 4.10: One-Way ANOVA; MDCT Apology by Groups*

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	977.152	2	488.576	27.133	.000
Within Groups	1746.638	97	18.007		
Total	2723.790	99			

Although the F-value of 27.13 indicated significant differences between the three groups' means on the MDCT apology, the post-hoc Scheffe's tests should be run to compare the groups two by two. Based on the results displayed in Table 4.11 it can be concluded that;

A: The mid proficiency group ( $M = 21.47$ ) significantly outperformed the low proficiency group ( $M = 16.93$ ) on the MDCT apology (Mean Difference = 4.53,  $p < .05$ ).

B: The high proficiency group ( $M = 25.19$ ) significantly outperformed the low proficiency group ( $M = 16.93$ ) on the MDCT apology (Mean Difference = 8.25,  $p < .05$ ).

*Table 4.11: Post-Hoc Scheffe's Tests; MDCT Apology by Groups*

(I) Proficiency	(J) Proficiency	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Mid	Low	4.532*	1.009	.000	2.02	7.04

High	Low	8.252*	1.126	.000	5.45	11.05
	Mid	3.720*	1.042	.003	1.13	6.31

\*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

C: The high proficiency group (M = 25.19) significantly outperformed the mid proficiency group (M = 21.47) on the MDCT apology (Mean Difference = 3.75,  $p < .05$ ).

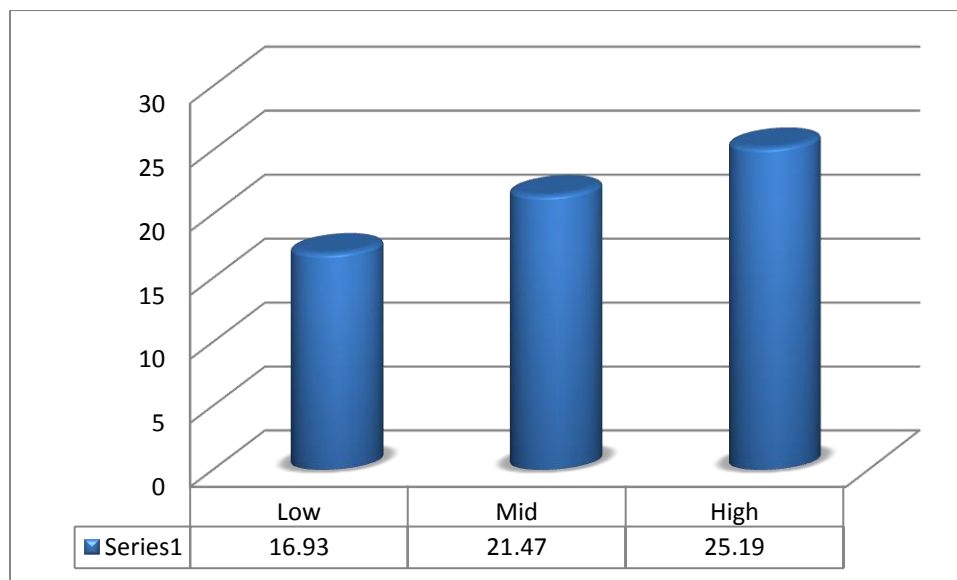


Figure 4.4: MDCT Apology by Groups

#### 4.7: Research Question 5

**What is the statistically significant difference between the performance of high, mid and low proficiency groups on the MDCT of request?**

A one-way ANOVA was run to compare the high, mid and low proficiency groups' means on the MDCT request in order to probe the fifth research question. As displayed in Table 4.12; the

high proficiency group (M = 26.59, SD = 5.29) showed the highest mean on the request. It was followed by the mid (M = 22.21, SD = 1.47) and low (M = 17.73, SD = 6.41) proficiency groups.

*Table 4.12: Descriptive Statistics; MDCT Request by Groups*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Low	30	17.73	6.411	1.170	15.34	20.13	7	29
Mid	43	22.21	1.473	.225	21.76	22.66	20	25
High	27	26.59	5.293	1.019	24.50	28.69	19	36
Total	100	22.05	5.622	.562	20.93	23.17	7	36

The results of one-way ANOVA ( $F(2, 97) = 26.93, p < .05, \omega^2 = .34$  representing a large effect size) (Table 4.13) indicated that there were significant between the three groups' means on the MDCT request. Thus it was concluded that **the fifth null-hypothesis** as "there is a statistically significant difference between the performances of high, mid and low proficiency groups on the MDCT of request" **was accepted**.

*Table 4.13: One-Way ANOVA; MDCT Request by Groups*

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1117.249	2	558.624	26.938	.000
Within Groups	2011.501	97	20.737		
Total	3128.750	99			

Although the F-value of 26.93 indicated significant differences between the three groups' means on the MDCT request, the post-hoc Scheffe's tests should be run to compare the groups two by two. Based on the results displayed in Table 4.14 it can be concluded that;

A: The mid proficiency group (M = 22.21) significantly outperformed the low proficiency group (M = 17.73) on the MDCT request (Mean Difference = 4.47,  $p < .05$ ).

B: The high proficiency group (M = 26.59) significantly outperformed the low proficiency group (M = 17.73) on the MDCT request (Mean Difference = 8.85,  $p < .05$ ).

*Table 4.14: Post-Hoc Scheffe's Tests; MDCT Request by Groups*

(I) Proficiency	(J) Proficiency	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Mid	Low	4.476*	1.083	.000	1.78	7.17
	High	8.859*	1.208	.000	5.86	11.86
High	Mid	4.383*	1.118	.001	1.60	7.16

\*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

C: The high proficiency group (M = 26.59) significantly outperformed the mid proficiency group (M = 22.21) on the MDCT request (Mean Difference = 4.38,  $p < .05$ ).

