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Pragmatic competence in English language learning: Exploring speech act awareness among Jordanian students

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the pragmatic competence of Jordanian undergraduate students at Applied Science Private University in terms of their comprehension and production of English speech acts, including requests, apologies, complaints, and refusals. The research also investigates the impact of social determinants, that is, power relationships, social distance, and status, on students' selection of communicative strategies. Data were collected through qualitative interviews and Discourse Completion Tests (DCTs). A thematic analysis of the interview data revealed that students possess rudimentary knowledge of pragmatic principles but encounter difficulties with their application, especially in contexts involving politeness and indirectness. The DCTs created a controlled setting to observe how students create speech acts in various social settings, complementing the findings from the interviews. It was found that the language choice of students is gender and discipline-based, with female and humanities students using more indirect language strategies and male technical students using more direct language. The findings reveal a gap in students' ability to adapt language to social contexts, highlighting the need for more explicit instruction in pragmatic competence within English language education. The study contributes to the understanding of pragmatic competence in non-native English speakers and sheds light on how language instruction methods can be improved.

KEYWORDS: pragmatic competence, speech acts, discourse completion test, Jordanian students, English language education

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Introduction

In second language acquisition (SLA), communicative competence extends beyond grammatical accuracy and lexical ability to encompass an understanding of how to utilize the language in diverse social and cultural contexts. Pragmatic competence, being one of the key dimensions of communicative competence, is the ability of the learner to understand and execute speech acts—requests, apologies, compliments, refusals, and suggestions—that are created in terms that satisfy the target language sociocultural norms (Bachman, 1990; Celce-Murcia, 2007). Unlike grammatical rules, which are often taught explicitly, pragmatic norms are acquired through exposure to authentic communicative contexts and unconscious learning (Kasper & Rose, 2002). However, when students lack adequate exposure to naturalistic language use, they may draw on pragmatic strategies in their native language (L1), which can lead to potential miscommunication or pragmatic failure (Thomas, 1983).

The pragmatic competence value has been widely acknowledged in language teaching, mainly because English remains the global lingua franca for higher education, professional communication, and international exchange. ILP studies have found that proficient learners struggle in speech act realization, politeness, and context aptness (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989). These challenges are particularly pronounced in the case of foreign language acquisition, where instructional practices often prioritize structural correctness over communicative purpose, and students receive limited exposure to authentic interaction with native speakers (Alcón-Soler, 2005).

Pragmatic Competence in the Jordanian Context

English is taught as a compulsory subject from early education and is employed extensively in higher education, commerce, and technology in Jordan. Despite its prevalence, English language teaching (ELT) in Jordan has been centered on grammar, lexis, and reading skills, and even when pragmatics and sociolinguistics were included, they were not given proper consideration (Al-Adwan & Al-Khawaldeh, 2018). As a result, there is a common occurrence among Jordanian learners of English of having a good command of formal grammar but struggling to perform speech acts appropriately, particularly when it comes to indirectness, politeness, or cultural sensitivity.

Previous studies of Jordanian EFL learners have identified pragmatic gaps in their consciousness, particularly in areas such as making requests, apologizing, and responding to compliments (e.g., Al-Ghaderi, 2010; Bataineh & Bataineh, 2006). The studies have shown that learners are prone to transferring Arabic pragmatic norms into English, producing messages that are likely to be interpreted as too direct, abrupt, or rude by native speakers of English. For instance, although directness is natural and welcome in Arabic communication, English may require greater indirectness and mitigation in specific situations (e.g., making requests to superiors or declining invitations). Unless learners are taught these differences, they will most likely unintentionally create pragmatically infelicitous language, which may hinder successful cross-cultural communication.

Although there is a considerable amount of research in interlanguage pragmatics, very few studies have extensively examined the pragmatic competence of Jordanian university students, particularly their recognition and production of speech acts. The majority of previous studies either focus on a very narrow set of speech acts (e.g., requests or apologies) or rely on written discourse completion tasks (DCTs), which can only partially reflect learners' online pragmatic judgments. In addition, while several studies have examined the influence of instruction on pragmatic development in Jordan (Al-Qadi, 2020), further empirical research is warranted to investigate learners' naturalistic production of English in socially situated interactions.

