



The Communicative Competence of Undergraduate Students at the Namibia University of Science and Technology, Namibia

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Abstract

The current study aimed to contribute towards the assessment of the pragmatic and communicative competence of second-year students in the department of communication at the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST). The significance of pragmatic competence in a multilingual setting where English is the medium of instruction cannot be underestimated for the successful social integration of L2 speakers, which has been highlighted, and the need for assessing it has grown. The study specifically focused on assessing the level of students' pragmatic competence by discovering the politeness level found in speech acts such as apologies, requests, and complaints. This study assesses these speech acts' syntactical structures and how important they are for determining and achieving pragmatic competence. A Written Discourse Completion Task (WDCT) was administered to study the formulation of apologies, requests, and complaint strategies, followed by an open-ended questionnaire, which was analysed qualitatively and quantitatively. A high pragmatic level was observed in request strategies, unlike in complaints where a low level of pragmatic competence is indicated, as more face-threatening acts were recorded. It further recorded that syntactical structures played a huge role in students' production of speech acts, whereby impoliteness was recorded in the use of imperatives. The indication of these disparities among participants in pragmatic competence is mainly caused by the differences in age, cultural differences, and different cultural backgrounds or languages. The study suggests the implementation of activities that promote pragmatic awareness and instructional materials in the English teachers training to focus on communicative language rather than just grammar.

Key words: pragmatic competence, communicative competence, politeness level, speech acts, syntactical structures, discourse, face-threatening acts.

1. INTRODUCTION

The current study aimed to contribute towards the assessment of communicative competence through pragmatic analysis of second-year students in the department of communication at the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST). After independence in 1990, Namibia adopted English as its official language to be utilized by its diverse people from different cultural backgrounds in official settings. The aim of learning a language is to communicate effectively; thus, communicative competence is needed by language learners to communicate in the language in a proper manner (Fitriyani & Andriyanti, 2020). Students need to communicate effectively in academic discourse; they should be able to know what to say, when to say it, and what is appropriate in a certain situation. This brings in the notion of 'pragmatic competence' in the assessment of communicative ability. Qi (2023) defined pragmatic competence as "the ability to use language forms correctly in a certain context to carry out communicative functions and to follow the social rules of language use for proper communication."

According to Tarawneh (2023), effective communication can be hindered by a lack of pragmatic competence as the recipient may misunderstand what is intended. Thus, the ability to communicate effectively requires pragmatic skills. So, both speaker and hearer should possess the pragmatic skills needed to make sure that no miscommunication has occurred. These skills can be influenced by certain factors, such as cultural background, environment, level of education, and age. In order for speakers of the second language (L2) to communicate effectively, they need to possess the essential language skill of pragmatics. The recognition of pragmatic competence, which is defined as "the ability to communicate your intended message with all of its nuances in any socio-cultural context and to interpret the message of your interlocutor as it was intended" (Fraser, 2010, p. 15), came about as a result of the current emphasis in the field of second language (L2) education on the development of communicative skills. As students live in the target language setting, they have to be able to use the language not only linguistically appropriate, but also be able to perform several speech acts, such as apologize, request, refuse, and make complaints. In certain real-world situations, language use in communication must take into consideration the cultural distinctions of the moment and be appropriate for the social setting. Thus, meaningful communication can only occur when pragmatic knowledge aligns with the practical context (Yan, 2022).

Leech (1983), in his 'Principles of Pragmatics', argued that we cannot really understand the nature of language itself unless we understand pragmatics, which is about how language is used in communication. When it comes to teaching and learning a language, pragmatic competence is crucial because it contributes to how effective a learner can be in managing conversations that go beyond the simple transfer of information.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Sorour (2015), argued that the tendency in English Second Language (ESL) instruction to focus more on grammaticality than on pragmatic appropriateness results in a gap between the learners' grammatical competencies and their pragmatic competence and

awareness. Shankule & Woldemariam (2015), argued that “if students have only learned English to pass an examination, then the language they might have acquired is probably transitional and focused on that need for the test.” This is the case in Namibia because English is mostly taught as a requirement to go to the next grade without acknowledging the use of English in effective social interactions. When a second language (L2) learner does not understand the sociocultural norms associated with L2, mistakes and misunderstandings can occur. University students in English classes and in everyday academic interaction in Namibian tertiary institutions tend to be challenged by using ESL appropriately to communicate and express their intentions to lectures and to other students. This leads to communication breakdown as they fail to achieve their interactional goals and break their interactional relationships with their teacher or lectures. According to Alharbi (2018), the use of language can determine the success of the teaching and learning processes. Misunderstandings or misinterpretations may occur during communication, especially in instructional settings. Misinterpretations and misunderstandings are sometimes the reason for the lack of communicative competency and indicate pragmatic failures. Apart from studies that looked at the communicative competencies of university students, the area of pragmatic competence has not received sufficient attention from scholars in Namibia, despite its significance in helping learners become competent speakers of ESL. The current study therefore aimed to explore how pragmatically competent the second-year students from the Department of Communication at NUST were. The study also aimed at recommending strategies that could be used in EAP and ESP classrooms to improve students’ pragmatic competence in ESL.

1.2 Research objectives

The main objective of this study was to evaluate the pragmatic competencies of NUST students in their academic communicative situations.

The study was guided by the following specific objectives:

- to determine the level of the NUST student’s pragmatic competence in communicative strategies at the discourse level
- to assess the link between utterances or speech acts and politeness in classroom discussions at NUST
- to evaluate the connection between syntactic structures and politeness levels in requests, complaints, and apologies of students at NUST.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Pragmatic competence

Pragmatic competence is the linguistic ability to communicate your intended message with all its nuances in any socio-cultural context and to interpret the message of your interlocutor as it was intended (Fraser, 2010). The key element of pragmatic competence is the context of utterance (interlocutor background knowledge, knowledge in other aspects of the spoken or written document, and the background experiences of the

interlocutor) (Rasheed & Khalil, 2020). Rasheed and Khalil further explained that the role performed mentally, socially, or culturally by meaning in influencing decision-makers in the composition and creation of text is performed by readers.

