University of Nevada, Reno

**Gaining Pragmatic Competence in English
as a Second and a Foreign Language:
The Effects of the Learning Environment and Overall L2 Proficiency**

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in
Curriculum and Instruction

by

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We recommend that the dissertation
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**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

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# Abstract

This study explores the influence of the learning environment and overall L2 proficiency on the development of pragmatic competence, with reference to grammatical competence. Participants were three groups of English language learners: 120 international students who speak English as a second language from a research institute in a western state of the U.S. (ESL groups 1 & 2) and 60 Chinese college students in northeastern China who speak English as a foreign language (the EFL group).

The participants were pre- and post-tested. They completed a questionnaire consisting of scenarios that measured their pragmatic and grammatical competence. Some of them were retrospectively interviewed in order to understand their decision-making on the tests and their academic and social life relating to their English language learning.

The statistical results show that the learning environment did not play an active role in L2 pragmatics among these participants: learners, regardless of their places of residence, gained significant pragmatic competence, as well as grammatical competence, as their overall L2 proficiency developed. Descriptive findings also demonstrate that overall L2 proficiency was a more reliable predictor of competence in L2 pragmatics: Advanced learners outperformed less proficient learners in both aspects examined. Retrospective reports further illustrate the salient proficiency effect and the less significant environmental influence.

These findings are important as this study is one of the first few to look at the effects of both the learning environment and overall L2 proficiency on L2 pragmatics from a developmental perspective, with reference to grammatical competence. It is also one of the first attempts to address the issues across settings by analyzing both

quantitative and qualitative data. Hence, findings from this study add an informative data set to the literature and enhance the current understanding of the influence of the learning environment and L2 proficiency on L2 pragmatic development. Most important, these findings enrich the body of knowledge of how English is learned and used, and what it means to be a proficient language user in English as an international language.

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## Chapter 1

## Introduction

Pragmatics is about language use in social life. Interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) is the study of nonnative speakers' acquisition of pragmatic knowledge in a second language (L2) (Kasper, 1996). This study is a year-long investigation into the influence of the learning environment and overall L2 proficiency on the development of pragmatic competence among college students who speak English as both a second (ESL) and a foreign language (EFL), with reference to grammatical competence. By ESL instruction, I refer to the instruction of English in countries like the United States of America and Great Britain where English is the dominant language. By EFL instruction, I am referring to English instruction in countries where English may be spoken by many people or learned in school, but is not the dominant language. Examples include China and Japan.

We live in a multicultural world in which the English language has become international. The cause of English becoming an international language is not the number of native English speakers but the increasing number of people who believe in the benefits of acquiring English as an additional language (McKay, 2003). The growing interest in English language learning, especially in the Asian and European regions, has promoted English as the most studied foreign language (Bolton, 2005; Braine, 2005). To gain English language competence, some countries, such as China and Japan, invite native English speakers to their schools to teach in order to give their EFL learners a model to imitate. Accordingly, EFL learners have more chances to converse with native speakers of English than ever before. At the same time, some college students from non-English-speaking regions choose to improve their English language proficiency in English-speaking countries such as the U.S., hoping the ESL

environment will bring them the benefits of learning English for both academic and communicative purposes. These ESL learners, however, do not always exchange ideas with native speakers of English due to their academic demands and particular social circumstances. More often than not, these ESL learners in the ESL environment carry on conversations with either their native peers of origin or other students who also speak English as an additional language.

Although the demographic diversity of English language learners continues to increase, few modifications have been made in the teaching of English and assessing of English language proficiency (McKay, 2003). Standard British and American English are still used as a yardstick to determine the success of English learning (Jenkins, 2006). The ultimate goal of English language learning is still believed to be a native-like proficiency, and communicative competence is still assumed to be the ability to communicate with native speakers (McKay, 2003; Jenkins, 2006). The native norm and the misinterpretation of communicative competence result in researchers' inability to argue convincingly for the persistent discourse accent of L2 learners in ILP – why some learners practice L2 conversational features in the same way as in their first language (L1), irrespective of their length of residence in the target language community and overall L2 proficiency (Scarcella, 1983).

## 1.1.    Statement of the Problem

Researchers of ILP are interested in how L2 learners gain pragmatic competence (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998; Hinkel, 1996; Kobayashi & Rinnert, 2003; Salsbury & Bardovi-Harlig, 2000, 2001; Niezgoda & Röver, 2001; Schauer, 2006a, 2006b, 2007; Taguchi, 2007, 2008). However, for the last few decades, research in ILP has focused on comparing and contrasting the comprehension and production of speech acts of L2 learners with native speakers of

the target language under investigation, and native speakers of L2 learners' first language (e.g., Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989; Schauer, 2006a). Although this body of research is valuable in indicating how far L2 learners' pragmatic competence deviates from the target norm, and how closely it retains its native standard of origin, it is problematic in that it ascribes a native-like competence as the only goal of L2 learning on the one hand, and ignores the communicative and social ways in which L2 learners develop their communicative competence on the other (Jenkins, 2006). Consequently, valid explanations are lacking for developing L2 pragmatic competence in various social settings.

Additionally, there is a shortage of developmental studies in ILP research (Bardovi-Harlig, 1999; Kasper, 1992; Kasper & Rose, 2002). Although the number of publications exploring L2 pragmatic development is increasing since the call for more developmental investigation (Kasper & Schmidt, 1996), the majority of this research has been undertaken in the target language (TL) communities, i.e., most researchers are interested in investigating the effects of study-abroad contexts on the development of L2 pragmatics, in which the language under investigation is the dominant language (e.g., Achiba, 2003; Barron, 2003; DuFon, 2000; Felix-Brasdefer, 2004; Han, 2005; Matsumura, 2003; Schauer, 2004, 2006a, 2006b, 2007). It is unclear, therefore, if L2 learners will develop their pragmatic competence in a non-target language setting such as in China, where English is mostly learned in school as a subject.

Furthermore, researchers disagree with each other as to which variable, the learning environment or overall L2 proficiency, contributes more to the development of L2 pragmatics. While some researchers argue for the primacy of the learning environment (e.g., Barron, 2003; Bouton, 1988, 1992, 1994; DuFon, 2000; Felix-Brasdefer, 2003, 2004; Kinginger & Farrell, 2004; Matsumura, 2001, 2003;

Olshtain & Blum-Kulka, 1985; Schauer, 2004, 2006a, 2006b, 2007; Shardakova, 2005; Takahashi, 1996), there are other studies which have shown that it is overall L2 proficiency that has a greater influence on L2 pragmatics (e.g., Cook & Liddicoat, 2002; Garcia, 2004a, 2004b; Kobayashi & Rinnert, 2003; Rose, 2000; Taguchi, 2007, 2008; Trosborg, 1995). This disagreement is triggered by the fact that, as of now, there are few studies that have examined the effects of both variables at the same time (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998; Niezgoda & Röver, 2001; Yamanaka, 2003). Most often, researchers isolate and measure the influence of one variable and report on its influence on L2 pragmatic comprehension and production. As a result, it is unclear which variable exerts a greater impact on the development of L2 pragmatic competence.

Within investigations into the influence of overall L2 proficiency on L2 pragmatics, there is no agreement so far as to how overall L2 proficiency affects the development of pragmatic competence. Whereas some studies (e.g., Hassall, 2003; Koiko, 1996) have identified a positive correlation between higher proficiency and higher pragmatic competence, there are other studies (e.g., Gass & Houck, 1999) arguing that learners with low overall L2 proficiency do not necessarily show inadequacy in their pragmatic competence. Conversely, a high level of overall L2 proficiency does not guarantee an equally high level of pragmatic competence. This dispute renews interest in the relationship between grammatical and pragmatic knowledge (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998; Niezgoda & Röver, 2001; Schauer, 2006a).

In the literature on the connection between grammatical and pragmatic knowledge, there exists no consensus, and the argument continues. Some studies (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998; Schauer, 2006a) have shown that while L2 learners

in the TL community were more sensitive to pragmatic violations, learners in EFL settings were less tolerant of grammatical errors. This body of research has also found that with a greater length of residence in the TL community, learners gained pragmatic competence significantly; with increasing overall L2 proficiency, learners in the TL community were more tolerant of grammatical errors but less tolerant of pragmatic violations, while the EFL learners showed the opposite. At the same time, however, some studies (e.g., Niezgoda & Röver, 2001) have demonstrated that learners in a non-target language setting were not deficient in pragmatic sensitivity and their pragmatic competence developed as their English language proficiency grew. One limitation with this body of research is that some researchers have not examined L2 pragmatics from a developmental perspective (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998; Niezgoda & Röver, 2001), and some researchers have left the non-TL settings unexamined in terms of L2 pragmatics with reference to grammatical competence (e.g., Schauer, 2006a).

To summarize, the bulk of research in ILP has suggested that the development of L2 pragmatic competence is a complex social activity which is related to both the learning environment and overall L2 proficiency, and is largely independent of grammatical knowledge. However, in light of how English is used in various communicative and international settings (Bolton, 2005; Jenkins, 2006), the research does not examine the true contexts in which English functions, nor does it take into consideration the learners' cultural beliefs behind their language behavior. The research ignores the contemporary thinking and the implications of English as an international language (McMay, 2003; Jenkins, 2006); little research has examined L2 learners' pragmatic competence in its own right (Kasper & Rose, 1999).

## 1.2.    Rationale of the Study

The researcher's motivations for the present study are several. First, as described earlier, few researchers have simultaneously investigated the influence of the learning environment and overall L2 proficiency on L2 pragmatics. A review of 73 previous studies shows that only three (Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998; Niezgoda & Röver, 2001; Yamanaka, 2003) have examined two variables within one study. Consequently, it is unknown which variable, the learning environment or overall L2 proficiency, would serve as a more reliable predictor in L2 pragmatics.

Secondly, to date, developmental studies in ILP literature are still few (Bardovi-Harlig, 1999; Kasper, 1992; Kasper & Rose, 2002; Kasper & Schmidt, 1996; Schauer, 2006a, 2006b, 2007); acquisitional studies undertaken in a non-TL community are even more limited (Taguchi, 2007, 2008). As a result, the development of L2 pragmatic competence across settings is not well understood.

Finally, the correlation between pragmatic and grammatical competence – the two indispensible components of communicative competence – is under-explored in literature and deserves attention (Kasper & Rose, 2002).

The understanding of the effects of the learning environment and overall L2 proficiency on the development of L2 pragmatics, with reference to grammar is of importance. This is because it will enlighten educators if one learning environment has advantages over another, and if proficiency level causes more discrepancy in L2 pragmatics than the learning environment. More important, it will help teachers make informed decisions in the classroom and tailor their instruction to L2 learners' needs.

## 1.3.    Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to explore the effects of the learning environment and overall L2 proficiency on the development of L2 pragmatic competence, with

reference to grammatical competence. To this end, the following research questions have been proposed:

1. Do ESL learners develop pragmatic competence in the same way as their EFL peers?

2. To what extent do ESL and EFL learners differ in gaining pragmatic competence?

3. How does L2 proficiency correlate with the development of pragmatic competence?

4. What rationales do ESL and EFL learners offer for their comprehension and production of pragmatic appropriateness/inappropriateness?

5. How does social and academic life relate to developing L2 pragmatic competence in each context?

## 1.4. Significance of the Study

This study will add an informative data set to the existing ILP literature and enhance the current understanding of the influence of the learning environment and overall L2 proficiency on the development of pragmatic competence, with reference to grammatical competence. Most important, the findings will add to the body of knowledge on how the English language is learned, used, and perceived, and what it means to be a proficient English language user in different social contexts. By implication, this study aims to shed light on classroom instruction in English as an international language.

## 1.5. Limitations of the Study

One limitation of this study arose from the unequal lengths of examination time across groups. For ESL group 1 and the EFL group, their pre- and post-tests were carried out over one academic year. For ESL group 2, their pre- and post-tests were

conducted over one semester. This variation might cause a different outcome on the influence of the learning environment on the development of L2 pragmatics.

The second limitation was the homogeneity of the EFL Group. Compared to the two ESL groups in the U.S., which had participants with diverse social and linguistic backgrounds and varied overall L2 proficiency, the EFL group in China was homogenous in terms of age, educational background, cultural influence, and overall L2 proficiency. Due to this limitation, the outcomes of the study should be interpreted with caution.

The third limitation of the present study was the various lengths of residence in the U.S. among the two ESL groups. Some of the participants had been in the U.S. for as long as six or more years; some had just arrived at the outset of the study. If the length of residence could be controlled, the interpretation of the results might be more readily generalized.

## 1.6.    Overview of the Dissertation

Chapter 1 introduces the topics of this study, contextualizes the problem, and presents the research questions. It also addresses the limitations and significance of the study. Chapter 2 outlines the theoretical background framing this study. Within this chapter, the concepts of pragmatics, interlanguage pragmatics, pragmatic competence, and several models of communicative competence (Bachman, 1990; Canale & Swain, 1980; Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei, & Thurrell, 1995) are reviewed; three theories pertaining to the acquisition and development of pragmatic competence are provided: speech act theory (Austin, 1962, 1975; Searle, 1969, 1971, 1975, 1976, 1979), cooperative principle (Grice, 1975), and politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987). This chapter also includes a review of the empirical work in the field with a focus on speech act realization and the development of pragmatic competence.

Chapter 3 describes the research design, the setting, the participants, the instruments, data collection procedures, and data analyses. This chapter also covers a discussion on the issues of validity and reliability. Chapter 4 reports the results of the study: the effects of the learning environment and overall L2 proficiency on the development of L2 pragmatic competence with reference to grammatical competence. It first reports descriptive data from tests, followed by qualitative results from the written production on the tests and retrospective interviews. Chapter 5 discusses the results and draws conclusions, highlights pedagogical implications, and suggests future research directions.

**Chapter 2**

**Theoretical Background**

The preceding chapter highlighted the context of the study, introduced the purpose of the study and presented the research questions. This chapter outlines the theoretical background of pragmatics research with an introduction to the concepts of pragmatics. This background, while lengthy, is intended to illustrate the kinds of demands made on the L2 learners in the course of everyday conversation followed by a review of three theories that are germane to the study of pragmatics: speech act theory (Austin, 1962, 1975; Searle, 1969, 1971, 1975, 1976, 1979), cooperative principle (Grice, 1975) , and politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

In the second section, theories pertaining to SLA are reviewed. Topics include pragmatic competence and three of the most influential models of communicative competence (i.e., Bachman, 1990; Canale & Swain, 1980; Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei, & Thurrell, 1995). In the third section, the concept of interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) is introduced, and relevant studies are presented which explore the pragmatic competence of multiple groups of L2 learners in a variety of settings; previous studies in ILP with a focus on speech act realization will be examined, respectively. The chapter concludes with a summary accounting of what research has been conducted in pragmatics and a discussion of how the present study can complement that body of research.

## 2.1.    Pragmatics

The term *pragmatics* can be traced back to 1938 introduced by Morris, a philosopher of language, in his *Foundations of the theory of signs*. According to Morris (1938), syntax studies the relationships between signs; semantics examines the correlations of signs and the objects that the signs refer to; and pragmatics explores

the associations of the signs and their interpretations. It can be said that if semantics deals with a sentence at its literal level, then pragmatics focuses on the implicit meaning of an utterance.

In language teaching and learning, the term *pragmatics* is defined in various ways depending on the context and the specific aspect(s) a scholar is concerned with (Levinson, 1983; Rose & Kasper, 2001). For instance, Leech (1983) defined pragmatics as "the study of how utterances have meanings in situations" (p. x); Levinson (1983) used the term to refer to the study which examines the linguistic features exhibited by a language user; Crystal (1985) understood it 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. 240); Yule (1996) interpreted it as "the study of the relationships between linguistic forms and the users of those forms" (p. 4); and Kasper and Rose (2001) considered it as "the study of communicative action in its sociocultural context" (p. 2). In this paper, I take Thomas's (1995) position and regard pragmatics as the study of "meaning in interaction" (p. 22). Pragmatics tries to answer such questions as who speaks what to whom, when, where, why, and how language is used, most importantly, how language is interpreted by the hearers (Bloomer, Griffths, & Merrison, 2005). The five areas usually covered in the study of pragmatics are deixis, conversational implicatures, presupposition, speech acts, and conversational structure (Levinson, 1983).

Concurring with Thomas (1995), LoCastro (2003) regarded pragmatics as meaning in interaction. She argues that pragmatics should be distinguished from other aspects of linguistics because she believes:

Meaning is created in interaction with speakers and hearers.

Context includes both linguistic (co-text) and nonlinguistic aspects.

Choices made by the users of language are an important concern.

Constraints in using language in social action (who can say what to whom) are

significant.

The effects of choices on coparticipants are analyzed. (p. 29)

Leech (1983) differentiated among *general pragmatics* from

*pragmalinguistics* and *socio-pragmatics*. By *general pragmatics*, Leech refers to "the

study of linguistic communication in terms of conversational principles" (p. 11),

*pragmalinguistics* and *socio-pragmatics* on the other hand, include more specific

local conditions on language use. While *pragmalinguistics* is language-specific,

addressing the grammatical aspects of pragmatics including pragmatic strategies,

routines, and modification devices used to manipulate (either intensify or soften) a

speech act, *socio-pragmatics* is culture-specific, paying attention to the social factors

such as interlocutors' social status, social distance, and degree of imposition that

influence the choices of linguistic forms and the ways they are produced. Leech's

delineation of pragmatics is shown below:

General pragmatics

[Grammar]     Pragmalinguitics     Socio-pragmatics     [Sociology]
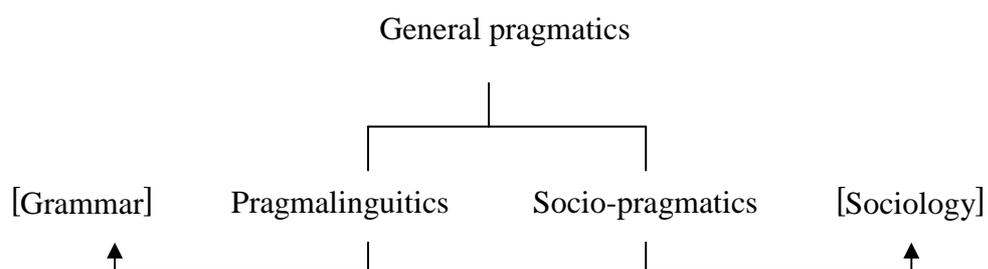
*Figure 1.* Leech's delineation of pragmatics (1983, p. 11)

Speech act theory is a central concern in the study of pragmatics (Levinson,

1983) and a theory that will be reviewed in the following subsection.

### 2.1.1. Speech Act Theory

Speech act theory, initiated by Austin (1962, 1975), and later elaborated by Searle (1969, 1971, 1975, 1976, 1979), argues that to say something is to accomplish something, i.e., a speaker may use words to do more than make a statement of fact. For both Austin and Searle, language is aligned with action and with a purpose. For instance, *I'm sorry*. One says it not only to state the fact that s/he is sorry but also to carry out the speech act of apologizing. In light of speech act theory, such speech acts as apologizing, requesting, and refusing are the minimal units of human communication.

Austin (1975) claimed that all utterances were performatives, and an utterance as an action has three forces: 1) locutionary force (i.e., the literal meaning of an utterance); 2) illocutionary force (i.e., the force or intention behind the words); and 3) perlocutionary force (i.e., the effect of the illocution on the hearer). To give another example, *I'm hungry*, *mummy*, may be simply interpreted as an informative statement that the child is hungry (i.e., the locutionary force), but it may also be understood as both a request for food (i.e., the illocutionary force), and an imperative for her/his mom to cook the food (i.e., the perlocutionary force).

***Illocutionary act***. Searle (1969, 1971) reviewed and extended Austin's (1962) theory of pragmatic functions by emphasizing that the successful performance of an utterance (i.e., an action) was speaker-hearer oriented. Searle believed that one spoke with a communicative intention and the illocutionary force of an utterance had an influence on the hearer; the realization of the speaker's intention was dependent on the interpretation of the hearer. Searle (1969, 1971) thus departed from Austin in proposing that communication was between a speaker and a hearer, depending on their shared knowledge to assign an utterance to a type of speech act. As Coulthard

(1985) pointed out, a main difference between Austin and Searle is their assignments of the illocutionary force of an utterance; for Austin, it is the realization of a speaker's intention. For Searle, it is the product of a listener's interpretation.

Additionally, Searle (1969, 1971) developed Austin's (1962) felicity notion in categorizing speech acts. Austin (1962) realized that performatives could go wrong even though sometimes they could not be testified as true or false, i.e., felicitous or infelicitous; he argued that there must be certain conditions for performatives to take place and for their illocutionary force to be achieved successfully. Searle (1969, 1971) expanded the felicity notion in claiming that felicity conditions constituted the various illocutionary forces in addition to the infelicitousness and felicitousness of the performatives. According to Searle (1969), all speech acts are subject to four kinds of felicity conditions in order to achieve their respective illocutionary force:
1) propositional content condition, 2) preparatory condition, 3) sincerity condition, and 4) essential condition. The felicity conditions he offered for requests are:

Propositional content: Future act A of H (the hearer)

Preparatory:

H is able to do A. S (the speaker) believes H is able to do A.

It is not obvious to both S and H that H will do A in the normal course of events of his own accord.

Sincerity: S wants H to do A.

Essential: Counts as an attempt to get H to do A. (p. 66)

These conditions are constitutive of requests and thus distinguish requests from other speech acts such as apologies and refusals. The speech act of commanding, to give another example, can only be successfully performed when a speaker commands a hearer to do something (propositional content condition), when

interlocutors recognize that the speaker is in a position of authority over the hearer (preparatory condition), when the speaker wants the commanded act to be done (sincerity condition), and when the speaker conveys the message in an attempt to get the hearer to do the act (essential condition). If any one of these four conditions is challenged by the hearer, the proposed act cannot be successfully performed.

Searle (1976, 1979) promoted Austin's notion of speech acts and classified five categories of illocutionary force: 1) assertives (e.g., asserting, believing, reporting, i.e., committing oneself to the belief that the content of one's utterance is true, telling others what things are); 2) directives (e.g., requesting, commanding, inviting, i.e., involving the hearer into a future action, getting others to do something); 3) commissives (e.g., offering, promising, swearing, i.e., committing oneself to a future action); 4) expressives (e.g., thanking, apologizing, congratulating, i.e., expressing one's psychological state of mind); and 5) declarations (e.g., appointing, declaring, i.e., bringing about a change).

As illustrated above, Austin and Searle's viewpoints towards language in use transform the way people look at language and lead philosophers of language to the investigation of pragmatics, "in saying something a speaker also does something" (Austin, 1962, p. 108).

