



## **The Effect of Explicit Pragmatic Instruction on EFL Students' Production of Speech Acts: Pragmalinguistic vs. Sociopragmatic Errors in Focus**

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### **ARTICLE INFO:**

#### **Received date:**

**2022.12.24**

#### **Accepted date:**

**2023.02.11**

**Print ISSN: 2251-7995**

**Online ISSN: 2676-6876**

### **Keywords:**

explicit pragmatic instruction,  
metapragmatic instruction,  
sociopragmatic errors,  
pragmalinguistic errors, gender,  
speech act production

### **Abstract**

L2 learners' pragmatic development could be manifested by their proper speech act production. Due to the existing differences among languages, errors in speech act realization are inevitable. Employing well-established teaching methods could help L2 learners overcome their problems in speech act production. This endeavor aimed to explore the effects of explicit metapragmatic instruction on Iraqi EFL learners' use of English requests, apologies, and refusals examining the possible intervening role of error type and gender. The study sample comprised 80 English major B.A. students at Al-Kufa University, Iraq. Within six online sessions, the EG received instruction through direct awareness raising and being provided with metapragmatic information. Data analyses indicated that explicit pragmatic instruction significantly improved the students' speech act realization. Additionally, while the female learners benefitted more from the intervention and a higher percentage of sociopragmatic, compared to pragmalinguistic, errors were amended after the treatment, the variables of gender and pragmatic error types did not have significant intervening effects. The findings imply that developing pragmatic competence via direct pragmatic intervention and metapragmatic knowledge awareness needs to receive much attention on the part of Iraqi language instructors, materials developers, and curriculum designers, as it could greatly help learners avoid pragmatic failures.

DOI: 10.22034/elt.2023.54597.2521

Citation: Afrouz, M.; Alkawaz, A.; Nejad Ansari, D. & Dabaghi, A. (2023). The Effect of Explicit Pragmatic Instruction on Iraqi EFL Students' Production of Speech Acts: Pragmalinguistic vs. Sociopragmatic Errors in Focus *Journal of English Language Teaching and Learning*, 15(31), 1-17.

DOI: 10.22034/elt.2023.54597.2521

## 1. Introduction

Pragmatic competence, as a major constituent of communicative capability (Bachman, 1990; Littlewood, 2013), refers to language users' ability to interact effectively in various social settings. More specifically, Kasper and Roever (2005) define pragmatic competence as the capability of producing and recognizing pragmalinguistically and sociopragmatically appropriate speech acts, which could be a complicated undertaking for L2 learners due to the existing discrepancies among languages.

Earlier studies (e.g., Lihui & Jianbin, 2010; Yusuf, 2018) suggest that, in speech act production, language learners commit a variety of errors resulting from semantic, structural, or pragmatic failures, which in turn inhibit speakers from successfully conveying their intended messages. Thomas (1983) believes while deficient grammatical performance might be interpreted as a lack of language proficiency, pragmatic deficiencies could adversely affect the addressee's perception of the speaker as an individual.

Employing influential methods to instruct the target pragmatic features could immensely help L2 learners dispose of their errors. According to Kasper and Schmidt (1996), one reason behind language learners' pragmatic failure is insufficient or misleading input provided by ineffective teaching resources. Therefore, providing learners with the authentic language via efficient teaching methods should be one main concern of language instructors. Input-based teaching methods, particularly explicit metapragmatic instruction, have been proven influential in pragmatic instruction, particularly when teaching speech acts.

Gender, as opposed to sex which is a biological entity, is a social concept that is possibly the most significant social division (Kakolaki & Shahrokhi, 2016). Alongside biological differences, males and females have a multitude of variations, which could be reflected in their speech patterns. Spolsky (1998) believes that "language reflects, records, and transmits social differences" (p. 36). Therefore, gender could play a critical role in how human beings carry out or even learn speech acts.

Although abundant research has been carried out on the explicit metapragmatic method to teach speech acts, the pragmatic errors that L2 learners, in general, and EFL Iraqi students in particular, commit when realizing L2 speech acts are rarely investigated in earlier studies. Indeed, the existing literature has failed to adequately examine L2 learners' pragmatic errors, their origins, and the influence of pragmatic instruction on alleviating them, particularly in the Iraqi culture. On the other hand, while a great number of research studies have addressed gender differences in speech act realization, only a few probed into how gender might affect the potential impact of explicit pragmatic instruction on learning speech acts. As such, the present research is an inquiry into the effects of explicit instruction on Iraqi EFL students' use of apologies, requests, and refusals as well as the role of gender and pragmatic error types in this regard.

