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AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE OF THE FRONT-OFFICE TRAINEES OF VALOMBOLA VOCATIONAL TRAINING CENTRE

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DEDICATION

At the outset, I would like to thank the Almighty God for keeping me courageous and giving me heavenly understanding to shoulder this study and finalising it. Furthermore, I would also like to devote this study to my daughter Peacefy Prosperity Nghilinganye.

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ABSTRACT

This investigation into the pragmatic competence of front-office trainees of Valombola VTC was conducted to analyse the trainees' competence on formulation and realisation of request strategies, to evaluate their application of politeness principles in the speech act of refusal and apologetic responses and to examine the factors that influence their pragmatic competence. Systematic random sampling was utilised to select the study sample of 15 out of 30 front-office trainees from the Hospitality Department's 2022 academic year's intake. Two sets of instruments were used to collect data – a Written Discourse Completion Tasks (WDCT), and a questionnaire. Data on the students' pragmatic competence was qualitatively and quantitatively analysed. The findings of the study suggest that, in terms of the speech act of refusal, the trainees' pragmatic competence was at 30%, a significantly low level. This means that, the front-office trainees demonstrated a lack of pragmatic competence in terms of the speech act of request responses, apologies and refusal strategy. Considering the three speech acts of request, apologies and refusal results, their levels of pragmatic competence was observed to be somewhat low, as they also indicated even in the questionnaire that they preferred using their vernacular language when socialising. In addition, the findings indicate that the trainees use different refusal responses, and apology strategies that lack politeness. Lastly, the findings demonstrate that there are some underlying factors that influence pragmatic competence, and these include misinterpretation of pragmatic implicature, educational background, low level of daily activities using English. Ultimately, English for Specific Purposes focusing on pragmatic competence was recommended for the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) sector in general and for front-office trainees in particular.

Key terms: *pragmatic competence, pragmatic reference, pragmatic inference, speech act of politeness, cross-cultural pragmatic failure, language anxiety.*

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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION AND GENERAL BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a discussion of the background of the study and introduces the research problem which the current study seeks to address - to investigate the pragmatic competence of the front-office trainees of Valombola Vocational Training Centre, a state-owned training institution. The chapter thus, explains the statement of the problem and further presents the significance of the study, the purpose of the study, research questions, limitations and delimitation of the study.

1.2 Background of the study

The ability to speak appropriately as well as communicate pragmatically and effectively in various settings is one of the decisive ambitions of all trainees of higher institutions. Pragmatics studies how context contributes to meaning (Taguchi, 2009). Taguchi seconding Searle (1969) states that pragmatic competence is the ability to use language appropriately in a social context. According to Austin (1960), 'pragmatics' as a field of study evaluates how human language is utilised in social interactions, as well as the relationship between the interpreter and the interpreted. Meanwhile, Hence et al (2000) indicate that 'pragmatics' is known as the field of all those investigations which take into consideration the state, action and environment of people who speak or hear the conversation. Hence et al. further observe that the characterisation of pragmatics is so broad that it includes all studies on language use, from neurolinguistics to sociolinguistics and would preclude the possibility of formulating general pragmatic principles. The term 'pragmatics' refers to the study of language use in relation to language structure and the context of utterance (Akmajian & Demers, 2000, p. 343). Pragmatics is a branch of linguistics that investigates the ways in which language is tied to the contexts in which it is used (Thomas, 1983). As this definition indicates, pragmatics is combined as a distinct and coherent domain of inquiry only in relation to the study of language abstracted from its use in context (Thomas). According to Thomas pragmatics outlines the study of meaning in the interactional context. It looks beyond the literal meaning of an utterance and considers constructed meaning while focusing on inferred meanings. The challenge on pragmatic competence has been presumed

among front office trainees at Valombola VTC's training division, where the front office trainees were observed to understand only instructions semantically, while lacking pragmatic competence as part of linguistic branches essential for effective communication. Pragmatic failure, pragmatic language impairment and social pragmatic communication disorder were some burning factors affecting communicative competence in that training division. This study therefore seeks to highlight the possible root causes of the above presumed pragmatic competence challenges amongst front-office trainees at Valombola Vocational Training Centre.

1.3 Statement of the problem

This study investigated the front office trainees at Valombola VTC in order to determine and establish the level of the presumed pragmatic failure perceived amongst them, and which is often imagined to lead to their poor inferring and referring abilities. It is further observed that there has been a problem of lack of politeness in addressing both their front-office trainers and their fellow trainees socially, around the campus and within the class environment. This had been often characterised by these front-office trainees speaking informally or in less formal ways, and in most cases failing to apply the necessary pragmatic competence required in their day to day interactions. Cohen (2008) states that language use pragmatically is normally a complex and challenging task that becomes even more complicated when it comes to foreign language speakers. There are social settings that add to the language forms that speakers use in their communication, which is obviously difficult because interlocutors do not only interpret semantically, but also consider the context of speech. Writing on pragmatic failure, Jie (2010) indicates that the knowledge of language not only presents the literal meanings of sentences but there is often a gap between what is said by a sentence and what a speaker will be trying to convey - and this is the gap that the current research on pragmatic competence seeks to address. According to Edward and Csizer (2004), students in general, as foreign language users, are considered effective communicators when they know the words and the grammar. However, when it comes to pragmatic competence, they appear to have a lack of understanding of different speech acts, cooperativeness and politeness principles. This is therefore referred to as Pragmatic Failure, which is considered as the main problem in this study, and this problem is presumed to contribute to rudeness,

arrogance, condescension, insincerity and other negative behaviours observed to be proliferate amongst people working at front offices in most hospitality organisations.

1.4 Research objectives

This study investigated the pragmatic competence of front-office trainees at Valombola Vocational Training Centre and was guided by the following specific research objectives:

- To analyse front office trainees' pragmatic competence on the formulation and realisation of request strategies;
- to evaluate the trainees' application of politeness principles in the speech acts of refusal and apologetic responses; and
- to examine the factors that influence the trainees' pragmatic competence.

1.5 Significance of study

It is envisaged that the study will contribute to the already existing body of knowledge on researches of English as a Second Language (ESL) in Namibia, a multilingual and multicultural country. This would therefore imply that, this kind of undertaking is crucial in providing insight into the problems associated with the use of the English language, especially amongst front-office trainees within the hospitality industry who are undergoing vocational training. The study has the potential to also provide curriculum planners in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) important evidence relating to communication successes and failures between trainers and trainees in pedagogical processes owing to the use of the English language within professional contexts. In addition, it is hoped that the study will also contribute to reduction of communication barriers relating to both pragmatic competence and discourse analysis, in the process, potentially ensure the creation of a desirable and conducive environment for achieving set goals for both trainers and trainees of the training department under study.

1.6 Delimitation of the study

The study was conducted at Valombola Vocation Training Centre in Ongwediva. The outcome of the research is based on a sample from the hospitality training department. This however, does not really reflect the same scenario and trends in all the other departments. The

Valombola VTC is within the radius of 10 kilometres from the researcher's residence making it easily reachable and accessible.

1.7 Definitions of key technical terms

- **Pragmatic competence** - refers to the ability to produce and comprehend utterances (discourse) in social-cultural contexts during communication interactions.
- **Pragmatic reference** - is an act in which a speaker or writer uses linguistic forms to enable a listener or reader to identify something (Wills, 2017).
- **Pragmatic inference** - is connecting prior knowledge to text-based information to create meaning beyond what is directly stated (Yule, 1997).
- **Sociolinguistic competence** - refers to the ability to use language that is appropriate to social contexts, (May, 2005).
- **Cross-cultural pragmatic failure** - refers to the failure to understand a speaker's intentions in intercultural communication (Thomas, 1983).
- **Language anxiety** - is the feeling of unease, worry, nervousness and apprehension experienced in learning or using a second or foreign language (Kitano, 2001)

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a review of some theories relating to pragmatics and pragmatic competence. It further presents detailed reviews of scholarly literature that shares close affinities with the concerns of the current study. This is done in order to contextualise the current study within the pre-existing corpus of scholarship on pragmatics and pragmatic competence.

2.2 Pragmatic and communicative competence analysis on formulation and realisation of request strategies

2.2.1 Pragmatics defined

Pragmatics is the study of the context-dependent aspects of meaning which are analytically abstracted away from the construction of logical form (Kasper, 2004). In the semiotic trichotomy developed by Morris, Carnap and Peirce in the 1930's, syntax addressed the formal relations of signs to one another, semantics – the relation of signs to what they denote and pragmatics – the relation of signs to their users and interpreters. 'Pragmatics' can therefore be defined as a subfield of linguistics which studies the ways in which context contributes to meaning (Kasper, 2004). According to Kasper, 'pragmatics' studies how the transmission of meaning depends not only on the linguistic knowledge (e.g. grammar, lexicon etc.) of the speaker and listener, but also on the context of the utterance, knowledge about the status of those involved and the inferred intent of the speaker. In this respect, pragmatics explains how language users are able to overcome apparent ambiguity, since meaning relies on the manner, place and time etc. of an utterance (Cohen, 2008). Cohen further adds that the ability to understand another speaker's intended meaning is called pragmatic competence. On the other hand, pragmatic awareness is regarded as one of the most challenging aspects of language learning, and comes only through experience.

2.2.2 Pragmatics and the concept of communication

Communication calls for the understanding of the intended meaning while pragmatics examines how context contributes to the understanding of an intended meaning. Understanding how successful communication works is actually a process of interpreting not just what speakers say, but also what they intend to mean (Yule, 2006). According to Yule, not only is interpreting what a speaker has said very important in communication, but also the ability to understand what the speaker wants to say beyond the words they have uttered. Hymes (1972) indicates that knowing a language does not just mean being linguistically competent in that particular language. A linguistically well-formed sentence can be appropriate in one context but completely inappropriate in another situation. When something is said wrongly in one context or when language is used wrongly, it could lead to misunderstanding or it could even result in hurting someone's feelings. So, to know a language, one must be pragmatically competent rather than just being linguistically competent. Wolfsan (1989) claims that a grammatical or pronunciation error may be easily forgiven by the native speakers of a language, but not a pragmatic one. It is possible to understand how much the knowledge of pragmatics plays a paramount role in communication besides knowing grammar or other linguistic aspects of a certain language. In order to smooth the communication process, it requires understanding pragmatics.

The study of what speakers mean, or speaker meaning, is called pragmatics (Yule, 2006). As can be discerned from the definition of pragmatics proffered above by Yule, knowing meaning alone cannot guarantee successful communication. One should also understand the intended meaning of the speaker. In order to have a common understanding, the listener should have the competence of predicting the speaker's intended meaning. Pragmatic failure is the inability to understand the meaning of an utterance (Thomas, 1983). This occurs when two speakers of the same speech community misunderstand one another. Wolfsan (1989) suggests that native speakers of a language are easy to forgive an error in grammar or pronunciation. However, a pragmatic one can cause offense. Perhaps a more accurate depiction of the current situation is that grammatical or pronunciation errors are more recognisable while many people are not consciously aware of their language's social rules of speaking. Thus, a pragmatic error can sometimes cause offense.

Trosborg (1995) states that proficient foreign language users may fail to communicate effectively because they lack social appropriateness rules for conveying their intended communicative acts. What is very important here is not only the knowledge of grammar, but social appropriateness too. What is appropriate in the society is given emphasis in pragmatics study. Oral communication comprises the participation of speakers in social interaction and the understanding of different forms of discourse. When people communicate with each other, they communicate meanings, information, thoughts, ideas, beliefs, attitudes, emotions, among other things (Sperber & Wilson, 1986). In order to achieve their communicative aims, learners not only need linguistic knowledge - coined by Chomsky (1957) as linguistic competence – but also pragmatic knowledge. Here one can deduce how both linguistic and pragmatic dimensions influence language users' linguistic performance noticeably.

The ability to use language in a socially appropriate manner is critical, as lack of it may lead to cross-cultural miscommunication or cultural stereotyping. Research on and into pragmatic competence has repeatedly proven that even proficient speakers of English often lack necessary pragmatic competence, i.e., they are not aware of social, cultural, and discourse conventions that have to be followed in various situations (Akram, 2008). Communication is the creation or exchange of thoughts, ideas, emotions, and understanding between sender(s) and receiver(s) in communicative context (Kong, 2009). It is essential to build and maintain relationships in the workplace. Although managers spend most of their time communicating (e.g., sending or receiving information), one cannot assume that meaningful communication occurs in all exchanges (Green, 2002). Once a memorandum, letter, fax, or e-mail has been sent, many are inclined to believe that communication has taken place. However, communication does not occur until information and understanding have passed between the sender and the intended receiver of the communicative act. As many authors explain, to make oneself understood as intended is an important part of communication.

A receiver may hear a sender but still not understand what the sender's message means. Being constantly engaged in encoding and decoding messages does not ensure that an interlocutor is an expert in communication. Based on the above explanations provided by the varied scholars cited above, it is possible to deduce that workplace success and teacher-student interaction depends on the ability to communicate appropriately with others. From

developing targeted messages to motivating workers and students as well as creating messages that keep us safe with increasing productivity, better academic achievement and better work environment and leading to career success, effective workplace communication skills are quite critical to day to day communication. Effective communication skills are among the skills we assume every worker has learnt along the way, especially through vocational or tertiary training. The problem is that not all the communication skills and habits that we would have learnt at home, school or social circles are appropriate for the workplace or classroom situation. Understanding how to speak, write and manage one's nonverbal messages is critical to one's success.

For sure, communication has always been a necessity in human life and through communication, the trade of thoughts among people, which directly contributes to the development of the quality of life itself, can be performed (Buck et. al., 2002). According to Buck et. al., the ability to make utterances in communication can determine the actions followed and messages can be conveyed through verbal and nonverbal communication. Leech (1983) states that pragmatics is concerned with problem-solving from the speaker's and from the hearer's points of view, in addition to identifying the meaning beyond the literal one. According to Leech, pragmatics is the one which creates life in communication and it is the only linguistic field that deals with intended and invisible meanings deduced by examining the context and mood of the speaker (situation).

Leech (1983) initially defined pragmatics as "the study of meaning in relation to speech situations" (p.6). Griffith (2006, p. 17) submits that speech acts do not refer just to the act of speaking, but to the whole communicative situation, including context of the utterance. A similar definition is also provided by Stalnaker (1996) who opines that "pragmatics is the study of linguistic acts and the contexts in which they are performed" (p. 79). Thomas (1995) formulated a definition of pragmatics in three words; 'meaning in interaction'. Thomas suggests that meaning is not something inherent in the words alone, nor is it produced by the speaker alone, nor by the hearer alone. Making meaning is a dynamic process, involving the negotiation of meaning between a speaker and a hearer, the context of utterance (physical, social, linguistic) as well as the meaning potential of an utterance (p.22). Leech's (1983) definition above relating pragmatics to speech acts situations is worth considering because the theoretical framework adopted for this study is largely couched within the

communicative roles as explicated through the Speech Acts Theory (SAT). With regard to communication in context, Buck et. al., (2002) further state that there are two types of communication: verbal and nonverbal communication.

Verbal communication is the means of communicating messages by using words as elements. Nonverbal communication is the manner of communicating messages by using gestures, body movements, eye contacts, facial expressions (Buck et. al). They therefore emphasise that one needs to develop pragmatic knowledge and maintain pragmatic competence, further noting that pragmatics is a study which believes that what is communicated is more than what is said. Yule (1996, p.3) argues suggests that utterances that speakers produce in communication contain deeper meanings/sense than the surface meanings of the words or phrases themselves. Yule indicates that pragmatics has more to do with the analysis of what people mean by their utterances than what the words or phrases in those utterances might mean in communication by themselves.

Pragmatics is also strongly related with the context or situation in which something is being said. Thus, it is very important for speakers to focus on the context. Barron (2003) citing Leech (1983) also states that pragmatics is the study of meaning which is related to the speech situations, highlighting the need to analyse speech acts. In line with Leech's statement, Yule (1996) argues that pragmatics should also consider aspects of context such as who people are talking to, when, where, and under what circumstances as these will determine the way they say what they want to say.

Yule (1996, p. 3) further opines that there are four areas which pragmatics is concerned with: the first being that pragmatics is the study of speaker meaning, the second being that it is the study of contextual meaning, the third being that it is the study of how to get more communicated than it is said and the fourth being that pragmatics is the study of the expression of relative distance. There are various definitions of pragmatics in the literature emphasizing different dimensions of this construct. One of the most analysed definitions is provided by LoCastro (2003). LoCastro defined pragmatics broadly as, "the study of speaker and hearer meaning created in their joint actions that include both linguistic and non-linguistic signals in the context of socio-culturally organised activities" (p. 15).

Kasper and Blum-Kulka (1993) view pragmatics "as the study of people's comprehension and production of linguistic action in context" (p. 3). However, the concept of context seems as difficult to define as the term pragmatics itself "because of its multifaceted nature and inherent complexity" (Fetzer, 2007, p.4). Duranti and Goodwin (1992) suggest that context is what "surrounds the event being analysed and provides resources for its appropriate interpretation" (p.3). Fetzer (2007) classifies context as linguistic, cognitive, socio-cultural and social context. Meanwhile the context is of three sorts according to Cutting (2002, p. 5) – "the situational context, what speakers know about what they can see around them; the background knowledge context, what they know about each other and the world; and the co-textual context, what they know about what they have been saying".

In the broad sense, as explicated to Yule (1996), through pragmatics people must be able to take hold of the message of the utterances by being aware that the words or phrases contain deeper meanings than the literal meaning of the words that are spoken. In line with this, Barron (2003) supports the explanation that pragmatics is the study of the use of language in communication related to sentences and the context and situations in which they are used.

2.2.3 The concept of multicultural communication

People utilise their own cultural principles and values to guide their words and their performances, even thoughts, and they also use these as standards to judge the words and deeds of others (Melinte, 2012). According to Melinte, this is mainly because national culture is so deeply fixed in the heart of the people of a specific nation. Melinte further adds that from the time people are born, they are subject to the influence of national culture. People adopt their own culture as the centre of their lives – they believe that only what people enact around them is correct. According to Gerber and William as cited in Wang & Lê (2006, p.1) "cultural differences are indeed significant, especially in areas of dialogue and public participation". In the same vein, Ting-Toomey (1996) argues that when individuals are socialising, they learn various patterns of interaction that are based on the norms, rules and values of their culture. These patterns of interaction form the basis for the individuals' communication styles. These styles that individuals use to communicate vary across cultures and within cultures. All the above-mentioned assertions are supported by Devito as cited in Wang & Gu (2005), who maintain that non-verbal messages and their meaning, such as the appropriate use of time and space, touch, eye contact, eye avoidance, facial expressions,

body language, body distance, paralanguage, and silence amongst others, all contribute to successful communication. Culture plays a critical role in moulding all of our non-verbal behaviours, which comprise an important part of the communication process (Matsumoto & Takeuchi, 1998) Ting-Toomey (1996) imagines these variations in communication styles as they are explained in Hall's (1976) differentiation between low and high-context communication. Low-context communication involves the use of explicit and direct messages in which meanings are contained mainly in the transmitted messages. High-context communication in contrast, involves the use of implicit and indirect messages in which meanings are embedded in the person or in the sociocultural context in which the message is constructed. Hall argues that people in a culture use both low- and high-context communication, but one tends to be predominant. However, low-context communication is used predominantly in individualistic cultures, whereas high context communication is used predominantly in collectivistic cultures. Individualism involves a focus on the self as a unique entity and collectivism involves a focus on the self-embedded in group memberships.

According to Hooker (2008) the individualistic or collectivistic tendencies that individuals learn when being socialised into their cultures in turn also influence individual-level factors such as the ways in which individuals conceive themselves and the values that individuals hold. Therefore, both low context and high context styles of communication have both direct and indirect effects on communication behaviour and these are mediated through individual-level factors such as self-construal and values. Hooker further indicates that individualistic and collective cultures influence the major cultural values which individuals learn and the ways that members of cultures acquire perceptions of themselves. Communication style has a direct influence on behaviour (e.g., through norms/rules used to guide behaviour), but it also influences behaviour indirectly through the values and self-construal that individual members learn when being socialised into a culture. Hooker {2008} emphasises that individualistic cultures emphasise the goals of the individual over group goals, whereas collectivistic cultures stress group goals over individual goals. In individualistic cultures, individuals tend to assume responsibility only for themselves and their immediate family. In collectivistic cultures, individuals tend to belong to in-groups that look after them in exchange for the individuals' loyalty.

Hooker further states that in high-context communication, the message cannot be understood without a great deal of background information. Low-context communication spells out more of the information explicitly in the message. The foregoing is supported by Kiss (2008) who believed that even the way people deal with conflict links back to the individualistic and collectivistic cultures. Some people more often than not, deal directly with conflicts as they arise. For example, a face-to-face meeting is a customary way to work through problems. In many Eastern countries, open conflict is considered embarrassing or demeaning. Differences are best worked out quietly. Another means might be enlisting a respected third party who can facilitate communication without risking loss of face or being humiliated. According to Kiss, from culture to culture, people have different ways of completing tasks and they might have different access to resources, different rewards associated with task completion, different notions of time and different ideas about how relationship-building and task-oriented work should go together. Asian and Hispanic cultures tend to attach more value to developing relationships at the beginning of a shared project, with more emphasis on task completion toward the end. In addition to the above, Kiss explains that attitudes towards personal disclosure also affect the ways in which we communicate. In some cultures, it is not appropriate to be frank about emotions, the reasons behind a conflict or misunderstanding or about personal information. Questions that might seem natural to one individual might seem intrusive to others. The variations among cultures in attitudes toward disclosure is also something to consider before one concludes that they must have an accurate reading of the views, experiences and goals of the people who that one is interacting with.

2.2.4 Intercultural communication barriers in a vocational education context

When communicating, trainers in vocational education and training often encounter trainees in the vocational institution who not only use different languages, but who also come from different cultural backgrounds. Because of the differences, misunderstandings may occur in the process of communication and this may have a negative effect on the people within such communicative contexts. Jeong (2008) submits that communicating with people from different cultural backgrounds may induce breakdowns due to significant dissimilarities between cultures. The issue of cultural barriers in academic institutions is critical, especially in intercultural interactions. According to Martinez (2003) people do not know about other

cultures, and some do not want to know. There is no doubt that both ignorance (lack of knowledge) and naiveté (lack of sophistication) can be important barriers to intercultural communication. Various scholars such as Martinez (2003), Kiss (2008) and Joeng (2008) argue that the main communication barriers in intercultural communication revolves around ethnocentrism, stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination amongst others.

These are barriers because each is constructed around a judgment made before any communication takes place, thus, bias influences the communication that follows. All communication has a past, present, and future – and barriers are part of the past that influences the communication that takes place now and affects all that follows in the future. In academic contexts, these barriers are often the cause of fears and frustrations. Martinez (2003) describes ethnocentrism as the belief that the behaviours of one's own cultural group, norms, ways of thinking, and ways of being are superior to all other cultural groups. This is supported by observations made by Kiss (2008) and Joeng (2008) in which they submit that most of us would like to believe we are open-minded and accepting. But in reality, a great number of us find discomfort with those who are different in terms of values, beliefs and behaviours. We may then, as a result of this, evaluate other in a negative light. Ethnocentrism carries devotion to the extreme point where one cannot believe that another culture's behaviours, norms, ways of thinking and ways of being are as good or as worthy as their own. We tend to evaluate good and bad, right and wrong relative to how closely the values, behaviours and ideas of others mirror our own. These scholars believe that ethnocentrism magnifies differences, thus, in the process discouraging trainees from attempting to interact with others from different cultures.

This becomes a barrier in intercultural communication when it prevents us from even trying to see another's point of view. It also hampers all attempts at empathy. In addition, Martinez (2003) identifies stereotyping as a communication barrier and this is also supported by studies by Kiss (2008), Dumessa and Godesso (2014) and Joeng (2008). Their studies identify stereotyping as the most significant barrier to effective intercultural communication. Stereotyping is the tendency to categorize and make assumptions about other trainees or trainers based on identified characteristics such as gender, race, ethnicity, age, religion, nationality and socioeconomic status. Whether we realise it or not (and we often do not), we all stereotype and make assumptions about others at one time or another. Stereotyping is

basically oversimplified or distorted views of another race, another ethnic group or even another culture. Stereotypes are stumbling blocks for communicators because they interfere with the objective viewing of stimuli. In other words, when people have a stereotypical preconception of a person from a certain culture, they often interpret his/her behaviour according to this preconception, whether the reason for the behaviour is what we think it is.

We shy away from people who are culturally different (therefore trainees of similar racial and cultural backgrounds tend to group together). These are simply ways of categorising and generalising from the overwhelming amount of information that we receive daily. Another study which focuses on "technical writing" argues that English courses in the tertiary education context should incorporate practical exercises, examples and activities that will enable vocational or tertiary trainees to write effective technical materials and grasp English skills and activities that can help them in their professional lives. Furthermore, for the current study, the trainees were found to lack confidence in using English communicatively as well as having a low motivation to learn the language further. The institution does not have a module or a fully-fledged course book for the Technical Report Writing course for front-office trainees

2.2.5 Stereotyping in intercultural communication

Once people develop stereotypes about members of different groups, there is a powerful psychological process at work that leads us to maintain these stereotypes. This process, known as expectancy confirmation, consists of the tendency to use instances when stereotypes are supported as "proof" that the stereotype is valid. And once again, this will often happen subconsciously. According to Hussen and Woldemariam (2016), a study conducted in the Ethiopian higher education context has confirmed 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 (Hussen and Woldemariam, 2016, p.91).

A similar type of study also concluded that English courses must be integrated with other fields of studies. The contents, strategies and tasks in the English teaching manuals must be designed based on the immediate academic and professional needs of students (Mognhode

and Woldemariam, 2015, p. 190). According to Martinez (2003) prejudice is a negative attitude toward a cultural group based on little or no experience. Kiss (2008) states that prejudice is caused by the lack of understanding that is frequently present between people from different backgrounds. Joeng (2008) also believes that prejudice is indeed a communication barrier because we make judgments about others without sufficient evidence to substantiate the opinions. Because people may have differences in values, beliefs, methods of reasoning, communication styles, work styles and personality types, communication difficulties will occur. Discrimination is also a communication barrier identified by Martinez (2003). It is the overt actions that one takes to exclude, avoid, or distance oneself from other groups. Discrimination takes stereotypes and prejudice one step further to action, whether overt or covert. Joeng (2008) argues that discrimination between lecturers and students normally arises from an observation of the students' academic achievements and classroom behaviour. However, Pilkington, as cited in Joeng (2008), believes that teacher typification can be based on prior observation of students' ability and behaviour. One can discriminate against someone subtly by slightly turning away their body when in a conversation, or by avoiding eye contact with them. One can also discriminate against people by hurling verbal insults at them.

Hussen and Woldemariam (2016) draw inspiration from a study conducted in the Ethiopian Higher Education context which observes that that teachers do not bring in outside materials to complement the paucity of intercultural pragmatics contents of the English language textbooks to facilitate the opportunities for teaching and learning pragmatics in the classroom. According to them, evidence for this points to 100% of the teachers responding unanimously that they have never supplemented the textbooks with additional materials to instruct pragmatics in English for in Foreign Language Learning settings, where there were rare opportunities to learning pragmatics outside the classroom (Shankule & Woldemariam, 2015, p.45).

Before reviewing the literature on how understanding other students' culture can minimize misunderstandings, it is of paramount importance to understand culture. According to Jandt as cited in Dumessa and Godesso (2014), "culture can be seen as the "way of living, including behavioural norms, linguistic expression, styles of communication, patterns of thinking and beliefs and values of a group large enough to be self-sustaining, and transmitted over the

course of generations" (p.1). According to Axner (2017), culture is a strong part of people's lives. It influences their views, their values, their humour, their hopes, their loyalties, and their worries and fears. So, when one is working with people and building relationships with them, it helps to have some perspective and understanding of their cultures. Gudykunst as cited in Gitimu (2005) proposes that effective intercultural communication is partly based on one's ability to manage anxiety and uncertainty. Anxiety has to do with feelings of discomfort while uncertainty deals with an inability to predict the behaviour of others. Dumessa and Godesso (2014) further opine that as cultures vary, misunderstandings and difficulties in intercultural communication are inevitable.

If we are aware of these differences, we are certain to face difficulties in communicating with people from other cultures. To increase the students' cultural fluency, it is important to ensure that they are aware of and sensitive to different values, beliefs, attitudes and assumptions in diverse aspects of life as well as culturally different modes of behaviour. Successful communication is a prerequisite for the effective transfer of knowledge in school. A rich repertoire of verbal and non-verbal behaviours appropriate to the intercultural situation as well as effective capabilities to react sensitively to fellow communicators from other cultures is a necessity in education (Gitimu, 2005).

> Effective knowledge transfer requires lecturers and students to communicate effectively which requires them to communicate linguistically, inter-culturally, and interpersonally. For effective communication to take place, lecturers should also acquaint students with the target culture. This will help to reduce cross-cultural communication barriers/misunderstandings, and make them communicate competently, both linguistically and cross-culturally (Wang & Gu, n.d.).

According to Martinez (2003), for accurate communication to occur, senders and receivers of messages must operate from the same perceptual point of view. This is usually not a problem when we interact with people from our own race or culture. However, when we communicate with someone from a different race or background, we must realise that the person will be operating from an entirely different point of view. The above is supported by Quappe and Cantatore (2007) who note that cultural awareness becomes central when we must interact with people from other cultures.

Ntuli (2015), in a study conducted in South Africa, argues that in our interactions, we sometimes come across people who not only use different non-verbal cues and speak different languages from ours, but who also come from cultures and backgrounds which are different. According to Ntuli (2012), because of our differences, misunderstandings may occur in the process of communication and this may have a negative effect on the people around us. Non-verbal gesticulation forms part of communicative behaviour and includes body language such as facial expressions like smiling, frowning, eye contact and different types of physical gestures. Intercultural communication takes place in various forms of interactions. For instance, it involves our beliefs, behaviour, language and non-verbal cues amongst others. Sottitat (2017) agrees with the above and argues that intercultural communication can be difficult in some countries because what is acceptable in one culture may be unacceptable in another.