*Indirect speech act.* A third contribution Seale made to speech act theory is his development of indirect speech acts. Seale (1975) defined indirectness as "those cases in which one illocutionary act is performed indirectly by way of performing another" (p. 60). In this light, a speech act can be performed directly or indirectly. For instance, in the case of apologizing, if directly put one might say: *I apologize for what I did*, indirectly one may say: *I'm sorry for what I did*. By the same token, one can request explicitly, such as *Pass the salt*, or implicitly, *Could you pass the salt*? Such indirect

speech acts as *Could you pass the salt*? by using an interrogative act to realize a requestive act, from Searle's (1975) perspective, indicates that certain kinds of indirect forms are conventionally used for certain kinds of speech acts.

Searle (1975) proposed two basic types of indirectness, conventional and non-conventional. In this regard, an utterance expressed in the conventionally indirect way does not try to call for an action immediately as denoted by its literal meaning. In other words, it retains its conventional usage while keeping its literal meaning. The above example *Could you pass the salt*? is considered conventionally indirect because, instead of querying the hearer's ability to pass the salt, the speaker intends to ask the favor of having the salt passed. It does not lose its conventional function in making a request.

When an utterance is non-conventionally indirect, its illocutionary force must be "calculated" (Grice, 1975, p. 50), because the illocutionary force is not conventionally related to any particular sentence structure. In this view, when one says *The weather is nice*, in response to *How do you like our school?* the hearer has to go through the calculation process to figure out what the speaker really means by responding in such a seemingly irrelevant way: s/he does not like the school. Therefore, to interpret the intended meaning of such an utterance, the hearer needs to consider it in its social context, the time, the place, and the situation, etc. The illocutionary force of such an utterance can only be derived from shared social conventions by interlocutors. Failing to recognize the meaning beyond its surface level may lead the hearer to take *The weather is nice* as a sheer statement about the weather and consider it off topic. The ambiguity of such an utterance can be treated as a breach of Grice's (1975) cooperative principle.

**2.1.2. Cooperative Principle**

Grice's (1975) cooperative principle (CP) rests on the premises that human communication is achieved by cooperative efforts from conversation partners to some extent, and that each party should bear some common purpose in mind. It maintains that to ensure a successful conversation, an interlocutor has the responsibility to "make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged" (p. 45).

This principle is further illustrated as four conversational maxims which state that interlocutors can only understand and interpret each other's intention when adhering to some common assumptions. Any flouting of the maxims would result in miscommunications and be considered as uncooperative. The four maxims are:

*Quantity*

Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange).

Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

*Quality*

Do not say what you believe to be false.

Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

*Relation*

Be relevant.

*Manner*

Be perspicuous.

Avoid obscurity of expression.

Avoid ambiguity.

Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).

Be orderly. (pp. 45-46)

The contribution of Grice's cooperative principle and conversational maxims to pragmatics is extremely germane to the study of interpreting implicatures. From Grice's (1975) perspective, interlocutors can only understand and interpret each other's utterances based on these shared assumptions, and by acting cooperatively according to the maxims. However, Grice's (1975) principle and maxims are not above criticism in the pragmatics literature. For instance, LoCastro (2003) pointed out that the Gricean philosophy of pragmatics in interaction only emphasized transactional information, giving little consideration to the interpersonal aspects of interaction. In communication, people do not always talk in the way ascribed by the maxims. Often, people consciously flout the maxims in a given context, such as the example mentioned previously, *The weather is nice*, in responding to *How do you like our school*? Speakers sometimes feel obligated to flout the maxims, as shown in the example, of relation and manner by producing such an ambiguous and irrelevant utterance. The rationale for flouting the maxims can be explained by Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory.

**2.1.3. Politeness Theory**

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), the reason why people sometimes do not follow Grice's (1975) cooperative principle and conversational maxims in communication (i.e., be informative, be true, be relevant, and be brief) is due to their willingness to communicate politely. They contended that the ultimate goal of communication between interlocutors was the cooperative preservation of "face."

In light of politeness theory, everyone engaging in an interaction collectively is maintaining "face." Face is "an image of self, delineated in terms of approved social

attributes" (Goffman, 1967, p. 5). Brown and Levinson (1987) further explained that face "is something that is emotionally invested, and that can be lost, maintained, or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to in interaction" (p. 61). They stated, "[i]n general, people cooperate (and assume each other's cooperation) in maintaining face in interaction, such cooperation being based on the mutual vulnerability of face" (p. 61).

Brown and Levinson (1987) considered "face as wants" (p. 62). In their view, there are two types of face, positive and negative. Positive face is "the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others" (p. 62), the desire to be accepted. Negative face refers to "the want of every 'competent adult member' that his actions be unimpeded by others" (p. 62), the desire to maintain one's personal territory. Accordingly, speech acts such as requesting, suggesting, and complimenting potentially threaten hearers' negative face because their freedom of action will be impeded. Such speech acts as refusing and complaining threaten hearers' positive face since addressees' feelings and emotions are not being taken care of when their offers, invitations, and suggestions are turned down, or their behaviors are criticized. Speech acts as such are called *face-threatening acts* (FTAs). To undertake an FTA, a speaker has two types of politeness strategy at their disposal, positive and negative.

Positive politeness strategies are "redress actions" (p. 69), which attend to the hearer's positive face wants, whereas negative politeness strategies are addressing the hearer's negative face wants. Depending on a speaker's judgment of the seriousness or weightiness of the imposition (W$\chi$), taking into consideration the relative power relationship (P) and the social distance (D) between a speaker (S) and a hearer (H), and also the culture-specific ranking (R) of imposition, the choice of a politeness strategy may vary from case to case and culture to culture. Brown and Levinson

(1987) suggested the following formula for a speaker to estimate the weightiness of a particular FTA:

$$(W\chi) = D\ (S,\ H) + P\ (H,\ S) + R\chi\ (p.\ 69)$$

This formula shows that any change in social distance (D), relative power (P), or ranking of the imposition (R) will consequently cause an adjustment in the weightiness of a particular FTA $(W\chi)$. It is based on the estimation of the weightiness $(W\chi)$ that a speaker chooses an appropriate strategy to carry on an interaction. Brown and Levinson (1987) further recommended the following strategies to enact an FTA (examples are mine):

Do the FTA on-record

a) Baldly without redressive action (i.e., speaking directly with no efforts to save the face of the addressee, e.g., *Clean the kitchen*!)

b) With redressive action (i.e., speaking with an effort to soften the illocutionary force of a speech act, e.g.,

Positive politeness: *Well, I know you're busy with your finals. How about we clean the kitchen together*?

Negative politeness: *I'm sorry to trouble you, but I wonder if you could clean the kitchen when you have the time.*)

Do the FTA off-record (i.e., using hints or indirectness, e.g., *What a mess in the kitchen*!)

Do not do the FTA (i.e., opting out, saying nothing because the risk might be too great. If this is the case, the speaker might clean the kitchen him-/herself.)

Politeness theory is important in studying speech acts in general, and indirect speech acts in particular. This is because indirectness interacts actively with politeness; in Searle's (1975) words, "politeness is the chief motivation for

indirectness" (p. 64). The more politely interlocutors act, the more indirectly they will use their words, and (in some speech communities) the more social distance the interlocutors will maintain. In this light, indirectness is the essence of the politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Leech, 1983).

While there are some universals of politeness (Brown & Levinson, 1987), cross-cultural studies in speech act theory, cooperative principle and conversational maxims, and politeness theory have indicated that "each speech community is pragmatically as well as grammatically unique" (Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2000, p. 28). As Wierzbicka (1991) reminds us, different languages entail different cultures and different speech acts. In this view, learning a language means more than just grasping the linguistic forms and grammatical structures; it is learning a second culture (Robinson-Stuart & Nocon, 1996). This claim is supported by studies which have argued that even higher proficiency learners with a good mastery of both linguistics and grammar fail to function pragmatically in an L2, indicating their under-developed pragmatic competence, a topic to be turned to now.

## 2.2. Pragmatic and Communicative Competence

Pragmatic competence is "[t]he ability to act and interact by means of language" (Kasper & Röver, 2005, p. 317). Leech (1983) delineated two types of pragmatic competence: *socio-pragmatic* and *pragmalinguistic* competence. To have socio-pragmatic competence requires that one should have the knowledge to interpret the interaction within which power and social distance are involved (Brown & Levinson, 1987), and the knowledge of mutual rights, obligations, taboos, and conventional practices (Thomas, 1983). The other type of competence one needs to have is pragmalinguistic competence, which encompasses the ability to apply conventions of both means and forms (e.g., the realization of speech acts and the

linguistic forms used to realize the speech acts). Accordingly, to be pragmatically competent, a speaker needs to have the ability to "understand and produce socio-pragmatic meanings with pragmalinguistic conventions" (Kasper & Röver, 2005, p. 318).

Pragmatic competence development becomes one of the focal goals in SLA as an outcome of the emphasis shifting from grammatical competence to communicative competence in second language (L2) teaching pedagogy (Trosborg, 1987). This shift of emphasis from grammatical to communicative competence in L2 teaching pedagogy, according to Ellis (1994), has been motivated by the belief that how languages are learned cannot be fully understood without the examination of how they are used in communication. As can be inferred from its title, the conventional grammar-translation approach in language teaching has been devoted to the grammatical and linguistic competence of a learner, restricting its attention only to the form-function relationships of a language. One of the limitations of this approach, as Rubin (1983) pointed out, lies in its not offering language learners "the underlying values of a speech act" (p. 12), nor does it supply the learners with the "deep-seated cultural values" (p. 11) embedded in the linguistic forms. Most unsatisfactory, it shows little concern for the significance of other competences that a language learner has had or should have. The communicative approach in language teaching pedagogy, on the other hand, addresses the global language competence in a language learner. It displays an equal attention to other competences that have been overlooked by the grammar-translation approach, such as the central topic of this study, pragmatic competence.

The concept of *communicative competence* was initiated by Hymes (1967, 1972) in opposition to the Chomskyan notion of linguistic competence. While

Chomsky (1965) defined his notion of competence as the knowledge of a language, Hymes's concept of communicative competence was the knowledge of a language and the ability to apply that knowledge (Barron, 2003; Widdowson, 1992). Realizing the limitations of Chomsky's notion of competence, Hymes (1967, 1972) proposed the communicative competence to address the other aspects of competence that a learner needs to have in addition to the form-function focused grammatical and linguistic competence. Hymes (1972) believed that "[t]here are rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless" (p. 278).

For Hymes, language is a social behavior and communicative competence should embrace both speaking and the ability to interpret speech acts and behaviors expected in the TL community. From his perspective, the central concern of communicative competence is speech communities and the interaction between language and culture. Savignon further speculates that communicative competence is "relative, not absolute, and depends on the cooperation of all the participants involved" (1983, p. 9); it is the ability to express, interpret, and negotiate (1997).

The advocating of communicative competence has transformed L2 teaching pedagogy, stimulating a great deal of thought-provoking research in SLA. Since its advent, the term communicative competence has been cited in literature distinctly from both grammatical and linguistic competence (Brown, 2000; Hadley, 2001), and has become an ascribed objective for both L2 instruction and L2 proficiency. Several models of communicative competence have been developed since its inception; three of the most influential models will be introduced below.

***Canale and Swain's framework of communicative competence***. Inspired by Hymes (1967, 1972), Canale and Swain (1980) developed a theoretical framework of communicative competence, which was further expanded by Canale (1983). This

model has been of significance in applied linguistics. Under their framework, communicative competence comprises:

1) Grammatical competence (the knowledge of vocabulary, pronunciation, syntax, etc., i.e., Chomskyan view of competence);

2) Sociolinguistic competence (the knowledge to use language appropriately according to the context);

3) Strategic competence (the use of communication strategies, both verbal and nonverbal);

4) Discourse competence (the ability to employ cohesive devices to express one's thought coherently).

Within these four areas of communicative competence, the development of sociolinguistic competence is most challenging for L2 learners, because of its obligation of cultural knowledge and sensitivity across speech communities (Brown, 2000). Canale and Swain's framework (1980, 1983) prescribes the minimal requirements for L2 teaching and testing and has motivated scholars and practitioners to pursue what communicative competence really means and what it entails to teach and learn an L2. This is because, as Canale (1983) pointed out, "the distinction between communicative competence and actual communication remains poorly understood . . . in the second language field" (p. 5). Additionally, under this framework, pragmatic competence is not explicitly spelled out as a distinct constituent of communicative competence, though it can be implied as a part of sociolinguistic competence.

***Bachman's model of language competence.*** One of the models explicitly attending to pragmatic competence is Bachman's model of language competence (1990). Bachman is among the first theorists who explicitly host pragmatic

competence in the overall competence of a language learner. The role pragmatic competence plays in one's language competence, illustrated by Bachman's model, is as follows.

```
                          Language
                         Competence
                              |
          +-------------------+-------------------+
          |                                       |
   Organizational                            Pragmatic
    Competence                               Competence
          |                                       |
    +-----+-----+                      +----------+----------+
    |           |                      |                     |
Grammatical   Textual            Illocutionary         Sociolinguistic
Competence   Competence           Competence             Competence
    |           |                      |                     |
 Vocabulary   Cohesion            Ideational          Sensitivity to
                                   Functions         Dialect or Variety

 Morphology  Rhetorical           Manipulative        Sensitivity to
             Organization          Functions             Register

  Syntax                           Heuristic           Sensitivity to
                                   Functions            Naturalness

 Phonology/                        Imaginative     Cultural References and
 Graphology                        Functions         Figures of Speech
```
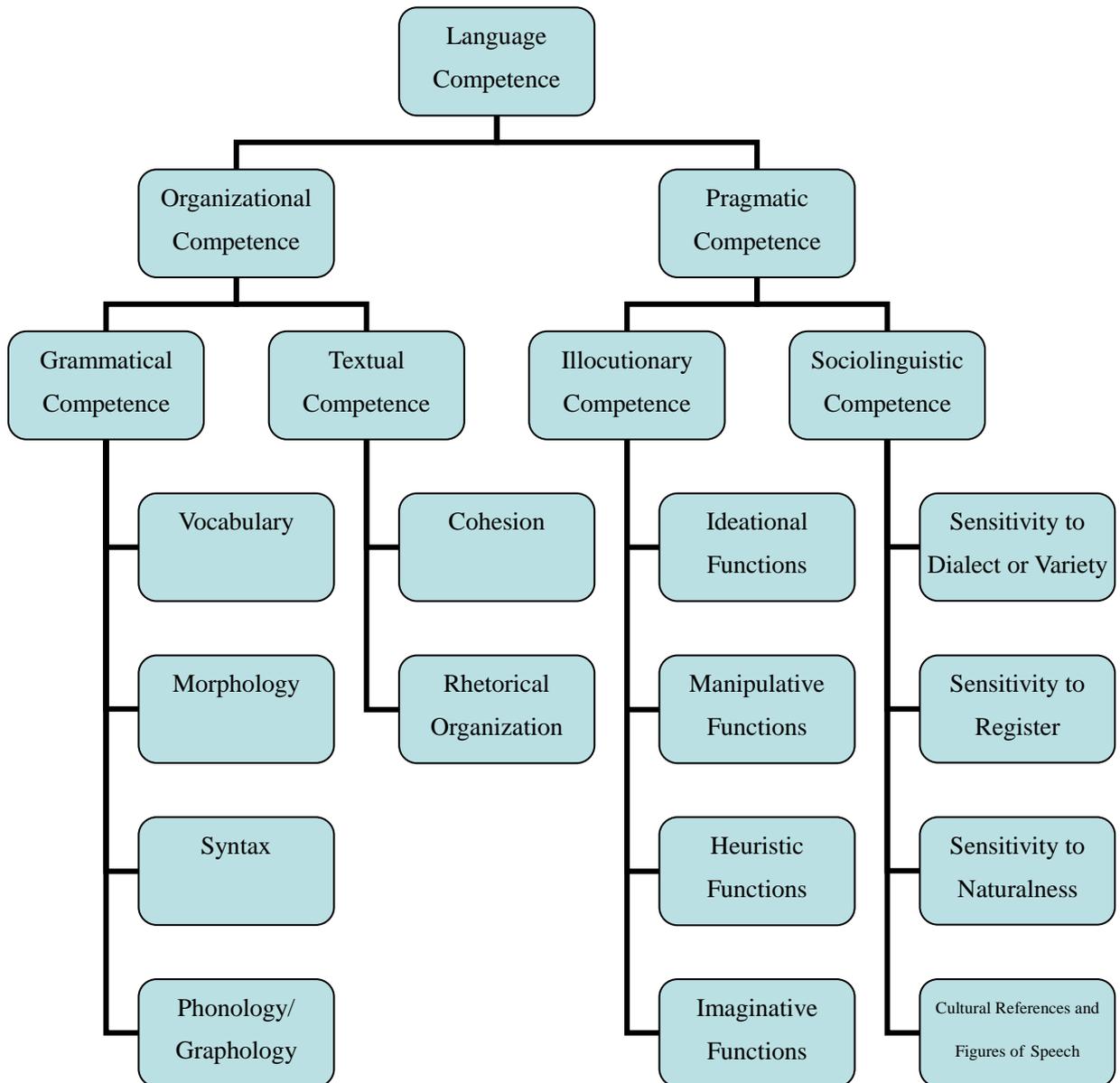
*Figure 2.* Bachman's model of language competence (1990, p. 87)

Bachman (1990) regarded language competence as "knowledge of language" (p. 85), which is analogous to communicative competence under Canale and Swain's (1980, 1983) framework. In a related vein, she reframed Canale and Swain's

discourse competence as textual competence. According to Bachman's model, to be a competent language user, one should be armed with at least two types of competence: *organizational* and *pragmatic* competence. To be organizationally competent, one needs to have *grammatical competence* (i.e., the knowledge of vocabulary, morphology, syntax, phonology, and graphology), and *textual competence* (i.e., the ability to organize one's speech cohesively and rhetorically).

The second competence one needs to be equipped with, according to Bachman's model (1990), is *pragmatic competence*, which includes *illocutionary* and *sociolinguistic* competence. To have illocutionary competence, one needs to have the ability to manipulate the functions of a language, the ability to express one's ideas and feelings (ideational functions), to get things done (manipulative functions), to use language to carry out daily work such as teaching, learning, and problem-solving (heuristic functions), and to be creative (imaginative functions). Lastly, it comes to the sociolinguistic competence, which refers to the sensitivity to dialect or variety, the sensitivity to register, the sensitivity to naturalness (i.e., native-like use of language), and the sensitivity to cultural referents and figures of speech.

Based on Bachman's model (1990), we may surmise that if communicative competence considers the global language proficiency of a language learner, then pragmatic competence is a compulsory constituent of the whole proficiency, without which one's language competence would be incomplete, without which an assessment of language proficiency would be inaccurate. In this light, Bachman's (1990) model advances Canale and Swain's (1980, 1983) framework in helping us understand further what communicative competence signifies and who should be considered a competent language user. Yet, like Canale and Swain's (1980, 1983) framework, Bachman's (1990) model does not indicate the correlations between the two key

components and their subcomponents. This gap is filled by Celce-Murcia et al.'s

(1995) communicative competence model.

**Celce-Murcia et al.'s communicative competence model**. In 1995,

Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei, and Thurrell put forth their model of communicative

competence, as shown below:

```
                    Sociocultural
                     Competence

                    ⬭ Discourse
                      Competence ⬭

   Linguistic                      Actional
   Competence                      Competence

              Strategic Competence
```
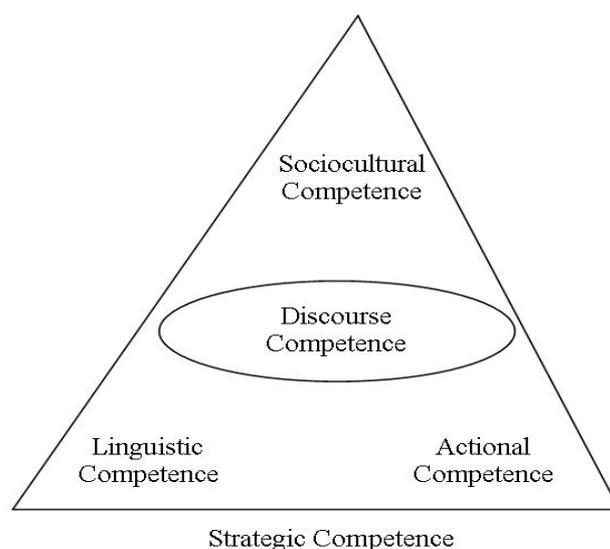
*Figure 3*. Celce-Murcia et al.'s model of communicative competence (1995, p. 10)

Under this model, communicative competence consists of five interrelated

constituents: linguistic, actional, sociocultural, discourse, and strategic competence.

Linguistic competence, in this model, in addition to the grammatical competence in

Canale and Swain's (1980, 1983) framework, also includes knowledge of the distinct

layers of a linguistic system, such as sentence patterns, morphological inflections,

lexis, phonological, and orthographic systems. The actional competence corresponds

to Canale and Swain's (1980, 1983) sociocultural competence and Bachman's (1990)

pragmatic competence, requiring the knowledge of language functions and speech act

sets in interpreting and conveying a speaker's intended meaning by means of

linguistic conventions.

The third component, sociocultural competence, is related to Canale and Swain's (1980, 1983) sociocultural competence and Bachman's (1990) sociolinguistic competence, addressing the ability to express one's self appropriately according to the cultural and social conventions of the context. Discourse competence is the key component in Celce-Murcia et al.'s (1995) model. As shown in Figure 3, it is closely associated with linguistic, actional, and sociocultural competence, and it encompasses cohesion, deixis, coherence, genre structure, and conversational structure.

The four constituents of communicative competence described above (i.e., linguistic, actional, sociocultural, and discourse competence) in Celce-Murcia et al.'s (1995) model were all subject to the last constituent, strategic competence. Celce-Murcia et al. (1995) framed strategic competence as the knowledge and use of communication strategies which included avoidance, achievement, time-gaining, self-monitoring, and interactional strategies. They believed that the five main components and their subcomponents should be employed not only to carry out communication, but also to improve the efficiency of communication.

Celce-Murcia et al.'s (1995) model, different from the previous two, illustrates the incorporation of the five components, consisting of communicative competence. Celce-Murcia et al. (1995) further suggested that part of their model could be extended to include other strategies relating to L2 learning and teaching, calling for a further construction on communicative competence.