## 2. Review of the Literature

### 2.1. Types of L2 Pragmatic Errors

EFL learners' successful pragmatic performance is closely linked to their pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic knowledge. According to Al-Jumah (2021), pragmalinguistic knowledge is the capability of successfully drawing on appropriate linguistic structures and strategies to realize an

illocutionary act, while sociopragmatic knowledge embraces the language user's ability to take social parameters such as social distance or power into account when realizing the social act. As such, two principal sources of pragmatic errors are learners' sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic defeats, the first of which arises from "cross-culturally different perceptions of what constitutes appropriate linguistic behaviour", and the second is due to "a linguistic problem caused by differences in the linguistic encoding of pragmatic force" (Thomas, 1983, p. 99). According to Thomas (1983), one chief origin of pragmalinguistic errors is transferring strategies or syntactic/semantic forms from L1. On the other hand, she believes that sociopragmatic errors are committed as a consequence of transferring L1 social conventions or the existing cross-cultural discrepancies between the two languages (i.e., L1 and the target language). Liu (2004) refers to pragmalinguistic errors as language-related defeats, which are originated from "differences in the linguistic encoding of pragmatic force", and sociopragmatic errors as culture- or society-related. Such errors were resulted from "cross-culturally different perceptions of what constitutes appropriate linguistic behavior" (p. 16).

Scarce attention has been dedicated to the type of pragmatic errors English learners commit and the roots of pragmatic deficiencies. Lihui and Jianbin (2010) probed into the errors which Chinese EFL students commonly make in cross-cultural interactions. They identified four principal causes of pragmatic failure in the learners' written performance, namely "cultural difference, negative pragmatic transfer, teaching-induced errors, and foreigners' tolerance towards Chinese speakers' pragmatic failure" (p. 50).

In an elaborate study on common Arab EFL learners' pragmalinguistic errors, Yusuf (2018) examined the essays written by 92 Egyptian intermediate and advanced university students. She diagnosed six types of pragmalinguistic errors, namely "Erroneous Construction of Sentences, Arabic Construction of Sentences, Literal Translation Errors, Multiple-Meaning Word Errors, Near Synonym Errors and Lexical Collocation Errors" (p. 25). She deduced that most of the committed errors were the result of L1 transfer and lack of language competence.

## 2.2. Explicit Speech Act Instruction

According to Schmidt's Noticing Hypothesis, to learn the target structures, language learners are required to notice them. Learners' attention could be drawn to the intended forms via effective instructional interventions. By explicit metapragmatic instruction, learners' attention is directly attracted to the TL pragmatic properties while the pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic features are metapragmatically taught and discussed (Bu, 2012; Taguchi, 2015), which means the pragmatic rules are presented, and learners go through a deduction process applying the instructed rules.

Earlier studies manifest the beneficial effects of explicit pragmatic instruction in yielding notable and long-lasting results (Taguchi, 2015). Regarding the speech acts under investigation (i.e., requesting, refusing, and apologizing), Safont-Jorda's (2004), Halenko and Jones's (2011), Mohammed's (2012), and Derakhshan and Eslami's (2015) studies indicated that explicit metapragmatic instruction is significantly advantageous to EFL learners.

Gharibeh, et.al (2016) explored the role of explicit pragmatic instruction in enhancing Iranian EFL learners' production of refusals. The participants included 36 male and 68 female students. The results revealed the efficacy of explicit metapragmatic instruction. Likewise, Derakhshan

and Arabmofrad (2018) probed into 69 Iranian EFL learners' comprehension of apologies, requests, and refusals and found metapragmatic awareness-raising highly beneficial in this regard. The investigations undertaken by Farahian et. al (2012) on refusals as well as Rajabi et al (2015a, b) on requests and apologies, confirmed the strong positive impact of explicit, direct, pragmatic instruction.

Omar and Razi (2022) conducted a study on 42 EFL university students at the intermediate proficiency level in Iraq. They directly instructed the speech acts of suggesting and requesting by utilizing videos and TV series to the treatment group, while the control group was exposed to the intended pragmatic features in their textbook and did not receive the researchers' direct instruction. Their experiment had significant effects on the students' pragmatic performance.

### 2.3. Gender Differences in Speech Act Production

Earlier speech act studies focusing on gender differences have mostly examined how L2 illocutionary acts are realized by males vs. females. In the Arabic context, Alfghe and Mohammadzade (2021) found that female Libyan Arab EFL learners are more polite requesters and suggestion makers and use a greater number of apology strategies. Moreover, Abu-Humeid (2013) asserts that female Iraqi EFL learners employ more strategies to apologize. While Bataineh and Bataineh's (2005) study points to the gender differences found in Jordanian Arab EFL learners, Muhammed's (2006) research indicates no significant discrepancies in this regard.

