

4. An investigation of the pragmatic knowledge of year one students of the School of Humanities and Law at Adama Science And Technology University: A case study

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Abstract

This research aimed to investigate the pragmatic competence of year one university students in the School of Humanities and Law at Adama Science and Technology University. Pragmatic competence requires being able to speak and behave appropriately, and being able to understand what others say and do according to the socio-cultural context in which they are used. The data were collected from 70 students learning in six departments in the School of Humanities and Law School. Three main instruments were used to produce these results: a discourse completion test, multiple choice discourse completion test and observation. The data gathered were interpreted using both qualitative and quantitative methods. The pragmatic competence level of these participants was found to be at a middle level. Generally, from a pragmatic competence viewpoints, first year students in the School of Humanities and Law are better at recognising what is given to them than produce the utterances practically in the case of speech acts, cooperative and politeness principles. The researcher recommends that students should have to practice a variety of activities in English to be pragmatically competent in daily communication.

Key words: pragmatic knowledge, discourse completion test, multiple choice discourse completion test and pragmatic competence.

Background

The ability to speak appropriately and communicate effectively in various settings is one of the decisive goals of second language learning and teaching. So, to achieve this goal, learners should be familiar with different components of language and how to use them. Pragmatics is the field of all those investigations which take into consideration the action, state, and environment of a man/woman who speaks or hears. However, this characterisation of pragmatics is so broad that it includes all studies on language use, from neuro-linguistics to sociolinguistics, and would preclude the possibility of formulating general pragmatic principles. Therefore, the term 'pragmatics' is the study of language use in relation to language structure and the context of utterance (Akmajian & Demers, 2000, p. 343).

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Brock (2005) mentions that in the field of pragmatics there is pragmatic competence, which encompasses a variety of skills in contextual language use. These include a speaker's ability to use language for different purposes (such as greeting, requesting, informing, demanding, warning, promising and so on), the speaker's ability to adapt or change language according to the needs or expectations of the listener or situation, and the speaker's ability to follow accepted rules; maxims of cooperation and politeness (Brock, 2005, p. 19).

Researchers indicate that even advanced speakers of a language face difficulties in collaborating socially, culturally, and conversationally, aspects of the target language in their daily communications. Hymes (1964, as cited in Fernandez, 2008, p. 1) states that the main purpose of learning a second language is communication. Nevertheless, many students are surprised when they realise that, in spite of having a perfect command of the second language grammar rules, they have difficulties at the interpersonal level when establishing a conversation with native speakers. This is because even fairly advanced language learners often lack pragmatic competence, that is to say, the necessary knowledge and experience to correctly use the socio-cultural norms of the second language.

Studies of pragmatic competence focus on how social situations affect language processes. Pragmatic analysis demonstrates how speech depends on who is listening (e.g. one's age, gender and socio-economic status), where a conversation is taking place (e.g. office, dormitory, retail store, etc.), the topic of discussion (e.g. politics, sexual desire, etc.), and the speaker's and the listener's goals (e.g. seduction, placing a bet, buying a car). Whereas speech production and comprehension studies commonly employ the word or sentence as a unit of analysis, studies of pragmatics involve strings of sentences in discourse (Jay, 2002, p. 270). Although pragmatic competence is very important for communication to be effective and efficient, no momentous attention is given to this part of language use.

The researchers argue that the principle of pragmatic competence with respect to the usage of English as a foreign language is a worthwhile inquiry. The researchers are also convinced that university students, even after a meaningfully long time of using English as a medium of instruction, still lack pragmatic competence in this language.

Statement of the problem

Human communication encompasses almost all interpersonal interactions, including those which involve verbal symbolism and those which are entirely nonverbal. This can even include intrapersonal communication when you plan "in your head" (Shames & Wiig, 1982).

Language use is an inherently complex and tedious task, and the complexity becomes twofold when it comes to foreign language speakers. This follows from the fact that the interpretation of language forms (words, phrases, sentences, etc.) does not base only on the grammatical facts of the forms involved: there are social settings that add to the language forms that speakers utter in their communication. It means that interlocutors do not interpret only the forms, they consider the

context too. As Larson and Segal (1995) state, the knowledge of language provides only the literal meanings of sentences. But there is often a gap between what is said with a sentence (fully interpreted in a context) and what a speaker using the sentence intends to convey. Pragmatics is required to bridge the gap.

Foreign language users are considered effective communicators when they know the words and the grammar, added on this, when they have a good pragmatic competence which is derived from the familiarity of the speakers with different speech acts, cooperativeness and politeness principles. As a result, non-native speaker pragmatic errors are less likely to be overlooked or forgiven by native speakers than are phonological, grammatical or lexical errors, and are more likely to be attributed to rudeness, arrogance, condescension, insincerity, servility and other negative behaviours. It is with this premise that the present research was planned.

English is a foreign language for Ethiopia. Nonetheless, the language is serving different purposes in the country, the most important of which is that it is a medium of instruction starting from high school onwards. Experience shows the researchers that university students exhibit severe competency problems in using English in general and in their pragmatic competence in particular.

While they are expected to have proper competency in the English language, the pragmatic competence level of students in Adama Science and Technology University (ASTU) appears to be low, and the researcher was convinced that this should be research supported. Research on pragmatic competence in Ethiopia, however, is very scanty, and this makes the present research a problem-oriented one.

Objectives

The research targeted the following main objectives, and it has both general and specific objectives.

General objective

- To investigate the pragmatic competence of first year students of ASTU.

The general objective has been broken into the following **objectives**:

- To explore how efficient the target students are in the different speech acts
- To explore the effectiveness of target respondents in the use of cooperative and politeness principles
- To examine to what extent pragmatic competence influences first year university students

Review of related literature

This section deals with a review and citation of different books and articles related to pragmatic competence. As in all other areas, there are some books, articles, documents and journals which were written on the area in question.

Pragmatic competence in the L2 classroom

Pragmatics has to be taught in English classrooms, whether English is learnt as a foreign or second language. Regarding this point, Brock (2005) suggested the “Four SURE Steps” as follows:

A strong case can be made that pragmatic competence needs to be a focus of classroom instruction, even in contexts where English is studied primarily as a foreign language. We teachers should not view pragmatic competence as simply a bonus that can be added on if time and student interest allow. Indeed, in order to communicate successfully in the target language, some measure of pragmatic competence in the L2 is a necessity. But how do teachers in EFL settings, where there are relatively few opportunities for students to use the language in communicative contexts, begin to introduce students to pragmatics in English?

*In answering that question, we suggest that teachers consider adopting the simple acronym S.U.R.E. to guide them as they help their students **See, Use, Review, and Experience** pragmatics in the EFL classroom.*

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.

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. This is the primary goal of language teaching.

Review

Teachers should review, reinforce, and recycle the areas of pragmatic competence previously taught.

Experience

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

Generally, pragmatic competence is essential for L2 learners to use language appropriate to particular communicative events, to use the relevant utterances necessary for being considered a competent conversant, and to interpret meaning contextually.

Why is pragmatics needed?

If the life of everyday language can be captured by any single domain of linguistic research, surely pragmatics must be among the top candidates for that honour. Casting its wide net around phenomena as diverse as intonational, morphological and syntactic variation with implications for social and interpersonal meanings, speech acts and their diverse realisations, discourses, coherence and cohesion, epistemic and affective stance, identity, and more, pragmatics has expanded our understanding of almost every domain that has been studied in the interest of shedding light on the complex nature of human social contact (Yoshimi & Wang, 2007).

Pragmatics emerged as an independent field of study primarily because semantics frequently fails to provide sufficient explanations with regards to meaning. While semantics caters for the literal meaning of an expression, it does not take contexts in which it is uttered into account. Pragmatics, on the contrary, recognises the importance of contexts, and thus reveals the meaning underlying certain utterances. To construct the appropriate meaning in an exchange, the speaker and the hearer need

to negotiate it, taking physical, social, and linguistic contexts as well as the meaning potential of the utterances into consideration (Cutting, 2002).