In addition to exemplification of pragmatic competence as an integral part of communicative competence, the three models of communicative competence underpin the interdependency of grammatical and pragmatic competence, indicating that meaningful communication can only take place with the integration of all

components. Lacking any kind of competence will result in communication breakdowns, issues that have received much exploration in ILP, and will be discussed in the next section.

In summary, this body of research and theory suggests that while the act of conversation takes place everyday among speakers of a given language, it is far from a simple activity to participate in. Theorists such as Grice (1975), Levinson and Brown (1987) explore the unstated rules of how larger chunks of discourse should be structured in conversation. Their work is built upon research by Austin (1962, 1975) and Searle (1969, 1971, 1975, 1976, 1979) who broke down conversation into smaller interactive segments they labeled as speech act theory.

Theorists also ask what it means to be competent in an L2, and researchers have investigated this from two very different perspectives. The earliest is found in the work of Hymes (1967, 1972) who introduced the notion of communicative competence, and in the work of Canale and Swain (1980, 1983) who initiated the framework of communicative competence. Hymes (1967, 1972) and Canale and Swain (1980, 1983) argued that competence in an L2 was much more than mastering the grammatical codes. How language is used in the community is also important. Researchers such as Bachman (1990) and Celce-Murcia et al. (1995) followed and added components and relationships to Canale and Swain's (1980, 1983) notion of communicative competence. The second venue is the area of L2 learners' pragmatic competence, including their pragmatic performance on a given test, as in the case of speech act realization. Researchers, such as Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei (1998) and Niezgoda and Röver (2001), show that both the learning environment and overall L2 proficiency are closely related to L2 learners' pragmatic competence. The next section reviews research into the particulars of how the learning environment and L2

proficiency interact with L2 learners' pragmatic competence.

## 2.3.    Interlanguage Pragmatics (ILP) and Studies in ILP

Interlanguage pragmatics (ILP), to repeat what has been said in the first chapter, is "the study of nonnative speakers' use and acquisition of L2 pragmatic knowledge" (Kasper, 1996, p. 145). "Interlanguage," first coined by Larry Selinker (1972), refers to the continuum that L2 learners construct when they are learning the L2 grammar system on their way to the target language (TL) norms. Later, it is cited in SLA literature as "the systemic knowledge of language which is independent of both the learner's L1 and the L2 system that he is trying to learn" (Ellis, 1985, p. 42). It by no means denotes an imperfect command of the TL. Instead, interlanguage is the learner language indicating that there is a unique and unavoidable process that L2 learners usually go through, during which they constantly make and test their hypotheses about the TL irrespective of their overall L2 proficiency; it deserves attention and investigation in its own right (Smith, 1994, p. 8). For some learners, the journey will successfully proceed and a higher level of competence in the TL will be attained; for some, a fossilization will occur somewhere along the continuum (Brown, 2000).

Researchers studying ILP investigate the development of L2 learners' pragmatic acquisition and their use of the target pragmatic knowledge (Kasper, 1996). Researchers try to define who succeeds and who becomes stagnant by identifying the systematic features along the continuum, offering possible explanations to the developmental patterns of L2 pragmatics acquisition, and seeking workable solutions to facilitate the process. Cross-cultural differences and L1 influences have been core interests in ILP research (Kasper & Schmidt, 1996). In other words, researchers usually compare the speech act realizations by native speakers of the TL, the TL

learners (i.e., L2 learners), and the native speakers of the learners' language in order to find the differences in the realizations among the three groups and to define how far L2 learners' realization deviates from the TL norms and how closely it retains its native standards.

The majority of early studies in ILP are cross-sectional. By comparing and contrasting pragmatic production either by L2 learners of different levels of L2 proficiency, or with various lengths of residence in the TL community, or in different social settings. Among developmental studies, the effect of the TL community on the development of L2 pragmatics has drawn much attention with a limited number of studies exploring the influence of a non-target language setting. Within this enquiry, L2 learners' speech act realization and pragmatic comprehension have received the most attention. Among the variables, the learning environment and overall L2 proficiency have drawn the most attention with respect to L2 pragmatic competence. Below, a review of some relevant studies which have explored the relationship among the learning environment, overall L2 proficiency, and pragmatic competence follows. The discussion highlights which variable, the learning environment or overall L2 proficiency, makes a stronger impact on L2 pragmatics.

### 2.3.1. Studies Examining the Learning Environment

The target language (TL) community is claimed to be an ideal environment of the acquisition of an L2 and its culture (Lafford, 2006). If learners are to better master a language, to become fluent speakers of that language, to attune their speech to that of a native speaker, and to broaden their cultural perspectives, it is believed that they should live in that culture for a considerable amount of time.

Following this assumption, it is argued, learners studying in the TL community develop their language skills better than those who stay at their home country, and this

argument is evinced by many studies in ILP. For instance, investigating L1 pragmatic

influence on L2 pragmatic competence, Takahashi and Beebe (1987) found more

negative transfers by their Japanese EFL learners in Japan than by their ESL learners

in the U.S. in realizing the speech act of refusal. Inspecting the development of the

ability to offer advice by two groups of English learners in both Japan and Canada,

Matsumura (2003) reported that her Japanese ESL learners made a greater

improvement in offering advice by benefiting from living in the TL community,

particularly when they offered advice to interlocutors of equal and lower status. But

the EFL learners who stayed in Japan failed to make similar progress. Similar

observations were also made by Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1986) on requests, Sawyer

(1992) on the Japanese sentence-final particle *ne*, Bardovi-Harlig and Harford (1993)

on suggestions and refusals, Kondo (1997) on apologies, and Hoffman-Hicks (1999)

on leaving-taking utterances.

Researchers who have examined the effects of the TL community on L2

pragmatics also investigate the correlation between the length of residence (LOR) and

L2 pragmatics (e.g., Barron 2003; Bouton, 1988, 1992, 1994; Felix-Brasdefer, 2004;

Schauer, 2004, 2006a, 2006b, 2007). These researchers argue that learners who spend

a considerable amount of time in the target culture will see greater gains in L2

pragmatics than their peers who spend a small amount of time. They believe that

living in the TL community and interacting with the native speakers afford the

learners valuable opportunities to experience the target norms; accordingly, their

pragmatic performance becomes native- or near native-like.

While not studying speech acts, in a series of studies, Bouton (1988, 1992,

1994) investigated ESL learners' ability to interpret implicatures in American English.

Students of different L1 backgrounds were arranged into three groups according to

their LOR in the TL community: 17 months, 33 months, and 4-7 years. All students

were asked to complete a multiple-choice questionnaire with contextualized cues.

Data analyses showed that learners' ability to interpret implicatures improved as their

LOR increased. Especially in the first 17 months, the students' implicature

interpreting skills accelerated significantly.

Recent developmental studies investigating various aspects of pragmatics by

DuFon (2000), Achiba (2003), Barron (2003), Tamanaha (2003), Felix-Brasdefer

(2004), Lafford (2004), Schauer (2004, 2006a, 2006b, 2007), and Shardakova (2005)

further stretch the importance of the learning environment on the development of L2

pragmatics. For example, DuFon (2000) studied the acquisition of Indonesian address

forms (an important part of Indonesian pragmatics since it carries politeness

implications). This study was based on natural conversations between six

college-aged learners and NSs of Indonesian. The college students were in a study

abroad program in Indonesia. DuFon found that the students progressed from

overusing the more formal *amda* (you), even when the informal *kamu* (you) would be

more appreciated, to a more appropriate and automatic employment of the suitable

address form, "approaching native-like use" (p. 94). One of the reasons for this

improvement, according to DuFon, was abundant interaction with the native speakers,

which offered the learners valuable input as well as drawing their attention to the

usages of the address forms by giving them feedback.

Barron (2003) acknowledged that her Irish college students of German, after

a one-year residence in Germany, adopted more native-like employment of discourse

structure in their offer-refusal interactions, amplified their use of pragmatic routines,

and more frequently used mitigation. With their LOR increasing, learners transferred

their L1 pragmatics more positively. Like Dufon (2000), Barron (2003) attributed the

progression in her learners' pragmatic competence to the frequent input her learners

obtained by exposing themselves to the TL input.

Schauer's (2004) findings suggested that LOR in the TL community

promoted her learners' request strategy development. In her examination of request

strategies by German college students of English studying in England for one year,

Schauer observed that the students used more internal modifiers such as politeness

markers, consultative devices, understaters, past tense modals, appreciative

embeddings, conditional clauses, and tentative embeddings, coupled with their

increasing employment of external modifiers including disarmers, imposition

minimizers, preparators, appreciators, sweeteners, and 'smalltalk' (p. 262). Similar

findings were also discovered in Schauer's recent studies (2006b, 2007). As their

stayed prolonged, the German ESL learners became more capable of mitigating their

requests by increasing employment of external modifies and changing the tone of

their requests by using more internal downgraders.

Studies by Tamanaha (2003), Felix-Brasdefer (2004), and Lafford (2004)

conform to the significance of the TL community in facilitating L2 pragmatic

development. In these studies, it is reported that those learners who had lived in the

TL communities outpaced their peers who had had no such experience in the

realization of speech acts of apologies, complaints, and refusals, and in decreasing use

of communicative strategies. Tamanaha (2003) found a lesser amount of negative

transfer with learners who had lived in Japan for an average of three years in making

an apology and a complaint. Felix-Brasdefer (2004) observed the LOR influenced

learners' Spanish sequential organization of politeness strategies and their ability to

turn down an offer as well. In a related vein, Lafford (2004) reported that the study

abroad group diminished their communication gaps markedly and was able to engage

in meaningful communication without sacrificing their grammatical accuracy compared to the at-home group which received classroom instruction only.

In sum, the benefits of studying abroad have been much elaborated on and this elaboration overemphasizes the facilitative effect of the TL community on successful L2 acquisition. This bias comes as no surprise. This is because most of the early studies are cross-sectional, and the majority of developmental research is undertaken in the TL community. However, not all studies are consistent in showing that the TL community brings learners closer to native socio-pragmatic norms. Some researchers find a counterintuitive relationship between the learning environment and L2 pragmatics. They question the belief that the learning environment and LOR are reliable determinants in L2 pragmatics.

Although acknowledging the positive effects of the TL community on L2 pragmatic development, some researchers (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig, 2001; Han, 2005; Matsumura, 2001; Scarcella, 1983) argue that there is little positive relationship between LOR and L2 pragmatic competence. These researchers do not agree that pragmatic development is closely associated with LOR in the TL community. This is because, regardless of a considerable LOR in the TL community, some learners are still found struggling with their L2 pragmatics, staying away from the native norms (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001); their "discourse accent" persists (Scarcella, 1983), i.e., learners practice L2 conversation features in the same way as their L1.

With respect to the LOR in the TL community, researchers also disagree on the notion of the longer the better. Matsumura (2001) speculated that it was during the earlier stage of residence in the TL community (the first three-month period in her case) that her Japanese learners of English changed their perceptions of social status when offering advice. One of the reasons for this quick change, according to

Matsumura, was because these students knew they were only going to stay for eight months, they were aggressive in promoting their English proficiency and actively engaged in interactions with native speakers from the beginning. This earlier-stage claim can be supported by Bouton's series of studies (1988, 1992, 1994) discussed earlier, which indicated that it was in the first 17 months that the students' ability to interpret implicatures improved the most.

The non-linear relationship between L2 pragmatic competence and LOR was also confirmed by Han (2005). Han's findings did not show a significant effect of LOR in the TL community on request strategies or on the type of modification used by Korean ESL learners in the U.S. All Korean learners of English in Han's research tended to use conventionally indirect strategies and employ similar external modifications. The learners failed to approximate their behavior to the native norms in some situations regardless of their LOR.

At the same time, a small yet growing number of researchers who have studied the development of L2 pragmatics find that L2 pragmatic development does take place among learners who speak English as a foreign language (Hill, 1997; Taguchi, 2007, 2008). This body of research demonstrates that learners in a non-target language community are not necessarily inefficient in L2 pragmatics, and as their overall L2 proficiency increases, their L2 pragmatic competence grows.

In an investigation into the development of the ability to request in English by a group of Japanese university students in Japan, Hill (1997) found that as the students' English proficiency increased, their ability to request improved as well. The students were found to use less direct requests and more conventional indirect requests, especially the more advanced students, who demonstrated a native level of requesting ability. Likewise, Taguchi (2007) found that the Japanese EFL learners

gained significantly in terms of accuracy and speed in pragmatic comprehension over a period of seven weeks.

Most recently, in a longitudinal investigation of the context effect on the development of pragmatic comprehension, Taguchi (2008) reported that both Japanese ESL ($N = 57$) and EFL learners ($N = 60$) made significant gains in both accuracy and speed in comprehending indirect refusals and opinions after receiving about 120-130 hours of classroom instruction in the U.S. and Japan, respectively. Furthermore, Taguchi found that the Japanese EFL learners outperformed their ESL counterparts in interpreting indirect refusals.

The aforementioned research shows that the TL community is not a panacea for pragmatic development (DuFon & Churchill, 2006; Kasper & Rose, 2002), and learners in a non-target language setting can gain L2 pragmatic competence as their overall level of L2 proficiency increases. This body of research further indicates that a successful development in L2 pragmatics cannot solely depend on the environment of learning. It has more to do with the learners and their local context, such as their overall L2 proficiency, their utilization of the learning opportunities, and their willingness to accept the TL norms. The following subsection will discuss the effects of overall L2 proficiency on L2 pragmatics.

**2.3.2. Studies Examining Overall L2 Proficiency**

Like the effects of the learning environment, there is no agreement so far as to what extent and how overall L2 proficiency interacts with L2 pragmatics. There are two major claims regarding the relationships between overall L2 proficiency and L2 pragmatics: one is that there is a strong correlation between the two, L2 pragmatic competence progresses hand-in-hand with overall L2 proficiency; the other contests that overall L2 proficiency can serve as a vigorous indicator for L2 pragmatic

competence and insists that learners of lower overall L2 proficiency do not necessarily show inadequacy in L2 pragmatics as expected. Conversely, a high level of overall L2 proficiency does not guarantee an equally high level of pragmatic competence.

Early studies by Cohen and Olshtain (1981), Takahashi and Beebe (1987), Trosborg (1987), Houck and Gass (1996), and Koiko (1996) showed that lower proficiency learners lagged behind their higher proficiency partners in realizing speech acts. These studies evince that lack of grammatical and linguistic skills prevents less-proficient learners from developing their pragmatic competence.

In their examination of L2 apology strategies, Cohen and Olshtain (1981) and Trosborg (1987) found that because of their limitations in grammar knowledge and linguistic repertoire, L2 learners employed fewer semantic formulas and intensifiers in producing apologies. In Trosborg's case, the L2 learners took fewer responsibilities, offered fewer explanations, and tended to apologize directly. Studies investigating L2 refusals by Takahashi and Beebe (1987) and Houck and Gass (1996) reported similar findings. In Takahashi and Beebe's case, the higher proficiency learners were capable of employing modal adverbs to soften their refusals, whereas the lower proficiency learners were prone to refuse directly. Houck and Gass's lower proficiency learners took shorter turns, with an average of 3.5 words per turn, while the higher proficiency learners were more productive, with a turn of 10.7 words. Similarly, Koiko (1996) reported a proficiency effect in her study on Spanish suggestions. Koike found that lower-level students (1st - and 2nd -year students) were less likely to understand speech acts than their advanced-level counterparts (3rd -and 4th -year students).

The positive correlation between overall L2 proficiency and L2 pragmatic competence has also received acknowledgment from recent studies by Rose (2000),

Hassall (2003), Holtman (2005), Kobayashi and Rinner (2003), and Pellet (2005). Findings from these studies suggest that higher proficiency learners surpass their lower proficiency peers in being able to provide more adjuncts and supportive moves in apologies and requests, and they are more successful negotiators in dealing with imposition. They are also more active learners who invest more in their opportunity to live in the TL community. In addition, these studies agree that with growth in overall L2 proficiency, L2 learners improve their comprehension and production in L2 pragmatics.

For instance, Rose (2000) studied three speech acts by two groups of primary school students (from grades 2, 4, and 6) in Hong Kong: requests, apologies, and compliment responses. He found that students who were more proficient in English moved more quickly from direct to conventionally indirect request strategies, and employed more apology and compliment- response adjuncts than their less proficient peers.

In their research into *Coping with high imposition requests: High vs. low proficiency EFL students in Japan,* Kobayashi and Rinnert (2003) examined request behaviors at both proficiency levels of Japanese learners of English, using the learners' TOEFL scores as benchmarks. The higher proficiency group had a mean TOEFL score of 562.5, the lower one averaged 467.9; all higher proficiency learners had lived in an English-speaking environment for a considerable period of time; only two in the lower proficiency group had traveled in an English- speaking country. All learners were asked to perform in two role-play request situations with different levels of imposition on a native speaker of American English.

Data analysis showed that the higher proficiency group's performance was closer to that of the NSs in integrating more grounders and mitigators in making their

requests. In particular, they exhibited their expected pragmatic competence in the high imposition situation with an increased use of grounders, longer turns, more mitigators, and proper employment of grounders before requesting. Overall, they demonstrated their better understanding of requests in coping with both low and high imposition requests compared to the lower proficiency group.

In a study of complimenting by L2 learners of French at three levels of proficiency (beginning, intermediate, and advanced), Holtman (2005) postulated that learners' pragmatic performance went through a U-shaped curve: First they approximated their complimenting behaviors to those of the NSs of French, then deviated, and finally came closer again when their L2 proficiency increased. Similarly, Pellet (2005) explored the development of the use of the French discourse marker '*donc*' by three levels of American learners of French (intermediate, advanced, and very advanced). Again, she found that overall L2 proficiency correlated positively with the number and frequency of '*donc*.'

There is also counter-evidence showing that L2 pragmatic competence is not closely associated with overall L2 proficiency. This lack of association between overall L2 proficiency and L2 pragmatics has been attested by a number of studies, both cross-sectional and longitudinal. These studies have repeatedly conveyed a message that "high levels of grammatical competence do not guarantee concomitant high levels of pragmatic competence" (Bardovi-Harlig, 1999, p. 686) and L2 grammatical/linguistic competence alone is not sufficient to predict L2 pragmatic competence, though a foundation in grammar/linguistics is necessary (Hoffman-Hicks, 1992; Salsbury & Bardovi-Harlig, 2000, 2001).

In two separate studies, Scarcella (1979, 1983) found that even highly proficient L2 learners could not use appropriate politeness strategies to address their

interlocutors of varying social status. Their discourse accent remained and could not be completely erased, irrespective of their L2 proficiency and LOR. Using the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Pattern (CCSARP) data, Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1986) identified that the advanced learners overused external modifications when making written requests, which led to verbosity that might further result in pragmatic failures. The Waffle phenomenon, to borrow Edmondson and House's term (1991), is extremely salient with higher levels of learners. Similar claims have been made by Bergman and Kasper (1993), who examined apology strategies by Thai graduate students and by Kobayahshi and Rinnert (2003), who investigated request strategies of Japanese learners of English. One possible reason for learners' lengthy elaboration is their mistaken belief of "the more the better" (Færch & Kasper, 1989, p. 245). Another reason for their verbosity, offered by Edmondson and House (1991), might be their lack of confidence or their eagerness to get their messages across. If it is the latter case, learners of a higher level proficiency tend to have the linguistic resources to do so.

Eisenstein and Bodman (1986, 1993) studied expressions of gratitude and found that advanced learners displayed deficiency in expressing gratitude in a native-like manner, lacking idiomatic routines and adequate syntactic means to say "thank you." Most important and obvious, they deviated from NSs at the socio-pragmatic level in failing to make their expressions sound either complete or sincere. While studying pragmatic transfer, Takahashi and Beebe (1987) reported that learners of both levels of proficiency (high and low) in the ESL setting transferred their L1 pragmatic norms, an unexpected result, as they had assumed that only advanced learners could transfer because they had "the rope to hang themselves with" (p. 153).

While most studies have recounted advanced learners' incapacity to transform their acquired linguistic resources into their expected correlated pragmatic competence (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig & Harford, 1990, 1993, 1996; Hoffman-Hicks, 1992; Takahashi, 1996; Salsbury & Bardovi-Harlig, 2000, 2001; Felix-Brasdefer, 2003), Gass and Houck's work (1999) illustrated that the lack of pragmatic knowledge did not naturally pose an obstacle for their Japanese learners of English in performing refusals in daily life.

Gass and Houck (1999) discovered that their L2 learners not only made use of their L1 semantic formulas by instinct but also actively brought their linguistic and attitudinal repertoire into the problem-solving procedure. By trying a variety of pragmatic communication strategies (e.g., directness, indications of linguistic or sociocultural inadequacy, using their L1, sequential shifts and nonverbal expressions of affection), L2 learners were successful in problem-solving, demonstrating their potentiality and ability to compensate for their un-tackled pragmatic knowledge and underdeveloped pragmatic competence. Similarly, both Suh's (1999) and Safont Jorda's studies (2005) failed to discern a significant difference in pragmatic performance between two levels of proficiency learners (intermediate vs. advanced; beginning vs. intermediate) in terms of request strategies. As a matter of fact, in Suh's research, Korean ESL learners of both levels of proficiency demonstrated a near-native employment of politeness strategies in most cases.

By the same token, Shardakova's (2005) study of apology strategies by American learners of Russian uncovered that the increment in overall L2 proficiency did not bring about a correlated growth in performing apologies. Unexpectedly, in this study, learners of low proficiency and with limited experience of studying abroad were found to align themselves most with the native norms in the utilization of

apology strategies.

In her investigation of the comprehension of indirectness among Japanese ESL learners in the U.S., Taguchi (2002), however, found that, regardless of their English proficiency, Japanese ESL learners were able to interpret indirectness according to context, although the less proficient learners (i.e., learners from the Intensive English Program) relied more on background knowledge and key word inferencing while the more proficient learners (i.e., learners enrolled in undergraduate courses) identified the speaker's intention  more frequently.

As discussed, the effects of overall L2 proficiency on the development of L2 pragmatics are also mixed, and the discussion of the extent to which the two variables, the learning environment and overall L2 proficiency, contribute to the development of L2 pragmatics is still going on. It should be noted that the interaction among the learning environment, overall L2 proficiency, and L2 pragmatics should be interpreted with caution. This is because, as studies show (e.g., Kobayashi and Rinnert, 2003), some higher proficiency learners have lived in the TL community, or have lived there longer than their lower proficiency peers. It remains unclear whether it is overall L2 proficiency or exposure to the TL community that distinguishes learners at different levels in L2 pragmatic performance. This is also because, to date, only a few studies have examined the two variables in a single study (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998; Niezgoda & Röver, 2001; Schauer, 2006; Yamanaka, 2003). These studies, although small in number, present a stronger argument for the influence of both the learning environment and overall L2 proficiency on the development of L2 pragmatics.