In more closely related research to the present study, Harooni and Pourdana (2017) investigated gender differences in forty Iranian EFL learners' perception of polite requests in listening comprehension tasks. They found that female learners took significantly more advantage of pragmatic instruction in comprehending indirectness and internal/external modifiers in requests. Nevertheless, in an earlier similar study, Shams and Afghari (2011) did not detect any significant cross-gender differences.

The present research was an analysis of the impact of metapragmatic instruction on Iraqi EFL learners' ability to correct the errors they commit when producing English requests, apologies, and refusals in informal and formal situations, and it examined if the type of pragmatic error or learners' gender could play a role in this regard. As such, the following research questions were addressed:

RQ1. Does explicit pragmatic instruction have any significant effect on Iraqi EFL students' production of apologies, requests, and refusals?

RQ2. Does the type of pragmatic errors (pragmalinguistic vs. sociopragmatic errors) play any significant role in error corrections made by Iraqi EFL students after receiving explicit instruction on producing apologies, requests, and refusals?

RQ3. Does gender play any significant role in error corrections made by Iraqi EFL students after receiving explicit instruction on producing apologies, requests, and refusals?

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Participants

The sample examined in this research was comprised of 80 male and female Iraqi EFL students. They were selected from English major B.A. students at Al Kufa University via convenience



sampling method. The learners were placed into two groups representing the EG (N=43) and CG (N=37).

### **3.2. Instruments**

#### **3.2.1. Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT)**

The OQPT, an English standard placement test, is a commonly used proficiency test acceptable in terms of validity and reliability. The test was employed to guarantee the participants' homogeneity. It included 60 multiple-choice questions. Consequently, the test takers' answers were graded on a scale of 60 points. The learners who scored 2 SD below and above the mean were selected to be invited to take part in the research.

#### **3.2.2. Written Discourse Completion Test (WDCT)**

AWDCT adapted from Farahian et.al (2012), Valipour and Jadidi's (2014) and Tajeddin and Tayebipour's (2015) studies was utilized to evaluate the learners' production of apologies, refusals, and requests in informal and formal situations. The test contained nine open-ended items (3 items for each speech act) varying in terms of social parameters (i.e., relative social power/distance). The respondents were required to write life-like answers for each of the provided situations. The content and appropriateness of the test were checked and validated by three experts in English teaching. The inter-rater reliability for the WDCT equalled 0.96. The test is presented in Appendix.

### **3.3. Teaching Materials**

The materials the researchers drew on to instruct the EG embraced a PowerPoint file accompanied by some YouTube BBC learning videos aiding the instructor to metapragmatically teach the target speech acts.

### **3.4. Procedure**

Because of the Coronavirus (Covid-19) outbreak, the tests and treatment were administered online. Firstly, 127 EFL learners received the OQPT via email and sent (emailed) back their responses to one of the researchers (the instructor). Next, 89 students were selected to be included in the groups under study. After taking the pre-WDCT, the experimental group was instructed within six online sessions. Next, the CG and EG took the DCT for the second time as their post-test. Finally, the performance of 80 learners who had sent their responses and attended every teaching session was analyzed.

The EG participated in six two-hour online sessions via Free Conference Call. Every two sessions, one of the speech acts was explicitly instructed through a PowerPoint file prepared by the researchers and a number of YouTube BBC learning videos. Each speech act was defined, explained, and practiced by presenting a variety of examples and activities to get the learners' attention toward the target forms. In addition, the sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic aspects of the presented speech acts in the videos were discussed. Ultimately, the participants took part in a communicative task. The instructor used the learners' L1 (i.e., Iraqi Arabic) whenever necessary to make sure of the learners' comprehension.

One of the researchers and an EFL instructor scrutinized, judged, rated, and coded the data based on the taxonomies of request strategies by Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) as well as Trosborg (1995), refusal strategies by Beebe et.al (1990), and apology strategies by (Olshtain & Cohen, 1983). It is worth mentioning that the raters consulted three Australian and two British

native speakers in the course of data coding. In the primary data analysis, four types of errors inhibiting the test takers from intelligibly conveying their messages were diagnosed, namely pragmalinguistic, sociopragmatic (categorized based on Thomas' (1983) and Liu's (2004) definitions), semantic, and syntactic errors. The codes 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 were allocated to appropriate, pragmalinguistically erroneous, sociopragmatically erroneous, semantically erroneous, syntactically erroneous, and missing responses, respectively. The data were classified and compared based on the identified error types, although only pragmatic errors were the major interest of the study.