Phaisarnsitthikarn (2020) utilised a mixed-methods study to examine the effect of studying abroad on the development of pragmatic competence by Thai learners of English. Drawing on Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory as a theoretical framework, the study focuses on the production of speech acts of request. The results revealed linguistic and cultural differences between the learners' L1 and L2 communities. Interview data showed that studying abroad learners generally held a very positive view of the impact of studying abroad on their pragmatic development, citing confidence gains resulting from the greater number of real-world interactions as a catalyst for this development.

2.2 Politeness

Lakoff (1973) is one of the first scholars to place a special focus on linguistic politeness in the pragmatic sense, where he described politeness as "a means of reducing friction in personal communication" (1975, p. 64). According to Lakoff, "the pillars of our linguistic as well as non-linguistic interactions with each other are to (1) make yourself clear (2) and be polite" (as cited in Schauer, 2009, p. 10). Fraser (1990) outlines four major perspectives on what constitutes politeness: the social-norm view; the conversational-maxim view (Grice, 1975; Lakoff, 1973; Leech, 1983); the face-saving view (Brown & Levinson, 1987); and the conversational-contract view (Fraser, 1975) (cited in Ciftci, 2015). It was Brown and Levinson (1978) who greatly developed the politeness theory, but the commencement was Grice's Cooperation Principle model, which requires that to be polite, participants in a conversation should not lose face. The speaker must choose his words so that the hearer can understand the intent, and the latter must try to figure out what the former meant. Grice's theory thus emphasizes the social and contextual aspects of discourse (Omar, Ilyas, & Kassem, 2018).

Leech (1983) also asserts that politeness can be investigated in terms of pragmatic theory and Grice's cooperative principle. The basic assumption of Leech's theory is that participants in an interaction tend to maintain an atmosphere of relative harmony by employing politeness maxims. Leech postulates seven maxims, all of which are related to the notion of cost and benefit: tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, sympathy, and consideration.

1. Tact concerns minimizing cost and maximizing benefit to the hearer.
2. Generosity tells people to minimize their own benefit, while maximizing that of the hearer.
3. Approbation involves minimizing dispraise and maximizing praise of the hearer.
4. Modesty concerns minimizing self-praise and maximizing self-dispraise.
5. Agreement is about minimizing disagreement between self and other.

6. Sympathy warns to minimize antipathy and maximize sympathy between self and other.
7. Consideration concerns minimizing the hearer's discomfort/displeasure and maximizing the hearer's comfort or pleasure.

Each maxim has a sub-maxim, not all the maxims are equally significant, and speakers can follow more than one politeness maxim at once, according to Leech (1983).

Brown and Levinson (1987) base their explanation of politeness theory on Goffman's notion of 'face'. "The face is something that is emotionally invested, and that can be lost, maintained, or enhanced, and that must be constantly attended to in interaction." Brown & Levinson (1987. P. 61). They identified two components of face, 'negative face' and 'positive face.' Positive face is the desire to show involvement with others, while on the other hand, negative face is the desire not to offend others (Crystal, 2008). In any interaction, face must be constantly addressed, as it can be lost, maintained, or enhanced. Furthermore, Brown and Levinson (1987) made a distinction between threatening acts of positive and negative politeness. They regard face-threatening acts (FTAs) as those acts that run contrary to the addressee's and/or the speaker's positive and/or negative 'face'. According to them, requests, orders, threats, suggestions, and advice are examples of acts that represent a threat to 'negative face' since the speaker will be putting some pressure on the addressee to do or refrain from doing a specific act. They further stated that, expressing thanks and accepting offers could be regarded to threaten the speaker's 'negative face'. On the other hand, they assert that apologies and accepting compliments are seen as FTAs to the speaker's 'positive face' since in the first case, the speaker will be indicating that s/he regrets doing a prior FTA and thus s/he will be damaging his/her own face; in the second case the speaker might feel that s/he has to reciprocate the compliment in one way or another.

The concept of politeness is crucial in interpreting why people choose to say ideas in a particular way in spoken or written discourse and why they flout a maxim and express an illocutionary act indirectly rather than directly. It can be said that academic discourse maintains a certain standard of decency, and that results in the use of less face-threatening acts by phrasing statements in a more polite way (David, 2009).

2.3 Speech acts

"In attempting to express themselves, people do not only produce utterances containing grammatical structures and words, they perform actions via those utterances" (Yule, 1996, p. 47). Martínez-Flor and Beltrán-Palanques (2014) claim that performing speech acts appropriately involves having a good command of pragmatic expertise to succeed in communication. The concept of speech acts was developed from the work of Austin (1962), who described a performative aspect of language, emphasizing that speech can represent not only the act of communicating meaning but also the act of performing an action (cited in Phaisarnsitthikarn, 2020). Austin specifies three ways an utterance can do something.

1. *Locution* - using a sentence to *mean* something in a certain context. The physical uttering of a statement.

2. *Illocution* - using a sentence to *alter* (in a kind of legal way) the state of affairs. The contextual function of the act.
3. *Perlocution* - using a sentence to *affect* the audience. The impact of the first speaker's utterance on the next speaker.

2.3.1 Requests

Requests are communicative acts in which one person asks another to take some sort of action (e.g., give information, make an appointment, or share an object, etc.) (Qari, 2017). "By making a request, the speaker may threaten the hearer's negative face by intending to impede the hearer's 'freedom of action,' and run the risk of losing face himself/herself, as the requestee may choose to refuse to comply with his/her wishes" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 65).