### 2.3.3. Studies Examining both the Learning Environment and Overall L2 Proficiency

Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei (1998) present an early study in which they investigated learners' ability to recognize pragmatic and grammatical errors. The variables under investigation were the learning environment, LOR, and overall L2 proficiency. To this end, the researchers recruited students from Hungary and Italy who studied English as a foreign language (EFL) and international students in the U.S. who learned English as a second language (ESL). Five hundred and forty-three learners in Hungary and the U.S. and their 53 teachers supplemented by 112 Italian EFL speakers were first asked to watch a series of 20 scenarios exhibiting four speech acts: requests, apologies, suggestions, and refusals. They were further asked to identify the appropriateness of the last utterance of each scenario. If a negative judgment was given, they needed to scale the severity of the problematic utterances.

Data analyses indicated that the learning environment, LOR, and overall L2 proficiency made significant differences in learners' pragmatic and grammatical awareness. The ESL learners in the U.S. paid more attention to pragmatic violations, while the EFL learners in both Hungary and Italy were more sensitive to grammatical errors. Results also indicated that the ESL learners with a longer LOR considered pragmatic infelicities as more severe than their ESL counterparts with a shorter LOR. Moreover, with an increase in overall L2 proficiency, the ESL learners were more tolerant of grammatical mistakes but less tolerant of pragmatic errors, while the EFL learners showed the reverse tendency. The teachers outperformed their students in general; they recognized more errors of both types than their students. The EFL teachers lagged slightly behind the ESL teachers in recognizing fewer pragmatic infelicities, but they surpassed their ESL counterparts in identifying 100% of the

grammatical errors. Whereas the influence of the learning environment, LOR, and overall L2 proficiency was acknowledged in this study, that of learning environment and LOR was considered stronger variables by the researchers. The researchers asserted that it was the amount of input the participants received that caused the disparity in their sensitivity towards pragmatic violations.

A replication by Schauer (2006a) of Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei (1998) corroborated most of the original findings, confirming the positive effect of the TL community on raising learners' pragmatic awareness. Consistent with the original findings, results indicated that the low proficiency ESL learners in Great Britain demonstrated a higher degree of pragmatic awareness than their high proficiency EFL counterparts in Germany, and German ESL learners developed their pragmatic awareness significantly due to their one-year residence in the TL community. Retrospective talks with participants in Great Britain confirmed that living in the TL community first offered the learners opportunities to notice the differences between their output and that of native speakers. As their LOR prolonged, the learners learned to modify their language use and tended to adapt to the L2 norms. The most significant gains experienced by the German learners in Great Britain, however, were the acquisition of vocabulary and colloquial expressions, and listening comprehension and fluency. The limitation with this study is that the developmental aspects in L2 pragmatics among German EFL learners are not examined.

At the same time, however, some studies (e.g., Niezgoda & Röver, 2001) have found that L2 proficiency has a stronger effect on L2 pragmatics than LOR. In an attempt to determine whether a pool of exceptional EFL learners can overcome the lack of LOR, for example, Niezgoda and Röver (2001) launched their replicating study of Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei (1998). Employing the same instrument used in

the original study, Niezgoda and Röver (2001) found that their highly selected Czech EFL group (*N*= 124) with little LOR in the TL community outpaced the ESL group in the U.S. (*N* = 48) in detecting more mistakes of both types and regarded both types of mistakes as more severe than the ESL group.

The authors also found that the Czech EFL group matched the competence of the ESL group in noticing pragmatic errors, and they recognized more pragmatic infelicities than the EFL learners in the original study. Although the Czech EFL groups' sensitivity towards pragmatic errors was slightly lower than that of the ESL group, it was higher than that of EFL learners in the original study. With regard to overall L2 proficiency, this study suggested that learners of a lower proficiency in both groups recognized more pragmatic violations than grammatical errors, while higher proficiency learners showed the opposite tendency. The authors concluded that overall L2 proficiency might be a more reliable determinant in L2 pragmatics.

Findings from Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei (1998) and Niezgoda and Röver (2001) showed that both ESL groups judged pragmatic appropriateness as more important than their EFL counterparts. However, the researchers disagreed on to what extent the two variables, LOR or overall L2 proficiency, contributes to L2 pragmatics. One explanation for the discrepancy might be the variation in the purpose for studying English and overall L2 proficiency among the participants. In Niezgoda and Röver's (2001) study, the EFL group consisted of selected college students who had passed rigorous tests to gain admission into an English major degree program, and a second group of ESL students who were attending a private language school in Honolulu. The EFL group in Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei's (1998) study was secondary and college students who were taking noncredit courses or earning certificates in teaching English, and their ESL peers were learners with English proficiency from low-intermediate to

low-advanced levels.

Yamanaka (2003) is one of the few researchers who have computed the correlation among LOR, overall L2 proficiency and L2 pragmatics. In order to explore the influence of LOR and overall L2 proficiency on comprehending indirectness, Yamanaka (2003) first assigned 43 Japanese ESL learners in the U.S. to four groups based on their L2 proficiency. She computed and compared their performance with that of 13 native speakers on interpreting implicatures from 12 televised-vignettes. After identifying a proficiency effect on comprehending implicatures, Yamanaka then subcategorized the same number of Japanese ESL learners into three groups based on their LOR. Data analyses showed that although LOR correlated significantly with L2 pragmatics in terms of interpreting implicatures, the correlation between overall L2 proficiency and the ability to interpret implicatures was larger than that between LOR and the interpretation ability (a Person's $r$ of .603 versus a Person's $r$ of .497). Yamanaka concluded that, while both LOR and overall L2 proficiency contribute to L2 pragmatic comprehension, overall L2 proficiency is more influential and can serve as a stronger predicator in L2 pragmatics.

In sum, previous research has indicated that both the learning environment and overall L2 proficiency play key roles in L2 pragmatics (e.g., Bouton, 1988, 1992, 1994; Cook and Liddicoat, 2002; Garcia, 2004a, 2004b; Matsumura, 2001, 2003; Olshtain & Blum-Kulka, 1985; Rose, 2000; Schauer, 2006a, 2006b; 2007; Taguchi, 2002, 2007; 2008), and pragmatic and grammatical knowledge are largely independent (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998; Niezgoda & Röver, 2001). However, the lack of investigation into the influence of both variables in a single study makes it unclear which variable, the learning environment or overall L2 proficiency, contributes more to the development of L2 pragmatics. Additionally, the

limited number of studies on the development of L2 pragmatics across settings makes

the effects of the learning environment on L2 pragmatic development even more

vague.

**2.4.    Summary**

This chapter presents the theoretical background for the present study. Against

this background, the effects of two variables pertaining to the development of L2

pragmatics have been reviewed: the learning environment and overall L2 proficiency.

These two variables, together with reference to L2 grammatical competence, are

discussed because they triangulate the information on the relationship among the

environment of learning, overall level of L2 proficiency, and L2 pragmatic

development. This information is beneficial to the present study because this study

sets out to examine the effects of both the learning environment and overall L2

proficiency on the development of L2 pragmatic competence, with reference to

grammatical knowledge, by expanding Bardovi-Harlig and Nörnyei's (1998) study.

In Chapter 3, the methodology of this study is described: the design, the

settings, the participants, the instruments, the procedures of data collection, and data

analyses. A discussion of reliability and validity is also included.

**Chapter 3**

**Method**

This study explores the influence of the learning environment and overall L2 proficiency on the development of pragmatic competence among college students in English as both a second and a foreign language, with reference to L2 grammatical competence. Two groups of English language learners in the U.S. (ESL groups 1 & 2) and one group of English language learners in China (the EFL group) participated in this study. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected. The rationale for collecting both quantitative and qualitative data is that it helps to get a more comprehensive understanding of the participants' performance on the tests by first analyzing the quantitative results and then associating the test results with their verbal accounts. This methodology also allows for a further pursuit of what cannot be obtained from the test scores. Data collection lasted for one academic year, through the semesters of fall 2007 to spring 2008.

Quantitatively, a pre-test and a post-test were administered. Descriptive data were computed and analyzed to answer research questions 1, 2, and 3 by documenting participants' pragmatic and grammatical competence at the initial stage and at the end of the study. The qualitative data consisted of written production on the tests and retrospective interviews with participants to tackle research questions 4 and 5. The researcher also sat in on one of the EFL group's classes to gain first hand information about their English language learning. Informal talks with EFL instructors and administrators were conducted as well. Finally, the findings from each set of data were integrated to draw conclusions.

In contrast to the majority of previous studies in ILP research, this study did not include a group of native speakers to elicit data as a baseline. This is because of

the researcher's belief that L2 learners' pragmatic competence should be assessed in its own right. While the native speakers' performance is valuable in serving as a yardstick to determine the deviation of L2 performance, native standards should not be cherished as a sole objective for L2 acquisition.

## 3.1. Settings and Participants

### 3.1.1. Settings

This study took place simultaneously in two sites: a research institute in a western state of the U.S. and a research institute in northeastern China.

### 3.1.2. Participants in the U.S.

Two groups of students who were studying in the U.S. were invited to participate in the study. ESL group 1 consisted of 60 international graduate students who were ESL learners with an advanced English proficiency. ESL group 2[1] included 60 undergraduate college students from the same institute as ESL group 1. They were ESL learners of low-to-advanced intermediate level. Both ESL groups were snowball samples. They spoke 20 languages and represented 17 countries in Africa, Asia, Europe, and South America.

These two academic levels were considered as two distinct English proficiency levels as determined by the admission score of TOEFL. To hold an assistantship in this university, a graduate student needs a TOEFL score of 550 or above. At the time of the study, all but seven of the 60 graduate students held an assistantship from their individual academic departments. The seven graduates who did not have an assistantship were students from an MA/TESOL program which

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[1] This group was originally designed to be Japanese college students who would attend a language training program at a private institute in Washington State. Due to unforeseen circumstances, they were not available for this study. The researcher recruited undergraduate international students from the University instead.

required a TOEFL score of at least 550. At the time of the study, the average TOEFL score of this university for graduate students ($N$= 339) was 576.74, with a range from 550 to 667. For undergraduate students ($N$ = 934), it was 528.24 with a range from 310 to 677. The 60 graduate students consisted of 24 females and 36 males with an age range from 23 to 40 years old (mean = 27.11). When the study began, there were 15 of them who had been in the U.S. for less than one month. As a whole, their LOR in the U.S. ranged from three weeks to eleven years, with a mean of 24.30 months. Twenty-nine were from China.

Of the 60 undergraduate students, 21 were taking ESL courses. Among them, three had a TOEFL score above 600, seven between 550 and 600, and the rest had either a TOEFL score below 550 or had not taken any proficiency tests. Forty-four came to the U.S. soon after they had finished their secondary education; three had earned their bachelor's degree; the remaining 13 had completed one to two years of college education in their home countries. There were 25 males and 35 females, with ages ranging from 18 to 29 years (mean = 20.08). When the study began, 18 had been in the U.S. for less than six months. Their LOR in the U.S. ranged from three weeks to five years, with a mean of 17.15 months. Fourteen were Chinese. Eleven were attending various ESL courses in the Intensive Language Center during the study.

### 3.1.3. Participants in China

Participants in group 3 (the EFL group, $N$ = 60) were second-year college students from a four-year university in northeastern China; they were EFL learners who were studying software technology (a purposive sample). They came from ten provinces and districts, and their university is one of the top universities in the country. To get admitted, the students had to pass national entrance examinations, and English was one of the tested subjects.

College students in China must pass a certain level of the College English Test to meet graduation requirements. The College English Test (CET) is a test battery which was launched in the late 1980s to measure college students' overall English proficiency and to promote the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language. The CET was developed by Chinese English language testing professionals. Since its inception, the CET has been believed to " meet the international standards of educational assessment" (Jin & Yang, 2006, p. 21). The CET consists of two written tests of Band 4 (CET-4) and Band 6 (CET-6), and one Spoken English Test (CET-9). As non-English majors, students need to pass the CET-6, which requires a score of at least 60 out of 100 to get a bachelor's degree.

In the university from which the participants came, the students are required to take English lessons for two academic years, which means they need to get their CET-6 certificates upon completion of their English learning. When the study began, all participants were in their second year of English instruction and had their CET-4 certificates in hand; by the time the study ended, all of them had passed the CET-6. It can be assumed that their English proficiency developed significantly over one academic year.

During the time of this study, the participants received English instruction from both their Chinese instructors and native English speakers from the U.S. and Canada. In the previous year, they had native English speakers from Australia and New Zealand. From their native English-speaking instructors, they had English conversation three times a week for about two hours each meeting. The purpose of inviting native English speakers to the classrooms, according to the Director of the English Department, was to provide the students with a model to imitate and to improve their communicative language skills.

From their Chinese instructors, the EFL group studied English eight hours per week from a series of textbooks called *Inside Out* by Macmillan Publishers Limited, United Kingdom. This edition is only for mainland China's audience. Although designed to further develop the four basic skills in English – listening, speaking, reading, and writing, it focuses more on fostering communicative competence. Throughout the study, the EFL group was learning *Series No. 3*, which is at the upper-intermediate level. The book consists of articles and reviews from English newspapers and magazines about current events and figures in the world such as Hollywood celebrities; it critiques contemporary thinking on issues of money, family, and cosmetic surgery, among others. It also teaches the learners to talk functionally in an interview and to write pragmatically, such as for a curriculum vitae. At the end of each semester, there is a final examination in both written and oral forms to evaluate their progress. According to the Chinese instructor interviewed, after two years of college English, the students are expected to meet basic needs for their future. In addition to the two years of English instruction, the students had to learn a second foreign language of their choice and pass a minimal exam to meet the graduation requirements.

Of the 60 participants in the EFL group, there were ten girls and 50 boys ranging in age from 19 to 22 years (mean = 20.6). No one had ever been in an English speaking country. One had been to Japan for a week on a tour; another had visited friends and relatives in Russia. Five had some knowledge of Japanese, and one had some French. Before college, they had studied English as a school subject for six to 14 years, depending on the English education arrangement in their hometowns. The average in English as a foreign language instruction for this group was 8.25 years.

Each participant received a $5.00 gift card as a form of appreciation for

participation. To avoid coercion, they were informed of, and given, the gift cards at the end of the study. Their bio-data are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

*Bio-Data of Participants*

| Group | *N* | Gender | | Age mean | LOR mean in the U.S. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | M | F | | |
| ESL group 1 | 60 (29 Chinese) | 36 | 24 | 27.11 | 17.15 months |
| ESL group 2 | 60 (14 Chinese) | 25 | 35 | 20.08 | 24.30 months |
| EFL group | 60 (all Chinese) | 50 | 10 | 20. 6 | none |
| Total | 180 | 111 | 69 | | |

## 3.2.    Data Collection

### 3.2.1.  Instrument

The quantitative data were elicited with an expanded and validated questionnaire of 20 conversations based on Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei's (1998) study. The instrument consisted of 20 written scenarios with discourse completion tasks (see the following page). Each scenario presented a conversation which could take place in an educational setting. Of the 20 scenarios, there were eight with pragmatic infelicities but without grammatical mistakes, eight grammatically incorrect but pragmatically correct scenarios, and four scenarios with no mistakes of any kind (controls). The eight pragmatic scenarios presented various kinds of inappropriateness, including the lack of explanation in a refusal and a request, a request with a bare imperative, a denial of the offense in an apology, and the lack of mitigators in a suggestion. The eight grammatically incorrect but pragmatically

correct scenarios contained mistakes, such as a zero object, a double use of the past tense, inversion in an embedded question, and –*ing* with a modal (See Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei's study for a full discussion of the instrument). Pragmatic competence on four speech acts was measured: requests, apologies, suggestions, and refusals. Below is an example of pragmatic inappropriateness:

> The teacher asks Peter to help with the plans for the class trip.
>
> T:  OK, so we'll go by bus. Who lives near the bus station? Peter, could you check the bus times for us on the way home tonight?
>
> P:  #No, I can't tonight. Sorry.
>
> ☐            ☐
>
> Is the last part appropriate/correct?            Yes            No
>
> If there is a problem, how bad do you think it is?
>
> Not bad at all＿＿＿:＿＿＿:＿＿＿＿:＿＿＿＿: ＿＿＿:＿＿＿＿Very bad
>
> And, how would you revise it?
>
> ＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿

The following is an illustration of a grammatical mistake:

> Peter and George are classmates. George invites Peter to his house, but Peter cannot come.
>
> G:  Peter, would you like to come over to my house tonight?
>
> P:     *I'm sorry, I just can't. I'm very tired. I couldn't sleep on last night.
>
> ☐            ☐
>
> Is the last part appropriate/correct?            Yes            No
>
> If there is a problem, how bad do you think it is?
>
> Not bad at all＿＿＿:＿＿＿:＿＿＿＿:＿＿＿＿: ＿＿＿:＿＿＿＿Very bad
>
> And, how would you revise it?

The following is an example of error-free in either type:

George is going to the library. Peter asks him to return a library book.

G: Well, I'll see you later. I've got to go to the library to return my books.

P: Oh, if you are going to the library, can you please return my book too?

☐ ☐

Is the last part appropriate/correct?  Yes  No

If there is a problem, how bad do you think it is?

Not bad at all____:_____:_____:_____: _____:_____Very bad

And, how would you revise it?

_____

The qualitative response of the discourse completion tasks uniquely expanded the present research to an area absent in the original study. This expansion allowed the researcher to accurately measure the participants' competence in both respects.

The researcher did not employ the video-taped scenarios as used in the original study (Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998). There were two reasons which justified this. First, although the video-taped scenarios could provide the participants with more cues and hints to determine each scenario and could bring the participants closer to the real life situations as claimed by the designers, it challenges the participants' listening comprehension ability. It might be the case that participants fail to recognize a problematic scenario, not because of their competence in either pragmatic or grammatical knowledge, but because of their listening ability. In this sense, the original study examined not only pragmatic and grammatical awareness, but also listening comprehension. Thereafter, the deviations in the outcome of the original study might be partly caused by participants' listening comprehension competence. In order to measure accurately the participants' pragmatic and

grammatical competence, the researcher decided to use a written questionnaire. The second reason for using written scenarios was to accommodate the schedule of each participant. In doing this, participants could complete the questions at their convenience, without disturbing their schedules.

### 3.2.2. Procedure

*Background information sheet*. Background information questionnaires (Appendix 1 & 2) were distributed in fall 2007 for ESL group 1 and the EFL group, in early spring 2008 for ESL group 2. These questionnaires helped to get the demographic information of the participants.

*Tests*. Participants completed twice the written questionnaire measuring their pragmatic and grammatical competence: a pre-test and a post-test over one academic year for ESL group 1 and the EFL group, and over one semester for ESL group 2. The participants were shown a written scenario of what was expected of them. First, they indicated the correctness of the last utterances in the 20 scenarios by checking *yes* or *no* (see above for an example). If the answer was *no*, the participants then rated the severity of the incorrectness on a Likert-scale of 6 points from "*not bad at all*" to "*very bad*." Finally, the participants completed a discourse completion task to replace the utterances that they thought incorrect. If the answer was *yes*, the participants proceeded to the next scenario.

In the U.S., some of the participants finished the questionnaire while the researcher waited (e.g., in her office, in the library), and some took it home and returned it at a later time. In China, the participants completed it in school. All participants were encouraged to ask questions when needed. Those participants who speak Chinese as their native language were further informed of the procedures/requirements in Chinese, and those who do not speak Chinese were asked

to explain the procedures/requirements to the researcher in order to make sure that everyone understood. It took the participants about 25 minutes to finish each test.

*Retrospective interviews*. Compared to other lines of research in SLA, there has been little use of retrospective interviews in ILP research (Gass & Mackey, 2000). The majority of the research in ILP analyzes test scores and speculates about learners' performance. Learners' voices and rationales for their decision-making are less investigated. As a result, little is known about how learners make their choices on the tests, and why some learners make an improvement while others do not.

The present study included retrospective interview data in order to tap into learners' decision-making processes, and, more important, to find out what leads to or hinders participants' progress in L2 pragmatics. In addition, informal verbal exchanges with EFL instructors (both Chinese and native English-speaking) and EFL classroom observations were also conducted. The analysis of this qualitative data was twofold: to help answer the last research question: How does social and academic life relate to the development L2 pragmatic competence in each context, and to supplement the results on the tests and to be used as a point of triangulation. This analysis also qualified valid or inconsistent responses from the quantitative results. The interviews were semi-structured, audio-taped, and conducted individually. The interview questions were constructed based on the research interests (Appendix 3 & 4), and they also allowed the researcher to follow up on learners' responses when needed.

Each interview began with a review of scenarios, for which the interviewee did not get points. The participants were reminded of the purpose of the study before the interviews started. They were encouraged to ask questions for clarification. During the interviews, they were asked to explain and comment on their responses to

the tests and to share their language learning experience in their local communities. To help them recall, their answers were reviewed when required. As mentioned in Chapter 3, ten participants from ESL group 1, eight from ESL group 2, and eight from the EFL group were interviewed after the post-test. With participants who spoke Mandarin Chinese as their L1, the conversations were carried out in Chinese; with the others, the interviews were in English.

With the EFL group, documentation, such as syllabi and coursework, was examined. Informal talks with instructors/administrators and classroom observations were also conducted in order to understand environmental teaching strategies and program development. These qualitative data offered insight into context behind the tests. The instruments used and the timeline for each procedure were as follows

Table 2.

*Instruments and Timeline*

| Instruments | Timeline | Purpose(s) |
|---|---|---|
| Background Information Questionnaire | September 2007 (ESL group 1) January 2008 (ESL group 2) October 2007 (EFL group) | Acquired demographic information from the participants |
| Pre-test | September 2007 (ESL group 1) January 2008 (ESL group 2) October 2007 (EFL group) | Documented participants' initial pragmatic competence |
| Post-test | Early May 2008 (ESL group 1) Late May 2008 (ESL group 2) June 2008 (EFL group) | Identified changes in pragmatic competence |
| Interviews | May 2008 after the post-test (ESL group 1 & 2) June 2008 after the post-test (EFL group) | Sought explanations for participants' responses, got information on participants' one-/half-year experience in the ESL /EFL communities, & documented structures of the program for the EFL Group |

### 3.3.    Data Analysis

Quantitatively, both pragmatic and grammatical competence was measured in terms of identification and correction of problematic utterances and sensitivity towards problems. The participants earned a score of "1" for identification (pragmatic or grammatical) if a mistake was correctly identified and a reasonable explanation was provided. The participants obtained a score of "0" for identification if a mistake was incorrectly detected or a mistake was correctly identified, but with no acceptable response/rationale. All scenarios were analyzed except for the last one[2]. The coding themes were based on Bardovi-Harlig and Griffin's (2005) study. New patterns were also generated according to the present production.