#### 4. Results

##### 4.1. Analysis of the Results related to the First Null Hypothesis

The first null hypothesis is as follows:

H01. Explicit pragmatic instruction does not have any significant effect on Iraqi EFL students' production of apologies, requests, and refusals.

The mean scores of the groups in the pre-WDCT and post-WDCT are reported in Table 1. The total score equals 9.

**Table 1.** The CG's and EG's Pragmatic Performance prior to and after the Treatment

Group	Test	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
CG	Pre-test	4.97	1.443	37
	Post-test	4.38	1.255	37
EG	Pre-test	4.58	1.735	43
	Post-test	6.09	1.087	43

As illustrated in Table 1, while the CG's performance deteriorated in the post-WDCT, the EG's had a 1.51 rise. To examine the statistical significance of the observed changes, an ANCOVA was run, controlling for the pre-test impact. The outcome of the test is tabulated in the following.

**Table 2.** Tests of Between-Subjects Effects (WDCT results)

Dependent Variable: Post-test

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Observed Power
Corrected Model	62.103	2	31.051	23.281	.000	.377	1.000
Intercept	167.690	1	167.69	125.73	.000	.620	1.000
Pre-test	3.633	1	3.633	2.724	.103	.034	.371
Group	61.185	1	61.185	45.875	.000	.373	1.000
Error	102.697	77	1.334				
Total	2412.000	80					
Corrected Total	164.800	79					

As indicated in Table 2, while the pre-test impact was controlled for, the group variable significantly influenced the participants' post-WDCT performance ( $p=.000$ ). Indeed, 37.3% of the variance existing in the post-WDCT scores resulted from the treatment. Accordingly, the first

null hypothesis was rejected, suggesting that explicit pragmatic instruction significantly affected Iraqi EFL students' production of apologies, requests, and refusals. Figure 1 was drawn to visually represent the groups' pre- and post-WDCT mean scores and to have a clear picture of the results.

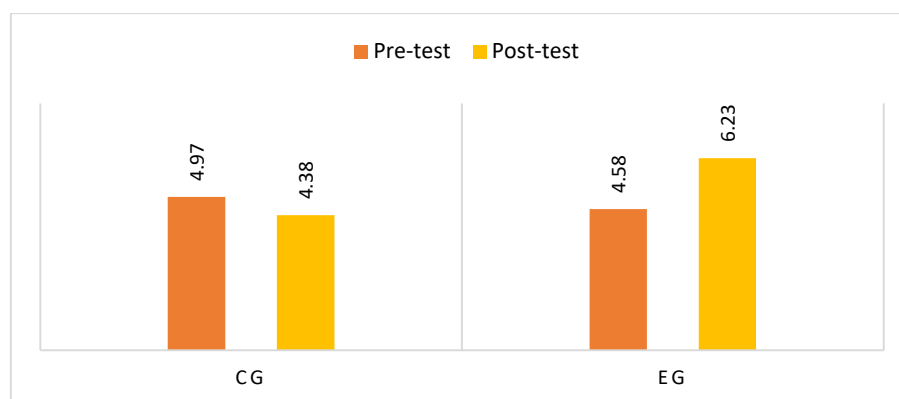


Figure 1. The Groups' Performance prior to and after the Treatment

#### 4.2. Analysis of the Results related to the Second Null Hypothesis

The second null hypothesis states that:

H02. The type of pragmatic errors (pragmalinguistic vs. sociopragmatic errors) does not play any significant role in error corrections made by Iraqi EFL students after receiving explicit instruction on producing apologies, requests, and refusals.

In order to determine to what extent each error type reduced after the treatment, the groups' errors and appropriate responses prior to and after the experiment were counted and are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3.** The participants' Responses to the WDCT prior to and after the Treatment

Group	Test	Appropriate	Errors				Missing	Total
			Pragm...	Socio...	Seman...	Gramm.		
CG	Pre	184 (55.26%)	32 (9.61%)	38 (11.41%)	76 (22.82%)	0	3 (.9%)	333
	Post	162 (48.64%)	26 (7.81%)	57 (17.12%)	86 (25.83%)	2 (0.6%)	0	333
EG	Pre	197 (50.91%)	26 (6.72%)	70 (18.09%)	89 (22.98%)	1 (0.26%)	4 (1.04%)	387
	Post	262 (67.7%)	16 (4.13%)	32 (8.27%)	69 (17.83%)	2 (0.52%)	6 (1.55%)	387

As indicated in Table 3, the pragmalinguistic errors decreased by 1.8% and 2.59% in the CG and EG, respectively. On the other hand, while the CG had a 5.71% increase in sociopragmatic errors, the EG's sociopragmatic errors lessened by 9.82%. As mentioned previously, in addition to pragmatic errors, two other types of errors, namely semantic and syntactic, were identified in the participants' responses to the pre-and post-WDCT. While the semantic errors committed by the CG increased by 3.01%, the ones observed in the EG decreased by 5.15%. Finally, the major syntactic errors found in the CG's and EG's responses rose by 0.6% and 0.26%.