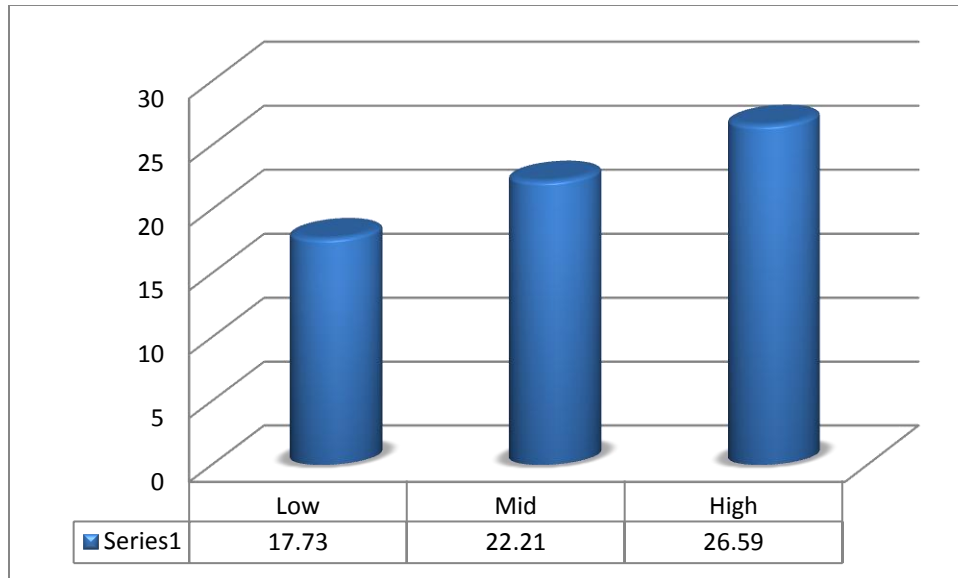


Figure 4.5: MDCT Request by Groups

#### 4.8: Item Analysis; Apology Speech Act

Table 4.15 displays the mean scores of the native and non-native speakers on the ten items of the speech act of apology. The native speakers had higher means on all of the items than the non-native speakers.

Table 4.15: Apology Item Means by Groups

Means		
Group	Native	Non-Native
A1	2.85	2.45
A2	2.60	2.30
A3	2.60	2.14

A4	2.10	1.92
A5	2.55	1.88
A6	2.65	2.20
A7	2.85	2.28
A8	2.40	1.78
A9	2.55	1.49
A10	2.30	1.60

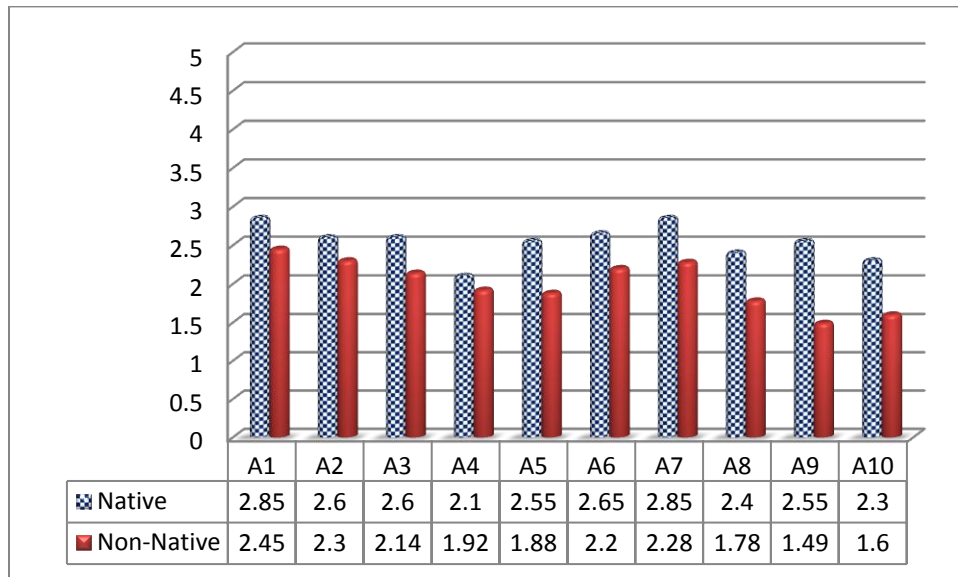


Figure 4.6: Apology Item Means by Groups

The Cronbach's alpha reliability for the apology items was .77 (Table 4.16).

Table 4.16: Reliability Statistics; Apology

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.776	10

The results of the item analysis (Table 4.17) indicated that the exclusion of none of the items change the reliability index of .77 to a great extent. The highest change would be due to the deletion of the third item. If this item is deleted, the reliability index will decrease to .73. The most important finding is that the exclusion of none of the items increased the reliability index, i.e. none of the items contribution to the total test had negative correlation. This fact is shown under the third column; “corrected item-total correlation.

*Table 4.17:Item-Total Statistics; Apology*

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item- Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
A1	18.58	24.185	.288	.776
A2	18.75	23.563	.428	.759
A3	18.88	21.400	.583	.737
A4	19.15	23.927	.433	.759
A5	19.10	22.414	.460	.754
A6	18.82	22.634	.491	.751
A7	18.72	21.658	.484	.751
A8	19.21	23.824	.420	.760
A9	19.41	21.982	.470	.753
A10	19.37	22.821	.386	.765

#### 4.9: Construct Validity of the Items of the Apology Speech Act

A factor analysis through the varimax rotation was run to probe the construct validity of the ten items of the apology speech act. Before discussing the results it should be mentioned that the present sample size was enough for running the factor analysis ( $KMO = .67 > .60$ ) (Table 4.18)

*Table 4.18: KMO and Bartlett's Test*

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin		Measure of Sampling	.672
Adequacy.			
Bartlett's	Test of	Approx. Chi-Square	314.833
Sphericity		Df	45
		Sig.	.000

Besides sampling adequacy, the correlation matrix used to extract factors should not suffer from multicollinearity – too high or too low correlations among all variables. The significant chi-square value of 314.83 ( $p < .05$ ) (Table 4.18) indicated that the correlation matrix was appropriate for running the factor analysis. As displayed in Table 4.19 the correlation coefficients between the ten items of the apology speech act ranged for a low of .014 to a high of .615.

