CORRELATION BETWEEN GRAMMATICAL COMPETENCE AND PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE AMONG IRANIAN UNIVERSITY EFL LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to determine the levels of pragmatic competence among Iranian EFL learners and to correlate these levels with their levels of grammatical competence. In order to do this, separate tests were devised. One set of tests was designed to measure pragmatic competence. A second set of tests was devised to test grammatical competence. The difference between their pragmatic competence and grammatical competence was examined for any significant correlation between them. In addition, the effect of learning methods on the pragmatic and grammatical competence was tested. The findings show that there is a weak or no correlation between EFL Iranian university students' grammatical competence and their pragmatic competence. The findings also show that learning methods do have a significant effect on the Iranian students' pragmatic and grammar competence. In addition, the study shows a predominance of traditional teaching and learning practices in Iran.

ABSTRAK

Kajian bertujuan untuk menentukan tahap kecekapan pragmatik pelajar EFL Iran dan mengaitkan hasil ini dengan tahap kecekapan tatabahasa mereka. Dalam usaha untuk melakukan ini, ujian berasingan telah direka. Satu set ujian direka untuk mengukur kecekapan pragmatik. Satu set ujian kedua telah direka untuk menguji kecekapan tatabahasa. Kemudian perbezaan diantara kecekapan pragmatik dan kecekapan tatabahasa telah dikaji untuk melihat sama ada terdapat sebarang hubungan yang signifikan di antara keduanya. Di samping itu, kesan kaedah pembelajaran ke atas kecekapan pragmatik dan tatabahasa juga diuji. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa terdapat hubungan yang lemah atau tidak ada antara kecekapan tatabahasa pelajar EFL Iran dan kecekapan pragmatik mereka. Kajian juga menunjukkan bahawa kaedah pembelajaran yang mempunyai kesan yang besar ke atas kecekapan pragmatik dan tatabahasa para pelajar Iran. Disamping itu, kajian menunjukkan dominasi pengajaran dan amalan pembelajaran tradisional di Iran.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1   Background of the study

One of the challenges that language teachers face is developing the language competence of Second Language (L2) learners so that they can use language correctly and appropriately in a variety of social contexts. In this sense, language competence not only refers to the underlying knowledge of the linguistic aspects of the language system under study, such as grammar and lexis, but also an understanding of the extra-linguistic features of a given communicative scenario, all of which contribute to meaning and the interpretation of meaning, These can include gesture, silence or suggested meaning (implicature). In relation to this, language competence is divided into three main competency areas: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence and strategic competence. Where grammatical competence focuses on knowledge of the syntax or morphological structure of a language in order to derive at its meaning, and is, therefore, purely linguistic in nature, sociolinguistic and strategic competences concern themselves with an appreciation of the context in which an utterance is made, with an emphasis on maintaining social relationships and achieving personal aims.

Sociolinguistic and strategic competences can both be grouped under pragmatic competence (Gumperz & Cook-Gumperz, 2008), as they look at both the learner's ability to understand a speaker's intended meaning by appreciating the factors that govern the speaker's choice of language in a given social context, and also the learner's ability to match their utterances with the context they are in, in order to maintain social relationships and achieve a specific communicative purpose. Therefore, in order to communicate effectively, a learner will require knowledge that goes beyond the level of grammar and lexis. Pragmatic competence is, therefore, a very important component when it comes to

teaching and learning a language, as it contributes to how effective a learner can be in managing conversations that go beyond a simple transfer of information. It is a branch of linguistics that began gaining attention in the late eighties, and has since been widely investigated by many researchers (Bardovi-Harlig, 1996; Rose & Kasper, 2001; Bardovi-Harlig & Griffin, 2005).

1.2   Perceptions of language competence

Language is a complex, multidimensional phenomenon which challenges a comprehensive definition. Nevertheless, arriving at such a definition has been attempted by some linguists and prominent figures in language and linguistics (e.g. Chomsky, 1965; Robins, 1989; Canale, 1983; Bachman, 1990; Martin, 2000). As a case in point, Lyons (1990) defines language as such:

> *Language is composed of various systems of communication, namely natural and artificial. The natural type may be verbal such as English, Chinese and (others)… whereas sign language and body language are referred to as non-verbal systems of communication. The other systems of communication mostly used by mathematicians, logicians and computer scientists for the purpose of notion or calculation is known as artificial language (Lyons 1990, 4).*

In addition to the two types of languages mentioned above, there is also the system of communication used by animals - a non-human mode of communication (Pearce, 1987).