According to Dessalles (1998 as quoted in Brock 2005), the importance of pragmatic competence is in equipping L2 learners to use language appropriate to particular communicative events, to use the relevant utterances necessary for being considered a competent conversant, and to interpret meaning contextually.

A substantial and growing body of second language research has also focused on the importance of pragmatics. Much of that research has shown the need for specific and explicit classroom instruction in pragmatics. Tanaka (1997 as quoted in Brock 2005), for example, found that communicative effects of L2 learners' speech acts resulted from more than grammatical, phonological and lexical usage and concluded that L2 learners need to acquire pragmatic competence in the social rules of speaking in order to achieve communicative competence. Similarly, despite an excellent command of the L2 grammar and lexicon, adult learners often fail to use pragmatically appropriate expressions. If pragmatic competence is vital to successful communication, then it is also vital that English teachers help their learners acquire or at least become more aware of this important competence.

The advantage of studying language via pragmatics is that one can talk about people's intended meanings, their assumptions, their purposes or goals, and the kinds of actions (for example, requests) that they are performing when they speak. The big disadvantage is that all these very human concepts are extremely difficult to analyse in a consistent and objective way. Thus, pragmatics is appealing because it is about how people make sense of each other linguistically, but it can also be a frustrating area of study because it requires us to make sense of people and what they have in mind (Yule, 1996, p. 4).

Leech (1983) states that pragmatics is involved in problem-solving from the speaker's and from the hearer's point of view in addition to telling the meaning beyond the literal one. From the speaker's point of view, the problem is one of planning: "Given that I want the mental state of the hearer to change or to remain unchanged in such and such ways, how do I produce an utterance which will make that result most likely?" From the hearer's point of view, the problem is an interpretative one: "Given that the speaker has said the utterance, what is the most likely reason for speaker saying the utterance?" (p. 36).

Therefore, pragmatics is the one which creates life in communication. It is the only linguistic field that deals with intended and invisible meanings using the context and mood of the speaker (situation).

Pragmatic presupposition

In the everyday sense, to presuppose something is to assume something, or to take it for granted in advance but not to say it. Since assuming is not normally considered an act but rather a state, presupposing is best viewed as a state and not an act. Related to (pragmatic) presupposing is (pragmatic) presupposition: that which is assumed or taken for granted. Clearly, presuppositions are not acts, though they are related to them. This characterisation is pretty vague, but the phenomena cited in current linguistics under the label of pragmatic presupposition are quite varied, and our characterisation has at least the virtue of reflecting a common denominator among many different kinds of cases. To simplify matters, we will identify three main types of phenomena that go by the

label of (pragmatic) presupposition (Akmajian, 2000, pp. 400-401).

Similarly, Levinson (1983) states that pragmatic presuppositions are best described as a relation between a speaker and the appropriateness of a sentence in a context (Keenan, 1971, cited in Levinson, 1983, p. 177). Lakoff (1970, p. 175, as cited in Akmajian 2000, p. 401) posits that presupposition is a speaker's assumption (belief) about the speech context, and thus "Natural language is used for communication in a context, and every time a speaker uses a sentence of his language ... he is making certain assumptions about that context".

Keenan (1971, p. 49, as quoted in Akmajian, 2000, p. 401) argues that "Many sentences require that certain culturally defined conditions or contexts can be satisfied in order for an utterance of a sentence to be understood ... these conditions are naturally called presuppositions of the sentence ... An utterance of a sentence pragmatically presupposes that its context is appropriate". In line with this idea, Fillmore (1971, p. 276, as quoted in Akmajian 2000) also posits that "By prepositional aspects of a speech communication situation, I mean those conditions which must be satisfied in order for a particular illocutionary act to be effectively performed in saying particular sentences (p. 402).

Moreover, Yule (2006) proposes how presupposition is tested:

One of the tests used to check for the presupposition's underlying sentences involves negating a sentence with a particular presupposition and checking if the presupposition remains true. Whether you say 'My car is a wreck' or the negative version 'My car is not a wreck,' the underlying presupposition (I have a car) remains true despite the fact that the two sentences have opposite meanings. This is called the 'constancy under negation' test for identifying a presupposition (p. 117).

So, the pragmatic presupposition of a sentence is the set of situations that has to be satisfied in order for the anticipated speech act to be appropriate in the circumstances, or to be felicitous.

How do we know we are dealing with pragmatics?

According to Leech (1983), since pragmatics studies meaning in relation to speech situations, reference to one or more of the following aspects of the speech situation will be a criterion:

Addressers or addressees - A significant distinction can be made between a receiver (a person who receives and interprets the message) and an addressee (a person who is an intended receiver of the message).

The text of an utterance - Context has been understood in various ways, for example to include 'relevant' aspects of the physical or social setting of an utterance; context can be considered any background knowledge assumed to be shared by the speaker and hearer and which contributes to the hearer's interpretation of what the speaker means by a given utterance.

The goal of an utterance - A goal or function of an utterance is useful in preference to talk about its intended meaning, or speaker's intention in uttering it.

The utterance as a form of act or activity: a speech act - Grammar deals with abstract static entities such as sentences (in syntax) and propositions (in semantics), pragmatics deals with verbal acts or performances which take place in particular situations in time. In this respect, pragmatics deals with language at a more concrete level than grammar.

The utterance as a product of a verbal act - There is another sense in which the word 'utterance' can be used in pragmatics: it can refer to the product of a verbal act, rather than to the verbal act itself. For instance, the words '*would you please be quiet?*' spoken with a polite rising intonation, might be described as a sentence, or a question, or as a request. However, it is convenient to reserve terms like 'sentence' and 'question' for grammatical entities, identified by their use in a particular situation. Hence an utterance may be a sentence, instance, or sentence token; but strictly speaking, it cannot be a sentence. In this second sense, utterances are the elements whose meaning we study in pragmatics .

Inter-language pragmatics

Inter-language pragmatics refers to how non-native speakers understand and carry out linguistic actions in a target language and how they acquire L2 pragmatic knowledge.

With a focus on the pragmatic aspects of language use, much attention in second language learning has been devoted to second-language (L2) learners' pragmatic competence. This has led to the study of inter-language pragmatics (ILP), "the branch of second-language research which studies how non-native speakers (NNS) understand and carry out linguistic action in a target language, and how they acquire L2 pragmatic knowledge" (Kasper, 1992, p. 203). Many ILP studies have revealed that even when L2 learners' utterances are perfectly grammatical, they may violate social norms in the target language because of their lack of pragmatic competence. Thus, learners' deviations from native usage may result in pragmatic errors "in that they fail to convey or comprehend illocutionary force or politeness value" (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989, p.10)

Cross-cultural pragmatics

Cross-cultural pragmatics is the study of linguistic action carried out by language users from different ethno-linguistic backgrounds.

When English language teaching takes place outside one of the inner circle countries, the question of which or whose socio-pragmatic norms should be taught, if at all, is of great concern (Decapua & Findlay, 2007). The social-norm view assumes that each society has a particular set of social norms consisting of more or less explicit rules that prescribe a certain behaviour or way of thinking in a given context.

In different societies and different communities, people speak differently; these differences in ways of speaking are profound and systematic, they reflect different cultural values, or at least different hierarchies of values; different ways of speaking and different communicative styles can be explained and made sense of in terms of independently established different cultural values and cultural priorities (Wierzbicka, 1991, p. 69, as cited in Prykarpatska, 2008).