When people are immersed in an environment in which facial expressions such as eye contact and body gestures are alien to their own experience, they may suffer from disorientation and frustration. Therefore, it is important to learn the body language of different cultures. Herring (1990) as cited in Gitimu (2005), concludes that non-verbal communication is really part of communication itself. Cultural misunderstandings and miscommunications can be greatly reduced by an increased awareness of cultural differences in non-verbal communication patterns. Herring defines nonverbal communication as behaviour that transcends verbal and written words. Herring opines thus, that many ethnic groups use non-verbal communication more extensively than they use verbal communication, especially in expressions of feeling and attitudes. Kiss (2008) argues that non-verbal behaviour arises from our cultural common sense - our ideas about what is appropriate, normal and effective. To communicate in relationships, we use different systems of understanding – gestures, posture, silence, special relations, emotional expression, touch, physical appearance and other non-verbal cues. Cultures also attribute different degrees of importance to verbal and non-verbal behaviours.

All communication is cultural and draws on the ways we have learned to speak and give non-verbal messages. We do not always communicate the same way from day to day, since factors like context, individual personality and mood interact with a variety of cultural influences and choices. Communication is interactive and as such, an important influence on

its effectiveness is our relationship with others. Perfecting ourselves in effective communication skills can ease our move through conflicts. A culturally fluent approach to conflict means working diligently to understand these and other ways that communication varies across cultures and applying these understandings to enhance relationships across differences (Ntuli, 2012).

2.2.6 Pragmatic comprehension

Understanding mechanisms, processes and strategies involved in pragmatic comprehension is a very important research gap that has remained understudied so far (Kasper & Rose, 2002). Knowing such possible procedures and strategies can assist second language users adapt better instructions for pragmatic comprehension development. In addition, gender in its socio-psychological view, as claimed by Kasper and Rose (2002), is a factor that can likely affect pragmatic comprehension in general and the pragmatic comprehension strategies in particular. Therefore, it is worth being including in this pragmatic competence assessment-based research. Garcia (2004) believes pragmatic comprehension to be the comprehension of pragmatic meaning through the spoken discourse during authentic interactions with native or competent non-native speakers. In comprehending pragmatic meanings, the mind is engaged in a chain of simultaneous and multidimensional interactions with the dimensions of the context of situation (Taguchi, 2013).

According to Taguchi (2013), both mind and context are highly dynamic and change drastically as their variables continuously vary. Pragmatic comprehension, therefore, is not vividly observable and studying it is more difficult compared to pragmatic production (Taguchi, 2017). That is the reason why most of the studies in second language pragmatics have investigated the language users' pragmatic production and a slight number of studies have been conducted on pragmatic comprehension. Here, some of these pragmatic comprehension studies are briefly reported and scrutinised here. Some pragmatic comprehension studies have examined whether second language users can precisely understand the implied meaning or not (Taguchi, Li & Liu, 2013).

Likewise, Taguchi et al. (2016) examine the comprehension of indirect pragmatic meanings across indirect rejections, indirect opinions and ironies in second language and observe that second language users understood indirect opinions more accurately and more quickly than

direct opinions and ironies. Krultaz (2018) submits that there is ordinarily a priority of oral and written pragmatic comprehension over pragmatic production and in the process argue that collateral interrelationships of both pragmatic skills and pragmalinguistic skills are "responsible for the ability to correctly interpret, select and utilise speech act strategies, which are conventionally, socially and culturally determined" (p. 7).

Another group of pragmatic studies dealt with cognitive processes underlying pragmatic comprehension (Garcia, 2004). Pragmatic production is intricately interwoven into pragmatic comprehension and none can operate independently (Kasper & Rose, 2002). Meanwhile Taguchi (2013) believes that pragmatic comprehension is the second language users' capability to reconstruct, interpret and understand other interlocutors' intended intentions on the basis of the shared knowledge of the world, sociolinguistic knowledge, interactional competence and the various dynamic dimensions of the context. Pragmatic comprehension is multifaceted because there are some social, linguistic, cultural, and pragmatic processes that determine the comprehension, reconstruction and interpretation of the intended meanings in discourse (Taguchi, 2017).

2.2.7 Speech act of request strategy

Iragui (1996, p. 58) observes that, "the native speakers' use of alerters and intensifiers confirms most studies on pragmatics that have reported that native speakers of English use more politeness markers than non-native speakers, who tend to be more direct". It is imperative to take note of the conclusions and the findings of the study that non-native speakers of English do not apply a combination of alerters and intensifiers in their practical use of language. This is crucial evidence to the supposition by the researchers that the non-native speaker's performance in speech acts is face threatening. Accordingly, the study believes that the non-native speaker's performance in cross-cultural communicative processes is direct and could be vulnerable to pragmatics communication breakdown. Kasper (1992, p. 208) argues that, "directness and indirectness, and a plethora of lexical, syntactic, and prosodic means capable of mitigating and aggravating illocutionary force have been identified crosslinguistically as polite marking devices".

A further analysis of Iragui's assertion highlights the lack of pragmalinguistic knowledge in the non-native speakers to construct responses with alerters, intensifiers and elements of

politeness. Hence, in a subtle way, Iragui puts it through that it is a combination of socio-pragmatic and pragmalinguistic knowledge that ensure an appropriate and relevant interactional pragmatic communicative process. In light of this, Lenchuk and Ahmed (2019, p. 11) point out that, "without making any judgements on the values of the speakers of different speech communities, we would like to emphasise the importance of awareness, tolerance and sensitivity towards the communicative styles of the other in a multicultural, multi-ethnic and multilingual community". An analysis of this assertion by Lenchuk and Ahmed highlights some important information about interactional pragmatics – different strategies are utilised to communicate in multilingual, multi-ethnic and multi-cultural environments. In other words, an appreciation of cultural differences as encompassed in language becomes vital to the realisation of successful interactional communicative processes.

Moreover, Lenchuk and Ahmed identify issues such as directness or indirectness, context, social status, social setting, linguistic forms and the choices available and politeness in a subtle manner. Additionally, all these variables are contained in socio-pragmatic and pragmalinguistic knowledge. The view is also held by Al-Zubaidi (2020, p. 2) who argues that, "therefore, communication breakdowns are often liable to occur in cross-cultural interactions when interactants of different linguistic backgrounds are not aware of such variables". These notions by Al-Zubaidi (2020) as well Lenchuk and Ahmed (2019) point to the importance of non-native speakers of the English language to develop awareness on the variables that can affect cross-cultural communicative engagements.

2.2.8 Pragmatic competence enhances communicative competence

Communicative competence is a general term used in this paper to help in understanding pragmatics in particular. Communicative competence has two essential components - sociolinguistic and pragmatic competencies. Although both are universally acknowledged as crucial for language teaching/learning, they are however, according to modern methodological requirements, not adequately taught and learned (Bachman, 1990).

The concept of communicative competence was Hymes' (1972) reaction, to Chomsky's (1965) concept of competence who made a fundamental distinction between competence (the speaker-hearer's knowledge of the language), and performance (the actual use of the

language in concrete situation). According to Crystal (1985) as cited in Thiba (1988), communicative competence focuses on the speaker's ability to produce and understand sentences which are appropriate to the context in which they occur – what they need to know in order to communicate effectively in socially distinct settings. Communicative competence, as viewed by linguists for sociolinguistic purposes, is laid out in strict definitive terms. According to Bachman and Palmer (1996), communicative competence involves not only knowing the language as a code of verbal and non-verbal interaction and its syntactic, phonetic, phonological rules and its lexis, but also the knowledge of what is proper and not so in any given context. In other words, it embraces the knowledge of what to tell a particular person, or when to opt for silence, how to talk appropriately in any given situation, how to address people of different statuses, ages and/or gender, how to command, how to express criticism, how to accept or reject offers and how to make requests etc. (Bachman & Palmer, 1996). Canal and Swain (1980) believe that communicative competence refers to a learner's ability to use language to communicate successfully.

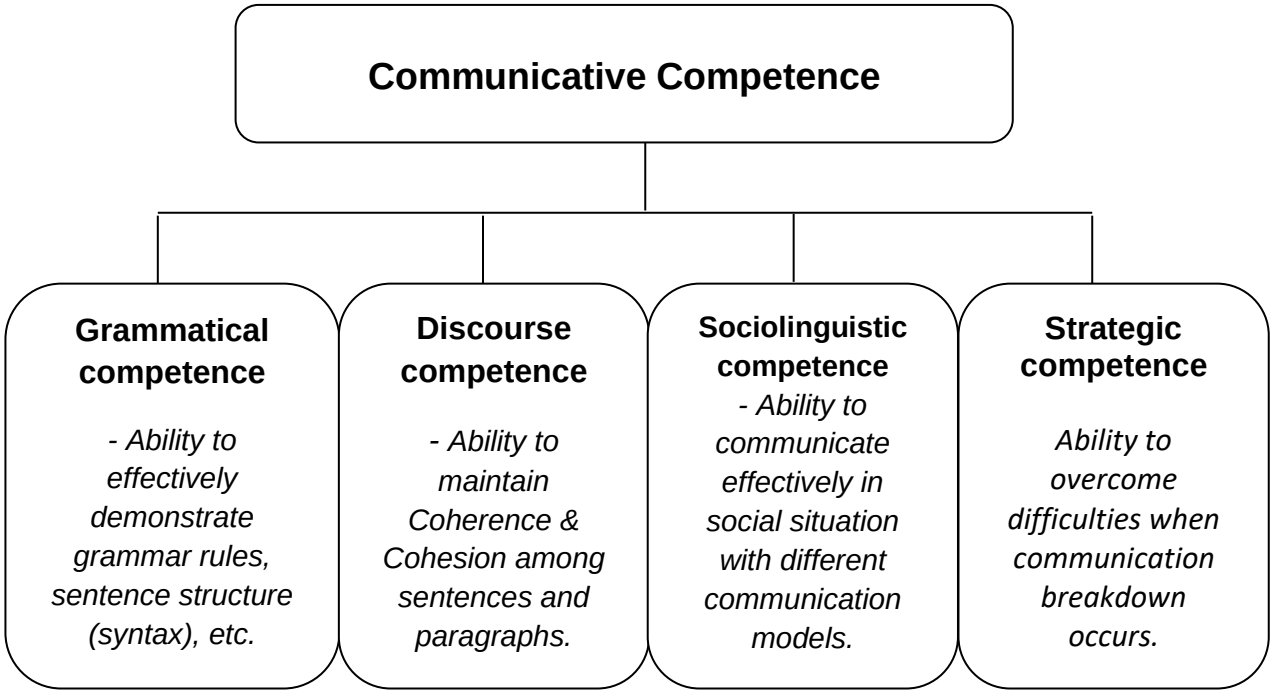
Pragmatic competence plays a key role in the era of globalisation where communication across cultural boundaries is an everyday observable fact. The ability to use language in a socially appropriate manner is critical, as the lack of it may lead to cross-cultural miscommunication or cultural stereotyping. Canale and Swain (1980) provide a discussion of communicative competence suggest that communicative competence is composed of grammatical competence (the knowledge of lexical items and rules of morphology, syntax, sentence-grammar semantics and phonology) sociolinguistic competence (sociocultural rules of use and rules of discourse) and strategic competence (verbal and non-verbal communication strategies) (p. 29 - 30). This suggestion was later expanded by Canale (1983) with the addition of discourse competence. Although Canale and Swain (1980) and Canale (1983) did not make an explicit mention of pragmatic competence in their categorisation, it was inherent in their definition of 'sociolinguistic competence'.

As aptly established by Kasper (2001), pragmatics was inherently part of the definition; "it had just not yet come to its own name" (p. 503). Thomas (1983) defines pragmatic competence as "the ability to use language effectively in order to achieve a specific purpose and to understand language in context" (p. 92). Bachman (1990) imagines pragmatic competence as one of the two major components of language competence. Bachman further

classifies language competence into two types – as organisational competence and pragmatic competence.

Organisational competence, composed of grammatical and textual competencies, has to do with the ability to produce and comprehend grammatically correct sentences and to be able to use the cohesive devices of language correctly. Bachman notes that although the components of this hierarchical model seem to be separate and independent of each other, they are intertwined and they all interact with each other in an act of communication and with the features of the situation that language is used in. Savignon (2002) similarly suggests that the four competencies (grammatical, discourse, sociocultural and strategic) are all interrelated in such a way that an increase in any one of them would eventually lead to an increase in the overall communicative competence. Communicative competence is more of the language user's grammatical knowledge of syntax, morphology, phonology, semantics and pragmatics, as well as social knowledge about how and when to use utterances socially.

Canale and Swain (1980) propose a theoretical framework of communicative competence into grammatical, sociolinguistic, strategic, and discourse competence:



2.2.9 Grammatical competence

Bearing in mind that the trainees' speaking skills are ideally the main goal for using language, grammatical competence is believed to have a big role within foreign language trainees in tertiary education, especially in the spoken form. Grammatical competence is defined as the speaker's ability to utilise the rules of grammar correctly in order to generate and understand linguistic symbols (Thiba, 1988). Thus, grammatical competence is demonstrated through the learner's ability to utilise language fluently, resulting from the correct use of the rules of grammar. This is in line with Krashen's (1982) observation that grammatical competence has its own role, which is very crucial within the trainees' language use, and which is not only for the production of language, but also for monitoring the use of language. Grammatical competence is referred to as the mastery of the linguistic codes (Chomsky, 1965). It is the ability to recognise lexical, morphological, syntactical, and phonological features of a language and to use these features effectively to interpret, encode, and decode words and sentences. According to Chomsky (1965), grammatical competence is the ability to recognize and produce the distinctive grammatical structures of a language and to use them effectively in communication. This means grammar has its own role in the delivery of meaning or messages within communication.

Linguistic scholars claim that grammatical competence is necessary for language users to achieve communicative competence. In several models of communicative competence, it is included as the prominent element (Ur, 2011). Due to the importance of grammatical competence, grammar lessons still remain as an important issue in language learning and prominent in training and classroom practices. However, scholars have different views about the concept of grammatical competence. Murcia (1988) defines grammatical competence as the language users' knowledge about the structure of the language. On the other hand, grammatical competence is defined as the knowledge about the structure of a language including phonology, lexicon, syntax, semantics, and the ability to practice that knowledge for communicative purposes (Bachman, 1990; Canale & Swain, 1980; Celce-Murcia et al, 1995; Larsen-Freeman, 2003; Richards, 2006). This means that grammatical competence is the product of having grammatical knowledge. It also can be observed that in most instances, the students with good grammatical competence have good grammatical knowledge. Therefore, it can be inferred that grammatical competence covers the aspects of knowledge and ability in using grammar (Canale & Swain, 1980).

2.2.10 Sociolinguistic competence

Intercultural exchanges between native and non-native speakers by means of indifferent approaches in life within the communication arena have created research and pedagogical interest because they provide opportunities for language users to participate in intercultural dialogue while simultaneously developing the necessary strategies to perform successfully in the activity (Thorne, 2005). The sociolinguistic competence applies to the knowledge and skills that are needed to deal with the social norms of language use such as the use of a selection of greetings, principles of turn-taking, the use of politeness markers, ways of expressing gratitude or regret, followed by the ability to use the language appropriately depending on the different functional styles in formal situations, less formal and informal contexts (Spolsky, 1998). According to Spolsky, sociolinguistic competence also includes the ability to distinguish different dialects, perceive and recognize regional differences – not only register differences between communication partners, but also differences in their non-verbal expressions.

Another explanation is provided by Spolsky (1998, p. 3) who submits that "sociolinguistics is the field that studies the relation between language and society, between the uses of

language and the social structures in which the users of language live". Spolsky further observes that "sociolinguistic competence is a field of study that assumes that human society is made up of many related patterns and behaviours, some of which are linguistic." As language is a means of communication, its consequent function is also to develop social relationships. According to Spolsky, almost every person is able to build a social relationship with varieties of groups and use an appropriate style of communication in certain social groups to achieve his/her communicative purposes. One will use a different style of addressing, possibly the informal and familiar style with the friends and family members and the formal style for example, with the respected members of the Royal family.

Spolsky (1998, p. 5) also observes the fact that "the existence of patterned variation in language makes it possible to identify ourselves and others as belonging to certain groups." Language and its use in social contexts, sociolinguistics, studies the complex connection between the variations within the language and variations within the social groups. Such differences can show the specific variations of pronunciation and grammar. Those minor variations can reveal whether the speaker is a native or non-native one, what nation he/she is from, or even the geographical information, such as what part of the country and city the speaker comes from.

It can also naturally reveal his/her social or economic background. Sociolinguistics studies those aspects of language which can inform us about the social and regional variations. (Spolsky, 1998, p. 6) notes that "as much as speech itself communicates content, so the form of speech, the selection among available society marked variants, communicates important social information about the speaker and the listener and about their relationship to each other." Another view on social communication is called the sociology of language and focuses on language and its role in the society (Spolsky, 1998).

Sociolinguistic competence enables interlocutors to use contextually appropriate language based on their grammatical knowledge. It, in a way, combines linguistic knowledge with contextual rules (Canale & Swain, 1980). In a manner of speaking, this means that sociolinguistic competence refers to the ability to use language that is appropriate to social contexts. Alptekin (2002, p. 58) explains that social context refers to culture-specific contexts that include the norms, values, beliefs, and behavioural patterns of a culture. This in other

words, means that sociolinguistics is the descriptive study of the effect of any and all aspects of society, including cultural norms, expectations and context on the ways in which language is used as well as society's effect on language. It differs from the sociology of language, which focuses on the effect of language on society (Alptekin, 2002).

2.2.11 Discourse competence

The concept of discourse competence derives from the theory of communicative competence. In fact, the concept of discourse competence occurs in all of the models of communicative competence in a language. The view that communicative competence in a language includes a number of different dimensions was first proposed by Hymes (1972), as a response to Chomsky's concept of competence as distinct from performance. Discourse competence generally references the ability to understand and produce extended speech and written features which assist connectedness and cohesion (Kaplan & Knutson, 1993, p. 167) in different spoken and written texts/genres. In Celce-Murcia et al.'s (1995, p. 15) model, discourse competence includes the five components: "cohesion, deixis, coherence, generic structure and conversational structure inherent to the turn-taking system in conversation". Parallel to Canale's definition (1983), Celce-Murcia et al.'s (1995) model has been developed for pedagogical purposes. Canale & Swain (1980) opine that discourse competence is about the ability of the language user to follow cohesion and coherence in language production in a bid to maintain flow and unity.

Discourse, in the broadest sense, refers to language use in social contexts. The two main aspects of discourse competence are cohesion and coherence (Celce-Murcia, Dornyei & Thurrell, 1995). Cohesion refers to using linking expressions, such as conjunctions or adverbial phrases, to connect ideas. A coherent text is one that makes sense. This concept includes clearly and logically indicating relationships, such as cause-effect and problem-solution, between ideas or events. Discourse competence also refers to the familiarity with genres such as conversations, interviews and reports. In other words, a discourse competent speaker or writer is able to arrange words, phrases and sentences to structure a text that is appropriate within a particular genre (Connor & Mbaye, 2002). According to Connor and Mbaye, a lack of coherence in a text is often noticeable when ideas jump out of the blue.

2.2.12 Strategic competence

The last item of communicative competence – strategic competence – is related to both verbal and non-verbal hints that can make interaction more effective and hinder possible communication breakdowns (Celce-Murcia et al, 1995). Strategic competence is the knowledge of how to use one's language to communicate intended meaning. In other words, strategic competence refers to the ability to get one's meaning across successfully to communicative partners, especially when problems arise in the communication process. Foreign language users may develop competence in each of these three areas at different rates, but all of them are important in developing communicative competence. According to Celce-Murcia et al (1995), strategic competence refers to the ability to overcome difficulties when communication breakdowns occur. Hence, based on these brief definitions, one can infer that effective communication with little or no misunderstanding requires a successful combination of these four competences. However, since strategic competence involves strategies to be used when communication is difficult, it is of crucial importance for foreign language users. A lack of strategic competence may account for situations in which language users with a firm knowledge of grammar and a wide range of vocabulary get stuck and are unable to carry out their communicative intents (Celce-Murcia et al, 1995).

2.3 Application of politeness principles in speech act of refusal and apologetic responses

2.3.1 Speech acts in pragmatics

Speech acts are an integral part of pragmatics and help ascertain if there are implicit beyond the phrases or words uttered when a speaker says something. Yule (1996) believes that speech acts refer to the study of how the speakers and hearers use language. Meanwhile, Bach (1979) explains that an action in verbal communication contains a message in itself, and as such, communication is not only about language but also the action as emphasised in speech acts. Speech acts are acts that refer to the action performed by produced utterances (Tsui, 1994). People can perform an action by saying something whereby the hearer needs pragmatic competence to be able to understand the force in the statement in order to perform the required actions. The idea proposed by Levinson (1983, p.236) which is also in line with Griffith (2006, p. 17) states that speech acts do not simply refer to the act of speaking, but to the whole communicative situation, including the context of an utterance

(including the situation in which the discourse occurs, the participants and any preceding verbal or physical interaction). Through speech acts, a speaker can convey physical action merely through words and phrases, and conveying utterances are essential to the actions performed (Tsui, 1994).

According to Tsui, it is easy for speakers or listeners to determine the intended meanings of utterances if they are spoken in their mother tongue. However, pragmatic knowledge is required. Factors such as idiomatic expressions and cultural norms are not supposed to function as barriers to determining the intended meaning. Speech acts, as variety of verbal communication and also a subdivision of pragmatics, often takes place as verbal and non-verbal communicative acts. There are often implicit and establishable aims beyond the words or phrases that are uttered when a speaker communicates something. Tsui (1994, p. 4) explains that speech acts are acts that refer to the action performed by produced utterances.

As earlier suggested by Tsui, factors such as idiomatic expressions and cultural norms are not supposed to function as barriers to the determination of intended meaning. However, in foreign language contexts, those factors tend to have the proclivity to hinder someone's ability to understand the 'true' meanings of utterances. It is also often hard to perform speech acts in a second language mainly because in most instances, language users may not know the idiomatic expressions or cultural norms in the second language or they may transfer their first language rules and conventions into the second language, assuming that such rules are universal (Tsui, 1994). Many language users have a natural tendency to fall back on what they know to be appropriate in their first language.

However, it is important that these language users understand exactly what they do in that first language in order to be able to recognise what is transferable to other languages. Something that, according to Tsui (1994), works in English might not transfer in meaning when translated into the second language. Hymes (1974) proposes the SPEAKING Model of speech analysis and speech events – also known as the Ethnography of Speaking Model. According to Hymes, in order to speak a language correctly, one does not only need to learn its vocabulary and grammar, but also the context in which words are used. In the speaking

model aspects of the linguistic situation are considered and applied to various components of a discourse sample or a communicated message.

In line with Tsui (1994), Yule (1996, p. 47) observes that a speech act is an action which is performed through utterances. Stating the same idea, Birner (2013) also believes that uttering something means doing something. Here, people can perform an action by saying something. Through speech acts, the speaker can convey physical action merely through words and phrases. Pragmatically, an action that is done through language can be studied under the concept of speech act. Retnowatz (2017) and Dorcheh and Barahartooie (2016) explain that in the scientific acceptance of the term, a speech act generally denotes the appropriate use of language in a given social environment, where both implicit and explicit meanings take centre stage. According to Renowatz et al., pragmatic competence is the knowledge of speech acts and speech functions and the ability to use language appropriately according to context. Yule (1996, p. 47) uses the term “speech act” to refer to the actions which are performed via utterances. In this regard, for example, when a manager says, “Follow Covid-19 protocols!”, his words constitute the act of promoting Covid-19 rules and regulations. In this example, the manager is performing an act via an utterance. It means the words can change someone`s attitudes. As Yule further indicates, language is also full of hidden (implicit) meanings. Sometimes when a speaker utters something, he does not just utter the utterance, but the speaker means something that should be inferred.

A powerful statement is presented by Yule (1996) that when people try to express themselves, they do not simply produce utterances that contain grammatical structures and words. However, actions are performed through those utterances. These actions performed by means of utterances are known as ‘speech acts’. According to Andersen and Aijmer (2011), the study of speech acts started out as a philosophical concern spearheaded by philosophers such as Austin and Searle in the 1960s. Austin paved the way by showing ‘how we can do things with words’ (Austin, 1962) and Searle (1969) formulated conditions or rules for the appropriate use of various speech acts such as promises or requests which he claimed to be universal.

However, Searle’s (1969) analysis of speech acts is based on isolated examples and no attention was given to the embeddedness of speech acts in different social contexts. Austin’s

idea of speech acts was developed and extended by Searle (1969), by the assumption that all utterances, even those without performative verbs, constitute acts. That is, rather than treating some utterances as examples of doing and others as instances of saying, Searle (1969) believes that both utterances under appropriate circumstances constitute acts. The theory was expanded by categorising all speech events into different types of acts and then trying to determine validity conditions on every type of speech act. All in all, Searle's theory states that everything that people say constitute some sort of speech act namely, promising, stating, apologising, threatening, requesting and predicting. According to Yule (1996) these terms apply to the speaker's communicative intention in producing an utterance. The expectation from the speaker is that the hearer will recognise his/her communicative intention. This is why it is impossible to leave out speech acts in the study of pragmatics due to their significance as a major area in language use.

According to Smit (2012), a useful speech act distinction is that between the act's locution, its illocution and its perlocution. Searle (1969) had as well looked at the concept that every speech act consists of three separate acts which are an act of saying something (locution), an act of doing something (illocution), and an act of affecting the listener (perlocution). Locutionary is the act of simply uttering a sentence from a language, in other words it is a description of what the speaker says. For instance, if one says "My watch is broken", the expression is referring to "my watch" and the predicating expression is "is broken". Illocutionary act is what the speaker intends to do by uttering a sentence. These acts are those that include stating, promising, apologising, threatening, predicting, ordering, and requesting. For example, if a mother says to her child "Take your feet off the table", here the illocutionary act is an act of ordering.

Furthermore, a perlocutionary act is the effect on the hearer of what a speaker says. They include such effects as persuading, embarrassing, intimidating, boring, irritating, or inspiring the hearer. For example, if a husband says to his wife ten times in five minutes "Hurry up, dear, we're going to be late for the party", the perlocutionary act is likely to be one of irritating (Parker, 1986). These are some of the acts that will be utilised in the WDCT to assess pragmatic competence. To conclude, the action performed by producing an utterance consists of three related acts, namely, locutionary act, illocutionary act and perlocutionary act. In brief, an locutionary act is the basic utterance, or producing a meaningful linguistic

expression. With illocutionary act, an utterance is formed with some kind of function in mind, whereas perlocutionary act deals with the effect of illocution on the hearer.

According to Mey (1994) one can perform three speech acts simultaneously such as locutionary act, illocutionary act, and perlocutionary act. Note that the locutionary act has to do with the utterance of a sentence which determines sense and reference. Locutionary act is about the literal meaning of words. Another example of a locutionary act is: "Covid-19 is serious in this area". The literal meaning here is a reminder that Covid-19 proliferates in the area. Mey (1994) indicates that an illocutionary act is about intended meaning – what a speaker wants to convey or say. Using the example above, here the intended meaning of the sentence above – is that the hearer must observe Covid-19 preventative measures such as wearing a face mask when in public spaces. This act thus deals with the making of statements, offers, promises etc. Meanwhile, at the stage of perlocutionary act, the listener performs what they have heard and, in this regard, using the same example, the listener or hearer thus puts on their face mask as a reaction to what has been said. According to Levinson (1983), this act deals with the effects on the audience achieved by uttering the sentence.

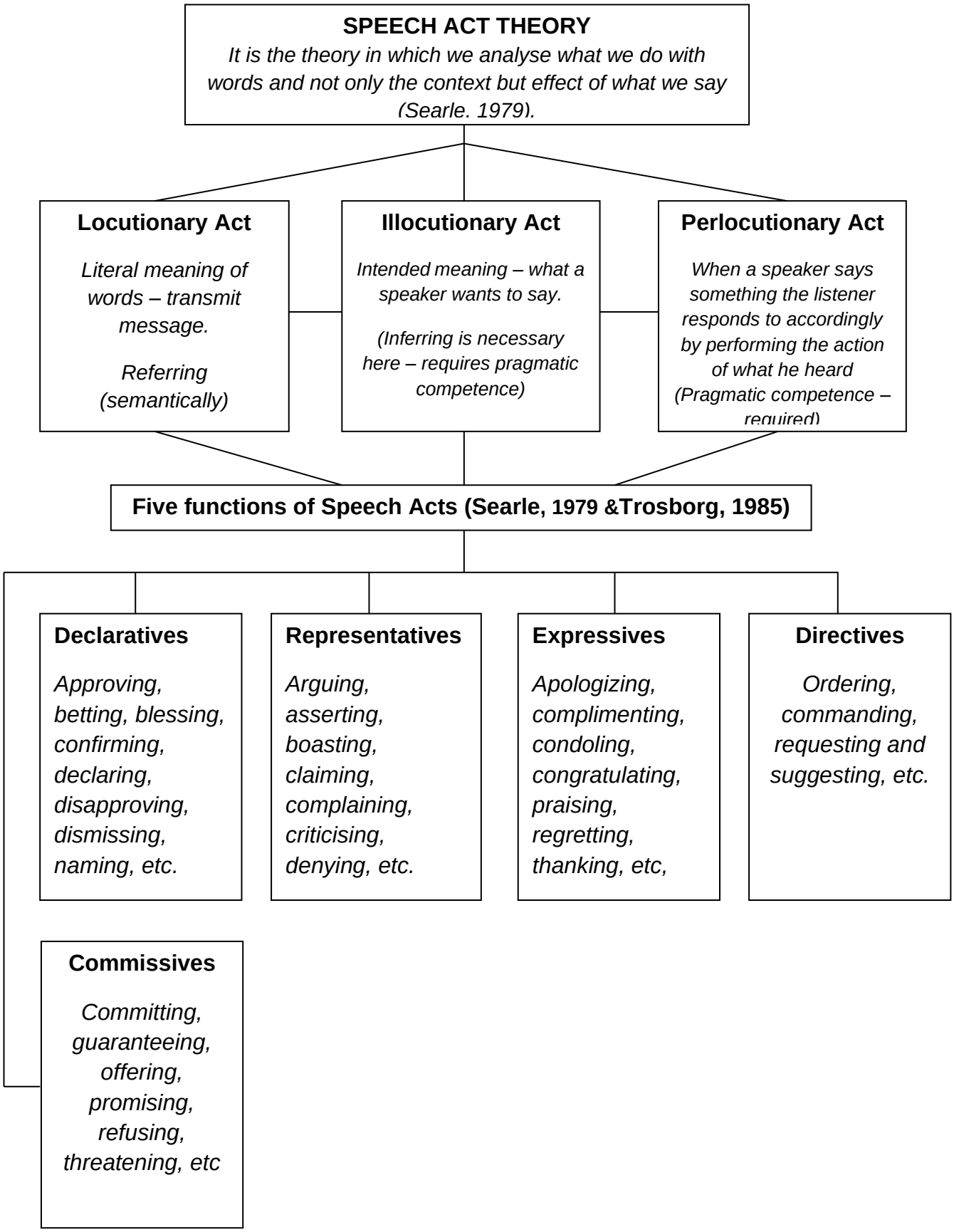
Another philosopher who shed light on three types of speech acts was Cutting (2002) who believes that a locutionary act is what is said. Cutting's statement has similarities with what is also proposed by Yule (1996) who notes that a locutionary act is the act of producing meaningful utterances. Like Mey (1994), Cutting (2002) also gives an example of the locutionary speech act seen in the following sentences: a) It's so dark in this room. b) The box is heavy. According to Cutting (2002) the above two sentences symbolise the real conditions. The first sentence refers to the lighting of the room and the second sentence refers to the weight of the box.

