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**TITLE**

**THE EFFECTS OF PRAGMATIC FAILURE ON THE DEVELOPMENT  
OF EFL LEARNERS' COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE**

The Case of Master One Students at English Branch in Biskra University

**A Dissertation Submitted to the Department of Foreign Languages in Partial**

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# *Dedication*

*I dedicate this work to my late beloved Grandpa who has never been to school but always valued my education and kept me motivated with the five hundred dinars' bill.*

*"Jeddi, I graduated."*

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## **Abstract**

This thesis is concerned with the effects of pragmatic failure on the development of EFL students' communicative competence among Master One students of English branch at Mohamed Kheider University of Biskra, and how the lack of cultural exposure and real-life communication can result in pragmatic failure; the sample of this study was purposely selected to suit the research scope assuming the students have already acquired the sufficient knowledge of the language. In order to investigate this problem, we hypothesized that If EFL teachers focus more on interactive activities and workshops, students will develop their communicative competence, and Pragmatic Failure in cross-cultural communication will lessen. To prove the validity of this hypothesis, the research was conducted through two different tools, a questionnaire for students in form of Discourse Completion Task (DCT) and interviews with teachers. The DCT consisted of two sections both of them demonstrating hypothetical situations for students to test their level in language awareness and appropriateness; it was distributed to thirty (30) students that represent 10% of Master One overall population. The interview was conducted with five (05) teachers of Master one level, the questions mainly concerned teachers' personal experience with teaching Master one students emphasizing on specific points that serve the results of the current research. The discussion of the results has shown that the majority of students have an acceptable level in language understanding, but still, they experience numerous difficulties when they try to communicate and express themselves properly; which as a consequence, ending up in a pragmatic failure. To conclude, this research hypothesis is confirmed and therefore, several pedagogical implications are provided to encourage teachers to adopt the necessary adjustments that would help students overcome their communication problems.

## **List of Abbreviations**

**CLT:** Communicative Language Teaching

**CC:** Communicative Competence

**DCT:** Discourse Completion Task

**EFL:** English as a Foreign Language

**L2:** Second Language

**N:** Number

**NS:** Native Speaker

**NNS:** Non Native Speaker

**TL:** Target Language

**VS:** Versus

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## **Introduction**

The main purpose of learning any language is being capable of communicating with it; as far as communication is considered as the substantial core of the language, pragmatic competence is a crucial component of communicative competence. Nonetheless, having a lack of pragmatic knowledge, EFL learners may end up committing pragmatic failures in cross-cultural communication.

Teachers often tend to focus on linguistic knowledge, whereas pragmatic information is not usually considered as an important part as language forms and rules. However, recent studies have shown that even students with sufficient linguistic competence still make mistakes in real-life communication with foreigners, these mistakes are not verbal or grammatical; instead, they occur because certain social conventions or rules of interpersonal relationships have been violated. These kinds of mistakes are defined as Pragmatic Failure.

Since Pragmatic Failure is mainly due to English learners' lack of understanding of the target language culture. Consequently, more introductions to pragmatic knowledge and cultural information should be significantly incorporated within English language teaching.

## **1. Statement of the Problem**

In Algeria, English is being taught as a second foreign language after French; therefore, students are contained in a limited context that doesn't allow them direct access to real-life English communication and provides them less exposure to the target language culture. As a consequence, most of students; regardless of their linguistic knowledge, they end up making serious mistakes whenever they have a chance to communicate with foreigners and they fall into what we know as Pragmatic Failure. In order to find a way overcoming Pragmatic Failure and to develop learners' communicative competence, this study will investigate and tackle the reasons behind this phenomenon, understand its nature, and try to come up with possible implications for both EFL learners and college English teaching.

## **2. Aims of the Study**

This study is concerned with college English teaching in the Algerian context and how the lack of cultural exposure and real-life communication can result in Pragmatic Failure. It has two main objectives to investigate, the first objective is to explore the nature of Pragmatic Failure, reasons behind this phenomenon, and its impact on communication. The second objective is to find out some suggested solutions for both learners and teachers to be incorporated within college English teaching which can contribute overcoming this issue.

## **3. Significance of the Study**

This research will serve both teachers and learners in the same time. It helps students get over this problem and develop their communicative competence by bringing up possible solutions and strategies for learners. On the other hand, it provides teachers with some implications to be

integrated within the process of English teaching, so that both sides can make benefit from the results of this study.

#### **4. Research Questions**

The current study aims to answer the following questions that pertain to Pragmatic Failure and its effect on learners' communicative competence:

- a) What are the reasons behind Pragmatic failure?
- b) What are the possible implications for this phenomenon?
- c) How can teachers improve students' communicative competence?

#### **5. Research Hypothesis**

In an attempt to answer the previous research questions, we hypothesize that:

If EFL teachers focus more on interactive activities and workshops, students will develop their communicative competence, and Pragmatic Failure in cross-cultural communication will lessen.

#### **6. Research Methodology**

The researcher intends to adopt a qualitative approach to acquire and gather data for this thesis. Moreover, a descriptive design is employed in the current investigation as a method which suits this research subject and which adopts an analytical framework to be implemented in the present study. The results of the study will be included in the dissertation.



## **7. Research tools**

Discourse Completion Task (DCT): for students. This research follows a qualitative method because it's the most suitable for gathering adequate data. The DCT will be distributed to first year master students of English. Sample subjects will be limited to 30 students.

Interviews: for teachers, the researcher will try to collect teachers' different opinions in the light of this issue. Interview will include 05 teachers.

## **8. Sample of the study**

Master one LMD Students of English at the Department of English branch in Biskra University. This population is deliberately chosen because it is put forward that those students have acquired sufficient linguistic foundations in almost all the subjects.

## **9. Structure of the Study**

The present thesis consists of three main chapters:

**Chapter One: Pragmatic Failures**, this chapter represents a general review about Pragmatic Failures; it provides a better understanding for the current issue and its nature, the reasons behind this phenomenon, and its effects on learning the foreign language.

**Chapter Two: Communicative Competence**, it talks about students' Communicative Competence, how it is developed, its relationship to Pragmatic Failures. Furthermore, this chapter deals with the students' Cross-Cultural communications, the mistakes they make, and how can they prevail such difficulties.

**Chapter Three: Field work**, this chapter explains the research method and the procedures that are used in conducting the research and gathering its data; it concerns the analysis of the students' questionnaire (DCT) and the teachers' interviews. By the end of this chapter, the hypothesis will be whether accepted or rejected.

# Chapter One

## Pragmatic Failure in Foreign Language Learning

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## **Introduction**

Language is naturally implanted in culture, in this manner, a device to wind up distinctly mindful of social idiosyncrasies in correspondence (Vygotsky, 1978, referred to in Dunworth, 2002). Language is liquid, and alteration happens first on the individual level, sub-gathering or group practically speaking, while later slowly advancing into changes at the social level (Plants, 2008). Native and non-native English interlocutors due to their feasible assorted social foundation encode and disentangle messages in various ways. Native English speakers have a tendency to end up distinctly content with the English dialect and culture which are pervasive and comprehended far and wide.

As it shows up from what has been said above by various scientists, comprehension of the target culture is vital when learning a language and important for an effective correspondence between native and non native speakers. Then, significant differences can make notable issues to non native speakers when associating with natives. These two focuses sustain the primary thought of this thesis which is about Pragmatic failure and its effect on learners' communicative ability.

### **1. Definition of Pragmatics**

Pragmatics is a systematic way of explaining language use in context. It seeks to explain aspects of meaning which cannot be found in the plain sense of words or structures, as explained by semantics. As a field of language study, pragmatics is fairly new. Its origins lie in philosophy of language and the American philosophical school of pragmatism. As a discipline within language science, its roots lie in the work of Herbert Paul Grice (1975) on conversational implicature and the cooperative principle, and on the work of Stephen Levinson, Penelope Brown and Geoff Leech on politeness.

Pragmatic competence, comprehensively characterized as the capacity to utilize language properly in a social setting, has turned into a question of request in an extensive variety of orders including phonetics, connected etymology, human sciences, humanism, brain research, correspondence research, and multifaceted reviews. It has been defined by many scholars and in various ways reflecting authors' theoretical orientation and audience, most definitions agree on the fact that interpretation of words varies to the specific context in which they are said.

Furthermore, the philosopher Morris Charles (1983) claims that pragmatics, as a new framework, is focally associated with “the study of the relation of signs to interpreters” (as cited in Levinson, 1983, p.1). In this respect, pragmatics took the position of the regulator between language as a set of symbols and the language users who particularly understand and respond to meanings in different contexts in which the language is being used. Then, an appropriate understanding of meanings is attributable to the understanding of the semantic content and the social context (immediate situation) of the utterances (Dimitracopodu, 1990).

Pragmatics focuses not only on the users of the language but on the context in which these users interact. Yule (2008, p.4) views pragmatics as “the study of the relationship between linguistic forms and the users of those forms”; he also believes that the primary concerns of pragmatics are both the speaker meaning and the contextual meaning. In the same way, Levinson (1983, p.24) sees pragmatics as “the study of the ability of language users to pair sentences with the context in which they would be appropriate”. In his turn, Leech (1983) thinks that pragmatics can be defined as the study of the uses and meanings of utterances to their situations.

However, the most frequent definition was proposed by David Crystal (1985, p.240) who suggests that pragmatics is a subfield of linguistics that has been defined as “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.”

By returning to distinguishing semantics from pragmatics, Thomason (1973) believed that pragmatics should focus on implicature; involving the way in which meaning is read into utterances. Leech (in Thomas, 1983, p.92) separates pragmatics from semantics by describing the former as "intended meaning" and the other as sentence meaning. For some linguists, this may seem a simplistic description without further development, as sentence meaning at times could be the intended meaning. As well, Thomas (1983) writes of how such a definition obscures the various levels of meanings. Hatch (1992, p.260) seemed to narrow pragmatic meaning to "that which comes from context rather than from syntax and semantics." However, Green (1996, p.5) provides useful elaboration by definition when he stated, "Semantics is compositional and is basically truth conditional." As Poole (2000, p.11) states, "the disparity between what we intend to communicate and what we actually say is central to pragmatics."

The majority of the previous definitions focus on pragmatics from two main perspectives, the interlocutors and the context in the process of communication. In other words, the utterances the speakers can make when using the language depend on the social environment of their communication. Therefore, pragmatics is considered as the study of meaning in interaction rather than the analysis of level sentences.

To sum up, the pragmatic competence is a combination of the linguistic and social aspects of the language in which people need to be competent, and realize success in communication. Therefore, EFL students should have the ability not only to use the linguistic code but also the socio-cultural aspects of the English language.

## **2. What is Pragmatic Failure?**

Pragmatic failure was firstly coined by Jenny Thomas in her article Cross-cultural Pragmatic Failure in 1983, she defines pragmatic failure as “the inability to understand what is meant by what is said” (1983, p.22). She also argues that “pragmatic failure is an area of cross- cultural communication breakdown which has received very little attention from language teachers.”

According to Thomas, pragmatic failure falls into two major types: Pragma-linguistic Failure and Socio-pragmatic Failure. Thomas (1983) points out that “pragma-linguistic failure occurs when the pragmatic force mapped by the speaker onto a given utterance is systematically different from most frequently assigned to it by native speakers of the target language, or when conversational strategies are inappropriately transferred from the speaker’s mother tongue to the target language.”

Since the coinage of the term, two types of such failure are normally distinguished according to Leech’s (1983) differentiation between *pragmalinguistic* and *sociopragmatic* aspects of language usage: *pragmalinguistic failure* and *sociopragmatic failure*. The former type arises when non-native speakers or L2 learners inadequately transfer linguistic strategies from their L1 to the L2, when they repeatedly resort to certain linguistic strategies and overgeneralize their usage or when they alter the order of strategies used to perform some speech act sequences or sets.

### **2.1. Pragmalinguistic failure**

Pragmalinguistic failure may arise when non-natives do not identify or express meaning correctly or use wrong suprasegmental/prosodic features (Thomas 1983; Riley 1989, 2006; Olshtain and Cohen 1990; Tran 2006). The literature offers many examples of this type of pragmatic failure. Thus, Olshtain and Cohen (1990) comment that the absence of intensifiers such as *very*, *deeply* or *really* in apologies by Israeli learners of English led their American interlocutors to perceive their apologies as insincere, formulaic or not very genuine. Han (1992) reports that Korean learners of English interpreted *really?* as a request for reassurance or repetition rather than as a compliment acceptance. Regarding compliments, Nelson et al. (1996) have found out that Syrian Arabic learners of English do not normally respond to compliments by simply accepting them with routines such as *thank you*, but with much more elaborate formulae, while Egyptian learners of English resort to innovative and creative comparisons or metaphors when paying compliments (1), which may sound somewhat puzzling or weird to their American complimentees:

(1) *You look like a bridegroom today!*

Arent (2000) explains that a question such as (2) intended as a sort of preliminary greeting or token of phatic communion at the beginning of a bargaining exchange is understood by many non-Arabs as an invasive request for personal information:

(2) *Where are you from?*

### **2.2. Sociopragmatic failure**

Sociopragmatic failure, on the contrary, originates when non-native speakers unknowingly abide by their L1 rules of speaking and their communicative behavior is therefore influenced by their sociocultural competence in the L1. This in many cases prevents them from correctly



identifying social situations (Takahashi and Beebe 1987; Riley 1989, 2006; Wolfson 1989; Beebe et al. 1990). In fact, L2 learners sometimes assume as universal the social norms governing their own behavior in specific circumstances and apply them directly to interaction in their L2 (Olshtain and Cohen 1989; Wolfson 1989; Tran 2006).