Responses/rationales for the 1st pragmatically problematic scenario (*Class Trip*) shown above were deemed as acceptable:

*Sorry, I cannot tonight. I'm busy.* (with a reason)

*Sorry, I'm not going home tonight.* (with a reason)

*I'm sorry that I cannot tonight, because…* (no production but knowing what's wrong)

*Needs more elaboration.* (no production but knowing what's wrong)

*Sorry, I cannot. Can you find somebody else?* (offering an alternative)

*I cannot tonight. How about tomorrow?* (offering an alternative)

Such answers as *Sorry, I can't tonight*, which was just reordering the formulas, and *Okay, I will do it*, which was turned into an acceptance, were rejected.

Answers to the 2nd pragmatically problematic scenario (*Snack Bar*) identified

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[2] The last scenario was not considered as saliently problematic according to the U.S. ESL teachers in Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei's (1998) study.

as proper were as follows:

*Would you please give me a sandwich and yogurt?* (acceptable production)

*Would you give me a sandwich and yogurt, please?* (acceptable production)

*A sandwich and yogurt, please.* (acceptable production)

*I would like to have a sandwich and yogurt.* (acceptable production)

*Can you give me a sandwich and yogurt, please?* (acceptable production)

*Too formal.* (no production but with an acceptable rationale)

*A little bit too much.* (no production but with an acceptable rationale)

For the 3rd pragmatically problematic scenario (*Not Ready*), the following adjustments were accepted:

*Sorry, I can't do it today but I will do it next week.* (apology with an alternative)

*I'm very sorry, I can't do it today but I will do it next week.* (apology with an alternative)

*Sorry, I'm not ready. I was sick last night.* (apology with an explanation)

Repairs made to the 4th pragmatically problematic scenario (*Directions*) such as follows were regarded as acceptable:

*Would you please tell me the way to the library?* (change of form)

*Excuse me, where is the library?* (an alerter in a question)

*Can you tell me where the library is?* (change of form)

*Not polite.* (rational)

*Sorry to trouble you, but where is the library?* (with an alerter)

As for the 5th pragmatically problematic scenario (*Late*), the following explanations were accepted:

*I feel sorry for George. Peter should say sorry.* (showing sympathy)

*I'm sorry for being late. But I couldn't come earlier.* (apology)

*I'm sorry, but I had a car accident.* (apology with excuses)

*I'm sorry for being late. I wanted to call you but I don't have a cell phone.* (apology with excuses)

*I'm sorry for being late. I won't be late next time.* (apology with a promise of forbearance)

For the 6th pragmatically problematic scenario (*Busy Teacher*), answers such as follows were considered proper:

*How about tomorrow morning at 8?* (negotiation of time)

*Are you available tomorrow?* (negotiation of time)

*Are you free at 8 tomorrow?* (negotiation of time)

*When are you free, then?* (change of form)

*If you don't mind, can I come back tomorrow morning at 8?* (Change of form)

For the 7th pragmatically problematic scenario (*Questionnaire*), the following repairs were acknowledged:

*…If you don't mind, can you help me with this form?* (change of form)

*…Sorry to trouble you. Would you mind filling this in for me?* (pre-query)

*…Do you have the time to fill this in for me? I'm a student in your class.* (request with an explanation)

*…I need your help. If you don't mind, will you please help me with this?* (explanation and change of form)

*…I wonder if you can help me with this.* (pre-query)

The researchers converted all *yes* answers (including a *no* response without an acceptable response/rationale) to 0 on the scale of severity ratings ranging from 1 to 6. Each participant accumulated five scores from each test – two for error correction

(pragmatic and grammatical), two for severity ratings, and one for controls. The researchers analyzed pragmatic items separately from grammatical ones.

Participants' performances across tests were calculated: means, standard deviations (*SD*s), effect sizes, and the *f- and t*-values across groups for error correction and severity ratings. Factorial analyses of variance (ANOVAs) with effect sizes and successive independent and matched-sample *t*-tests were computed in order to seek differences in identification of both items (i.e., grammatical and pragmatic), to identify correlation between pragmatic and grammatical competence, and to seek growth within groups. These measurements quantified the degree of difference by which the three groups of learners develop their pragmatic competence. The measurements also revealed the magnitude of difference within groups.

Qualitatively, the written production was coded, based on the framework from Bardovi-Harlig and Griffin (2005) as previously introduced. The interviews were transcribed by the researcher, and then were reviewed by one of her colleagues. After transcription, the researcher read through the transcripts, making notes and memos in the margin. Keeping the research interests in mind, i.e., the effects of the learning environment and overall L2 proficiency on the development of L2 pragmatics, the researcher coded and analyzed the interview data according to these two categories.

## 3.4.    Reliability and Validity

The Cronbach α internal consistency coefficient of each scale was computed to determine the reliability of the instrument. The statistics of severity rating scale for pragmatic and grammatical items were .76 and .81, respectively, for the present study. For Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei's (1998) study, they were .72 and .77; for Niezgoga and Röver's (2001) study, they were .73 and .79, respectively. These coefficients have

proven that the instrument is reliable. The content validity of this instrument was first established by Bordovi-Harlig and Dörnyei (1998). Before administering the instrument to 708 students and teachers in three regions, they gave the instrument to their sample of ESL teachers in the U.S. to evaluate. It was used again by Niezgoda and Röver (2001) and Schauer (2006a) with 172 and 53 participants, respectively.

For the qualitative part, low-inference descriptors and peer review were utilized to ensure the validity of the study (Johnson & Christensen, 2000). To enhance its validity, direct quotes from the participants and participants' feedback to the interpretations were also incorporated.

### 3.5. Summary

This chapter introduces the research design, settings, participants, instruments, procedures of data collection, and data analysis approaches. The issues of reliability and validity are also discussed. In the next chapter, the findings will be presented.

**Chapter 4**

**Results**

This study examines the influence of the learning environment and overall L2 proficiency on the development of L2 pragmatics, with reference to grammatical competence. This chapter reports the results of this examination. It first presents the results across tests – error correction and severity ratings. Pragmatic and grammatical competence was measured in terms of correction of problematic utterances and of sensitivity towards problems. Pragmatic items were analyzed separately from grammatical ones. Second, it reports findings from written production on pragmatic items, followed by findings from retrospective interviews.

**4.1.    Test Score Results**

**4.1.1.  Pre-Test**

As introduced in Chapter 3, for ESL group 1 and the EFL group, the pre-tests were undertaken at the onset of the study, i.e., in September and October 2007, respectively. For ESL group 2, the pre-test took place in January 2008.

*Error Correction*. In order to determine the extent to which the learning environment and overall L2 proficiency contribute to L2 pragmatics and grammar in identifying and producing acceptable utterances, one-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were conducted on the percentage means on the pre-test on pragmatic and grammatical error corrections. Table 3 presents the means and standard deviations for all groups.

Table 3

*Error Corrections (%) in the Pre-Test*
*(0 = no mistakes; 1 = a mistake with an acceptable correction/rationale)*

| Group | N | M P/G* | SD P/G* |
|---|---|---|---|
| ESL group 1 (grads in the U.S.) | 60 | .69/ .65 | .86/.54 |
| ESL group 2 (undergrads in the U.S.) | 60 | .45/.47 | .27/.28 |
| EFL group (undergrads in China) | 60 | .56/ .30 | .27/.27 |

*Note*. *P = pragmatics; G = grammar.

One-way ANOVAs were calculated on these mean scores. For pragmatic error corrections, the calculation produced a significant analysis of variance: $F(2,177) = 3.03$, $p = .05$, $\eta^2$ (effect size) $= .03$[3]. Multiple comparisons with the Tukey *HSD* test revealed a significant difference of means between ESL group 1 and ESL group 2 ($p = .04$).

For grammatical error corrections, the calculation also produced a significant analysis of variance: $F(2,177) = 11.92$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .12$, indicating a strong effect size. Multiple comparisons with the Tukey *HSD* test revealed that differences existed between two pair-wise comparisons of the means of ESL group 1 ($M = .65$) and ESL group 2 ($M = .47$): $p = .03$, and of ESL group 1 and the EFL group ($M = .30$): $p < .001$.

To calculate the relationship between pragmatic and grammatical competence within groups, a paired-sample *t*-test was computed on the percentage means of error corrections for each group. These paired-sample *t*-tests showed a significant

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[3]According to Sprinthall (2003), an effect size ($\eta^2$) of .01 is small, of .06 medium, and of .14 large, respectively.

difference in error corrections of both types for only the EFL group. Undergraduate

students in China who corrected considerably more pragmatic than grammatical

mistakes: $t = 6.35$, $df = 59$, $p < .001$, with a strong effect size: Cohen's $d = .82$[4].

Differences in correcting mistakes between types for the two ESL groups in the U.S.

were not significant (ESL group 1: $t = .17$, $df = 59$, $p = .86$, n.s.; ESL group 2: $t = .43$,

$df = 59$, $p = .67$, n.s.).

     To summarize, in respect to pragmatic competence, graduate students in the

U.S. (ESL group1) were capable of recognizing and correcting more pragmatic

violations than undergraduate students in the U.S. (ESL group 2) but not more than

undergraduate students in China (the EFL group). Regarding grammatical competence,

graduate students outperformed undergraduate students in the U.S. and China in

having a greater ability to correct problematic utterances. However, compared to the

two groups of undergraduate students, the graduate students showed larger standard

deviations in both types examined: pragmatics- $SD$ ESL group 1 $= .86$, $SD$ ESL group 2

$= .27$, $SD$ EFL group $= .27$; grammar- $SD$ ESL group 1$= .54$, $SD$ ESL group 2 $= .28$, $SD$ EFL

group $= .27$. These results reveal greater within-group variation with ESL group 1 than

the other two groups in identifying and correcting errors of either type. Within groups,

while participants in the U.S. (ESL groups 1 & 2), regardless of their overall L2

proficiency, showed a non-significant difference in correcting errors between types,

participants in China (the EFL group) demonstrated a stronger ability to correct more

pragmatic than grammatical errors.

     ***Severity Ratings.*** To determine to what extent the learning environment and

overall L2 proficiency contribute to the learners' attitudes towards pragmatic and

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[4] According to Cohen (1988), effect sizes of .2, .5, and .8 are small, medium, and large, respectively.

grammatical violations, one-way ANOVAs were computed on the mean scores on the

pre-test across groups on rating pragmatic and grammatical errors. Table 4 displays

the means and standard deviations for these three groups.

Table 4

*Severity Ratings in the Pre-Test (1 = not bad at all; 6 = very bad)*

| Group | *N* | *M* P/G* | *SD* P/G* |
|---|---|---|---|
| ESL group 1 (grads in the U.S.) | 60 | 3.60/3.27 | 1.39/1.18 |
| ESL group 2 (undergrads in the U.S.) | 60 | 3.72/2.98 | 1.66/1.46 |
| EFL group (undergrads in China) | 60 | 4.16/2.97 | 1.68/1.59 |

*Note.* *P = pragmatics; G = grammar.

One-way ANOVAs were calculated on these mean scores. No significant

difference was found among groups in terms of pragmatic severity ratings:

$F (2,177) = 2.06$, $p = .13$, n.s. The differences for grammatical severity ratings among

groups were not significant either: $F (2,177) = .85$, $p = .43$, n.s. However,

paired-sample *t*-tests revealed that the differences in severity ratings between the two

types (pragmatic and grammatical) were significant for both ESL group 2: $t = 2.69$,

$df =59$, $p =.01$, $d = .35$, and the EFL group: $t = 4.12$, $df =59$, $p < .001$, $d = .53$, but not

for ESL group 1: $t = 1.65$, $df =59$, $p =.11$, n.s. These results suggest that while

graduate students treated mistakes of both types as equally serious, undergraduate

students, irrespective of their social settings, considered pragmatic violations as more

severe than grammatical errors.

To sum up, all participants showed a similar attitude towards pragmatic

infelicities; all groups rated grammatical errors as equally serious. Participants of advanced proficiency exhibited identical attitudes towards mistakes of both types. Participants of low proficiency in both contexts considered being pragmatically right as more important than being grammatically accurate.

### 4.1.2. Post-Test: Development

The influence of the learning environment on the development of learners' pragmatic competence was not examined in Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei's (1998) or Niezgoda and Röver's (2001) studies. In Schauer's (2006a) research, only the effect of length of residence in the target culture (i.e., in England) was explored. Two sub-questions were asked in order to provide a fuller understanding of the influence of the learning environment and overall L2 proficiency on developing L2 pragmatic competence: 1) Does the correlation between pragmatic and grammatical competence change over time? and 2) Do learners' attitudes towards pragmatic and grammatical violations change over time? The present study conducted a post-test for all groups. The post-test was carried out through May to June 2008.

***Error Correction***. One-way ANOVAs were carried out on percentage means of the post-test for all groups on pragmatic and grammatical error corrections. Table 5 presents the means and standard deviations for these three groups.

Table 5

*Error Corrections (%) in the Post-Test*
*(0 = no mistakes; 1 = a mistake with an acceptable correction/rationale)*

|                                      |     | *M* P/G\* | *SD* P/G\* |
| ------------------------------------ | --- | --------- | ---------- |
| Group                                | *N* | P/G\*     | P/G\*      |
| ESL group 1 (grads in the U.S.)      | 60  | .79/.67   | 1.02/.61   |
| ESL group 2 (undergrads in the U.S.) | 60  | .57/.53   | .27/.31    |
| EFL group (undergrads in China)      | 60  | .79/.50   | .17/.28    |

*Note.* \*P = pragmatics; G = grammar.

One-way ANOVAs were calculated on these mean scores. Neither examination produced a significant analysis of variance: pragmatic – $F$ (2, 177) = 2.54, $p$ = .08, n.s.; grammatical – $F$ (2, 177) = 2.64, $p$ = .07, n.s. While on the pre-test, there was a significant difference in means between ESL group 1 and ESL group 2 (*M* ESL group 1 = .69 versus *M* ESL group 2 = .45, $p$ = .04) with regard to pragmatic error corrections, the difference was not found on the post-test, indicating ESL group 2 developed significantly in their ability to identify and correct more pragmatic errors over one semester. In addition, the pre-test showed existing differences among two pair-wise comparisons of grammatical corrections (i.e., between ESL group 1 and ESL group 2 and between ESL group 1 and the EFL group). On the post-test, there was no mean difference across groups. This result reveals that both ESL group 2 and the EFL group gained grammatical competence considerably over time.

Paired-sample *t*-tests, conducted to measure the growth for each group, revealed significant pragmatic gains for ESL group 2 ($t$ = 3.52, $df$ = 59, $p$ = .001, $d$ = .45) and the EFL group ($t$ = 6.94, $df$ = 59, $p$ < .001, $d$ = .90), but not for ESL

group 1 ($t = 1.21$, $df = 59$, $p = .23$, n.s.). As for grammatical competence, only the

EFL group saw a significant gain: $t = 5.16$, $df = 59$, $p < .001$, $d = .67$. Neither ESL

group 1($t = .16$, $df = 59$, $p = .88$, n.s.) nor ESL group 2 ($t = 1.71$, $df = 59$, $p = .09$, n.s.)

gained significantly in grammar on the post-test. As can be seen in Table 6 below, the

undergraduate students in the U.S. (i.e., ESL group 2) developed significantly in their

ability to correct pragmatic mistakes over one semester, and the undergraduate

students in China (i.e., the EFL group) grew both pragmatically and grammatically

over one academic year. Table 6 summarizes the percentage means for groups

between the pre- and post-tests and the results of paired-sample $t$-tests regarding error

corrections.

Table 6

*Participants' Error Corrections (%) across Tests*
*(0 = no mistakes; 1 = a mistakes with an acceptable correction/rationale)*

| Group | $N$ | Type | $M$ pre- /post-test | $SD$ pre- /post-test | $p$ | Effect size |
|-------|-----|------|---------------------|----------------------|-----|-------------|
| ESL group 1 | 60 | Pragmatics | .69/.79 | .86/1.02 | .23 | n.s. |
| (grads in the U.S.) | | Grammar | .65/.67 | .54/.61 | .88 | n.s. |
| ESL group 2 | 60 | Pragmatics | .45/.57 | .27/.27 | .001 | .45 |
| (undergrads in the U.S.) | | Grammar | .47/.53 | .28/.31 | .09 | n.s. |
| EFL group | 60 | Pragmatics | .56/.79 | .27/.17 | <.001 | .90 |
| (undergrads in China) | | Grammar | .30/.50 | .27/.28 | <.001 | .67 |

Figure 4 and 5 present the bar graphs of the results from the tests.
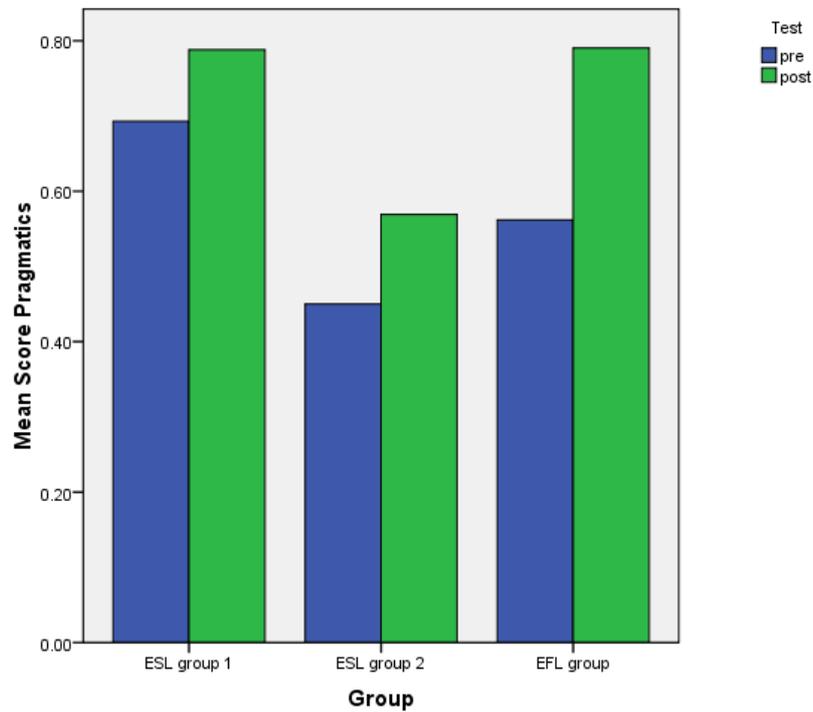


*Figure 4*. The development of pragmatic competence.
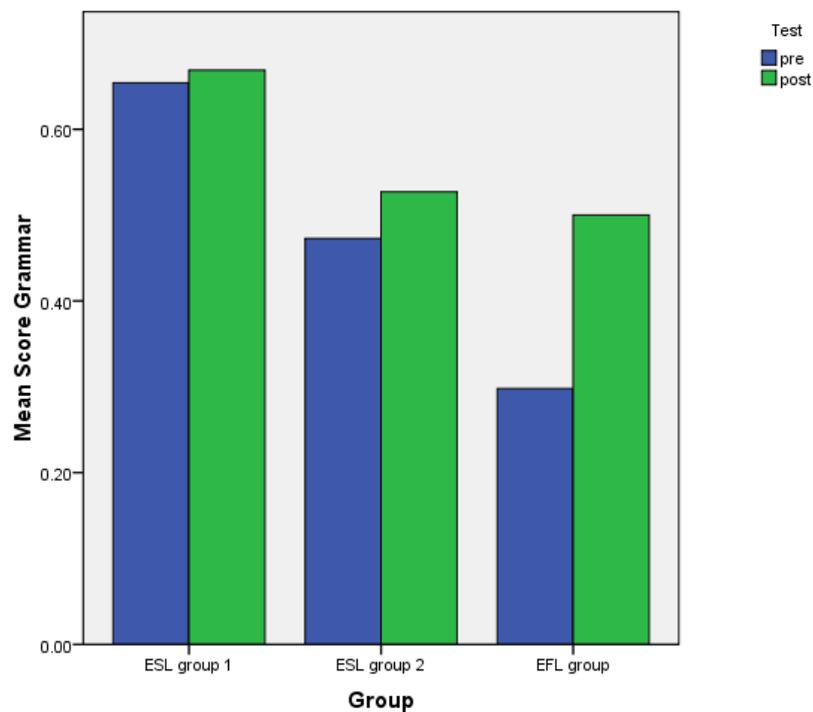


*Figure 5*. The development of grammatical competence

With respect to the relationship between pragmatic and grammatical competence, while the two ESL groups showed no considerable mismatch between pragmatic and grammatical competence on the pre-test (ESL group 1: $t = .17$, $df = 59$, $p = .86$, n.s.; ESL group 2: $t = .43$, $df = 59$, $p = .67$, n.s.), the EFL group exhibited more pragmatic than grammatical competence ($t = 6.35$, $df = 59$, $p < .001$, $d = .82$). On the post-test, a similar result was seen: the EFL group continued showing their stronger pragmatic competence in correcting more pragmatic than grammatical errors ($t = 8.39$, $df = 59$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.08$). The differences on the post-test within the two ESL groups were not salient, as they were found on the pre-test ($t$ ESL group 1 $= .91$, $df = 59$, $p = .37$, n.s.; $t$ ESL group 2 $= .76$, $df = 59$, $p = .45$, n.s.). Table 7 displays the results of these analyses.

Table 7

*Participants' Pragmatic and Grammatical Competence across Tests*

| Group | *N* | Test | *M* P/G* | *SD* P/G* | *p* | *Effect Size* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ESL Group 1 | 60 | pre- | .69/.65 | .86/.54 | .86 n.s. | |
| (grads in the U.S.) | | post- | .79/.67 | 1.02/.61 | .37 n.s. | |
| ESL Group 2 | 60 | pre- | .45/.47 | .27/.28 | .67 n.s. | |
| (undergrads in the U.S.) | | post- | .57/.53 | .27/.31 | .45 n.s. | |
| EFL Group | 60 | pre- | .56/.30 | .27/.27 | <.001 | .82 |
| (undergrads in China) | | post- | .79/.50 | .17/.28 | <.001 | 1.08 |

*Note*. *P = pragmatics; G = grammar.