In fact, the treatment helped the learners dispose of their pragmatic errors, although to varying extents. The mostly corrected errors were sociopragmatic (EG= -9.82%), semantic (EG= -5.15%), and then pragmalinguistic (EG= -2.59%). Pragmatic instruction decreased the participants' sociopragmatic errors more than their pragmalinguistic errors in the post-WDCT. In order to examine if the type of pragmatic error had played a major role in error corrections made by the EG, a chi-square test was conducted.

**Table 4.** *Chi-Square Tests*

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.605 <sup>a</sup>	1	.437		
Continuity Correction	.340	1	.560		
Likelihood Ratio	.598	1	.439		
Fisher's Exact Test				.444	.278
Linear-by-Linear Association	.601	1		.438	
N of Valid Cases	144				

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 14.00

The p-value of 0.444 indicates that pragmatic error types did not have a significant impact on the participants' (EG's) error corrections. Accordingly, the second null hypothesis was refuted. Figure 2 demonstrates the rates of the groups' pragmatic errors in the pre- and post-WDCT.

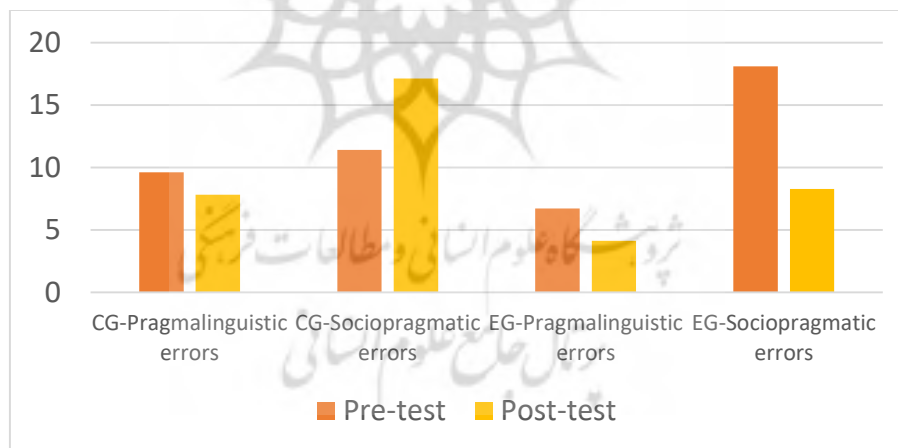


Figure 2. The Percentages of Pragmatic Errors in the Pre- and Post-WDCT

#### 4.3. Analysis of the Results related to the Third Null Hypothesis

The last null hypothesis is as follows:

H03. Gender does not play any significant role in error corrections made by Iraqi EFL students after receiving explicit instruction on producing apologies, requests, and refusals.

The mean scores of the male and female participants in each group are indicated in Table 5.



**Table 5.** *Descriptive Statistics of the Males and Females in the CG and EG*

Group	Gender	Test	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
CG	Male	Pre-test	5.00	1.414	18
		Post-test	4.06	1.259	18
	Female	Pre-test	4.95	1.508	19
		Post-test	4.68	1.204	19
EG	Male	Pre-test	5.06	1.298	17
		Post-test	5.94	1.249	17
	Female	Pre-test	4.27	1.930	26
		Post-test	6.19	.981	26

As illustrated in Table 5, while the performance of both gender groups in the CG deteriorated, the male and female participants' mean scores had 0.88 and 1.92 rises in the EG. It means the treatment had more positive effects on the females' pragmatic production. To test the significance of the existing discrepancies, an ANCOVA was carried out.