On the illocutionary level, Cutting (2002) citing (Yule, 1996, p.48), explains that an illocutionary act is performed through the communicative force of an utterance, such as promising, apologising, offering. This act is also known as the act of doing something in saying something. According to Yule the most considerable level of action in a speech act is the illocutionary act because of the force in it, which has been desired by speakers. Cutting (2002) further explains that an illocutionary act can be the real description of interaction condition, for example: a) *It's so dark in this room* and b) *The box is heavy*.

Based on the examples above, the first sentence portrays a request to switch the light on and the second sentence represents a request to lift up the box. Regarding the perlocutionary act, Hufford and Heasley (1983, p. 250) observe that the perlocutionary act is the act that is taken into consideration by a speaker when making an utterance and which causes a certain effect on the hearer and others.

Hufford and Heasley (1983) argue that perlocutionary act refers to the effect the utterance has on the thoughts or actions of the other person. Their explanation is in line with Levinson (1983) and Mey (1994) who also observe that the perlocutionary act is specific to the circumstances of issuance, and is therefore not conventionally achieved just by uttering that particular utterance, and includes all those effects, intended or unintended, often indeterminate, that some particular utterance in a particular situation cause.

Hufford and Heasley (1983) elaborate on the above given example by explaining that, drawing from the examples given above, it can be inferred that the first sentence is uttered by someone while switching on the light and the second sentence is made by someone whilst lifting up the box – in both instances thus, performing a perlocutionary act by doing so. Still on speech acts, the research here also considers the views of various seminal scholars with regards to their classifications of the functions of speech acts such as representatives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives. The views are summarised Figure 2.1 below:


SPEECH ACT THEORY
It is the theory in which we analyse what we do with words and not only the context but effect of what we say (Searle, 1979).
Locutionary Act
Literal meaning of words – transmit message.
Referring (semantically)
Illocutionary Act
Intended meaning – what a speaker wants to say.
(Inferring is necessary here – requires pragmatic competence)
Perlocutionary Act
When a speaker says something the listener responds to accordingly by performing the action of what he heard (Pragmatic competence – required)
Five functions of Speech Acts (Searle, 1979 &Trosborg, 1985)
Declaratives
Approving, betting, blessing, confirming, declaring, disapproving, dismissing, naming, etc.
Representatives
Arguing, asserting, boasting, claiming, complaining, criticising, denying, etc.
Expressives
Apologizing, complimenting, condoling, congratulating, praising, regretting, thanking, etc,
Directives
Ordering, commanding, requesting and suggesting, etc.
Commissives
Committing, guaranteeing, offering, promising, refusing, threatening, etc

2.3.2 The Classification of Speech Act functions

Speech acts have at least five functions which are representative, directive, commissive, expressive and declarative (Searle, 1979 as cited by Mey, 1993).

2.3.2.1 Declaratives

Declaratives are a type of speech act which change the world via an utterance and these are exemplified by approving, betting, blessing, confirming, cursing, declaring, disapproving, dismissing and naming, etc. (Mey, 1993). An example of this category of speech acts is: “Do away with Covid-19 rules and regulations”. In this example, the speaker tells the hearer to ignore Covid-19 rules and regulations. Regarding declaratives, Mey (1993) believes that declaratives are speech acts through which an utterances effects immediate changes in the institutional state of affairs and which tend to rely on elaborate extra-linguistic institutions. These speech acts include communicating, declaring war, christening and firing from employment. for example: “You are fired!”.

2.3.2.2 Representatives

Representatives are a kind of speech act which state what the speaker believes to be the case or not. The type includes arguing, asserting, boasting, claiming, complaining, criticising, denying, describing, informing, insisting, reporting, suggesting and swearing, etc. (Mey, 1993). An example of representative is “Over my dead body! I will not obey the new police road safety rules”. The speaker here does the act of disobeying by refusing to adhere to/follow the new road safety rules. Representatives are speech acts through which the utterances commit the speaker to the truth of the expressed proposition. The utterances are produced based on the speaker’s observation of certain things followed by a stating of the fact or opinion based on the observation. When someone says “she’s beautiful”, the speaker can state the sentence based on the fact or just give his own opinion about the physical appearance of a female person. In this manner, the act functions as a statement of what the speaker believes to be the case or not. Statements of fact, assertions, conclusions, and descriptions are all examples of the speaker representing the world as he believes it to be. For example, when someone says “The earth is flat”, this represents the speaker’s convictions about the shape of the earth. The speaker has thus, expressed an opinion that the earth is flat. According to Mey (1993) representative speech acts can be identified

through some speech acts verb, such as: remind, tell, assert, deny, correct, state, guess, predict, report, describe, inform, insist, assure, agree, claim, beliefs and conclude, etc.

2.3.2.3 Expressives

Mey, (1993) states that expressives are a type of speech act which state what the speaker feels. Expressives are exemplified by apologizing, complimenting, condoling, congratulating, deploring, praising, regretting, thanking, etc, for example, “You have done a good job by passing exams with a distinction.” Here the speaker shows his appreciation to the hearer`s pass grade. Expressives are speech acts through which the utterances express a psychological state (Mey, 1993). These speech acts include thanking, apologising, welcoming and congratulating. For example, when someone says “Don’t be shy, my home is your home.” According to Mey (1993), the utterance represents the speaker’s emotive state, that is, that he/she welcomes the hearer.

2.3.2.4 Directives

Directives are a kind of speech act which the speakers use to get someone else to do something (Mey, 1993). The acts are exemplified by ordering, commanding, requesting and suggesting. An example of a directive is “Make sure that all of our employees respect and follow Covid-19 protocols.” In this sentence, the speaker commands the hearer to ensure that Covid-19 rules are adhered to and observed by the specified employees. Directives are speech acts which speaker use to get someone else to do something. These speech acts include requesting, questioning, command, orders, and suggesting. An example, of a directive is a polite request such as when someone says “Could you lend me a pencil, please?”. In this instance, the utterance represents the speaker’s request to the hearer to do something, which in this case is to lend them a pencil.

2.3.2.5 Commissives

Commissives are a type of speech act which a speaker uses to commit themselves to some future action (Mey, 1993). The acts are exemplified by committing, guaranteeing, offering, promising, refusing, threatening, volunteering and vowing etc. For example, when one says, “Just come with your return ticket and accommodation will be taken care of.” Through this utterance, the speaker is promising and guaranteeing the hearer to come and not to worry about accommodation since they promised to arrange for that. According to Mey

commissives are speech acts in which an utterance commits the speaker to some future course of action, these include promising, threatening, offering, rejection and pledges etc. For example, when someone says “I’ll be back”, this represents the speaker’s promise that they will return.

2.3.3 Politeness in pragmatics

Politeness comprises linguistic and non-linguistic behaviour through which people indicate that they take others’ feelings of how they should be treated into account (O’Keeffe et al., 2011). Recommending politeness in speech acts practice, Gleason and Ratner (1998, p. 286) opines that politeness means to act in manner that takes into cognisance the feelings of others and involves both those actions associated with positive face (the wish to be approved of) and negative face (the wish to be free from the imposition, unimpeded, or left alone). Eelen (2001, p. 2) observes that Robin Lakoff can be imagined as the mother of modern politeness theory since she was one of the pioneers to study it from a pragmatic perspective. Lakoff (1990, p. 34) defines politeness as “a system of interpersonal relations designed to facilitate interaction by minimising the potential for conflict and confrontation inherent in all human interchange”.

Meanwhile, Yule (2010, p. 135) submits that politeness is defined as showing awareness and consideration for another person's face. According to O’Keeffe et al. politeness comes into operation through evaluative moments that involve assessing someone’s behaviour and interpersonal altitudes, and in fact it helps people build and maintain interpersonal relationships – and when people behave in what they perceive as polite in a given situation, they attempt to perform shared values with others, hence cause positive emotions. Thus, the examination of politeness reveals information about the broader in-group, social and cultural values that underlie the productive and evaluative interactional behaviour of individuals. O’Keeffe et al. further describe politeness as a social action that consists of both linguistic and non-linguistic elements and that represent a social practice. By extension, the research of politeness also provides insight into the social practices that surround individual language use.

Crystal (1997, p. 297) believes that politeness is a term that implies linguistic features associated with the norms of social behaviours, in relation to concepts such as courtesy,

rapport, deference and distance. Crystal further indicates that many studies have focused on the role of politeness in social interaction and conversation. In a manner of speaking, the speaker, to be polite, needs to adopt specific strategies to cope with the hearer's face wants during any social interaction. Some of these strategies reflect the relationship between indirectness and politeness. However, choosing the appropriate strategies is determined by some factors that affect how and what is said in an interaction since they are allied with social distance and closeness (Crystal, 1997).

Meanwhile Eelen (2001) notes that the study of politeness explains clearly whether all cultures are similar or different in the way they follow to show politeness. According to Eelen (2001, p. 1) politeness is investigated from the pragmatic and sociolinguistic perspective and it is also quite agreed that theories of politeness are involved in what belongs to either of these linguistic subfields. This is because politeness is specifically concerned with language use that is connected with pragmatics – and it is a phenomenon that represents a link between language and the social world. Scovel (1998, p. 38) explicates that pragmatics represents the study of what people mean when they use language in normal social interaction, while sociolinguistics refers to the study of why we say, what to whom, when and where. Eelen (2001, p. 1) confirms that although the pragmatic and the sociolinguistic perspectives are different from one another, they unify the field of politeness theory in that, politeness seems to be a phenomenon that is associated with the relationship between language and social reality.

Watts (2003, p. 13) believes that the meaning of politeness is reproduced and renegotiated whenever and wherever it is utilised in verbal interaction. In general, as Watts explains, while politeness has been defined by different linguists, their definitions evince that all of them agree that ''face'' is the most relevant concept in the study of linguistic politeness. Having said that it is therefore becomes critical to analyse the following factors which play a major role in politeness analysis such as politeness and cultures, negative and positive face and other necessary aspects of language and communication discussed in detail below.

2.3.4 Politeness and cultures

The concept of politeness has been applied by many researchers to a number of different languages (Saeed, 2009). Saeed further emphasises that when considering the value of the

concept of politeness for studying indirect speech acts, one important issue that needs to be considered is cross-cultural variation. Yule (2010, p. 134-136) observes that a person's indirect speech act is occasionally not recognised well by others. For example, let us consider the following dialogue between a visitor, carrying his luggage, looking lost and a passer-by.

Visitor: Excuse me. Do you know where the Ambassador Hotel is?

Passer-by: Oh sure, I know where it is. (And walks away)

In this scene, the visitor uses an interrogative structure to make a request, i.e., indirect speech act, but the passer-by acts as if the utterance was a direct speech act (Yule, 2010). According to Yule, ideas about the suitable linguistic resources that demonstrate politeness differ from one culture to another – and If a person from a culture in which directness is a good way to show solidarity uses direct speech acts (e.g. Give me that chair!) to a person whose culture is oriented to indirectness and avoiding direct imposition, they will be regarded impolite. In turn, there will be a misunderstanding of an utterance such as (Are you using this chair?), in that it is unclear whether the speaker want the chair or are just asking about it.

Saeed (2009, p. 248) opines that speech acts such as thanks, apologies, compliments and invitation, etc., as well as indirectness differ from one culture to another. Politeness has had a controversially universal interest, yet it is different traditionally from one culture to another (Brown, 1987). Saeed (2009, p. 247) adds that the concept of face, for Brown and Levinson, is universal. It is thus important to observe that every linguistic community has a system of politeness, but the details associated with that system will vary since face is associated with the most essential cultural ideas concerning the nature of the social persona, honour and virtue, shame and redemption and thus, to religious concepts too.

Saeed (2009, p. 247) indicates that unlimited things, such as requesting, ordering, warning and so on, can be accomplished by using the language. Consequently, politeness is essentially associated with language use. Saeed further observes that politeness has been given different definitions by different linguists, yet what unifies their definitions is the concept of 'face', which is agreed to be the most relevant concept in the study of politeness. This is related to the fact that all human social interaction involves ‘face work’ of one kind or another, and there is a relationship between 'face' and 'indirectness' since indirectness

involves negative and positive indirectness to cope with negative and positive politeness. On this basis, there is a close affinity between politeness and indirectness, as indirect forms are more polite than direct one.

Politeness represents a link between language and the social world. As such, it is very necessary to minimise potential conflict and also to enhance an individual's social relations. According to Saeed it is clear that the speaker may get his request recognised through different ways – e.g. saying nothing, making off the record statements and/or making on the record statements that may be done baldly or indirectly. Anyhow, to reach a satisfying degree of politeness, an individual must use one of the following strategies: making off the record statements; making on the record statements with redressive action to include the positive and negative face. Saeed further observes that the choice of such strategies is determined by specific social factors. After all, it becomes clear that what is considered as polite in one culture may be considered as impolite in another culture since politeness strategies vary across cultures. It can be concluded, in this regard thus, that every language has a system of politeness, and that linguists have failed to formulate a universal system of politeness.

2.3.5 Politeness and social values

A language cannot be defined without referring to some aspects related to society. Therefore, a great deal of what we say, and much of what we communicate, is identified by our social relationships (Yule, 1996). A linguistic interaction is basically related to a social interaction. Gleason and Ratner (1998, p. 286) suggest that politeness is governed by the power relations between members, the social distance between them and the degree of obligation which may be included. Yule (1996) states in this regard that, the various factors associated with social distance and closeness must be considered to make sense of what is said in an interaction, within which some of these factors are largely external factors and prior to an interaction. These factors typically include the relative status of the participants, based on social values related to such things as age and power. Giving example, Yule states that in English speaking contexts, speakers of lower status tend to use address forms which involve a title and a last name (for example, Mrs Clinton, Mr John, Dr Smith) to express the social distance between themselves and higher status speakers. Other factors are internal to

the interaction, such as the amount of imposition or degree of friendliness that are often negotiated during an interaction (Yule, 1996).

The initial social distance may change to be less or more during its course. This may lead participants to move from a title-plus-last name to a first-name basis during the talk. These external and internal factors have an influence on both what we say and how we are interpreted. The speaker may be misunderstood by the hearer that goes beyond the speaker's intention and evaluates him as 'rude' and 'inconsiderate', or considerate and 'thoughtful'. Such evaluations lead to a clear idea that more is being communicated than what is said. The investigation of the impact of such interpretation is achieved in terms of politeness. Yule (2010, p. 135) explains that when a speaker uses a direct speech act to get someone to do something (For example, “Give me that paper!”), they show that they have more social power than the other person. Thus, if the speaker acts in a way that shows a threat to another person's self- image, they are using a face-threatening act. When the assumption of social power is removed, and a speaker uses an indirect speech act to ask someone to do something, i.e., they use an interrogative structure instead of imperative one to make a request (Could you pass me that paper?). The new form makes the request politer and lessens the possible threat to another's face (Yule, 2010).

2.3.6 Face–Threatening Act (FTA): negative and positive face

One can always see that politeness assumes that we all have faces, and we all have face wants and needs. Furthermore, there are different types of faces threatened through various face-threatening acts, and sometimes the face threats are to the hearer, while other times they are to the speaker (Saeed, 2009). According to Saeed sociological variables come into play when considering a face-threatening act, which Seed also calls ‘weight’. The weight of a face-threatening act is determined by considering the combination of three variables: power, distance, and rank. Politeness Theory relies, in part, on the idea that there are different kinds of faces: positive face and negative face. Positive face reflects an individual's need for his or her wishes and desires to be appreciated in a social context. This is the maintenance of a positive and consistent self-image. Negative face reflects an individual's need for freedom of action, freedom from obligation, and the right to make one's own decisions (Saeed, 2009).

Saeed further observes that the Politeness Theory relies on the assumption that most speech acts inherently threaten either the speaker or the hearer's face, and that politeness is therefore a necessary component of inoffensive, i.e. non-face threatening communication and involves the redressing of positive and negative face. Saeed submits that face, according to Brown and Levinson (1978, p. 66), has two components:

a) Positive face, which is associated with a participant's desire to be liked and approved by others and his/her need to be connected and to be a member of the same group and

b) negative face, which is associated with a member's need to be independent and not to be imposed on by others.

Yule (1996, p. 61-62) explains that when the speaker tries to save other people's face, they have to care for their negative face wants and their positive face wants. The word 'negative' doesn't have bad meaning, but it shows the opposite pole from 'positive'. When one needs to be free of action and not to be imposed on by others, but independent, he has negative face. When a participant needs to be liked and accepted by others, to be treated as a member of the same group and to recognise that his or her wants are shared by others, he has a positive face. Simply put, positive face reflects the need to be connected, and negative face reflects the need to be independent. Saeed (2009, p. 246-47) asserts in this regard that "face, in many verbal interactions, may be threatened."

Threatening negative face, which represents damaging participant's autonomy, involves orders, requests, suggestions and advice. Threatening positive face, that decreases an individual's self and social discretion involves expressions of disapproval, disagreements, accusations and interruptions. Anyhow, by using expressions of apologies and confessions, speakers may threaten their own face. Yule (1996, p. 61) observes that there are many various methods of performing face saving acts, since every person generally tries to respect the face wants of others. Yule explicates that a face-saving act emphasising a person's negative face reflects concern about imposition, for example in expressions such as, "I am sorry to bother you…" and "I know you are busy, but...". A face-saving act emphasising a person's positive face reflects solidarity and shows a common goal, for example, "Let's do this together…" and "You and I have the same problem, so…".

Yule (1996, p. 62) believes that deference, emphasising the importance of the other's time or concerns and an apology for the imposition or interruption, are associated with a face-saving act that is concerned with the person's negative face. This is called negative politeness. On the other hand, when there is a tendency to show solidarity, emphasise that both speakers want the same thing and that they have a common goal, a face-saving act is oriented to the person's positive face. This is called positive politeness. Matthews (2007, p. 135) supposes that diminishing the threat to an addressee's 'negative face' and optimising their 'positive face' can be accomplished by following the basic strategy of politeness.

In language study, politeness goes beyond the obvious or general daily meaning. Politeness is the expressions of the speaker's intention to mitigate face threats carried by certain face threatening acts (Pinyo, 2010). Brown and Levinson's (1987) face-based theory of politeness sparked interest in studies of how speakers use certain general politeness strategies oriented to saving their own or the hearer's face, for instance, when asking someone to do something. The relationship between politeness and indirectness which was a cornerstone for speech act research based on Brown and Levinson's theories has been shown to be problematic because of its culture-specificity. According to Yule (1996) politeness can be treated as a fixed concept, as in the idea of polite social behaviour, or etiquette, within a culture.

Furthermore, a number of general principles for being polite in social interaction within a particular culture can also be specified. These principles may involve things such as being tactful, generous, modest and sympathetic toward others. The researcher's assumption is that one's pragmatic competence may be influenced by the etiquette within one's culture. The concept of face cannot be overlooked when norms and principles that exist in the society at large are discussed. Face has to do with the public self-image of person. It refers to emotional and social sense of self that everyone has and expects everyone else to recognise. Yule (1996) then concludes that in an interaction, politeness is "the means employed to show awareness of another person's face".

In addition, politeness can be accomplished in situations of social distance or closeness. For instance, showing awareness for another person's face when that other seems socially distant is often described in terms of respect or defence. Showing the equivalent awareness when the other is socially close is often described in terms of friendliness, camaraderie or

solidarity. Within the context of politeness, external and internal factors which relate to social distance and closeness are useful in conversations as they assist one to make sense of what is said. These are factors such as the relative status of the participants, which has to do with social values that are tied to aspects of age and power. The one which is considered as an internal factor is the amount of imposition or degree of friendliness which takes place during an interaction. With this factor, social distance is likely to change.

Therefore, both internal and external factors can influence not only what one says, but how one may be interpreted. Possibilities are that of the interpretation to go beyond a person's intended meaning, which may include evaluations such as 'rude' or 'inconsiderate' or vice versa. Recognition of the effect of these evaluations makes it very clear that more is being communicated than said. This flows into the concept of pragmatics which is central to the current study. The researcher thus, observes the connection between the two terms, 'pragmatics' and 'politeness'.

According to Andersen and Aijmer (2011) a maxim-based view of politeness was first suggested by Robin Lakoff (1973). What Lakoff did was to propose two rules of pragmatic competence, namely, "be clear" this is formalised in terms of Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle. The next is "Be Polite" and this is formalised in terms of Politeness Principles. This second Politeness Principle entails maxims such as 1) Don't Impose 2) Give Options and 3) Make your receiver feel good. Moreover, Lakoff (1973) notes that sometimes there is a clash between the need for clarity and need for politeness. Furthermore, the argument is that, what is more vital in an interaction is to avoid offense than achieve clarity.

2.3.7 Speech act of refusal strategy

Campilo, (2009) as cited in Dewi, Anisa and Aniq (2020, p. 89) states that the refusal speech act is a face-threatening act that requires a reasonable pragmatic competence since it is likely that it can give some risk to the interlocutor's negative or positive face. "Refusal act is essentially a face-threatening act in which the hearer's expectation is not met so that his action freedom is hampered" (p. 89). As demonstrated in the expression, it is imperative to accentuate that the refusal speech act carries with it pragmatic competence as a pre-requisite in order for an individual to function properly in cross-cultural communicative processes and contexts. That awareness or appropriate functioning is meant to maintain a

positive face in the interlocutor because a negative face or threat can result in pragmatic communication breakdown.

It is critical and critical here to highlight that those individuals from different cultures have a self-image awareness which is termed face. As such, in communicative processes and contexts, it is highly important to take cognisance of face. Moreover, a face-threatening act is one that subjects or exposes an individual to lose face or cause some kind of damage to it. A manner that is appropriate, relates to a communicative engagement that does not damage the face of the interlocutor by selecting the expected linguistic forms and units, giving awareness to the contextual situation.

Maroti (2016, p. 77) opines that, “when choosing an appropriate method for expressing refusal, the issue of social standing – the distance according to rank or relationship that exists between given speech partners – plays an important role in determining our selection”. Maroti’s belief is couched within a study conducted on refusal of offers. The notion highlights critical elements that are associated with the performance of refusals. The sociological point of view has been pointed out as a determinant in addition to the pragma-linguistic perspective. The understanding of forms and meanings cannot be separated from the context in which a communicative process takes place. In light of this, Maroti singled out socio-pragmatic knowledge as vital to a successful formulation and maintenance of positive face in a communicative process. Saud (2019, p. 97) submits that, “Refusals occur in all but not in the same way - what may be appropriate in one culture may not be so in another”. This resonates with the observations through the cross-cultural communication lens which believe that students using a second language or target language might face challenges in the formulation of appropriate and effective refusal strategies. This is observed on the backdrop of cultural differences having an impact on the ways in which we comprehend and interpret speech acts such as refusals in a second language. Besides the importance of selecting the appropriate linguistic forms and units in a communicative process, Saud raises a crucial variable that falls in the category of socio-pragmatic concerns, which is “the cultural perspective”.

Campillo, Safont-Jorda and Codina-Espurz (2009) points out that, refusals are often realised through indirect strategies, which require a high level of pragmatic competence. If refusals

are challenging for native speakers as they may involve lengthy negotiation moves, the situation becomes even more complex in interactions. Hence, communicative processes in which the non-native speakers of the English language are expected to perform indirect strategies could result in anxiety and withdrawal due to fear of humiliation. Campillo et al. (2009) in a subtle manner argues that non-speakers of the English language are susceptible to the utilisation of direct strategies due to lack of appropriate pragma-linguistic knowledge and awareness. “Consequently, the performance of refusals requires the selection of appropriate linguistic means and access to extensive cultural knowledge and can thus pose challenges to adult language learners” (Krulatz & Dixon, 2020, p. 752).

2.3.8 Pragmatic analysis of irony

In considering the concept of irony in pragmatics, one needs to bear in mind that even though the analysis of understanding is not a pragmatic discipline it is important to describe what conditions can shape people’s understanding and what factors can influence them (Colebrook, 2004). Irony is a common form of figurative language, widespread across cultures and languages (Tannen, 2005 citing Booth, 1974). The comprehension of irony is an important aspect of pragmatic language skills, and one that is challenging for typically developing trainees. Deficits in understanding irony can have negative social consequences, including social exclusion and misunderstandings (Kim & Lantolf, 2018). According to Colebrook (2004), it is also important to mention that people’s interpretations are not shaped only by the linguistic devices used in the utterance, but also by extra-linguistic cues, and that if people analyse the process of understanding then the process of creating an ironic utterance needs to be analysed too.

Giora (1998) believes that irony is not primarily a rhetorical device or a literary technique; it is found in ordinary language with a relatively high frequency. The most common and the simplest definition that is used to define irony is that it is saying something while meaning its opposite (Barbe, 1995; Colebrook, 2004; Giora, 1998; Muecke, 1970). The main problem with this definition is that there is some underlying meaning of an ironical utterance does not necessarily mean the exact opposite of its literal meaning. To be able to demonstrate the inconsistency between the literal or the sentence and the implied or underlying meaning, first, the distinction between sentence and speaker meaning needs to be explained.

To understand the sentence meaning the interpreter needs to understand the dictionary meanings of the words that are linked to the grammatical devices used in the sentence (Colebrook, 2004). However, in order to understand the speaker meaning, it is not enough to know the meaning of the words used in the utterance. The speaker meaning consists of two components: utterance meaning and force (Thomas 1995, p. 18). The utterance meaning is “what the speaker actually does mean by these words on this particular occasion” (Thomas 1995, p. 16) while “the term force refers to the speaker’s communicative intention” (Thomas 1995, p. 18). Dichotomies of the sentence meaning and speaker meaning are not always applicable when speaking about irony (Barbe, 1995, p. 88) arguing that a clear distinction of these dichotomies can be applied to underlying irony, as in this case the underlying meaning is clearly the opposite of the utterance.

For sure irony is defined as the use of words where the meaning is the opposite of their usual meaning or what is expected to happen (Attardo, 2000). Attardo attempts to compare ’irony’ with ‘implicature’ and establishes that there is slight difference between implicature and irony. An implicature is something the speaker suggests or implies with an utterance, even though it is not literally expressed, implicature can aid in communicating more efficiently than by explicitly saying everything we want to communicate (Attardo, 2000). Both irony and implicature use pragmatics efforts of inference and reference, and it is for this reason that they are viewed as part of pragmatics, a sub-discipline of linguistics – meaning that pragmatic competence or knowledge reinforces the efficient translation of an utterance in irony and it is an interpretation of the thoughts of someone other than the speaker or of the speaker in the past using inference or reference approaches.

Remember, irony expresses an opposition between what is said and implied. This means that the statement is ironic because there is implicature. About pragmatics itself, pragmatics is defined as the branch of linguistics that studies implied and inferred meanings. Therefore, the knowledge of pragmatics or competence is needed to clarify ironic statements. In line with this observation, Attardo (2000), pragmatics follows certain rules that natural speakers can follow without much thought at all. The most important aspect of pragmatics is the context, analysing the implicatures. That is to say, these utterances are second-degree interpretations of someone else's thoughts, irony, linguistic and literary devices, in spoken or written form and in which real meaning is concealed or contradicted.

In comparison with the traditional account of irony in terms of truthfulness, and mainly with Grice's proposal that irony is a case of violating the conversational maxims of quality, relevance theorists suggest that irony should be viewed as a case of echoic mention, and that recognition of an ironical utterance as a case of mention is crucial to its interpretation. Creusere (1999, p. 213) points out that "listeners understand ironic utterances by tending to implicit or explicit thoughts, behaviour, utterances or social norms". Yus (2000, p. 28) believes thus, that an ironic utterance in this respect is an interpretation of another thought, utterance or an assumption, which it resembles or attributes to different speaker's utterance at another time.

Consequently, Attardo (2000) concludes that the speaker of an echoic utterance must necessarily have a certain attitude that might be positive, negative or neutral towards the echoic utterance itself. In this respect, Attardo quotes Sperber and Wilson (1986, p. 239) who postulate that "sometimes, the speaker's attitude is left implicit, to be gathered only from the tone of voice, context and other paralinguistic clues, at other times it may be made explicit". In this regard Sperber and Wilson proceed to expand their theory of irony. They argue that "irony invariably involves the implicit expression of the attitude, and that the relevance of an ironical utterance invariably depends at least in part, on the information it conveys about the speaker's attitude towards the opinion echoed" (Sperber & Wilson, 1986, p. 239). As a result, an echoic utterance achieves relevance by "making it possible for the hearer to recognise, and perhaps to emulate, the speaker's interest in, and attitude towards somebody else's thoughts" (Sperber & Wilson, 1990, p. 5).

Conversely, the meaning of a sentence is often understood without the sentence being recognised as ironic. Lakoff and Johnson (1980, 1999) indicate that all of these points to irony are an integrated part of human communication which works implicitly and automatically. The case of irony is a bit like what Lakoff and Johnson (1980, 1999) observe concerning metaphor. Metaphor is not just a rhetorical figure of speech found in literary texts – it is used in ordinary language all the time and it is processed without necessarily being recognized as a metaphor. Lakoff and Johnson (1999) attempt to compare metaphor to irony in order to establish a clear distinction between them.

According to Lakoff and Johnson, metaphor is simply defined as a comparison between objects or people or places. They provide the following examples, “Life is a roller-coaster”, which implies the existence a lot of ups and downs in life. Another example being is “Success is a bastard as it has many fathers, and failure is an orphan, with no takers” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999).