*Table 4.19: Correlation Matrix; Apology Speech Act*

A1	A2	A3	A4	A5	A6	A7	A8	A9	A10
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A1	1.000									
A2	.481	1.000								
A3	.515	.562	1.000							
A4	.236	.393	.492	1.000						
A5	.171	.233	.370	.394	1.000					
A6	.047	.152	.255	.241	.440	1.000				
A7	.014	.108	.249	.259	.336	.553	1.000			
A8	-.055	.177	.129	.121	.237	.347	.429	1.000		
A9	.077	.134	.164	.107	.189	.346	.289	.509	1.000	
A10	.111	.080	.325	.055	.087	.132	.298	.245	.615	1.000

The SPSS extracted three factors which accounted for 66.90 percent of the total variance (Table 4.20).

*Table 4.20: Total Variance Explained*

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared			Rotation Sums of Squared		
	Total	% Variance	of Cumulative %	Loadings			Loadings		
				Total	% Variance	of Cumulative %	Total	% Variance	of Cumulative %
1	3.378	33.776	33.776	3.378	33.776	33.776	2.359	23.589	23.589
2	1.851	18.506	52.282	1.851	18.506	52.282	2.241	22.409	45.998
3	1.262	12.624	64.906	1.262	12.624	64.906	1.891	18.908	64.906
4	.750	7.500	72.406						

5	.675	6.752	79.158		
6	.619	6.188	85.346		
7	.480	4.799	90.145		
8	.438	4.383	94.528		
9	.347	3.467	97.994		
10	.201	2.006	100.000		

And finally; Table 4.21 displays the factor loadings of the ten items under the three extracted factors. The first four items have loaded on the first factor. The third three loaded on the second factor and the rest of the items formed the last factor. Two items have loadings on two factors. Those who wish to employ the same test in their studies should pay attention to the structure of the items.

*Table 4.21: Rotated Component Matrix*

	Component		
	1	2	3
A3	.815		
A1	.793		
A2	.777		
A4	.569	.454	
A6		.795	
A7		.732	

A5	.318	.685	
A10			.858
A9			.849
A8		.513	.518

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#### 4.10: Item Analysis; Request Speech Act

Table 4.22 displays the mean scores of the native and non-native speakers on the ten items of the speech act of request. The native speakers had higher means on all of the items than the non-native speakers.

*Table 4.22: Request Item Means by Groups*

	Means	
Group	Native	Non-Native
R1	2.90	2.44
R2	2.85	2.36
R3	2.65	2.13
R4	2.45	2.19
R5	2.15	1.44
R6	2.85	2.31
R7	2.60	1.49
R8	2.75	2.19
R9	2.90	2.28
R10	2.55	2.09

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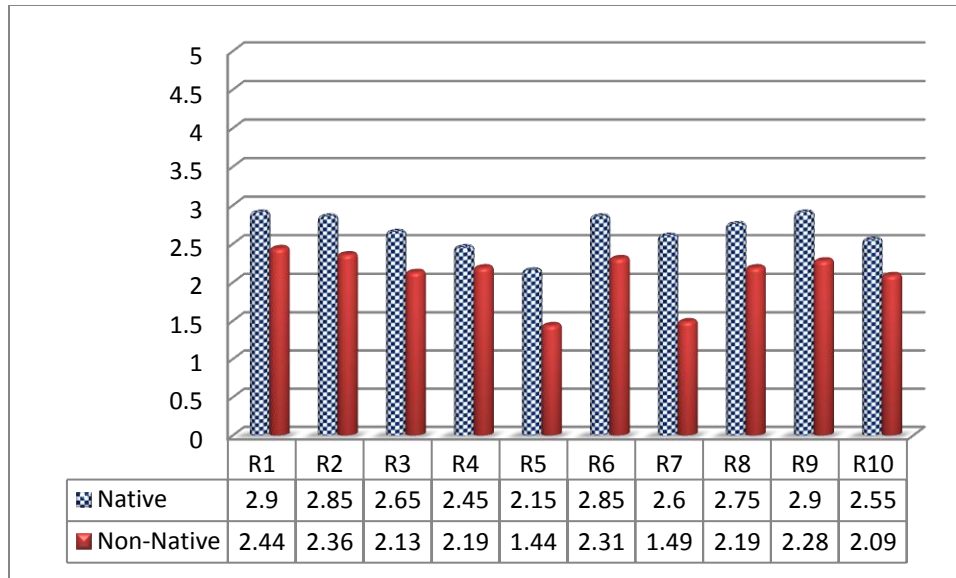


Figure 4.7: Request Item Means by Groups

The Cronbach's alpha reliability for the request items was .81 (Table 4.23).

Table 4.23: Reliability Statistics; Request

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.814	10

The results of the item analysis (Table 4.24) indicated that the exclusion of none of the items change the reliability index of .81 to a great extent. The highest change would be due to the deletion of the eighth item. If this item is deleted, the reliability index will decrease to .78. The most important finding is that the exclusion of none of the items increased the reliability index, i.e. none of the items contribution to the total test had negative correlation. This fact is shown under the third column; "corrected item-total correlation.