The study of differences in expectations based on cultural schemata is part of a broad area of

investigation generally known as cross-cultural pragmatics. To look at the ways in which meaning is constructed by speakers from different cultures will actually require a complete reassessment of virtually everything. The study of those different cultural ways of speaking is sometimes called contrastive pragmatics. When the investigation focuses more specifically on the communicative behaviour of non-native speakers, attempting to communicate in their second language, it is described as interlanguage pragmatics. Such studies increasingly reveal that we all speak with what might be called a pragmatic accent, that is, aspects of our talk that indicate what we assume is communicated without being said (Yule, 1996, pp. 87-88).

Nowadays, cross-cultural communication is more frequent and important in the world. In order to communicate with people from different cultures successfully, we must improve our intercultural communicative competence.

Second language learners must know if a successful speech act performance has been presented in a “top-down processing” manner (Kasper, 1984, p. 3): learners first have to recognise the extra-linguistic, cultural constraints that operate in a NS’s choice of a particular speech act appropriate to the context. They also have to know how to realise this speech act at the linguistic level and in accordance with the L2 sociocultural norms. Cohen (1996a) terms this “socio-cultural knowledge” a “speaker’s ability to determine whether it is acceptable to perform the speech act at all in the given situation and, if so, to select one or more semantic formulas that would be appropriate in the realization of the given speech act” (p. 254).

Lack of complete and appropriate knowledge of the social rules of speaking (pragmatic knowledge) may also lead to cross-cultural pragmatic failure. In recent years, efforts have been made to raise pragmatic awareness in the EFL classroom; however, acquiring these pragmatic norms is a difficult task (Charlebois, 2003).

Generally speaking, intercultural communicative competence is the competence and quality that successful cross-cultural communication needs in a target language.

Research gap

Based on the literature review, the following are the research gaps that the researchers observe:

- Linguists and ELT professionals do not seem to pay attention to research on pragmatic competence in particular and pragmatics in general in Ethiopia. The present research hence may narrow the absence of research conducted on pragmatics.
- In some of the research conducted on pragmatic competence or pragmatics, the researchers used less than 10 situations, but in the present research 20 situations were used.
- The method and tools used to conduct research on pragmatics have not been clear, but the current research is thought to narrow this gap. Research on pragmatic competence or on pragmatics is not carried out using only the qualitative method – a quantitative method is also used, as can be seen from the current research.
- Researchers in Korea and Iran mostly used the written discourse completion test for data collection, while the present research employs a multiple choice discourse completion test and observation, and this makes the present research more reliable.

Research methods

This section deals with the research design, population, sample size, source of data, instruments and data analysis part of the paper.

The objective of the research is to examine the level of the pragmatic competence of first year university students. Accordingly, pragmatic aspects of language use such as context, implied meaning, situation, abstract meaning or meaning beyond the surface meaning are investigated with respect to the awareness that the target group has. Therefore, the

research followed both qualitative and quantitative methods. The main sources of the data were students enrolled in the School of Humanities and Law at ASTU, using the instruments mentioned below.

The population of the study is students of Adama Science and Technology University. There were 319 year one students enrolled in the School of Humanities and Law. Out of a total of 319 students, 79 were enrolled in the Geography Department, 75 were enrolled in the Department of Law, Sociology, History and English, each of which has 42 students in its department, and 39 students were enrolled in the Department of Afan Oromo. Sampling was necessary, as it was difficult to conduct the research on the whole population. Although a large sample size is advisable, there is no clear-cut answer for the correct sample size (Cohen, 2007, p. 101). It may depend on the nature of the population of interest, purpose of the study, or the data to be gathered and analysed (Best, 2003, p. 18). Therefore, based on the above premises, the researchers used a random sampling technique to select 12 students from each department out of 319 freshman students enrolled in the School of Humanities and Law. Hence, the sample size for this paper was 70 participants. The researchers used the following instruments to collect data: a questionnaire on background information, a written discourse completion test, a multiple-choice discourse completion test and observation.

The researchers made use of the questionnaire on the background information to identify the extent to which the participants use English in their daily activities and the length of time they communicate in English, browse the internet, etc. This background information helped the researcher to elicit participants' attitude and interest towards English.

A written discourse completion test is a written questionnaire including a number of brief situational descriptions, followed by a short dialogue with or without an empty slot for the speech act under study. Participants were asked to provide a response that they think was appropriate in the given context. They were required to read the situation precisely and respond in writing to a prompt. Subjects were expected to give responses as closely as possible to what they would say in a real-life situation. Ahn (2007) states that the discourse completion test is largely used to collect data in the field of speech acts, cross-cultural and inter-language pragmatics, and that it has several advantages: (a) it provides learners with an opportunity for knowledge display that is precluded for many NNSs by the cognitive demands of face to face interaction; (b) it allows the researcher to collect a large corpus of data from many individuals in a short period of time; (c) the researcher can control different socio-pragmatic variables related to a given context; (d) the DCT easily produces replicable data and results that are readily generalisable (pp. 90).

The DCT creates model responses which are likely to occur in spontaneous speeches, and it also provides stereotypical responses for a socially appropriate response. The DCT is still better than other major elicited data instruments because its efficacy in administration makes it a valuable and necessary instrument in interlanguage pragmatic research (Nurani, 2009).

According to Nurani (2009), there are five types of DCT questionnaires. The first is the classic format. In the classic DCT, the prompt is ended by a rejoinder and/or initiated by the interlocutor's utterance. The second type is a dialogue construction which may be commenced by an interlocutor initiation. However, the rejoinder is not present. The next type is the open item-verbal response only. In this format, participants are free to respond without any limitation from an interlocutor initiation and rejoinder. However, they are

required to provide verbal responses. The fourth type is the open item-free response construction. In this type, participants are free to give verbal responses or non-verbal responses and are even allowed not to respond at all. The last type of DCT is the new version of DCT developed by Billmyer and Varghese (2000, as cited in Nurani, 2009). This “new” type is actually a modification of the open item-verbal response. The difference is that in the new version the situational background is provided in detail.

The researchers used the value label rating scale to identify the pragmatic competence of each participant. The value label rating scale ranges from *not acceptable* to *native-like* (not acceptable, problematic, acceptable and native-like) answers to the written discourse completion test. The researchers used three instructors (two PhD scholars and one MA holder) and his own experience to give a key (answer) for the discourse completion test so as to rate the respondents’ answers using a value label rating scale.

Out of the aforementioned five types of discourse completion test questionnaires, the researchers explored the first four types for this particular research.

The multiple choice discourse completion test consists of test items where the test taker is required to choose the correct response (the key) from several options. Most commonly, multiple-choice items include an instruction to the test taker and a stem (typically either a phrase or a sentence to be completed, or a question). The key and several distracters then follow in random order.

The researchers used observation to collect natural data occurring in real class situations and the use of the language by both the students and the teachers. The researchers observed four classes, each of which was observed twice for two hours in order to cross-check the validity of the data collected using other instruments. The researchers used only four sections, as only four English teachers were teaching English in the semester during which the research was conducted in the School of Humanities and Law.

Data analysis

The collected data were analysed in order to give meaning, draw a conclusion and propose solutions to the possible problems. The steps and methods involved in data analysis were functions of the type of information collected.

The data collected were both qualitative and quantitative in nature. Therefore, qualitative data were interpreted accordingly whereas quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics as it is appropriate for analysing the data. Moreover, tables were used to analyse the gathered data. Quantitative data gathered were also analysed using percentages.

Discussion and interpretation of data

In this section, the findings from the data will be discussed, analysed and interpreted. Along with the presentation of the research findings, research questions and the objectives are examined against the data at hand.

A questionnaire was distributed to 70 participants selected randomly from eight sections. Out of 1400 possible responses (70 times 20 situations) expected from WDCT, only 1160 responses were found to be valid for the analysis, as 9 respondents did not return the

questionnaires and 3 questionnaires were also found invalid; these were discarded from the analysis. Similarly, a total of 580 (58 times 10) responses were found valid for analysis from the MDCT. Hence, the findings in this research have been derived from responses from 58 respondents. Besides, as the questionnaires were pragmatics oriented, one must admit that there are no absolutely correct answers to the questions or to the situations. Nevertheless, answers which are very close to that of the native speakers are taken as correct ones for the questions or the situations.