According to Lakoff and Johnson (1999), irony is defined as a contrast between expectations and realities in a circumstance. It their attempt to compare irony with metaphor, Lakoff and Johnson (1999) observe that irony does not need to be mocking or insulting as sarcasm. However, this means that a statement can be metaphoric in nature but pragmatically ironic. Lakoff and Johnson (1999) argue that sarcasm involves deliberate mocking or insulting the object or person towards whom it is directed and it involves saying something which is the opposite of what one really means as in irony. Irony, on the other hand, is a pragmatic operator with no influence on the structure of language. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1999) irony is a literary device in which words are used to express a contradiction between appearance and reality. In irony, reality is usually the opposite of what it seems. In literature, there are three types of irony:

2.3.8.1. Verbal irony

Verbal irony is traditionally defined as "the figure of speech that conveys the opposite meaning of what is literally said. It is frequently used in daily discourse and in fact, it is so commonly used that many ironical utterances have become idiomatic, thus losing their ironic touch" (Sperber & Wilson 1995, p. 67). Verbal irony is when a speaker or writer says one thing but actually means the opposite. For example, when one’s mom walks into their dirty bedroom and says, “I see you’ve cleaned your room!”. Sarcasm is one type of verbal irony. According to Sperber and Wilson (1995) to discover verbal irony, one needs to ask themselves: What is really being said? If what the person actually says is not exactly what the person really means, that is more likely than not, verbal irony.

With verbal irony, the speaker’s intended meaning can be counterfactual to the literal meaning of their words and this form of figurative language can help speakers achieve a number of communicative aims. It however, also presents an interpretive challenge for some listeners. Irony is identified in many different types of verbal expressions, but also in

situations that are not necessarily expressed verbally. Irony is therefore not a unitary phenomenon. For instance, in a narrative the protagonist can utter a sentence that is ironic; this is called verbal irony (Sperber & Wilson, 1995). The verbal reasoning suggests that irony results from flouting the maxim of quality (i.e. do not say what you believe to be false). This violation allows the hearer to infer the opposite of what has been said in order to restore the assumption that the maxim has in fact been obeyed.

To illustrate this, let us consider the following example: On a rainy day someone exclaims "What a beautiful day!" In this type of example, the speaker encodes a proposition that is clearly false for the situation at hand, since a rainy day is manifestly not seen as a beautiful day (in normal circumstances). From a Gricean point of view, the speaker is saying something that is manifestly false and, therefore, he is openly violating the maxim of quality (Allan & Salmani Nodoushan, 2015).

However, if the hearer assumes that the speaker is in fact observing the cooperative principle and the maxim of quality, then the speaker must be taken to be communicating some related proposition that would satisfy this maxim (i.e. a true proposition). Grice argues that the related proposition actually communicated is the opposite of what has been said literally. Thus, the speaker would be conveying the following proposition: "What an ugly day!" This implicature allows the hearer to restore the application of the quality maxim by conveying a true proposition. The same type of reasoning (involving a blatant violation of the quality maxim) also applies to other types of tropes, such as metaphor. What distinguishes each trope from the others is the type of related proposition being communicated (Allan & Salmani Nodoushan, 2015).

Thus, whilst in irony the implicature conveys the opposite of the literal meaning, in metaphor it conveys a related implicated comparison between the intended referent and the property being figuratively applied to it in the situation. In this respect, Grice (1989, p.34) submits that,

> metaphorical examples…involve categorical falsity, so the contradictory nature of what the speaker has made as if to say will, strictly speaking, be a truism; so it cannot be that that such a speaker is trying to get across. The most likely supposition is that the speaker is attributing to his audience some feature or features in respect of which the audience resembles (more or less fancifully) the mentioned substance.

To illustrate further, let us consider the following example: “John is an angel”. In this type of example, it is manifestly clear that the speaker is not intending to communicate that the person concerned is an actual angel. For a start it is not clear whether angels actually exist, let alone that a human may be able to be one of them. Thus, on a Gricean approach, the speaker is flouting the maxim of quality. Consequently, in order to restore its application, the hearer must derive some related proposition that satisfies the maxim. In the case of metaphor, that related proposition is supposed to be a related comparison, e.g.: John is like an angel (Allan & Nodoushan, 2015). This comparison allows the hearer to satisfy the required standards of communication by involving a proposition that avoids the violation of our communicative expectations.

2.3.8.2 Situational irony

Situational irony is when the outcome of a situation is inconsistent with what we expect would logically or normally occur. It is the reverse of what we expect will be or will happen. An example of situational irony would be if a thief’s house was broken into at the same time he was robbing someone’s house (Sperber & Wilson, 1995). According to Sperber and Wilson (1995) to find the situational irony, ask yourself what you were expecting would happen or what did you expect it to be. If the situation is something different from what one expects would happen or is the opposite of what one might expect someone would say or do, then it is likely situational irony.

2.3.8.3 Dramatic irony

Dramatic irony is when the audience or the reader is aware of something that a character does not know. For example, in William Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, when Romeo believes that Juliet is dead, but the audience knows that she has only been given a potion to make her sleep, this is an example of such. According to Sperber and Wilson (1995) to identify dramatic irony, ask yourself: What did you already know had happened or was going to happen? Researchers have explored teaching verbal irony in a very small number of teaching studies in disparate fields. Some have argued that a focus on teaching studies in future research could address a number of theoretical questions about irony comprehension and could help refine interventions for individuals who struggle with this form of social language.

Grice (1975, p. 30) notes that "irony is intimately connected with the expression of a feeling, attitude, or evaluation". Sperber and Wilson (1995) opine that the attitude expressed by irony is always negative since it tries to communicate an undercover message that attempts to threaten someone's face. However, there are some who maintain that a positive irony is also possible. Irony does in this regard is imagined as capable of muting both the negative effect of ironic criticism and the positive effect of ironic praise (Sperber & Wilson, 1995).

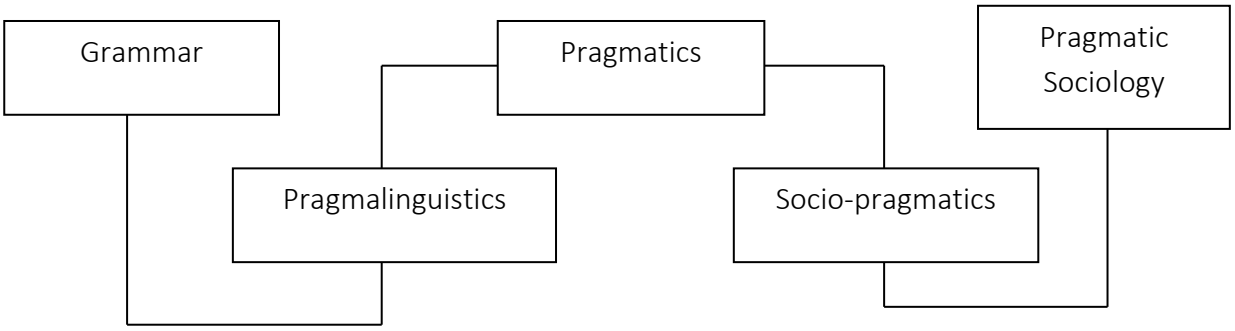
2.3.9 Pragmalinguistics vs. sociopragmatics

In many societies across nations, language use is challenging mostly because many people have different ways of speaking and different communicating strategies. These are often used with little or no knowledge at all that not everyone has pragmatic competence in particular and communication competence in general. Resultantly, this ends up either in pragmalinguistic or sociopragmatic failure. Leech (1983) aligns pragmalinguistic failure to a speaker's mistake in choosing appropriate words of utterance and the speaker's wrong belief about the hearer's competence. Sociopragmatic failure refers to the inability of the hearer to discern the speaker's identity and social status. Leech (1983) and Thomas (1983) divided pragmatics into two parts: pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics. Pragmalinguistics refers to the linguistic resources for conveying communicative acts and interpersonal meanings. In other words, pragmalinguistics refers to the knowledge of the strategies for realising speech intentions and the linguistic items used to express these intentions. On the other hand, the term "sociopragmatics" refers to the knowledge of the social conditions governing language use (Leech, 1983; Thomas, 1983). In other words, sociopragmatics refers to the social perceptions underlying the participants' interpretation and performance of communicative acts. According to Leech "sociopragmatics is referred to the language user's knowledge of social norms and conventions or the sociological interface of pragmatics" (p.10). However, Kasper and Rose (2002) believe that pragmalinguistics deals with the linguistic resources which are available for conveying communicative acts and performing pragmatic functions and sociopragmatics, in contrast, deals with how social context affects the linguistic resources (e.g. books, journals, etc.) to employ, the interpersonal meanings to convey and the type of action to take in a given situation.

According to Kasper and Rose, to be pragmatically competent requires one to associate specific linguistic resources with particular meanings and functions and be able to

appropriately select from those resources according to an assessment of the socio-contextual factors involved. Lee (2011) submits that requesting, as one of the most widely researched communicative acts in the literature of pragmatics in general, and in cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatics in particular, can be broadly defined as a demand made by someone for something from another person, for the benefit of the requester. Both Kasper and Rose 2002, and Lee (2011) believe that pragmalinguistics typically concerns itself with the study of the particular resources that a given language provides for conveying pragmatic meanings (illocutionary and interpersonal). Sociopragmatics, on the other hand, as evinced by their explanations relates pragmatic meaning to an assessment of the participants' social distance, the language community's social rules and appropriateness norms, discourse practices, and accepted behaviours.

The figure below represents Leech's (1983) comparison between pragmalinguistics and socio-pragmatics:



2.3.10 Pragmatics rescues semantic failures

Many researchers in pragmatics provide a variety of definitions on pragmatics and pragmatic competence, often than not indicating the need for understating what is behind semantic meanings. Horn (2006) observes that researchers like Levinson (1983), for instance, provide definitions of pragmatics which are relevant to pragmatic stylistics and that pragmatics is the study of those contextual meanings beyond semantic literal meanings, and which are encoded in the structure of language. We can examine in this regard, the following example from Cutting (2002):

> Say you pick up the phone and call your favourite restaurant: "*Hi, do you have any free tables this Saturday?* "

Restaurant manager replies: "*Yes, we do,* " and he puts down the phone.

Semantically, you asked if they had any table, and they gave you a literal answer, "yes" – which by the way, is also correct. However, when we engage pragmatics, it can be inferred that you wanted to reserve a table for that particular Saturday. Through this explanation, one can discern that pragmatics came into existence because semantics had failed to contextually deliver the exact meaning within the message the speaker had conveyed.

Considering the understanding of semantics for pragmatics analysis, Cutting (2008) submits that pragmatics emerged as an independent field of study primarily because semantics frequently fails to provide sufficient explanations with regards to meaning. As in the example above, pragmatics helps us look beyond the literal meaning of words and utterances and focuses on how meaning is constructed within context. When we communicate with other people, there is a constant negotiation of meaning between the listener and the speaker. According to Cutting while semantics catered for the literal meaning of an expression, it does not consider the context in which it is uttered into consideration.

Pragmatics therefore, recognises the importance of contexts, and thus reveals the meaning underlying certain utterances (Cutting, 2002; Larson, 1995). According to Cutting, pragmatics looks at the difference between the literal meaning of words and their intended meaning within social contexts and takes things such as irony, metaphors and intended meanings into account. For example, when one is late for work, and their boss says, '*What time do you call this?* ' By examining the context and the boss's tone of voice, one can infer that the boss does not want to know the time but pragmatically or actually wants to know why one is late for work. It is for this reason that it is emphasised that pragmatics rescues semantics' failures. 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; Larson, 1995).

Drawing attention to the essential role of speakers and hearers in an act of communication, Leech (1983) highlights the difference between pragmatics and semantics. Leech posits that pragmatics deals with meaning relative to a speaker or user of a language unlike semantics, which handles meaning without any consideration of particular situations, speakers, or

hearers. One of the most cited definitions of the term pragmatics is one by Crystal (2008), who also put emphasis on the users of language. According to Crystal pragmatics is "the study of language from the point of view of the users, especially of the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction, and the effects their use of language has on the other participants in an act of communication" (p. 379). Putting speakers, and hearers for that matter, in the spotlight, this definition acknowledges the interaction between the linguistic and non-linguistic acts of speakers and hearers.

In further comparison, Crystal (2003) provides a working definition of pragmatics which can be more relevant to pragmatics stylistics. In Crystal's opinion, pragmatics is "the study of language from the user's point of view, especially of the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction and the effects their use of language has on other participants in the act of communication" (p.301). Necessitating the need for semantic and pragmatic collaboration, Crystal states that "if we approach meaning from a point of view of which combines semantics and pragmatics, the result can be satisfactory…" (p.7).

2.3.11 Language anxiety and interaction altitudes

Foreign language anxiety also known as xenoglossophobia is the feeling of unease, worry, nervousness and apprehension experienced by foreign language learners and users. Horwitz (2001), Aida (1994) and Macintyre and Gardner (1991), are of the opinion that foreign language anxiety consists of "self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings and behaviours related to workplace or classroom language learning arise from the uniqueness of the language learning process." The language learning process is a unique process because trainees are required to communicate using a language which they have not mastered perfectly, in the current case, the English language. Horwitz and Cope (1986) identify three components of foreign language anxiety: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. According to Horwitz (2001), language users who exhibit communication apprehension do not feel comfortable communicating in the target language in front of others, due to their limited knowledge of the language, especially in relation to speaking and listening skills.

Horwitz further argues that language users who experience fear of negative evaluation do not consider language errors as a natural part of the learning process but as a threat to their image, and a source for negative evaluations either from others. As a result, they experience test anxiety when one considers the foreign language process, and especially oral production as a test situation rather than an opportunity for communication and skills improvements.

Cheng, Horwitz, and Schallert (1999, p. 420) also believe that apart from general foreign language workshop or classroom anxiety, many learners are highly anxious with respect to participation in speaking activities. Indeed, it is often suggested that speaking is the most anxiety-provoking aspect in a second language learning situation. Kitano (2001) also suggests that educators should find ways to support language learners with the fear of negative evaluation, and such solutions may involve providing them with positive reinforcement such as positive comments. In the context of the established perception of low abilities amongst the trainers, trainers are thus encouraged to make interventions in the classroom environment and practices, Trainers are advised thus, to create a sense of community in the workshop or classroom so that learners do not perceive the learning process as a competition. As such, pair and group work can be incorporated in the teaching and learning processes (Kitano, 2001).

2.4 Exploring the factors that influence pragmatic competence

2.4.1 Pragmatic implicature

In everyday communication people do not just state what they think in words, but people's intentionality is also reflected through the linguistic choices that they make. This means that, in most cases, in conversation, people use indirect speech acts to communicate their messages. It is for this reason that, in order to arrive at the intended message, it is not sufficient to draw its meaning from the language itself. People must also, and more importantly, work out what the sender wants to convey through it. When the literal meaning of what speakers say does not agree with what they intend to communicate, listeners rely on a set of principles to infer indirect meaning. Given the pervasiveness of this inference process, which Allot (2018) citing Grice (1975) labels "conversational implicature", in our

daily interaction, it is undeniable that this strategy is highly significant in interpreting and conveying a message in a conversation (Green, 1989 as cited in Bouton, 1994). It has also been claimed that the principles resorted to in the interpretation of implicatures can operate differently across societies (Allot, 2018), among different social groups and situations and therefore pose an obstacle to cross-cultural communication.

In everyday conversations people often convey information that goes above and beyond what they strictly speaking say: overstatement, exaggeration and irony are obvious examples (Allot, 2018). Grice introduced the technical concept of a conversational implicature in systematizing the phenomenon of meaning one thing by saying something else. Rose and Casper (2001) indicate that in introducing the concept, Grice drew a line between what is said, which he understood as being closely related to the conventional meaning of the words uttered, and what is conversationally implicated, which can be inferred from the fact that an utterance has been made in context. Like many other researchers, Davis (2016) explains implicature as something the speaker suggests or implies with an utterance, even though it is not literally expressed. According to Davis (2016), implicatures can aid in communicating more efficiently than by explicitly saying everything that we want to communicate.

According to Rose and Casper (2001), the concept of implicatures was introduced by Paul Herbert Grice in 1975. Grice observes that in conversations “what is meant” often goes beyond “what is said” and that this additional meaning is inferred and predictable. ‘Implicature’ is a term which is derived from the verb 'to imply' (Rose & Casper, 2001). The verb 'implicate' and the related noun 'implicature' are technical terms denoting to 'implying something by saying something else' (Grice, 1975). Rose and Casper observe that implicature in Grice's definition implies that unstated information is conveyed to an audience that is able to work out what is being said by reference to cultural or linguistic maxims that are being obviously ignored. Rose and Casper further explicate that with conversational implicatures, Grice implied that conversational implicatures are implicit meaning that requires pragmatic inferencing i.e. the assumptions that hearers make and the implicatures that speakers make.

However, it is important to observe that conversational implicatures are tied to particular words and phrases in an utterance. Levinson (2000) in this regard indicates that conversational implicatures depend on a wide range of contextual information including

information about the participants and their relationship with each other. May (2019) elaborates that conversational implicatures demand speakers should make utterances coherent, clear and orderly. According to May, Grice (1975) attempted to account for conversational implicatures by suggesting a general co-operative principle between speaker and hearer i.e. a kind of agreement between speakers and listeners to co-operate in communication.

According to Davis (2016), this implicature is part of pragmatics, a sub-discipline of linguistics. In pragmatics, conversational implicature is an indirect or implicit speech act: what is meant by a speaker's utterance that is not part of what is explicitly said. The expression is also known simply as implicature and is the opposite of explicature, which is an explicitly communicated assumption (Grice, 1975 as cited in Davis, 2016). "Implicature" denotes either the act of meaning or implying one thing by saying something else, or the object of that act. Implicatures can be determined by sentence meaning or by conversational context, and can be in different senses.

Like Davis (2016), Rose and Casper (2001) also indicate that figures of speech such as metaphor and irony provide familiar examples, as do loose usage of, and damning with faint praise. Implicature serves a variety of goals such as communication, maintaining good social relations, misleading without lying, style and verbal efficiency. According to Davis, knowledge of common forms of implicature is acquired along with one's native language. Grice (1975) conforms conversational implicatures to four maxims of conversation – the maxims of quantity, quality, relation and manner. The following are definition of the maxims as established by Grice (1975) and exemplified by Allot (2018) citing Grice (1975):

- **Grice's maxim of q*uantity***: Make your contribution as informative as required. - Do not make your contribution more informative than is required. Consider the example,

  A: "It may be raining".

  This certainly implies that the speaker does not know whether it is raining or not (Grice, 1975).
- **Grice's maxim of *quality***: Allot (2018) citing Grice (1975), explains that this means do not say what you believe to be false. - Do not say that for which you lack evidence. Consider the example,

A: I am out of petrol.

B: There is a garage around the corner.

The reply from **B** implies that the garage may be open.

- **Grice's maxim of *relation***: Be relevant, make your contribution relevant. Consider the example:

  A: Can I borrow ten dollars?

  B: My purse is in the hall (the implicative: Yes).

  The assumption here is that the reply is intended to be relevant in a manner that allows the inference: "Yes, that you would lend the person ten dollars" (Grice, 1975).

- **Grice's maxim of *manner***: Be perspicuous and (clear) - Avoid dimness of expression. Avoid ambiguity. Be brief. Be orderly. Consider the example,

  A: He cocked the chicken then he ate it.

  The implicature here is that one cannot eat the chicken unless they cook it (Allot, 2018 citing Grice, 1975).

Rose and Casper (2001) further explain how Grice (1975) has categorised pragmatic implicatures into two main types, that is, conversational implicature and conventional implicatures. According to Rose and Casper, unlike conversational implicatures and conventional implicatures are not based on the cooperative principle or the maxims. Conventional implicatures do not occur in conversation and are not dependent on special contexts for their interpretation (Rose & Kasper, 2001). Rose and Casper (2001) provide the following example of a conventional implicature, "Donovan is poor but happy". The use of the word/conjunctive "but" implicates a sense of contrast between being poor and being happy. It is also important to note that in speech acts especially at illocutionary and perlocutionary act levels, one needs to demonstrate inference and reference competence in order to understand the intended meanings. In this regard, the sections below discuss and explain pragmatic inference and reference in detail.

2.4.2 Pragmatic reference and inference

When the message of a speaker goes beyond the literal or logical meaning of the sentences used, a pragmatic inference approach is required to understand the complete meaning of an utterance. Here, one needs to understand pragmatic inference, called scalar implicature

(Yule, 1997). According to Yule, in pragmatics, scalar implicature or quantity implicature, is an implicature that attributes an implicit meaning beyond the explicit or literal meaning of an utterance, and which suggests that the utterer had a reason for not using a more informative or stronger term on the same scale. Such an inference is required when a weaker term "some" is used in a sentence like in the sentence "Some of the trainees passed the exam". Here "some" is used because the speaker presumably had a reason not to use a stronger term like "all". Pragmatic implicature is analysed in this paper. Pragmatic reference is an act in which a speaker or writer uses linguistic forms to enable a listener or reader to identify something. Inference on the other hand, is connecting prior knowledge to text-based information to create meaning beyond what is directly stated (Yule, 1997).

According to Yule (1997), inference is additional information used by the listener to create a connection between what is said and what must be meant. Yules believes that words themselves do not refer to anything but people refer. For example, is somebody says "It is on the shelf. The inference here would be a book but not a person (Yule, 1997). We should know that the speaker is the one who makes a reference to convey his intentions about something or somebody, while the listener is the one who makes inference to recognise the intentions of the speaker. Sometimes, the process needs not only work between one speaker and one listener, but it also works in terms of connection or social acts between all members of a community who share a common language culture. In a restaurant, for example, one waiter can ask another: "Where is the green salad sitting?" And the other replies: "He is sitting by the door". (Here words themselves do not refer to anything but people refer). Another example, is when a student asks another at NUST library: "Can I have your Sifiso Nyati?" The other trainee replies: "Yes, just check in the first front shelf". These examples make it clear that we can use names associated with things (salad) to refer to people, and use names of people (Sifiso Nyati) to refer to a novel.

The key process here is called inference. Chan and McDermott (2006), explain that if reference is done and depends on the speaker's goals, then inference is the listener's task to discover the relationship between expressed entities with words. Listeners make inferences about what is said in order to arrive at an interpretation of the speaker's intended meaning. Our ability to identify intended referents actually depends on more than just our understanding of the referring expressions. According to Chan and McDermott (2006), in the

English language, referring is often achieved through indefinites, the definite noun phrases and the pronouns – generally known as anaphoric reference. The role of inference in communication is to allow the listener to identify correctly which particular entity (thing/person) the speaker is referring to. As in the above examples, is the speaker referring to the salad, the person or thing? Also, is the speaker referring to Sifiso Nyathi or the book?

Norvig (2007) notes that for successful reference to occur, we must recognise the role of inference and collaboration between speaker and listener in thinking what the other has in mind. Sometimes we use vague expressions relying on the listener's ability to infer what referent we have in mind: i.e. the blue thing, or that stuff. Chan and McDermott (2006) define pragmatic reference as an action in which a communicator utilises linguistic forms in order to direct listeners into the identification of something. Meanwhile Allan and Jaszczolt (2012) differentiate between reference and denotation (semantic) describing reference s the specific and mainstream link between an expression, referent or role – referring is simply labelling or classifying something.

Denotation, according to Allan and Jaszczolt (2012), is a unique link between expression and something, with a satisfying specific condition and semantically well-expressed. In an attempt to infer or refer in order to understand statements in a conversation, many people tend to simply presuppose, in other words assume, by guessing the intended meanings. It therefore, becomes important to understand the term "pragmatic presupposition", and it is discussed in details below.

2.4.3 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 (Gobena & Woldemariam, 2019 citing Levinson, 1983). Pragmatic presuppositions are best described as the relationship between a speaker and the appropriateness of a sentence in a context (Levinson, 1983). Meanwhile, Lakoff (1970, p. 175) as cited in Akmajian (2000, p. 401) submits that presupposition is a speaker's assumption (belief) about the speech context. Keenan (1971, p. 49) as quoted in Akmajian (2000, p. 401) argues that,

> …many sentences require that certain culturally defined conditions or contexts 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.

Furthermore, 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. Gobena & Woldemariam (2019) citing Yule (2006) explain that whether one says "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. According to Yule, 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 have to be satisfied in order for the anticipated speech acts to be appropriate in the circumstances, or to be felicitous (Yule, 2006). In line with this thinking, Fillmore (1971, p. 276) as quoted in Akmajian (2000) also observes that "… prepositional aspects of a speech communication situation are those conditions which must be satisfied in order for a particular illocutionary act to be effectively performed when saying a particular sentence.

2.4.4 Pragmatic failure

In different societies and different communities, people tend to speak differently. These observed differences in ways of speaking are thoughtful and orderly, and they reflect different cultural values, or at least different hierarchies of values. These different ways of speaking and the 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). Pragmatic failure is a misunderstanding in communication that occurs between interlocutors due to problems in the use of language, especially by foreign language speakers (Thomas, 1983). Thomas believes it to be the failure to understand an utterance whereas Ziran (1988) imagines it as the inability to achieve the wanted communicative effects in communication. Pragmatic failure can cause more serious communication problem than grammatical failure does. In cross-cultural situations, pragmatic failure may cause serious "communication breakdown" (Thomas 1983, p. 97).

Pragmatic failure is thus believed to occur when the hearer fails to understand what the speaker means by what s/he says.

Cross-cultural communication breakdown is most likely to take place when the speaker and hearer are from different cultural backgrounds. Pragmatic failure can therefore be minimised by mastering both grammatical and pragmatic competence in the target language. Grammatical competence suggests mastery of grammatical rules and systems governing the said language, whereas pragmatic competence is the ability to use language in order to achieve a certain purpose as well as the ability to understand language in context (Thiba, 1988). Furthermore, the rules that govern the grammar are said to be prescriptive whereas pragmatic principles differ across cultures. Both grammatical and pragmatic competences form one's linguistic competence. Riley (1984) as cited in (Thiba, 1988) notes that pragmatic failure is said to occur when we fail in some way to understand a speaker's full intention in saying something. For some reason we do not successfully distinguish the difference between what is said and what it meant. It is therefore an umbrella term covering a wide variety of communicative problems which prevent the successful grasping of the contextual meaning of an utterance. Thiba (1988) observes that indirect speech acts appear to cause a lot of pragmatic failures by their lack of straightforwardness.

However, there are still language errors and communicative breakdowns in societies, what is termed to be pragmatic failure. Thomas (1983) coined the term 'pragmatic failure' to explain the lack of pragmatic competence, especially in the case of foreign language speakers. Thomas considers a pragmatically competent person as follows:

> I think that in order to be considered pragmatically competent, one must be able to behave linguistically in such a manner as to avoid being unintentionally offensive, for most of the time, to strangers who speak the same language or variety of language as oneself (p. 95).

Thomas submits that competent native speakers also use pragmatically inappropriate forms intentionally or unintentionally, but this does not necessarily make them pragmatically incompetent. Foreign language users, according to Thomas, should also be given the benefit of the doubt and should not be perceived as pragmatically incompetent based on the few utterances that they produced. However, "the non-native speaker who says anything other

than what is expected finds it difficult to get his views taken seriously" (Thomas, 1983, p. 96) and their pragmatic failure is not as much tolerated as their grammatical failure since pragmatic failure. This is because, most of the time, is not apparent in the surface structure unlike grammatical errors.

Thus, Thomas concludes that there is a need to reconsider language teaching practices as it would be unwise and unfair to simply expect foreign language users to fully grasp pragmatic norms on their own. Accordingly, Thomas believes that "sensitising users to expect cross-cultural differences in the linguistic realisations of politeness, truthfulness, etc. takes the teaching of language beyond the realms of mere learning and makes it truly educational" (p. 110). What is suggested by Thomas (1983) here, has been the subject of research by several scholars and to a large extent they have come to be a consensus that pragmatic competence becomes especially important in as far as foreign language users are concerned, and that pragmatics should be incorporated into language teaching practices. The present study contributes to this discourse by investigating the pragmatic competence of front office trainees, who are also both foreign language learners and speakers alike.

One of the major aims of second language users is to achieve efficient communication that conforms to native standards. However, one of the factors that can impede such communication is pragmatic failure (Thomas, 1983). Although in some cases pragmatic failure lacks serious consequences and, on the contrary, results in rather funny and subjective misunderstandings, in other cases it has had more dramatic repercussions by causing misunderstandings that may result in puzzlement, surprise, astonishment, frustration, embarrassment or anger. In extreme cases, it may even produce interactive conflict, cultural friction, communication breakdown, unfair and unjustified attribution of personality traits with subsequent negative labelling and stereotypes, or contribute to the perpetuation of discrimination as a consequence of very different interactive norms across speech communities (Beebe & Takahashi, 1989; Kasanga, 2000; Kasanga & Lwanga-Lumu, 2007; Thomas 1983). In fact, deviations from the expected or usual communicative practices in a community or sociocultural group are judged differently depending on the degree of error or flaw perceived (Riley, 2006, p. 314).

Thomas (1983) suggests two types of pragmatic failures on a cross cultural basis. The first is pragmalingustic failure, which is defined as a matter of grammar and can be taught. The other is socio-pragmatic failure, which involves learning the systems such as the knowledge of the language and is therefore much more difficult to deal with (Thomas 1983, p. 91). The three types of pragmatic failures (pragmalinguistics, sociolinguistics and cross-cultural pragmatics) as suggested by Thomas, are discussed in details below:

2.4.5 Pragmalinguistic failure

People in different societies and different cultures speak differently because understanding of appropriate linguistic behaviour varies from one place to another. The current research also explores pragmatic competence challenges. By extension, it investigates the different cultural values, examining the impact of pragmalinguistic failure in the use of English language, as evinced through front office trainees at Valombola Vocational Training Centre, Ongwediva, in northern Namibia. According to Lee (2011) citing Thomas (1983), pragmalinguistic failure occurs when the pragmatic force mapped by the speaker onto a given utterance is systematically different from the one most frequently assigned to it by native speakers of the target language, or when conversational strategies are inappropriately transferred from the speaker's mother tongue to the target language. However, pragmalinguistic failure, according to Lee is considered easier to overcome because it is a linguistic problem and can be corrected as a simple grammatical error. Meanwhile, a sociopragmatic failure (discussed in next section in details) is not as easy to correct as a pragmalinguistic one because it "stems from cross-culturally different perceptions of what constitutes appropriate linguistic behaviour" (Thomas, 1983, p.99).

Kasper and Rose (2002) explain that the term pragmalinguistics refers to the knowledge of the strategies for realising speech intentions and the linguistic items used to express these intentions. However, Kasper and Rose submit that pragmalinguistics deals with the linguistic resources which are available for conveying communicative acts and performing pragmatic functions. Kasper and Rose (2002) and Lee (2011) believe that pragmalinguistics typically concerns itself with the study of the particular resources that a given language provides for conveying pragmatic meaning (illocutionary and interpersonal). According to Lee, in pragmalinguistic failure, speakers fail to convey their meaning because the message's pragmatic force is misunderstood.