In sum, pragmatic failure results from different cultural norms and pragmatic principles that govern linguistic behaviors in different cultures. Since speakers with different cultural backgrounds have different understandings of the appropriateness of linguistic behavior, there may be barriers to effective communication.

### **3. Austin, Searle, and Speech Acts**

The British philosopher John Langshaw Austin (b. 1911–d. 1960) was intrigued by the way that we can use words to do different things. Whether one asserts or merely suggests, promises or merely indicates an intention, persuades or merely argues, depends not only on the literal meaning of one's words, but what one intends to do with them, and the institutional and social setting in which the linguistic activity occurs.

Austin began by distinguishing between what he called ‘constatives’ and ‘performatives.’ A constative is simply saying something true or false. A performative is *doing* something by speaking; paradigmatically, one can get married by saying “I do” (Austin 1961). Constatives are true or false, depending on their correspondence (or not) with the facts; performatives are actions and, as such, are not true or false, but ‘felicitous’ or ‘infelicitous,’ depending on whether or not they successfully perform the action in question. In particular, performative utterances to be felicitous must invoke an existing convention and the convention must be invoked in the right circumstances.

Austin's student, John R. Searle (1969) developed speech act theory as a theory of the *constitutive* rules for performing illocutionary acts, i.e., the rules that tell what performing (successfully) an illocutionary act (with certain illocutionary force and certain propositional content) consists in. The rules are classified as (i) propositional content rules, which put conditions on the propositional content of some illocutionary acts; (ii) preparatory rules, which tell what the speaker will imply in the performance of the illocutionary acts; (iii) sincerity rules, that tell what psychological state the speaker expresses to be in; and (iv) essential rules, which tell us what the action consists in *essentially*. If someone, then, wants to make a (felicitous) promise she must meet these conventional conditions. The study of these conventional conditions for illocutionary acts, together with the study of their correct taxonomy constitutes the core of speech act theory.

#### **4. Grice and Conversational Implicatures**

Herbert Paul Grice (b. 1913-d. 1988), his so-called theory of conversation starts with a sharp distinction between what someone says and what someone implicates by uttering a sentence. What someone says is determined by the conventional meaning of the sentence uttered and contextual processes of disambiguation and reference fixing; what she implicates is associated with the existence of some rational principles and maxims governing conversation. What is said has been widely identified with the literal content of the utterance; what is implicated, the implicature, with the non-literal, what it is (intentionally) communicated, but not said, by the speaker. Consider his initial example:

A and B are talking about a mutual friend, C, who is now working in a bank. A asks B how C is getting on in his job, and B replies: *Oh quite well, I think; he likes his colleagues, and he hasn't been to prison yet.* (Grice 1967a/1989, 24.)

What did B say by uttering “he hasn't been to prison yet”? Roughly, all he literally said of C was that he hasn't been to prison up to the time of utterance. This is what the conventional sentence meaning plus contextual processes of disambiguation, precisification of vague expressions and reference fixing provide.

But, normally, B would have *implicated* more than this: that C is the sort of person likely to yield to the temptation provided by his occupation. According to Grice, the ‘calculation’ of conversational implicatures is grounded on common knowledge of what the speaker has said (or better, the fact that he has said it), the linguistic and extra linguistic context of the utterance, general background information, and the consideration of what Grice calls the ‘Cooperative Principle (CP)’: Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged. (Grice 1967a/1989, p.26)

#### **4.1.Implicatures: Conversational Vs Conventional**

##### **4.1.1. Conversational Implicatures**

We customarily obey, and assume our interlocutors are obeying, the following rules of conversation, which together constitute the Cooperative Principle:

- 1. Quantity:** give the right amount of information (not too little, not too much).
- 2. Quality:** try to say only what is true (don't say that for which you lack adequate evidence; don't say what you know to be false).
- 3. Relevance:** make what you say relevant to the topic at hand.
- 4. Manner:** be clear (avoid ambiguity, excessive wordiness, obscurity, etc.).

- **Generalized vs. particularized implicatures**

- A particularized conversational implicature is one which depends on particular features of the context, as in the first example above. The proposition 'Sally's car broke down' would ordinarily not convey anything about Sally going to a meeting, so the implicature in this case depends on the context as well as the utterance itself.
- A generalized conversational implicature is one which does not depend on particular features of the context, but is instead typically associated with the proposition expressed.

Here are some (relatively) clear examples of generalized conversational implicatures:

- "Fred thinks there is a meeting tonight."

+> Fred doesn't know for sure that there is a meeting tonight.

- "Mary has 3 children."

+> Mary has no more than 3 children.

- **Criteria distinguishing implicatures** from aspects of conventional meaning (entailments, conventional implicatures/presuppositions).

**a) Cancellability** (defeasibility): Implicatures can be denied without self-contradiction.

**b) Non-detachability** — any way you had expressed the proposition you uttered would have given rise to the same implicatures (with the exception of implicatures arising from the rules of Manner).

**c) Calculability** — you can trace a line of reasoning leading from the utterance to the implicature, and including at some point the assumption that the speaker was obeying the rules of conversation to the best of their ability.

### 4.1.2. Conventional Implicatures

Paul Grice coined the term conventional implicature in his seminal paper 'Logic and conversation' (Grice, 1975). In some cases, the conventional meaning of the words used will determine what is implicated, besides helping to determine what is said.

Grice illustrates in his example how conventional implicatures are generated by the meaning of certain particles like 'but' or 'therefore.' Consider the difference between (1) and (2):

1. He is an Englishman; therefore, he is brave.
2. He is an Englishman, and he is brave.

According to Grice, a speaker has *said* the same with (1) as with (2). The difference is that with (1) she implicates (3).

3. His being brave follows from his being English.

This is a *conventional* implicature. It is the conventional meaning of 'therefore,' and not maxims of cooperation, that carry us beyond what is said.

## 5. Contemporary Pragmatic Theories

### 5.1.Relevance Theory

Following Grice's model, understanding what someone means by an utterance is a matter of *inferring* the speaker's communicative intention: the hearer uses all kinds of information available to get at what the speaker intended to convey. The semantic information obtained by decoding the

sentence uttered is but one example of such information. But much more information has to be used to infer what the speaker meant.

Sperber and Wilson (1986) see the fundamental mechanism of such inferences as going well beyond language, and beyond humans. In terms of Carston's distinctions, relevance theory departs from Grice's philosophical project, and aims at an empirical psychological theory of human cognition and communication. They see the phenomenon they call 'relevance' as a psychological phenomenon basic to the lives not only of humans but of all animals with a cognitive repertoire sophisticated enough to have choices about which environmental cues to attend to.

Instead of Grice's cooperative principle and conversational maxims, relevance theory postulates principles of relevance, which stem from the applicability of the general phenomenon of relevance to linguistic situations in the context of a representational theory of mind. There are two fundamental principles

### **5.1.1. Principles of Relevance theory**

An input is relevant to an individual when it connects with available contextual assumptions to yield positive cognitive effects: for example, true contextual implications, or warranted strengthenings or revisions of existing assumptions. (Sperber & Wilson 2005, p.7)

In general, the greater those positive cognitive effects with the smaller mental effort to get them, the greater the relevance of the input for the individual. Sperber and Wilson conjecture that the cognitive architecture of human beings tends to the maximization of relevance. This is what their first principle of relevance states:

- ***First cognitive principle of relevance:*** Human cognition is geared towards the maximization of relevance (that is, to the achievement of as many contextual (cognitive) effects as possible for as little processing effort as possible).

Applied to linguistic communication, this involves the following: For a communicative act to be successful, the speaker needs the addressee's attention; since everyone is geared towards the maximization of relevance, the speaker should try to make her utterance relevant enough to be worth the addressee's attention. This leads us to :

- ***Second (communicative) principle of relevance:*** Every act of ostensive communication (e.g. an utterance) communicates a presumption of its own optimal relevance.

By 'ostensive' relevance theorists make reference to the 'overt' or 'public' nature of the speaker's communicative intentions in acts of communication. Communication will be successful when the addressee recognizes those intentions. Thus, when someone utters something with a communicative purpose, she or he does it, according to relevance theory, with the presumption of optimal relevance, which states that:

- The utterance is relevant enough to be worth processing.
- It is the most relevant one compatible with the communicator's abilities and preferences.

## **5.2.Adaptation Theory**

Adaptation theory was firstly put forward by Verschueren in 1999. He argues that the process of using language is also a process of choosing language with feasible principles and strategies. The reason language users can make linguistic choice is that language has the nature of variability, negotiability and adaptability. Variability makes it possible for language users to choose language.

Negotiability endows language with variety and feasibility. Adaptability leads to the aim of communication after making negotiation and choice. Adaptation of language is one of the characteristics of human language as well as the starting point to conduct pragmatic analysis.

Adaptation of language includes the following:

- Adaptation to context: varieties of factors considered in the process of making linguistic choice.
- Adaptation to language structures: adaptation in different levels of language and language structures.
- Dynamics of adaptation: the process of making linguistic choice and negotiation is also a process of dynamic adaptation.
- Salience of adaptation: the degree of awareness of the communicators when making linguistic choice.

According to Verschueren, the process of making linguistic choice is also a dynamic process that language structures adapt to their context. Context is composed of language context and communicative context. Language context refers to the language means that language users choose to achieve the aim of communication. Communicative context is non-language context, which includes language users, the physical world, social world and mental world of language users. Language users are the focus of communication. The contextual factors in the physical, social and mental world need to be motivated by the cognitive activities of the language users. In other words, the strategies of the language users have to adapt to the physical, social and mental world of the both parties of communication.



## 6. Teaching Pragmatics

The teaching of pragmatics aims to facilitate the learners' sense of being able to find socially appropriate language for the situations that they encounter. Within second language studies and teaching, pragmatics encompasses speech acts, conversational structure, conversational implicature, conversational management, discourse organization, and sociolinguistic aspects of language use such as choice of address forms; these areas of language and language use have not traditionally been addressed in language teaching curricula. A growing number of studies exist that describe language use in a variety of English-speaking communities, and these studies have yielded important information for teaching. From the teacher's perspective, the observation of how speakers do things with words has demystified the pragmatic process at least to the point that we can provide responsible and concrete lessons and activities to language learners. We are in the position to give assurance that they too can learn pragmatics in their second or foreign language and that they can be "in the club" of English speakers.

Mark N. Brock and Yoshie Nagasaka (2005) answer the question of how EFL teachers can introduce students to pragmatics in classroom settings by suggesting a teaching method which they call *S.U.R.E.* to guide teachers as they help their students *See, Use, Review, and Experience* pragmatics in the EFL classroom.

### *a. See*

Teachers can help their students see the language in context, raise consciousness of the role

of pragmatics, and explain the function pragmatics plays in specific communicative events. Many students do not know how to make polite requests in English in the classroom. On more than one occasion, for example, we have heard students of English use the single word, “repeat,” to request that teachers repeat something they have said. Training students in making requests is a particularly useful way of raising student awareness of pragmatics at work.

Using a politeness continuum based on Brown and Levinson’s (1978) work, we have developed a simple activity which illustrates one way of raising student awareness of pragmatics in English.

*b. Use*

Teachers can develop activities through which students use English in contexts (simulated and real) where they choose how they interact based on their understanding of the situation suggested by the activity. As Olshtain and Cohen (1991) and others have pointed out, using role plays, drama, and mini-dialogs in which students have some choice of what they say provides students with opportunities to practice and develop a wide range of pragmatic abilities. For example, in certain contexts in the United States some compliments will be met with a devaluing of the item complimented. If, for instance, someone were to comment to her friend that she liked her handbag, it would not be unusual for the friend to reply that the handbag was old or that she purchased it on sale or that it was indeed nice but a bit too small.

Another way to help students use their developing pragmatic knowledge in English is through role plays that require students to adjust what they say based on their relationship with their interlocutor. An example would be to ask students to work in groups of four in which one member of the group is assigned the role of a student wishing to borrow a particular book needed to

complete an important school project due that next day. The other three students are assigned the role of the student's brother, friend or teacher. Each is instructed to interact using language appropriate to their role. The role plays can be performed for larger groups or for the whole class so that students can observe how the language and communicative strategies we use are affected by the relationship we have with the person with whom we are interacting.

### *c. Review*

Teachers should review, reinforce, and recycle the areas of pragmatic competence previously taught. In EFL contexts, where opportunities to use English for communicative purposes are limited, teachers should avoid the temptation to use the L1 for the daily tasks and interactions that classroom management requires. Through our discussions with English teachers from a variety of countries, we have found that a significant number have not considered the value of using English for classroom management. Not doing so wastes a valuable opportunity for students to review how English is used in the context of the classroom for real communicative purposes.

Using English for classroom management takes the language out of its all-too-common role as an abstract, lifeless linguistic system to study, and places it in the role of a real-life, breathing communication system. When teachers and students use English to complete common communicative functions in the classroom, such as requests, commands, openings, closing, refusals, apologies, and explanations, students' developing pragmatic knowledge can be reinforced through the common communicative events that take place daily in every EFL classroom.