This study aims to address these gaps by exploring the pragmatic competence of Jordanian EFL learners, employing a mixed-methods framework that combines discourse completion tasks, role-plays, and retrospective interviews. By analyzing their performance across different speech acts, this study aims to address the following key questions:

1. How familiar are Jordanian university students with the sociopragmatic rules governing English everyday speech acts?
2. What pragmatic strategies do they employ when performing these speech acts, and how do these

strategies differ from those used by native English speakers?

3. What influence (e.g., L1 transfer, exposure to English, instructional background) has on their pragmatic choices?

Literature review

Pragmatic competence, a key constituent of communicative competence, refers to the ability to use language effectively in social contexts through the knowledge and production of sufficient speech acts, such as requests, apologies, refusals, and compliments (Bachman, 1990; Celce-Murcia, 2007). Unlike grammatical knowledge, which is often explicitly taught, pragmatic competence involves implicit learning through observing real-life interactions (Kasper & Rose, 2002). Interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) studies have demonstrated that second language (L2) learners frequently encounter difficulties with pragmatic norms, leading to misunderstandings or pragmatic failures (Thomas, 1983). Current research indicates a growing need for pragmatic teaching in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings, particularly where students have limited exposure to native speakers (Alcón-Soler, 2005). English in Jordan, which is primarily learned through formal education, is a less researched area of pragmatic competence but one that is pivotal to academic and professional communication (Al-Adwan & Al-Khawaldeh, 2018). This review collates recent research (2015–2024) from Google Scholar on the pragmatic competence of Jordanian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, with a particular focus on speech act awareness, L1 transfer, teaching, and assessment.

Hammouri & Al-Khanji (2023) also investigated the pragmatic capacity of Jordanian EFL learners to respond, suggest, threaten, and bid farewell in their speech acts. Based on a Discourse Completion Test (DCT) administered to 130 students, the research collected 2,600 responses.The findings demonstrated that, although native speakers and learners utilized similar strategies, significant differences led to instances of pragmatic failure. These were caused by insufficient linguistic competence (pragmalinguistic failure) and sociocultural difference (sociopragmatic failure). The research emphasized the importance of explicit interlanguage pragmatics instruction to help students develop pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic knowledge.

Kreishan (2018) analyzed refusal and complaint strategies used by Jordanian undergraduate EFL learners. Data were gathered using role-playing scenarios and a Discourse Completion Test (DCT). Participants used indirect semantic formulas in most of the scenarios. Refusal strategies used often involved explanations or excuses, refusing apologies, expressing inability, delaying, or rejecting adjuncts. Strategies used to express complaints involved hints, requests, and expressions of annoyance, which were the most frequent. Usage of polite and indirect strategies demonstrates the impact of culture on language use. The study suggested that teacher training should focus on linguistic pragmatics to enable educators to guide students toward proficient expression in English social interactions.

Al-Khatib, Al-Kadi, and Haddad (2023) conducted a socio-pragmatic study of favor-asking among Jordanian university students. The study was to explore the impact of gender and social distance on the performance of favor-asking. Data from 100 students were analyzed using the CHARPS model, about the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP) model. The results showed that indirect methods were most frequently used, and that females used them more frequently than males. The results show that both social distance and gender are crucial variables in the selection of a favor-asking strategy and therefore reflect larger sociocultural forces at work in Jordanian society.

Al-Shboul (2023) likened the threat acts of American English and Jordanian Arabic native speakers. A hypothetical scenario questionnaire with open-ended questions elicited five threat strategies. Four of them—mentioning authority, harming, offering choices, and threatening—were characteristic of both groups, but "threat of vague consequence" was characteristic of Jordanian speakers alone. The Jordanian respondents were less direct in speech compared to Americans. These findings exhibit cross-cultural differences in speech act realization and the necessity of cultural sensitivity in second language learning.

All of the above-mentioned activities reflect the pragmatic challenges faced by Jordanian EFL learners. Pragmatic failure is, to a great extent, caused by a lack of exposure to natural language use and the neglect to give sufficient attention to pragmatic teaching in EFL programs. To combat such issues, instructors should incorporate direct speech acts and pragmatic strategies into their courses. Role-plays, free discussions, and

cross-cultural comparisons can be used to enhance knowledge of pragmatic conventions and their usage.