**Table 6.** *Tests of Between-Subjects Effects (the Role of Gender)*

Dependent Variable: Post-test							
Source	Type III	df	Mean	F	Sig.	Partial	Observed
	Sum of Squares		Square				
Corrected Model	67.202	4	16.80	12.911	.000	.408	1.000
Intercept	152.944	1	152.9	117.531	.000	.610	1.000
Pre-test	4.432	1	4.432	3.405	.069	.043	.445
Group	58.618	1	58.61	45.046	.000	.375	1.000
Gender	4.847	1	4.847	3.725	.057	.047	.478
Group * Gender	.341	1	.341	.262	.610	.003	.080
Error	97.598	75	1.301				
Total	2412.000	80					
Corrected Total	164.800	79					

As the p-value of 0.610 in Table 6 suggests, the last null hypothesis could be accepted, implying that gender did not significantly affect the error corrections made by Iraqi EFL students after receiving explicit instruction on producing apologies, requests, and refusals. Figure 3 is the visual representation of the male vs. female participants' pragmatic performance.

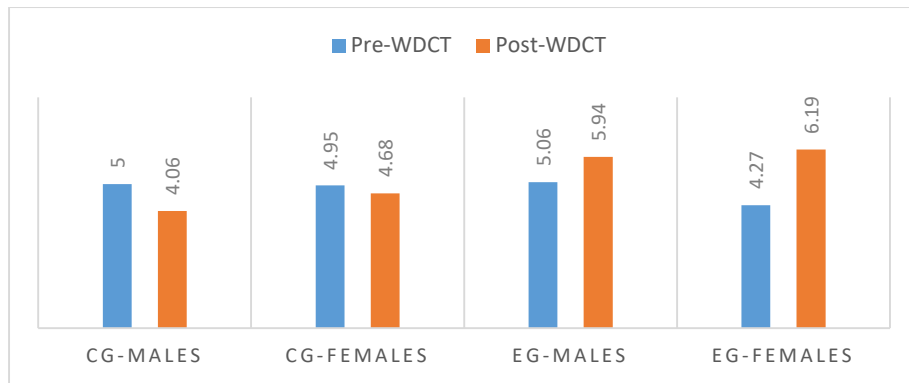


Figure 3. Male vs. Female Participants' Production Scores

## 5. Discussion

The first finding of the research was that explicit metapragmatic instruction had a statistically significant and positive impact on Iraqi EFL learners' production of apologies, requests, and refusals. This finding is in alignment with the results of the endeavors by [Safont-Jorda` \(2004\)](#), [Halenko and Jones \(2011\)](#), [Mohammed \(2012\)](#), [Farahian et al. \(2012\)](#), [Derakhshan and Eslami \(2015\)](#), [Rajabi et al. \(2015a, b\)](#), [Gharibeh et al. \(2016\)](#), [Derakhshan and Arabmofrad \(2018\)](#), and [Omar and Razi \(2022\)](#) all of which point to the teachability of pragmatics.

Explicit pragmatic instruction helped the learners correct a multitude of their pragmatic errors. The efficacy of the treatment could be due to the fact that it acquainted the learners with the mitigating devices and linguistic forms commonly used by native speakers to realize speech acts (i.e., the pragmalinguistic aspect of speech act production) and the L2 social norms (i.e., the sociopragmatic aspect of speech act production). According to the Noticing Hypothesis, attending to the target features is a prerequisite to learning them; however, L2 learners are not fully capable of noticing L2 pragmatic properties independently ([Ahmadian, 2020](#)). Indeed, receiving pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic explanations raised the Iraqi learners' awareness in this regard and thus enhanced their pragmatic production.

The second finding of the study was that although pragmatic error types did not significantly affect how the learners benefitted from explicit instruction, a greater number of sociopragmatic errors were committed prior to the treatment and rectified after the instruction. Scrutinizing the respondents' productions, it was obvious that the committed sociopragmatic errors mainly originated from neglecting the social distance between the interlocutors or the social power of the addressee in formal situations, being too direct, unfriendly, or even impolite in less formal situations, and using improper English phrasal verbs (mainly observed in the first situation of the request part) making the produced speech acts insulting as reflected in the following utterances.

\*Sir, I want an appointment to ask you about exams. (Although the request has taken place, it is not sociopragmatically acceptable as employing a "want" statement is informal and thus not appropriate in this formal situation.) (CG, female, situation 2, request part)

\*I can't, sorry. (The refusal has taken place, but the social status/power of the addressee was not taken into account.) (IG, male, situation 2, refusal part)

As mentioned previously, one of the commonly observed errors in the first situation in the request part, in which the participants were required to ask a close friend's child not to block their view, was the participants' inability to choose suitable verbs leading the produced requests to be insulting and thus sociopragmatically deficient. Verbs like:

- Go, go out, go away, get out, get away= to leave or depart (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, n. d.)

- Get off = to leave a place or to help someone to leave a place (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, n. d.)