2.4.6 Sociopragmatic failure

Communicative norms differ from one culture to another across the globe, and therefore, if language users lack the knowledge of appropriate linguistic behaviour in different countries, they may often experience some difficulties speaking a foreign language. In this case, sociopragmatic failure occurs. LoCastro (2012) explains that the term 'sociopragmatics' was coined by Leech (1983) to describe the study of the ways in which pragmatic meanings reflect "specific 'local' conditions on language use" (Leech, 1983, p. 10) – a sub-field of pragmatics that Leech distinguishes from the study of more 'general' pragmatic meanings. In the relevant literature, there is a tendency to explain sociopragmatic failure by comparing various languages to English. However, the present study analyses the examples of this phenomenon at Valombola Vocational Training Centre, Ongwediva in northern Namibia since sociopragmatic failure can often lead to communication breakdown.

In making sociopragmatics and, more particularly, "how communication of pragmatic meaning involves speakers' presentation of their identities" (Leech, 1983, p. 159) its central concern, Pragmatics for Language Educators offers a refreshingly different perspective from the mainstream approach to 'general' pragmatics taken by Leech and subsequently followed by the authors of most pragmatics textbooks (LoCastro, 2012).

Socio-pragmatic failure, is the failure to choose what to say under certain circumstances and social factors (Leech, 1983, p.10). Leech further refers to this as "the sociological interface of pragmatics". Riley (1989, p. 234) asserts that socio-pragmatic failure is the outcome of applying the social rules of one culture in a communicative situation where the social rules of another culture should be applied. Thus, misunderstandings may occur in communication. Thomas (1983) reminds us that the unawareness of cross-cultural differences between people speaking different languages has the proclivity to further cause socio-pragmatic failure in cross-cultural communication. Socio-pragmatic failure is therefore related to "socio-pragmatic judgement concerning the size of imposition, social distance and relative rights and obligations in language use" (Thomas 1983, p. 104-5).

2.4.7 Cross-cultural pragmatic failure

Cross-cultural pragmatics is the study of linguistic action by language users from different ethno-linguistic backgrounds (Decapua & Findlay, 2007). According to Decapua and Findlay

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. 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). 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 examine the manners in which meaning is constructed by speakers from different cultures requires a complete re-assessment 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, p. 87-88).

2.4.8 Pragmatic failure Vs Cross-cultural pragmatic failure

Cross-cultural pragmatic failure refers to the failure to understand a speaker's intentions in intercultural communication (Thomas, 1983). According to Thomas, it seeks to improve the pragmatic and communicative competence of second language learners through analysing the sources of pragmatic failure and developing the awareness of cross-cultural pragmatics. The concept "pragmatic failure" applies to misunderstandings between people from the same speech community. However, the term "cross-cultural pragmatic failure" is used to describe the case of pragmatic failure between people from different speech communities (Charlebois, 2003).

Pragmatic failure is an important source of cross-cultural communication crash (Thomas, 1983). Thomas further adds that there is an emergency to include pragmatic knowledge in cross-cultural communication since linguistic knowledge is not enough to interact in a second language usage contexts. Baker (2001, p. 217) observes that "people need to get away from the linguistic organisation and look at reality, precisely because that reality is encoded in situations and texts … and not in language". Baker further states that, language is a means of communication, but if it is not related to the social and cultural perspectives of people, it will

not be so. Therefore, in order to avoid cross-cultural pragmatic failure, pragmatic awareness should be improved and pragmatic competence should be developed.

Nelson et al. (2002) add that pragmatic competence can be developed through investigating and analysing cases of pragmatic failure. In this way, second or foreign language users will have experience and thus, will be able to avoid repeating the same mistakes in their future cross-cultural communication. In this regard therefore, learning pragmalinguistic aspects of the target language helps to decrease communication misunderstandings and develop the pragmatic competence of second language users. But this does not mean that pragmatic competence can be acquired to levels comparable to those of natives. This is because acquiring native level pragmatic knowledge of a target language requires early and continuous dealing with the target language and culture (Kasper, 1998). Thomas (1983) suggests that teachers should develop the trainees' meta-pragmatic ability; i.e., the ability to study and discuss language use in a conscious manner, to avoid cross-cultural failure.

Kasper (1998) gives the example of discussing a drama through analysing pragmatic parameters explicitly in class or workshop in order to build the trainees' awareness of pragmatic differences. In his words, Kasper (1998) discusses the characters’ implied meaning in dramatic dialogues to help the trainees understand the use of language appropriately. But explaining pragmatic limitations in the target language is not enough and as such trainers should also make their trainees aware of possible cross-cultural pragmatic differences between their first language and the language they use (Kasper, 1998). Furthermore, effective training reduces cultural interference and protects the trainees from being impolite, ineffective, or inappropriate in their behaviours in the target language (Thomas, 1983).

According to Yule (1996), mastering linguistics competence is not enough without developing pragmatic competence and dealing with a foreign language means getting in touch with the different norm or cultural values of the target language. Therefore, pragmatic competent trainees should have the capacity to identify the differences of both cultures to avoid pragmatic failure. Pragmatic competence apparently involves not only speech acts, implicature, etc. but the most important thing is how to apply the politeness strategy in different contexts/situation (Yule, 1996).

2.4.9 The rationale for pragmatic competence

Pragmatic competence has been identified as one of the important components of language abilities (Barron, 2003). According to Barron, before the 1970s, research on language competence focused on the trainees' ability to produce grammatically correct words and forms. Baron further indicates that it was not until 1990 that Bachman (1990) suggested "the model of language ability" that the concept of pragmatic competence became an integral part of communicative language abilities. Pragmatic competence needs to be understood by people since it can reveal people`s thoughts and ideas (Retnowaty, 2017). Retnowaty indicates that pragmatic competence is known as the capability to communicate in a foreign language and that deals with the meaning and in actual sense, pragmatically, a language is used in daily life as people interact with one another. An example which can be used to demonstrate this is when someone says, "I am thirsty". Their words can be interpreted in many ways and, the hearer can interpret them semantically as a sign that references the fact that the speaker is merely dehydrated. However, it can also still be interpreted to mean that the speaker is requesting for someone to bring/get them something to drink. A such, the hearer thus needs context or situational background in order to correctly interpret the speaker`s intention, since an utterance can be interpreted in many forms.

To understand people`s intentions, according to Yule (2012), the hearer cannot only depend on the structure of language but they should also deal with the context in which the words are spoken (pragmatics). Bachman (1990) argues that pragmatic competence is independent from grammatical and discourse organisation, and is concerned with the functional aspect of language that coordinates with the formal aspects of language use to ensure successful communication. Pragmatic competence has thus, been defined from two perspectives: knowledge and ability. Barron (2003), for example, regards it as the "knowledge of the linguistic resources available in a given language for realizing particular illocutions, knowledge of the sequential aspects of speech acts and finally, knowledge of the appropriate contextual use of the particular languages' linguistic resources" (p. 10). Bachman (1990) and Rose (1999) in this regard, second Thomas (1983) for they too have defined pragmatic competence as the ability to use language effectively, emphasising on ability and knowledge, in order to achieve a specific purpose and to understand language in context.

According to Rose (1999), pragmatic competence is the ability to use the available linguistic resources in a contextually appropriate fashion. Despite the 'ability' or 'knowledge' argument, researchers agree that being pragmatically competent involves two basic components: pragmalinguistic competence and sociopragmatic competence. This 'ability' in their definition is closely related to social parameters such as social status, social distance, and the degree of imposition of specific communicative acts. To be pragmatically competent, a language user should not only know the correct usage of linguistic forms but can also use these forms appropriately based on the knowledge of sociolinguistic rules (Thomas, 1983 cited by Bachman, 1990 & Rose, 1999).

Philosophers like Yoshimi and Wang (2007), Brock (2005) and Retnowaty (2017) as well as Yule (2012) also believe that pragmatic competence is the study of understanding contextual meaning which involves the ability of interpretation of what people mean in a particular context and how the context influences what is said. They also further opine that pragmatic competence is the ability to recognise what is meant, even when it is not written or stated. Meanwhile, Griffiths (2006, p. 1) suggests that pragmatic competence is concerned with the "toolkit" for the skilful understanding of meanings: knowledge encoded in the vocabulary of the language and in its patterns for building more meanings in meaningful communication.

According to Leech (1983, p. 10), pragmatic competence can be defined as the study of the abilities or skills for decoding the meanings of within a context or situation. Leech explicates that, regarding the definitions and concept of pragmatic competence as mentioned above, pragmatic competence refers chiefly to the ability to understand the meaning of utterances in relation to the context of language use, and which involves understanding and examining how speakers can produce or utter the best utterance to express their intentions. Yoshimi and Wang (2007) observe that pragmatics has expanded people's understanding of almost every area that has been studied in the interest of clarifying the complex nature of human social interaction. In linguistics, pragmatic competence is defined as the ability to identify/deduce how context contributes to meaning, and the pragmatic field of study assesses how human language is used in social interactions, as well as the relationship between the interpreter and the interpreted (Yoshimi & Wang, 2007).

Pairing the two, 'pragmatics' and 'pragmatic competence', Brock (2005) indicates that in the field of pragmatics, there is pragmatic competence, which includes 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, and which play an integral part of speech acts. Here, interest is on the speaker's ability to become accustomed to, 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).

As has been established in the foregoing discussion, pragmatic competence has cast its wide net around phenomena as diverse as 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 (Cutting, 2002). In line with this, Kasper (2001) believes that pragmatic competence involves problem-solving skills from the speaker's and from the hearer's point of view, in addition to deducing the meaning of an utterance beyond the literal one. It is for this reason that 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) as well as where a conversation is taking place. This implies thus, that although pragmatic competence is very important for communication to be effective and efficient, no significant attention should be given to this part of language use. Akmajian and Demers (2000) submit that the ability to speak appropriately and communicate effectively in various settings is one of the decisive goals of language learning and teaching. So, to achieve this goal, trainees should be familiar with different components of language and how to use them. They should therefore consider pragmatics as the field of all those investigations which take into consideration the action, state and environment in which people speak or hear (Akmajian & Demers, 2000). The concept of pragmatic competence was earlier on defined by Chomsky (1980) as the "knowledge of conditions and manners of the appropriate use of the language, in agreement with various purposes" (p.224).

This concept was seen in opposition to grammatical competence that in Chomskyan terms is "the knowledge of form and meaning." In a more contextualised fashion, Canale and Swain (1980) include pragmatic competence as one important components of their model of communicative competence. In this model, pragmatic competence is identified as sociolinguistic competence and defined as the knowledge of contextually appropriate language use socially (Canale & Swain, 1980; Canale, 1983). However, Canale (1988) expands on this definition, and notes that, pragmatic competence includes "illocutionary competence, or the knowledge of the pragmatic conventions for performing acceptable language functions and sociolinguistic competence, or knowledge of the sociolinguistic conventions for performing language functions appropriately in a given context" (p.90).

From the diverse definitions provided by varied scholars above, one is able to establish that many linguists have largely defined pragmatics and pragmatic competence interchangeably. Akmajian and Demers (2000) define pragmatics as a "study of language use in relation to language structure and the context of utterance" (p. 343). Within this context of seemingly divergent definitions of pragmatics the current study considers as a working definition, Crystal's (1997) understanding of the concept when defining pragmatics as a subfield of linguistics, and specifically imagined as "the study of language from the point of view of users, especially of the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction and the effects their use of language has on other participants in the act of communication" (p.301).

2.5 The need for pragmatics pedagogical intervention

One major advantage of studying language through 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 (Gobena & Woldemariam, 2019 citing Yule, 1999). Teaching pragmatics, according to Taguchi (2017), focuses on how people perform, interpret, and respond to language functions in a social context. Pragmatic language is the language that people use daily to communicate with other people and this can include the words people use and how they say those words as well as their body language when speaking and when silent. The concept of 'pragmatic language' also applies to how people do all this in different social settings (Taguchi, 2017). According to Taguchi, deficits in pragmatic skills can make it difficult for trainees to correctly and

appropriately express what they are thinking and feeling, as well as make it difficult to understand what others are thinking and feeling.

Teaching a language involves more than the teaching and learning of grammar and lexis. The rules of proper communication, such as how to speak appropriately in a situation or understand another person's intention, are critical skills to master in order to become a fully knowledgeable speaker in another language (Taguchi, 2017). According to Taguchi citing Leech (1983), the objectives of pragmatics learning are represented in the connection between pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics in which pragmalinguistics refers to the linguistic forms available to perform language functions, while sociopragmatics refers to the appropriateness of the linguistic forms in a given social context.

Taguchi further believes that pragmatic competence requires both types of knowledge, as well as processing skills that mobilise this knowledge in real time communication, . Trainees or students need to have a range of linguistic forms at their disposal in order to perform language functions (e.g., greetings), but at the same time, they need to understand the sociocultural norms and rules that govern the usage of these forms (e.g., what to say to greet a certain person). Hence, in second language use, grammar (forms) and pragmatics (rules of communication) deserve distinct attention but should be used jointly. This is because the object of pragmatics use is form-function–context mappings— knowledge of forms and their functional possibilities, as well as contextual requirements that determine the form-function mappings (Taguchi 2017).

The significance of pragmatic competence in second language use has been well articulated in theory, pedagogy and assessment. Taguchi further indicates that pragmatic competence has thus been operationalised as a measurable construct, and tasks and instruments have been developed to extract and examine it in pedagogy and assessment. Correspondingly, these models of communicative competence have been applied to pedagogy and assessment. For instance, as Taguchi explains, communicative language teaching and the functional approach have included pragmatics as important objectives of instruction.

Having recognised the prominence of pragmatics in the field, the current study reviews three central issues in the teaching of pragmatic competence: targets of pragmatic instruction, instructional practice and materials as well as current challenges in pragmatics teaching.

With regards to Instructional Targets, we focus on: What Pragmatics Can Be Taught? This is because the selection of focal pragmatic features for instruction, according to Taguchi (2017), clearly reflects disciplinary histories. Following the first appearance of the term "pragmatics" in Charles Morris' (1938) Theory of Signs, a number of influential pragmatics theories were born in the field.

For example, Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principles and Conversational Implicature and Sperber and Wilson's (1995) Relevance Theory all served as common frameworks for examining pragmatic phenomena across languages and language users. The concepts and terminologies stemming from these theories have provided a platform for organising units of instruction in pragmatics. By far, speech acts (e.g., requests, Rejections, apologies, compliment, and compliment responses, etc.) have been the most popular goals of instruction because of their clear connections of linguistic forms, language functions, and social context.

Typically, syntactic forms and strategies used to realise speech acts are taught in conjunction with situational variables that determine the degree of politeness and indirectness of the forms (i.e., power relationships, social distance between the interlocutors and the degree of imposition). In conjunction with the compliments, trainees need to be taught a range of compliment response types (i.e., acceptance, deflections, and rejection), and to also be made aware that deflection is a preferred strategy. Other instructional studies have dealt with the comprehension of implicature, namely the ability to comprehend speakers' intentions conveyed in an indirect, non-literal manner (e.g., Bouton, 1999).

Instructional pragmatics currently lacks evidence-based approaches to teaching pragmatic formulas. In particular, major pedagogical models of teaching speech acts (e.g., Martínez-Flor & Juan, 2006) make only vague references to pragmatic formulas. Furthermore, instructional pragmatics mainly follows the awareness-raising approach and lacks more structured and controlled activities to help trainees make form-meaning connections to successfully interpret and produce target language utterances in a given context. It has been imagined that awareness-raising alone has a weak potential for the retention of formulaic sequences in the trainees' long-term memory (Boers & Lindstromberg, 2009). Therefore, more pedagogical intervention studies that link the knowledge of prescribed language with

well-established methods like task-based teaching and focus on form are needed (Wood, 2015).

According to Woods, the field of pragmatic teaching today deals with a range of issues faced by language trainees and second language teachers who teach and assess them. Many of the issues addressed include the teaching approaches, the materials adopted in the classroom as well as testing and assessment. This section of the study reviews a corpus of the existing literature and discusses diverse issues related to pragmatics teaching and learning in three categories: effectiveness of specific instructional methods of pragmatics learning; instructional materials and resources for pragmatic development in formal classroom settings; and the testing and assessment utilised in evaluating the trainees' pragmatic ability (Wood, 2015).

Woods believes that teaching pragmatics involves the use of linguistic resources for both performing communicative acts and explaining social perceptions of these acts. In this regard, teaching materials should include several key elements: social context, functional language use and interaction. Therefore, teaching materials and resources should be designed in a way to incorporate these important elements. Ishihara (2010) reviews researches on pragmatic teaching resources in recent years and establishes that, when teaching pragmatics to second language trainees, teachers should adapt their teaching materials or prepare supplement teaching resources. The chief goal of instruction in pragmatics is to raise the trainees' pragmatic awareness and give them choices about their interactions in the target language. The goal of instruction in pragmatics thus, is not to insist on conformity to a particular target-language norm, but rather to help the trainees become familiar with the range of pragmatic devices and practices in the target language.

Ishihara further observes that with such instruction, trainees can maintain their own cultural identities, participate more fully in target language communication and gain control of the force and outcome of their contributions. The classroom thus, is in this way able to provide a safe place within which trainees can try out new forms and patterns of communication in an accepting environment. Trainees are then able to experiment with unfamiliar forms of address. The instructor and other trainee participants can provide feedback. Instruction should allow the trainees to choose how much of the pragmatic norms of the culture they

would like to include in their own repertoire. They will also enjoy greater insights into the target culture. Equally important, “one believes that trainees genuinely enjoy learning about pragmatics because it is like being let into a secret” (Ishihara, 2010).

Since pragmatic competence is a combination of situational and social factors, the development of the pragmatic ability should be accepted as one of the primary teaching goals. If considered wisely, trainees are able to find the opportunity to experience language in different social contexts and practice the functions of language in a variety of interactional patterns, by using the right utterance at the right time. They also learn how to be socially responsible language learners. Moreover, the study of different communicative patterns not only assists teachers to be the active participants in the social interactions but they can help their students become active classroom participants. Teachers become also able to encourage their trainees/students to think critically and creatively in a foreign language.

In sum, language learning is a socio-cultural process which requires the application of linguistic rules in a variety of contexts, audiences and purposes. The development the pragmatic competence with all its aspects, helps the language learners to broaden their education and shape their world views. If the language learner does not achieve most of these goals through the language learning process, the result will absolutely be a 'pragmatic failure’. White (1993) infers, this implicates a context in which, ". . . although an utterance is grammatically well formed it may be functionally confusing or contextually unsuitable."

Therefore, the message conveyed by the speaker can be grammatically well-formed, but because of the contextual factors the message might sound unsuitable. The reason for this inappropriacy can result from social factors (traditions, customs, values), the lack of interpersonal and intrapersonal skills, cultural differentiations, the lack of critical and creative thinking, etc. Therefore, it should be noted that the development of pragmatic competence in language learning and teaching today is very indispensable, because pragmatic competence not only shapes the world view of the individual through language but also provides teachers with the opportunity to better understand their students (White, 1993).

2.6 Research Gap

Pragmatic Competence is still an emergent field of study and research in Africa. Researchers are still engaged in studies that seek to evaluate its effectiveness in second language learning. However, a sizeable number of studies have been carried out in an attempt to emphasise the concerns of pragmatic competence in the attainment of effective and appropriate communicative processes. These concerns are more prevalent in environments where non-native speakers of the English language are expected to reach a certain level of proficiency in the use of the language for successful interactional pragmatic communication actions. Related studies have pointed out various challenges and problems which derive from such environments, such as pragmatic failure. It is on the backdrop of this understanding that the research establishes that a gap still exists i.e. the need to examine pragmatic competence as reflected in interactions between trainers and trainees in Namibia. In attempting to address this research gap, the study seeks to critically evaluate whether pragmatic competence as a concept and method is a necessary skill for the teaching and learning of English as a Second Language in the country. It is also envisioned that the study will assist in the realisation and establishment of the nature of communicative breakdowns that could have been taking place between trainers and trainees in vocational education and training contexts in Namibia, and as largely due to interactional pragmatic incompetence.

2.7 Theoretical Framework

Theoretical Framework refers to the outline or guide for a research which is usually based on an existing theory in a field of inquiry that is related and/or reflects the hypothesis of a study (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). The current study is couched within the theoretical explications of the Speech Acts Theory (Austin, 1975). According to Grant and Osanloo, the theoretical framework serves as the foundation upon which a research is constructed, as well as the explications and context in which the analysis and interpretation of data is couched. The theoretical framework usually guides the researcher so that they do not deviate from the boundaries of the accepted theories in analysing and interpreting collected data (Grant & Osanloo, 2014).

2.7.1 Application of the Speech Act Theory (SAT) to the study

This study adopted the Speech Act Theory (Austin, 1975) as theoretical framework. It specifically draws from the explications of J. L. Austin's development of performative

utterances and attendant theoretical concerns of locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts in investigating the pragmatic competence of front-office trainees of Valombola VTC. The theoretical concerns are drawn from in evaluating the front-office trainees' levels of understanding of different aspects of the speaker's intention, and this is achieved by analysing their communicative and pragmatic competence on formulation and realisation of request strategies. In addition, the Speech Act Theory was used in this study to evaluate the front-office trainees' application of cooperative and politeness principles in the speech acts of refusal and apologetic responses, and to examine the factors that influence their pragmatic competence.

Yoshimi and Wang (2007) seconding Yule (1996) submit that 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. Meanwhile, Nikula (2008) citing Austin (1960) observes that speech acts serve their function once they are said or communicated. The analyses of the examples of requests generated by the trainees as responses to the Written Discourse Completion Tests were conducted in line with Trosborg's taxonomy (1995). The analysis of the trainees' application of speech acts, in terms of formulation and realisation of request strategies, was conducted qualitatively and quantitatively by examining the appropriateness and linguistic formulae by making use of the interactional model in pragmatics communicative competence.

The taxonomy of request by Trosborg is divided into strategies of conventionally indirect requests (either hearer oriented or speaker based), indirect requests and direct requests. This study made room for other types of strategies in the formulation of requests in case they might occur. These 'extra' types of strategies are adopted from Trosborg's taxonomy of internal and external modifications. The modifications were realised in the formulation of requests in situations where the speaker sought to decrease the face threatening nature and. in the process, sound politer to the interlocutor. The theory was therefore applied to this study considering the components of the Trosborg's taxonomy of request and refusal formulation and realisation as indicated in the table below:

Trosborg's taxonomy of request realisation strategies (adapted from Trosborg, 1995, p. 205)

TYPE Indirect	**STRATEGY** Hints	**EXAMPLE** Statement
Conventionally Indirect **(hearer oriented)**	*Ability*	*Could you…* *Can you…?*
	Willingness	*Would you…?*
	Permission	*May I …..?*
	Suggestive formulae	*How about…?*
Conventionally indirect **(Speaker based)**	*Wishes*	*I would like…..*
	Desires/needs	*I want/need you to…*
	Obligation	*You must……* *You have to……*
Direct	*Perfomatives*	*I ask you to….*
	Imperatives	*Lend me your...*
	Elliptical phrase	*Your...*

Trosborg's (1995, p. 209-219) taxonomy of request modification items

TYPE **Internal modification**	SUBTYPE EXAMPLE
	Syntactic downgraders: I wonder if you would be able to...
	Lexical/phrasal downgraders: Could you..., please?
	Upgraders: I'd be very grateful if you'd...

External modification	*Preparators:* *Are you busy right now? I need that...*
	Disarmers: *I'm sorry to trouble you, but could you...?*
	Supportive reasons: *Could you ...? I cannot...*

The analyses of the refusal strategies were conducted through adopting and utilising the taxonomy developed by Campillo et al. (2009). The taxonomy has been used in a sizeable number of studies and has proved to be quite effective in the analysis of socio-pragmatic descriptions and pragma-linguistic accounts (Al-Eryani, 2007; Beebe, Takahashi & Uliss-Weltz, 1990; Ghahraman, 2006; Kasper, 2006; Kondo, 2001 & 2008). The taxonomy accounts for most refusal strategies utilised by non-native speakers of the English language from a discourse point of view. The taxonomy divides refusals into direct, indirect and adjuncts to refusals. It is within these three broad perspectives that the study analysed the refusals produced by the front office trainees in the department of hospitality at Valombola VTC. The thrusts was placed on closely analysing the semantic expressions, to establish the implementation of any mitigators to save the face of the interlocutor or whether the context and selection of linguistic units in the formulation of requests account for such concerns as social distance and appropriateness.

Campillo et al. (2009) Taxonomy of refusals

TAXONOMY OF REFUSALS	
Direct strategies	
1. Bluntness	*No/I refuse*
2. Negation of proposition	*I can't, I don't think so*
Indirect strategies	
1. Plain indirect	*It looks like I won't be able to go...*
2. Reason/Explanation	*I can't. I have a...*
3. Regret/apology	*I'm so sorry I can't*
4. Alternative: • Change option • Change time (postponement)	 *I would join you if you choose another...* *I can't... right now, but I could...*
5. Disagreement/Dissuasion/Criticism	*Under the current situation, you should not be asking for a... right now!*
6. Statement of principle/philosophy	*I can't. It goes against my beliefs*
7. Avoidance • Non-verbal: Ignoring (silence, etc*)* • Verbal: ✓ Hedging ✓ Change topic ✓ Joking ✓ Sarcasm	 *Well, I'll see if I can*
Adjuncts to refusals	

1. Positive opinion	*This is a great idea, but…*
2. Willingness	*I'd love to..., but…*
3. Gratitude	*Thanks so much, but...*
4. Agreement	*Fine! But…*
5. Solidarity/empathy	*I'm sure you will understand, but...*

The Speech Act theoretical framework is utilised to give answers and great insight into the factors that influence the pragmatic competence of front-office trainees at Valombola VTC. Speech Act Theory recognises the importance of analysing intended meanings in a statement or speech, by taking practical situations into consideration with cultural concerns, pragma-linguistic and socio-pragmatic issues (Amaya, 2008). It is for this reason that the items in the questionnaire (Appendix C) have assisted the researcher to establish relevant data. The questionnaire established the background information of the respondents, that is, their cultural beliefs, their exposure to the native speakers of the English language, etc.

2.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter established that the capability or ability to understand the hidden messages of utterance is really important. This is because, in some instances, words or utterances can be misdirected and misinterpreted into something unlikeable if people are not vigilant. The chapter further observes that, by understanding pragmatics and speech acts, people are able to get a clearer and better understanding of the utterances. It was learnt that there are some expressions that one needs to consider when communicating with a person of a different cultural background in order to avoid cross-cultural pragmatic failures, and that there are linguistic components and expressions that exist that require socio-pragmatic competence for better understanding. In the English language for example, there are some ironic or idiomatic expressions that do not exist in some of the vernacular languages in Namibia.

Therefore, pragmatic knowledge or competence and the respect of cultural integrity are essential factors to consider when communicating. Idiomatic expressions are barriers that could hinder an individual's ability to comprehend the actual and intended message

contained within expressed words or utterances fully. In the effort of raising the awareness to the observed barriers, speech acts could be socialised in the workshop environment such in the case of front-office trainees. It was further observed that it is necessary to accurately understand the intended meanings by intently analysing utterances and also making pragmatics an essential topic of discussion. By understanding the norms and idiomatic expressions of the first and second languages, users are able to easily determine the messages of utterances and this could potentially expand their linguistic knowledge, resulting in the ability to perform the speech acts as an integral part of pragmatics discipline.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a discussion of the research methods used in the current study, which sort to analyse front office trainees' communicative and pragmatic competence with regards to the formulation and realisation of request strategies. The study also sought to evaluate the trainees' application of politeness principles in speech act of refusal and apologetic responses as well as to examine the factors that influence the trainees' pragmatic competence. Research methodology refers to the various procedures, techniques, and processes employed in conducted research on a specific topic (Bryman & Bell, 2003). The chapter thus, discusses the research design, the participants and the data collection instruments that were used in the study. The data collection procedures, the pilot study as well as ethical consideration are also explained.

3.2 Research Design

Research design refers to "the specific procedures involved in the process, including the data collection, data analysis, and report writing" (Creswell, 2012, p. 20). The current study employed a mixed method approach as recommended by Gay, Mills and Airasian (2009, p. 462) who explain that "mixed methods research approaches combined quantitative and qualitative approaches by including both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study." According to Gay, et al., quantitative studies investigate whether there is a relationship between and amongst variables whereas qualitative studies seek a thorough understanding of a situation or state of being.

3.3 Research Paradigm

The research sought to examine the communicative beliefs regarding the nature of reality, and how one should go about obtaining this knowledge. The researcher therefore used the interpretive paradigm by interpreting the subject matter in order to understand the world as it is imagined from perspectives and experience of individual subjects involved and consulted during the data collection stage. Nguyen (2019, p. 2) supports this choice of paradigm by explaining that, "through this conceptual lens, the researcher examines the methodological aspects of their research project to determine the research methods that would be used, and

how the data would be analysed". This means that the researcher's use of interpretive approach is chiefly opted for as it provides ways for understanding the diversity of information from the collected data. Grix (2004) defines a research paradigm as a way of understanding the reality of the world and studying it. Accordingly, as Crotty (1998) explains, the interpretive paradigm is mostly interested in understanding methodologies such as interviewing or participant observation which rely on a subjective relationship between the researcher and subjects in question.

3.4 Research approach

This study utilised the mixed methods and the collected data was analysed both quantitatively (by applying some statistics methodology) and also interpreted qualitatively t(o obtain a complete overview of interactional pragmatics concept at Valombola VTC). According to Regnault, Willgoss and Barbic (2018),

> mixed methods [approach] allows a research question to be analysed from different viewpoints. For example, one can combine the rich, subjective insights on complex realities from qualitative inquiry, with the standardized data generated through quantitative research. When applied mixed methods allow respective strengths and weaknesses of each approach to complement each other (p.1).

The mixed methods approach provides the researcher with a strong platform to analyse the data collected from different angles (qualitative and quantitative), enhancing the description and understanding of the pragmatic competence situation at Valombola VTC. The complementary nature of qualitative and quantitative analyses of the collected data allows for the in-depth comparisons and verification of collected data, critically examining all the variables with regards to how they respond to the objectives of the research. Data obtained from the questionnaires and the written discourse completion tests provided the researcher with the flexibility to apply the quantitative and the qualitative techniques in the analyses of the variables.