Table 4.24: Item-Total Statistics; Request

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
R1	19.52	26.070	.538	.793
R2	19.59	25.376	.576	.788
R3	19.82	25.624	.551	.791
R4	19.81	26.277	.466	.800
R5	20.47	27.888	.273	.822
R6	19.63	25.549	.605	.786
R7	20.34	25.823	.459	.802
R8	19.75	25.280	.615	.784
R9	19.65	25.402	.577	.788
R10	19.87	27.993	.311	.816

#### 4.11: Construct Validity of the Items of the Request Speech Act

A factor analysis through the varimax rotation was run to probe the construct validity of the ten items of the request speech act. Before discussing the results it should be mentioned that the present sample size was enough for running the factor analysis ( $KMO = .72 > .60$ ) (Table 4.25)

Table 4.25: KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin	Measure of Sampling Adequacy.	.729
Bartlett's Test	of Approx. Chi-Square	384.516

Sphericity	Df	45
	Sig.	.000

Besides sampling adequacy, the correlation matrix used to extract factors should not suffer from multicollinearity – too high or too low correlations among all variables. The significant chi-square value of 384.51 ( $p < .05$ ) (Table 4.25) indicated that the correlation matrix was appropriate for running the factor analysis. As displayed in Table 4.26 the correlation coefficients between the ten items of the request speech act ranged for a low of -.070 to a high of .785.

*Table 4.26: Correlation Matrix; Request Speech Act*

	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	R6	R7	R8	R9	R10
R1	1.000									
R2	.785	1.000								
R3	.339	.278	1.000							
R4	.265	.350	.253	1.000						
R5	.232	.207	.178	.259	1.000					
R6	.385	.449	.423	.449	.092	1.000				
R7	.278	.250	.148	.287	.389	.311	1.000			
R8	.313	.393	.641	.349	.077	.514	.197	1.000		
R9	.275	.386	.498	.322	-.070	.585	.319	.663	1.000	
R10	.100	.097	.327	.071	.187	.113	.391	.242	.225	1.000

The SPSS extracted three factors which accounted for 64.90 percent of the total variance (Table 4.27).

*Table 4.27: Total Variance Explained*

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared			Rotation Sums of Squared		
	Total	% Variance	of Cumulative %	Loadings			Loadings		
				Total	% Variance	of Cumulative %	Total	% Variance	of Cumulative %
1	3.378	33.776	33.776	3.378	33.776	33.776	2.359	23.589	23.589
2	1.851	18.506	52.282	1.851	18.506	52.282	2.241	22.409	45.998
3	1.262	12.624	64.906	1.262	12.624	64.906	1.891	18.908	64.906
4	.750	7.500	72.406						
5	.675	6.752	79.158						
6	.619	6.188	85.346						
7	.480	4.799	90.145						
8	.438	4.383	94.528						
9	.347	3.467	97.994						
10	.201	2.006	100.000						

And finally; Table 4.28 displays the factor loadings of the ten items under the three extracted factors. Items (9, 8, 3 and 6) have loaded on the first factor. The first, second and fourth items loaded on the second factor and the rest of the items formed the last factor. Three items have loadings on two factors. Those who wish to employ the same test in their studies should pay attention to the structure of the items.

*Table 4.28: Rotated Component Matrix*

Component
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	1	2	3
R9	.839		
R8	.834		
R3	.739		
R6	.628	.457	
R2		.857	
R1		.841	
R4	.304	.474	
R7			.745
R5		.328	.722
R10	.364		.691

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## **Chapter Five**

### **Discussion**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter contains the interpretation of the results. The findings of the research are then compared and contrasted with those of previous studies presented in the literature review. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the findings and the outcomes of the research in relation to the results that have been obtained.

#### **5.2 Summary of the Results**

The study results firstly revealed that there was not any significant difference between subjects' means on the pragmatic tests of apology and request. Thus it was concluded the participants' performance on the test was the same for the pragmatic tests of apology and request. It means that both native and nonnative speakers were able to answer the items referring to both speech acts of the study with no preference. Secondly, the findings indicated that there was a significant difference between two groups' means on the MDCT of apology. This means that there is a significant difference between the performance of native and non-native learners on the MDCT of apology and consequently it was revealed that native speakers showed a significantly higher performance on the MDCT of apology. Thirdly, a significant difference was found between the performance of native and non-native learners on the MDCT of request, stressing that the native speakers showed a significantly higher performance on the MDCT of request. Fourthly, the results revealed that there were significant differences between the performances of high, mid and low proficiency groups on the MDCT of apology. The high proficiency group significantly outperformed the low and mid proficiency groups on the MDCT of apology. Lastly, the results of data analysis indicated that there was a statistically significant difference between the performances of high,

mid and low proficiency groups on the MDCT of request. Actually, the high proficiency group significantly outperformed the low and mid proficiency groups on the MDCT of request.

### **5.3 Discussion of the Results**

All of the study findings are in line with the findings of other researchers recorded in the literature. The first finding of the study presents that speech acts of request and apology, both have been the same to the participants meaning that the none of speech acts under discussion has affected the performance of the participants and both native and nonnative speakers were able to answer the items referring to both speech acts of the study with no preference: This finding is inline with Cohen's (2009) findings on the value of the speech acts for both NNSs and NSs, as he reports that NNSs are able to answer test items pertained to different speech acts almost at the same level, which means that either the testees are strong in the speech act recognition or they do not have enough mastery over the speech acts in general. Birjandi and Rezaei (2010) also argue that speech act variation does not that much affect the learners' mastery over one or all of them. Shariati and Chamani (2010) who have investigated the frequency, combination, and sequential position of apology, request, and complaining strategies in Persian, present that learners' mastery over the speech act strategies does not differ that much. McNamara and Roever (2006), in this regard, discuss that in a successful conversational discourse in which a comprehensible discourse is produced, requests are made, and turn taking is appropriately followed, both components of pragmatic competence, linguistic knowledge and socio-pragmatic knowledge, are equally necessary: "language users who know target language socio-pragmatic norms but have no pragmalinguistic tools at their disposal are prevented from even participating in interaction" (McNamara &Roever, p.55).

Bachman and Palmer (2010) also present that pragmatic competence is a characteristic feature of second language development and mastery over various strategies of communicative competence facilitates communication, but it seems that these varieties in strategies are following a systematic mode, as if mastery over different strategies is shaped in a parallel trend.