This study aimed at analysing data in terms of speech acts, focusing on requests, refusals, and compliments as main speech acts that can be easily seen, and the cooperative principle in terms of the four most prominent maxims such as maxim of quantity, maxim of quality, maxim of relation and maxim of manner. Politeness, which plays a great role in pragmatic, was also focused on in the analysis.

The analysis in the study proceeded in three stages in such a way that each was groundwork for the next step. In the first place, questionnaires on background information were tabulated to help with the analysis of the multiple discourse test and the written discourse completion test which were analysed correspondingly. Besides, data gathered through observation were analysed in line with MDCT and WDCT.

Questionnaire on background information

The many-sided background information questionnaire took into consideration the participants' age and sex, the time they spend speaking English; reading English books, newspapers, magazines, fiction, listening to the radio, watching films, audio records, etc. Moreover, the average hours the participants use the internet to send/receive email, chat, make Skype calls, and their attitudes and feelings towards English language were included in the same questionnaire.

Table 2: Time the students use English

Average age	Sex		Time English is spoken per day	Time they read in English per week	Average time listening in English per week	Average Internet use per week
	M	F				
20	32	26	2.4	8	12.7	6.8

As tabulated above, the respondents are young, and more than half of them are males. These subjects use the English language only 2.4 hours per day to exchange their ideas with their teachers, friends, and with others. As they are first year students, the time they speak English per day may be the period they have per week (3 credit hours) for an English language course, because as the researcher himself is a teacher at ASTU, the average time given by the informants and the 3 credit hours are almost equal.

The time the informants use to read, listen and browse the internet per day or per week is not enough for these university students. For instance, the average number of hours students spend browsing the internet is 6.8, which is less than one hour per day. Therefore, we can deduct from the data that year one students enrolled in the School of Humanities and Law use little time to get information to enhance their English language skills in general and pragmatic competence in particular.

Table 3: Feeling, attitude and anxiety of the student when speaking English

Feeling & attitude towards English language				The anxiety when speaking in English language			
Weak		Strong		Very Calm		Very nervous	
#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
7	12.1	51	87.9	34	58.6	24	41.4

As depicted in Table 3 above, 87.9% (51) of subjects have a good feeling and attitude while using the English language. However, 41.4 % (24) of the respondents are nervous when they are speaking in English; the anxiety is not because of their dislike towards English, but it is because of their poor command of the language.

Data from the background questionnaire indicated that the participants of this study like learning English for different purposes. Many of the respondents learn English because of its worldwide importance or its international domain, and thus they need it for global communication with different individuals from different countries.

Generally, the students involved in this study have an interest in learning English, and they have a good attitude towards the English language.

Analysis of Multiple Choice Discourse Completion Test

This part of the paper presents the results obtained from the multiple choice questionnaire. Out of the expected 580 responses from this MDCT, 557 responses were given, and some scenarios were not filled by the subjects.

The analysis of this part takes into consideration speech acts such as an apology, request, regret, asking, refusal and advice. Politeness and cooperative principles are also focused on in this study. The number of informants' answers to each choice in the 10 scenarios and the percentage of correct responses to each item are shown as follows:

Table 4: The number of responses to each choice and the percentage of correct answers

Situation No	Choice			Percentage of Correct answers	
	A	B	C	# Correct answers	Percentage
1	39	11	7	39	68.4
2	23	2	32	32	56.1
3	4	50	2	50	89.3
4	7	3	48	48	82.8
5	1	2	54	54	94.7
6	1	9	47	47	82.5
7	3	49	2	49	90.7
8	27	3	28	28	48.3
9	33	22	2	22	38.6
10	2	4	49	49	89.1

According to Table 4, in all the situations (5, 7, 3, 10, 4, 6, 1 and 2) the subjects responded more than average, but in situations, 8 and 9, they answered below the average. Therefore, one can infer from the data that these students are able to identify pragmatic aspects like speech acts, as well as cooperative and politeness principles when given in written form.

Table 5: Correct and wrong answers to the MDCT situations

No	Situation	Correct answers		Wrong answers		Total
		#	%	#	%	
1	S1:	39	68.4	18	31.6	57
2	S2:	32	56.1	25	43.9	57
3	S3:	50	89.3	6	10.7	56
4	S4:	48	82.8	10	17.2	58
5	S5:	54	94.7	3	5.3	57
6	S6:	47	82.5	10	17.5	57
7	S7:	49	90.7	5	9.3	54
8	S8:	28	48.3	30	51.7	58
9	S9:	22	38.6	35	61.4	57
10	S10:	49	89.1	6	10.9	55
Total		418	73.9	148	26.1	566

Data in Table 5 above indicate that 73.9% (418) had correct answers and for 26.1% (148) wrong answers were given by the respondents. The fact that students can only easily identify common expressions in a given situation, made them respond below average in scenarios 8 and 9 which requested more indirectly than other situations.

Therefore, this enables the researchers to deduce that students' pragmatic competence is of intermediate level, because pragmatics does not only deal with direct politeness, but also with meaning beyond the literal.

Analysis of speech acts in MDCT

Speech acts are the main components and core issues in the field of pragmatics. Hence, we can say that there are no actions without speech acts.

One comes to understanding aspects of pragmatic competence in the realisation of such speech acts - one pragmalinguistic aspect and the other sociopragmatic. Speech acts are attempts made by a speaker to express communicative intentions in a given context and to produce a particular effect in the mind of the hearer (Ahn, 2007, p. 2). The speech acts reflected in the above situations are seen in scenarios 1, 2, 4,6,7,8, and 10.

Table 6: Speech Acts

No	Situation	Correct answer		Wrong answer		Total responses
		#	%	#	%	
1	S1: <i>Apology</i>	39	68.4	18	31.6	57
2	S2: <i>Asking for something</i>	32	56.1	25	43.9	57
4	S4: <i>Refusal</i>	48	82.8	10	17.2	58
6	S6: <i>Regret</i>	47	82.5	10	17.5	57
7	S7: <i>Advice</i>	49	90.7	5	9.3	54

8	S8: <i>Regret</i>	28	48.3	30	51.7	58
10	S10: <i>Apology</i>	49	89.1	6	10.9	55

The above speech acts: apology, asking, refusal, regret and advice are what the investigator thought are used in one of the ten situations listed under the MDCT. Among the five speech acts, the ones that are used in the MDCT are apology (68.4), asking (56.1), refusal (82.8) and advice (90.7), and they are already known to year one university students. These speech acts are analysed according to the descending order of their percentage as mentioned below.

The speech act of advice has taken the lion's share in the given speech acts taken from the MDCT. The majority of the respondents know how they can give advice whenever they need to do so. About 90.7% (49) of the respondents gave correct answers for situation 7. This may be due to the fact that the same idea is given in the respondents' culture when helping someone or when giving advice.

The second speech act given the highest percentage is apology. This speech act is stated in situations 1 and 10 of the MDCT. In most cultures, if someone old or young, a boss or subordinate, offends someone else, she/ he must apologise. For example, situation1:

You were given a geography assignment two weeks ago, and on the submission date you forgot to bring it. You give your teacher an apology.