To recap, regarding the development in L2 pragmatics and grammar, both ESL

group 2 and the EFL group improved their pragmatic competence statistically over time, and the EFL group gained grammatical competence as well. Over one academic year, the competence measured in this study in terms of correcting pragmatic violations among undergraduate students in China was identical to that of graduate students in the U.S. (i.e., both means were .79). These outcomes indicate that the low-proficiency learners in both contexts grew pragmatically competent, and the low-proficiency learners in the EFL setting were also becoming more grammatically capable as their overall L2 proficiency increased.

***Severity Ratings*.** One-way ANOVAs were computed on the mean scores on the post-test among groups to assess the severity of pragmatic and grammatical errors. Table 8 displays the means and standard deviations for all groups.

Table 8

*Severity Ratings in the Post-Test (1 = not bad at all; 6 = very bad)*

| Group | *N* | $\underline{M}$ P/G* | $\underline{SD}$ P/G* |
|---|---|---|---|
| ESL group 1 (grads in the U.S.) | 60 | 3.78/3.30 | 1.30/1.32 |
| ESL group 2 (undergrads in the U.S.) | 60 | 3.87/3.26 | 1.03/1.47 |
| EFL group (undergrads in China) | 60 | 4.61/3.40 | .93/1.23 |

*Note*. *P = pragmatics; G = grammar.

One-way ANOVAs were calculated on these mean scores. For pragmatic severity ratings, the examination produced a significant analysis of variance $F(2,177) = 10.20$, $p = .000$, $\eta^2 = .10$, showing a large effect size. Multiple comparisons with the Tukey *HSD* test revealed significant differences in means

between the EFL group and ESL group 1 ($p < .001$), and between the EFL group and

ESL group 2 ($p = .001$). These differences were not found on the pre-test. However,

results from paired-sample $t$-tests did not reveal changes for either group: the EFL

group: $t = 1.82$, $df = 59$, $p = .07$, n.s.; ESL group 1: $t = 1.22$, $df = 59$, $p = .23$, n.s.;

ESL group 2: $t = .69$, $df = 59$, $p = .49$, n.s. For grammatical severity ratings, no

significant difference was found from the pre-test to the post-test: $F (2,177) = .18$,

$p = .84$, n.s., which means participants' attitudes towards grammatical mistakes

changed little throughout the study: the EFL group: $t = 1.83$, $df = 59$, $p = .07$, n.s.;

ESL group 1: $t = .19$, $df = 59$, $p = .85$, n.s.; ESL group 2: $t = 1.23$, $df = 59$, $p = .23$, n.s.

Table 9 summarizes the means for all groups between the pre- and post-tests and the

results of paired-sample $t$-tests regarding severity ratings.

Table 9

*Severity Ratings across Tests (1 = not bad at all; 6 = very bad)*

| Group | N | Type | M pre- /post-test | SD pre- /post-test | p |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ESL group 1 | 60 | Pragmatics | 3.60/3.78 | 1.39/1.30 | .23 n.s. |
| (grads in the U.S.) | | Grammar | 3.27/3.30 | 1.18/1.32 | .85 n.s. |
| ESL group 2 | 60 | Pragmatics | 3.72/3.87 | 1.66/1.03 | .49 n.s. |
| (undergrads in the U.S.) | | Grammar | 2.98/3.26 | 1.46/1.47 | .23 n.s. |
| EFL group | 60 | Pragmatics | 4.16/4.61 | 1.68/.93 | .07 n.s. |
| (undergrads in China) | | Grammar | 2.97/3.40 | 1.59/1.23 | .07 n.s. |

Regarding the correlation between pragmatic and grammatical attitudes, on

the pre-test, ESL group 1 rated errors of both types as equally severe; both ESL group 2 and the EFL group rated pragmatic mistakes as more severe than grammatical errors. On the post-test, all three groups converged in considering proper pragmatics as more important than being grammatically correct: ESL group 1: $t = 2.43$, $df = .59$, $p = .02$, $d = .31$; ESL group 2: $t = 2.47$, $df = 59$, $p = .02$, $d = .32$; the EFL group: $t = 6.91$, $df = 59$, $p < .001$, $d = .90$. This similarity indicated that learners' sensitivities towards mistakes of both types became identical over time. Table 10 shows participants' attitudes towards mistakes of both types between tests.

Table 10

*Participants' Attitudes towards Pragmatic and Grammatical Mistakes across Tests*

| Group | *N* | Test | *M* P/G* | *SD* P/G* | *p* | Effect Size |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ESL group 1 | 60 | pre- | 3.60/3.27 | 1.39/1.18 | .11 n.s. | |
| (grads in the U.S.) | | post- | 3.78/3.30 | 1.30/1.32 | .02 | .31 |
| ESL group 2 | 60 | pre- | 3.72/2.98 | 1.66/1.46 | .01 | .35 |
| (undergrads in the U.S.) | | post- | 3.87/3.26 | 1.03/1.47 | .02 | .32 |
| EFL group | 60 | pre- | 4.16/2.97 | 1.68/1.59 | <.001 | .53 |
| (undergrads in China) | | post- | 4.61/3.40 | .93/1.23 | <.001 | .90 |

*Note*. *P = pragmatics; G = grammar.

To reiterate, although all groups' attitudes towards mistakes of both types changed over time, the growth was not significant. The EFL group continued regarding pragmatic infelicities as more severe than grammatical incorrectness, as they did on the pre-test. ESL group 1 also continued their balanced awareness of both

types of inappropriateness as on the pre-test. Only ESL group 2 converted their attitudes from in the pre-test weighting pragmatic violations more seriously than grammatical mistakes to considering errors of both types as equally serious on the post-test.

### 4.1.3. Summary of Findings on Error Correction and Severity Ratings

The above sections have presented the quantitative findings on the effects of the learning environment and overall L2 proficiency on L2 pragmatic development, with reference to L2 grammatical competence. The results reveal that L2 learners of low proficiency (i.e., ESL group 2 and the EFL group), regardless of their place of residence, developed their pragmatic competence over time significantly; L2 learners in China also considerably gained competence in grammar. The advanced ESL learners (i.e., ESL group 1), compared to their low-proficiency peers in both contexts, did not grow significantly in either aspect throughout the study. With respect to learners' attitudes towards pragmatic and grammatical mistakes, the results demonstrate that learners, irrespective of their overall L2 proficiency and place of residence, by the end of the study became similar to each other in being less tolerant of pragmatic than grammatical errors.

### 4.2. Results from the Written Production

### 4.2.1. Coding and Analyzing the Written Production

Rationales and production from pre- and post-tests were coded and compared across groups and within groups. Tables 11 – 17 summarize the written production that each group made for each of the pragmatic scenarios. The coding framework was adapted from Bardovi-Harlig and Griffin (2005) with new themes added based on the present data.

In the *Class Trip* scenario (Table 11), participants got a point in case of either

offering a reason/explanation and an alternative, or showing that they needed to do more than just be sorry. As can be seen, the scenario posed a difficulty for most of the participants regardless of their learning contexts and overall L2 proficiency throughout the study. To most of the participants in each group, reordering formulas was their primary choice on the pre-test, and it continued to be on the post-test.

Table 11

*Summary of Written Production for the Class Trip Scenario*

|  | ESL group 1 pre- /post-test | ESL group 2 pre- /post-test | EFL group pre- /post-test |
|---|---|---|---|
| Explanation | 5/16 | 1/7 | 4/10 |
| Alternative | 4/7 | 1/2 | 2/4 |
| No production but with rationales | 3/5 | 2/2 | 5/11 |
| *Total accepted* | *12/28* | *4/11* | *11/25* |
| Reordering formula | 36/30 | 30/33 | 34/26 |
| "I'm sorry" | 25/28 | 23/31 | 13/10 |
| "I'm really/terribly/very/so sorry" | 11/2 | 7/2 | 21/16 |
| Acceptance | 4/2 | 15/9 | 7/5 |
| No modification | 8/0 | 11/7 | 8/4 |
| *Total not accepted* | *48/32* | *56/49* | *49/35* |

However, analyses between tests (Table 11) showed that the percentage accepted on the post-test was doubled for every group: ESL group 1 – 20% vs. 47%; ESL group 2 – 7% vs. 18%; the EFL group – 18% vs. 42%. More participants added

an explanation or suggested an alternative to their refusals on the post-test than on the pre-test, and more EFL participants were aware that they should do more than just say, sorry. Moreover, in the revision category, more ESL participants chose a full form of "I'm sorry" to downgrade their refusals on both tests. To most of the EFL participants, the more intensified forms of "I'm really/terribly/very/so sorry" were preferred.

The problem planted in the *Snack Bar* scenario (Table 12) concerns being too elaborate for a service encounter. As shown, to the majority of the ESL participants, it was not hard to put it right on both tests. However, it was difficult for most of the EFL participants on the pre-test, with only 22 answers being accepted. Each group improved over time: ESL group 1 – 77% vs. 88%; ESL group 2 – 57% vs. 70%; the EFL group – 37% vs. 75%. The advanced ESL group 1 outscored the other two groups of low overall L2 proficiency on this scenario. The EFL group made the most gain, with more participants being able to revise the original response into *A sandwich and a yogurt, please*. In fact, the "please" formula remained the first choice for all groups on both tests.

However, further observation of Table 12 reveals that, compared to the ESL participants, most of the EFL participants lacked the means to place an order over a counter. Their production was less variable than that of the two ESL groups. Few of them considered using *I'd like to* and *could you* in their production. Although a similar trend also occurred in the production of ESL group 2, there were more participants in ESL group 2 that used various expressions. In general, throughout the study the ESL participants could make revisions by either changing the form into a request or reducing the formality, especially among ESL group 1of high overall L2 proficiency.

Table 12

*Summary of Written Production for the Snack Bar Scenario*

|  | ESL group 1 pre- /post-test | ESL group 2 pre- /post-test | EFL group pre- /post-test |
|---|---|---|---|
| Can I? | 4/3 | 8/2 | 2/3 |
| Will you? | 6/2 | 2/3 | 1/0 |
| Could you? | 10/11 | 1/4 | 1/1 |
| I'd like to | 6/6 | 2/2 | 0/0 |
| Please | 20/31 | 19/31 | 18/41 |
| No production but with rationales | 0/0 | 2/0 | 0/0 |
| *Total accepted* | *46/53* | *34/42* | *22/45* |
| No modification | 14/7 | 26/18 | 38/15 |
| *Total not accepted* | *14/7* | *26/18* | *38/15* |

In the *Not Ready* scenario (Table 13), an apology is expected. As shown, on the pre-test most of the participants from all groups could either make an apology or include an explanation, and this pattern continued into the post-test. Each group made progression: ESL group 1 – 77% vs. 82%, ESL group 2: 52% vs. 63%, and the EFL group – 75% vs. 87%. The three groups resembled each other, with the majority of the participants making an apology.

Nonetheless, there were differences across groups. As Table 13 displays, on both tests, there were more participants in ESL group 1 than in the other two groups who could add more explanations to their apologies, and who could request a new date. The numbers of participants in ESL group 2 who offered reasons in addition to

apology and who requested an alternative also increased. The EFL group showed a similar pattern, but to a lesser extent. There were only three EFL participants who supplemented their apologies with justification. Additionally, similar to the responses to the *Class Trip* scenario, the EFL participants used the intensified form of "I'm really/very sorry" more often than the ESL participants on both tests. The ESL groups, on the other hand, chose the basic apologetic form of "sorry" more frequently.

Table 13

*Summary of Written Production for the Not Ready Scenario*

|  | ESL group 1 pre- /post-test | ESL group 2 pre- /post-test | EFL group pre- /post-test |
|---|---|---|---|
| Apology | 37/28 | 30/31 | 45/49 |
| "Sorry" | 28/26 | 19/18 | 11/16 |
| "I'm really/very sorry" | 9/2 | 11/13 | 34/33 |
| Apology with explanation | 6/11 | 1/3 | 0/3 |
| Request new date | 3/10 | 0/4 | 0/0 |
| *Total accepted* | *46/49* | *31/38* | *45/52* |
| No modification | 14/11 | 29/22 | 15/8 |
| *Total not accepted* | *14/11* | *29/22* | *15/8* |

The *Directions* scenario (Table 14) seemed to be the least challenging to all participants as a whole. Most of them knew that they could change the command into a request or use an alerter in a question. ESL group 1 did remarkably well on this scenario across tests, with only one revision being rejected on the pre-test and all

accepted on the post-test. ESL group 2 and the EFL group made improvement, too:

ESL group 2 – 70% vs. 83%; EFL group – 85% vs. 98%. Change of form was the

most common decision that the participants made across groups, followed by

including an alerter.

Table 14

*Summary of Written Production for the Directions Scenario*

|  | ESL group 1 pre- /post-test | ESL group 2 pre- /post-test | EFL group pre- /post-test |
|---|---|---|---|
| Alerter | 22/20 | 14/19 | 13/13 |
| Change of form | 30/31 | 19/20 | 38/39 |
| Could you | 17/10 | 8/10 | 0/0 |
| Would you | 9/16 | 5/6 | 0/0 |
| Can you | 1/2 | 4/2 | 17/19 |
| Will you | 3/3 | 2/2 | 21/20 |
| Please | 4/7 | 6/11 | 0/5 |
| No production but with rationales | 3/2 | 3/0 | 0/2 |
| *Total accepted* | *59/60* | *42/50* | *51/59* |
| No modification | 1/0 | 18/10 | 9/1 |
| *Total not accepted* | *1/0* | *18/10* | *9/1* |

Additional examination of Table 14 indicates, however, that the two ESL

groups had more means of changing forms than the EFL group. As can be seen, the

ESL participants employed multiple forms such as *could you*, *would you*, *can you*, and

*will you*. ESL group 1 outperformed ESL group 2 in being more expressive in this respect. The EFL participants, on the other hand, utilized only *can you* and *will you* throughout the study.

The majority of the participants did not find it difficult to include an apology in the *Late* scenario (Table 15) on the pre-test. Each group developed their competence in their own terms: ESL group 1 – 82% vs. 87%; ESL group 2 – 52% vs. 72%; the EFL group – 75% vs. 93%. To apologize was most participants' choice in all groups.

Table 15

*Summary of Written Production for the Late Scenario*

| | ESL group 1 pre- /post-test | ESL group 2 pre- /post-test | EFL group pre- /post-test |
|---|---|---|---|
| Apology | 34/40 | 30/32 | 44/45 |
| "Sorry" | 19/24 | 21/20 | 13/15 |
| "I'm really/very/so sorry" | 15/16 | 9/12 | 31/30 |
| Explanation | 9/8 | 0/6 | 1/5 |
| Promise of forbearance | 6/4 | 0/4 | 0/6 |
| Empathy | 0/0 | 1/1 | 0/0 |
| *Total accepted* | *49/52* | *31/43* | *45/56* |
| No modification | 11/8 | 29/17 | 15/4 |
| *Total not accepted* | *11/8* | *29/17* | *15/4* |

ESL group 1 showed their advantage in being more able to add explanations

and promises of forbearance to their apologies (Table 15). ESL group 2 and the EFL group did not show much difference in this regard. However, the EFL group employed apologies more often than the two ESL groups, with more participants using the intensified formula. As in the *Class Trip* and *Not Ready* scenarios, the main expression among ESL participants was "sorry."

To most of the participants, the *Busy Teacher* scenario (Table 16) was not hard. While ESL group 1 outperformed ESL group 2 and the EFL group in being able to change the semantic formula from a statement into either a suggestion or a question on the pre-test, the EFL group caught up on the post-test. The EFL group made more progress (55% vs. 77%) than ESL group 2 (52% vs. 62%).

Table 16

*Summary of Written Production for the Busy Teacher Scenario*

|  | ESL group 1 pre- /post-test | ESL group 2 pre- /post-test | EFL group pre- /post-test |
|---|---|---|---|
| Change of form | 38/42 | 30/33 | 26/34 |
| Suggestion | 10/18 | 0/5 | 0/7 |
| Question | 28/24 | 30/28 | 26/27 |
| "OK, I'll come back (later/soon)." | 5/4 | 1/4 | 7/12 |
| *Total accepted* | *43/46* | *31/37* | *33/46* |
| No modification | 17/14 | 29/23 | 27/14 |
| *Total not accepted* | *17/14* | *29/23* | *27/14* |

Inspection of Table 16 further reveals that within the "change of form" category, most participants in all groups converted the original statement into a

question. However, ESL group 1 had more participants making a suggestion than the other two groups of low overall L2 proficiency. The EFL group had more participants who changed the response to *OK, I'll come back (later/soon)* than the two ESL groups, indicating that the EFL participants were less aggressive when talking to their teachers.

On the pre-test, the *Questionnaire* scenario (Table 17) was hard for most of the participants among ESL group 2 and the EFL group, but not ESL group 1. It remained a problem for ESL group 2 on the post-test, too, with most of them thinking that the original response was acceptable. The EFL group became more competent in asking for help from their teacher on the post-test than they were on the pre-test (48% vs. 82%). They even outscored ESL group 1 on the post-test.

Yet close examination of Table 17 shows that although "change of form" was the first option among all groups, ESL group 1 was more competent in mitigating their requests than the other two groups of low overall L2 proficiency. ESL group 1 included more pre-queries such as *I wonder if you can help me with…* in their requests, a typical native strategy (Bardovi-Harlig & Griffin, 2005). Additionally, the variety of changing forms among ESL group 1 was larger than that of the other two groups. More participants in ESL group 1 used *could you* and *would you* expressions in their requests than participants in the other two groups. The number of participants in ESL group 2 who could mitigate their requests through explanations also increased. The EFL group, however, was predominated by changing forms and employed mostly the expressions *can you* and *will you* when requesting.

Table 17

*Summary of Written Production for the Questionnaire Scenario*

|  | ESL group 1 pre- /post-test | ESL group 2 pre- /post-test | EFL group pre- /post-test |
|---|---|---|---|
| Change of form | 20/18 | 13/13 | 28/48 |
| Can you | 2/2 | 4/5 | 19/25 |
| Will you | 2/0 | 5/3 | 8/21 |
| Could you | 9/10 | 3/4 | 1/1 |
| Would you | 7/8 | 1/0 | 0/1 |
| Explanation | 8/14 | 0/3 | 1/1 |
| Pre-query | 5/10 | 3/2 | 0/0 |
| *Total accepted* | *33/42* | *16/18* | *29/49* |
| No modification | 27/18 | 44/42 | 31/11 |
| *Total not accepted* | *27/18* | *44/42* | *31/11* |

### 4.2.2. Summary of Results from Written Production

To sum up, most participants found the *Class Trip* scenario most challenging on both tests, regardless of their learning contexts and overall L2 proficiency. It seems that to say *no* properly in English is not easy, especially when the conversations are between teachers and students, each with distinct social positions. For ESL group 2, the *Questionnaire* scenario remained a challenge throughout the study. While it was also hard for the EFL group on the pre-test, most of the EFL participants learned how to ask for help from the teacher on the post-test. The EFL group also improved aggressively in the *Snack Bar* scenario over time.

ESL group 1 of advanced overall L2 proficiency had more linguistic means of requesting (*Snack Bar*), apologizing (*Not Ready*; *Late*), negotiating (*Busy Teacher*), and asking for help (*Directions*; *Questionnaire*) than ESL group 2 and the EFL group of low overall L2 proficiency. ESL group 2 showed their strength in making a request (*Snack Bar*), making an apology with an explanation and a suggestion (*Not Ready*), and asking for a teacher's help (*Questionnaire*) by employing a greater variety of strategies than the EFL group. The two ESL groups were also better than the EFL group at asking for a favor (*Directions*) and mitigating their requests (*Questionnaire*) by utilizing multiple expressions.

The EFL group, on the other hand, made the most gain in most cases compared to the two ESL groups. Their competence in comprehending and producing acceptable pragmatic utterances improved significantly over time. Additionally, they were more polite than the ESL participants in including more intensifiers in their apologies (*Class Trip; Not Ready; Late*). And they preferred to use more formal expressions than the other two ESL groups.

## 4.3.    Retrospective Interviews

Two findings are obvious from the analyses of retrospective interviews. First, although there was some variation in getting the TL input across settings, the amount of this input did not make an influential impact on the development of L2 pragmatics. Second, overall L2 proficiency played a more active role in L2 pragmatics than the learning environment. The advanced learners' language skills were better developed than those of low proficiency learners because of their highly demanding academic responsibilities. Their better-developed language skills, in turn, brought them more proficiency in L2 pragmatics.

### 4.3.1. The Learning Environment

Most participants interviewed said that their English language skills had improved since the pre-test. In both contexts, learners made an effort to seek opportunities to get exposure to the TL. In each setting, learners underwent the noticing-and-modifying process (Schmidt, 1995), i.e., they developed their communicative competence consciously by constantly observing and comparing their language behavior to that of the others and making adjustments accordingly. However, their forms of getting the TL inputs vary. As some of them said:

> I learn to make excuses when answering the 1st question (*Class Trip*) in class. I hear my American classmates often say that "I'm sorry, but I cannot do or go because I have something else to do" or…"I'm busy". Then they added: "I'm terribly sorry about that". I learn that only say(ing) sorry is not enough. There should be some reason. Also, we should say "very sorry", "terribly sorry" to show we are really sorry. (Thu, female, Vietnamese, LOR: 5 months, age: 23, ESL group 2)

> …I know in real life, we just need to say " a sandwich and a yogurt, please." (Translation) (Zijun, male, age: 19, EFL group, the *Snack Bar* scenario)

> How do you know that? the researcher asked.

> Because I watched a lot of English movies. I heard them say so. (Translation)

Their comments suggest that both contexts offer opportunities for learners to grow, yet their avenues of getting the TL inputs differ from each other. The ESL participants have the advantages of experiencing the TL in real life. Constant interaction in English has brought them the benefits of observing how others do things with words, and of adjusting their language behavior. This indicates that the TL community is unique in providing the learners with live examples which they can learn from; this is especially true for the ESL participants who have been in the U.S. a shorter time. Similar comments were also made by other newcomers:

> I live with an American family. I often speak English with them.
> They correct me whenever I make a mistake… because I ask them
> to correct me. I like it because it helps to improve my English.
> Now I can say more English. I learned a lot of new words and
> expressions. I also learn to behave like an American…for
> example, I now smile at people in the street, as the others do to
> me. In Japan, we do not greet people we do not know. But in here,
> everyone is friendly and say hello to other people.    Both my host
> family and my teachers say that my English improves very much
> in the last five months. I'm so happy about it. (Yuka, female,
> Japanese, LOR: 6 months, age: 22, ESL group 2)

The EFL participants, on the other hand, have other forms of exposure to the TL that are available in their local learning community. As the above participant interviewed disclosed, they can get input from other possibilities, such as watching movies, to make up for their shortage of live experience with the TL. One of the EFL participants shared:

> I plan to study in the U.S. in the future. So I make use of every
> opportunity to talk to the native speakers. I want to improve my
> English. But I do not mind speaking English with other people. I
> usually go to the English corners on Saturdays (an activity in
> China for English language learners to practice their English). As
> long as I can use English, I don't mind who they are. (Translation)
> (Shuai, male, age: 19, EFL group)

At the time of the interviews, three of the EFL participants had applied to study abroad and communicated with prospective universities in English through emails. Some of them had frequent contacts with friends who were studying in the English-speaking world.