### *d. Experience*

Teachers can arrange for their students to experience and observe the role of pragmatics in

communication. Films, television shows, and other video programs can provide us excellent resources for experiencing and analyzing language use in specific contexts. We have found situation comedies particularly good for this purpose when used with advanced secondary school and university students. These programs are relatively short (if you omit the commercials and the opening and closing credits, most American-made situation comedies are only about 20 minutes long). They also place characters in easily defined situations and allow students to observe the characters' language use within those situations. While the situations are not authentic, observing and analyzing the use of language within these simulated situations can provide students with vicarious experiences in the ways pragmatics permeates communicative events and contexts.

Other ways teachers can help students experience and observe pragmatics at work is to invite native-speaking guests to class to interact with students. After this experience, students can reflect on the language and mannerisms they observed the guest using. Arranging for students to interact with native speakers outside class and report on what they observed is another activity that can help students experience, observe, and reflect on the role of pragmatics when communicating in English.

## **Conclusion**

Pragmatics constitutes a fundamental element of language ability for EFL learners. However, EFL teachers often overlook pragmatics, due to the difficulty of its teaching, and instead focus on the grammatical aspects of language. The resulting lack of pragmatic competence on the part of EFL students can lead to pragmatic failure and, more importantly, to a complete communication breakdown. The consequences of pragmatic differences, unlike the case of grammatical errors, are often interpreted on a social or personal level rather than as a result of the language learning

process. The main purpose of instruction in pragmatics is not to insist on compliance to a particular target-language norm, but rather to help learners become familiar with the range of pragmatic devices and practices in the target language. With such instruction, learners can maintain their own cultural identities, participate more fully in target language communication, gain control of the force and outcome of their contributions, and expand their perception of the target language and those who speak it.

## Chapter Two

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## **Introduction**

Language is used for self-expression, verbal thinking, problem-solving, and creative writing, but it is used essentially for communication. Communicating effectively in a language requires the speaker's good understanding of linguistic, sociolinguistic and socio-cultural aspects of that language. This understanding will enable him to use the right language in the right context for the right purpose and then he can be referred to as communicatively competent.

However, the realization of this level of knowledge and understanding is always a challenge for foreign language learners. They often struggle through their journey towards the achievement of this goal and are often met with many obstacles. Therefore, many arguments have been raised against designing language courses and programs for foreign language contexts to achieve this goal.

### **1. The concept of Communicative Competence**

#### **1.1.Chomsky (1965)**

According to Chomsky, the term "*Communicative competence*" is comprised of two words, the combination of which means competence to communicate. This simple lexicosemantical analysis uncovers the fact that the central word in the syntagma *communicative competence* is the word *competence*.

*Competence* is one of the most controversial terms in the field of general and applied linguistics. Its introduction to linguistic discourse has been generally associated with Chomsky



who in his very influential book “*Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*” drew what has been today viewed as a classic distinction between competence (the monolingual speaker-listener’s knowledge of language) and performance (the actual use of language in real situations).

“Linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogeneous speech community, who knows its language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interest, and errors (random or characteristic) in applying his knowledge of the language in actual performance” (Chomsky, 1965, p.3). Chomsky clearly distinguished the description of language form *competence* and language use *performance* and established that the speaker-listener’s internal grammar that judges the grammaticality of sentences should be the main object of investigation for linguists.

## **1.2.Hymes (1972)**

Hymes (1972) finds Chomsky’s distinction of competence and performance too narrow to describe language behavior as a whole. Hymes believes that Chomsky’s view of competence is too idealized to describe actual language behavior, and therefore his view of performance is an incomplete reflection of competence. According to Hymes (1972) ‘communicative competence’ refers to the level of language learning that enables language users to convey their messages to others and to understand others’ messages within specific contexts. It also implies the language learners’ ability to relate what is learnt in the classroom to the outside world. From this perspective, Hymes described the competent language user as the one who knows when, where and how to use language appropriately rather than merely knowing how to produce accurate grammatical structures.

Hymes concludes that a linguistic theory must be able to deal with a heterogeneous speech community, differential competence and the role of sociocultural features. He believes that we should be concerned with performance, which he defines as the actual use of language in a concrete situation, not an idealized speaker-listener situation in a completely homogeneous speech community.

### **1.3.Widdowson (1978)**

In an attempt to clarify the concept of communicative competence, Widdowson (1983) made a distinction between competence and capacity. In his definition of these two notions he applied insights that he gained in discourse analysis and pragmatics. In this respect, he defined competence, i.e. communicative competence, in terms of the knowledge of linguistic and sociolinguistic conventions. Under capacity, which he often referred to as procedural or communicative capacity, he understood the ability to use knowledge as means of creating meaning in a language. According to him, ability is not a component of competence. It does not turn into competence, but remains “an active force for continuing creativity”, i.e. a force for the realization of what Halliday called the “meaning potential” (Widdowson, 1983, p.27).

Having defined communicative competence in this way, Widdowson is said to be the first who in his reflections on the relationship between competence and performance gave more attention to performance or real language use.

## **2. Models of communicative competence**

### **2.1.Canale and Swain’s model of Communicative Competence**

Hymes’ ideas about the ‘communicative competence’ were later developed by Canale and

Swain in 1980 who introduced a theoretical model of ‘communicative competence’. Their concept of ‘communicative competence’ refers to “the relationship and interaction between grammatical competence, or knowledge of the rules of grammar, and sociolinguistic competence, or knowledge of rules of language use” (Canale & Swain, 1980, p. 6).

Canale and Swain’s model of ‘communicative competence’ consists of three domains of knowledge and skills. They are ‘grammatical competence’, ‘sociolinguistic competence’ and ‘strategic competence’. Grammatical competence refers to accurate knowledge of sentence formation and vocabulary. Sociolinguistic competence refers to the language user’s ability to produce and understand language in different social contexts. Strategic competence refers to the ability of using language to achieve communicative goals and enhance the effectiveness of communication (Canale & Swain, 1980, p. 28-31)

Despite the simplicity of the model of Canale and Swain, this model has dominated the fields of second and foreign language acquisition and language testing for more than a decade. Moreover, the tendency to use this model, or refer to it, has remained even after Bachman (1990) and Bachman and Palmer (1996) proposed a much more comprehensive model of communicative competence. The easiness with which the model of Canale and Swain can be applied is probably the main reason why many researchers of communicative competence still use it.

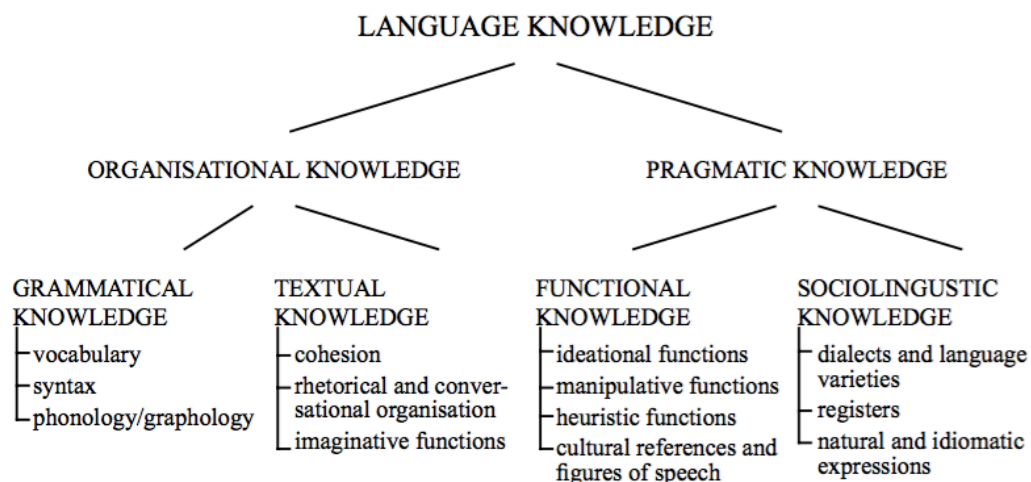
## **2.2. Bachman’s model of communicative competence**

In the late 1980s, Bachman proposed a new model of communicative competence or, more precisely, the model of communicative language ability. That model was, however, slightly altered by Bachman and Palmer in the mid 1990s. According to Bachman and Palmer (1996), many traits of language users such as some general characteristics, their topical knowledge, affective schemata

and language ability influence the communicative language ability. The crucial characteristic is their language ability which is comprised of two broad areas: language knowledge and strategic competence.

Language knowledge consists of two main components: organizational knowledge and pragmatic knowledge which complement each other in achieving communicatively effective language use. In Bachman and Palmer's model, organizational knowledge is composed of abilities engaged in a control over formal language structures, i.e. of grammatical and textual knowledge. Grammatical knowledge includes several rather independent areas of knowledge such as knowledge of vocabulary, morphology, syntax, phonology, and graphology. They enable recognition and production of grammatically correct sentences as well as comprehension of their propositional content. Textual knowledge enables comprehension and production of (spoken or written) texts. It covers the knowledge of conventions for combining sentences or utterances into texts, i.e. knowledge of cohesion (ways of marking semantic relationships among two or more sentences in a written text or utterances in a conversation) and knowledge of rhetorical organization (way of developing narrative texts, descriptions, comparisons, classifications etc.) or conversational organization (conventions for initiating, maintaining and closing conversations).

Bachman and Palmer's model of communicative language ability is more complex, more comprehensive and much clearer than the model of Canale and Swain. It is preferable because of its detailed and at the same time very organizational description of basic components of communicative competence.



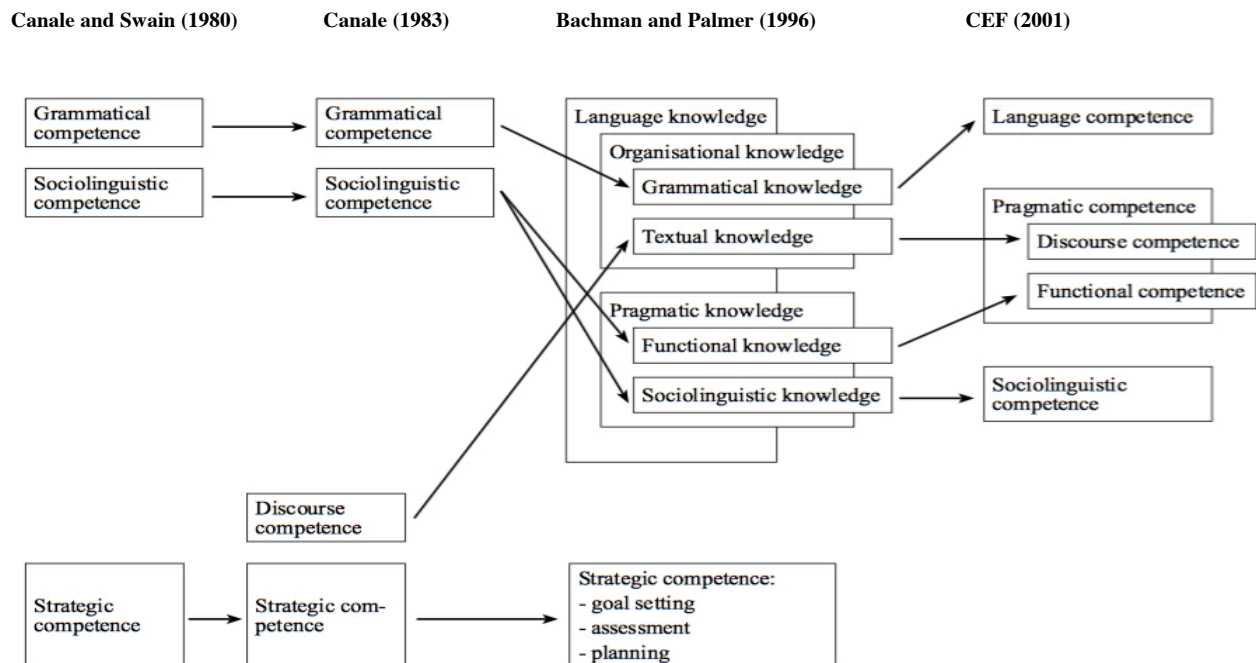
**Figure 1.** *Areas of language knowledge (Source: Bachman and Palmer, 1996:68)*

### **2.3.CEF’s (Common European Framework) model of Communicative Competence**

In the CEF, communicative competence is conceived only in terms of knowledge. It includes three basic components: language competence, sociolinguistic competence and pragmatic competence. Thus, strategic competence is not its componential part. It is interesting, however, that each component of language knowledge is explicitly defined as knowledge of its contents and ability to apply it. For instance, language competence or linguistic competence refers to knowledge of and ability to use language resources to form well structured messages. The subcomponents of language competence are lexical, grammatical, semantic, phonological, orthographic and orthoepic competences. Sociolinguistic competence refers to possession of knowledge and skills for appropriate language use in a social context. The following aspects of this competence are highlighted: language elements that mark social relationships, rules of appropriate behavior, and expressions of peoples’ wisdom, differences in register and dialects and stress. The last component in this model, pragmatic competence, involves two subcomponents: discourse competence and functional competence. A part of both of these competences is the so-called planning competence

which refers to sequencing of messages in accordance with interactional and transactional schemata. Strategic competence is mentioned in the part the CEF dedicated to a discussion of communicative language use. This competence is conceived as strategy use in the broadest sense. Thus, the stress is put not only on the use of communication strategies which can help to overcome the lack in a particular area of language knowledge but on the use of all types of communication strategies. As to the authors of the CEF, the use of strategies can be compared with the application of metacognitive principles (planning, achieving, controlling and correcting) on different forms of language activity: reception, interaction, production and meditating.