Thus, presenting a scientific, concise and comprehensive definition of language which encompasses all varieties of language, namely natural (verbal and non-verbal), artificial, and non-human is quite beyond the reach of the average researcher, and is extremely difficult. Despite this, the current research presents a brief description and discussion of issues such as language and culture and the roles of the speaker and hearer. However, in the preliminary stage of the study, to rationalize the need for the study, the significant role that English as a global language might play in the domain of other sciences will be delineated.

1.2.1 English and status of teaching English in Iran

The desire for seeking knowledge is one of the outstanding characteristics of human activity. However, accessing that knowledge is becoming increasingly dependent upon proficiency in the English language. There is a growing trend, that began in the latter half of the twentieth century to publish scientific articles in English. For example, as reported in Elsevier Research Trends (2008), roughly 80% of all the journals indexed in Scopus are published in English. Concerning the scientific role of English, Flowerdew and Dudley-Evans (2002, p. 463) states that "*Scientists need to be able to access literature, which will invariably be published in English, and to be able to disseminate the findings of their own research through the leading international journals, which, again, are likely to be published in English.*" Additionally, due to the increase in world population, the number of learners who globally pursue their higher degree either at home or overseas is increasing day by day. The British Council (2012), in their 2012 Going Global report, states that tertiary education enrolments globally reached 170 million in 2009, which represents a 160% growth since 1990. Furthermore, there are trends which indicate that growth is being matched by the number of programs that are being taught in English. The Institute of International Education (2013) stated that, as of June 2013, according to StudyPortals.eu, the total number of English-taught programs in Europe was 6,407, representing a 38 percent increase since 2011.

However, due to the existence of a large amount of materials written in English for the learners and whoever seeks knowledge, proficiency in English is a prerequisite or a necessary means of the enhancement in any field that the learners are involved in. Similarly, Callaham (2005, p. 305) claims that, "*English is in fact necessary for academic success*" and it can be considered to be one of the pathways for career advancement. This view is also supported by Harris (2001) who provides a comprehensive discussion of the

significant role of English stating that "*In recent decades, English has increasingly become the medium of communication, both in international congresses and in geographical periodicals and serials published in many countries and distributed over all continents*" (p. 675). English is not only significant for scholars, researchers, web bloggers and others who have a thirst to gain knowledge but also for travelers, businessmen, and academics who wish to engage in sabbaticals or fellowships in English speaking countries. Thus, for all who pursue the earlier mentioned goals around the world, learning the English language either through native or non-native teachers is a must. Iran is a case in point, with a population of more than 70 million, many of whom seek the ends to which English is the means.

To sum up, in the light of rapid changes taking place in today's world, exposure to mass communication media, and access to scientific articles in English through the World Wide Web, it is undoubtedly necessary for Iranians, especially the new generation, to master an international global language after they have acquired their mother tongue. Due to this necessity, in the area of English language education in the country, teaching quality and teachers' qualifications are of central concern in the present study. To put the research work in perspective, a brief summary of the background of foreign language education in Iran is provided in the ensuing sections, including remarks on Iran's educational system and the status of English in the country.

Before delving into the history of Foreign Language Learning (FLL) in Iran, it is appropriate to describe, briefly, the present educational system of the country. This comprises three levels: primary (five years), guidance (three years) and secondary (four years). Upon completing the secondary level with a diploma, students can gain entry into the university to study in an area of their choice, provided they pass the university entrance examination.   Presently, English is taught as a foreign language in Iran, and is introduced

at the level of guidance school, when the children are about 12 years old. The teaching of the language is then continued into secondary school and university. At these two levels (guidance school and secondary school), English is a compulsory subject, and students have to attend English classes three hours per week. The schools are under the purview of the Ministry of Education, and the teachers are hired and paid by the government. The language educators who are involved in the teaching of English at public (national) schools are mainly non-native speakers of English.

From the historical perspective, as stated by Sadigh (1965), foreign language instruction in Iran dates back to 1851, when the first well-known Iranian institution of formal instruction in higher education called '*Darol-Fonoon*' was established. In those days, due to the political and social conditions of the country, the needs of the Iranian elite (e.g. scientists, politicians), and international ties with Europe, it was necessary for educated Iranians to learn both English and French. Hence, the two languages were taught alongside one another. Accordingly, due to the lack of local English and French teachers, non-native foreign language teachers were invited to the country from Anglophone and Francophone countries to teach English and French. Gradually, France and French as an international language lost power and Britain along with its language gained sovereignty and as a result French was completely replaced by English.