Methodology

This research examines the pragmatic competence of Jordanian EFL learners by analyzing their speech act performance in various social contexts. To achieve this purpose, the research employs a mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. The method aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the utilization of pragmatic strategies in English communication among Jordanian students, with a particular emphasis on how linguistic and cultural factors influence this practice.

Participants

The population of the study in the research was universities in Jordan and included EFL learners who had a minimum of three years of exposure to the English language. This ensures that the respondents are well-versed in English language proficiency and are able to comprehend and produce speech acts for various functions in various contexts. The population sample is 100 students enrolled at the Applied Science Private University, in the faculty of Translation and English Language, evenly split along gender lines to adequately control for any gender differences in pragmatic strategy use. The participants will be enlisted through email solicitation and in-class advertisement of English language courses.

Data Collection

The research employs two primary data collection methods: a Discourse Completion Test (DCT) and semi-structured interviews.

Discourse Completion Test (DCT)

The DCT is the central instrument employed to collect quantitative data. It comprises 12 situations with varied speech acts such as requests, refusals, apologies, complaints, and compliments utilized in typical communication. There are responses directed at giving social factor-based replies, such as power, social distance, and imposition of the request. The DCT is completed by participants over the internet, where they are asked to complete the test at their own convenience, alone, without any outside pressure. This measure is effective because it can elicit intended speech acts within controlled environments, allowing one to consider how students build responses to social interactions.

Semi-Structured Interviews

In addition to the DCT, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a further 20 students (10 male and 10 female). Interviews provide qualitative data to understand how students perceive the speech acts they perform and the justification for their choices. The interview questions are open-ended and directed towards areas such as learners' awareness of pragmatic competence, the difficulties they experience in communicating pragmatically, and their awareness of cultural variation in speech act realization. The interviews have been tape-recorded and transcribed for analysis. The qualitative data is used to triangulate the findings from the DCT and to obtain additional information about the pragmatic decision-making process of the learners.

Data Analysis

The data obtained from the DCT are analyzed using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods:

Quantitative Analysis of DCT Responses

The responses from the DCT are categorized based on the types of speech acts performed and the strategies used (e.g., direct, indirect, and hedging). Descriptive statistics are used to determine the frequency of each strategy, and a comparison has been made between the participants' responses and those of native English speakers, utilizing existing data. Additionally, inferential statistical tests, such as chi-square tests, are used to examine differences in pragmatic competence between genders and among different student groups.

Qualitative Analysis of Interview Data

The interviews are theme-coded and analyzed. The theme analysis involves coding the data to identify recurring patterns and themes in the students' pragmatic competence, the difficulties they encounter when using speech acts, and the factors that influence their strategy choices. The themes are compared across gender and discipline to determine how these determinants influence pragmatic competence.

Discussion and Analysis
Quantitative Analysis of DCT Responses

DCT was used to assess the pragmatic ability of Jordanian EFL learners based on their utilization of various speech acts in a range of social situations. The DCT's 12 scenarios elicited responses in terms of requests, refusals, apologies, complaints, and compliments, with a focus on how social power, social distance, and imposition would influence the linguistic choices of the participants. The responses were analyzed thematically to uncover pragmatic strategy patterns and to find challenges in learners' communicative competence.

4.2 Thematic Analysis of Speech Acts

4.2.1 Requests

Higher-Power Interlocutors (Professors, Supervisors, Employers)	*"Would it be possible for me to submit my assignment a day late?"*
	"I was wondering if I could take an extra day off for personal reasons."
Peers and Lower-Power Interlocutors (Friends, Classmates, Younger Siblings)	*"Could you please give me your notes from yesterday's lecture?"*
	"Can you help me with my homework?"

DCT request analysis reflected apparent differences across power dimensions, social distance, and levels of imposition. To higher-power interactants, such as teachers or employers, learners employed strategies of indirectness and politeness to soften their requests. Examples such as "May I be allowed to submit my assignment one day late?" and "I was wondering if I could take an extra day off on personal grounds?" demonstrate respect for English politeness norms. Such responses are consistent with Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, which emphasizes a special focus on indirection in maintaining the interlocutor's face. However, some students excessively used hedging or formed awkward phrasings, suggesting that they lacked adequate control of pragmatic request strategies.