The similarities and differences in the componential structure of the three models of communicative competence described above, the model of Canale and Swain, the model of Bachman and Palmer and the model proposed in the CEF, are presented in a graphic illustration:



**Figure 2.** Similarities and differences between several models of communicative competence

### **3. The Role of Communicative Competence in L2/FL Teaching**

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), in English classrooms has been repeatedly stressed by SLA researchers, and indeed, there have been many studies attempting to determine its effects on L2 learners (Breen and Candlin, 1980; Canale, 1983; Canale and Swain, 1980; Fillmore, 1979; Kasper and Rose, 2002; O'Malley and Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990; Swain, 1985; Skehan, 1995; Tarone and Yule, 1989; Widdowson, 1978). In discussing syllabus design, for example, Canale and Swain (1980) justify the application of CLT by defending it against the claim that the communicatively oriented syllabus tends to be disorganized in terms of acquisition of grammar. They believe that there are no empirical data to support it and that the functionally organized communicative approach is more likely than the grammar-based approach “to have positive consequences for learner motivation” (Canale and Swain, 1980, p. 32) as it provides a form of in-class training that makes learners feel more comfortable, confident, and encouraged, with a clear, visible purpose for L2 learning, namely successful communication. With respect to the use of strategies in learning a target language, Rubin (1979) describes seven learning strategies typically employed by a “good language learner” in a second language classroom. While many of the strategies seem to be rooted in the cognitive processes for language learning, she claims that a learner’s intent behind the use of the strategies is a strong drive to communicate, and not effective understanding of grammatical items presented, and consequently there is much relevance and value in throwing light on what a learner does to develop his or her communicative competence in classroom activities.

## **4. Developing Communicative Competence**

### **4.1. Brown (1994)**

Brown (1994a), viewing CLT as an approach (that is a theoretical position about the nature of language and of language teaching), rather than a specific method of teaching, describes four underlying characteristics in defining CLT in a second language classroom, which are summarized below (Brown, 1994a, p.245):

- Focus in a classroom should be on all of the components of communicative competence of which grammatical or linguistic competence is just part.
- Classroom activities should be designed to engage students in the pragmatic, authentic, and functional use of language for meaningful purposes.
- Both fluency and accuracy should be considered equally important in a second language learning classroom. And they are complementary.
- Students have to use their target language, productively and receptively, in unrehearsed contexts under proper guidance, but not under the control of a teacher.

Moreover, Brown (1994b) lists six key words of CLT to better understand what it aims at: learner-centered, cooperative (collaborative), interactive, integrated, content-centered, and task-based. They indicate supposedly ways in which language teaching is conducted communicatively, and so reflect the abovementioned characteristics of CLT.



#### **4.2.Macaro (1997)**

Macaro (1997) referred to four popular beliefs among language teachers that facilitate the realization of the level of ‘communicative competence’. These beliefs include: giving more attention to speaking and listening skills than reading and writing, practicing more in communicating new information rather than ‘already known’ information, enhancing students’ involvement to overcome passive learning and focusing on practicing the language in meaningful situations rather than on producing well-formed sentences or in individual words (Macaro, 1997, p.42-43). However, it should be noted that seeking the objective of developing students’ ‘communicative competence’ should not lead to focusing more on speaking and listening than reading and writing skills. The good command of any language requires reaching sufficient understanding of all the language skills.

#### **4.3.Moor (2009)**

In 2009, Moor, introduced the concept ‘field language communicative competence’. He insisted on the importance of working within the field of language we want to master and pointed out the little research conducted on this aspect of communicative competence. Based on the findings of his research which was conducted in West Africa, he concluded that field language communicative competence “is dependent on more than the knowledge of and ability to use a given field language in ways that are grammatical and socioculturally appropriate” (P: 9). This argument may put the goal of developing language learners’ communicative competence in terms of native speakers through formal education which does not involve field language experience into question.

## **5. Challenges for Achieving the ‘Communicative Competence’**

### **5.1.Course Design**

Despite the popularity of the term ‘communicative competence’ many teachers often find it a far reaching goal for foreign language (FL) contexts (Sano et al, 1984). Therefore, many arguments have been raised against designing language programs for FL contexts to achieve this level of competence (Huda, 1999; Alptekin, 2002). This is due to the challenges that have been encountered by both EFL teachers and students in these contexts since the introduction of this concept. The language teachers in these contexts will face difficulty in choosing what skills are to be taught for students and in identifying the effective methods for developing students’ communicative competence (Huda, 1999, p.30).

### **5.2.Misunderstanding of CC concept**

Another difficulty may result from teachers’ misunderstanding of the concept of ‘communicative competence’. Butler (2005) pointed out the lack of clear definition about ‘what constitutes ‘communicative competence’ for FL and about what teaching for achieving this aim constitute. He argued that implementing communicative activities in classrooms would not necessarily lead to enhance students’ learning (Butler, 2005, p.442).

### **5.3.Proficiency level of teachers**

Another significant challenge which may encounter EFL teachers in teaching language programs aiming at developing students’ communicative competence is the high proficiency level required for the effective teaching of these programs. In line with this argument, EFL teachers’ low proficiency level is always reported as an impediment for implementing communication

methods for language teaching and learning (Li, 1998; Nunan, 2003; Orafi & Borg, 2009). Another relevant issue could be related to the difficulty of measuring language learners' communicative competence or communicative language ability as there are many factors more than the language ability we intend to measure can affect the language user's performance (Bachman, 1990, p.24)

#### **5.4. Alptekin's (2002) concept of "Intercultural Communicative Competence"**

These difficulties and challenges led Alptekin (2002) to criticize the validity of the conventional model of 'communicative competence' in terms of native speaker norms for non-native contexts. He suggested redefining the concept of 'communicative competence' in terms of its use in FL settings into "intercultural communicative competence" (Alptekin, 2002, p.63). This argument was later advocated by Sowden (Sowden, 2007). It seems that complexities of the skills and the high proficiency level required for achieving communicative competence make it unrealistic objective for non-native speakers. These arguments suggest that course designers for EFL contexts have to be realistic in their expectations and aims when they design language courses and or plan learning programs. The formulation of the aims of these courses in terms of Alptekin's (2002) concept of "intercultural communicative competence" (p: 63) can be a successful model. Through setting attainable goals and selecting appropriate methodologies we can enhance the likelihood of the success of language learning programs in FL contexts (Segovia & Hardison, 2009).

Reflecting on these arguments, the development of the communicative competence for foreign contexts in terms of the native speaker's level seems to be a far-reaching goal. This could be due to the low language proficiency level of students and teachers' in these contexts which is often reported as a major challenge (Li, 1998; Nunan, 2003; Orafi & Borg, 2009). Setting the objectives

of language learning in these contexts should be guided by the realities and specifications of these contexts. The complexity of the tasks which the FL learner needs to perform in learning the language through communication should be considered. Klein (1986) explained that the language learner “must learn the language by which he intends to communicate” and “must communicate by means of the language he intends to learn” (Klein, 1986, p.146).

## **6. Communicative Strategy**

It is an essential capability for the speakers to adopt communicative strategies to deal with the difficulties and problems in communication. Communicative strategies as auxiliary measures have drawn more and more attention, especially of as L2 learners who often find themselves in situations of lacking vocabulary to express their ideas or when confronted with another totally new culture. The communicative strategy is closely interrelated with linguistics, sociology and psychology, which supply the appropriate rules and norms in intercultural communication. However, there is no universal definition about communicative strategies in academic field (Corder, 1984; Faerch & Kasper, 1983; Ellis, 1985), whereas scholars unanimously agree on two features, problem-orientation and consciousness. It is obvious that, by analyzing the pragmatic failure, people can predict what the trouble spots will be and what’s more important is to find the possible strategies to improve the effectiveness of people’s communication.

To achieve effective communication, the adequate requirements are vital—proficiency of language, mutual understanding and basis of shared cultural norms and conventions. However, in most of the communication, the presupposition is not so adequate that the interlocutors are needed to take compensating techniques to reestablish the interpersonal relationship. The strategies people can apply in their cross-cultural communication are suggested as avoidance, tolerance, suspension and accommodation (XU, 2000). The strategies people resort to in their cross-cultural

communication can also be categorized into active strategy and passive strategy. Active strategy is the remedy actively adopted to solve communicative difficulties, including cooperative strategy, stalling strategy and paralanguage strategy. Using various sources verbal or nonverbal to get speakers' meaning across can enhance communication effectiveness, whereas appeal for help is a basic social interaction strategy. This strategy involves asking someone, especially a native speaker in an interactive encounter, for clarification, verification or correction. To satisfy mutual needs, communicators must be cooperative and friendly.

All the active strategies enable interaction to continue, not to break down because of communicators limitation in linguistic and social knowledge. Reduction strategies like suspension, simplification and avoidance are summarized into passive strategies (XU, 1996). They are used temporarily to suspend the puzzles or to tolerate the incomprehensibilities in cross-cultural communication. As cross-cultural communication is of ambiguous characteristics, misunderstandings and confusion may arise. One should be willing to tolerate the communication counterparts' ideas and propositions that run counter to his culture systems or norms.

Proper use of strategies may not only make the communication go smoothly, but also create the conditions for successful communicative success.

## **7. Communicative Language Teaching**

Integrating communication and learner-centeredness as two complementary aspects of FL instructional strategies may lead to improving students' communication skills. The active participation of FL students in carrying out communication activities such as pair and group work, role-plays, games and problem-solving independently can develop their communication skills in order to be able to apply what they learn in classrooms in the outside world. Most importantly,

these activities should offer the opportunity for students to learn about the sociolinguistic, grammatical and strategic aspect of the ‘communicative competence’ However, conducting English classes through teacher-centered instruction may not lead to improve students’ communication skills. The limited time devoted for students’ talk during these classes would not make any improvement on their communication skills (Cuban, 1993; Rico, 2008, Yilmaz, 2009). Moreover, it is not always possible for language learners to have the opportunity for living the field language experiences which Moore (2009) believed as an important condition for developing communicative competence.

### **Conclusion**

Many course designers now plan language courses to end up with students’ development of communicative competence. However, the realization of this objective is not feasible for all language learners, especially the foreign ones. Many of them end their language courses without developing the required level of the communicative competence. Different factors may contribute to this failure including teachers’ and students’ low language proficiency, the traditional teaching methods with teacher-centered instruction, the lack of opportunities for active language practice and the high expectations regarding the development of the communicative competence in comparison with native speakers. Another fundamental factor could be related to the lack of including field language experiences (living with native speakers’ community) for language learners to observe how native speakers use their language and how they interpret messages.

In foreign language contexts, it is better to develop a model of communicative competence that takes into account the specific contextual, social and linguistic factors of non-native speakers. Therefore, local experts need to be involved in the process of designing the language learning materials for their own contexts.

## Chapter Three

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## **Introduction**

This part of the research is regarded to be the most significant part of the entire study to which the results and hypothesis testing will be ascribed. In this respect, the explication of each the items included in this chapter is based on the belief that the current research outcomes will help EFL students improve their communicative competence and overcome, or at least decrease pragmatic failure in language use. Therefore, the methodology of this chapter is mainly chosen to explain and illustrate matters related to the population and sampling, the means of the research, the aim of the research tool, the stage of piloting the study, the administration of the Discourse Completion Task (DCT), the conduction of the interview, procedure and steps maintained for analyzing the gathered data, and finally the detailed description and discussion of the results obtained through the students' responses and the interview conducted with teachers.

### **1. Population and Sample**

#### **1.1.Students**

The target population in this work is Master One LMD English students at the Department of Foreign Languages, English Branch at Biskra University. However, the participants who took part in this study represent a sufficient sampling involve a randomized chosen group (N=30) from the whole population (N=308). As to the reason of choosing this population in particular, these students are thought to have a satisfactory level of language use.

#### **1.2.Teachers**

A specific number of teachers (N=05) was chosen to be interviewed in order to pursue in-depth information around the topic of this research and to study the research problem from

another perspective behind the teachers' own experience. The sample involves two (02) teachers of Oral expression who supposedly have taught Master one students in the preceding year which is considered to be the last level of studying Oral Expression; the other three (03) are the students' current teachers in Master One level. Those teachers are intentionally chosen to provide more accurate information about the target sample in both the current and previous levels to better reach a more valid conclusion.

## **2. Means of the Research**

### **2.1. Discourse Completion Task (DCT)**

The Discourse Completion Task was adopted as a tool to accumulate data about the informants. In this research, the DCT was defined as a written questionnaire which underlies brief descriptions of a number of particular situations that are meant to reveal certain patterns of speech acts that are mostly embodied within these situations (Kasper and Dahl, 1991).

These hypothetical scenarios are divided into three sections, the first section concerned with the Personal information about the subjects, it mainly addresses their age, gender, English level, understanding level when interacting with people, and the language areas they want improve most to be taken into account in analyzing and discussing the the students' responses; the second involves different daily situations that the students may encounter in their every day life, the third section tests the students language awareness through different situations; both of the sections put the respondent in a set of distinctive situations of natural language use where she/he is supposed to choose the appropriate answer in each of the given situations, taking into account the contextual variables of each setting in order to best pick the appropriate answer choice. The different situations that are used in the second section of the DCT were adapted from the studies conducted by Yuanshan Chen and D. Victoria Rau, University of Technology, Taichung, Taiwan. The third

section situations of language awareness were adapted from the studies conducted by Nguyen, T. M. P. (2006.), University of Queensland, Vietnam. Their studies were conducted on EFL learners and were effective in achieving accurate results; as a consequent, some of the situations from these studies were adapted in this research to reach better results in the local context.