3.5 Research Setting

In considering the research setting protocols, the researcher considered the key determinants of a research setting in order to safeguard the ethical concerns related to the success and reliability of the study from a scholarly point of view. The study was therefore

carried out at Valombola Vocational Training Centre in Ongwediva, in northern Namibia. Specifically, the researcher conducted the study in the Hospitality Training Department, targeting front-office trainees. A study sample of 15 students was selected using the systematic random sampling technique from a study population of 30 trainees registered for the 2022 academic year. The research setting was established in line Majid's (2018, p.3) recommendation that, "keep in mind that a protocol's discussion on the study setting has to be coherent with other parts of the research protocol".

3.6 Study Population

The researcher conducted the current study with an underlying ideology of the units on which the research findings can be applied. This means that the researcher imagined this group of units as the population of the study under which the research findings and conclusions could be established. Therefore, the population of the study was clearly highlighted in the research title, the problem statement and the broad objective of the study. The researcher demarcated the study population as comprised of front-office trainees of Valombola Vocational Training Centre after having carefully considered them as a group of individuals that had common characteristics and of great interest to the researcher with regards to the relative concerns of the problem under investigation. The researcher took it upon themselves to make use of some certain parameters like pragmatics effect in communication. Creswell (2003) explains that a population refers to the entire group that a researcher wants to draw conclusions about. Kazeroon (2001, p 994) further explains that the "study population is subset of a target population that can be studied and that samples are subsets of the population of the study." The population of this study comprised of 30 front-office trainees selected from the 2022 intake in the Department of Hospitality Training at Valombola VTC.

3.7 Sampling Procedures and Sample Size

Systematic sampling is the process of selecting a sample that is believed to be representative of a given population (Gay, et al., 2009). A sample is then thus, imagined as a representative part of the population of the study (Majid, 2018). The researcher applied the systematic random sampling procedure to the population of the study (constituted of 30 front-office trainees who are part of the 2022 academic year intake in the Department of Hospitality at

Valombla VTC) to come up with the sample of 15 trainees (which constitutes 50% of the total population and thus can be argued to be adequate to provide a statistical representation of the total population).

The systematic random sampling procedure presented the researcher with the flexibility to draw up generalisations about the population from the sample. This means that the systematic random sampling procedure was selected by the researcher guided by a consideration of the characteristics of the population of interest, the significance and power levels as well as the research objectives. According to Taherdoost (2016), the systematic sampling procedure is not biased. Majid (2018, p.5) reinforce this belief by observing that, "the sample size of a research study should have adequate power and significance, allowing the investigators to be confident that the study findings cannot be attributed to random variations in the population of interest". In this regard, the researcher deducted major conclusions and recommendations about the study population based on the data extracted from the sample. This was due to the inherent belief that the findings from the study sample possessed the proclivity to represent real and actual inferences and associations in the population of interest

3.8 Research Data Collecting Tools

Canal (2017) explains that research instruments are the tools which the researcher utilises to gather data for analyses. According to Canal the selection of tools to collect data should be closely linked to the problem to be investigated, the objectives of the study and informed by the theoretical framework. The study employed three sets of data collecting instruments, which are two Written Discourse Completion Tests) one of formulation and realisation of request and another on formulation and realisation of refusal) and a questionnaire. The collection of data for objective 1 was done utilising a WDCT (Appendix A) which provided requests response analyses that required the trainees to attempt a comprehensive written discourse completion test. A second WDCT provided data on refusal strategies and required that the trainees attempt responding to questions on the comprehensive WDCT (see Appendix B). Data responding to Objective 3 was collected using a questionnaire (see Appendix C).

3.8.1 Questionnaire

The questionnaire has been one of the most preferred data collection instruments of study. Questionnaires can be of various kinds, including but not limited to open-ended, close-ended, multiple choice tests or rating scales and it is quite popular in every field of research (Dörnyei, 2010; O'Keeffe et al., 2011). In the current study, the questionnaire was used to gather data to respond to the first research question of the study which sought to determine the understanding and the level of pragmatic competence of the front-office trainees. Using the questionnaire (Appendix C), the researcher targeted 15 front-office trainees selected from the total population of the study of 30 front-office trainees who are part of the 2022 academic year intake in the department of Hospitality at Valombla VTC, using a systematic random sampling procedure. The questionnaire was designed in such way that it consisted of two main parts. The first part collected personal biographical and educational background, the second part sought to collect data on general details English language usage patterns. The questionnaire was adapted from Pinyo (2010) and was adjusted in order to fit the context of the current study.

3.8.2 The Discourse Completion Tests (DCTs)

The Written Discourse Completion Tests (Appendix A and B) targeted 15 front-office trainees selected using the systematic random sampling procedure from the total population of the study (30 front-office trainees from among the 2022 academic year intake in the Department of Hospitality at Valombla VTC). Hyman (2000) notes that, literature the research methodology reveals numerous methods for collecting data in pragmatics research. According to Hyman the WDCT is the most commonly used method although its validity is sometimes controversial. A WDCT is defined by Houck and Gass (1996) as cited in Hyman (2000) as a written questionnaire consisting of a brief description of a situation followed by a dialogue with a blank line where the subject puts in what they believed to be an appropriate response.

In addition, despite the about the validity of the DCT, it remains the popular means of data collection. Some strong reasons why many scholars continue to employ this instrument are because it can control contextual variables such as social status, sex and social distance more easily. Furthermore, with it, a large amount of data can be collected in a short period of time. It is specifically suitable for cross-sectional studies and the data collected can be compared

easily. For the above reasons, this study made use of a WDCT. Supporters of the WDCT sserta that this test is able to not only test pragmatic awareness, but also assess their production within certain speech acts.

Liu (2006) explains further that WDCTs are written questionnaires including a number of brief situational descriptions, followed by a short dialogue with an empty slot for the speech act under study. With this instrument, the participants were asked to provide responses which they thought were appropriate in the given contexts. Blum-kulka and Olshtain (1984, p. 198) as cited in Liu (2006) provides a situational example of a professor and student conversation, in which a student borrows a book from his professor promising to return it the very day. When the two met again, the student realised that has forgotten to bring the professor's book along. The professor asked: "Mathew, I hope you brought the book I lent you." Mathew: "Oo, sorry, not". And the Professor replies: "But please remember it next week". (Blum-kulka & Olshtain, 1984, p. 198 as cited in Liu, 2006).

According to Aufa (2013) the WDCT has some limitations. For example, using a written form to elicit oral productions cannot reflect the cognitive processes involved in the interaction. That is to say, the realisation of targeted speech acts in the actual oral production is quite different from the written forms. In addition, it is not possible to play conversational turns in the WDCT since it does not allow the assessment of speech act production in their real discourse contexts. Conclusions can be made thus, that the WDCT does not demonstrate the interactive aspects of oral performance in authentic conversations even though this test portrays the linguistic expression of speech acts. Regardless of these criticisms, the WDCT remains an essential means for data collection. Therefore, the current study employed the WDCT, which is one of the six test types used in assessing second language trainees' pragmatic knowledge. The WDCT is adapted from Yuan (2012) in order to ensure validity and reliability.

3.9 Data Collection Procedures

The researcher consulted with the trainer responsible for English for Communication Skills module at Valombola Vocational Training Centre, and the tests were arranged to be written after lesson times. Arrangements were made with the trainees and they communicated the times that were convenient for them to write the tests. The tasks were

explained to the trainees, and they were requested to write down their answers in written form. The trainees were also instructed to use pseudonyms on all the papers. However, the trainees were requested to use the same pseudonym on all their answer sheets in order to ensure that the data analysis was accurate.

3.10 Data Analysis

According to Patton (2012) analysis of data refers to the systematic examination and determination of parts of, the relationship between the parts of the whole set of data collected. Bell (2013) suggests that "a hundred separate pieces of interesting information will mean nothing to a reader unless they have been placed into categories or groupings, patterns and items of particular significance" (p.127). Data on the trainees' pragmatic competence as well as grammatical competence was qualitatively and quantitatively analysed, making use of coding, which was done by categorising data into different themes and the classifying approach.

3.11 Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted in order to assess the reliability and validity of research instruments (specifically Appendices A and B), in order to determine whether situational analysis questions contained in them were comprehensive enough to collected the required data. As a result of the pilot study conducted, the politeness tests in Situational Questions D and H were rephrased, to strengthen their reliability and validity.

3.12 Ethical Considerations

Ethics in a research require researcher to do no harm to respondents. Resnik (2015) indicates that ethics are the moral principles that govern a person's behaviour. Resnik further indicates that research ethics may be referred to as doing what is morally and legally right in research and that they are actually norms for conduct that distinguish between right and wrong, and acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. According to Resnik research ethics are the common denominator for researchers' relations with respondents and colleagues. The research sought and received ethical clearance from the NUST of Higher Degrees Committee to conduct the current study on pragmatic competence. The researcher strove to take into consideration all the ethical elements relating to the processes of engaging with the research respondents.

The researcher further obtained permission from the Head of Training Department at Valombola Vocational Training Centre and informed consent was also sought from all the participants. These processes are in line with observations by Jensen (2002) who believes that ethics are central to the research process and that researchers need to take care of various ethical issues at different levels of this process. Participation in the study was voluntary, allowing trainees to withdraw at any time without any consequences. Furthermore, the research was conducted in a way that guaranteed the anonymity and confidentiality of respondents. Anonymity was maintained through ensuring that the real names of trainees were not used on the test papers. With regards to confidentiality, the information collected was used for academic purposes only, specifically for this study – and stored on a password protected computer. The data collected was used strictly for the purposes of the academic analysis of the aspects of language that the current research sought to investigate. No harm was inflicted on any of the participants as well as the receivers of the final results of this study.

3.12.1 Consideration of ethical issues

According to Sawant (2012), ethics refers to a diverse set of values, norms and institutional regulations that help constitute and regulate scientific activity. Sawant further highlights that the objectives of research ethics are: protecting human participants and of ensuring that the research is conducted in the way that serves the interests of individuals, groups and society as a whole. On the other hand, the participants were given exclusive rights to withdraw from, or refuse to take part in the research project. The participants were also accorded the right to confidentiality and to their right to preventing personal information or identifiable data from being published or shared. They were accorded the right to observe how the data they had given was secured. The research also strove to ensure that participants were not exposed to unnecessary or disproportionate levels of risk, as discouraged by Jensen (2002).

3.12.2 Anonymity and confidentiality

The anonymity and confidentiality of the participants were preserved by not revealing their names and identities in the data collection, analysis and reporting of the study findings. Jensen (2002) explains that the terms 'anonymity' *and* 'confidentiality' are frequently confused in human subject research and thus indicates that the distinction between the two terms, however, is critical in the design of protocols that protect the participants' privacy and

provide for adequate informed consent. According to Jensen (2002) as cited in Sawant (2012), *c*onfidentiality refers to a condition in which the researcher knows the identity of a research subject, but takes steps to protect that identity from being discovered by others.

3.13.3 Informed voluntary consent

As Sawant (2012) advises, the process of obtaining consent during this study consisted of the following: consent was given freely (voluntary), subjects understood what was being asked of them and involved persons had to be competent to consent. Sawant states that to participate in a research study, participants need to be adequately informed about the research, comprehend the information and have the power of freedom of choice that allows them to decide whether to participate or decline to participate in a research. The researcher therefore sought the express permission from all research respondents.

3.12.4 No harm

Sawant (2012) emphasises that ethics in a research require a researcher to do no harm to respondents. Broadly speaking during the study, the researcher strove to ensure that he inflicted no harm to the respondents. Care was taken to ensure the welfare of the human research participants by avoiding physical harm to them, often associated with experimental research studies, as well as emotional and psychological harm.

3.12.5 Respect

In order to make the research more engaging and the research comprehensive, the researcher established an interactive atmosphere with the respondents. Time management was a critical concern in the researcher's conduct with the respondents. According to Sawant (2012), it is more frustrating when told that something would take 20 minutes, for example, but actually ends up taking 30 or 40 minutes. Respect for people was one of the fundamental principles during the research. According to Sawant (2012) respecting a person ensures that their dignity is valued. A frustrated respondent would be more likely to disengage or drop off. This study therefore ensured that communication was done according to the communicated timelines in order to uphold the respect for the respondents' time. For this reason, all the research questions were therefore kept focused and necessary.

3.13 Summary

This chapter explained the methodology used in conducting this mixed methods research which sought to understand the pragmatics challenges faced by front-office trainees. The target population for this study was the front-office trainees in the Hospitality Department at Valombola VTC. Participants were selected using the random systematic sampling procedure. The chapter also presented an overview of the research methods used in investigating the research problem. Furthermore, the chapter explained and justified the research design, population, sample and sampling procedures, research instruments, data collection procedures, data analysis as well as ethical considerations.

CHAPTER FOUR

MAJOR FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Introduction

The chapter presents the findings of the study logically, in in response to the research objectives as established in Chapter 1. The presentation of the findings is conducted following descriptive data analyses generated from the data collecting tools. The collected data is also analysed qualitatively. Data was collected through the utilisation of Written Discourse Completion Tests (WDCTs) (attached as Appendices A and B). The prominent findings were linked to the third objective: evaluating the application of and politeness principles in speech acts of request-refusal strategies by front-office trainees of Valombola VTC. A total of 9 requests and 9 situations were presented to the participants which sought demonstrations of how to respond to requests in normal situation, and these were analysed based on different situations presented to them. The second objective tested and analysed the respondents' communicative competence in the formulation and realisation of refusals. The participants were presented with real life situations which they are likely to encounter in their dealings and engagements with both their trainers and fellow trainees at the Vocational Training Centre (VTC). The situations required them to formulate and realise refusals to given requests. A questionnaire was also employed to collect data linked to the third objective of the study which sought examine the frequency of the use of the English language at the VTC.

4.2 Assessing the communicative and pragmatic competence in responding to request strategies

4.2.1 Formulation and realisation procedure

The Written Discourse Completion Test (WDCT)was distributed to a sample of 15 participants selected using the Systematic Random Sampling procedure. The WDCT comprised of nine requests and nine given situations that required the participants to formulate requests. Procedurally, the study analysed the participants' production of requests quantitatively and qualitatively. The qualitative analyses provided great insight into the linguistic formulae employed by the participants, especially so when examined through Trosborg's (1995) taxonomy of request realisation strategies. There were only a few errors recorded as a result mistranslation of a request. The analysis presents the findings of the Requests Discourse

Completion Test focusing intently on each projected situation in order to generate an in-depth understanding of the concept and its practical realisation amongst the trainees. Therefore, the researcher analysed all responses on each situation qualitatively and quantitatively.

Request A (see Appendix A)

While attending a data-projected presentation on the importance of speech acts, you receive a call to meet an important visitor. How would you request the trainer for notes on what you have missed?

The analysis of the given request portrayed very interesting data. The frequently employed request linguistic realisation referred to willingness and ability strategies. The ability strategy was divided into two depending on the use of the modal *verb would* and/or *could*. *Would you please repeat the presentation? Could you please be kind to give me some notes, Sir?* The use of the ability strategy accounted for 70% of the total responses. Meanwhile, the willingness strategies under the broad concept of conventionally indirect strategies were observed in 15% of the requests. The trainees utilised the expression *Is it possible…..?* in addressing the trainer. Direct requests linguistic formulae were realised in 10% of the responses, as in the example: *Give me some notes Sir, I had to attend to an important visit.* These responses did not highlight any form of mitigation in their formulation. Imperativeness was also observed to be evident in the responses.

Internal modification request linguistic formulae were realised in responses like: *Could you give me some notes, please? I had to attend to an important visit.* These types of responses accounted for 5% of the total requests. On the contrary, external modification linguistic formulae were realised in responses like, *I am sorry to disturb you Sir, but could give me some notes.* It is noteworthy to realise that no permission and suggestive formulae request strategies were utilised by the trainees. Moreover, the conventionally indirect (speaker-based) request linguistic formulae were not utilised by the front-office trainees.

Request Strategies: Responses Analysis for Request A							
Conventionally Indirect strategies						Direct strategies	
Ability Strategy	Willingness	Permission	Wishes	Obligation	Suggestive	Imperatives	Others
70%	15%	0%	0%	0%	0%	10%	5%
Indirect conventionally strategies						Direct strategies	
Ability Strategy	Willingness	Permission	Wishes	Obligation	Suggestive formulae	Imperatives	Others
Could you	*Is it possible*	-	-	-	-	Give me your…	-

Request B (See Appendix A)

You know you will not cope with the given deadline to submit your practical tasks. How would you request for an extension considering that you have other pending academic activities?

The situation presented a diversity of requests linguistic realisations formulae as indicated in the table of analysis below. The frequently realised strategies occurred under the broad type of conventionally indirect (hearer-oriented). The use of the modal verb *could* was realised within some of the request formulations in the quest to ask for permission for the trainees to submit their practical tasks after the deadline as demonstrated in: *Could I please submit my proposal three days late? I have some other pending academic activities due to hectic workshops this month.* The trainees also applied some form of mitigation in their expressions to convince the trainer. The utilisation of the ability strategy accounted for 45% of the responses. The permission linguistic formulae under the conventional indirect strategy was observed in 20% of the responses. The modal verb *May I….* was also evident in these

responses. For example, *Sir, may I be pardoned to submit my tasks three days late.* The trainees formulated their requests to submit their practical tasks on a later date utilising the wish strategy in 20% of the responses as expressed in the following statement, using: *I would like to,* for example, *I would like to submit my practical activities three days after the given deadline*. The other realisation =of internal modification was also observed in the responses by the trainees, for example: *Could you kindly allow me to submit my tasks three days after the given deadline, please Sir*? Requests in form of willingness strategy evinced themselves at 15% in examples such as: *Would you mind allowing me to submit a bit late, Sir?* Furthermore, external modification was also used in the responses by the front-office trainees. For example; *I am sorry to inform this to you*, *but could I please submit my practical tasks three days after the given deadline?* It is noteworthy to highlight that this given situation got responses from almost all the request strategy types.

Request Strategies: Responses Analysis for Request B							
Conventionally Indirect strategies						Direct strategies	
Ability Strategy	Willingness	Permission	Wishes	Obligation	Suggestive	Imperatives	Others
45%	15%	20%	20%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Indirect conventionally strategies						Direct strategies	
Ability Strategy	Willingness	Permission	Wishes	Obligation	Suggestive formulae	Performatives	Imperatives
Could you…	*Would you mind…*	*May I be…*	*I would like to…*	-	-	-	-

Request C (See Appendix A)

Your recent assignment on the relationship between communicative and pragmatic competence has received low grading. How would you request your Communication trainer to remark your paper?

Situation C presented interesting request linguistic realisations in the responses provided by the trainees. This could have been necessitated by the nature of the anxious position that the trainees found themselves when it comes to requests such as these. The situation represents a practical situation which is experienced by most trainees in their daily encounters with their trainers. It is a situation which invokes emotions and thereby probably triggers diverse types of request strategies. The frequently employed strategies in this situation are obligation strategies out of anger or disappointment as in this response: *You have to remark it, just remark my assignment. You must look at it again.* Obligation request strategies are often characteristic of an angry speaker. The obligation strategy was found to have been used in this situation the most, at the high rate of 42%. The use of the modal verb '*could'* was evident in many of the trainees' responses as in this quotation: *Could you go through my assignment again? I feel it is recommendable and relevant*. In addition, 20% of the responses were realised under the wishes strategy which falls in the broad concept of conventionally indirect (speaker-based) type as in this example, *I would like you to reconsider remarking, Sir.*

Moreover, under the direct strategy type, the responses accounted for 10% of performatives and examples such as: *I ask you to go through it*, were evident in the responses. Under the concept of imperatives (accounting for15% of the responses), the following was realised, *Go through my assignment again Sir, your recommendation is discouraging.* However, towards the end of request some trainees opted to be a bit polite considering suggestive strategy (also accounting for 15% or the responses) as realised in the response: *I suggest you remark my work sir, yes how about going through again?* Internal modification strategies (downgraders) were realised also in the responses as in the example, *could you remark again my project, please*? *I feel I can get a better performance outcome.* Toward the end a disarmer approach was detected as in the example: *I am sorry to say this*, *but can you re-mark my assignment, Sir. I feel you did not practice fairness to my task*.

Request Strategies: Responses Analysis for Request C							
Indirect conventionally strategies						Direct strategies	
Ability Strategy	Willingness	Permission	Wishes	Obligation	Suggestive	Imperatives	Performatives
42%	0%	0%	20%	0%	15%	15%	8%
Conventionally Indirect strategies						Direct strategies	
Ability Strategy	Willingness	Permission	Wishes	Obligation	Suggestive formulae	Performatives	Imperatives
Could you…	-	-	I would like you to…	You have to / You must..	*How about going through again…*	*I ask you to go through it …*	*Go through my…*

Request D (See Appendix A)

You have a lesson on Speech Act Theory which is difficult to you. What do you say to the Communication trainer, requesting him to revise the theory with practical examples?

This request presented extra request linguistic formulae evidenced by the trainees utilising the ability requests strategy as demonstrated by the use of the modal verb *could*. The ability request strategy accounted for 23% of all the responses as in the example: *Could you kindly revise the topic Sir? The theory is difficult*. The ability requests strategy used by the trainees had the modal verb *can you* at the beginning. The Request D situation realised a suggestive formulae strategy at 36% which was not often used before in the other responses. However, only two of such responses were identified in the analysis: *How about if you could repeat the explanation with examples Sir? The topic is challenging*. The conventionally indirect type of request strategies were also realised through the utilisation of the obligation strategy.

The obligation strategy was identified by the use of expression like *you ought to, you must* and *you have to*. The two accounted for 20% of the responses altogether (*You must*, 15% and *You have to*, 5%). This is demonstrated in the response*: You must repeat the theory Sir. I did not catch up with it*. The direct imperative requests strategy was realised too in the analysis, and accounted for 21% of the responses as demonstrated in the response: *Give some examples Sir, your explanation is inadequate*. Internal modification was realised through the use of "*please"* (phrasal downgrader) as exemplified in the example: *Could you give examples in your explanation Sir, please?* The responses that utilised the lexical downgrader and the external modification responses were realised through the use of *I am sorry* at the beginning. See the table below for the analysis:

Request Strategies: Responses Analysis for Request D							
Indirect conventionally strategies						Direct strategies	
Ability Strategy	Willingness	Permission	Wishes	Obligation	Suggestive	Imperatives	Performatives
23%	0%	0%	0%	20%	36%	21%	0%
Conventionally Indirect strategies						Direct strategies	
Ability Strategy	Willingness	Permission	Wishes	Obligation	Suggestive formulae	Imperatives	Performatives
Could you…	-	-	I would like you to…	You have to / You must…	*How about…*	*Give some examples*	...

Request E (See Appendix A)

Your trainer is using Moodle e-learning platform and appears to be struggling with the e-learning program you know better. How would you ask to assist him?

The situation provided the prevalence of new requests linguistic formulae in formulating strategies. The use of the modal verb *could* and *can* reduced a little under the ability request strategy to a prevalence rate of just 15%. The responses utilising the modal verb *could* were also used in these responses, for example: *Could you extend the submission date Sir?* The permission request strategy recorded the highest responses accounting for 50% of the total responses as demonstrated by this response: *I kindly request you to permit me to help you out, Sir.*

The use of the expression *May I* was also observed in the request strategies. The strategy falls under the permission technique, for example: *May I kindly request you to allow me to help you out?* External modification was realised by the utilisation of the expression *Excuse me* at the beginning of a request, for example; *Excuse me Sir, could you kindly allow me to come forward and assist, you seem to be struggling with my favourite platform?* The technique falls under preparatory approach. A new request modification item under syntactic downgraders was realised. The use of *if you could* at the beginning of an expression, indicated some mitigation effect, for example; *If you could let me help you Sir, I would be grateful to continue your presentation successfully.* The strategy accounted for 35% of the total responses.

Request F (See Appendix A)

You are assigned to do an urgent practical project utilising remote communication. You are struggling to develop the assigned project. You feel you require one-on-one contact with your trainer. How do you request for that opportunity?

The situation presented a variety of request linguistic realisations. Most of the responses by the trainees fall under the bracket of conventionally indirect strategies (hearer-oriented). The responses were realised by the expression of asking for permission as in this response: *This project is difficult for me. May I visit your office for help*? The permission strategy accounted for 36% of the total responses. The suggestive formulae under the same broad concept of conventionally indirect (hearer-oriented) type totalled 30% as demonstrated by the response:

The project is challenging, how about if I arrange for an appointment to see you? The mitigation effects were noted in some of the responses under the suggestive formulae strategy.

The wishes strategy under the conventionally indirect (speaker-oriented) type accounted for 19% of the responses as exemplified by the response: *I would like to come and visit you because I am finding the project difficult.* Imperative direct strategies were realised at 15% as represented by e statement: *I want to come to your office to discuss the project, it is challenging.* The internal modification was realised in the form of syntactic downgraders: *I wonder if I could come to your office Sir, I am finding the project hard*. It is important to mention that no request linguistic formulae aligned to external modification were realised in this request analysis.

See the table below for the presentation of the data for this request analysis.

Request Strategies: Responses Analysis for Request F							
Indirect conventionally strategies						Direct strategies	
Ability Strategy	Willingness	Permission	Wishes	Obligation	Suggestive	Imperatives	Others
0%	0%	36%	19%	0%	30%	15%	-
Conventionally Indirect strategies						Direct strategies	
Ability Strategy	Willingness	Permission	Wishes	Obligation	Suggestive formulae	Imperatives	Performatives
-	-	*May I visit your*	I would like you to…	-.	*How about if I arrange…*	*I want to come to…*	…

Request G (See Appendix A)

Your trainer presented a very useful topic on the difference between semantics and pragmatics using a data projector. You need his softcopy. How do you request for his softcopy?

The situation presented varying request linguistic formulae. This is a common scenario to the trainees considering that virtual learning has been implemented in vocational education and training. Most of the responses were linked to the use of the modal verb *Can*. For example, in the response: *Can you share your notes Sir, the presentation is very useful*. The use of the modal verb '*can*' represents the ability strategy which is a conventionally indirect type and accounted for 40% of the total responses. Moreover, still under the conventionally indirect (hearer-oriented) type, the use of the modal verb '*could*' was also realised in the responses, as in for example; *Could you* share *your presentation Sir, it appears to be straight forward*.

The permission strategy was realised by the utilization of the expression *May I* as in this *example; May I have your softcopy of the presentation Sir for further reading?* The strategy presented 25% of the responses. Some of the trainees expressed their requests in the form of wish strategy too at 20%, for example, *I would like to ask for your presentation Sir*. Interestingly, the trainees utilised direct imperatives too in their requests to the trainer, for example in statements such as; *Give me your softcopy Sir, they are good*. The direct strategies accounted for 15% of all the responses. The use of the internal modification was realised as well but at a very low scale as in the previous situations. The internal modifications were realised in the form of lexical downgraders: *Can you share your softcopy Sir, please?*

Request Strategies: Responses Analysis for Request G							
Indirect conventionally strategies						Direct strategies	
Ability Strategy	Willingness	Permission	Wishes	Obligation	Suggestory	Performatives	Imperatives
40%	0%	25%	20%	0%	0%	0%	15%

Indirect conventionally strategies						Direct strategies	
Ability Strategy	Willingness	Permission	Wishes	Obligation	Suggestive formulae	Performatives	Imperatives
Could you	-	May I have	I would like	-	-	-	Give me your…

Request H (See Appendix A)

While attending lessons, you receive a private and confidential call and decide to call it a day. How would you request the trainer to be excused for a day?

The situation presented interesting findings. It is probably because it was a familiar experience for many of the trainees in vocational education and training. They were engaging their trainers via online/remote learning. Most of the responses utilised the expression *May I* at the beginning, signalling the utilisation of the permission strategy. The permission strategy falls under the conventionally indirect (hearer-oriented) type. The permission strategy accounted for 56% of the total responses. Meanwhile, under the permission strategy, the trainees largely utilised the modal verb '*can'* in formulating their requests as in the response: *Can I call it a day Sir*? *It is a matter of urgency.* Some mitigation was evident in the strategy.

Interestingly, the trainees also utilised an expression which was not so common in the formulation of requests in the other situations. The request linguistic formulae applying the expression '*excuse me'* was realised in eleven responses. The use of this expression falls under external modification (preparators) as evinced in the example: *Excuse me Sir, can I call it a day? It is a matter of urgency*. The trainees further evinced another expression; '*please excuse me'* to formulate requests, for example: *Please excuse me; can I leave I just received an urgent call?* The strategy was realised in at least five requests formulated as part of the responses. Some requests were also formulated by utilising the direct strategy. For example,

I have received an urgent call, see you tomorrow, Sir. The direct strategy was realised in six of the responses and accounted for a 44% tally.

Request I (See Appendix A)

You are taking some notes while the trainer is writing on the board. His handwriting is so curvy to you that you cannot read it. How would you request the trainer to write in block letters, instead?

The analysis of responses received presented a diversity of requests linguistic formulae. The trainees utilised varying strategies to formulate their responses. The use of the modal verb '*can you'* was realised in nine of the responses and is exemplified by, *Can you please write in capital letters?* The modal verb '*can'* falls under the ability strategy. Furthermore, the choice of the modal verb '*could you'* was also evinced in ten of the responses, accounting for 48% of the total responses, for example: C*ould you change your handwriting to better, Sir?* The modal verb *'could you'* belongs to the same strategy of ability under the broad type of conventionally indirect (hearer-oriented).

The trainees also applied the expression '*may you'* to formulate requests to the trainer. The use of '*may you'* in this scenario aligns with the suggestive formulae, for example: *May you kindly write in capital letters, your handwriting appears curvy?* This strategy was evidenced in 22% of the total responses. In the same scenario, the trainees used an unfamiliar expression in the form of '*do you mind….'* to formulate requests to the trainer. The strategy aligned to the suggestive technique as demonstrated by the example, *Do you mind writing in capital letters, Sir*? There were also four trainees who responded using the obligation strategy (accounting for 18% of the responses). This was realised in expressions such as: *Sir, you must write in Caps* and *You have to write in block letters.*

Some of the responses for this request were realised under the direct imperatives. The strategy is demonstrated in 12% of the responses. For example, *Write in block letters Sir, your handwriting in unreadable from far* and *Write clearly Sir to accommodate all of us. Your handwriting has many question marks*. External modification was also realised, and this occurred through the utilisation of preparators. The trainees used the expressions '*please'*

and '*excuse me'* at the beginning of the specific requests, for example: *Please write legibly.* See the table below, indicating the distribution of the data collected on the request.