- a. *I'm sorry, but I forgot the deadline for the assignment. Can I bring it tomorrow?*
- b. *Pardon me sir, I forgot the assignment. Shall I do the assignment at once?*
- c. *I have completed my assignment but forgot to bring it with me. I will bring.*

Choice 'a' best fits the pragmatic speech act. Thus, 68.4 % (39) of the respondents know how they apologise to smoothen the communication between themselves and the teacher. It does not mean that other choices are totally wrong; however, they are asked directly without being polite and with a high face-threatening act. In this scenario, the student(s) who forgot the assignment should have to speak to his/her/their teacher with a 'good face' (less face-threatening act) so as to make the communication healthy. Moreover, situation 10 is also about apology. In this scenario, 89.1% (49) informants gave correct answers (choice 'C' *sorry for interruption, today you are too fast*), and the students know how to apologise whenever the other person is engaged in some task. In this case, except 10.9% (6) of the students, the rest used the correct expressions to communicate with their teacher. Those subjects who took choices 'a' and 'b' are also not totally wrong, but their pragmatic competence level is lower. For example, choice 'a' *teacher slow* is pragmatically wrong because it is as if the students are ordering their teacher to minimise his speed or they are behaving as if they have more social power than the teacher, but they do not actually have that power, and it is a forceful type that is highly face-threatening. In many cultures, including the Ethiopian cultures, our listeners or interlocutors need our good face for communication to attain the anticipated goal.

The third speech act used in the MDCT is refusal. It refers to the denial of some request from the listener or interlocutor. As indicated in Table 5 above, in situation 4 'a' (*sorry, I do have something to do*) is the key and the percentage of correct responses from the respondents is 82.8%. In this situation, only 17.2% of the students do not know how to communicate one's refusal indirectly with less face threatening, and they tend to express their refusal to a request in a rather direct manner. The consequence of such direct responses by a few students may lead to a rough relationship with their friends. As a result, some of the students who are learning in the School of Humanities and Law do not know how to

communicate refusal without offending their friends or others.

In scenarios 6 and 8, the percentages are 82.5 % (47) and 48.3% (28) with key 'c' (*sorry for being late, may I come in*) and 'c' (*I lost a word to say to ask you for forgiveness*), respectively. As to item 6, many of the respondents chose the correct key; this may be because the word 'sorry' is a common expression and is simple to use. The researcher can attest this idea comparing it with scenario 8 in which the word 'sorry' is included, yet it is not the correct answer. More than half of the participants, i.e. 51.7% (30) did not get the answer; 27 of them chose 'a' (*Sorry, I'm late*) and 3 chose 'b' (*I'm Ethiopian*). Here is the situation itself:

You have an appointment with your friend from another dormitory. You came to the appointment place after one hour. What would you say to him?

- a. *Sorry, I'm late*
- b. *I'm Ethiopian*
- c. *I couldn't find a word to ask you for forgiveness*

Therefore, from this example, we can say that students' pragmatic competence level has two categories. The first one is that year one students are able to respond using common expressions or phrases like 'sorry' with friends or others (see situation 6), and they are good at using this kind of language. The second category is that their pragmatic competence level is lower when uncommon language forms or expressions are used. So, one can deduce that the pragmatic competence level of year one students the School of Humanities and Law is lower, as pragmatics is not confined to the literal meaning of language.

This issue is again echoed in item 2 of MDCT in which 56.1% (32) subjects got the key 'c' (*I'm happy if I have extra pen*), and 43.9% (25) of them answered wrongly by selecting other choices ('a' *I've only one and 'b' What about yours?*) which are not polite enough and cooperative in dealing with others.

Analysis of cooperative behaviour and politeness in MDCT

Cooperative behaviour and politeness are the main components of pragmatics in the study of language in general and pragmatic competence in particular. In this study, the investigator presented cooperative behaviour and politeness principles gathered through the MDCT instrument.

Politeness can be shown using different principles in the social interaction of a given society. These principles include tact, generosity, approbation, agreement, sympathy and modesty maxims. These interrelated principles are also used in this paper in order to determine year one university students' pragmatic competence level.

In multiple choice discourse completion tests, many of the situations have one politeness-indicating answer. This idea can be illustrated using scenarios 1, 3, 4, 5,6,7,8 and 10.

In condition 1 and 10 for example, the key is 'a' (*I'm sorry, but I forgot the deadline for the assignment. Can I bring it tomorrow?*), and 'c' (*Sorry for interruption, today you are too fast*) in which cases 68.4 % (39) and 89.1 (49) students used agreement and sympathy maxims respectively. The students use the agreement maxim to minimise disagreement between himself/herself and the teacher or to maximise agreement between students and the teacher. In the same way, the students used the sympathy maxim to reduce the antipathy

between her/himself and the teacher, or students used to maximise sympathy between her/himself and the teacher.

The modesty maxim is also used in scenarios like number 4 and 7; in this situation 82.8% (48) and 90.7% (49) of the respondents agreed to these maxims respectively. For example, in situation 4:

You are studying in the Department of Law, and you have an assignment to be submitted. One of your dorm mates asked you to go for a walk. How would you refuse his request?

- a. I've something to do*
- b. No, I don't go for a walk this time.*
- c. Sorry, I do have something to do*

The key is 'c', and the modesty maxim is applied for this circumstance. In the way to refuse the friend's answer she/he minimised praise and maximised dispraise to himself/herself because the second student does not know what his friend offered him. The student answers his friend using the word 'sorry' to maintain a friendly relationship instead of using other choices 'a' and 'b' which are direct and are higher face-threatening acts.

Therefore, one can infer from the above points that the purpose of politeness is to maintain a good relationship between the interlocutors for the future and to get further information. In other words, politeness is conceptualised as a good technique for conflict avoidance for these subjects who took part in the study.

When there is a need for politeness in a certain communication, one has to cooperate in order to perform the act of politeness. This is to say that there is a trade-off between CP and PP. Therefore, in the above MDCT, what was taken as a correct response for the politeness principle can work for the CP as well?

For example, in situation2:

Your friend asked you to give him a pen, but you have only one.

- a. I've only one*
- b. What about yours?*
- c. I'm happy if I had an extra pen*

In this case 23 respondents chose 'a' and 2 of the subjects answered 'b', whereas 32 of the respondents clicked on the right answer. In this scenario 25 subjects responded rudely without cooperating with their interlocutors. For instance, if we take choice 'b' (*what about yours?*), it looks as if you have a pen, but you do not want to give it to your friend. However, in choice 'c' there is cooperation in that although you do not have a pen, you are sharing the problem of your friend.

The cooperative principle is broken in scenarios 8 and 9; many of the responses were given out of the correct answers. Situation 8:

You have an appointment with your friend from another dormitory. You came to the appointment place after one hour. What would you say to him?

- a. Sorry, I'm late*
- b. I'm an Ethiopian*
- c. I couldn't find a word to ask you for forgiveness*

For the above situation, 27 of the respondents wrongly considered 'a' as the answer, and only 3 of the subjects preferred to say Ethiopians do not keep appointments; 28 of the subjects circled the key.

Here, choice 'a' can be the answer, but pragmatics looks to softer expressions than others; in this case, choice 'c' is more cooperative and polite than the other ones. In other words, the idea stated under choice 'c' tries to prolong the relationship between the two interlocutors through cooperation. By the same token, in scenario 9, 33 and 2 of the subjects wrongly chose 'a' and 'c', respectively while the key is 'b' and it was chosen by 22 subjects only. Choice 'a' is direct without being cooperative towards the other interlocutor, but choice 'c' - which is the answer - is indirect and the most cooperative of the three given choices.

Therefore, one can deduct from the data that these subjects from whom the data were gathered preferred using common expressions and literal meanings of utterances instead of looking at the correct answer from the pragmatic and semantic viewpoints. This tells the researcher that the participants have a lower level of pragmatic competence in this regard.

Analysis of the discourse completion test

The written discourse completion test contains 20 different situations. These scenarios times the total number of respondents give us 1160 (20X58) different responses. However, out of the 1160 expected total responses, 159 answers were omitted by the subjects, and 1001 results responded to are indicated below. All situations and the respondents' answers to the WDCT are categorised under four value label rating scales.