2.3.2 Apologies

Borer (2018) argued that an apology is a face-threatening act (FTA) for both the speaker and the hearer, making it both a good and a negative face-saving tactic. Negative face is the desire to be autonomous and/or not be forced, whereas positive face is the desire to belong to a community. An apology is often given in an attempt to preserve face when a speaker makes a social faux pas that damages their reputation. An effective apology restores the speaker's good reputation and wins back the listener's favour.

2.3.3 Complaints

Complaint is one of the speaking behaviours that could lead to a breakdown in communication. When a complainer offers unfavourable opinions on an event that the addressee caused in the past, it threatens their positive face. A complaint is the illocutionary act that is included in expressive classification, Searle, 1979; Trosborg, 1995, cited in (Astia, 2020). The four sections of the complaint categories are outlined by Trosborg (1995).

The four sections are: (1) no explicit reproach; (2) expression of irritation or disapprobation; (3) allegation; and (4) blame. Trosborg then divided the four complaint types into eight smaller groups known as "strategies." The first category is no explicit reproach, which refers to complaints that do not explicitly explain what is offensive and do not do so. It has a plan 1 hints. Expressions of irritation or disapproval fall into the second group. The complainers can express their annoyance, displeasure, distaste, or many other emotions regarding a certain scenario that they feel to be detrimental to them (Trosborg, 1995). It has a 1. plan, 2. anger and tactic, 3. repercussions. The third type of accusation is that the complainers have established the complainers as the complainable party.

2.4 Syntactical level and politeness

Qizi (2020), presented what he calls "elements of politeness at syntactic level." These include the use of subjunctive mood instead of imperative mood, interrogative sentence instead of affirmative ones, passive voice instead of active, impersonal structure instead of personal structure, affirmatives instead of negatives, and all of them serve to be politer

ways of delivering a message. *The subjunctive mood* is the verb form used to express a wish, a suggestion, a command, or a condition that is contrary to fact. This element is used to avoid directness, which is impolite than indirectness. Also, according to Leech (1983), one may choose an indirect speech act instead of a direct one in order to be more polite.

Another element postulated by Qizi (2020) is the use of *interrogative sentences for affirmative ones*. According to the principle of politeness, interrogative sentences are considered politer than affirmatives. Affirms such as commands, can be made sound politer by using either a low rising tone or words, phrases and structures like "please; I'm afraid; I think; perhaps; don't you think; I (don't) want you to...; I (don't) expect you to...; would you like; would you, please; ..., will you; ..., could you; what if...; let's/let's not." *Affirmatives instead of negatives* - Affirmatives refers to any positive statements and negative sentences that are formed with can't and won't make the speaker sound particularly negative and unhelpful and can often be rephrased with be able to, or a similar expression

2.5 Communicative competence

Communicating effectively in a language requires the speaker's good understanding of linguistic, sociolinguistic and socio-cultural aspects of that language. This understanding will enable him to use the right language in the right context for the right purpose, and then he can be referred to as communicatively competent (Saleh, 2013). According to Junaidi (2017), linguistic elements in language use are created by language users and represent their linguistic and communication proficiency. The first one depends on how well-versed the speakers are in language grammars such as syntax, phonology, morphology, and semantics. The notion of 'communicative competence' was introduced by Dell Hymes (1972). Hymes' (1972) introduction of communicative competence widely acknowledged that teaching and learning languages involves far more than targeting grammatical or lexical systems. He defined communicative competence not only as an inherent grammatical competence but also as the ability to use grammatical competence in a variety of communicative situations (as cited in Taghizadeh, 2017).

According to Lebedev et al. (2021), communicative pragmatics is defined as "the ability to correlate communicative intentions with linguistic means at the receptive and reproductive levels in order to have an impact and be effective in everyday communication." In EFL contexts, the goals of language teaching should be designed to meet the needs of the language learners to help them develop and improve their communicative competency, both spoken and written (Hamdany, 2019).

Canale and Swain's (1980) concept of 'communicative competence' refers to "the relationship and interaction between grammatical competence, or knowledge of the rules of grammar, and sociolinguistic competence, or knowledge of rules of language use" (as cited in Saleh, 2013). Canale and Swain's model of 'communicative competence' embodies four domains of knowledge and skills. They are: 'grammatical competence', 'sociolinguistic competence', 'strategic competence' and 'discourse competence' (which was later added by Canale, 1983). Bachman (1990) proposed a concept of communicative competence ability (CLA), which he refers to as being similar to communicative

competence by Hymes 1972, 1973; Munby 1978; Canale and Swain 1980; Sauvignon 1983; Canale, 1983, that he described as consisting of both knowledge, or competence, and the capacity for implementing or executing that competence in appropriate, contextualized communicative language use (Bachman, 1990). He proposed the following three elements for a CLA framework: language competence, strategic competence, and psychophysiological mechanisms (Bachman, 1990).

In his framework, Bachman (1990) classified ‘language competence’ into ‘organizational competence’ and ‘pragmatic competence’. Organizational competence comprises grammatical and textual competences, in which they are defined as abilities involved in controlling the formal structure of language for producing or recognising grammatically correct sentences, comprehending their propositional content, and ordering them to form texts (Bachman, 1990)

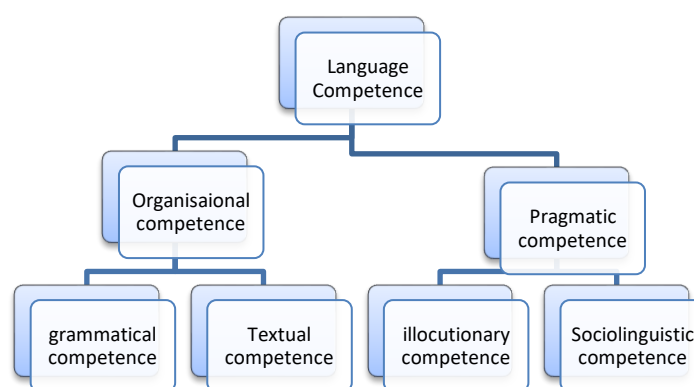


Figure 1. Bachman’s (1990) Model is a model of “Language Communicative Ability”

From the above figure, pragmatic competency is further divided into illocutionary competence and sociolinguistic competence, whereby illocutionary competence enables us to use language to express a wide range of functions and to interpret the illocutionary force of utterances or discourse whereas, ‘sociolinguistic competence’ is the sensitivity to or control of the conventions of language use that are determined by the features of the specific language use context; it enables us to perform language functions in ways that are appropriate to that context (Bachman, 1990).