After the Islamic revolution (1979), during the last 30 years, the importance of foreign language teaching and the status of foreign language experts have continuously been under review. During this era, textbooks and the time allocated for teaching English were constantly a matter of change, with an undesirable outcome. In other words, the development of EFL learners, particularly in terms of language pragmatic competence, has not prospered.

Nevertheless, English has been and is taught in state schools, private institutes and all universities as a foreign language. However, the present aim of most EFL learners, except for those who are in private language institutes, is just to know the grammatical rules of the target language (English) rather than how to use the language for communicative purposes. This aim has been established through a failure in the national curriculum, because even though it professes to abide by principles of Communicative Language Teaching, the reality is that political agendas have undermined the intent, and furthermore, teachers are not equipped enough to deliver a syllabus based on modern methods or techniques (Dahmardeh, 2009). This has resulted in a situation where most Iranian undergraduates, post-graduates, researchers and even university professors suffer from a lack of pragmatic competence in English proficiency. This lack of pragmatic competence may present some obstacles or hindrances for those who wish to pursue higher education or seek career advancement abroad. It will especially affect those who want to pursue research - or write articles in English. In a study in Iran investigation the needs of learners following MA programs Khajavi and Gordani (2010) performed a needs analysis to discover a skills deficit in terms of writing articles and presenting their research findings at international conferences.

This situation gives rise to the following questions: Why is the proficiency of English in Iran so generally poor? What are the factors that affect the students' competence in Iran? Do learning methods have any effect on these competences? What is the solution to this problem? Where can we begin to look for these solutions?

Hence, a scientific investigation into these issues should be conducted. To do this, it is hypothesized that some of the weaknesses of the Iranian EFL learners may be grounded in the learning approaches, and in order to support or negate this hypothesis, the scores they attribute to the learning methods used as well as their perceptions about them, in terms of

their relationship with pragmatic and grammar competences should be considered. Due to the significant role EFL learners and teachers play in developing language competence it would be necessary to touch upon the status of the two separately.

1.2.2 Problems faced by Iranian students learning EFL

As stated earlier, the main objective of English language students in Iran is merely to pass the course; as such, the teaching of the language is confined to the form or the structure of the language rather than its use. Official tests are usually based on grammar, reading comprehension, and vocabulary. Consequently, the various parts or skills of language are taught and tested in isolation. There is little room for listening and speaking, and the language is taught mostly through Persian. Thus, Eslami-Rasekh and Valizadeh (2004) believe "*The orientation is therefore towards a combination of grammar-translation and audio lingual methods in most schools*" This shows that little attempt has been made for teaching language use. According to Widdowson (1990), language as a system consists of knowing and doing, meaning that just having the knowledge about language is inadequate. Similarly, it should be acknowledged that in the process of second or foreign language teaching, as Nassaji (2000) claims, just focusing on language use, as done in the weak version of communicative language teaching[1], is insufficient. This implies that the integrating of both form-focused instruction along with communicative interaction in the second or foreign language classroom is necessary.

Consequently, the reason for the poor English proficiency amongst Iranian EFL learners could be due to the fact that for more than half a century, the English teachers consciously

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[1]   Howatt distinguishes between a "strong" and a "weak" version of Communicative Language Teaching: There is, in a sense, a 'strong' version of the communicative approach and a 'weak' version. The weak version which has become more or less standard practice in the last ten years, stresses the importance of providing learners with opportunities to use their English for communicative purposes and, characteristically, attempts to integrate such activities into a wider program of language teaching.... The 'strong' version of communicative teaching, on the other hand, advances the claim that language is acquired through communication, so that it is not merely a question of activating an existing but inert knowledge of the language, but of stimulating the development of the language system itself. The former could be described as 'learning to use' English, the latter entails 'using English to learn it.' (1984: 279)

or unconsciously "*used either the prescribed traditional grammar method of teaching or followed the structuralists' stand introduced by the American post-Bloomfield linguists*" (Fard, 1998, p. 1). Accordingly, from the 1950s onwards, particularly in terms of teaching English in Iran, the emphasis was placed on the form or the structure and little attention was paid to the function or the sociocultural aspects of language in the hope and belief that the overt teaching of grammar, vocabulary or language forms to the students may help them eventually pick up language use on their own when needed (Fard, 1998). However, this type of teaching has led to a situation whereby even the best students who get the highest marks in English tests are not even capable of giving or asking for an address when the need arises. The reason is that they lack language use skills as they have not received instruction in the sociocultural aspects of language use.