Requests addressed to equals or lower-power members were generally unmitigated and direct. Sentences such as "Give me my notes for yesterday's lecture" or "Do my homework for me?" lacked softening devices, such as "please," "would you," or "could you." This is a cultural borrowing from Arabic, where directness between friends is typical and is not perceived as being rude. However, to make the same request more acceptable in English, the sentence could be perceived as too presumptuous or even rude. The findings suggest that while Jordanian learners effectively modify their requests in formal situations, they require further exposure to informal English requests to develop their pragmatic ability. Pedagogical interventions, including role-plays, discourse modeling, and instructions on politeness markers, can help learners refine their request strategies across various social environments.

Refusals

Refusals to Higher-Power Figures	I would be happy to help, but I have much work to do.
	I am sorry, but I have other commitments at that time.
Refusals to Peers	*"No, I do not have time."*
	"I cannot figure it out for you."

The refusals analysis of the DCT highlights salient differences in the way Jordanian EFL learners adjust their refusals in terms of social status. When refusing requests from more powerful individuals, such as teachers or supervisors, learners often employ indirect strategies through apologies and justifications, as seen in phrases like "I would be happy to help, but I have much work to do." These responses demonstrate positive politeness strategies and align with Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, indicating that learners are aware of face-saving strategies. Some refusals were nevertheless too elaborate, suggesting that learners are not confident in refusing naturally and thus over-mitigate.

Refusals to peers were direct and blunt, sometimes without hedging or politeness markers ("No, I do not have time."). This directness is likely the result of pragmatic borrowing from Arabic, where direct refusals are the norm rather than being perceived as impolite. In English, however, such refusals sound abrupt or rude, and this is one source of pragmatic inadequacy in learners' inability to soften refusals in informal contexts. Although they can employ polite strategies for refusal in formal contexts, their directness in refusing in peer-to-peer conversations reflects a sensitivity to pragmatic norms in English interaction.

To achieve pragmatic competence, students would learn through explicit instruction of refusal strategies in different contexts. Role-plays, discourse analysis, and authentic listening to English use can be utilized to enable students to develop an effective strategy for refusals, which can help them communicate efficiently in both formal and informal contexts. Through the integration of pragmatic training in language classrooms, students would enhance their refusal strategies and obtain general communicative competence.

Apologies

Acceptable Apology Strategies:	*"I'm really sorry for being late."*
	"I apologize for the inconvenience. It won't happen again."
Justification-Based Responses	*"I was busy, that's why I didn't submit it on time."*
	"I had a lot of work, so I couldn't make it."

In the context of apologies, the learners' responses often followed two distinct strategies: acceptable apology strategies and justification-based responses. The acceptable apology strategies, such as "I'm really sorry for being late" and "I apologize for the inconvenience. It won't happen again," clearly demonstrate an effort to acknowledge the mistake directly and express regret. These responses align with typical English-language politeness norms, where the speaker accepts responsibility upfront and expresses a commitment to improve behavior in the future. The learners' use of phrases like "I'm really sorry" and "I apologize" shows their understanding of the importance of taking responsibility and repairing social damage, reflecting a formal and polite manner that is culturally acceptable in English-speaking contexts.

On the other hand, explanation-based apologies such as "I was busy, that is why I did not give it on time" and "I had lots of work, hence could not make it" are typical of most cultures, including the Arabic, where one needs to explain along with the apology. Such apologies, although expressed in a somber tone, emphasize the reason behind the failure rather than simply apologizing. Although explanations can moderate the impact of the apology by providing context, they can simultaneously have the secondary impact of deflecting some of the blame from the speaker. In English-speaking societies, however, this can sometimes be regarded as insincere or an attempt to duck complete responsibility, as it is more likely to linger over explanations than mere expressions of regret. Thus, students' application of explanations demonstrates the need for further teaching to reconcile apologies with an adequate level of responsibility assuming in English.

Complaints

Complaints about Authority Figures	I found the exam to be somewhat challenging.
	"Some of the questions were not covered in class."
Complaints to Peers or Service Workers	"This coffee is terrible, make me another one."
	"You never return my calls, that's really annoying!"