Alakrash and Bustan (2020) opine that the most essential utilities of languages in interaction are the ‘politeness strategies’ use, which is likely to differ from one language to another besides from one culture to another. Students in their academic interactions produce utterances that are not clear. A study by Muhammad and Nair (2017) affirms that the majority of the ESL learners’ face significant challenges in the areas of mechanical, grammatical, and sentence formations. Pragmatic instruction played a vital role in rising students’ communicative competence in diverse contexts (Hussein, Albakri, & Seng, 2020). Effective communication can only take place when the message conveyed by the speaker is interpreted appropriately and understood by the hearer.

2.5.1 Discourse in pragmatics and communicative competence

At its most basic level, academic discourse refers to written and spoken language and communication in an academic context (Duff, 2010, as cited in Hagen, 2015). Yule (1996)

claims that within the study of discourse, the pragmatic perspective is more specialized. Yule (1996) explained that discourse tends to focus specifically on aspects of what is unsaid or unwritten (yet communicated) within the discourse being analysed. For pragmatics of discourse, one must go beyond the primarily social concerns of interaction and conversation analysis, look behind the forms and structures present in the text, and pay much more attention to psychological concepts such as background knowledge, beliefs, and expectations. The pragmatics of discourse explores what the speaker or writer has in mind. Blommaert (2011) agrees with Yule in his explanation that “different speech acts (asking, ordering, etc.) produced different illocutionary meanings, meanings that derived from the structure of the act itself, not from its linguistic form. To understand this process, however, we need to consider the total speech act in the total speech situation.”

2.6 Theoretical framework

Politeness was the main concept in pragmatics that was used to analyse the results of this study. There are several tenets of politeness theory in pragmatics, but this study employed Brown and Levinson's politeness theory and speech acts since there cannot be politeness without speech acts. Leech's theory of politeness places politeness within a framework of interpersonal oratory. The departure spot is his wider distinction between semantics as the field of grammar, the linguistic method, the rules, and pragmatics as the field of oratory, namely the execution of the rules. The idea of speech acts was first introduced by the British philosopher John Langshaw Austin in 1911 - 1960. According to Vitale (2009), evidence of a speech act's role in pragmatic competence can be reflected in its communicative nature. This is because the sociocultural context of an utterance determines the actual grammatical, semantic, and pragmatic entities of the speech act.

Brown and Levinson (1987) rely on Goffman's notion of face in explaining their theory. Goffman claimed that the concept of 'face' (one's social image) serves as the foundation for structuring and regulating the behaviours of participants in every social interaction. The goal of politeness theory developed by Brown and Levinson (1987) is to explain how face management and the factors influencing it shape how people in any culture would word their remarks. Thus, their approach makes use of the concept of face to establish a connection between language use and the application of politeness throughout the process of managing the other's self-image.

To save face, B and L recommended five strategies to be used by interlocutors, which they defined on a scale of 1 to 5, as follows: (1 being the least polite, and 5 being the most polite).

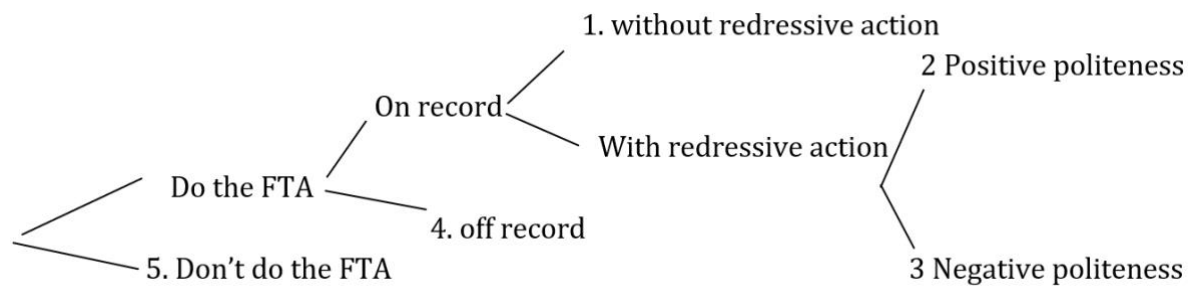


Figure 2. Possible strategies for doing FTA (Brown & Levinson, 1987)

According to B and L, S (speaker) assesses the weightiness of the FTA based on three social factors: (P)ower, (D)istance, and (R)anking. Brown and Levinson's (1987) model of politeness has proved very popular, complaints, apologies and requests, which are the focus of this paper, offer an excellent site for the exploration of the power politeness model.