The second and third findings of the study stress the difference between the ability of the NSs and NNSs concerning the speech act strategies of request and apology in the academic level. This means that in both cases the native speakers have been far better than the non-native speakers. Accordingly, the finding signifies that the previous training of the NNSs, better say ESL learners in this study, has not been sufficient to make them pragmatically competent to use specific strategies under investigation in the real like situations. The literature recorded on pragmatic competence supports this finding as Olshtain and Cohen (1990) suggest that clear cut quantitative improvement of the learners' speech act behavior after the given training program cannot be presented. Kasper (1997) argues that while competence cannot be taught, students should be provided with opportunities to develop their pragmatic competence: Competence is a type of knowledge that learners possess, develop, acquire, use, or lose. "The challenge for foreign or second language teaching is whether we can arrange learning opportunities in such a way that they benefit the development of pragmatic competence in L2" (Kasper, 1997, p. 1).

Other researchers also stress teaching pragmatic competence to the EFL/ESL learners (Akutsu,2006;, Billmyer, 1990; Bouton, 1988; Jeon and Kaya ,2006; Martinez-Flor & Fukuya, 2005; McNamara & Roever, 2006; Mirzaei & Esmaeili,2013; Morrow, 1996; Ogiermann,2009;Olshtain & Cohen, 1990; Ravetto,2012 ; Wildner-Bassett, 1994; Zangoei et al,2014); meanwhile, they mainly agree that one hundred percent mastery over the

communicative and pragmatic competence in the second or foreign language is highly tough work, if not impossible.

Previous research on apology and request also support the present finding: Jalilifar's (2009) study was a cross-sectional investigation into the request strategies used by Iranian learners of English as a Foreign Language and Australian native speakers of English suggests that pragmatic development of the NNSs is evident but learners with higher proficiency displayed overuse of indirect type of requesting; whereas the native group was characterized by the more balanced use of this strategy. Halupka-Rešetar (2014) who explored the types and frequency of usage of internal and external request modifications in the production of ESP learners, also found that pragmatic knowledge of the learners under investigation was lower than their linguistic knowledge. Shariati and Chamani (2010) who investigated the frequency, combination, and sequential position of apology strategies in Persian, report that using these strategies appeared to be culture-specific in Persian and English.

Studies conducted on other speech acts and their related strategies also support the present findings: Behnam and Niroomand's study (2011) which investigated the ways power relations influence politeness strategies in disagreement, found that NNSs show their own cultural backgrounds and their native linguistic system in the production of such strategies in the SL they are developing. It means that they rely on transferring their cultural norms in the SL situations, something which might seem odd for a target language native speaker. Behnam and Niroomand's study also revealed a high correlation between the learners' level of language proficiency and type and frequency of disagreement and choice of politeness strategies associated with people with different power status.

In another study Pishghadam and Sharafadini (2011) investigated how Iranian EFL learners utilize suggestion speech act, and found discrepancy in three types of suggestion samples between natives and non-natives. Moreover, gender and language proficiency were found to play a significant role in the production of suggestion strategies.

Brubæk (2012) studies the pragmatic ability of Norwegian EFL students to make requests in English. Taghizade Mahani (2012) runs a cross-sectional study of Iranian EFL learners' realization of request speech acts while Beltrán (2013) studies requesting in English as a Lingua Franca. Ashoorpour and Azari (2014) conduct their study on the relationship between grammatical knowledge and pragmatic knowledge of speech act of request in Iranian EFL learners and Halupka-Rešetar (2014) considers request modification in the pragmatic production of intermediate ESP learners. Masouleh, et al. (2014) report on the positive effect of explicit metapragmatic instruction on request speech act awareness of EFL learners in the Iranian context, and finally, Zamani Roodsari, et al. (2014) argue the positive effect of task-based language teaching on learning English request Iranian EFL learners.

Farashaiyan and Hua (2012), in their study concerning the relationship between pragmatic knowledge and language proficiency among Iranian male and female undergraduate EFL learners have used speech act of apology.

Jernigan (2012) in a study concerning the effectiveness of output-focused video-based instruction on the target language pragmatic development of the EFL learners, employs speech acts of refusals, suggestion, and apology, and comes to know that the learners have developed well in the production of all the speech acts but they are far better in speech act of apology. Shariati and Chamani. (2010) have studied the apology strategies in Persian and Mirzaei, et al.

(2012) in exploring pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic variability in speech act production of L2 learners and native speakers, use speech acts of apology, request and refusals. Other researchers also have use apology in their research on pragmatics (Mirzaee and Esmaeili, 2013; Rasouli Khorshidi, 2013; Salehi, 2013; Razavi & Tabatabaei, 2014; Zangoei, et al., 2014).

#### **5.4. Summary**

To sum up, it can be concluded that NNSs need to gain mastery over various speech act strategies to show they are pragmatically competent and ready to accomplish effective negotiations or communications in the real language situations at the academic level. The study findings also revealed that NNSs taking part in the study were not competent enough to perform as effectively as the NSs. Meanwhile, the more proficient ones were able to perform better in the MCDT than the less proficient ones. This means that the NNSs need training in terms of their pragmatic competence and this point might have been neglected in the previous training of the learners of the present study. The findings of the study were in line with the previous research findings recorded in the related literature.

## **Chapter Six**

### **Conclusion**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

In the first part of this chapter, restatement of the problem, as well as research questions, hypotheses, and an overview of the procedures followed for the study, will be presented. In the second part, the findings are summarized and their pedagogical implications are discussed, and in the third part, suggestions for further research will be dealt with.

#### **6.2 Restatement of the Problem**

The present study was an attempt to investigate a comparative study on native and non-native speakers' pragmatic competence about speech act strategies of request and apology in the academic level in University of Malaya. More precisely, the study as an attempt to find out if the Malaysian Chinese studying both English and Malay during their schooling years and that are willing to continue their studies abroad in the native speaking English environment or native like situations are pragmatically competent enough, at least in terms of these two specific strategies or not.