## **2.2.The interview**

The conducted interview is a standardized open-ended interview in which the same open-ended questions are asked to all interviewees; this approach facilitates faster interviews that can be easily analyzed and compared. The interview questions cover and discuss the main points that will help the researcher achieve better results; these questions involve background information about teachers, their personal work experience, opinions concerning the master one students' language level, and their personal view about the instructional material and the possible solutions that can be adopted. The data gathered from this interview is based on the teachers' personal responses of the questions.

## **3. Piloting the Study**

For the purpose of checking the research viability, the discourse completion task was handed to six (06) students who belong to the same population selected in this study i.e., Master One LMD English students. Those students were asked about the time they took to fully answer the DCT. As well as, they were asked to mention any ambiguity that might arise while doing the task.

As to the results of piloting the current study, all the students did not show any kind of difficulties while selecting the answers or writing their own responses; however, two (02) students did not clearly understand the instructions given in the third section which is about giving the reasons for the chosen answer. In this way, the instruction given in the third section was refined

and some linguistic forms were restated in a simpler way so that the students can easily understand how they are supposed to answer.

#### **4. Administering the DCT**

After the necessary adjustments were made, the DCT was administered to the students at the very beginning of the Methodology course. The reason of choosing that formal setting was to have the certitude of getting back all the administered DCTs in a short period of time. As doing so, the students were briefly oriented as they were doing the activity to avoid any kind of misunderstanding that might affect the respondents' selection of the answers. In addition, the participants were gently requested to answer the research tool according to their personal level of understanding since the designed situations were basically elaborated to reflect natural settings of language use.

#### **5. Conducting the Interview**

The interview took place at the Department of English branch in University of Biskra with the teachers of Master one LMD students. The researcher conducted the interview orally with five teachers and recorded each session individually. The target sample involved two (02) third year Oral teachers, as experienced teachers who taught master one Oral Expression in their third year, and three (03) master one teachers of different modules including Literature, academic writing, and Linguistics. The time taken for this process was more than two weeks due to the difficulties and the interruptions the researcher has faced trying to find the available teachers to make appointments with; most of the teachers refused to make an oral interview with the researcher, and the reasons for their rejections were about *“not having much free time, asking to come back later, suggestions to make it a written interview, throwing a random appointment and not showing up,*

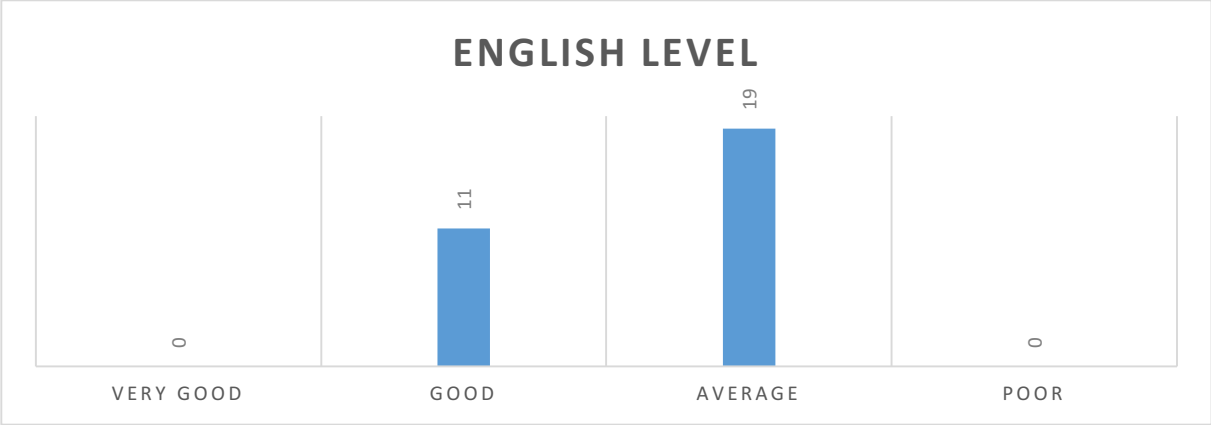
*and sometimes direct refusals*”. The interview included mainly seven (07) questions that discussed different points, the level of the teachers and their work experience, how do they see master one students’ English level and their communicative competence? Do the students often make pragmatic failure when interacting with their teachers? Do the teachers face any difficulties making them understand their lectures? What are the reasons behind these difficulties? Does the instructional material need to be adapted or somehow changed? What are the possible implications the teachers think should be implemented? Each session took from 10 to 18 minutes, at different settings, depending on where each teacher was available for the interview and how much he/she was involved in the discussion.

## **6. Data Analysis**

### **6.1. Discourse Completion Task (DCT)**

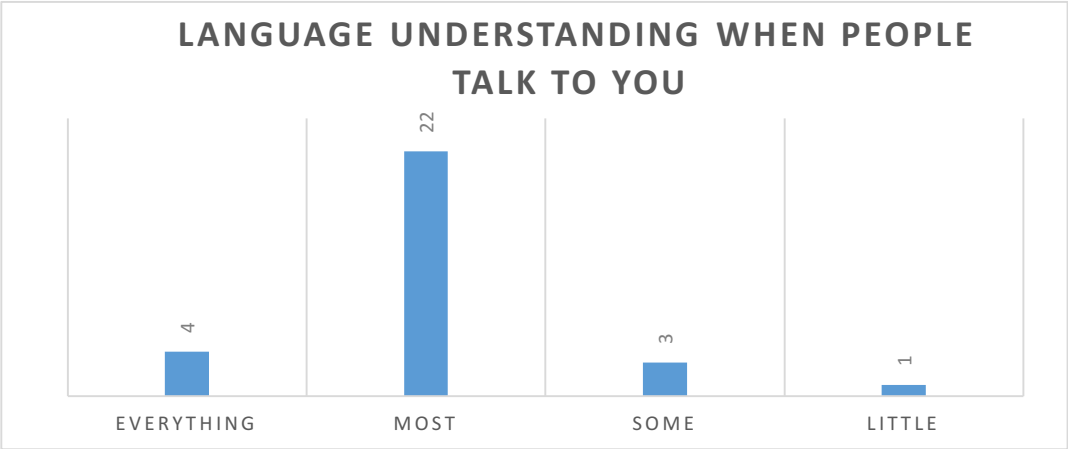
#### **6.1.1. Section One: Personal information**

Amongst the overall number of the respondents (30) who took part in the present research, the vast majority was for the female students (80%) since it is already known that in foreign language education females always reflect the largest portion of the students; however, only (20%) of the male students have completed the task. Their ages range from 22 to 39 years, and the majority (86%) of them were between 22 and 23 years old. In addition, most of them (90%) have studied English for eleven years, few of them (10%) have studied English for ten years. Moreover, some of them (37%) claimed to have a good English level whilst the rest majority (63%) considered themselves as average, as shown in the graph below:



*Graph: 1 Students' English Level*

Furthermore, as to the question of how much understanding they get when other people talk to them, or the other way round when they talk to people how much the listener would understand from them, the majority (73%) answered “Most”, few (14%) answered “Some”, and the rest (13%) said “Little”, answers illustrated in the graphs below:



*Graph: 2 Students' Language Understanding Level*

This background knowledge will be associated with the subjects’ responses to help the researcher draw some conclusions about the respondents’ level of communicative competence.

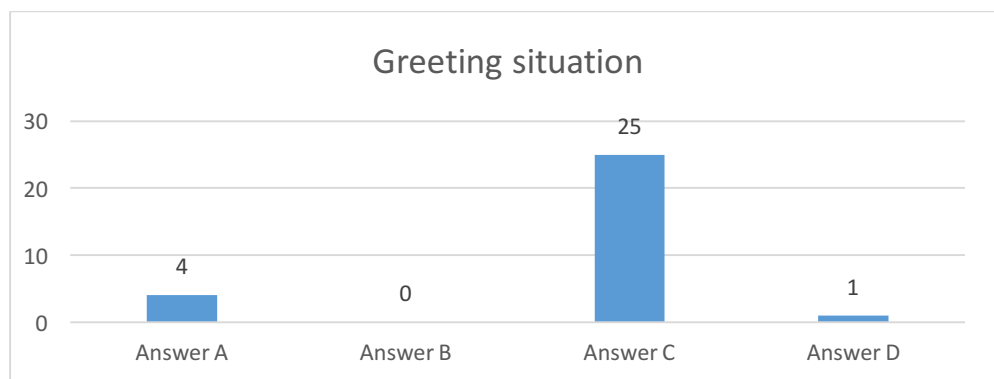
## 6.1.2. Section Two: Different Daily Situations

### A. Greetings

The participants in this case are put in a context, which they frequently encounter in their daily life, where they are supposed to choose the most appropriate answer. The description of this scenario is as follows “Oscar sees an acquaintance, Bill, from a neighboring apartment as he is leaving his apartment building for work. If Oscar does not have time to stop and chat, what would be his most likely choice of greetings as he passes the neighbor?”

- a) Hey, Bill! How are you doing? What’s going on in your life? We should catch up!
- b) Hey, Bill! How are you this fine morning? Did you sleep well?
- c) Mornin’, Bill, how’s it goin’?
- d) Good morning, Bill! What’s on the agenda for the day?

In order to simplify matters further, the chart below displays the informants’ selections of the proposed answers, in terms of frequency in order to depict a clear image of the participants’ use of the suggested utterances to give the most appropriate answer.



*Graph: 3 Students’ Performance in Greeting Situation*

The greeting situation shows an informal style with g-dropping in option C (the most appropriate response among the four options), which can help shift the relationship from equal-distant to equal-close relationship, as it evokes an image of male solidarity. Options A and D imply a longer conversation than Oscar has time for since he is on his way to work, while option B is unusual in that Oscar would not ask about how Bill slept unless they were close friends.

The majority of the participants (83%) in this case have ticked “answer C” which is the most appropriate one whereas the rest have chosen different answers (A and D). This indicates that most of the students have well understood the situation and chosen the right answer that matches the situation. Therefore, the students’ performance in this situation was good at the general level, as well as their language understanding.

## **B. Apology**

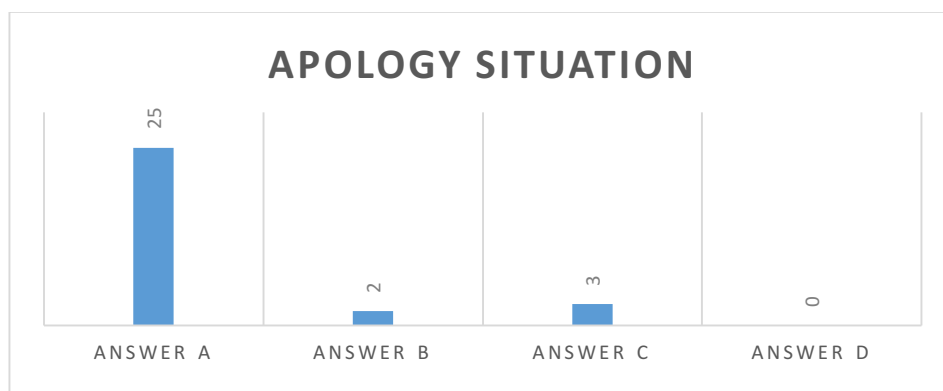
This case puts the participant in a situation in which he/she is supposed to have entered home late, and he/she is required to apologize to his/her parent. Participants were given the next choices below:

- a) I'm sorry, You're right. It won't happen again. I promise.
- b) I know, I know. But, like, it wasn't my fault! And I tried to leave but like, Stacy was talking to Blake and I was like, “Yo! Stacy we gotta go dude!” and she was like, “Geez just chill ok? Just like 5 secs.” And then...
- c) I formally want to extend my apology to you as I realize the ill I have committed against you and can only hope for your forgiveness in return.

To simplify matters further, the bar chart below displays the informants’ selections of the



proposed answers, in terms of frequency, in order to depict a clear image of the participants' use of the suggested utterances to give the most appropriate answer for this apology situation.



*Graph: 4 Students' Performance in Apology Situation*

Apology situation illustrates that the assertion of self-identity in a strong relationship is crucial in deciding on an appropriate response. While the mother may view A as more appropriate, the daughter would be more likely to choose B. In other words, response A would place the mother-daughter relationship in the quadrant of distance-hierarchy, but response B would shift it to the quadrant of closeness-hierarchy. Option C's style is so overly formal that it would be considered a parody.

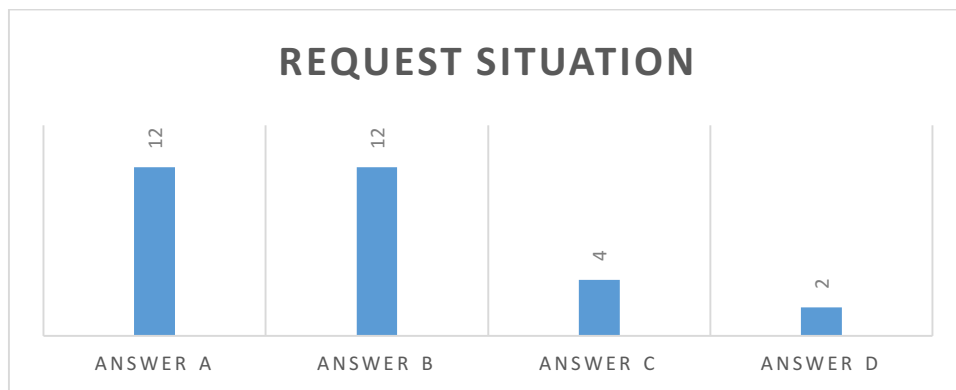
In the situation, most of the participants (83%) have ticked "answer A", it may seem close to the appropriate answer, but it still does not indicate the mother-daughter relationship as it is supposed to be; however, only few students (7%) selected "answer B" which is the appropriate answer for this situation; the rest (10%) picked "answer C". The students' performance in this case did not match the appropriate use of the given answer; and consequently, misunderstanding might have occurred in this situation.