3 RESEARCH METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The current study is conducted at the Namibia University of Science and Technology, Windhoek main campus. The population of the study was second-year students, with a special focus on students from the Department of Communication and Languages doing the Bachelor degree in English. Since this study chose to use mixed methods, which involve combining or integrating qualitative and quantitative research and data in a research study, it employed an explanatory sequential design, which, according to Creswell and Clark (2018), is one in which the researcher first conducts quantitative research, analyses the results, and then builds on the results to explain them in more detail with qualitative analysis. The study adopted the pragmatism philosophical research approach. This study then utilised a mixed research methodology to get the necessary data since the aims of the study call for both qualitative and quantitative approaches, considering the research questions of this present study, which relate to various dimensions of speech acts of request, complaint, and apologies, including evaluating two phenomena, pragmatics and communicative competence, with a special focus on discourse, lexical, and semantic level. The study population focused on the second-year students, with a planned size of 45 participants, only 32 participants made up the sample of this study, as some students could not complete the test due to commitments as it was done during the time students were about to write exams. Convenience sampling was specifically, used to select the students because they were available to participate in the study.

The data in this study were collected by a pragmatic judgment assessment that is presented in the form of a Written Discourse Completion Test (WDCT) questionnaire as the post-test and is chosen for a variety of reasons. A total of 45 students were handed WDCT and questionnaires to complete, and only a total of 32 WDCT and questionnaires were returned since some students weren't willing to participate due to some responsibilities they had. A WDCT was used in the study to collect data, which included both quantitative and qualitative techniques. The WDCT has two components, the first of

which entails gathering requests, apologies, and complaints replies that are later categorized and quantitatively examined. The analysis of the data involved calculating and comparing the response length, numbers of syntactic formulas, patterns of syntactic formulas combined in the apology, request, and complaint responses, and the reason provided in the response from each task. The data were classified into groups in accordance with the different speech acts. Short expressions from each group from each different speech act were reported in frequency and in percentages, but not numbers, in order to give a brief picture of pragmatic competence. The data statistics were presented according to the utterances made by students. The number in the tables represents the total number of responses that fall into each category, as one response could contain more than one strategy.

4 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The demographic data represent the factors that are considered to influence pragmatic competence in students.

Table 1. Demographic Data

Category		N
Gender	Male	11
	Female	21
Age	15-20	9
	21-25	21
	26-30	0
	30-35	2
Language spoken	English	2
	Khoekhoegowab	1
	Lozi	2
	Oshiwambo	12
	Otjiherero	11
	Rukwangali	0
	Others	4
Level of Education	Undergraduate	30
	Postgraduate	1
	Others	1
Years of studying English	12-14	20
	14-16	8
	16-20	4
Reasons for studying English	Prescribed and compulsory	11

Useful for their careers	20
They like it	2

Table 1 shows that more females participated in this study accounting up 66% of the total population as compared to 34% of males' population. It is evidently shown that the majority of the participants are aged 21-25 as they take up 66% of the total study population. The second age group comprised of 28%, is the age group of 15 -20 year old participants. No participant was recorded in the age range of 26-30. The least number of participants (2) was recorded in the age category of 31 and above, representing only 6% of the total population. A total of six languages were identified for sampling. As it is shown in the table below, Oshiwambo recorded the highest percentages of participants with 38%, while Otjiherero recorded the second highest number of participants with 34% of the total population. Lozi and English recorded both 6% and 13% for other languages like Afrikaans. The lowest percentage was recorded in Khoekhoegowab, with only 3%, which represents only one participant. The majority of the participants are undergraduates or have not acquired any tertiary qualifications, as indicated by 94% of the total population, representing 30 out of 32 participants. Postgraduates only recorded 3%, and others have 3%, which represents 1 out of 32.

The table also shows the number of years participants have gone through formal education of learning English. The result shows that the highest percentage is recorded in those who studied English for 12-14 years, with 63%, which represents 20 out of 32 participants. This is followed by those who studied English for 14 to 16 years with only 25%, and that is just 8 out of 32 participants. The years with the least percentage are 16-20 years, with 13%. Participants also provided the reasons why they are studying English and had to choose from the given responses. About 63% of students are studying English because they feel it is important for their career, a representation of 20 out of 32 participants. The other 34% of students are studying English because it is part of their interest or they like it, and this represents 11 out of 32 participants. Only 6% of participants are studying English because they feel it is compulsory in their education.

4.1 The Written Discourse Completion Task Results

A total of 15 situations (5 requests; 6 apologies, and 4 complaints) were presented to the participants to develop speech acts of requests, complaints, and apologies to test their politeness level in different communicative situations. The participants were presented with real life situations that they may encounter in their affairs and interactions with their lecturers and other academic staff at the Namibia University of Science and Technology.

Table 2. Request Situations

Request Situation	
Request 1	Request lecture notes from a friend
Request 2	Request notes from a stranger

Request 3	Request for an extension on essay paper
Request 4	Request for a remark of exam paper
Request 4	Request for an explanation on a new topic you did not understand.

Table 3. Summary of results

Strategy	N
Ability	39
Suggestion Formula	34
Permission	15
Imperatives	13
Hints	7
Obligation	7
Desire/Wishes	8

The data from the speech act of request indicated that the most frequent lexical items used by the students to make apologies include the strategy of ability, such as, "Can you please help me your notes... Could you kindly help me..." with a total of 39 responses from all situations.

This is followed by the strategy of suggestion formulas such as, "*Would it be okay if you could...?*" *Is it possible?* / *May we?* / *may you...?*" With a total of 34 expressions used it in their responses. Only 15 lexical items were utilised fall under the permission strategy, with responses such as, "*My I ask that you grant me an extension to finish my essay?*"; "*May I please get an extension to finish my essay paper, ma'am?*" About 13 of the expressions are imperatives, as in "*I want a review on my exam paper, so please do review my paper.*" Hints and performative strategies both respectively received attention of 7 expressions respectively.

Below are some example of responses by student for request:

Situation 1. Your friend attends classes regularly and takes good notes. You often miss class and ask your friend for the lecture notes. What will you say?