Considering the review of the related literature and what happens in real language environment and especially in the academic situations, the following research questions were put forward:

1. What is the statistically significant difference between the speech acts of pragmatic test (apology and request) in the academic level?
2. What is the statistically significant difference between the performance of native and non-native learners on the MDCT of apology?

3. What is the statistically significant difference between the performance of native and non-native learners on the MDCT of request?
4. What is the statistically significant difference between the performances of high, mid and low proficiency groups on the MDCT of apology?
5. What is the statistically significant difference between the performances of high, mid and low proficiency groups on the MDCT of request?

Considering the research questions stated above the following research hypotheses were formulated:

1. There is a significant difference between the components of pragmatic test (apology and request) in the academic level.
2. There is a significant difference between the performance of native and non-native learners on the MDCT of apology.
3. There is a significant difference between the performance of native and non-native learners on the MDCT of request.
4. There is a statistically significant difference between the performances of high, mid and low proficiency groups on the MDCT of apology.
5. There is a statistically significant difference between the performances of high, mid and low proficiency groups on the MDCT of request.

In order to test null hypotheses, firstly a pilot study was run to check a previously developed and validated Multiple-Choice Discourse Completion Test (MDCT) by Birjandi and Rezaei (2010) with 20 individuals; 10 NSs of English and 10 NNSs from among Malaysian



Chinese studying in University of Malaya. Then, in the second phase of the study 100 educated individuals were randomly selected to take part in the study. Eighty (80) of these participants were Malaysian Chinese taking part in the study as Non Native Speakers (NNSs) of English and were studying various majors at the B.A. /B.S. levels in the University of Malaya. These participants were randomly selected from a population pool of 2000 students studying in the aforementioned university. Also 20 Native Speakers (NSs) of English from North America took part in the study. These NSs were also randomly selected from among the native speakers of English working in the academic positions in the University of Malaya.

These participants of the study received a valid and reliable version of a test of academic pragmatic ability, namely Multiple-Choice Discourse Completion Test (MDCT), constructed and validated by Birjandi and Rezaei (2010).

The data collected was analyzed via employing SPSS version 21 and the results were reported and checked against the research questions of the study.

### **6.3 Conclusion**

The study results firstly revealed that the participants' performance on the test was the same for the pragmatic tests of apology and request. Thus it was concluded both native and nonnative speakers were able to answer the items referring to both speech acts of the study with no preference. Secondly, there was a significant difference between the performance of native and non-native learners on the MDCT of apology and consequently it was revealed that native speakers showed a significantly higher performance on the MDCT of apology. Thirdly, a significant difference was found between the performance of native and non-native learners on the MDCT of request, stressing that the native speakers showed a significantly higher

performance on the MDCT of request. Fourthly, the results revealed that there were significant differences between the performances of high, mid and low proficiency groups on the MDCT of apology. The high proficiency group significantly outperformed the low and mid proficiency groups on the MDCT of apology. Lastly, the results of data analysis indicated that there was a statistically significant difference between the performances of high, mid and low proficiency groups on the MDCT of request. Actually, the high proficiency group significantly outperformed the low and mid proficiency groups on the MDCT of request.

The first finding of the study is in line with findings of previous research (Birjandi & Rezaei, 2010; Cohen, 2009; McNamara & Roever, 2006; Shariati & Chamani, 2010) who mainly argue that speech act variation does not that much affect the learners' preference of performance towards them. This is in line with Bachman and Palmer (2010) who argue that mastery over various strategies of communicative competence facilitates communication, but it seems that these varieties in strategies are following a systematic mode, as if mastery over different strategies is shaped in a parallel trend.

The second and third findings of the study which stress the difference between the ability of the NSs and NNSs concerning the speech act strategies of request and apology in the academic level are well supported in the recorded literature (Akutsu,2006;, Billmyer, 1990; Bouton, 1988; Jeon and Kaya ,2006; Kasper, 1997; Martinez-Flor & Fukuya, 2005; McNamara & Roever, 2006; Mirzaei & Esmaeili,2013; Morrow, 1996; Ogiermann,2009;Olshtain & Cohen, 1990; Ravetto,2012 ; Wildner-Bassett, 1994; Zangoei et al,2014) on the ground that they stress teaching pragmatic competence to the EFL/ESL learners.

Studies conducted on other speech acts and their related strategies also support the present findings (Behnam & Niroomand, 2011; Jalilifar, 2009; Pishghadam & Sharafadini, 2011).

The fourth and fifth findings of the study revealed that the more proficient learners represent higher performance in their MCDT. Compared to the less proficient ones. This means that training the students towards the socio-cultural norms of the target language community in the second language classes is effective and can help the learners improve their pragmatic knowledge of the second language they are developing. Meanwhile, this training should be implemented in all language proficiency levels.

#### **6.4 Pedagogical Implications**

The present study demonstrated that NNSs need to gain mastery over various speech act strategies to show they are pragmatically competent and ready to accomplish effective negotiations or communications in the real language situations at the academic level. EFL learners need to know native like vocabularies, grammatical points, and preferences, dictions, and the like for a native like performance. Therefore, according to the results of the present study, some implications for teaching and learning speech act loping pragmatic competence among EFL/ESL learners in the academic situations can be suggested.

Pragmatic competence of ESL learners, mainly Malaysian Chinese studying in the University of Malaya can be enhanced through paying more attention to the real language use of speech acts in the real or semi-real environment. As a lot of such students aim at studying abroad for their M.A.s or M.S.s and need to take high stake tests which include some pragmatic language items, they need gaining a moderate mastery over the pragmatic issues as well.