### C. Request

As to the current case, the respondents were supposed to choose the most appropriate request from the given answers. The context was described as “Peter’s lawnmower is not working, but he really wants to mow before his wife’s parents visit tomorrow. He wants to borrow his neighbor’s lawnmower. He and his neighbor, Phil, are acquaintances but not close friends. He calls Phil on the phone and asks:

- a) Would it be OK if I borrowed your lawnmower this afternoon? Mine is broken down and my wife’s parents are coming tomorrow...
- b) Can you lend me your lawnmower this afternoon? Mine is broken down and...
- c) I’d really like to mow my lawn this afternoon. My lawnmower is broken down
- d) I’d like to borrow your lawnmower. Mine is broken down and...

To simplify more, the students’ answers of this situation are illustrated in the bar chart below:



*Graph: 5* Students' Performance in Request Situation

Option A is considered more appropriate than C and D, as a delayed topic introduction (i.e., request) and the use of a question and the past tense “Would it be OK if I borrowed...?” all indicate

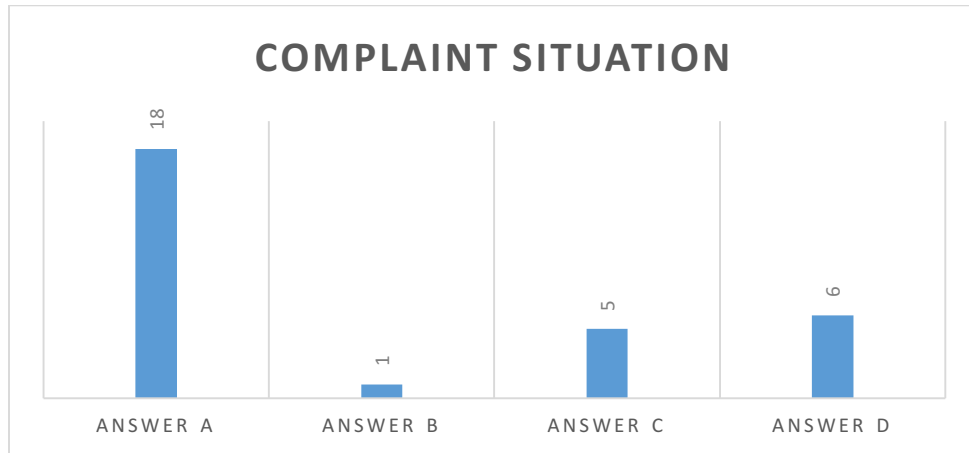
politeness. Compared with B, the use of “I” (speaker-oriented) in A also mitigates imposition and thus renders the request politer in the quadrant of distance and equality. A group of students (40%) have picked “answer A”, also the same number (40%) of another group chose “answer B”, while the rest (20%) selected C and D. The students’ performance in this case was below the average.

#### **D. Complaint**

In this situation, the students were given the following context description “Mike asks one of his employees, Andrew, to move some boxes from the delivery station to the storage shelves. Mike leaves to go take care of some other work and returns 2 hours later. When he returns he sees that Andrew did not do what he asked him to do. He approaches Andrew and says...”

- a) Why haven’t you moved the boxes yet? I thought you would be done by now.
- b) I’ll finish up that work for you.
- c) Why are you so slow at doing your work?
- d) Were you planning on finishing that work next week?

For better illustration, the students’ selections are shown in following the bar chart



*Graph: 6* Students' Performance in Complaint Situation

In a hierarchical-distant relationship, the speech act of complaint is face-threatening and thus requires some indirectness to mitigate the negative tone of voice. As a result, the use of a WH-question to address the reason why no action has been taken in A is more appropriate than B. The utterances in C and D would be considered rude and disrespectful.

A large number of the sample (60%) picked “answer A”, and the rest (40%) selected C and D; accordingly, the students’ general performance in this case was above the average which reflects their good understanding of the situation.

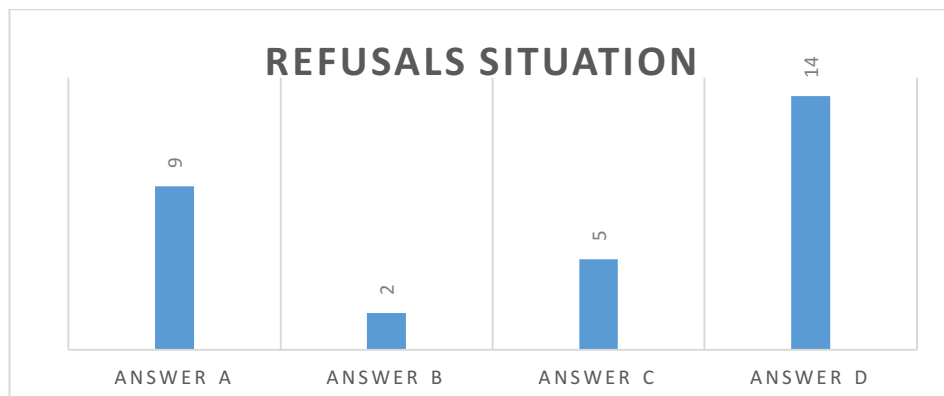
### **E. Refusals**

In an attempt to put the participants to elicit the most appropriate way to make a refusal, they were given the following situation “It is your mother’s birthday celebration tonight but your boss tells you that you must get this project done before you head for home. You respond:”

- a) Oh, I am sorry. If I had only known earlier about this deadline. You see, my mother is celebrating her birthday tonight and we have a lot of guests invited and I am in charge of food. Is there another way we can handle this so that I can get the project done for you?

- b) Oh man, you can't be serious! I only work until 5 PM and you know that.
- c) Oh, I would really like to help. You know I take my work very seriously and I want to be responsible for getting everything done. I have this conflict though; do you remember meeting my mom? (continues to explain about the party, but does not give a clear "yes or no" response)
- d) You know I have a conflict with a personal commitment I have tonight. What possibility would there be that I come in tomorrow or put in extra time on Monday?

To illustrate the obtained results, the below graph identifies the students' selections



*Graph: 7* Students' Performance in Refusals Situation

The most face-threatening speech act is probably refusal, as shown in this case. Except for B, any of the other three responses could possibly be chosen as appropriate, depending on how the employee perceives his/her relationship to the boss. For example, if the employee views the relationship to be in the hierarchy and distance quadrant, s/he would be more likely to choose D. A group of students (46%) have selected "answer D", the rest (46%) chose answer A and C, and only few (8%) who have picked "answer B". Consequently, the students' performance in general did match the appropriate use of the given utterances, and consequently, the participants manifested a good understanding level.

### 6.1.3. Section Three: Awareness test

In this section, we put the participants into different hypothetical communicative situations in which someone is making a request and a rejection for a response to each situation, the participant is required to answer whether the rejection is appropriate or inappropriate and justify his/her answer choice. This section was designed to test the students' level of awareness and politeness in language use.

- **Situation 1:** You are a student at a University. You are about to go home in your car. Another student, whom you have never met before, approaches you and asks you for a lift home saying that you both live in the same area of the city. *You refuse by saying:*

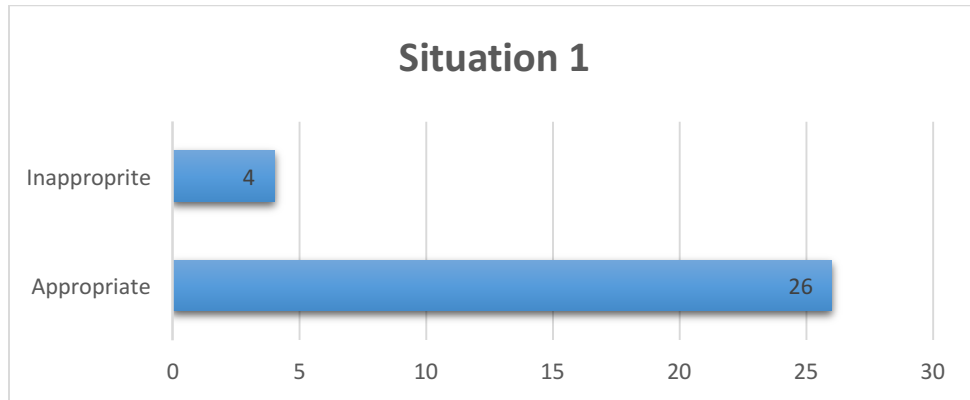
*I'm sorry, but I am not going straight home. There are quite a few things I need to do before heading home! Perhaps another day.*

- Appropriate
- Inappropriate

Justification: .....

The rejection in this situation is “*Appropriate*” since the speaker has made an apology and gave a reason with an explanation for the rejection, he/she also offered an alternative “*Perhaps another day*”, so the answer “*Inappropriate*” would be wrong. The majority of the students (86%) selected “*Appropriate*” as an answer, and the justifications they gave for their choice included “*indirect rejection, apology, explanations*”; the the rest few ones (14%) chose “*Inappropriate*”. Accordingly, the majority of participants manifested a good level of awareness when it comes to the appropriateness of language use. To illustrate the obtained results, the below bar chart identifies

the students' selections



Graph: 8 Students' Performance in Situation 01

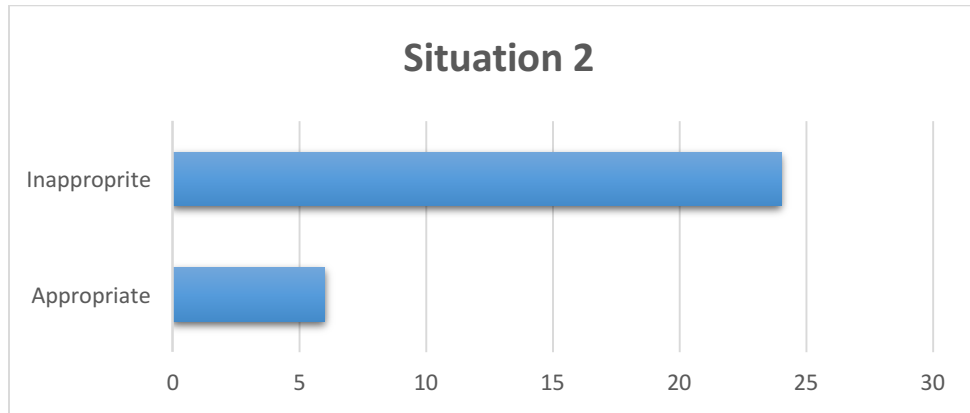
➤ **Situation 2:** You are a student in a Business studies class at the university. One of your lecturers asks you to pick him/her up every day from his/her home, saying that his/her house is near yours. You refuse by saying:

*No, I can't. I always have things to attend to before classes.*

- Appropriate
- Inappropriate

Justification: .....

The speaker in this situation made a direct refusal “No” and negation of proposition “I can't”, so the rejection here is “*Inappropriate*”, though he/she gave an explanation following the rejection, the directionality of the refusal still makes it inappropriate, the answer “*Appropriate*” in this situation is wrong. Again, most of the participants (80%) answered “*Inappropriate*”, and their justifications included “*direct rejection, not friendly*”; the rest (20%) selected “*Appropriate*”, this result contributes to the previous one and reflects on the same on the same idea about the students' awareness level. The participants' selections are illustrated in the bar chart below:



Graph: 9 Students' Performance in Situation 02

- **Situation 3:** You are a student at University. A classmate, and close friend of yours, has been sick and has not been able to attend classes. He/she asks if he/ she can borrow your class notes. You refuse by saying:

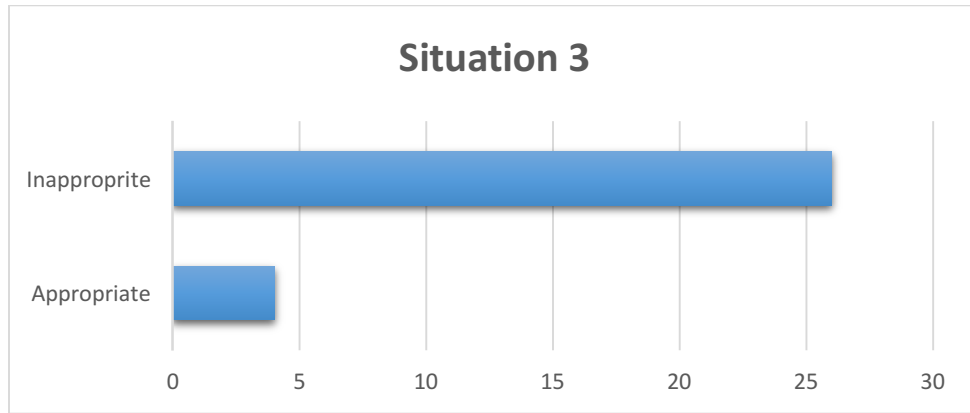
*I don't want to. It goes against my convictions!*

- Appropriate
- Inappropriate

Justification: .....