- Uno, would you please share your lecture notes with me, if that's ok with you?
- I am sorry to be a bother, but may I please borrow some of your lecturer notes?
- Please lend me your notes quickly.
- My I please copy from your notes.
- Hey friend, do you have any notes/? If you do, please pass them along, thanks.

Situation 2. You want another student (who is not your close friend) to lend you some lecture notes. What are you going to say to him/her? Friend: Well...then I guess I'll have to ask someone else.

- Hi my name is Hazel, I know we don't really know each other, but I do know we are in the same class. Do you mind sharing your notes with me please?
- Please share the lecture note. I'll assist you in the future as well.
- Can you please lend me your notes if you are not using them?
- Good day? Can you kindly lend me some of your lecture notes?
- Hi. I hope you're doing well. Is it possible that you send me some of the lecture notes please?

Situation 3. You are a student, and you want to ask your teacher for an extension for finishing an essay paper. What are you going to tell your teacher?

- Sir may I ask that you grant me an extension to finish my essay?
- I am working on something really great, but I need some extra time. Please give me an extension.
- Is it possible that (sir/madam) can extend the essay date because we are occupied with a lot of work?
- Due to unforeseen circumstances, I was unable to finish with the essay could you please give me an extension?
- Good day ma'am/ sir. Can you please extend the due date for the assignment?

4.2. Responses to speech acts of Apologies

Table 4: List of Apologies responses.

Apologies situations list	
Apology 1	Apologise to the instructor for forgetting a book
Apology 2	Apologise for offending fellow student
Apology 4	Apologise for not turning up to the meeting
Apology 5	Apologise for ripping a book cover page
Apology 6	Apologise for interrupting a teacher's writing
Apology 7	Apologise for bad memory

Table 5. Summary of results

Strategy	N of occurrences
Regret	112

Explanation	58
Responsibility	57
Offer repair	39
Promise forbearance	8
Denial of responsibility	1

Unlike request strategies, a response can carry several strategies, that's why this presentation shows a bit of a difference from those of request. Of all the apologies responses, 112 expressions indicated the strategy of regret such as, *"I am sorry", "sorry," "I am very/so/ sincerely sorry", "my apologies/sincere apology and I apologise/ I sincerely apologise..."* This is followed by the explanation strategy with 58 expressions used by the respondents, example, *"Ma'am, I apologise that I did not return your book as promised because I forgot it at home, I will bring it with me tomorrow."*

Responsibility is another apology strategy mostly used in expressions such as, *("It was my fault, I was careless", "and I must have been careless...")*. This account for 57 in responses/expressions. Promise of repair from accounts for 39 expressions in responses *("I'll fix it", "I promise I will replace it")*.

Some examples of apology responses are presented below.

Situation 6. You borrowed a book from your instructor, which you promised to return the following day. However, when you came to class, you realised you forgot to bring it along.

- Ma'am I apologise that I did not return your book as promised because I forgot it at home. I will bring it with me tomorrow.
- Pardon me sir, I'll return the book tomorrow.
- Ooh! I forgot to bring along the book, I will make sure that I will bring it tomorrow.
- I apologise, I forgot the book at home, hope it won't cause any inconvenience.
- My apologies sir, I was in a rush and forgot the book at home. Can I bring it tomorrow?

Situation 7. You offended a fellow student during a class discussion. After the lesson, the fellow student mentions this fact and you admitted you were wrong. What will you tell her?

- I am sorry that I may have offended you unintentionally, I was wrong, and I am sorry.
- Sorry, I was wrong.
- I am really sorry I didn't know that it will offend you in such a manner.
- That was wrong of me, I realized after and I apologize for my offence.
- I'm sorry I made you feel that way. I was clearly in the wrong

Situation 8. A friend arranges to meet you yesterday to get some notes from you to study for an exam. He waited for an hour, but you didn't come. He calls you up:

Friend: You know, I waited for you for an hour yesterday.

- I'm sorry I didn't alert you in time that I was not able to make it, something came up.
- Sorry, it won't happen again.
- I am sorry for that; I had an accident on my way to you.
- I am sorry the situation was out of control, what can I do to make it up to you?
- Hi, I'm so sorry you had to wait. An emergency popped up and I completely forgot to let you know.

Situation 9. You borrowed a book from a best friend, and you ripped the cover page by accident. You are giving back the book to your friend.

Friend: Oh, what happened to the book?

- I accidentally tore the cover of your book; I am very sorry about that. I will try and repair it for you.
- It ripped, but I will repair it.
- Friend, I ripped the cover page accidentally, my bad.
- I am so sorry I accidentally ripped the book cover page.
- I'm sorry; I accidentally ripped the cover page. I'll fix it

Table 6. Student's responses to complaint strategies

Complaint situations	
Complaint 1	Complaint to a group member who is always late
Complaint 2	Professor who did not finish your recommendation letter
Complaint 3	Professor who speaks very quietly
Complaint 4	A clerk who did not make copies of your assignment

Table 7. Summary of Results

Strategy	N of Occurrences
No explicit reproach	27
Irritation/Annoyance	27
Allegation	8
Blame	9
Solution	11