Teaching speech acts can take find way to the English classes in the University of Malaya and its role in daily academic negotiations, lectures and talks could be highlighted; hence the present findings could be employed by second language teachers to make the learners more aware of what they are dealing with. The assumption is that participation in a noticing treatment facilitates learning (Doughty, 2001), and learners must pay attention to the features of input they are exposed to and notice the gap between the target like forms in it and the current state of their linguistic knowledge. This could be done through a kind of cognitive comparison which has been seen as one of the crucial processes in language acquisition (Rauber & Gil, 2004).

Mackey (2006), within the framework of SLA pays attention to the role pragmatic noticing and interactional feedback play in L2 development. Although she does not directly use the term “speech acts”, she emphasizes the importance of presence of noticing in prompting learners to notice L2 forms, meanings, and socio-cultural norms.

English teachers and learners could employ pragmatic based learning to increase their awareness of a mismatch between input they receive and their current learning. This way the classroom interactions could be enriched and would help subsequent L2 development of the learners and their active role in the real second language interactions.

Materials developers in the ELT domain also could employ the findings of the present study and those of the similar ones to present tasks in which learners’ awareness toward learning is enhanced. Such tasks may help the learners move towards self-correction, autonomy, and meaningful learning.

## 6.5 Suggestions for Further Research

The findings of the present study have some limitations as mentioned in chapter I, and further research is needed for investigations:

1. The same hypothesis can be formulated for other nationalities learning English or go to university in Malaysia. Malaysian ESL learners at different levels of language proficiency could be also studied in terms of their mastery over pragmatic competence of English both in the academic and non-academic levels.
2. It is worth investigating whether providing learners at various proficiency levels with pragmatic competence training has the same effects on the learners' general proficiency knowledge, linguistic competence, and socio-cultural competence.
3. Future studies might consider examining the residual effects of pragmatic competence activities to explore whether and how long-term these effects actually could be. A semi-longitudinal study of the concept of pragmatic competence and speech act strategies on a specific group of learners can reveal if this theory energizes "retention of pragmatic competence in the learners' mentality or not.
4. In addition, the present study employed only two speech acts of request and apology to check the pragmatic competence of Malaysian Chinese at the academic level. Future studies may be needed to replicate the findings with other minorities in Malaysia inviting other speech acts to the discussion and research.
5. Further research is recommended to explore the role of cooperative learning, instructed noticing, attention, and awareness in developing pragmatic competence of the ESL learners in various academic and non-academic situations and their relationship together or the

probable effect they leave on learner autonomy, self-regulatory factors of learning, and learner motivation.

6. The age and gender of students were not controlled in this research. The researcher had to assume that no significant difference exists between male and female participants in this study, nor does a significant difference exist between participants with different ages. The age and gender of the learners could be taken into consideration in another study of the same type with a bigger size to present more generalizable results and findings.

To sum up, a replication of the present study is needed to investigate the other speech acts at the academic level in the University of Malay or in general in the Malaysian context. If the results of this study are supported by further research, then it can safely be argued that teaching pragmatic competence and its offshoots could find way to the program of English Teaching in Malaysia.

The central aim of this study was investigating a comparative study on native and non-native speakers' pragmatic competence about speech act strategies of request and apology in the academic level in University of Malaya. The study findings revealed that NNSs taking part in the study were not competent enough to perform as effectively as the NSs. This means that the NNSs need training in terms of their pragmatic competence and this point might have been neglected in the previous training of the learners of the present study. The researcher hopes that the results of the present study could shed more lights into this area, and teachers would hopefully take what has been presented here and apply it to their own situations in order to improve the pragmatic competence of their ESL students.

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# Appendix

## **Appendix**

### **Pragmatics Test: Apology and Request**

Please read each of the following situations. There are three responses following each situation. Please read the responses to each situation and decide which one is the **BEST** in each situation. Please put your answers on the ANSWER SHEET by blackening the corresponding letters.

#### **Situation 1**

Suppose you are late for an important class and the teacher is very punctual and principled. How would you express your apology in this situation?

The Teacher: This is the third time you're late for this class. Next time I won't let you in.  
You.....

- a. **I understand. I won't be late again.**
- b. Sorry but the important thing is that I attend, right?
- c. Things happen in life, sorry.

#### **Situation 2**

You have been asked to hand in your project, and the time is due. However, you have not prepared it, and you want to make an apology for that. How would you express your apology in this situation?

The Teacher: I told you that there won't be an extension. Why didn't you prepare your term project?  
You.....

- a. Sorry but I had too much other homework from my other projects to finish this one on time.
- b. Well, I had some unexpected problems, so you should make an exception for me.
- c. **That's true. I'm sorry. I had some unexpected obstacles, but I understand that this is the policy.**

**Situation 3**

You are almost asleep in the class while the teacher is teaching. The teacher gets very angry when he sees you sleeping in the class. How do you express your apology?

The Teacher: Did you sleep well last night?

You.....

- a. **I'm sorry; I will try and not let it happen again.**
- b. I'm sorry, but I didn't sleep a wink last night.
- c. Pardon me. I couldn't help it.

**Situation 4**

Your teacher is giving a lecture on an important topic. You have a related question to that part of his lecture. How do you interrupt your teacher?

The Teacher: ...constructivist views are very important for..... (interruption)

You.....

- a. I don't understand what you are talking about.
- b. Sorry but I really don't understand what are you saying!
- c. **I'm sorry to ask but could you explain a little more?**

**Situation 5**

Your cell phone suddenly starts ringing loudly amid a very serious discussion in the class. How would you apologize to the teacher?

The Teacher to the class: It is very important to respect each others' (the phone rings) views.

You.....

- a. I'm sorry! This is an important call. I'll just step out for a moment.
- b. **(Immediately silencing the phone, which should have been silenced or turned off before the class meeting, and speaking in a very low volume so as not to increase the interruption)—I'm sorry.**
- c. Oh, no! I meant to turn my phone off at the beginning of the class!