Table 7: Summary of the discourse completion test

VLR scale	5	4	3	2	1
Situation	Like native	Acceptable	Problematic	Not Acceptable	Total #
1	5	7	12	22	46
2	15	15	4	21	55
3	10	20	13	6	49
4	12	20	7	15	54
5	6	7	3	30	46
6	17	22	8	5	52
7	28*	7	7	2	44
8	3	25	19	6	53
9	2	25	21	3	51
10	12	13	10	18	53
11	9	18	15	8	50
12	1	19	20	13	53
13	5	25	15	5	50
14	5	27	13	4	49
15	18	18	13	0	49
16	32	8	6	7	53
17	15	20	9	1	45
18	1	16	18	15	50
19	13	13	15	10	51
20	6	23	17	2	48
Total	215	348	245	193	1001
Percent	21.5	34.8	24.5	19.3	100%

The above table indicates that the majority, i.e. 34.8% (348) of the subjects' responses fall under the "acceptable" category. This means that even if there are minor problems with the discourse completion, the meaning of the dialogue is still understandable/meaningful. Column four shows the number of answers with a problematic discourse completion, which tells us that the discourse completion contains mistakes that might be the result of misunderstanding with the interlocutors. On the other hand, 21.5% (215) responses indicate the subjects completed the given dialogues without error or their answers are similar to that of native speakers. The fifth column in the table summarises that a total percentage of 19.3% of responses are unacceptable due to a violation of social norms or due to a lower level of pragmatic competence.

The researcher preferred to take examples from each value label rating scale used to analyse WDCT for the sake of elaboration. Below are examples for each situation:

In the above table, 28 (63.6%) and 32 (60.4%) of the respondents respectively completed the discourse completion dialogues given in situation 7 and 16 as native-like responses.

You are on an airplane. It is dinner time. Iranian flight attendant who doesn't speak Ethiopian languages sets your food on your tray. You need a napkin (soft tissue). How do you ask her/him?
For this scenario, the subjects mentioned responses like the following:

'Excuse me madam/sir, can I get a tissue' {if the speaker on the plane is an English speaker they used this response}, and as an alternative, the respondents said "we would use sign language to get the attention of the attendant.

It was your 2nd day you heard that you scored good grades to join the university. One of your neighbours has heard your success and said to you congratulations. What is your response?

You: _____

This scenario was answered as follows:

'Thank you or thank you so much' and even a few used an extended form such as *'Thanks, it is nice of you to say so'*.

These responses are native-like responses syntactically and pragmatically as there seems to be no error in the responses.

In column 3, situation 9 and 14 are taken as examples out of the acceptable responses.

Two students who are dorm mates are walking to each other, and they are rushing to different classes. They see each other and say.

Student 1: _____

Student 2: I'm sorry; I have another class.

Situation 8, which 25 (49%) of the participants completed with an acceptable reply, contains minor mistakes that made it non-native-like, but the meaning is understandable and it enhances communication between the interlocutors; instances of answers are:

'Would you go out with me?'

'Can we go to library?'

'Shall we go to cafe?'

The majority, i.e. 27 (55%) of the respondents share a rating of 3 which is acceptable in

situation 14.

You want to request your teacher to give you your mid-term result. How would you ask him/her to do so?

You: _____

These are example responses:

'Can you give us our mid-term exam?'

'Teacher, can you give me my mid-term result?'

These responses are acceptable although they are not like that of native speakers.

Scenario 12 is taken from the group that received a rating of 2 as example.

Your father will bring you a laptop from Canada next week. You promised to give this laptop to your best friend who is doing on his master's thesis. You come together and say to each other.

Your friend: _____

You: *Don't worry; I will keep my word (promise is promise).*

This situation produced 20 (37.7%) answers with some problems, and below are sample answers:

'Would you give me the laptop for the research?'

'We do our work by that laptop when the laptop comes to us'

These responses for the given condition have problems as the first answer is requesting as if the one responding did not have any information before. The second response also does not match the completed response *'the promise is a promise'*. These responses are difficult to comprehend with respect to the given scenario.

In scenario 5 out of the 193 unacceptable total responses, 30 answers are shared by situation 5.

You are invited for lunch in one of your friends' home. You are very hungry, but you feel that elders should start first. What would you say?

You: _____

'Start to eat I'm hungry'

'Thanks for your invitation but I have appointment'

These responses do not fit the given situation at all, which categorises them under the unacceptable rating scale. The first response above gives the impression that the speaker wants to start without considering the elders. This is unacceptable in many cultures, including the Ethiopian cultures, because there is a violation of social norms, and the second response has no relation with the given discourse completion scenario.

Hence, we can put the data in the above table into two main categories: acceptable meaning, and unacceptable meaning. Out of a total of 1001 valid responses, 56.3% (563) responses are acceptable and can solve the problems of the interlocutors through the discourse completion dialogues. The total responses, i.e. 44% (438) out of 1001 have problems, which results in total or partial loss of meaning with the interlocutors, and this results in ineffective communication between the communicators. Besides, natural data gathered through observation were categorised under the unacceptable category, because respondents neither used speech acts nor cooperative and politeness principles when they were interacting with their teachers and classmates in actual classroom situations. They

were communicating their ideas directly, which was highly face-threatening.

Therefore, one can infer from this that the level of pragmatic competence of these respondents is oscillating between the two extremes (acceptable-unacceptable meanings). This means that the individuals fall in the value label rating scale of 3 and 2 are outweighing the other two extremes (native-like and unacceptable).

Analysis of speech acts in the written discourse completion test

Under this section, the researcher tries to analyse some speech act verbs used in the written discourse completion test questionnaire. Even though speech acts are reflected in most of our daily activities, the researcher wanted to consider some of the speech acts mentioned in the WDCT for analysis purposes in this particular study. Hence, scenarios such as 5, 6, 12, 14 and 16 are taken as examples for the analysis. These situations include the speech acts of inviting, asking for something, promising, requesting and congratulating, as indicated in the table below.

Table 8: Speech acts in WDCT

Situation	Like native	Acceptable	Problematic	Not Acceptable	Total #
5: Inviting	6	7	3	30	46
6: Asking for something	17	22	8	5	52
12: Promising	1	19	20	13	53
14: Requesting	5	27	13	4	49
16: Congratulating	32	8	6	7	53

In the above table, for invitation, 65% of the respondents' answers are invalid messages, and in this speech act 20% of the informants abandon the message. This means that a total of 72.4% (not acceptable + message abandoned) subjects failed to give correct responses for situation 5. The reason why many of the students gave unacceptable messages or abandoned the message is a lack of pragmatic competence, or they do know norms associated with the situation, but they do not know what to say or/and how to say it.

Regarding situation 6, 75% (39) of the respondents agreed to communicate with the interlocutor or they communicated with acceptable ideas. Therefore, the majority of the informants know how they should ask politely what they want. However, in situation 12, 62% (33) of the informants were unable to complete the given situation correctly; surprisingly, only 1.9% (1) of the informants gave a native-like response and this reveals that the students have low pragmatic competence in some speech acts, e.g. in this situation in which one makes a promise for future actions. Hence, the students' pragmatic competence is so low that they cannot cope with uncertain future circumstances.

In scenario 14, which is about requests, more than half of the respondents completed the discourse with insignificant errors that do not hinder the communication/meaning of the conversant. In addition to the 27 acceptable responses, 10.2% (5) of the respondents completed the discourse like natives and without any problems. These respondents came up with meaningful messages for requesting/asking for something from someone else, because the data provided above put this fact on the spot in which a total of 65.3% (native-like+

acceptable) finished the dialogue in the approved manner.

The last speech act mentioned in the above table is congratulating someone for something he/she has done well for him/herself or others. The respondents provided 60.4% (32) native-like responses using expressions like *'Thank you/ thank you very much'* or other similar responses. Hence one can figure out from this that first year students know how to react/respond when someone congratulates them.