The overall results for the speech act used by students when making complaints show that students tend to use more of 'no explicit reproach', with 27 occurrences like; (*"I have placed my order yesterday at this photocopy shop, and I am supposed to deliver all this copies to my professor by 12:00 noon", or "I thought you guys have my booklet done", "Sir, I've observed that during our classes sir tends to speak very quietly in a way that I cannot hear what message you are trying to get through", "Sir, I am having difficulties capturing what you are saying, do you mind speaking a little louder please?"*).), which indicate the awareness of complainer's use of positive face towards the complaine, by using hints to lay a complaint. The same numbers of occurrences were recorded in expression of irritation or disapprobation strategy. The complainers expressed their annoyance, displeasure, distaste, and other emotions caused by a certain situation, like, *"Whenever you speak, I hardly hear you, and it affects my learning process", "But I ordered it yesterday, how can an order that was placed yesterday not be visible?" "It is unfair because I need the booklet to submit."* or *"OMG! You are not serious with your works. Now my life is a mess because of your inconvenience."* This strategy is part of direct complaints where the complainant addresses the individual she believes to be (at least partially) accountable for the undesirable behaviour directly. This is a face - threatening act and therefore threatens the face of the hearer. A reasonable number of students (11) used a directive act of suggesting a solution, a request for repair or even a threat for the issue at hand, like, *"How are we going to fix this? Either reprint or I call your manager."* *"Please check again or otherwise just print one immediately", "Can you make copies of it now?" "Please write it for me as soon as possible..."*, *"...so please, please finish it", "Can we sit together now so you write the letter?"* Total blame was also recorded with a number of occurrences (9) like in. *"How careless can you guys be?" "You speak too low."* *"I really don't understand you when you speak"*). Finally the allegation strategy was least used with only 8 occurrences. Some recorded expressions are: *"You are not serious with your works."* *"I thought you guys have my booklet done, that's why you called me?" "If you don't want to be part of the group, just say so..."*

Here are some examples from students' responses:

Yesterday you placed an order at the photocopy shop for 10 bound copies of your assignment. Today you must deliver all 10 copies to your professor by 12:00 noon. When you go to the photocopy shop to pick up your booklet the clerk, who you recognize from one of your classes seems confused and unaware of your request.

You: Hi, I'm [your name]. Do you have my assignment booklet ready?

Clerk: Hmmm. Uh, I don't see anything here under your name.

- I had asked for copies of the booklet to be printed yesterday as I need to hand them in today at 12, please recheck and see how you can assist me to have them ready by 12 please.
- Please check again, I am sure it is there.
- I have placed my order yesterday at this photocopy shop, and I am supposed to deliver all this copies to my professor by 12:00 noon, what do you guys expect me to do now?

- Can you kindly recheck, I placed an order yesterday for 10 bond copies of it?
- But I was here yesterday, and you said you will have it ready by this morning.

Situation 13: One of your professors speaks very quietly, and it is hard for you to understand him. You want to talk to him about this problem. You will say:

- Excuse me sir, I wish to bring to your attention that I find it difficult to hear you during lessons, my I ask you to please raise your volume so I can hear you better.
- Dear professor, I really don't understand you when you speak, therefore can you kindly rise a bit of your voice? Can you kindly make adjustments?
- I am finding it hard to understand you because I can barely hear you
- Professor you speak very quietly, and it is very hard to understand you, can you try speaking louder?
- Prof, I find it very difficult to hear what you are saying, maybe you could just speak up a bit.

You want to study in a university abroad. You have asked a professor at your university to write a letter of recommendation for you which should be finished by today. It turned out that your professor hasn't done it. You must send it with an application form as soon as possible. What will you say to him?

- Excuse me sir, I had asked for your assistance with the letter of recommendation for my university application abroad, I did not want to rush you, however I urgently need the letter today and want to ask you to please write it for me as soon as possible if you could please assist me with this matter I would highly appreciate it.
- Just leave it, I'll ask another lecturer.
- Is it possible that professor can please write the recommendation letter now if he/she is not busy?
- Dr., you said it will be done today, what do I do now?

Table 8. Pragmatic results on syntactical level

Syntactic form	Examples	Frequency of use		
		Requests	Apologies	Complaints
Interrogatives	Can I.../ Can you...?	51%	20%	36%
Conditionals	Would you mind.../If it is	21%	18%	21%
Imperatives	Don't.../ always make sure...	7%	59%	106%
Statements		43	88%	24%

Table 8 reports on the variety of syntactic forms observed in the request, apologies, and complaint strategies tasks. Many utterances were formed with the use of interrogatives, while the other three syntactic structures were significantly less common. It is worth

noting that the preferred syntactic choice shifted from conditionals in request strategies to interrogatives. Such shifts could perhaps be an indication that the recall of syntactically simpler structures, such as interrogatives, may be easier in face-to-face interaction; hence, less pragmatic awareness may be inclined to rely on these more.

First of all, interrogatives were the most common form in all situations, but especially overly, accounting for more than 50%. Noticeably, they were replaced by conditionals with (21%) due to the fact that there was a balanced situation when it comes to power. The two hearers in this speech act were only their fellow students and their lectures. Imperatives came third with only 7%. Imperatives were rare, which was somewhat expected, as their tendency to imply a threat to H's face may prompt speakers to avoid them to avoid confrontation when making requests. Similarly to apologies, a range of syntactic forms were displayed in complaint speech utterances to show politeness in different situations. Imperatives provided the most utterances with 106%, followed by interrogatives with a huge gap that accounted for 36%, which is lower than the use in requests. Statements and conditionals were used less frequently, with 24% and 21%, respectively.

5. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

5.1 Student's level of pragmatic competence in communicative strategies at the discourse level.

Knowing students' level of pragmatic competence can provide convincing evidence for language education experts to prepare effective curriculum and teaching material (Yuan, 2012). Assessing pragmatic competence was done in terms of responses to speech acts of apology, request, and complaint in different communicative situations. In request strategies, learners are found to have shown high pragmatic competence as more indirect strategies are used.