Learners' complaint responses to members of authority and classmates revealed contrasting strategies under the norms of politeness in different cultures and social power relations. In those against authority members, such as teachers or examiners, learners employed a softer and more oblique style, consistent with expected deference to authority in most cultures, including Arabic culture. Answers like "I found the exam a little tough" and "There were some questions that hadn't been covered in class" are instances of a contained complaint strategy, wherein the complainant is complaining but not directly challenging the authority figure. The use of the word "somewhat" and the general vagueness of the words indicate a need to be polite and non-aggressive, which is acceptable in a culture when addressing someone in authority.

Complaints to peers or service staff, however, showed a coarser and more assertive tone, typical of informal communication between equals. Phrases such as "This coffee is terrible, make me another one" and "You never call me back, that is frustrating!" are a testament to the absence of mitigation and a confrontational approach, which is too familiar in communication with peers in the Arabic-speaking world. This kind of directness in English, however, may be perceived as rude or impolite, as it does not employ the politeness strategies typically expected in English, especially when communicating with people outside close relationships. This is a pragmatic incompetence on the part of the learners, as they may fail to adequately grasp the nuances of complaint strategies, particularly in striking a balance between directness and politeness. To enhance their English-speaking communication, learners may find it helpful to learn how to effectively address their grievances in both everyday and official situations, thereby sounding more considerate and socially aware.

Compliments

Compliments Given	"You look amazing in that dress!" "You did a great job on the presentation!"
Responses to Compliments	"No, I do not think I did that well." "Oh, this dress is ancient."

The compliments provided in the DCT are pleasant and uplifting, aiming to complement one's beauty or performance. For example, phrases such as "You look nice in this dress!" and "You gave a good performance on the presentation!" are clear examples of positive reinforcement, supporting Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of positive politeness, which aims to maintain and enhance the recipient's self-image. Such compliments are typically used to express admiration and appreciation, which in turn promote social harmony and strong relationships.

However, compliment responses reflect interesting patterns of self-downing and humility. Responses such as "No, I do not think I did that well." or "Oh, this dress is ancient." reveal a pattern of rejecting or disparaging compliments, which can reflect cultural expectations within Jordanian culture, where modesty is highly valued and responding to compliments at times may be seen as conceited. These modesty strategies are not unusual in Arab cultures, where self-downgrading is employed to maintain humility and avoid being perceived as arrogant. However, in English-speaking cultures, such a response may be viewed as diminishing one's achievements or appearance, which creates a distance between the giver and the receiver of the compliment, as positive compliments typically expect an expression of gratitude or acknowledgment.

The variations of complimenting and responding in this study indicate that Jordanian EFL learners should receive more training in cultural compliments and responses. Although the compliments themselves were well-deserved, the responses showed excessive self-deprecation that could hinder effective communication in English. In English, it is customary to respond to compliments with acknowledgment or thanks (e.g., "Thank you, I am glad you liked it!"), Moreover, students could benefit from learning such a response. Adding pragmatic training that includes role-plays and analysis of authentic interactions can help students learn the nuances of compliment exchange in English-speaking cultures, ensuring their responses are socially accepted and culturally appropriate.

Qualitative Analysis of Interview Data

The qualitative data for this study were gathered from 20 participants, all of whom are undergraduate students

at the Applied Science Private University in Jordan. The participants were from various fields of study and therefore provided a wide range of perspectives on pragmatic competence and the application of speech acts. The educational levels of the students enrolled in the undergraduate program were diverse, from students in their second to fourth year of study. These respondents were asked a series of predetermined questions designed to uncover their perceptions of pragmatic competence, issues encountered when utilizing speech acts, and the social and cultural factors influencing strategic choices in communication. Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring themes and patterns throughout the interviews, which were then comprehensively analyzed.

Perceptions of Pragmatic Competence

One of the underlying themes that can be gleaned from the interviews is that students are struggling with the concept of pragmatic competence. They can see that communication is more than just grammar and lexis, but they struggle to explain how face-to-face communication, through context, social conventions, and politeness strategies, functions. For example, when asked if they can perform speech acts like requests or apologies, it is generally accepted by the majority of the students that they do not know when and how to use indirectness or formal politeness, particularly in interacting with people of other social ranks. This suggests that pragmatic competence is not typically acquired explicitly in their language classes, and students are often unaware of how to navigate communicative subtleties such as tone, formality, and the contrast between direct and indirect speech. Nevertheless, the majority of students acknowledge that language must be used appropriately in social life, particularly when establishing relationships at school and in the workplace. They emphasize practical proficiency in order to communicate proficiently in English, but are typically not themselves competent enough to handle the complex social norms.