Generally, from the above premises one can say that the students possess a middle level pragmatic competence in using speech acts, because they are good at some of the speech acts and they are poor at others.

Analysis of the cooperative principle in WDCT

Here, the researcher discusses the cooperative principle using the maxims, especially focusing on the maxim of quantity and the maxim of quality, and selected situations are included for analysis purposes.

Table 9: Expressions of cooperation in WDCT

Situation	Majorities' sample answer		
1	A: It is nice to see you B: It is nice to see you too	A: How are you? B: I'm fine thank you.	I've seen many times around and we are neighbourhoods
5	We'll wait till elders start	please may our elders eat first	please elders you can start know, etc.
7	Many said using sign language	Can I've a napkin?	
10	No, you have to return that first	no matter I'll give you, etc.	
12	Don't forget the laptop	You promised to give me laptop	you will give me the laptop
15	Please open the window	would you mind opening window	open the window please
16	Thank you	thank you very much	

In scenario one *'Abebe and Kebede live in the same village, but they only know each other by sight. One day, they alone meet on the way to school. How do they exchange their feelings?'* Many respondents violated the maxim of quantity in that they didn't provide the required information. As the two individuals did not know each other before, after they do the act of greeting, they should get to know each other's names. Besides, they at least have to "promise their relations", for they had been neighbours before the words/expressions of welfare were communicated.

Similarly, in situation 5 many respondents know that in the Ethiopian culture elders start to eat by blessing, using some expressions according to the respective norms. Nevertheless, the situation is given for the respondents to use expressions like *'it is high time we ate lunch', 'I'm sorry, to talk about the lunch before elders', 'I think we are hungry', etc.* Furthermore, other positive politeness strategies could be used, like beating about the bush saying *'you must be hungry; it is 1:30 pm in the afternoon. How about something to eat? Please'*. The maxim of relation is also violated in this scenario because respondents' replied

with unrelated utterances to the given conversation.

For example, instead of using the aforementioned expressions, the subjects used irrelevant utterances like *'we will wait for elders to start'*, which is not related to the required meaning.

The maxim of manner is violated in situation 7, in which many responses read *'using sign language or body language'*. There is ambiguity in such responses because what kind of body language is used? Body language by itself is a broad concept in non-verbal language. Moreover, the informants did not make clear why they preferred sign language or body language; is it because they cannot speak English, or is non-verbal language more powerful than verbal language? So, for these and other reasons, one can say that the maxim of manner was violated.

The maxim of quality is related with speaking the truth and the use of information that has evidence. In scenario 7 for example, the respondents did not suggest the evidence for their using body language instead of verbal language. Likewise, in situation 10:

'Your intimate friend from your hometown is studying in Adama University with you. A week ago, he borrowed 100 birr from you, and he has finished it. He again comes to ask you for more money, and you decide to give him another 100 birr.

Your friend: *It is my shame to ask you for money again. Please, would you lend me 100 birr again?*

You: _____'

The sample answer *'No, you have to return that first'* is false information which violates the maxim of quality. It is false because in the written discourse, the lender already agreed to give the additional one hundred (100) birr.

In situations 12, 15 and 16 the maxim of quantity is infringed. In scenario number 12, the information presented is not sufficient, for the reason that a person who wants to get a laptop from another person should have to use tactful expressions rather than asking the lender directly. For instance, one can say *'Dear friend is your dad arrived? Is your dad alright?'* This can be used instead of asking about the laptop, which may offend the lender or result in rough communication. The same is true for situation 15 in which the respondents use expressions like *'Please open the window'*, *'Would you mind opening window?'* and *'Open the window please'*, but this information is not sufficient in the given situation, since the respondents did not make clear why the window should be opened. We can add more expressions like *'would you mind opening the window? It is very hot in here.* The meaning is clear now because the window needs to be opened as it is very hot, so we need fresh air in the taxi.

The last situation to be mentioned is 16 in which a lot of the informants completed the discourse with the phrases *'thank you'* and *'thank you very much'*. The response for the given situation is correct, but the information is limited as the maxim of quantity is not satisfied. We can expand the response like: *'Thanks, it is nice of you to say so (congratulation).* The meaning of this expression is somewhat better than what respondents gave, as this one is smoother and has a more complete meaning. The data obtained from classroom observation revealed that violations of the quantity maxim is frequently seen in real classroom situations in two ways. First, respondents don't give the information as they are required, although they have something to say in their minds. This is not because they

don't know the answer, but it is a lack of pragmatic competence. They don't know how to use speech acts, or cooperative and politeness principles. Secondly, students are not using the target language during group discussions; instead they use their native language. This indicates that respondents have problems in using different speech acts to express their feelings and ideas to give the required information.

Therefore, the data confirm that the participants' pragmatic competence, which encompasses the cooperative principle with its maxims, is not adequate.

Analysis of the politeness principle in WDCT

This part of the thesis attempts to shed light on the politeness principle using some of the scenarios stated in Table 9 below. According to Jucker, politeness has become a cover term for both norms of behaviour and linguistic choices made in relation with the need to preserve one's face in general, that is, one's public self-image (Jucker, 2008, p. 120).

The data reveal that the informants used different types of politeness strategies. Expressions such as *please*, *excuse me*, *pardon*, *sorry* are employed frequently in the data to play the role of hedging or politeness markers. Some clauses are also used as softeners or a perlocutionary effect of an utterance on the addressee, probably such as *'if you don't mind'*, *'if you wouldn't'*, etc. Hence, some situations have been selected analysing the degree of politeness which the informants used to complete the discourse completion test given to them.

Table 10: Some politeness expressions used in WDCT

Polite expressions used	Situation								Total
	S2:	S3:	S4:	S8	S13:	S15:	S16	S19	
Please...		31	17	3	12	13			76
Excuse me ...	10	4	6	2	8	7		4	41
I'm sorry/ sorry...	22	2	5		2	6		30	67
Would you /could...		7	6	2	21	9			45
Would you mind...?		1	3		3	12			19
Thank you...					1		32		33
Total	32	45	37	7	47	47	32	34	

As shown in the above table, the expressions start with the word 'please' like in *Please go away*, *Please open the window*, *Please would you open...*, *Please read silently*, etc. In situations 3 and 4, some 31 and 17 participants used the word 'please' to show politeness in the discourse completion scenario, respectively. This is an indication that politeness is often used in the Ethiopian context to minimise face-threatening acts in communication. The politeness indicator 'please' is not only used at the beginning, it is also used in the middle or at the end of the phrases or the sentences. However, some subjects employed the bald on-record politeness strategy in which they did not try to minimise face-threatening acts. They communicated directly without using politeness, indicating expressions that have been mentioned in Table 9 above. Consider situation 3:

'Students are making too much noise around the office and disturbing the teacher. What will the teacher say to quiet them down?'

Some participants gave responses for this discourse completion saying directly *'don't disturb'*, *'you are disturbing us'*, etc. In this case the students used severe face-threatening acts (FTA) that make the interlocutors' communication ineffective and inefficient pragmatically, because our interlocutors need our good (positive) face in conversation. So, some participants are unknowingly using impolite expressions due to their poor pragmatic competence in English.

In situations 2 and 19, around 22 and 30 participants, respectively, used expressions such as *'sorry'*, *'I'm sorry'*, *'am sorry'*, etc. to reject the request. To make the idea clearer, let us have a situation with a high percentage of response (situation 19):

You are in your dormitory studying for tomorrow's civics test. A friend of yours is also studying in the dormitory. Your friend's pen ran out of ink, so he wants to ask you to lend him a pen. You have an extra pen, but you decided not to give him. What can you say?