Additionally, their learning materials provide them with more authentic learning opportunities to experience the usage of the TL in their own way. As one of the EFL instructors (Chinese) explains, the articles in their textbook, *Inside Out,* are about current issues and are adapted from newspapers and magazines from the English-speaking world. The activities are organized in such a way that the students have to put their learned knowledge into immediate use.

Furthermore, the availability of native English-speaking instructors also seemed facilitative. Some of the EFL participants reported that they hung out often with their foreign instructors after class. They went out together exploring the city, dining, and exchanging ideas. One foreign instructor (American) said the following when asked what they did in the classroom:

> Sometimes we watch movies, sometimes we read novels. Talking about current world affairs is also our topic. For example, we have talked a lot about the forth- coming Olympic Games in Beijing recently, also the earthquake in Sichuan.

Most important, the shift of teaching and learning styles in the classroom played a role in helping these EFL participants improve their English proficiency. Observations from one of the EFL classes showed that although their classroom instruction was predominantly teacher-centered, the students had more chances to speak than they did in a traditional English language classroom in China, where grammatical rules were first presented and followed by drill practice. As observed, there was a five-minute presentation at the beginning of the class. On that day (i.e., June 27, 2008), in a PowerPoint presentation one student talked about a new type of recorder from the Sony company. The instructor explained that the purpose of this activity was to make time for the students to talk. Each student was allowed to introduce a topic of their interest in the first five minutes of each class. During the class, students were encouraged to give their opinions on the topics discussed and to relate their personal experience to the content. When they were short of words, they switched code from English to Chinese to make themselves understood.

The above remarks and observations exemplify that learning opportunities are not limited in an EFL setting, and that EFL learners can get as much TL input as ESL learners as long as they make an effort. It seems that ESL learners are not necessarily

at an advantage in getting exposure to the TL, and EFL learners are not disadvantaged in getting opportunities to develop their English proficiency. Additionally, their narratives suggest that gaining proficiency in English has more to do with their motivation to learn and initiative to succeed and less to do with their place of residence.

Interestingly, although learners in both settings made improvements in L2 pragmatics, they consciously integrated their L1 beliefs into their L2 production. Their discourse accent (Scarcella, 1983) seemed to be with them regardless of their place of residence. Although some participants knew the correct answers, they thought the given responses were appropriate anyway. Take the *Snack Bar* scenario, for example. The following were typical explanations:

> I know it's kind of too much, but it's not wrong. Peter is just being polite.
> (Ichiro male, Japanese, age: 24, ESL group 2, LOR: 4 years)

> There's nothing wrong with it. How can we say a person is wrong
> for being too polite? So I did not correct it. But I know in real life,
> we just need to say " a sandwich and a yogurt, please."
> (Translation) (Zijun, male, age: 19, EFL group)

It shows that these participants have their own benchmark in deciding what is pragmatically right or wrong. Their L1 beliefs actively interact with their L2 use. One participant shared the following in the *Class Trip* scenario:

> …In Japanese, we usually say "sorry, I can't." That will do.
> (Aya, female, Japanese, age: 25, ESL group 1, LOR: 1 year)

> Why should there be a reason? What if I do not have a reason, and
> I do not feel like it? Should I make up something? (Translation)
> (Shuai, male, age: 19, EFL group)

In Confucian culture, to be polite and honest is valued, and to tell a lie to a teacher is unforgivable. It seems that these learners would rather choose to be judged as incompetent in L2 pragmatics than to follow the L2 rules of telling a white lie to help

them get around. Their comments further demonstrated the salient L1 influence on their L2 process. The implication of this finding is twofold: when learning an L2, to neglect the culture that one was born into is not possible, and to learn an L2 means more than grasping the L2 rules and codes and imitating the TL language behavior; it is a process of constructing one's intercultural identity by utilizing one's resources in both L1 and L2.

### 4.3.2. Overall L2 Proficiency

With respect to their improvement in English, all of the ESL participants, the advanced participants in particular, are more competent than their peers of low proficiency in noticing their growth. As one said:

> Since I came to the U.S., I learned a lot of new words and expressions that I had not learned in China, both academically and in daily life. For example, when I first came when someone asked me: *How are you*? I could only reply: *Fine, thank you*. Now I can say: *Fabulous* and *Cannot be better*. I don't think I would know these expressions if I were in China. I think I am more fluent now. Before, I had to think a while before talking. Now I just open my mouth and say what I want to say. I'm not afraid of making mistakes any more. (Translation) (Lin, female, Chinese, age: 24, ESL group 1, LOR: 1 year)

Additionally, they are also more capable of explaining the reasons for their gains:

> My English has been improved because I did more research reports and presentations than before. When I first came, my job was limited to the experiments in the lab, my advisor and the senior colleagues were responsible for the reports and presentations. Now that I am a senior, part of my responsibility is to work on the reports and to prepare for the final presentations. It is a great experience. It helps me a lot to improve my English. (Translation) (Peng, male, Chinese, age: 27, ESL group 1, LOR: 2 years)

> As a TA, I need to do a lot before and after classes. I'm teaching a course in my department. Although it is challenging, it helps me in both the contents of the subject and my English. The frequent contacts with my advisor and the students all push me to grow. Without the teaching duties, I do not think my English could improve this much. (Chang, female, Chinese, age: 27, ESL group 1, LOR: 3 years)

The less proficient learners, especially the EFL participants, on the other hand, can

hardly discuss their gains, although their English proficiency has developed since

they attended college:

> I think my English improved. I can say more and make fewer
> mistakes, and more fluently. (Yuki, male, Japanese, age: 25, ESL
> group 2, LOR: 5 years)

> Why do you think your English has improved? asked the researcher.

> Because I have been here for nearly five years. It has to be
> improved.

Likewise, one of the EFL participants shared:

> I can say more now, and I know more. I think our English
> knowledge is large now. (Translation) (Zijun, male, age: 19, EFL
> group)

> In what ways? the researcher followed, for example…

> I am not sure, but I know that my English has improved.
> (Translation)

> Then why do you think your English has improved? the researcher followed.

> (chuckle)…because I have learned more now than before. (Translation)

This message conveys that English competence among advanced learners was better

developed because of their more demanding academic duties than learners of low

proficiency; accordingly, their better developed linguistic skills in English brought

them the gains in pragmatics. Learners of low proficiency, on the other hand, due to

less demanding academic work, did not have as many opportunities to experience their

gains as their advanced peers, although their English language proficiency increased

as time went by. The lack of less challenging academic opportunities made them less

aware of their gains in an explicit way, in turn making them less capable of describing

and discussing their growth in English. This discrepancy echoes the findings

demonstrated in the written production: production by learners of high proficiency

exhibits a greater variety than that by learners of low proficiency.

### 4.3.3. Summary of Results from Retrospective Interviews

In sum, although their avenues of getting TL exposure varied, learners on both sides had ample opportunities to get exposure to the TL input. In both settings, learners seek chances to develop their communicative skills by exposing themselves to the TL. Frequently experiencing the TL, learners followed the process of noticing-and-modifying proposed by Schmidt (1995). As far as the proficiency effect is concerned, it reveals that the more challenging academic work brought the advanced learners the benefit of better English skills development than low proficiency learners and in turn, making them more proficient in pragmatics.

### 4.4. Summary

This chapter first reports participants' performance across tests: error identification, severity ratings, the interrelatedness between pragmatic and grammatical competence. Second, it presents the written production on pragmatic error correction. Finally, the chapter includes results from retrospective interviews. In Chapter 5, these results will be discussed, followed by implications and directions for future research.

**Chapter 5**

**Discussion and Conclusions**

**5.1.    Discussion**

This study was a longitudinal examination of the effects of the learning environment and overall L2 proficiency on the development of L2 pragmatics, with reference to grammatical competence. Three groups of college students participated in this study. There were two groups from the U.S. with overall L2 proficiency of an advanced level (ESL group 1) and a low-to-advanced intermediate level (ESL group 2). The third group was from China (the EFL group) with an overall L2 proficiency of intermediate level. They were pre- and post-tested on their comprehension and production of pragmatic violations and grammatical mistakes. Analyses of their performances on the tests and retrospective interviews were motivated by the current discussion on the extent to which the two variables, the learning environment or overall L2 proficiency, contribute more to the development of L2 pragmatics. To this end, five research questions were specified:

1.  Do ESL learners develop pragmatic competence in the same way as their EFL peers?

2.  To what extent do ESL and EFL learners differ in gaining pragmatic competence?

3.  How does L2 proficiency correlate with the development of pragmatic competence?

4.  What rationales do ESL and EFL offer for their comprehension and production of pragmatic inappropriateness?

5.  How does social and academic life relate to developing L2 pragmatic competence in each context?

These questions were raised in order to determine the effects of the learning environment and overall level of L2 proficiency on the development of L2 pragmatics. The following discussion is thus organized in light of findings and the research interests.

### 5.1.1. Effects of the Learning Environment

Results across tests demonstrated that both ESL and EFL learners of a low overall L2 proficiency (ESL group 2 and the EFL group) progressed significantly over time in L2 pragmatics. A one-way ANOVA analysis on the post-test also revealed a significant progression among the Chinese EFL learners in grammar. Grammatical competence among ESL learners in the U.S. of a similar level of L2 proficiency improved as well, although the improvement was not saliently pronounced. ESL learners in the U.S. of a low proficiency changed their attitudes towards pragmatic and grammatical mistakes over time from treating pragmatic infelicities as more severe than grammatical mistakes to considering errors of both types as equally important. EFL learners in China maintained their position of being less tolerant of the pragmatic than grammatical errors.

These results suggest that L2 learners gain pragmatic proficiency as their overall level of L2 proficiency develops, regardless of their learning contexts. Put in another way, the environment of learning has little to do with pragmatic development, at least from the present study. As Table 6 shows, the growth in pragmatics among ESL learners (ESL group 2) is significant at the .001 level; among the EFL learners, it is less than the .001 level. It is obvious that the significance is caused by the amount of time learning not by the contexts of learning. The differences between the two groups are that the development of pragmatic and grammatical competence are significant at the same level for the EFL group ($p < .001$; effect sizes: .90 and .67),

and for ESL group 2 the pragmatic improvement is significant at .001 level (effect size: .45) with a non-significant grammatical increase ($p = .09$, n.s.). However, these differences are small in that ESL group 2 is only measured over one semester. If they had been examined for the same length of time, their development might have been as statistically significant as that of their EFL counterparts. By the same token, taking into account the fact that ESL group 2 had been in the U.S. for an average of 24.3 months at the outset of the study, while nobody in the EFL group had ever set foot in the English-speaking world, the achievement among the EFL group was equally exceptional.

Findings regarding the influence of the learning environment on the development of L2 pragmatics of this study contradict previous research which shows that pragmatic competence among learners in the TL community is better developed than among the learners in their home country. For instance, both Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei's (1998) study and Schauer's (2006a) replication reported a high pragmatic awareness among learners in the U.S. and Great Britain and a low pragmatic awareness among learners in the Czech Republic and Germany. In a related vein, Takahashi and Beebe (1987) found more negative transfers among EFL learners in Japan than Japanese ESL learners in the U.S. in realizing the speech act of refusal. Similarly, Matsumura's (2001) research on offering advice showed that Japanese ESL learners in Canada were more capable of offering advice to individuals of equal or lower status  than their EFL peers in Japan.

On the other hand, the findings from the present study add evidence to the previous research which finds that pragmatic development takes place among learners who speak English as a foreign language. In their replication of Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei's (1998) study, Niezgoda and Röver (2001) found that pragmatic awareness

among the advanced Czech EFL learners was higher than that among the ESL learners in the U.S. As before, Hill (1997) found that the advanced Japanese EFL learners demonstrated a near-native level of competence in being able to use less direct requests and more conventional indirect requests. Recently, Taguchi (2007) reported a significant gain in pragmatic comprehension among EFL learners in Japan.

Most important, this study lends support to previous research which finds that the learning environment is not influential in developing pragmatic competence, and learners in both settings gain pragmatic proficiency as their overall L2 proficiency develops. As reported in Taguchi's (2008) study, EFL learners in Japan and Japanese ESL learners in the U.S. developed their competence in interpreting indirect utterances notably over time. Likewise, both ESL and EFL participants of similar overall L2 proficiency in the present study developed their pragmatic competence remarkably. Furthermore, the pragmatic competence measured in this study among the EFL participants is slightly higher than that of the ESL participants of a similar level at the onset of the study, and their pragmatic ability grew. The present study thus echoes Taguchi's findings and indicates that an EFL setting does not prevent its learners from gaining pragmatic competence, and EFL participants can gain pragmatic proficiency as significantly as their ESL peers.

The retrospective interview data further suggest the less significant influence of the learning environment on L2 pragmatic development. As revealed, both ESL and EFL participants have abundant exposure to the TL, although their resources of getting the input differ. Their retrospective comments suggest that while having the chance of living closer to the native speakers is helpful, other forms of exposure to the TL input are equally valuable in improving communicative ability and pragmatic competence. Most important, their verbal accounts indicate that as long as one actively engages in

L2 learning, one can make the optimal use of one's learning opportunities and develop one's pragmatic competence and overall L2 proficiency.

The present finding of little influence of the learning environment on the development of L2 pragmatics might be caused by the fact that this study investigated pragmatic development across contexts, whereas many other developmental studies have only investigated the effects of the TL community, and many more studies are one-moment examinations. Most of the previous research on pragmatic development (e.g., Barron, 2003; Bouton, 1988, 1992, 1994; DuFon, 2000; Felix-Brasdefer, 2003, 2004; Schauer, 2006a, 2006b, 2007) follows a cohort of students who study abroad and measures their language behaviors before and after their stay in the target culture, and then reports the influence of their stay in the TL community. Although many early cross-sectional studies include learners in different settings (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998; Takahashi & Beebe, 1987), their conclusions are limited in that they overlook the developmental influence of the learning environment on L2 pragmatics.

Although participants in both contexts grew pragmatically competent over time, subtle differentials emerged when examining their written production. For ESL group 2, their request (*Snack Bar*, *Directions,* and *Questionnaire*) and apology strategies (*Not Ready*) exhibited slightly more variety than those of the EFL group, and their pragmalinguistic means kept expanding over time. A similar pattern was not observed in the EFL production. On the other hand, the number of intensifiers in apologies used by the EFL participants was larger than that by both ESL groups on the pre-test, and the number became larger on the post-test (*Class Trip, Not Ready, & Late*). Unlike the ESL participants who preferred to use a more simple form of apology supplemented with explanations, the EFL learners tended to consider that more intensifiers could help them better convey their apologetic intention.

These dissimilar patterns in L2 pragmatic development suggest some nuances of the effects of place of residence. More exposure to the TL and handy opportunities of authentic language use may bring the ESL participants the benefits of being more pragmalinguistically competent. These outcomes corroborate Schauer's results that the German ESL learners became more capable of lessening the illocutionary force in requests by either using a wider range of external modifiers (2006b) or internal downgraders (2007) over their stay in Great Britain.

With respect to severity ratings, the present results do not support the previous findings (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998) that the ESL learners tend to be more tolerant of grammatical mistakes and less tolerant of pragmatic violations as their LOR extends, and the inverse pattern is true among the EFL learners. The present findings indicate that participants on both sides became similar to one another in realizing that to be pragmatically appropriate is more crucial than to be grammatically accurate. This disagreement may be due to the fact that all of the ESL learners in Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei's (1998) study were still enrolled in an intensive language program, while only 21 out of 60 of the present undergraduate ESL participants were taking remedial courses when this study took place, indicating a higher overall L2 proficiency with the present participants than the ESL learners in Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei's study.

## 5.1.2. Effects of Overall L2 Proficiency

Contrary to the results of ESL group 2 and the EFL group, analyses of the post-test failed to reveal a marked gain among ESL group 1 of advanced learners in both pragmatics and grammar. These results might be due to the fact that the advanced learners had exhibited their high competence on the pre-test. As Table 6 displays, the mean of pragmatic error identification and correction on the pre-test for

ESL group 1 ($M$ = .69) is the highest with the mean for the EFL group ($M$ = .56) in the middle, and the mean for ESL group 2 ($M$ = .45) the lowest, although the difference between the means of ESL group 1 and the EFL group is not as notable as that between ESL group 1 and ESL group 2. Based on their high foundation in pragmatics, ESL group 1 raised their mean in pragmatics to .79 on the post-test, indicating they were advancing in their own terms and at their own pace: they were consistent in exhibiting their elevated capability in mitigating a request, making an apology, making a suggestion, and downgrading a refusal; they employed more strategies in their requests, apologies, suggestions, and refusals than the other two groups of a low level of L2 proficiency.

The results relating to the effects of overall L2 proficiency on L2 pragmatics suggest that a high overall L2 proficiency predicts a high level of L2 pragmatics. These findings lend support to the previous research that pragmatic proficiency increases as overall L2 proficiency develops. The proficiency effect has been shown in many other studies such as by Cohen and Olshtain (1981) on apologies in English; by Koiko (1996) on comprehension of speech acts in Spanish; by Houck and Gass (1996) on refusals in English; by Rose (2000) on requests, apologies, and compliments in English; by Niezgoda and Röver (2001) on pragmatic awareness in English; by Taguchi (2002) on implicatures in English; by Kobayashi and Rinner (2003) on requests in English; by Holtman (2005) on compliments in French. These studies, joined by the present research, have demonstrated that the L2 proficiency level is more influential than the place of residence in L2 pragmatics.

Examination of the written data further exemplifies the importance of proficiency. As shown in scenarios *Snack Bar*, *Directions*, and *Questionnaire*, the advanced learners could utilize various modalities in their requests. Unlike the other

two groups of a low overall L2 proficiency, the advanced learners included more *could you*, *would you*, and *I'd like to* expressions to alleviate their illocutionary force of requesting, whereas such usages in the other two sets of data were limited. They also displayed their larger pragmalinguistic repertoire in integrating proper explanations into their refusals (*Class Trip*, *Not Ready*, & *Late*) and requests (*Questionnaire*). In addition, they were more capable in the use of alerter and pre-queries in requests (*Directions* & *Questionnaire*).

The greater employment of modalities of *could* and *would* in the advanced data and use of *will* and *can* in the less advanced data supports the acquisitional pattern in modality suggested by Salsbury and Bardovi-Harlig (2000). In their longitudinal examination of modality emergence in speech acts among beginning ESL learners, Salsbury and Bardovi-Harlig reported that their participants learned to make use of *could* and *would* late, indicating the sequence in modality acquisition. This sequence can also be obtained in the data of ESL group 2: while on the pre-test the learners in ESL group 2 seldom used *could* and *would*, on the post-test they increased their utilization of these modalities. These findings suggest that learners of advanced L2 proficiency are more competent in mitigating the illocutionary force of utterances by making their request formula syntactically more complex.

The analysis of interview data demonstrates the proficiency effect as well. As shown, the advanced learners benefited from their more challenging academic work; in turn their English proficiency was better developed than less proficient learners. They were also more aware of their language improvement, more able to notice the specifics on which they improved and the causes of their improvement. Additionally, they outperformed learners of a low proficiency in being more capable of elaborating their gains.

In sum, ESL group 1 of advanced learners exhibits their advantage in L2 pragmatics in this study. They are better at both changing forms and extending content to the original production than the other two groups of a low-proficiency level. Considering that the means of LOR in the U.S. for ESL group 2 is 24.3 months and 17.15 months for ESL group 1, findings of this study are in favor of the body of research which argues for the primacy of overall L2 proficiency in L2 pragmatics (e.g., Hassall, 2003; Holtman, 2005; Kobayashi & Rinner, 2003; Niezgoda & Röver, 2001; Pellet, 2005; Rose, 2000; Takahahi & Beebe, 1987).

### 5.1.3. Pragmatic and Grammatical Competence

With regard to the connection between pragmatic and grammatical competence, results from paired-sample $t$-tests show that in general (Table 7), learners' pragmatic and grammatical competence develop in parallel, especially in the case of the two ESL groups of distinct academic levels. On the pre-test, ESL group 1 outperformed ESL group 2 in correcting pragmatic ($p = .04$) and grammatical ($p = .03$) violations. By the end of the study, the two ESL groups developed in both aspects, with ESL group 1 leading slightly, indicating learners were able to coordinate the two components of communicative competence in their L2 development.

The results of connected development between pragmatics and grammar are in contrast to previous claims that "high levels of grammatical competence do not guarantee concomitant high levels of pragmatic competence" (Bardovi-Harlig, 1999, p. 686; Hoffman-Hicks, 1992; Salsbury & Bardovi-Harlig, 2000, 2001), and that L2 learners often gain grammatical competence at the expense of pragmatic competence (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1990, 1993; Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998). Instead, the present study shows that with an increase in their overall L2 proficiency, learners gain both pragmatic and grammatical competence, and pragmatic and grammatical

development occur concurrently.

The positive association between pragmatics and grammar observed in this study is also in disagreement with the conclusions by Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei (1998) and Niezgoda and Röver (2001) that pragmatic and grammatical knowledge are largely independent. While Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei (1998) found that their Hungarian EFL learners identified more grammatical than pragmatic errors, and their ESL learners in the U.S. showed the inverse, Niezgoda and Röver (2001) reported the opposite: learners of a low proficiency in both the U.S. and the Czech Republic recognized more pragmatic than grammatical mistakes, while high proficiency learners showed the opposite tendency. The results of the present study came as no surprise. This is because the advanced participants in the present study were graduate students with a higher English proficiency with TOEFL scores of at least 550. This was not the case for the participants in Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei's study, who were students in an intensive ESL program and were less proficient than the advanced participants in this study.

The advanced participants in this study were also different from the highly proficient Czech EFL learners in Niezgoda and Röver's (2001) study. For the advanced Czech EFL learners, due to specific purposes, grammatical knowledge was more of a priority than pragmatic proficiency. The less proficient ESL and EFL participants in this study were also different from those Hungarian EFL learners in Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei's study and those less proficient learners in Niezgoda and Röver's study. The Hungarian EFL learners in Bardovi-Harlig and Dörney's study were secondary school students who learned English as a subject in school, and young adults who were taking noncredit courses in English. The low-level learners of overall L2 proficiency in Niezgoda and Röver's study comprised students who had been in a

college for only six months in the Czech Republic and ESL students attending a private language school in the U.S.