Challenges in Using Speech Acts

Students also consistently comment on problems with the use of politeness and indirect speech acts. One of the most common problems they have is understanding the use of indirectness, particularly in requests and refusals. Students often use direct requests, i.e., "Can you do my homework?" instead of more polite alternatives, such as "Could you possibly do my homework?" They justify this by noting that in Jordanian society, where direct communication is practiced, this directness comes more naturally. However, they are aware that in English, especially in formal situations, this directness can come across as rude or impolite, and they do not know how to adjust their language to make it more culturally appropriate.

The same can be said of refusals. While they can give bald refusals, e.g., "No, I cannot help you," students know that a hedged refusal, maybe with a reason, is more suitable in English-speaking cultures. A second source of difficulty that emerges in the interviews is the use of apologies. While the students acknowledge that apologies are warranted in certain instances, several of them express uncertainty about the sequencing of their turns. For example, they prefer to give explanations before apologizing, e.g., "I was busy and could not attend the meeting," rather than starting with "I apologize for not attending the meeting." The difference in the ordering of speech acts in this example highlights a gap in their understanding of norms in English society, where one typically apologizes first, followed by an explanation if necessary. The use of justifications by students reflects the fact that they tend to explain themselves, influenced by cultural norms in the Arab world, where explaining oneself is at times perceived as a necessity to convey sincerity.

Influencing Factors on Speech Act Strategy Choice

There are additional variables influencing the choice of speech act strategies by students, but the most dominant ones are gender and discipline. Gender, for example, has a highly apparent influence on the pragmatic competence of male and female students. Female students, for example, use mitigated language, particularly in situations such as requesting or refusing. For example, they would begin speaking in a sentence such as "I'm afraid I cannot" or "I hope this is not too much trouble," so that they will soften their tone, as there is a culturally expected politeness and yielding behavior demanded of women. Male students are direct and assertive in their language use, particularly in informal settings. They do not use mitigation but issue a bald refusal or request. This reflects Jordanian gendered communication norms, whereby women are expected to be more indirect and polite in speech and men can be direct.

At the academic level, humanities students, for instance, English literature or linguistics, are more sensitive to contextual indirectness and politeness. These students are more likely to use polite forms in formal communication, recognizing the need to vary their speech based on the social distance and power dynamics involved. For example, students in these fields will make their requests in a more polite shape, with phrases like "Could you please" or "Would it be possible," reflecting knowledge of linguistic politeness learned through their courses. By contrast, all the engineering and science students report using less tactful speech, as their fields prefer the accuracy and directness of language. Their students are more likely to care about speaking their minds than to care about offending others in the process. This shows that the nature of their academic teaching, which demands lucid and articulate expression, is embodied in their speech acts.

Social Contexts and Pragmatic Choices

The context in which communication is taking place also has a profound effect on students' choice of speech act strategies. Most students are aware that the relationship among speakers—whether they are speaking to a friend, a professor, or a service worker—affects their language choice. In formal contexts, such as interactions with professors or university staff, students are more indirect and polite, and would say something like "Excuse me" or "Would you mind if I…?" In informal contexts, such as interaction with peers, the students are more comfortable being direct. They report using direct requests such as "Can you give me your notes?" and reject invitations without using any softening device. This indicates that the students recognize they must adjust their language according to the formality of the situation, but they do not necessarily know the degree of politeness required for less formal English communication. This suggests the need for further practice in being polite and proper in various social situations in English.

Recommendations for Enhancing Pragmatic Competence

From the interviews, the students feel that they need to develop their pragmatic competence but believe that instruction does not provide them with what they ought to know in order to grasp the subtlety of speech acts in English. Most students believe that language instruction should involve contextual practice, such as role-playing and simulations, in simulated real-life conditions, encompassing a variety of speech acts. In addition, students also desire culturally and gender-sensitive training, which would make them understand how social and cultural environments influence their communication choices. Incorporating these elements into language instruction allows teachers to help students better prepare for the implicit social norms and expectations that govern politeness and indirectness in English.