Request Strategies: Responses Analysis for Request I							
Indirect conventionally strategies						Direct strategies	
Ability Strategy	Willingness	Permission	Wishes	Obligation	Suggestive formulae	Performatives	Imperatives
48%	0%	0%	0%	18%	22%	0%	12%
Indirect conventionally strategies						Direct strategies	
Ability Strategy	Willingness	Permission	Wishes	Obligation	Suggestive formulae	Performatives	Imperatives
Could you	-	-	-	*You must..*	*May you kindly*	-	*Write legibly*

4.3 Formulation and application of cooperative and politeness principles in the speech acts of refusal and apologetic responses

4.3.1 Trainees' responses on the speech acts of refusals

Yuan (2012) states that the speech act of refusal can be observed when a speaker directly or indirectly says no to a request or an invitation. Yuan further adds that these may often be regarded as the face-threatening acts to the requestor as the response refutes the speakers' expectations. Smit (2012) supports this proposition by also observing that speech acts that pose a threat to one's positive or negative face are referred to as face threatening acts. Chen (1996) as cited in Tanck (2002) believes that in the case of refusal, one may produce three

speech acts as: 1) an expression of regret, “I’m sorry”, followed by 2) a direct refusal, “I cannot come to your birthday party, followed by 3) an excuse, “I will be on business in the US”. Tanck suggests these three components based on a study done by Beebe, Takahashi and Uliss-Weltz (1990), observing that in case of an invitation, the formulaic sequence would comprise of 1) an expression of regret, followed by 2) an excuse, and ending with 3) an offer of alternative. The current study also made use of the same components to analyse the front-office trainees’ refusal responses. The speech act of refusal data collection section of the WDCT consisted of nine situations.

In evaluating their pragmatic competence, the trainees were expected to refuse the requests made, and in doing this, considering politeness and apologetic approaches where necessary was important. The nine situations were presented as illustrated in the table below:

Speech Acts of Refusals: Situations (see Appendix B)	
Refusal A	Refuse your trainer’s request to mark a fellow trainees’ papers for him.
Refusal B	Refuse a fellow trainees’ appeal to do a class assignment for her.
Refusal C	Refuse your trainer’s request to submit your tasks three days before the given deadline.
Refusal D	Refuse your fellow classmate’s request to lend her your summary books.
Refusal E	Refuse your trainers’ request to present the computer lab rules to fellow trainees.
Refusal F	Refuse your trainer’s instruction to remain behind to redo tasks he claims we inadequately attended to.
Refusal G	Refuse you fellow trainee’s appeal to show her how to upload some activities on the Moodle E-learning platform.
Refusal H	Refuse your friend’s request to attend her party.

Refusal I	Express your objection against a divisional trip to Ruacana Waterfall in the midst of assessment preparations.

4.3.2 Formulation and realisation procedure

The study analysed refusals formulated by the trainees qualitatively and quantitatively by means of descriptive statistics. There were 9 requests, totalling 135 potential attempts from the 15 trainees selected through the systematic random sampling technique from 30 front-office trainees who are part of the 2022 intake in the Hospitality Training Division at Valombola VTC. After an in-depth scrutiny of the Written Discourse Completion Test (Appendix B), 2 of the completed refusal attempts could not be used for the purposes of analysis, as they appeared to not have been handled with a clear understanding of their intended purposes.

This means that the possible attempts at refusals strategies in totals were now 133. The analysis of the findings was presented in the form of tables indicating the type of refusal strategy, the number of strategies realised on each refusal type were presented in percentages, based on the total number of responses per given situation. The findings were presented systematically and logically for each situation presented to the study sample.

Situation A (Appendix B)

Your trainer realised you are one of the best trainees and as a result assigns you to some of his tasks like marking fellow trainees' papers. You have some pending tasks this time to complete. ***Your Trainer****: Could you please help me with this...? How do you refuse his request?*

The analysis of the data on the situation presented interesting findings. The total percentage of the proliferation of the direct refusal strategy accounted for 50% of the responses and also included negation of proposition which accounted for 25% of given responses, exemplified through expressions such as: *I cannot mark this time* and *I do not think so.* The above direct refusal percentage also included 25% of bluntness (direct refusal), such as: *I cannot do it Sir my time is against it*. Plain indirect refusal strategies were realised in 15% of the trainees' responses and are evidenced by expressions such as: *it appears that I won't make time for it Sir* and *It looks will not be able to make time for it Sir* and *I really will not find time for it.* The reason refusal strategy was also realised in the responses and accounted for 15% of the total

responses by the trainees. These responses indicate that front-office trainees are not pragmatically competent enough to refuse requests through indirectly reasoning. Consider the examples: *For sure, this time, I cannot do it for you. I have pending practical task to complete* and *I don't think I will make time for your marking; I really cannot.*

The trainees also utilised the disagreement refusal strategy on this situation. For example, in responses such as: *In the situation I found myself in, I cannot help you with that. Is it possible to do it over the weekend?* and *For these two days, I do not think is the right time to help you with that.* Adjuncts to refusal strategies were also identified in some of the responses. For example, *I would have wished to help you, Sir, but I am running out of time.* The expressions utilised by the some of the trainees also evinced some willingness strategy. The alternative refusal strategy was realised in 25% of the strategies. For example, *I will see if I can do your work over the weekend* and *I will see Sir if I can find someone to help me with that my time will not permit accepting your assignment.*

The table below presents the findings of Situation A.

Refusal Strategies: Finding Analysis for Situation A					
Direct refusal strategy		**Indirect refusal strategy**			
Bluntness	**Negation of proposition**	**Plain refusal strategy**	**Apologetic refusal**	**Reason/explaining Strategy**	**Alternative refusal**
I cannot do it, Sir.	*I can't. I do not think so.*	*It looks like I will not be able to make time*	*Sorry, I am afraid to tell you that I cannot help.*	*For these two days, I do not think is the right time to help you with that.*	I will see if I can do your work over the weekend.
Direct refusal strategies		Indirect refusal strategies			
Negation of proposition	Bluntness	Regret/apologetic refusal	Reason/ Explaining	Plain indirect	Alternative refusal
25%	25%	0%	15%	10%	25%

Situation B (Appendix B)

A fellow trainee does not understand the difference between semantics and pragmatics. She approaches you to write for her a list of variations as part of her class assigned activities. What do you say to the fellow trainee in refusing?

The findings from this situation were fascinating as this situation represents a common experience amongst trainees at tertiary institutions. In this situation, trainees appeared to be present psychological tact and avoided blunt refusal strategy responses. No participant responded bluntly. This means that there were no responses such as: *No, I cannot do that for you* and *I do not want to help you with what you can search for in Internet* or *I refuse to search*

for you, try yourself to learn more. Likewise, no trainee used the negation of proposition refusal approach. Like bluntness, negation of proposition also falls under the direct refusal strategies. This means in this situation the responses sounded apologetic and none of the respondents used the negation of proposition type of refusals such as: *I cannot help you with that* and *I cannot assist you with Internet searching*. Furthermore, a slight difference between bluntness and reason refusal strategy was realised whereby 35% of the total refusal responses provided some reasons. The front office trainees tried to be smart by avoiding bluntness refusal strategies, and in the process proffered some reasons or excuses as demonstrated in examples such as: *The trainer will not accept that. It is a corrupt practice* and *I cannot upset our trainer in that way* or *Put it your effort then bring it to me for proof reading instead.*

Interestingly, the trainees utilised the statement of principle in formulating their refusals. For example, in refusals such as; *It is not a fair practice, it can upset the trainer* and *The trainer prefers individual effort that is why he assigned it to group work* or *I cannot assist you with that*. There were also of apologetic refusal responses and these accounted for 45% of the responses, for example: *I regret to tell you that will not do that for you* and *I am afraid I cannot help you this time*. 25% of trainees responded by giving some alternatives, demonstrated through examples such as: *Remember that the library is full of English books, note that librarians are dosing there, friend.*

Examples of Refusal Strategies Detected in Situation B					
Direct refusal strategy		**Indirect refusal strategy**			
Bluntness	**Negation of proposition**	**Plain refusal strategy**	**Apologetic refusal**	**Reason/explaining Strategy**	**Alternative refusal**
-	-	-	*I am afraid I cannot help you this time.*	*I cannot upset our trainer in that way.*	*Remember the library is full of*

					English books.

Percentages of Refusal Strategies: Finding Analysis for Situation B					
Direct refusal strategies		**Indirect refusal strategies**			
Negation of proposition	Bluntness	Regret/apologetic refusal	Reason/ Explaining	Plain indirect	Alternative refusal
0%	0%	45%	30%	0%	25%

Situation C (Appendix B)

Your trainer experienced that you are always late in submitting your practical tasks. You received a call from him requesting you to submit your tasks three days before the given submission date. How do you refuse the trainer's request?

This situation presented a slight difference in percentages between direct and indirect refusal strategies developed by the trainees in which blunt refusal strategies accounted for 35% of the responses. Many of the trainees as indicated by the findings responded bluntly by giving responses such as: *No Sir, I have some pending academic activities* and *No, what did I do wrong? I can't submit three days before the given deadline.* The negation of proposition refusal strategy was also quite popular, accounting for 25% of the responses and exemplified through responses such as: *I can't submit three days before the given deadline, I spare that time for other given practical activities* and *I don't think I can submit your work three days earlier.*

Some trainees also utilised the reason or explanation refusal strategy and these were observed in 30% of the responses given. For example; *I cannot submit your work three days earlier since I do not see why I deserve your unjustified punishment* and *Sir. I still have other assigned practical tasks from other trainers.* Interestingly, the trainees also utilised the regret or apology refusal strategy on this situation, realised through 10% of the trainees providing responses such as: *Sorry Sir, bear with me I am not able to do that this time.* A disagreement

refusal strategy was observed too in which responses demonstrated by the example: *Sir, I still have other assigned practical tasks from other trainers, bear with me!* were also realised.

Percentages of Refusal Strategies: Findings Analysis for Situation C					
Direct refusal strategies		**Indirect refusal strategies**			
Negation of proposition	Bluntness	Regret/apologetic refusal	Reason/ Explaining	Plain indirect	Alternative refusal
25%	35%	10%	30%	0%	0%

Situation D (Appendix B)

You attend lessons regularly, writing summaries and taking regular notes. One of your classmates who often leaves lessons for sport approaches you to lend him your summary books to make some copies. ***Classmate****: Dear, I do not have summaries and there will be some summative tests next week. Do the best you can do? I need to make some copies!*

The findings from this presented situation evince that most trainees gave blunt responses on this situation because it is couched within a sense of friendliness. The situation presented interesting findings as it related to a common practice among trainees at tertiary institutions. The direct blunt refusal strategy was very high at 35% of the total responses by the trainees. It was observed that socially, the trainees did not bother being cautious with their responses – forgetting the linguistic culture. i.e. that English is one of the professional languages is full of polite words for communication. Bluntly, trainees gave responses such as: *No, I can't give you my summary books* and *No, I do not want to give you my books.*

The negation of proposition under direct strategies was also realised at 15% of the total responses by the trainees. Notwithstanding, however, some front-office trainees utilised the reason or explanation refusal strategy in their responses, evinced by expressions such as: *I would have given you but cannot do it during reading for tests time* and*I have to read paging through and do some comparisons of summaries* and *I just cannot do that as it is not a good idea* and *I am sorry, if my refusal has disappointed you. But come back if you fail to find assistance somewhere.* The reason/explaining strategy accounted for 25% of the responses that appeared to have been combined with the regret/apologetic refusal strategy. The statement of regret was also evident in the responses by the trainees. The regret/apologetic refusal strategy instances represent 15% of the total responses and are demonstrated through examples such as; *I am sorry, if my refusal has disappointed you. I suggest you try some other fellow trainees to assist you with that* and *The trainer might also assist with his notes, excuse me!*

Percentages of Refusal Strategies: Findings Analysis for Situation D					
Direct refusal strategies		**Indirect refusal strategies**			
Negation of proposition	Bluntness	Regret/apologetic refusals combined strategy	Reason/ Explaining refusal strategy	Plain strategy	Alternative refusal
15%	35%	15%	25%	10%	0%

Situation E (Appendix B)

Your recent presentation was recommendable as a result, your trainer approached you to present computer lab rules and regulations to all of your fellow trainees enrolled for the front-office course. You are afraid that this may be taken as conflict of interest since that duty falls under the Trainee Support Officer. How do you reject his request?

The findings on this situation presented a diverse range of refusal strategies. Firstly, there were no instances of the blunt refusal strategy recorded (0% of the total responses), meaning there were no trainees who gave response such as: *No Sir, It is not my responsibility* and *No Sir, I cannot do that it seems to be a conflict of interest.* The findings also demonstrate that the trainees acted professionally. In addition, there were none who used the negation of proposition refusal approach. The negation of proposition strategy was thus, also recorded at 0% of the total responses. This means that no trainee gave a response such as: *I don't think I can do that Sir.*

It was further noted that trainees instead, opted for the reason or explanation refusal strategy accounting for 45% of the total of the trainees' responses to Situation E. Most of them gave explanatory responses such as: *I cannot do it Sir, find the Centre' Trainee Support Officer* and *I cannot present on that Sir since I won't be comfortable with that* and *It is like exposing that someone somewhere is not doing his job.* Interestingly, the trainees also utilised the alternative refusal strategy. The alternative refusal approach presented in 35% of the response and is demonstrated through examples such as: *I will only present if authorised by*

the responsible office. The alternative refusal strategy employed by the trainees aligned to the change option technique. The trainees were also observed to utilise the adjuncts to refusals strategy by indicating some willingness in their linguistic formulations. The willingness refusal strategy accounted for 20% of the total responses by the trainees = and was detected combined with regret/apologetic response as in the example: *I am afraid to tell you that I will present on those rules and regulations only once officially permitted by the Student Support Office, Sir*.

Percentages of Refusal Strategies: Findings Analysis for Situation E				
Direct refusal strategies		**Indirect refusal strategies**		
Negation of proposition	Bluntness	Regret/apologetic refusals combined strategy	Reason/ Explaining refusal strategy	Alternative refusal
0%	0%	20%	45%	35%

Situation F (Appendix B)

"I have gone through all your roughly attended Word Processing practical activities you submitted for marking recently", Said your trainer. "You ought to remain and redo all of them, this evening!" How do you refuse his notification?

Refusals Approach: Findings Responses for Situation F	
Components	**Frequency**
Expression of regret	0%
Direct refusals	60%
Indirect refusals	30%

Excuses	10%

The findings on the situation presented some interesting data. The trainees' responses accumulated 30% instances of bluntness (direct refusal strategy) as demonstrated by examples such as: *No, it will be too late for me, Sir. I refuse to remain alone; it is not safe at all.* Amusingly, the researcher identified some measures in some blunt strategies. Quite a number of responses by the trainees were classified under the negation of proposition refusal strategy = accounting for 30% of the responses. it is important to note that the blunt and negation of proposition strategies are both classified under the broad concept of direct strategies and it is for this reason that direct refusal indicates 60% in the table above.

Negation proposition refusal could be seen in this example: *I don't think I can remain alone in the computer lab, its not safe going home late.* Here, one could see that the trainees also utilised new refusal linguistic formulae in the form of plain indirect strategy that falls under the broad type of indirect strategies, accounting for 20% of the responses. An example of the plain refusal strategy extracted from the responses is: *It seems that I will not accept your suggested time Sir.* Furthermore, three of the refusal responses by the trainees portrayed the concept and strategy of hedging of (accounting for 20% of the responses) as demonstrated in the example: *I will see if I will be able to do that in the next period, instead.* The utilisation of reason/explanation was also detected in the following example as part of the collected responses: *it is not fine Sir because it is not safe at night* and *It is ok Sir, but the time is not recommendable.*

Situation G (Appendix B)

Your fellow trainee approaches you during break time to show her how to upload practical activities on the Moodle e-learning platform. You appear to have no time for that. How do you refuse her request?

Situation G produced interesting responses in which most of the refusal strategies are actually realised and utilised. Blunt refusal as part of broad type of direct strategies was also realised and accounted for 20% of the total responses. It is demonstrated by examples such as: *No, I feel like resting, excuse me* and *No, I can't do it now* and *No, I am not interested* and *No, let*

us do that during free period. There was also an observed proliferation of direct negation of proposition which accounted for 22% of the total responses formulated by the trainees. These are exemplified through expressions such as: *I don't think i can help you now, I feel like resting.*

The indirect strategy of giving a reason or explanation 13% of the total responses. These are evinced through examples such as; *I cannot show you now, I feel like resting.* Interestingly, the trainees were also observed to utilise refusal strategies that portrays regret. The regret or apology refusal strategy accounted for the highest percentage of the responses – 30% of the total responses. The use of the expression '*I am sorry'* was so widespread on the formulation of regret or apology responses, as demonstrated by examples such as: *I am sorry; I cannot show you right now* and *I am sorry, but I can only help you during free period, forgive me.* The willingness refusal strategy under the adjuncts to refusals was also detected but at a low rate (accounting for 15% of the total responses). The willingness in the response was identified by the use of the expression *I would have* as evinced in the example; *I would have helped you, but I feel like tired and would have no time for that.*

Percentages of Refusal Strategies: Findings Analysis for Situation G					
Direct refusal strategies		**Indirect refusal strategies**			
Negation of proposition	Bluntness	Regret/apologetic refusals combined strategy	Reason/ Explaining refusal strategy	Alternative refusal	Willingness
22%	20%	30%	13%	0%	15%

Situation H (Appendix B)

While taking a walk, a friend of yours approaches you and invites you to attend her birthday party that afternoon. You won't be able to attend since you have some cooking trials during the afternoon. ***Friend:*** *"Hi, come to my birthday party this afternoon!". How would you refuse this invitation, giving some compliments instead?*

The study observed a proliferation of polite response which, is part of English culture, needs to be emphasised in tertiary education in this country. Like with other situations analysed, situation H also presented a high percentage of direct refusals. This situation recorded a high prevalence of blunt strategies40% of the respondents bluntly responded to the request as demonstrated through examples such as: *No, remember I am not from this town* and *No, I cannot attend* and *No, I have no time for parties.* The direct negation of proposition also had one the larger percentages of the responses. It accounted for 30% of the total responses, and was evinced in examples like: *I don't think I will attend.* However, some of the trainees utilized the strategy of giving a reason and explanation as part of their refusals. Giving a reason or explanation falls under the broad concept of indirect strategies. Giving a reason or explanation accounted for 10% of the responses, and was demonstrated through refusals such as; *I can't come because parties often end late at night* and *I do not think I will since I have to be home early.*

Interesting enough, the trainees also formulated and produced refusals by applying the regret or apology strategy and these represent 20% of the total responses, demonstrated the use of expression '*I am afraid...'* as in cases such as*: I am afraid to tell you that I will not attend your birthday party* and *My apologies, I won't be there, I should be home by that time.* It is noteworthy pointing out that the trainees further utilised the strategy of positive opinion (which falls under adjuncts to refusals) in the production and formulation of refusals for this situation. Positive opinions were noted in their responses, as evinced in responses such as: *The birthday is known to be crucial moments of our times, unfortunately I will not celebrate with you, since I live a distant away from here, you know!* The positive opinion is realised in the opening expression of this statement.

Percentages of Refusal Strategies: Findings Analysis for Situation H					
Direct refusal strategies		**Indirect refusal strategies**			
Negation of proposition	Bluntness	Regret/apologetic refusals combined strategy	Reason/ Explaining refusal strategy	Alternative refusal	Willingness

30%	40%	20%	10%	0%	0%

Situation I (Appendix B)

The Hospitality Training Division has organized a farewell tour to Ruacana Waterfall and all front-office trainees are expected to attend. You made up your mind not to travel any longer since assessment is starting the following week. How would you express your objection to participate in the trip?

The situation presented a wide range of refusal linguistic formulae by the trainees. The direct blunt refusal accounted for 40% of the total responses. The observance of the expression '*but me'* was clear. For example; *But me, I cannot travel* and *No, I am not comfortable with travelling during assessment time.* The direct negation of proposition accounted for a sizeable number of direct refusal linguistic formulae and was rated at 25% of the responses. These are exemplified by expressions such as: *I can't travel* and*. I don't think I will travel with you, guys*. However, there was also some observed instances of plain indirect strategy (accounting for 10% of all the responses), and evinced through responses like: *It seems it is worth suggesting that the tour be postponed.*

Moreover, the trainees utilised the indirect reason or explanation strategy to formulate their refusals. The reason or explanation strategy accounted for 5% of the total responses, and is aptly demonstrated through verbalisations like: *I cannot come because of studying for the forthcoming assessments* and *I am not coming due to reading overload since I am preoccupied with summary reviews.* In the same scenario, some of the trainees applied the strategy of regret in refusals in which they utilised the indirect apology strategy. The regret or apology strategy accounted for 20% of all the responses by the trainees, and manifested through responses such as: *I am sorry; I can't make it because of some summary reviews* and *I can't make it; I must be forgiven* and *I am sorry to inform you that I have made up my mind against your tour, if it was not assessment we would have gone some.* The willingness strategy under the adjuncts to refusals was identified too. The trainees, through this strategy, expressed some willingness in their refusal responses on the presented situation. This is demonstrated through the example; *If it was not assessment time, we would have gone together.*

See the table below for the presentation of the results.

Percentages of Refusal: Findings Analysis for Situation I					
Direct refusal strategies		**Indirect refusal strategies**			
Negation of proposition	Bluntness	Regret/apologetic refusals combined strategy	Reason/ Explaining refusal strategy	Plain strategy	Alternative refusal
25%	40%	20%	10%	5%	0%

4.3.3 Revelation of the speech acts of apologies

Murphy (2015) states that the act of apologising can take one of two basic forms, or a combination of both. One is that a speaker may use an explicit 'illocutionary force indicating device' and the other is that the speaker may make reference to one of the factors which precipitated the need for an apology and the speaker's responsibility for the offence. Human beings are prone to making mistakes, they may do wrong to one another – intentionally or accidentally, whatever the case may be – and an apology has to be made at some points to maintain peace. According to Murphy the performative verbs such as *sorry*, *excuse*, *apologise*, *forgive*, *regret* and *pardon* are used to carry out the speech act of apologising. Apologies are face-threatening acts (Brown & Levinson, 1987, as cited in Yuan, 2012), as there is a need for the speaker to admit having done wrong when performing an apology and this undermines his/her face. Should the speaker fail to apologise, it becomes a threat to the hearer's face (Wouk, 2006, as cited in Yuan, 2012).

In this regard, Bataineh and Bataineh (2006) as cited in Yuan (2012) observe that when one offers an apology, one demonstrates the willingness to humiliate oneself, which makes an apology a face-saving act for the hearer but a face-threatening act for the speaker. In analysing the speech act of apology, Brown and Attardo (2000) propose the five components of an apology and these are: a) an expression of apology, through which the wrongdoer repeats the feeling of regret; b) an explanation of the situation, in which the wrongdoer tries to reconstruct the incident to see whether he/she deserves forgiveness; c) an acknowledgement of responsibility, in which the wrongdoer states his/her responsibility for

what has happened as a part of the apology; d) an offer of repair, through which the wrongdoer tries to offer a way to compensate for the harm; and e) a promise of non-recurrence, in which the wrongdoer promises not to repeat the offense. Divorced from these five components of an apology, Yuan (2012) suggests the employment of three R's: Regret, Responsibility and Remedy. The current study adopted the three R's approach to analyse the apologies provided by front-office trainees under study. The WDCTs (Appendix B) was used for this study comprised of nine situational analysis designed to examine the front-office trainees' pragmatic competence in making apologies and apologetic refusals.

However, the most notably finding of this study demonstrates that the targeted participants lacked apologetic approach, evinced by their failure to communicative competently. Their linguistic behaviours demonstrate pragmatic impairment. It was also observed that bluntness and negation of proposition – as part of direct refusal strategies – accounted for the larger percentage of responses when compared to apologetic responses as demonstrated in the situations detailed above

Analysis of the politeness in refusal strategies in WDCT (Appendix B)

Polite expression of refusal used	(S#) Request - frequency of utilization (Often / Rarely)								
	S#1	S#2	S#3	S#4	S#5	S#6	S#7	S#8	S#9
No please…	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely
Couldn't…	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely
Wouldn't…	Often	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely	Often	Rarely	Rarely
No, I am sorry	Often	Often	Rarely	Often	Often	Often	Often	Rarely	Rarely
Excuse me…	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely	Often	Rarely	Rarely

Thank you for…	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely
I am afraid…	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely	Often	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely

This study attempted to assess the frequency of the usage of the polite refusal strategy in responding to certain given situations. The analysis of responses for all nine refusal situations was made and it was established that most trainees lacked the polite refusal strategies approaches as evinced in the table above. According to Jucker (2008, p. 120), politeness has become a cover term for both norms of behaviour and linguistic choices made in relation to the need to preserve one's face in general, that is, one's public self-image. The data reveals that the respondents did not use different types of politeness strategies but rather used bluntness more often. It was observed that expressions such as '*please no..'.,* '*please not'*, '*excuse me', 'pardon' and 'sorry'* were not frequently used in most refusal responses.

It was further learnt that the trainees did not use clauses that are also used as softeners or a perlocutionary effect of an utterance on the addressee, exemplified by expressions such as *'if you don't mind', 'if you wouldn't', etc*.. As demonstrated in the above table, the usage of '*please'* as in the example '*Please not this time of exams…'* was rarely used. In the first situation (Situation A) for example, '*would'* in combination with '*please'* was supposed to be used often for a polite approach like in the example: *No please, I would rather not give you some notes this time of examinations*. However, it was found that the polite expression '*would not'* was rarely used. This was indicative of the fact that politeness is rarely used in vocational education in general, and by front-office trainees in particular. According Jucker (2008) the politeness indicator 'please' or *no 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.

Ishihara and Cohen (2007) opine that lessons on politeness strategies should not be weak and that there should be no meta-pragmatic explanations provided. They gave the following clues on how one would say sorry to someone exemplified by the following expressions: • Sorry, I didn't mean to… • I am sorry but… • I apologize for…

• I hope you will forgive me but… • I seem to have made a mistake. I'm really sorry… • I am sorry for misunderstanding… • I hope you will understand…" (p. 62).

Similarly, with the intention to say 'no' or refusal to requests, the following expressions are recommended with no meta-pragmatic explanation provided. '*I would really rather not… If you don't mind, I'll say 'no' to that*. *I don't want…, if you don't mind. I'm sorry, but I've said 'no'* and *I'm not going to change my mind. I'd prefer to…/ I'd rather… Why don't we… instead?*' (p.103).

4.5 Discussions

The current section discusses in-depth the findings of the study closely examining their relevance, importance and implications. The central goal of the section is to also provide further and theorised explanations and evaluations of the findings. All the crucial discussions here are conducted in line with how they speak to the reviewed literature as well as respond to the objectives of the study. In order to come up with a comprehensive, systematic and logical presentation, the discussion responded to the individual objectives.

4.5.1 An analysis of the trainees' communicative and pragmatic competence on formulation and realisation of request strategies

The formulation and realisation of request strategies was the first target objective of the current enquiry and as such, the research sought to investigate whether the front-office trainees possessed the requisite pragmatic knowledge as evinced through their formulations of requests and refusals. The Written Discourse Completion Tests (Appendix A) proved effective in collecting data to respond to the objective. The front-office trainees were presented with a variety of requests that they potentially were likely to encounter occasionally in their engagement with the either their trainers or with their fellow trainees. The entire nine requests presented to the trainees required their formulation and production of requests in response to trainers and other fellow trainees' requests. The study adopted Trosborg's (1995) Taxonomy of request realisation in analysing the responses provided by the participants.

4.5.2 Summary analysis of all the given requests

The study did not use the entire format of Trosborg's (1995) taxonomy of request realisation because some components were not relevant to, and thus not utilised in the current study. Therefore, not all the five major request strategy types which are conventionally indirect (hearer oriented), conventionally indirect (speaker-based), direct, internal modification and external modification, were used. First and foremost, the participants displayed widespread and diverse responses which could be argued to conform to most of the broad request type strategies. Most of the request strategies were realised under the indirect conventional (hearer-oriented) strategy.

Meanwhile a major observation is how the indirect conventional strategy accumulated a high percentage of responses in comparison to the direct strategy. This is contrary to the assertion by Iragui (1996, p. 58) who points out that, "the native speakers' use of alerters and intensifiers confirms most studies on interactional pragmatics that have reported that many trainees used impoliteness markers and used direct refusal strategies (bluntness) at high rate". The second greater percentages were also recorded for the direct refusal strategy of negation of proposal strategy. It is also imperative to point out that a sizeable number of responses were also recorded on the ability strategy (*Could you*). This was crucial as it emphasises a situation in which the pragmatic communicative engagements between the trainees and the trainers could be negatively impacted in some instances.

What is more, the findings revealed that some of the participants had the conscience required in cross cultural communication. Strategies were speaker-based, as such carrying a great possibility for causing some discomfort and wrong interpretations in the hearer or receiver of the request. The utilisation of '*you must/I need you to'* and '*I would want you to'* were common in the requests proposed by the trainees. The use of these expressions in formulating requests to the trainers transmits a certain unwanted characteristic in pragmatics communication contexts. It sounds as if the trainees were making demands on the trainer to perform an action rather than requesting, and this demonstrates the need for pragmatic pedagogical intervention.

The utilisation of direct imperative and performative strategies by some of the participants' points to a complex situation in communication that could be taking place in the Hospitality

training division at Valombola VTC and within TVET in general. The utilisation of these strategies implicates a very low level of pragmatic knowledge in the participants, especially with regards to language functions in different contexts. Particularly, in pragmatics, the utilisation of direct performatives and imperatives as requests signaled some missing crucial knowledge on pragma-linguistics and socio-pragmatics concerns.

Such missing links in cross-cultural communication posed serious consequences as the request formulations by the participants were classified and interpreted as rude or impolite and that the front-office trainees urgently need pragmatic competence schooling, possibly aligned to English for Specific Purpose. Yazdanfar and Bonyati (2016, p. 8) argue that some choices and preferences of direct strategies by users of a language should not be taken as evidence of being impolite. Emphasis was therefore placed on the discretion attached to cultural scripts when analysing directness and indirectness. According to Thomas (1983) and Blum-Kulka (1991), rude or impolite requests could result in communication breakdown, pragmatics failure or possibly to socio-pragmatic failure.