This rejection is “*Inappropriate*”, the speaker made a negation of the proposition “*I don't want to*” without an apology or a clear reason, he/she also displayed a quality of selfishness by saying “*it goes against my convictions*”, the answer “*appropriate*” would be wrong. The students’ answers were mostly (86%) on “*inappropriate*” choice, the rest (14%) were on “*Appropriate*” choice. Still, the same results add to the previous situations. Students’ selections are illustrated in the below bar chart:





Graph: 10 Students' Performance in Situation 03

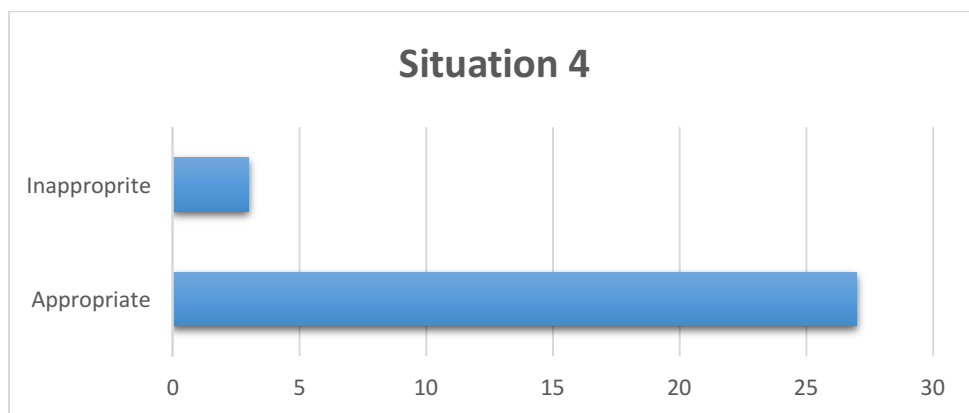
- **Situation 4:** You are a research assistant to a Professor, with whom you have a good academic relationship. At the end of the hours, you are going to leave. The Professor asks if you can stay with him/her and help him/her with some papers. You refuse by saying:

*I am sorry, but I have an urgent appointment that I simply must attend. I can definitely help tomorrow.*

- Appropriate
- Inappropriate

Justification: .....

In this situation, the speaker made a clear regret “*I am sorry*”, followed by an explanation for his/her rejection “*but I have an urgent...*”, and he/she offered by the end of the statement an alternate way to help his/her Professor; obviously, the correct answer will be “*Appropriate*”, and the opposite would be wrong. The students’ answers still reflect on the same assumption we made in the first situation about the level of awareness of language use; the vast majority (90%) selected “*Appropriate*”, and the left ones (10%) chose “*Inappropriate*” as an answer. The participants’ selections are illustrated in the following bar chart:



*Graph: 11* Students' Performance in Situation 04

#### **6.1.4. Discussion of the Results**

The analysis of the data gathered through the Discourse Completion Task would greatly help the researcher to deduce the students' level of language use, mainly the notions of cultural awareness, politeness and appropriateness that are maintained in the present hypothetical scenarios. Furthermore, the researcher would have the tendency to reach trustworthy outcomes and justifications through comparing and contrasting the responses yielded by the participants.

With reference to the already obtained and analyzed data, the participants demonstrated a good and clear understanding of language use through the different hypothetical situations presented in both sections of the DCT. Their answers in the first section of different daily situations "Greetings, Refusals, Complaints, Request, Apology" were satisfactory, the majority of the students seemed to understand the different situations and could clearly select the most appropriate statement of the given answers in each situation; few of them did not perform well, that maybe due to their low language level or they were not interested in taking the DCT. Moreover, the last section of the questionnaire was a confirmation for the preceding section, the vast majority in this section answered correctly and could clearly describe what is appropriate and what is not in the

different situations of this section, giving relevant justifications to each answer. These results collected from both sections of the DCT helped the researcher to deduce that the majority of master one students have got a satisfactory level of language understanding and language awareness, especially when it comes to the notion of politeness and appropriateness, they displayed an acceptable language performance.

This consequence may contradict with what the researcher is seeking to investigate, which is the EFL students' communicative competence, but it represents the basis of the final conclusion of this research. Using the DCT, the researcher could depict a clear image about the students' level of language understanding and language use which was suitable; however, concerning their level of communicative competence, we conducted an interview with their teachers in order to analyze the problem from another perspective and reach more valid and authentic conclusion.

## **6.2.The Interview**

The data gathered by this research tool are based on the personal responses of each teacher, taking into consideration their level as teachers, work experience, and field of expertise.

### **6.2.1. Participant 01:**

- **Degree & work experience :**

Twelve (12) years of teaching, Phd degree.

- **M1 students english level and Their communicative competence**

The general level of the students is not satisfactory level, only few students who are good ones, and only those few who usually interact most of time, the rest are passive, they just receive.

- **Are they qualified enough to conduct a conversation ?**

Depends on the atmosphere, they can't sustain a conversation in a situation of anxiety like in exams, they experience shyness, stress, anxiety ; however, if they are in a friendly environment or with a friendly teacher, things change, some of them can interact very accurately, they have the potential.

- **Do they often make pragmatic failure when they try interact with you ?**

Sometimes they fail to address the teacher properly, maybe cause they couldn't understand what they were asked to do, the pragmatic failure exists somewhere, even with excellent students they experience that to some degree.

- **Do you face any difficulties making them understand your lectures ?**

Yes, Sometimes you have to repeat some points again and again, though it is not a difficult point.

- **What do you think the reasons are behind these failures & difficulties ?**

Lack of linguistic competence mainly, no sufficient background about the topic, maybe the fault of the teacher for not informing them ahead, also maybe due to the lack of exposure to the target language & language practice

- **Do you think instructional material should be adapted or somehow be edited?**

It should be adjusted to the needs & levels of learners, and to the objective itself, some things are no use for learners

- **What are the possible implications you think can be implemented ?**

Reinforce the classroom practice, assignments, and regular tests, so that the students will feel they are in a field of practice. Also, implementing workshops within teaching is effective to get the students more involved.

- **Anything to add or comment**

The admission to master level should be selective, i.e. ; only for those who are good enough and competent.

### **6.2.2. Participant 02 :**

- **Degree & work experience**

Magister degree, preparing PhD about the oral communication strategies, eleven (11) years of teaching experience at university level.

- **M1 students english level and Their communicative competence**

Only few are good students, the rest are not competent enough. Students struggle to communicate in class, they are not good at all, they encounter many difficulties at different levels, pronunciation, oral strategies, some linguistic terms

- **Are they qualified enough to conduct a conversation ?**

They cannot ensure the continuity of the conversation, unless they are given enough time.

- **Do they often make pragmatic failure when they try interact with you ?**

Almost all the students fail to address, pragmatically speaking they are not good enough.

- **Do you face any difficulties making them understand your lectures ?**

Yes, in some cases, it is quite difficult for them to grasp the idea, and you have to simplify and repeat things for many times, maybe associate the first language to make them understand.

- **What do you think the reasons are behind these failures & difficulties ?**

They are very attached to their mother tongue & culture, lack of exposure to the real context of the target language

- **Do you think instructional material should be adapted or somehow be edited ?**

Teachers should be flexible enough in teaching to meet with the students' needs and interests, taking into consideration their language level, not strictly follow the instructional material.

- **What are the possible implications you think can be implemented ?**

Pragmatics is an important area that must be taught at an early age, teachers should set objectives in advance, assign more activities that go with the students needs & interests, put the students in the real context of language & give them the chance to experience authenticity.

### 6.2.3. Participant 03 :

- **Degree & work experience**

Magistrate degree, preparing Phd, eleven (11) years of work experience at university

- **M1 students english level and Their communicative competence**

They are average in general, but it depends, some students are very good, they transmit their messages clearly, but the majority are average, or rather acceptable

- **Are they qualified enough to conduct a conversation ?**

Some are very competent they can do that, the rest are average, it depends

- **Do they often make pragmatic failure when they try interact with you ?**

Yes, sometimes they fail, they do not know how to use the appropriate vocabulary

- **Do you face any difficulties making them understand your lectures ?**

Yes, repetition, simplifying, and writing on the board, few of them do not grasp the idea instantly

- **What do you think the reasons are behind these failures & difficulties ?**

Not good level of English, they have difficulties with vocabulary & grammar, not sufficient pragmatic courses, and lack of cultural exposure; students do not use the target language among themselves.

- **Do you think instructional material should be adapted or somehow be edited?**

Of course, new teaching methods should be implemented, rather than the traditional methods and the teacher-centered approaches.

- **What are the possible implications you think can be implemented ?**

Administration should provide better conditions for teaching English, there is a lot of noise outside, no labs, the large size of students, very poor teaching materials ; the use authentic teaching material also is important in teaching

#### **6.2.4. Participant 04 :**

- **Degree & work experience**

Magister degree, three (03) years of teaching experience at university level

- **M1 students english level and Their communicative competence**

Acceptable at the general level, few are good, the vast majority are average,

- **Are they qualified enough to conduct a conversation ?**

Only few with assistance, the rest involve their mother tongue « Arabic »

- **Do they often make pragmatic failure when they try interact with you ?**

Yes, they do not know how to express their ideas clearly (lack of vocabulary & linguistic competency) and politely, they lack the general norms of conducting a conversation, and it has been discussed with most teachers.

- **Do you face any difficulties making them understand your lectures ?**

Yes, due to the content itself, it is new, complicated and difficult for the students, because some of them are not qualified enough to be at the master level.

- **What do you think the reasons are behind these failures & difficulties ?**

Some of the students are relectant & passive, they wait to be asked or pushed to participate, also there is a lack of learning aids

- **Do you think instructional material should be adapted or somehow be edited ?**

Slightly, we can encompass some new points or elements within the lectures, maybe by preparing the students in advance about what they are going to learn in master and adapt the content to suit the learners' needs

- **What are the possible implications you think can be implimented ?**

We can encorporate new approaches like learner-centered, learning toturials, reading assignments & workshops ; also, using learning aids is vey important ; build better teacher-student interaction space like blogs, emails, and things that facilitate the teaching learning process. Students need to depend more on themselves, not only on teachers.

- **Anything to add or comment...**

There should be a strict selection, especially concerning the average of specific subjects.

#### **6.2.5. Participant 05 :**

- **Degree & work experience**

Magister degree, preparing PhD, ten (10) years teaching experience at university level.

- **M1 students english level and Their communicative competence**

Few are very excellent, they manifest good level of english, the rest are considered acceptble. Most of them are good at speaking but when it comes to the written form there is a huge gap in between, they are not that competent, there is no balance; and since the marks are mainly paper-based, their general level is below the average.

- **Are they quilified enough to conduct a conversation ?**



Yes, most of them, like said earlier.

- **Do they often make pragmatic failure when they try interact with you ?**

Sometimes, some of them fail to convey the right message .

- **Do you face any difficulties making them understand your lectures ?**

It depends on the content itself, the problem is within the cultural differences that make new topics kinda hard for students to understand, so the teacher is required to simplify, repeat & make analogies.

- **What do you think the reasons are behind these failures & difficulties ?**

Literary works may not correlate with the students' cultural background, like dealing with taboos (sexuality, religion, politics) which may cause some teachers to be culturally and psychologically inhibited to take part in these discussions on one hand ; and on the other, it may make students passive to interact or participate in such topics eventhough these topics must be presented. Also the large number of students is a problem in teaching.

- **Do you think instructional material should be adapted or somehow be edited?**

Yes, it should be adapted to the use of new technology, like audio-visual aids, to better present the lesson & overcome a number of problems

- **What are the possible implications you think can be implemented ?**

Minimize the role of the teacher, make it more learner-centered and develop learners' autonomy; raising the students' awareness in the academic context, and lessen the interference of the original culture in the classroom context. The use of new patterns of reading assignments, adapted to the students' needs, and participating in workshops & discussions.

### **6.2.6. Discussion of the results**

The results obtained from the interview will help the researcher to study the problem in depth and analyze it from another perspective, giving the investigator the possibility to compare the outcomes that were generated from both research tools.

With reference to the interview, most of participants (04) have been teaching English for a sufficient period of time, from 10 to 12 years, and only one teacher who has been teaching for 3 years only; and they all have acquired high levels as teachers, one (01) got a PhD degree, three (03) are preparing their PhD, and one (01) has a Magister degree. When the teachers were asked about how they would consider master one students' English level, all of them said that it is average, and two (02) of them added "Not satisfactory, under average", making an exception for those few ones who usually exhibit good language performance in the class. Subsequent to this point, they were also requested to describe the students' level of communicative competence, the majority of teachers (04) described their students as incompetent, passive, not motivated, and average, with exclusion of course for those who are considered as excellent students; only one (01) teacher who mentioned that the majority are good at speaking, but they do not perform well on exam paper, another teacher added that it depends on the surrounding atmosphere, i.e., students can be more interactive if they were in a friendly environment or with a friendly teacher. However, when it comes to making pragmatically speaking, all the teachers agreed that the students make pragmatic failures so often when interacting with their teachers, even those excellent students experience this kind of problem to certain degree, and that they have to simplify, repeat, and use analogies to make the students understand the lesson or a particular point, though it is not that difficult, as they mentioned in discussion, which made the answer for the following question very clear, that most of students cannot conduct a normal spontaneous conversation by themselves,

unless they were assisted or guided by the teacher. The teachers gave several reasons for this crucial problem including the lack of linguistic competence, poor English level, no sufficient background about the topics of study, interference of the mother tongue, lack of practice and language use, absence of interactional norms, lack of exposure to the target language, lack of learning aids, difficulties at the levels of grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation; moreover, another teacher added that some topics discuss points that are culturally considered as “Taboos” which may turn the students, and even some teachers, reluctant, passive and psychologically inhibited to take part in the discussion, though such topics are supposed to be presented very openly and flexibly. For the question of the possibility of changing or adapting the instructional materials, all participants said that it must be adapted to meet with the students’ needs, their level, and to the learning objective itself. As to the last question of the potential solutions that may help overcome this problem, there were numerous implications suggested by the teachers, each according to his/her own experience, that can be implemented in the teaching-learning process, most of them focused on making teaching more learner-centered, develop learners’ autonomy, and reinforcing the classroom practice, assignments, workshops, so that the students feel they are in a field of practice rather than the traditional method where the learners only receive. The rest of the suggestions differed from one participant to the other, but all shared the same point, those solutions included providing better learning conditions like labs, audio-visual aids, reducing the large number of students and use of authentic teaching material would ensure better outcomes; furthermore, one teacher suggested that pragmatics is an important subject that should be taught at an early age and that the teachers must set objectives in advance and put the students in the real context of language so that they have the chance to experience language authenticity. By the end of the interview, two (02) of the teachers added that the admission to the master level should be

strict and selective, i.e., only for those who are good and competent enough, and that is due to the large number of the students and the low level of the majority.