\*Go away boy. ("Go away" means "to leave a person/place", which could be offensive.) (CG, male, situation 1, request part)

\*Get off here. ("Get off" means "to leave a place", which could be insulting.) (EG, female, situation 1, request part)

The pragmalinguistic errors identified in the participants' productions resulted from transferring Arabic strategies, structures, and expressions. Some samples of what the participants transferred from their L1 are presented in the following:

➤ Joking is a common strategy which Iraqi speakers employ when apologizing. The following sample shows that the respondent transferred and utilized this strategy.

\*I'm terribly sorry, you are sure that I didn't return it? (IG, female, situation 1, apology part)

➤ 'Invoking the name of God' was observed in a number of produced refusals, reflecting the Islamic ambiance of the participants' country, Iraq. It is a common strategy Arab speakers employ when realizing speech acts like requests, apologies, refusals, etc. (Hussein, 2018).

\*No, Allah gives mercy to your parents; I'm full, which means "انا شبعان" in Iraqi. (While the refusal has taken place, employing an Arabic utterance made it pragmalinguistically erroneous.) (CG, female, situation 3, refusal part)

➤ In the Iraqi culture, it is common to tell a white lie when refusing a request in situations like the first one in the request part, in which the respondents were supposed to ask a close friend for class notes.

\*Sorry, I did not attend the lecture. (IG, male, situation 1, request part)

➤ In Iraq, giving advice or even blaming the request maker is an acceptable and common refusal strategy when he/she has not fulfilled his/her duties.

\*Relay on yourself my friend, don't be exploitative. ("اعتمد على نفسك", meaning "rely on yourself", is a common expression that Iraqis use in such situations.) (IG, male, situation 1, refusal part)

➤ In Iraqi Arabic, things are either masculine or feminine, as reflected in the following instance in which the refusal has taken place, but the use of a masculine pronoun instead of 'it' made it pragmalinguistically inappropriate.

\*I can't give him because i keep one copy. (IG, female, situation 1, refusal part)

➤ The expression "كانت لدى ظروف خاصه", literally meaning "I had special circumstances", is a common expression that Iraqis use when they forget an obligation.

\*I really sorry I have conditions. (CG, male, situation 1, apology part)

➤ The expression "بدون زحمه", literally meaning "without crowding", is commonly used by Iraqi speakers when asking for something.

\*But excuse me, without crowding, can I change the request? (Although the apology has taken place by the expression "excuse me", adding "without crowding", being transferred from Iraqi culture, made the apology pragmalinguistically erroneous.) (EG, female, Situation2, apology part)

In addition to the observed pragmatic errors, a multitude of semantic errors were found in the participants' responses. The main causes of the identified semantic errors were the use of irrelevant or incomplete expressions/utterances, failing to employ proper lexical items or phrasal verbs, and producing meaningless / incohesive utterances, all of which could reflect the participants' limited language proficiency leading to deficient and erroneous speech act production, as in the following samples.

\*Hello sir, can I ask you please. (It is an incomplete request, as the request maker did not ask for an appointment.) (IG, female, situation 2, request part)

\*I ask your permission from you and your promise that this will not happen again. (Not only has the apology not taken place, but also the sentence is incohesive and meaningless, not being proper in this situation.) (CG, male, situation 3, apology part)

\*Can you step beside if you can. (Although the request has taken place, the use of "step beside" instead of "step aside", which means "stand aside/to move to the left or right with one step or a few small steps" (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, n. d., changed the meaning of the utterance making it semantically inappropriate.) (CG, male, situation 1, request part)

The findings of the present research reinforce the results of Yusuf's (2018) study in which using Arabic structures and literal translation of Arabic expressions, among other factors, were found as two main sources of Arab EFL learners' pragmalinguistic errors. Additionally, they support Lihui and Jianbin's (2010) study in which L1 influence was regarded as one of the major causes of pragmatic defeat. In the current research, invoking the name of God or swearing to God was detected as a common refusal strategy utilized by the Iraqi EFL students reflecting the Islamic culture of this country. This is an Arabic refusal strategy that Abdel-Jawad (2000), Hussein (2018), and Turki, Juma'a, and Al-Kubaisy (2020) also found in their studies.

The higher frequency of sociopragmatic errors could be ascribed to the differences between the learners' L1 and the TL cultures, the students' unawareness of the existing cultural discrepancies, and the impact of their L1 culture. Not only English speaking and Arabic speaking countries have different cultures and social conventions but also, as Sattar, Lah, and Suleiman (2010) also assert, Iraqi speakers are culturally different from speakers in other Arab countries. As a matter of fact, Iraqis are more direct in their interactions, even in formal situations. Al-Issa's (1998) and Stevens' (1993) studies also indicate that compared to English natives, Arab native speakers resort to less mitigation and employ fewer mitigating devices in producing the speech



act of refusal. Similarly, Nelson et.al (2002) found that Egyptians use more direct strategies in refusal making compared to American native speakers.