**Situation 6**

You have an appointment with your family doctor and you need to leave early in order to be on time for your appointment with the doctor. How do you express your apology to your teacher when you ask for an early leave?

You: .....because this appointment is very important for my health.

The Teacher: No problem. Just don't forget to ask your classmates about the pages we will cover next session.

- a. **Excuse me. I am wondering if it would be OK for me to leave the class early for a doctor's appointment.....**
- b. Excuse me! I have to leave now for a doctor's appointment.
- c. I have to go now; please tell me whether I'll miss anything important.

**Situation 7**

Suppose that the teacher is teaching and you are talking to your classmate. The teacher gets angry with you. How do you express your apology?

The Teacher: Don't you think it is impolite to speak while I'm teaching?!

You: .....

- a. I beg your pardon. I won't let it happen again.
- b. OK OK...I guess you're right.
- c. **Excuse me. I didn't mean to interrupt you.**

**Situation 8**

You are daydreaming in the class and lose track of what the teacher has said. At once, he asks you a question about the topic under discussion. You are totally unaware of what has been going on in the class. How do you apologize?

The teacher: What are you thinking about? Are you following me?

You:.....

- a. Sorry; I wasn't listening to you. What did you say?
- b. **I'm really sorry I got sidetracked for a moment.**
- c. I was thinking of something else; I don't understand what you are saying.

**Situation 9**

You are not ready for the class and you can't answer the questions asked by the teacher. How do you apologize for not being ready for the class?

The teacher: I told you several times that you must be always ready for the class. Why didn't you study this chapter?

You.....

- a. **I'm terribly sorry. I did study the material, but I am having trouble understanding it.**
- b. I didn't have time to do the reading.
- c. I need to apologize and say that I had too much other work to do.

**Situation 10**

You borrowed a book from your teacher but you accidentally spilled a cup of coffee all over it. You return it to the teacher. How do you apologize to him/her?

The Teacher: (very angry) I can't believe it. This was the only copy I had.

You.....

- a. Sorry, it was an accident, chill out.
- b. **I am deeply sorry. Please allow me to replace the copy.**
- c. I'm desperately sorry but accidents happen, you know?

**Situation 11**

Suppose you have not understood what the teacher has just explained about "simple past tense". How do you ask for explanations about the structure of this tense?

- a. Should I ask you a question?
- b. How can I ask you a question?
- c. **Excuse me sir, may I ask you a question?**

**Situation 12**

Suppose you have a listening class and you cannot hear what is played on T.V. How would you ask your teacher to turn it up?

- a. **I'm sorry, but I cannot hear.**
- b. I'll ask you to turn it up.
- c. What? Turn it up please.

### Situation 13

Suppose the teacher is writing with a red marker on the board, and the color really disturbs your eyes. How would you request the teacher to use a different color?

- a. Why are you writing with red! It's a pain in the neck.
- b. I think you must use another color or I won't see anything on the board.
- c. **Excuse me; I can't read that color of pen, do you think that you could use another color when writing on the board?**

### Situation 14

Suppose you have been absent the previous session, and you have not understood a specific part on your own. How would you ask your teacher to give a brief explanation about that part?

- a. Could you tell me what I missed last class?
- b. **Could you please review the grammar very quickly...**
- c. I don't understand the material from the previous class meeting.

### Situation 15

The teacher has announced the date of midterm exam but you have another exam on that same day. How would you ask your teacher to change the date of the exam?

- a. You need to change the date of the exam. We already have an exam on that day.
- b. **Could you please possibly take the exam some other day?**
- c. Couldn't we just not have the exam? We have one exam already on that day.

### Situation 16

Suppose the teacher is using power point for teaching writing in the class. How would you ask your teacher for the power point file?

- a. **Is there any way that I could get a copy of the power point you used today to study with?**
- b. Professor, would it be possible for me to get a digital copy of those slides? You should e-mail those slides to the students.
- c. Is it ok if I get a copy of your PowerPoint?



### Situation 17

Suppose you have got 14 on your reading test and you are sure that your score must have been higher. How would you ask your teacher to check your paper again?

- a. I know that I did better than 14. You must have made a mistake when you were grading.
- b. I studied really hard for this test and I thought that I would do better than 14. Is there any way that you could review my test and double check my grade?**
- c. You need to recheck my test. I don't think that I got a 14 on this test.

### Situation 18

Suppose you need a recommendation letter for teaching at an English language institute very urgently for tomorrow. How would you ask your teacher to do that?

- a. Can you write me a recommendation letter? And I need it by tomorrow.
- b. I wonder if you could possibly give me a recommendation letter for my workplace.
- c. Could you please write me a letter of recommendation really quickly? The deadline is tomorrow and it's really important!**

### Situation 19

Suppose that you need to have your teacher's phone number in case you might have some questions while studying. How would you ask for his/her phone number?

- a. Could you possibly provide me with a telephone number where I could contact you with questions I might have during the class?**
- b. I am going to need your telephone number so that I can call you with any problems I might have when I am studying.
- c. Is it Ok if I ask for your phone number in case I face any problems while studying?

### Situation 20

Suppose you want to have an appointment with the teacher this week for asking some questions about your term project. How do you ask him for an appointment?

- a. Excuse me; are you available this week for me to ask a few questions about my term project?**
- b. Would you like to keep your appointment with me?
- c. Do you mind if I arrange an appointment with you for this week?

Group	Apology	Request
1	24	28
1	20	29
1	22	21
1	30	29
1	31	30
1	21	23
1	27	23
1	27	32
1	26	27
1	33	24
1	28	31
1	23	18
1	21	20
1	12	33
1	22	36
1	29	24
1	22	30
1	30	26
1	29	19
1	32	25
2	19	24
2	18	20
2	26	30
2	21	14
2	22	21
2	12	23
2	17	21
2	15	23
2	17	20
2	16	24
2	25	18
2	21	26
2	17	23
2	22	13
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