## **Conclusion**

This research is mainly centered on investigating the students' level of communicative competence and what reasons that let them pragmatically fail when interacting with others. To answer the research questions and reach a valid result, the investigator has conducted two research tools, a Discourse Completion Task (DCT) with the master one LMD students and an interview with their teachers.

As it stands, the results gathered by the DCT proved that master one students exhibited a good level of language understanding and language use, their general performance was quite satisfactory referring to their answers on the different hypothetical situations given in the DCT. The outside language exposure the students get from the TV shows, movies, news and documentaries might have contributed in raising their language awareness; additionally, the universality of the notions of politeness and appropriateness seemed to have helped the students understand the language use in different situations and distinguish what is appropriate and what is not, that is for language understanding. However, in order to investigate their level communicative competence, the researcher interviewed their teachers in person and discussed the issue with them, all the teachers said that the students' overall level of communicative competence was under average, not satisfactory and it did not meet their expectations. Moreover, they listed a number of reasons that are behind this problem mainly including: lack of language use and language practice within and outside the class, poor level of linguistic competence, and absence of interactional norms. In view of this, we can conclude that the target students may have acquired a good level of

language understanding and language awareness, but still, their level communicative competence is poor and needs to be improved for which, as a consequence, they still fall in what we know as a pragmatic failure when it comes to real interaction. Therefore, the research hypothesis is accepted and; consequently, to develop the students' communicative competence and lessen pragmatic failure, the teachers should focus more on interactive activities and workshops within the class and reinforce the learners' autonomy.

## **General Conclusion and Pedagogical Implications**

On the basis of discussing and interpreting the results of the current investigation, it is argued now that the research hypothesis is logically and practically confirmed, and it is evident that Master One LMD English students at the department of foreign languages, English branch at Biskra University have showed a suitable level of language understanding and language awareness. However, their communicative competence was proved to be unsatisfactory and insufficient to overcome a number of communication problems such as pragmatic failures, which they frequently encounter in any normal interaction using their foreign language.

Consequently, this current research proved to hold much promise for a number of pedagogical implications that can be invested by EFL teachers to help the students effectively develop their communicative competence and lessen pragmatic failure. First of all, teachers of the language should encourage students to take part in classroom interaction and create a stress-free and less inhibited atmosphere for their students to avoid anxiety, shyness, and passivity. Moreover, teachers ought to put more focus on embracing workshops and reading assignments within the class and implement new teaching methods and approaches that would make the teaching-learning process more learner-centered. Furthermore, teachers must raise their students' awareness of language practice within and outside the classroom setting and put more emphasis on developing their linguistic knowledge since it is considered as a crucial part of the speaking skill. Additionally, students need to depend more on themselves and develop their learning autonomy, not to rely only

on their teachers and classroom instruction, since the classroom instruction is too limited to teach everything. Also, the students must be more aware about the interactional norms of conducting conversations in both formal and informal settings, as well as being more open-minded to the different cultural subjects that are considered as part of the foreign language learning. Further, Pragmatics, as a significant subject of study, must be taught at early educational levels and be given more time in the instructional programs for its importance in developing students' awareness in cross-cultural communication. Finally, not to forget the part of the administration, learning conditions must be improved and taken care of, such as, the use of audio-visual technology, more labs, dealing with noise and large groups, and most importantly as some teachers said in the interview, there should be a strict selection for the administration to the master level and be only for the competent ones, due to the large number of incompetent students and to the difficulty the teachers face in teaching them.

Ultimately, this present research provided insights about the level of communicative competence among Master One LMD students of Biskra University, their level of language understanding and the communicative problems they face; also, we supported these conclusions with several implications that can help both teachers and students improve this skill, hoping that the results of this research will be a rich reference for further studies and of a good use for teachers and students.

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# Appendices

## Appendix One

### Students' Questionnaire

#### In form of Discourse Completion Task (DCT)

Dear Students,

You are kindly invited to help us by answering these questions in the below "Discourse Completion Task (DCT)" as carefully as possible. This questionnaire is designed to gather data about the students' communicative competence and their pragmatic ability by providing different situations in which the students are supposed to answer accordingly. Your credibility is highly important for the validity and success of our research.

- **NOTE:** Please use a tick (✓) to indicate your chosen option

Thanks for your collaboration.

#### **Section One : Personal information**

1) Gender :

Male

Female

2) Age : .....

3) How long have you been studying English language ?

.....

4) How do you consider your level in English?

Very good

Good

Average

Poor

5) When people speak to you in English, how much do you understand ?

Everything       Most       Some       Little

6) When you speak in English, how much do other people understand ?

Everything       Most       Some       Little

7) What specific areas of English you want to improve most (choose only two)?

Speaking       Writing       Listening       Reading

(Turn on the page)

## **Section Two : Different daily situations**

(Some situations from this test were adapted from the study conducted by Yuanshan Chen and D. Victoria Rau)

### **1. Greetings**

Oscar sees an acquaintance, Bill, from a neighboring apartment as he is leaving his apartment building for work. If Oscar does not have time to stop and chat, what would be his most likely choice of greetings as he passes the neighbor?

- . Hey, Bill! How are you doing? What's going on in your life? We should catch up!
- . Hey, Bill! How are you this fine morning? Did you sleep well?
- . Mornin', Bill, how's it goin'?
- . Good morning, Bill! What's on the agenda for the day?

### **2. Apology**

Your daughter has returned home 3 hours passed her curfew...again. Angered and concerned, you give her a good talking to by saying, "I told you to be home! When I tell you something I expect you to follow it! How dare you disobey me!" Her response is most likely to be:

- I'm sorry, You're right. It won't happen again. I promise.

- I know, I know. But, like, it wasn't my fault! And I tried to leave but like, Stacy was talking to Blake and I was like, "Yo! Stacy we gotta go dude!" and she was like, "Geez just chill ok? Just like 5 secs." And then...
- I formally want to extend my apology to you as I realize the ill I have committed against you and can only hope for your forgiveness in return.

(Turn on the page)

### **3. Request**

Peter's lawnmower is not working, but he really wants to mow before his wife's parents visit tomorrow. He wants to borrow his neighbor's lawnmower. He and his neighbor, Phil, are acquaintances but not close friends. He calls Phil on the phone and asks:

- e) Would it be OK if I borrowed your lawnmower this afternoon? Mine is broken down and my wife's parents are coming tomorrow...
- f) Can you lend me your lawnmower this afternoon? Mine is broken down and...
- g) I'd really like to mow my lawn this afternoon. My lawnmower is broken down
- h) I'd like to borrow your lawnmower. Mine is broken down and...

### **4. Complaint**

Mike asks one of his employees, Andrew, to move some boxes from the delivery station to the storage shelves. Mike leaves to go take care of some other work and returns 2 hours later. When he returns he sees that Andrew did not do what he asked him to do. He approaches Andrew and says...

- e) Why haven't you moved the boxes yet? I thought you would be done by now.
- f) I'll finish up that work for you.
- g) Why are you so slow at doing your work?
- h) Were you planning on finishing that work next week?



## 5. Refusals

It is your mother's birthday celebration tonight but your boss tells you that you must get this project done before you head for home. You respond:

(Turn on the page)

- e) Oh, I am sorry. If I had only known earlier about this deadline. You see, my mother is celebrating her birthday tonight and we have a lot of guests invited and I am in charge of food. Is there another way we can handle this so that I can get the project done for you?
- f) Oh man, you can't be serious! I only work until 5 PM and you know that.
- g) Oh, I would really like to help. You know I take my work very seriously and I want to be responsible for getting everything done. I have this conflict though; do you remember meeting my mom? (continues to explain about the party, but does not give a clear "yes or no" response)
- h) You know I have a conflict with a personal commitment I have tonight. What possibility would there be that I come in tomorrow or put in extra time on Monday?

### Section Three: Awareness Test

Read the following nine communicative situations in which someone is making a request and a rejection for a response to each situation. Tick (✓) whether the rejection is appropriate or inappropriate to each particular situation and **justify** your answer

(Some situations from this test were adapted from the study conducted by Nguyen (2006))

- **Situation 1:** You are a student at a University. You are about to go home in your car. Another student, whom you have never met before, approaches you and asks you for a lift home saying that you both live in the same area of the city. *You refuse by saying:*

*I'm sorry, but I am not going straight home. There are quite a few things I need to do before heading home! Perhaps another day.*

- Appropriate
- Inappropriate

Justification: .....

(Turn on the page)

- **Situation 2:** You are a student in a Business studies class at the university. One of your lecturers asks you to pick him/her up every day from his/her home, saying that his/her house is near yours. You refuse by saying:

*No, I can't. I always have things to attend to before classes.*

- Appropriate
- Inappropriate

Justification: .....

- **Situation 3:** You are a student at University. A classmate, and close friend of yours, has been sick and has not been able to attend classes. He/she asks if he/ she can borrow your class notes. You refuse by saying:

*I don't want to. It goes against my convictions!*

- Appropriate
- Inappropriate

Justification: .....

- **Situation 4:** You are a research assistant to a Professor, with whom you have a good academic relationship. At the end of the of ce hours, you are going to leave. The

Professor asks if you can stay with him/her and help him/her with some papers. You refuse by saying:

*I am sorry, but I have an urgent appointment that I simply must attend. I can definitely help tomorrow.*

- Appropriate
- Inappropriate

Justification: .....

**Thanks for your time!**

## Appendix Two

### Interview Questions for Teachers

**1. Short introduction to the topic :**

- Some background questions (age, gender, level), Introducing the problem, the aim of the study, population (master one)

**2. Experience :**

- How long have you been teaching ?

**3. Opinions :**

- How do you see M1 students english level ?
- How about their communicative competence ?
- Are they qualified enough to conduct a converstaion ?

**4. Work experience :**

- Do they often make pragmatic failures when interacting with you ?
- Do you face any difficulties making them understand your lectures ?
- What do you think the reasons that are behind these failures & difficulties ?

**5. Personal opinions :**

- Do you think that instructional courses should be adapted or somehow be edited or changed ?
- What are the possible implications you think must be implimented ?

**6. Conclusion :**

- Anything you want to add or comment on ?

## Résumé

Cette thèse porte sur les effets de l'échec pragmatique sur le développement de la compétence communicative chez les étudiants de Master 1 à l'Université de Mohamed Kheider Biskra, et sur la façon dont le manque d'exposition culturelle et la communication de la vie réelle peuvent entraîner un échec pragmatique; L'échantillon de cette étude a été délibérément choisi pour correspondre à la portée de la recherche en supposant que les étudiants ont déjà acquis une connaissance suffisante de la langue. Afin d'étudier ce problème, nous avons émis l'hypothèse que si les enseignants d'anglais se concentrent davantage sur les activités interactives et les ateliers, les élèves développeront leur compétence de communication et l'échec pragmatique dans la communication interculturelle va diminuer. Pour prouver la validité de cette hypothèse, la recherche a été menée à travers deux outils différents ; un questionnaire pour les étudiants sous forme de Tâche d'Achèvement du Discours (DCT) et des entretiens avec les enseignants. Le DCT consiste en deux sections, qui démontrent des situations hypothétiques pour les élèves afin de tester leur niveau de sensibilisation et de pertinence linguistique ; Il a été distribué à trente (30) étudiants qui représentent 10% de la population générale de Master 1. L'interview a été mené avec cinq (05) enseignants du niveau master 1, les questions concernaient principalement l'expérience personnelle des enseignants avec les étudiants de Master 1 en mettant l'accent sur des points spécifiques qui servent les résultats de la recherche actuelle. La discussion des résultats a montré que la majorité des étudiants ont un niveau acceptable dans la compréhension de la langue, mais ils éprouvent de nombreuses difficultés lorsqu'ils essaient de communiquer et de s'exprimer correctement ; Ce qui, en conséquence, se retrouve dans un échec pragmatique. Pour conclure, cette hypothèse de recherche est confirmée et, par conséquent, plusieurs implications pédagogiques sont prévues pour encourager les enseignants à adopter les ajustements nécessaires qui aideraient les élèves à surmonter leurs problèmes de communication.