Additionally, the restricted language proficiency and L2 experience of the participants could lead to committing not only a large number of sociopragmatic errors but also numerous major semantic errors. Indeed, the participants did not have sufficient knowledge of L2 proper linguistic forms, particularly English phrasal verbs, hedging devices, or more polite linguistic structures to prevent social breakdowns. Earlier studies (e.g., Maeshiba, et. al 1996) also suggest that language proficiency plays a paramount role in speech act production and proficient learners perform better as they possess more linguistic tools to produce more polite and native-like illocutionary acts.

The last finding of the present research was that while the female learners in the EG benefitted more from explicit instruction than the male students, the identified difference was not statistically significant. This opposes the results of Harooni and Pourdana's (2017) study while supports Shams and Afghari's (2011) research findings, suggesting that, regardless of the learners' gender, metapragmatic instruction positively affects both the male and female EFL learners' speech act knowledge.

## 6. Conclusion

The present research suggested that explicit instruction could be a highly beneficial method to teach speech acts to EFL students, and it could be adopted when instructing pragmatics to both males and females despite the many differences between these two social divisions. The study also indicated that Iraqi EFL learners commit sociopragmatic errors more often than pragmatolinguistic errors when producing apologies, requests, and refusals and rectify a higher percentage of sociopragmatic errors when being explicitly instructed as metapragmatic instruction raises their awareness of the L2 cultural conventions.

The results of the present research are enlightening as little is known about the pragmatolinguistic and sociopragmatic errors which EFL learners commit and their origins. The study findings not only expand SLA researchers' knowledge in this area but also have some implications for L2 instructors. Language teachers could raise the efficiency of their instruction by providing metapragmatic explanation regarding the target culture, its conventions, the existing discrepancies between L1 and L2 cultures, the social dynamics to be considered in informal and formal situations, and the linguistic forms demanded to express pragmatic intentions, avoid communication breakdowns, and transfer less from L1. On the other hand, one of the problems causing a great number of sociopragmatic and semantic errors to be committed was the participants' inability to use appropriate English phrasal verbs. This points to the significance of aiding EFL students in learning phrasal verbs as they are not only frequent in English but also are complicated to deal with for language learners. Since the data of the study were gathered via a written DCT, the forthcoming research could evaluate learners' performance in more communicative situations representing real life. Additionally, they could take into account learners' demographics like their age, proficiency level, etc.

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## Appendix

### Written Discourse Completion Test (WDCT)

Dear respondent, read the following situations and write what you would say in each provided situation.

#### Apology

Situation 1: Suppose you are in Australia. You promised to return your intimate friend's book within a week or two after copying a unit of the book. Instead, you have kept it for almost two months.

Your intimate friend: "I'm really upset about the book because I terribly needed it for last month's class".

You will apologize by saying: -----

Situation 2: You are in a café in Australia. The waitress takes your order. A few minutes later, you change your mind about the drink and call the waitress for a new order.

Waitress: "Yes, sir, how can I assist you?"

You will apologize for changing the drink by saying: -----

Situation 3: Assume that your English teacher is lecturing and you are chatting with your classmate. The teacher loses his cool. The instructor: "Is it right to chat with your classmate while I'm teaching?"

You will apologize by saying: -----

#### Request

Situation 1: You are watching a volleyball game in your close Australian friend's flat. His child comes and stands just in front of you. What would you say to make her not block your view?

You: -----

Situation 2: You need to have an appointment with your Australian instructor to ask some questions about your final exam. What would you say?

You: -----

Situation 3: You are taking an English writing course at an English college. You are supposed to get prepared for the next month's test. You realize that the student (who is close to you) sitting next to you is competent in English writing. How would you request her to let you join her in studying for the upcoming test?

You: -----

#### Refusal

Situation 1: You are a student in an Australian college. You take notes in every class, while your close friend rarely attends the classes and usually borrows your notes.

Classmate (your close friend): "I didn't attend the classes last week, and I can't study for the exam tomorrow. Would you give me your notes, please?"

You will refuse by saying: -----

Situation 2: Your Australian boss (whom you are used to seeing) is going to throw a house party for the promotion he has received recently. He invites you to attend there.

You will refuse his invitation by saying: -----

Situation 3: You are at a close friend's house in Britain. After having lunch, he offers you a piece of cake.

You will refuse by saying: -----