The less proficient ESL participants in the present study, on the other hand, consisted of 39 students who were taking degree courses in their fields of study, and only 21 of them were taking various ESL classes. Their EFL counterparts in China were students who had passed vigorous tests to get admitted into a top university in China and had received intensive English instruction, ten hours per week, from both native and non-native instructors of English. The contents of their instruction had been targeted to enhance their communicative competence. Additionally, the EFL participants showed a high motivation to learn the English language and made an effort to develop their overall L2 proficiency. For all participants in the present study, being both grammatically accurate and pragmatically proper was essential to thriving in present and future social and academic life.

What is also worth mentioning is the high pragmatic and low grammatical competence among the EFL sample at the onset of the study. As a matter of fact, their pragmatic competence was comparable to that of ESL group 1 of advanced level. This would be consistent with Niezgoda and Röver's findings (2001) that their less proficient EFL group had a higher pragmatic awareness than their highly proficient EFL counterparts. One possible explanation for this result might be the "cohort effect" (Niezgoda & Röver, 2001, p. 78), which reflects the recent trend in foreign language instruction worldwide. This effect is also observable from the present research and further illustrates the less influential effects of the learning environment.

## 5.2. Conclusions

Research into the question as to what extent the learning environment and overall L2 proficiency contribute to L2 pragmatic development has inspired much

exploration. This study has examined the influence of the learning environment and overall L2 proficiency on the development of L2 pragmatics, with reference to grammatical competence. Findings from this study lead to the following conclusions:

1) A learning environment does not predict pragmatic competence. At a time of globalization, when the English language traverses borders and is used worldwide, an EFL setting does not impede one's growing pragmatic competence in English as an international language.

2) A high level of overall L2 proficiency indicates a high level of pragmatic competence, i.e., an increment in overall L2 proficiency brings an increase in pragmatics.

3) Given time, L2 learners gain both pragmatic and grammatical competence. The two indispensible components of communicative competence corroborate with each other in the development of overall L2 proficiency.

The present study thus contributes to the existing body of research into the effects of the learning environment and overall L2 proficiency on the development of L2 pragmatics, with reference to grammatical competence. The findings of this study are important because they shed light on the fact that, as an international language, the English language can be owned and shaped by those who learn and use it in their local communities.

## 5.3.  Implications

### 5.3.1.  Communicative Competence

The framework that guided the present research, as reviewed in Chapter 2, is primarily based on several models of communicative competence (e.g., Bachman, 1990; Canal, 1983; Canale & Swain, 1980; Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei, & Thurrell, 1995). Under these models, pragmatic competence consists of both knowledge of a language

and the ability to use that language. Additionally, these models emphasize the interdependence between pragmatic and grammatical competence, indicating that one of the goals of SLA is to develop accuracy in grammar and proficiency in pragmatics. As Canale and Swain put it:

> Just as Hymes (1972) was able to say that there are rules of grammar that would be useless without rules of language use, so we feel that there are rules of language use that would be useless without rules of grammar. (1980, p. 5)

The present study observes that participants, as being pragmatically competent, have the needed knowledge and the capacity to transform their learned knowledge into performance by the end of the study. They are able to have the two elements complement each other and contribute to their overall performance. Additionally, the present research finds a balanced combination of pragmatic and grammatical competence in L2 development. As shown, advanced learners exhibit their expected high pragmatic competence and a matched grammatical ability; low-proficiency learners develop pragmatic and grammatical competence over time. These results suggest that the development of pragmatic and grammatical competence is not contradictory but complementary; when learning an L2, to be pragmatically competent, as well as to be grammatically capable, is not only obligatory, but also attainable.

### 5.3.2. Pragmatic Pedagogy

How can teachers benefit from this study? Instructors might need to realize that the development of L2 pragmatic competence is related more to the development of overall L2 proficiency and less influenced by the learning environment; the development of pragmatic and grammatical competence complements each other. Instructors might need to understand that less proficient learners may struggle in

developing their pragmatic proficiency. The low-proficiency learners may show a degree of pragmatic awareness, but they may not be ready to translate this awareness into production because of their under-developed language skills. This realization and understanding is vital in L2 instruction. It informs that EFL instructors may facilitate their learners in the development of their L2 pragmatics by expanding their language skills first. It further reminds the ESL instructors that it should not be taken for granted that pragmatic development will take place naturally in the TL community.

With the more influential proficiency effect and less influential environment impact on the development of pragmatic competence in mind, instructors might consider giving learners of low-proficiency more time to grow, and they might add more pragmalinguistic elements into their curricula at an early stage in order to help these learners become competent language users. Furthermore, the complementary improvement of pragmatics and grammar found in this study implies that instruction may be helpful which facilitates learners' coordination of the two essential components of communicative competence in the development of their L2 proficiency.

### 5.3.3. L2 Pragmatics

The present study offers insight into research in L2 pragmatics. That L2 learners of low proficiency, irrespective of their place of residence, develop their pragmatic competence over time, and advanced learners do not improve significantly suggests that L2 pragmatic competence should be assessed on its own terms. For decades, L2 pragmatic research has been predominantly comparing and contrasting L2 learners' language behavior to that of native speakers. A native model has been ascribed as the ultimate goal for an L2 acquisition. It has been taken for granted that the native norms are used to monitor L2 learners' language behavior. With the

growing attention to World Englishes to date, a native or a near-native competence is questionable. There are two reasons to question the validity of ascribing a native-like competence in L2 acquisition. One is that a native speaker is hard to define (McKay, 2003). As a matter of fact, the very term "native speakers" is debatable. This is because, due to historical and political reasons, people living in countries and regions such as India, Singapore, and Hong Kong grow up bilingually by using the English language alongside their native languages. They are also legitimate owners of the English language, and they are competent users of the English language in their own right.

Second, the very concept of TL community is also a variable. This is because even people living in the same community do not always share the same values, and their language behavior varies from door-to-door and person-to-person (Kasper, 1997), especially in the case of English. People who speak English as an L1 are spread over several continents and across oceans. They are different from one another in a number of ways. As a result, to advocate a native competence in L2 acquisition and use a fuzzy set of native norms to define L2 language behavior is not only unrealistic, but also ignorant to the fact of the heterogeneity of native speakers of English.

Furthermore, with the emergence of English as an international language, communication in English takes place in various social settings among speakers of other languages. As an international language, English functions as a tool which enables its users to gain knowledge of the other culture and, at the same time, to share their ideas and cultures as well (McKay, 2002). In this light, it is important for researchers in L2 pragmatics to adopt a more descriptive and less prescriptive approach. This is because, after all, pragmatics is about language use in social life.

What does this mean for conducting research on pragmatics? Instead of

hunting for deficiencies in their development of language skills, a descriptive study in English as an international language would be a candid documentation about how L2 learners learn to do things with words, how they make the English language relevant to themselves, and more important, how they construct their intercultural identity by utilizing language resources in both their L1 and English. This study has followed this tradition by exploring learners' growth in English in their local contexts in which the English language is considered as an international language and a means for communication.

The objective description of how learners do things with words in English could help instructors understand the complexity of the acquisition of an international language, and, accordingly, help them to make informed decisions on teaching goals, textbooks, and teaching methods. Most important, this approach could help L2 learners realize the importance of gaining intercultural competence; learning and understanding the knowledge of the target culture does not mean an obligation to follow the TL rules (Byram, 1998), and the ultimate goal of learning another culture is to enrich "all our experiences" and to give "us a sense of being more in control of our destiny, and to perceive the things that go on around us with greater clarity" (Van Lier, 1995, p. xii). Asking L2 learners to follow the native norms and to ignore their meaningful communication contexts is to decontextualize their gained knowledge, making their learning goal less achievable, and leading them into the misconception that their L1 beliefs should be subordinated to the L2 practices.

## 5.4. Future Research

As mentioned previously, several limitations in the present study confine the generalization of its findings. Future researchers would benefit by taking the following into consideration:

1) From a methodological perspective, in order to determine the proficiency effect, future studies should include various levels of L2 proficiency among the EFL sample. This research only sampled the intermediate level of Chinese EFL students from one of the top universities in the country, leaving learners of either a low or an advanced level of proficiency unexamined.

2) In order to make a reliable conclusion on the effects of the learning environment, more developmental studies across settings and using multiple approaches are needed. To date, the majority of the developmental studies focus on the influence of the TL community by using the quantitative approach, leaving the impact of EFL settings underexplored and learners' thinking, relating to their language behavior, less investigated.

3) The effects of LOR are left unexamined in this study. With varied lengths of residence in the U.S. among the ESL groups, the present research might have been improved to gain further insight into the influence of the TL community by examining L2 pragmatics among the ESL participants, based on their LOR.

4) One of the present findings is that advanced learners do not progress as significantly as learners of low proficiency. This is not surprising because, to date, very little research in ILP has examined pragmatic development among advanced learners. Oftentimes, the advanced learners are included in single-moment research in order to find their persistent discourse accent. More developmental studies should include advanced learners in order to find the unique pattern that they follow in L2 pragmatics.

**Appendix A**

Background Information (for ESL participants)

Thank you for helping us with this study. We appreciate your participation.
The following questions will help us know you better. Please choose the answers
applied to you, and fill in the blanks. Please do not leave any identifying information
on the sheet. Please do not leave any personal identifying information on the paper.

1)      Your gender       _____ male_____female

2)      Your age   _____20s_____30s_____40s_____older

3)      Is this your first time to come to an English speaking country? \_\_\_\_Yes\_\_\_No

        If yes, then go to the question; if no, please go on with question 4).

4)      This is your _____ time in an English speaking country. I have been to \_\_

        _____, for_____days, months, years).

5)      Other than English, what languages do you speak?

        _____.

6)      Which countries have you been to other than the U.S.?

        _____.

7)      How long have been studying English? And where?

        _____.

8)      Did you have any English-speaking friends before you came here?

        _____Yes_____No

9)      What is your TOEFL score?

        Below 550_____between 550 to 600_____above 600_____

        N/A _____.\_\_

Thank you very much for help.

**Appendix B**

Background Information (for EFL participants)

Thank you for helping us with this study. We appreciate your participation.
The following questions will help us know you better. Please choose the answers applied to you, and fill in the blanks. Please do not leave any identifying information on the sheet. Please do not leave any personal identifying information on the paper.

1)  Your gender  _____ male_____female

2)  Your age: Less then 20 _____20s_____30s_____.

3)  Your major of study  _____.____

4)  Have you been to an English speaking country?

_____Yes, places: _____, for_____ (days, months,

years). _____No.

5)  How long have you been studying English? _____.

6)  Other than Chinese and English, what other languages do you speak?

_____.

7)  Which countries have you been to? For what reasons and for how long?

_____.

8)  Do you have any English-speaking friends?

_____Yes, how many? _____.      _____No

9)  How many hours do you spend in English per week of school? And what do

you do?

_____.

10) Have you taken any English proficiency test? ____Yes, what is your score?

_____. _____No.

Thank you very much for help.

**Appendix C**

Instructions and Scenarios          Name _____

*Instruction*

Thank you for helping us with our research. In this questionnaire you are going to read Anna and Peter talking to classmates and teachers. Their English will sometimes be correct but sometimes there will be a problem. You job is to decide how well Anna and Peter use English in different conversations. Please decide whether you think there is a mistake or not and mark your answer.

Let's look at an example:

  John: Good morning, Anna.
#Anna: Good night, John.

|  | ☐ | ☐ |
|---|---|---|
| Is the last part appropriate/correct? | Yes | No |

If there is a problem, how bad do you think it is?
Not bad at all_____:_____:_____:_____: _____:_____Very bad
If you think it is not appropriate, how would you revise it?
(Good Morning, John.                                       )

Anna's answer is obviously not good. So in the example on your answer sheet put an *X* in the box marked *No*. After this, you decide how big the mistake is. Put an *X* somewhere on the line between *not bad at all* and *very bad*. For a small mistake mark the second or third slot; for a serious mistake mark the last slot. Accordingly, you may revise it like Good morning, John.

**Remember: This is not a test; we are interested in what you think.**
If you have a question, please ask.

***Scenarios***

[Grammatical errors are indicated by *, pragmatic inappropriateness by #, some with no marks. It's up to you to decide if they are correct or not.]


1. The teacher asks Peter to help with the plans for the class trip.
   (*Class Trip* Scenario)
   T: OK, so we'll go by bus. Who lives near the bus station? Peter, could you check the bus times for us on the way home tonight?
   P:     #No, I can't tonight. Sorry.

                                    ☐           ☐

   Is the last part appropriate/correct?          Yes          No
   If there is a problem, how bad do you think it is?
   Not bad at all____:____:____:____: ____:____Very bad
   If you think it is not appropriate, how would you revise it?
   (_____)


2. Peter and George are classmates. George invites Peter to his house, but Peter cannot come.
   G: Peter, would you like to come over to my house tonight?
   P: *I'm sorry, I just can't. I'm very tired. I couldn't sleep on last night.

                                    ☐           ☐

   Is the last part appropriate/correct?          Yes          No
   If there is a problem, how bad do you think it is?
   Not bad at all____:____:____:____: ____:____Very bad
   If you think it is not appropriate, how would you revise it?
   (_____)


3. Peter goes to the snack bar to get something to eat before class.
   (*Snack Bar* Scenario)
   F: May I help you?
   P: #Would you be so kind as to give me a sandwich and a yogurt please?

                                    ☐           ☐

   Is the last part appropriate/correct?          Yes          No
   If there is a problem, how bad do you think it is?
   Not bad at all____:____:____:____: ____:____Very bad
   If you think it is not appropriate, how would you revise it?
   (_____)

4. George is going to the library. Peter asks him to return a library book.

   G: Well, I'll see you later. I've got to go to the library to return my books.

   P: Oh, if you are going to the library, can you please return my book too?

   |  | ☐ | ☐ |
   |---|---|---|
   | Is the last part appropriate/correct? | Yes | No |

   If there is a problem, how bad do you think it is?

   Not bad at all_____:_____:_____:_____: ____:_____Very bad

   If you think it is not appropriate, how would you revise it?

   (_____)

5. Peter is talking to his teacher. The conversation is almost finished.

   T: Well, I think that's all I can help you with at the moment.

   P: *That's great. Thank you so much for all the informations.

   |  | ☐ | ☐ |
   |---|---|---|
   | Is the last part appropriate/correct? | Yes | No |

   If there is a problem, how bad do you think it is?

   Not bad at all_____:_____:_____:_____: ____:_____Very bad

   If you think it is not appropriate, how would you revise it?

   (_____)

6. Anna is talking to her teacher in his [sic] office when she knocks over some
   books.

   A: (knocks over some books) Oh no! I'm really sorry! Let me help you pick them
   up.

   |  | ☐ | ☐ |
   |---|---|---|
   | Is the last part appropriate/correct? | Yes | No |

   If there is a problem, how bad do you think it is?

   Not bad at all_____:_____:_____:_____: ____:_____Very bad

   If you think it is not appropriate, how would you revise it?

   (_____)

7. It is Anna's day to give her talk in class, but she is not ready. (*Not Ready* Scenario)

   T: Thank you Steven, that was very interesting. Anna, it's your turn to give your talk.

   A: # I can't do it today but I will do it next week.

   ☐　　　　　☐

   Is the last part appropriate/correct?　　Yes　　　　No

   If there is a problem, how bad do you think it is?

   Not bad at all_____:_____:_____:_____: _____:_____Very bad

   If you think it is not appropriate, how would you revise it?

   (_____)

8. Anna goes to the snack bar to get something to eat before class.

   F: May I help you?

   A: A cup of coffee, please.

   F: Would you like some cream in it?

   A: *Yes, I would like.

   ☐　　　　　☐

   Is the last part appropriate/correct?　　Yes　　　　No

   If there is a problem, how bad do you think it is?

   Not bad at all_____:_____:_____:_____: _____:_____Very bad

   If you think it is not appropriate, how would you revise it?

   (_____)

9. Anna has borrowed a book from a classmate, Maria. Maria needs it back, but Anna has forgotten to return it.

   M: Anna, do you have the book I gave you last week?

   A: * Oh, I'm really sorry but I was in a rush this morning and I didn't brought it today.

   ☐　　　　　☐

   Is the last part appropriate/correct?　　Yes　　　　No

   If there is a problem, how bad do you think it is?

   Not bad at all_____:_____:_____:_____: _____:_____Very bad

   If you think it is not appropriate, how would you revise it?

   (_____)

10. Anna needs directions to the library. She asks another student.

    (*Direction* Scenario)

    A:  Hi.

    S:  Hi.

    A:  #Tell me how to get to the library.

                                       □               □

    Is the last part appropriate/correct?        Yes         No

    If there is a problem, how bad do you think it is?

    Not bad at all_____:_____:_____:_____: _____:_____Very bad

    If you think it is not appropriate, how would you revise it?

    (_____)

11. Peter is going to George's house. He is quite late. (*Late* Scenario)

    P:   Hi George.

    G:  Hi Peter. I've been waiting for over half an hour. Weren't we supposed to meet at 4?

    P:   #I couldn't come earlier. And anyway, we don't have to hurry anywhere.

                                       □               □

    Is the last part appropriate/correct?        Yes         No

    If there is a problem, how bad do you think it is?

    Not bad at all_____:_____:_____:_____: _____:_____Very bad

    If you think it is not appropriate, how would you revise it?

    (_____)

12. Peter and George meet before class. They want to do something before class starts.

    G:  Hey, we've got 15 minutes before the next class. What shall we do?

    P:  *Let's to go to the snack bar.

                                       □               □

    Is the last part appropriate/correct?        Yes         No

    If there is a problem, how bad do you think it is?

    Not bad at all_____:_____:_____:_____: _____:_____Very bad

    If you think it is not appropriate, how would you revise it?

    (_____)

13. Peter goes to see his teacher at his office. When he arrives, his teacher is busy.
    (*Busy Teacher* Scenario)
    P: (knocks on the door)
    T: Yes, come in.
    P: Hello, Mr. Gordon. Are you busy?
    T: Erm…I'm afraid so. Could you come back later?
    P: #OK, I'll be here tomorrow morning at 8.

       ☐      ☐

    Is the last part appropriate/correct?     Yes     No

    If there is a problem, how bad do you think it is?

    Not bad at all_____:_____:_____:_____: _____:_____Very bad

    If you think it is not appropriate, how would you revise it?

    (_____)

14. Peter asks his teacher for a book.
    P: Mr. Gordon?
    G: Yes?
    P: *Could I possibly borrow this book for the weekend if you not need it?

       ☐      ☐

    Is the last part appropriate/correct?     Yes     No

    If there is a problem, how bad do you think it is?

    Not bad at all_____:_____:_____:_____: _____:_____Very bad

    If you think it is not appropriate, how would you revise it?

    (_____)

15. Peter's teacher wants to talk to Peter about the class party. Peter makes arrangements to come back.
    T: Peter, we need to talk about the class party soon.
    P: Yeah, if tomorrow is good for you, I could come any time you say.

       ☐      ☐

    Is the last part appropriate/correct?     Yes     No

    If there is a problem, how bad do you think it is?

    Not bad at all_____:_____:_____:_____: _____:_____Very bad

    If you think it is not appropriate, how would you revise it?

    (_____)

16. Anna goes to ask her teacher to fill in a questionnaire. She knocks on the office door.    (*Questionnaire* Scenario)

    A: (knocks on the door)

    T: Yes, come in.

    A: #Hello. My name is Anna Kovacs. If you don't mind, I would like you to fill this in for me.

    &#9744;    &#9744;

    Is the last part appropriate/correct?   Yes   No

    If there is a problem, how bad do you think it is?

    Not bad at all_____:_____:_____:_____: _____:_____Very bad

    If you think it is not appropriate, how would you revise it?

    (_____)

17. Maria invites Anna to her house but Anna cannot come.

    M: Anna, would you like to come over this afternoon?

    A: I'm sorry, I'd really like to come but I have a difficult history test tomorrow.

    &#9744;    &#9744;

    Is the last part appropriate/correct?   Yes   No

    If there is a problem, how bad do you think it is?

    Not bad at all_____:_____:_____:_____: _____:_____Very bad

    If you think it is not appropriate, how would you revise it?

    (_____)

18. Anna needs directions to the library. She asks another student.

    A: *Excuse me, could you tell me where is the library?

    &#9744;    &#9744;

    Is the last part appropriate/correct?   Yes   No

    If there is a problem, how bad do you think it is?

    Not bad at all_____:_____:_____:_____: _____:_____Very bad

    If you think it is not appropriate, how would you revise it?

    (_____)

19. Anna has borrowed a book from her teacher. Her teacher needs it back, but Anna has forgotten to return it.

T:  Anna, have you brought back the book I gave you yesterday?

A:  *Oh, I'm sorry, I completely forgot. Can I giving it to you tomorrow?

|  |  | ☐ |  | ☐ |
|---|---|---|---|---|

Is the last part appropriate/correct?                    Yes                    No

If there was a problem, how bad do you think it is?

Not bad at all_____:_____:_____:_____: _____:_____Very bad

If you think it is not appropriate, how would you revise it?

(_____)

20. Anna meets her classmate, Maria, after school. They want to go somewhere.

A:  Maria, are you doing anything this afternoon?

M: No, I've already prepared for tomorrow's classes.

A:  #Then I say we go to the cinema. OK?

|  |  | ☐ |  | ☐ |
|---|---|---|---|---|

Is the last part appropriate/correct?                    Yes                    No

If there is a problem, how bad do you think it is?

Not bad at all_____:_____:_____:_____: _____:_____Very bad

If you think it is not appropriate, how would you revise it?

(_____)

**Appendix D**

Interview scripts for the ESL groups

1. Why did you choose to study in the U.S.?

2. Have you adjusted to the life style here? Are you willing to make an adjustment?

3. Do you talk with people in English the same way as you talk in your native language? If yes, how and why? If no, how and why not?

4. Do you think your English has changed since you came to the U.S.? If yes, in what respects and why? If no, why not?

5. On average, do you speak your L1 more or English more?

6. Please share with me your language learning experience in the U.S.

**Appendix E**

Interview scripts of the EFL group

1. Why do you study English?

2. Do you think that your English language skills have improved since you attended college? If yes, in what respects and why? If no, why not?

3. What do you usually do after class regarding your English language learning?

4. Do you talk with people in English the same way as you talk in your native language? If yes, how and why? If no, how and why not?

5. On average, do you speak Chinese more or English more?

6. Please share with me your English language learning experience.

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