Additionally, the findings verified that the participants utilised the least strategies in internal and external modification strategies which speak to a possible scenario in which the trainees could have struggled in formulating requests applying the appropriate linguistic resources. The research believes that the environment is a major factor in equipping non-native speakers of the English language with the appropriate skills necessary for cross-cultural communicative processes. Moreover, the study focused on crucial concepts of internal lexical and syntactic downgraders. An internalisation of such skills and awareness is crucial in the formulation and production of acceptable, relevant and appropriate request strategies in the non-native speakers of the English language. However, the context in which the study by Blum-Kulka (1991) and the current study were conducted are different, as most of the participants in the current study indicated that they had not been exposed to an environment in which they experience and engage with the native speakers of the English language.

The study verified that the use of '*can you'* and '*could you'* indicate some limitations of pragma-linguistic knowledge in the participants. This could be directly linked to the instruction that the participants have been exposed to in the teaching and learning of grammar. This scenario was observed in requests classified under the indirect conventional

strategy and the external modification (supportive reasons). The application of the same

Number of Refusal to suggestions or requests on:	
Equal or less power participants (e.g fellow trainees)	High Power (e.g trainer)
5	4

strategy and request linguistic formulae was an indicator of a limitation in diversifying request formulation (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2000 and 2009; House & Kasper, 1987; Trosborg, 1995). These studies have also argued that non-native speakers of the English language do not modify their requests frequently due to proficiency levels.

4.5.3 Application of cooperative and politeness in speech act of refusal and apologetic responses

The participants were presented with a Discourse Completion Tests (Appendix B). The study presented the front-office trainees with sensitive and tricky situations that they may or might have experienced in their daily engagements with their both trainers and fellow trainees in pedagogical environment. As a way to check the pragmatics knowledge and awareness in the participants, the Discourse Completion Test (Appendix B) included situations that required them to formulate refusals to suggestions or requests by participants of equal power or lesser power to them (fellow trainees) and there were 5 situations. Meanwhile, 4 of the situations required refusal strategy responses and were directly linked to refusal to their trainers' requests (see Appendix B).

4.5.4 Review of the given refusal situations and the strategies

It is very important to present an insight on the review of analyses as demonstrated by the study with regards to refusal situations and the relevant strategies. Direct strategy refusals accumulated high proliferation rates. These responses were realised under two refusal strategies of bluntness and negation of proposition. This emphasises a crucial point relating to the participant's awareness and knowledge regarding the speech act of refusals in pragmatics communicative processes. Such a proposition is derived from the fact that the participants engaged the trainers from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, but still

expected to utilise the appropriate linguistic units and formulae refusals to attenuate the negative effects of direct refusals and mitigate their face-threatening nature. Beebe, Takahashi and Ulib-Weltz as cited in Boonsuk and (Ambele 2019, p. 221) agree to this assertion, further highlighting that the refusal speech act is, “a significant intercultural stinking point of ESL/EFL learners”. Bluntness and negation of proposition strategies in the formulation of refusals could result in intercultural communication breakdown or cause the misinterpretation of messages – a situation which might damage the face of the interlocutor.

The analysis of the findings reveals that a high rate of responses was aligned to direct strategies. It is of critical importance to note that the direct refusal strategy realised was based on the two strategies: bluntness and negation of proposition, and the indirect strategy which were largely observed were plain direct, reason or explanation, regret or apology and the alternative. Meanwhile disagreement, statement of principle and avoidance played a minimal role in the findings of the current study. Considering the number of options that are on indirect strategies, more responses could have been realised under the bracket and this demonstrates the dominance of direct refusal strategies amongst the front-office trainees who participated in the research.

The study further indicates that only quite a few numbers of participants utilised the adjuncts to refusal strategy - meaning that it was observed at a minimal rate. The statistics relating to the formulation of adjuncts confirmed that the participants have little knowledge on softening and mitigating the directness or bluntness of refusals in pragmatics communicative processes. Moreover, the formulation of adjuncts to refusals requires linguistic competence in selecting the appropriate linguistic units and forms. Such an argument to the performance of the participants brings in the concept of pragma-linguistic awareness and development into the broader picture, and this may stimulate the need for pragmatic pedagogical intervention. Moreover, when pragma-linguistic concerns are mentioned, socio-pragmatic issues are pulled along.

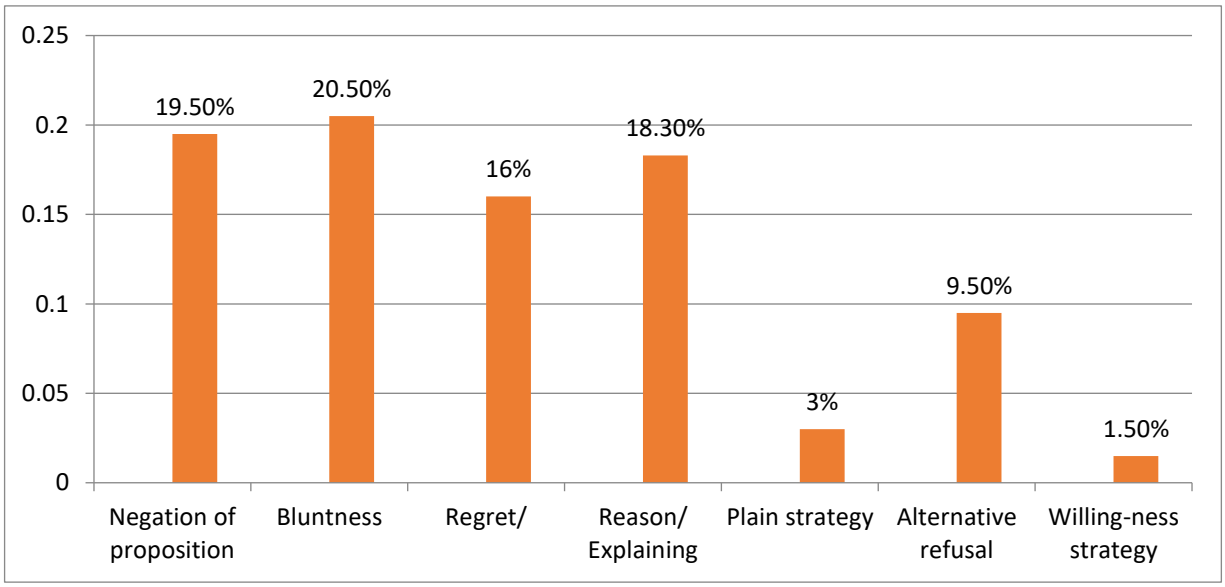
This is because the situations presented to the participants required them to utilise their knowledge of selecting the effective and appropriate linguistic units and forms by also examining and taking into consideration the socio-cultural variables. The willingness strategy was utilised minimally also, and the positive opinion could not play a significant role in

formulation of the responses. This kind of knowledge and skill is crucial, and it is heavily imbedded in the pragma-linguistic and socio-pragmatic systems of target language. The avoidance to formulate and produce longer sentences that have the proclivity to soften refusals, is a clear indication by the trainees that their level of competence and knowledge relating to pragma-linguistics is at a lower level relative to their level of study (tertiary level).

On the contrary, the study demonstrates that the participants had some kind of socio-pragmatic knowledge and awareness as demonstrated by the refusal strategies and responses formulated in situations when they were responding to interlocutors of the same or lesser power. Direct refusal responses were identified within the four situations that involved the participants communicating refusals to their fellow trainees. The participants formulated responses that were so blunt and direct by nature. Negation of proposition was identified as highly proliferate and no effort was utilised to soften the refusals or formulate refusals providing longer reasons. In a nutshell, lesser mitigation linguistic formulae were noted as compared to the situations in which the participants responded to their trainers. (2016) reaches the same conclusions by observing that participants tended to be blunt when formulating refusals to interlocutors of the same power and status with them.

Further findings of the study indicate that the participants tended to utilise the blunt direct strategy to their trainers when the situation given to them implied some kind of mental pressure on them. This contradicts the above discovery because in these instances, the participants failed to demonstrate the crucial knowledge relating to socio-pragmatic concerns and variables. In communicating with their superiors, refusing a suggestion or request could have not marked a deviation from the expected realisation of socio-pragmatic variables such as the distance between the interlocutors, context and the differences in power distribution. This is in contrast to several reviewed studies that have established that pragmatics awareness should be observed to be higher in multilingual settings like the Valombola VTC.

Total percentages of Refusal: Finding analysis of Situation A – I						
Direct refusal strategies		**Indirect refusal strategies**				
Negation of proposition	Bluntness	Regret/ apologetic refusals combined strategy	Reason/ Explaining refusal strategy	Plain strategy	Alternative refusal	Willing-ness strategy
19.5%	20.5%	16%	18.3%	3%	9.5%	1.5%



4.5.5 Questionnaire findings (see Appendix C)

To address the third research question, a questionnaire was distributed to each selected front-office participating trainee. The questionnaire (see Appendix C) consisted of three parts. Part 1 required participants to provide their personal information and educational background (biographical information). For part 2 of the questionnaire, respondents had to tick and/or mention activities in which they use the English language and part 3 was based on the trainees' awareness in learning and using the English language. A total of 15

questionnaires were distributed to 15 front-office trainees but only 13 of these were returned.

4.5.5.1 Personal information

All fifteen (15) front-office trainees who participated in this exercise were females. Their ages ranged between 19-35 years.

4.5.5.2 Educational background

In the questionnaire, five areas concerning the participants' educational background were examined, namely: the participants' highest educational level, the educational level at which they began to study English, their experience studying English with native speakers, information about their educational institutions, and their experiences living in English-speaking countries. Based on the information obtained from the questionnaire (Appendix C), most participants began studying English at grade 5 and none of participants had had an opportunity to study English with native speakers of the English language at any given point in their educational life. Furthermore, no participant had native teachers from primary throughout to tertiary levels of education. In addition, none of the participants had the chance to live in a non-English speaking country. The fact that all participants did not have any exposure to English native speakers nor lived in English-speaking countries also had an influence as well as impact on their English pragmatic competence because they needed to have knowledge of culture of the target language.

According to Reigle (2011) a learner cannot fully catch up without developing a shared understanding of the intricacies of social norms within the target language. In order to fully belong, grammatical knowledge and linguistic familiarity are not enough and thus, pragmatic competence is requisite to bridge the gap between bilingualism and biculturalism. With pragmatic awareness a language learner can integrate as part of the target culture and become part of the group. There is a need for one who is learning a language to be in contact with native speakers of the same language in order to acquire some norms (way of communicating). This is because, as intimated by Bennet (1993) as cited in Reigle (2011), along with language is the inseparable function of culture.

4.5.5.3 Activities using the English language in daily life

This part of the questionnaire was designed to collect data regarding the participants' exposure to English. It focused on establishing the activities which gave the participants an opportunity to use English in their daily lives. The findings demonstrate that close to 80% of the participants indicated that they had opportunities to use English in their daily lives. This response, however, was contrary with their responses to the question of their preferred language of socialisation with friends to which the 72% of the participants demonstrated a preference for Oshiwambo as compared to the English language. That could potential impact the trainees' pragmatic competence in the English language, because the more they use English, the more they are able to learn and improve on how the language is used in communication.

4.5.5.4 Awareness in learning and using the English language

The data on the respondents' language awareness were categorised according to the means resulting from the response based on the rating scale employed. Most respondents indicated that they were ***for sure*** aware. This showed that they were ***for sure*** aware of the fact that if they use English, they should use it accurately and appropriately. However, on culture, most trainees (respondents) were also ***a little bit*** aware that it is important to study the culture of the target language, in this case English. However, they were aware that an interlocutor influences their utterance.

Furthermore, the participants were ***for sure*** aware of the significance of trying to use English whenever they can as well as the significance of noticing mistakes when using English and trying to improve on them in the future. Trainees tried to speak those new expressions with their friends; most participants' responses were ***sometimes*** aware. The overall participation level of awareness in language use in this study was not high since some of them indicated that they were ***sometimes*** aware. According to Bardovi-Harling (1996) and Bardovi-Harling and Dornyei (1998) as cited in Pinyo (2010), learners who are well aware of the differences between the target language and their first language are likely to use the target language appropriately. In addition, Bardovi-Harling alludes to the fact that there are factors that have a direct influence on the acquisition of pragmatic competence.

The table below represent major findings of participants' level of awareness in language use

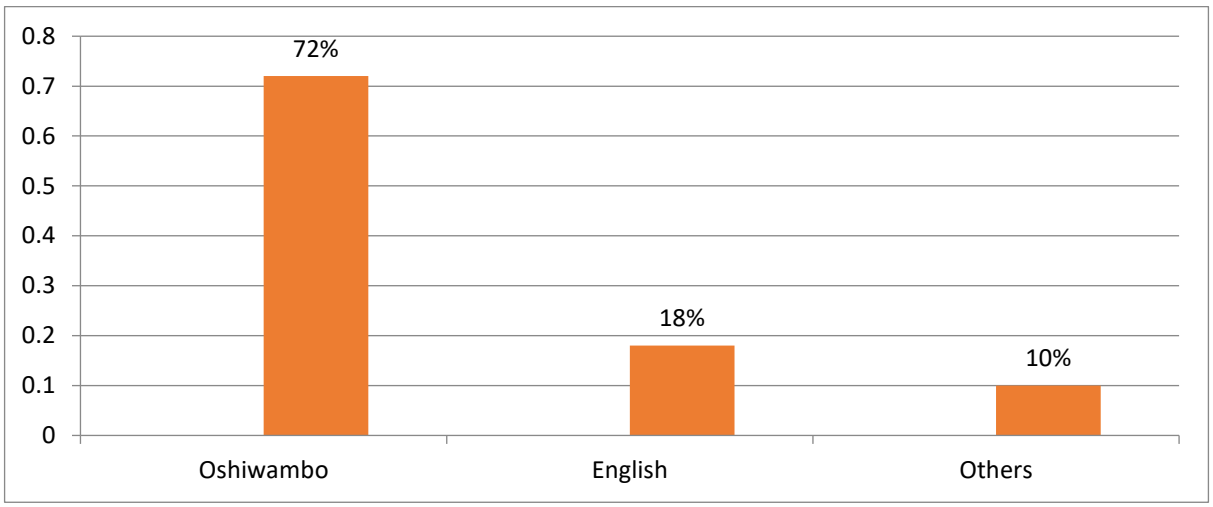
A = For sure B = a little bit C = sometimes D = there is no time E = I don't' even try

One should write down language expressions when using a language	C
It is advisable that you search for the meanings of the new expressions you always	A
You should try to speak those new expressions with your friends	C
Always find time to use English everyday	A
You should try to adopt the culture of the target language	B
Always note mistakes when using English and work on them next time	C

4.5.5.6 Language preferred in socialisation (Appendix C)

The questionnaire presented the participants with a scenario in which they had to select the language which they use when they engage with their fellow trainees outside the training environment. 72% of the participants indicated that they use the Oshiwambo vernacular language when they engage with friends. Only 18% of the total responses indicated that they use the English language when socialising with friends, meanwhile those who indicated other language accounted for 10% of the responses.

The questionnaire also presented the participants with a scenario in which they had to select the language which they prefer to understand explanations and conversations better. The statistics presented by the option indicated a paradigm shift regarding the understanding of discussions and crucial concepts in the participants. As stated above, 72% of the participants indicated that they prefer Oshiwambo to the second language in terms of understanding explanations and discussions in a better manner. That statistic represented the highest figure in comparison to those who prefer the official language, English. For sure many front-office trainees indicated that they would prefer the local native language (Oshiwambo) to understand discussions and explanations in an improved way. The chart below presents the statistics relating to the concept of language preference.



Language preference patterns amongst the trainee front desk managers at Valombola VTC

4.6 Summary

The chapter presented the findings of the study rationally, in response to the research objectives as recognized in Chapter 1. The major findings were linked to the third objective: evaluating the application of and politeness principles in speech acts of request-refusal strategies. A total of 9 requests and 9 situations were presented to the participants who sought demonstrations of how to respond to requests in normal situation, and these were analysed based on different situations portrayed to them. The second objective tested and analysed the respondents' communicative competence in the formulation and realisation of refusals. The participants were presented with real life situations which they were likely to encounter in their dealings and engagements with both their trainers and fellow trainees. The situations required them to formulate and realise refusals to given requests. On review of the given refusal situations, it was very important to present an insight on the review of analyses as presented by the study with regards to refusal situations and the relevant strategies. Direct strategy refusals mounted up high rates and were realised under two refusal strategies of bluntness at 20.50% and negation of proposition at 19.20% meanwhile the indirect strategies which were largely observed were plain direct, reason or explanation. Respondents also demonstrated lack of regret or apologetic approach in responding in several given situations, meaning they lacked politeness approach strategies too.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusions

This study analysed the front-office trainees' pragmatic competence as evinced through the formulation and realisation of request strategies. It also evaluated their application of politeness principles in speech acts of refusal and apologetic responses. Furthermore, the study has examined the factors that influence the trainees' pragmatic competence within a cross-cultural setting. The study utilised two Written Discourse Completion Tests (WDCTs) – the first one, to collect data on the speech act of request formulation and realisation and the other to collect data on the formulation and realisation of refusal and apologetic strategies. A questionnaire was also used to collect additional data.

5.1.1 Request strategies formulation and realisation

Following the schema on organising the request realisation strategies proposed by Trosborg (1995), the study established that there was a kind of balance in the production of direct requests and conventional direct requests. This was a cause for concern as the occurrence of direct requests on such a magnitude suggests the need for some kind of remediation for the trainees. The impact of direct requests on pragmatic communication evinces deep-rooted effects as they yielded wrong interpretations in the interlocutors that lead to interactional pragmatic impairment.

The Discourse Completion Test yielded great evidence that pragmatic failure in cross-cultural communication is evident in the hospitality training division at Valombola Vocational Training Centre. This is demonstrated through the idea that in pragmatic communication, the speaker should always activate psychological, social and contextual concerns when they speak to the other interlocutor. The presence of direct requests from the trainers presented illustrates that the language performance by the trainees influenced their formulation and production of requests. Therefore, pragmatic communication between the trainees and the trainers was mostly influenced by pragma-linguistics concerns more than cultural background or influences. The challenge to select the appropriate linguistic forms and units in an interactional pragmatic communicative process greatly influenced the trainees' formulation and production of requests to seniors. It is crucial to observe here, based on the presenting

evidence that, the choice of language in interactional pragmatic environments must observe the social variables that can affect the outcome in communication process.

5.1.2 Refusal strategies formulation and realisation

The results obtained from the WDCT indicate that the students' pragmatic competence in the speech act of refusal was somewhat realised at a low level. This pragmatic incompetence could have been influenced by the fact that some responses sounded rude, especially in formal situations, through their using direct refusal strategies that sounded largely impolite. That was a result of their lack of awareness of the differences in the cultural imports between the English language and vernacular languages. All in all, different cultures may have an impact on the application of refusal speech acts. The speech may be influenced by one's first language expressions, and giving a direct refusal "no" to decline an offer or request may offend someone or speakers may consider it impolite, and might influence others to imagine that an individual was not brought up well. However, indirect refusals are considered strategies that speakers use to minimise the offense – and these unfortunately evinced themselves with less frequency in comparison to direct refusal strategies.

The goal of the WDCT was to examine the formulation and production of refusals by the trainees, with a specific focus on the trainee's interactional pragmatic knowledge and pragmatics awareness. The refusals were classified according to Campillo et al.'s (2009) refusal realisation taxonomy. The trainees demonstrated little awareness of some sensitivities to social variables such as power and distance. This was aligned to socio-pragmatic knowledge. According to Kim (2004) and Lee (2013), respondents usually respond bluntly to interlocutors of the same or lower status than they do to their superiors. This could be imagined as the main reason why, the magnitude with which blunt and negation of proposition refusal strategies were utilised. It is also speculated that such a proliferation of such resources highlights the probability of a complex pragmatics communication scenario between the front office trainers and the trainees in the hospitality training division.

The utilisation of blunt and negation of proposition strategies did not consider the face of the interlocutor and was an unwanted and unexpected phenomenon in the pragmatic communicative process. The study concludes that the limitation in pragma-linguistic knowledge, in formulating and production of refusals, was the source of the problem. The

study further observes that the trainees utilised the least strategies in internal and external modification due to the length of the sentences required and the knowledge of selecting the appropriate linguistics forms and units. Such a conclusion could be aligned to interactional pragmatic transfer. This could also result from the fact that these kinds of strategies may not be available in the native languages of the participants. Grammatical proficiency was not tested in this study, and it was of that reason why the study avoided the term 'proficiency'.

5.1.3 Questionnaire results and findings

As represented by Appendix C, the questionnaire was used to collect additional data and focused on retrieving crucial evidence that could not be collected through the WDCTs. The study, based on evidence collected through the questionnaire, concluded that the trainees' awareness of culture as the crucial starting point of communication needs more emphasis. This was revealed by the negative responses to the learning or studying of the culture embedded in the English language. The underlying philosophy was that by learning the culture of the English language, the trainees would appreciate cultural inclusivity.

The trainees demonstrated that they have had no practical experience within an environment in which they communicated with the native speakers of the English language. The study concludes that the trainees' exposure to the English language mainly occurred within the ESL classrooms and workshops – through encounters with their trainers. This is further demonstrated by their selection/preference of the use of their local language outside the pedagogical environment. According to Bardovi-Harlig (2001), such a mix up in the local and target languages might result in negative transfer leading to phonetic exchange errors, miscomprehension, underproduction and overproduction. Cohen (1996) indicated that achieving effective interactional pragmatics competence in such an environment is a difficult task.

5.2 Recommendations

5.2.1 Recommendations for further studies

This study investigated the pragmatic competence of Valombola VTC's front-office trainees of 2022 intake evaluating their pragmatic competence in declining an offer, refusing a request and possibly making an apology. Based on the results obtained from the research as discussed above, the researcher suggests that pragmatic competence be taught at tertiary

level. Front-office trainees should to be taught an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course targeting communicative competence in general and pragmatic competence in particular. This should be done in order to familiarise trainees with better pragmatic competence and knowledge to avoid pragmatic failure in general, and socio-pragmatic failure in particular. However, this should not be seen as imposing a foreign culture on non-native speakers – but should be seen as emphasising the importance of pragmatic competence and the avoidance of the effects of pragmatic failure on non-native language speakers.

In addition, the textbooks used for the English Communication Skills course should be designed in a manner that incorporates the teaching of pragmatic competence. According to Thiba (1999), textbooks used in most ESL classrooms are only designed for the teaching of grammar only. The suggestion was however not to get grammatical competence out of picture but to make pragmatic competence an integral part of English Communication Skills teaching and learning in order for language users to be able to contextualise intended meanings (to be pragmatically competent). Since the current research focused entirely on the speech acts of request, refusal and apology responses, future research should be focus on investigating the pragmatic competence of trainees' complements to responses.

5.2.2 Requests strategies formulation and realisation

The findings from the study highlight that vocational trainees in general and front-office trainees in particular require language intellectual capacity which could assist them communicate effectively within the front office environment. Pragmatic competence or pragmatic knowledge would equip the trainees with reference and inference skills expected from them when engaging with visitors and with their trainers, respectively.

The results obtained from the WDCT (Appendix A) demonstrate that the trainees' pragmatic competence in the speech act of requests was somehow low. This pragmatic incompetence could have been influenced by the fact that some requests or responses sounded rude especially in formal situations. It is therefore recommended that trainees should be made aware of the cultural difference between the English language and their vernacular languages. All in all, different cultures may have an impact on the application of request speech acts but speech may not be allowed to be influenced by one's vernacular language. Making a request or questioning without considering politeness strategies may offend the

other interlocutor or the hearer may consider it impolite. Considering request strategies politely would therefore enable front-office trainees to pay attention to language forms and socio-cultural aspects to enhance their pragmatic comprehension of requests formation

5.2.3 Refusal strategies formulation and realisation

Based on the findings, the study notes that most trainees exhibited high a degree of usage of direct refusal hence the direct refusal 'no' or 'I couldn't' or 'I won't' was supposed to either accompanied by an excuse (apology) to avoid bluntness or negation of proposition strategy. Furthermore, some expressions of regret were also neither accompanied by an alternative nor by explanation. This represents interesting evidence that trainees in vocational education require a pragmatic competence course or related module such as English for Specific Purpose. Accurate formulation of refusal strategies would assist front-office trainees in focusing on the speech act of refusals and the socio-cultural elements that determine the formulation and production of strategies in cross-cultural communicative processes. Therefore, an urgent pedagogical intervention on pragmatic competence is highly recommended.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

Discourse Completion Test: Polite Request Strategies

Dear Trainee

As part of my study on Pragmatic Competence, I humbly request your support in completing the Discourse Completion Test on Request Strategies regarding your pragmatic competence and knowledge in using the English language as a second language. The information you are going to provide would be essential and welcomed for my research, and it is not necessary to write your real name on this questionnaire. All the information you are going to provide will be treated confidential and will be used for this study purpose, solely.

Thank you for your support indeed!

Read the following communication requests. At the end of each given request, there is a blank space where you should write your response. Take each request as normal as if you are the

one involved in the conversation. Do not worry about any grammatical mistakes in writing your responses but rather consider politeness in your request approach.

Request A

While attending a data-projected presentation on importance of speech acts, you received a call to meet an important visitor. How would you request the trainer for notes on what you have missed?

Request B

You know you will not cope with the given deadline to submit your practical tasks. How would you request for extension considering that you have other pending academic activities?

Request C

Your recent assignment on relationship between communicative and pragmatic competence has received low grading. How would you convince your Communication trainer to remark your paper?

Request D

You have a lesson on the Speech Act Theory which is difficult to you. What do you say to the communication trainer, requesting him to revise the theory with practical examples?

Request E

Your trainer is using Moodle e-learning platform and he appears to be struggling with the e-learning program you know better. How would ask to assist him?

Request F

You are assigned to do an urgent practical project utilising remote communication. You are struggling to develop the assigned project. You feel you require one-on-one contact with your trainer. How do you request for that opportunity?

Request G

Your trainer presented very useful topic on the difference between semantics and pragmatics using a data projector. You need his softcopy. How do you request for his softcopy?

Request H

While attending lessons, you received a private and confidential call and decided to call it a day. How would you request the trainer to be excused for a day?

Request I

You are taking some notes while the trainer is writing on the board. His handwriting is so curvy to you that you cannot read it. How would you request the trainer to write in block letters, instead?

APPENDIX B

Discourse Completion Test: Polite Refusal Strategies

Situation A

Your trainer realised you are one of the best trainees and as a result he assigns you with some of his tasks like marking fellow trainees' papers. You have some pending tasks this time to complete. Your Trainer: Could you please help me with this...? How do you refuse his request?

Situation B

A fellow trainee does not understand the difference between semantics and pragmatics. She approaches you to write for her a list of variations as part of her class assigned activities. What do you say to the fellow trainee in refusing her request?

Situation C

Your trainer experienced that you are always late with submitting your practical tasks. You received a call from him requesting you to submit your tasks three days before the given submission date. How do you refuse the trainer's request?

Situation D

You attend lessons regularly, writing summaries and taking regular notes. One of your classmates who often leave lessons for sport approaches you to lend him your summary books to make some copies. Classmate: Dear, I do not have summaries and there will be some summative tests next week. 'Do the best you can do'? I need to make some copies!

Situation E

Your recent presentation was recommendable as a result, your trainer approached you to present computer lab rules and regulations to all of your fellow trainees doing front-office course. You are afraid that that may be taken as conflict of interest since that duty falls under the Trainee Support Officer. How do you reject his request?

Situation F

I have gone through all your roughly attended Word Processing practical activities you submitted for marking recently, “Said your trainer.” You ought to remain and redo all of them, this evening! “He concluded.” How do you refuse his notification?

Situation G

Your fellow trainee approaches you during break time to show her how to upload practical activities on Moodle e-learning platform. You appear to have no time for that. How do you refuse her request?

Situation H

While taking a walk, a friend of yours approaches and invites you to attend her birthday party this afternoon. You won’t be able to attend since you have some foodstuff cooking trials this afternoon. Friend: Hi, come to my birthday party this afternoon! How would refuse this invitation, giving some compliments instead?

Situation I

Hospitality Training Division has organized a farewell tour to Ruacana Waterfall and all front-office trainees are expected to attend. You made up your mind not to travel any longer since assessment is starting the following week. How would you express your objection at a trip preparation gathering?

APPENDIX C

QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear participant, may you please tick in the box of your choice and provide some details where necessary

Part 1: Personal and educational background

1. Age

18-21 □

21-24 □

25 plus □

2. Gender

□ Male □ Female

3. At which level of education did you start studying the English Language?

Primary □ Secondary □ Tertiary □

4. Were you ever taught English language by a native English speaker?

Yes □ (If yes, respond to question 5 and 6)

No □

5. At which level of study did you experience this?

Primary □ Secondary □ Tertiary □

6. Language preferred / used when socializing with friends at the Centre

English □ Oshiwambo □ Others □

7. Have you ever had the opportunity to live in a country were English is the native language?

Yes □ (If your answer is yes, respond to questions 8 and 9)

No □

8. For how long did you stay in that country?

Days □ Weeks □ Months □ Years □

9. What was the purpose of staying in that country?

Studying □ Vacation □ Seminar/workshop □

Other (Please specify)……

Part 2: English use activities

1. For what purposes did you use the English language during your stay in the English speaking country?

Socializing with the native people □

Teaching and learning □

Exchange of greetings □

Other (Please specify)……

2. Which environment do you normally use the English language?

University □

Home □

Home and University □

3. Which language do you use with your fellow trainees?

Native (local) language (e.g Oshiwambo) □

English language □

4. What do you normally use the English language for?

Socialization activities □

To access information on the internet □

Reading the newspaper □

During teaching and learning activities □

5. Which language do you prefer in order to understand conversations and explanations better?

English □

Native (local) language (e.g Oshiwambo) □

6. Are you comfortable using English in your daily activities?

Yes □ No □

Part 3:	**Awareness in learning and use of English language**

1. Indicate with a letter of your appropriate reply on the use of English language

A = For sure B = a little bit C = sometimes D = there is no time E = I don't' even try

It is appropriate that when you learn new English expressions, write then down

It is advisable that you search for the meanings of the new expressions you always

You should try to speak those new expressions with your friends

Always find time to use English everyday

You should try to adopt the culture of the target language

Always note mistakes when using English and work on them next time

2. The appropriateness and accurateness of messages in the English language is a key.

Disagree □ Agree □

3. It important to consider context and word choice when communicating using the English language.

Disagree □ Agree □

4. The background of the other person important when requesting or refusing.

Disagree □ Agree □

5. The local language influences your performance in the English second language.

Disagree □ Agree □

6. The use of requests and refusals affect the way people communicate.

Disagree □ Agree □

7. It matters to consider culture when communicating with another person.

Disagree □ Agree □

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