Your friend: *Please, I'm happy if you lend me your pen?*

You: _____

In this scenario, 30 informants used an expression with *'sorry'* to reject the request. This means that at least more than half of the students know that direct refusal to the request would offend their friends. Therefore, from these data one can infer that the participants are in the middle level with respect to their pragmatic competence, because they know how they can reject a certain action indirectly without offending one's interlocutor.

Other expressions the informants used to show politeness are *'would you...'*, *'would you mind...'*, *'can you...'*, *'will you...'*, *'would you please...'*, *'could you'*, etc. In this case, the respondents prefer to request the willingness or the possibility of the act being performed by someone else. These modal verbs are used with the tendency that *would* and *could* are used more often than other modal verbs. Though they are not pragmatically preferred, modals like *will you...* and *can you...* are also used in some cases. The participants did not know the difference between the modal verbs in relation with when and how they are used. Native speakers do not use *'will you...'* and *'can you...'*; instead they use *'could you...'* and *'would you...'* for situations like 13 and 15 of the discourse completion test. Therefore, L2 learners, like the subjects from whom these data were obtained, use *'will you...'* and *'can you...'* in scenarios 13 and 15 because of their low level of pragmatic competence.

In situation 15:

You are travelling to Franco Hotel by taxi and it is hot. You need windows to be opened. How can you say?

In the above case, the participants employed an off-record politeness strategy using either a hint or making things vague. For example, a few used expressions like *'it is very hot today, would you open the window'* or *'would you mind opening the window, it is hot in here'*, etc.

As to situation 16, more than half of the subjects used appreciation tokens such as *'thanks, thank you/ thank you very much'* politely to respond to the *'congratulations'* uttered by the speaker, because Ethiopians use equivalent words in their own languages.

To bring the whole together for this particular point, politeness is one of the core points in

pragmatic competence, and the main purpose of politeness is to decrease the face-threatening acts so as to enhance communication between the conversants. This being the case, the data confirmed that the pragmatic competence of year one students studying in the School Humanities and Law is at an average level.

Conclusions

This section of the paper presents the summary of the main findings. Conclusions are drawn from the data analysed and some recommendations are based on the findings of the research conducted. The purpose of this research was to investigate the pragmatic competence of year one university students of the School of Humanities and Law. To obtain the findings, three main research questions were raised in the paper. They are: What are the pragmatic competence levels of year one university students? What are the efficiency of first year students in using speech acts? And, Do these students use cooperative and politeness principles properly?

Important literature on the title in question was reviewed on pragmatics and pragmatic competence, speech acts, inter-language pragmatics and cross-cultural pragmatics, cooperative and politeness principles, etc.

Three main tools were selected and used to gather data: the written discourse completion test, a multiple choice discourse completion test, and observation. The data were analysed qualitatively and quantitatively for interpretation purposes.

The major findings obtained:

- The level of the pragmatic competence of first year students of the School of Humanities and Law is intermediate.
- Students focus on common expressions rather than the meaning of the given utterances; common expressions are almost the literal meaning of the utterances. However, pragmatic competence deals with meaning beyond literal meaning/known expressions of human communication.
- The results from the data triangulation in this research indicate that students are better at identifying what is given to them rather than themselves applying it practically. This means that from the natural data gathered through observation, the students were not using speech acts, or cooperative and politeness principles to interact with their friends and teachers. However, they are able to identify the pragmatic matters mentioned above in MDCT, although they are not good at WDCT.

The main purpose of learning a second language is for communication. Communication without pragmatic competence is only following the literal meaning. Pragmatics gives meaning to what is not given semantically or syntactically. Therefore, in order to communicate successfully in a target language, pragmatic competence in L2 must be reasonably well developed; pragmatic utterances are analysed from the point of view of their adequacy in the social context (situation), and their social effects and efficiency.

The major objective of this paper was to investigate the level of pragmatic competence of year one students of the School of Humanities and Law, ASTU. The study reveals that these students are at their middle level in their pragmatic competence compared to that of native speakers. The students are familiar with some common speech acts, yet they failed to give

responses for uncommon expressions in the multiple choice discourse completion test. They used expressions like “*excuse me*” for apologising, and ‘*I am sorry*’ for regretting. However, they could not identify where to use expressions for apology and regret, because they used these speech acts interchangeably.

Many of the respondents identified and used politeness-indicating expressions like *please, would you...* but the problem is that they were limited only to the short expressions without providing evidence and alternatives. The research reveals that the students were not using the politeness principle when interacting with their teacher; they were simply forwarding their utterances without politeness. Even teachers themselves rarely use speech acts and politeness-indicating expressions in class. Teachers only use some speech acts like warnings, e.g. please ‘don’t do these and do that’, etc. and advising: please don’t forget, etc.

The main problems of the respondents were revealed in the written discourse completion test. Under data collected via WDCT, almost half of the respondents provided insufficient responses; as writing is tough for many of the 2nd language learners, the respondents were unable to include expressions that encompass all pragmatic matters such as appropriate speech acts, politeness and the cooperative principle with their maxims.

Generally, lack of pragmatic competence on the part of L2 students can lead to pragmatic failure and, more importantly, to a complete communication breakdown. Therefore, teachers and students must be aware of pragmatic competence and of how they use it in communication.

Recommendations

The researcher recommends the following, based on the conclusion, be done:

- Teachers and students must know that pragmatics is an influential field of English like syntax, semantics, etc.; it is not extra or ornamental, like the icing on the cake or a supplement to the other fields.
- Teachers should support students’ knowledge of how pragmatics and communicative situations are linked.
- Video is one of the richest resources teachers have for helping their students experience and observe pragmatics at work. Films, television shows, and other video programs can provide us with excellent resources for experiencing and analysing language use in specific contexts.
- Teachers should help students experience and observe pragmatics at work by inviting native-speaking or other fluent speakers to the class to interact with students. After this experience, students can reflect on the language and mannerisms they observed.
- 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
- Students have to be involved in activities such as role play, simulation, drama, engaging in different social roles and speech events. Such activities provide opportunities to practise the wide range of pragmatic and sociolinguistic abilities.
- In order to empower learners to make their own choices, teachers need to equip students with the necessary inputs.

Implications for future research

Research is not always all- inclusive because of different factors which prevent the

researcher from investigating all things under the particular topic. Hence, some future work must be suggested based on what is on hand.

The present study was done to investigate the pragmatic competence of first year university students in Adama Science and Technology University; it is a more general study. To this end, it mainly dealt with some of the speech acts, or politeness and cooperative principles. Moreover, the researcher used only three tools: the written discourse completion test, multiple choice discourse completion test, and observation. However, better results will be obtained if role play, simulation, etc. which are necessary to gather natural data, are included. Therefore, future studies are needed to get a complete picture of pragmatic competence by employing these additional tools.

This research was done on students of equal status; but it is difficult to see the impact of social power, distance, etc. which affect the pragmatic competence across students of different statuses. Further studies are needed on individuals of different status: between students of different batches, teachers vs. students, etc. Moreover, the present study is limited to only a few students in the School of Humanities and Law. Thus, further study will be extended to all the Schools in ASTU.

Scholars argue about whether pragmatic competence is teachable or not. Some scholars say pragmatics is teachable like other English (linguistics) fields, while others argue that it is not. The latter group says knowledge of pragmatics perhaps simply develops alongside lexical and grammatical knowledge, without requiring any pedagogic intervention. Thus, future studies are suggested to test these arguments, and to validate methods for pragmatics assessment, and pedagogical ways of teaching it.

The present study did not include the effect of inter-language pragmatics and cross-cultural pragmatics. As Ethiopia is a country with different languages and cultures, future studies are required to see how language and culture influence the pragmatic competence of a particular group/society.

Moreover, future studies will be needed on speech acts, or cooperative and politeness principles. This must be done independently to understand pragmatic competence better, as the present study dealt only with the highlights of them.

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