Discussion

The qualitative interview analysis results provide some significant findings regarding students' notions of pragmatic competence and usage of speech acts in English. One significant finding is that the majority of students appear to possess an apparent lack of knowledge about pragmatic competence, i.e., the social dimension required in communication. The majority of the participants expressed that it was hard for them to differentiate between direct and indirect speech acts, particularly when there is a question of formality and politeness involved. This is in agreement with the claims of previous studies (e.g., Kasper & Rose, 2002), which state that pragmatic competence goes beyond linguistic competency and involves knowledge of society and the ability to adapt the language to various social contexts. The results of the interviews suggest that Jordanian learners acquire mainly rules of the language and not enough practice in applying these rules to different types of social context, and thus this results in ambiguity when attempting to use proper strategies in speech acts such as requests, apologies, and complaints.

In comparing two different methodologies of analysis—thematic analysis and DCTs, their weak and strong aspects in the current study have to be established. The thematic analysis employed in this research provides qualitative information about participants' beliefs and attitudes toward pragmatic competence and a reflective appreciation of the problems and experiences faced by the students. This method is extremely powerful to obtain participants' subjective accounts and is also helpful in uncovering deeply rooted themes and patterns, such as from the findings, where gender and subject discipline had a dramatic effect on speech act strategies. Although thematic analysis provides rich qualitative results, it may not be successful in reporting participants'

entire linguistic production in actual settings. On the other hand, DCTs, as Beebe and Cummings (1996) point out, offer a more controlled and structured way of watching how participants go about performing speech acts in line with specific contexts. DCTs allow for one to access explicit information about specific speech acts without the likelihood of exploring the underlying reason why participants choose so, which thematic analysis can best uncover.

The inferences of both the interviews and the DCT procedure are that contextual factors like social power, distance, and status govern students' choice of speech act to a large extent. This was evident in the interview data, where students reported using more indirectness when talking to professors or individuals of authority, suggesting that they were attuned to the social dynamics of the academic context. The same was corroborated in the DCT results, where the students adjusted the language based on the perceived power gap between the situations. This confirms Holmes (1995), where it is contended that pragmatic competence can include achieving a harmony between linguistic norms and communication social context. The interview information, nevertheless, showed that students have a natural understanding of these principles but cannot apply them universally in English due to disparities in cultural expectations between Jordanian and English cultures.

Both thematic analysis and DCTs provide rich insights into pragmatic competence of students, but with varying strengths. Thematic analysis gives a richer understanding of participants' perceptions and attitudes towards language use, whereas DCTs allow for more controlled observation of spontaneous speech act production. Based on the synthesis of findings of the two processes, the current study emphasizes the role of context and cultural norms in defining language use among students and suggests instructionally guided interventions are warranted to enhance the pragmatic competence of students, particularly for English language teaching. Both models emphasize the need for increased contextualization in instruction, aiming not only at linguistic forms but also at social conventions regulating their use.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to analyze the pragmatic competence of Jordanian undergraduate students enrolled at the Applied Science Private University, specifically in terms of their comprehension and use of speech acts, including requests, apologies, complaints, and refusals. The goal of this study was to investigate how social factors, such as power relations, social distance, and status, shape students' use of language options and to determine the challenges they face in mapping their communication strategies in the English language. Two underlying methods were employed in the study: qualitative interviews and Discourse Completion Tests (DCTs). The data obtained from the interviews were thematically analyzed to identify prevalent themes about students' perceptions and experiences. In contrast, the DCTs gave structured data in the form of students' spontaneous speech act production within predetermined contexts.

The results of the study showed that Jordanian students possess implicit pragmatic competence awareness but experience significant difficulty in employing proper speech act strategies, especially those termed indirect and polite. The results pointed out the awareness that the language students employed was socially restricted, and both gender and the subject of study were crucial in accounting for the range of strategy availability. The research contributes to the pragmatic competence literature by pinpointing the understanding and use of speech act nuances among Jordanian English language learners. It makes actionable suggestions on how the teaching of pragmatics can be enhanced at the university level. Taking a combined qualitative observation and DCT analysis approach, this research provides a balanced insight into how university students address pragmatic problems and why contextualized teaching is necessary in the process of teaching the English language.

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