The WDCT used gave an insight into the pragmatic and communicative competence of students. From the different speech acts analysed, the results indicate that there is a higher level of pragmatic competence due to the utilisation of more indirect strategies when making requests. Indirect strategies are mainly used because they are considered 'face-saving' strategies, and this helps them avoid threatening the face of the hearer. However, some students demonstrated a low level of pragmatic competence when they used direct strategies. The face - saving strategy was not applied, and therefore negative politeness is exhibited. These differences could be due to the language group of students, their level of education, and the social status of the hearer. Apologies have also shown a high level of pragmatic competence, as students used face saving strategies when apologising. This can be influenced by the previous encounter with the hearer and the need to show regrets. Thus, apologies of regrets, offers of explanation, and offers of repair were highly recorded, which shows high level of pragmatic competence. However, with complaint strategies, the pragmatic level was not consistent, and this is due to the social power that the hearer has. Students exhibited a low level of pragmatic competence by using strategies of annoyance/consequences and directive acts of request for repair and

threats that obviously threaten the face of the hearer and therefore not save the speaker's face.

5.2 The link between utterances or speech acts and politeness in discussions at NUST

The findings of the study indicate that there is a huge link between speech acts and politeness, as politeness is expressed through these utterances. NUST students were able to recognise the apology situation and apply the proper expression of apology, which demonstrated high awareness of being polite to save the recipients' face, therefore demonstrating high pragmatic competence. Students were able to acknowledge responsibility in their apologies, and many promised to ease the situation with the promise of repair and forbearance. The utterances made by students in requests also demonstrated an average level of politeness. Moreover, the choice of directive expression and different speech act verbs could be highly dependent on the students' cultural backgrounds and socio-pragmatic situations they find themselves in. Directive or direct speech acts tend to be more impolite, unlike indirect speech acts, which are more polite and act as face-saving acts.

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), a speaker making an FTA, such as a request, must determine the appropriate degree of politeness by assessing three independent social variables: relative power, social distance, and the degree of imposition. It is observed that students are mostly polite or impolite due to these social variables. The relationship between students also played a role in deciding what verbs to use, which indicate their politeness level towards the hearers.

5.3. The connection between syntactic structures and politeness levels in requests, complaints, and apologies of students at NUST

It should be noted that, while pragmatic competence includes the ability to choose appropriate language for the right context, the goal of this study was not to rank these grammatical (syntactic structure) choices in terms of effectiveness but rather to assess their general appropriateness in the given context and identify speakers' preferences for their use. In terms of syntactic forms, it is worth noting that students frequently used interrogatives and conditionals more in their request strategies, while on the other hand, imperatives were rarely used in requests. There was no sign of declarative or statement use in request strategies. In speech acts of apologies, declaratives were more utilised by students with few interrogatives and imperatives. Conditionals were rarely used in making apologies. Imperatives showed a high use by the students in complaints with interrogatives. Conditionals and declaratives received little attention from students. The data show that all syntactic forms were used to some extent in all speech acts, but several trends in their use have been identified.

Additionally, the participants exhibited a wide range of responses that could be aligned with most of the broad request type strategies. The indirect conventional (hearer-oriented) strategy is realised in the majority of the request strategies. Interrogatives were mostly used in apologies, where participants gave an account of what happened before asking H to grant a wish (i.e., *the due date of an assignment*). Although the student's types

of syntactic structures utilised were identical at each speech act strategy, they differed greatly in terms of complexity. The data revealed that, there was a tendency to use more grammatically complex forms in terms of tense and aspect (*e.g., I would like to kindly request; can you please; could you please; I was hoping you would...*). However, the learners showed some pragmatic development in L2, as evidenced by their increased use of syntactic downgrades.

Finally, imperatives were used far less frequently than the other syntactic forms in each speech act. A closer examination of the data revealed that they were primarily used in complaints involving equal social power, where participants were required to complain to a classmate about not committing to a specific task.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study is aimed at contributing towards the existing literature on the assessment of NUST L2 students' pragmatic competence in communicative discourse in an academic context. The research questions focused on evaluating the pragmatic competence of NUST second-year students; the link between utterances or speech acts and politeness; assessing the different pragma-linguistic devices (syntactical structures) and politeness level.

The politeness level of students/participants was analysed on the basis of different speech acts (requests, apologies, and complaints). In requests, there is inconsistency in the use of politeness strategies. Firstly, willingness, ability, and suggestory strategies are frequently used. This mainly happened due to the fact that different situations were encountered requiring different approaches. A number of participants could not observe social distance and relations of power, and this is an indication of a low level of pragmatic competence.

Different syntactical downgraders were deduced from the utterances and analysed. The most frequently used syntactical structures are interrogatives, conditionals, and imperatives. Imperatives do not show positive politeness, and most interrogatives were not polite. Few students used direct speech acts like commands, which indicate rudeness and threaten the face of the hearer. Considering all the findings and the main objective of this study, which is to evaluate the pragmatic and communicative competence, it shows that they have an intermediate pragmatic level.

According to the findings of the study, the researcher recommends that:

The goal of implementing a variety of instructional activities is to assist students in becoming more effective, fluent, and successful communicators in the target language.

Pragmatics and pragmalinguistic devices should be taught from secondary school to university level in the multilingual Namibian education system, and they should be part of teachers' and teachers' Vocational Education and Training (TVET) training courses. This should be done to acquaint students with better pragmatic competence and knowledge at an early stage to avoid pragmatic failure.

One idea is to engage learners in cultural discussions about the socio-cultural norms of the L2. Following that, the educator may design activities that require students to

communicate in ways that reflect L2 norms. These activities may include contextualised role plays by focusing on situations that require learners to use these speech acts (complaints, apologies and requests). Learners writing (writing formal letters or emails) should be adjusted to focus on different politeness strategies. Technology can also be used more like online discussions forum where learners interact and receive feedback on their politeness level.

There is a need to investigate and assess the influence of media (social media), and technology, and how they play a role in enhancing the pragmatic competence of users.

A different pragmatic theory such as conversational implicatures, the cooperative principle, conversational maxims, and relevance theory can be applied to study the pragmatic competence in separate fields such as tourism, nursing, or parliament debates, political speeches, etc. in a Namibian context.

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