In order to overcome these problems which are related to English language proficiency, the Iranian Ministry of Education as well as the university professors involved in the design of the school curriculum, usually work in close collaboration with English teachers and try to produce new teaching materials in tandem with the new theories of teaching and learning. However, the outcomes of such collaborations have not been encouraging.

As the teaching/learning issue has still not been properly addressed in the schools, language institutes have been established in Iran as adjuncts to public schools with the aim of overcoming the weaknesses in the system of learning English. This has led to the private language institute administrators hiring language teachers who are preferably native speakers of English, probably because of the perceptions of these institutes that their customers (students) would prefer these teachers; the learners would probably believe that teachers who were native speakers of English could teach the English language more effectively than non-native speakers of the language (Mahboob, 2003; Celik, 2006).

1.2.3 Teachers' perceptions of EFL learners

In an academic sense, students and teachers are two sides of a coin. In the foregoing sections on English education in Iran, some of the disadvantages of the Iranian EFL learner population at the school level were discussed. "*Understanding teachers' perceptions and beliefs is important because teachers, heavily involved in various teaching and learning processes, are practitioners of educational principles and theories*" (Jia, Eslami & Burlbaw, 2006). Therefore, in what follows, the researcher explains Iranian EFL teachers' tendency to attribute problems leading to failure in ELT to external sources such as poor living conditions, low student motivation, curricular weaknesses, and other similar causes. Concrete research-based steps should be taken for the improvement of English language education in the country and the enhancement of learners' proficiency.

1.3 The problem statement

Much research has been conducted on the efficacy of ELT methods and contexts, with the aim of determining what conditions promote successful English language learning. However, that generalization also needs to be understood in terms of the impact of the cultural values and norms that pervade school or EFL classrooms in countries around the world. With this in mind, ideas of language competence are guided by what is perceived as the purpose of language study, and what educational policies and influences are in forces that affect the learning contexts.

During the 1970s, ELT approaches underwent both critical analysis and, as a result, a number of evolutionary changes – this stemming from the realization that language itself needed a reappraisal (Nunan, 1998), whereby it became widely understood that language competence extended beyond knowledge of an abstract system of linguistic rules. Instead,

language was to become regarded as a dynamic resource for the creation of meanings in a variety of social contexts.

ELT has its stories of successes and failures around the world, in terms of how well English language programs help develop proficiency and prepare learners to communicate in an international context. Much research has been carried out in looking at the factors that affect the quality of English language teaching and learning. One principal factor is the status of English in the country where it is taught; is it viewed as a second or foreign language, and, perhaps more importantly, how do policymakers view its importance? Is English seen as a stepping stone for further educational opportunity abroad; will it prop up a desire to develop tourism in the country? Or is it seen only as just another academic subject? Is the focus therefore on developing real communicative competence, or could it be a case of securing enough knowledge of language forms in order to pass an exam?

In China, for example, the curriculum for many years in the 1980s and 1990s focused on the passing of exams at the expense of developing communication skills, a deficiency which was later recognized by the late 1990s, when the English syllabus was re-designed (Lu, 2007).

Another key aspect is funding, and the amount a country is either able to or willing to invest in infrastructure – classrooms, technology, educational materials. According to an Irin news report (2008) countries such as Nigeria suffer badly in this respect, with the result that schooling is under-resourced.

Elsewhere in parts of Africa, class sizes are too high for effective instruction – on average, there is one teacher for 46 pupils (Diligent, 2011).

How well is school teaching integrated with private tuition, and is there adequate teaching expertise or support? If English language teaching is not highly valued, salaries and working conditions may be too poor to attract English language teachers who have

been willing to invest a great deal in their professional development, and who naturally seek adequate remuneration. An adjunct to poor schooling is low school enrolment, as students tend to respond to their own context with low motivation. It has been cited in Education First (2012) that this is the main cause of the very poor English standards in Latin America, as witnessed following an online self-test study conducted by EF, the Swiss-based education company. Even though India has a reputation of being an Anglophone country with pockets of high proficiency among the educated classes, the average performance score is drawn downwards by the fact that most of the country is still poor (Azam, Chin & Prakash, 2013).

Another factor playing a role in English proficiency is access to English in the media and how this is often utilized as authentic materials in the classroom. Yet another factor is the way English is taught, and what methods have gained ground, which often depends on the progressiveness of the education system as a whole. Traditional focus tends to be on more antiquated methods, such as Grammar Translation or Audiolinguilism, whereas, in Europe, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) with its focus on student-centred learning has gained a lot of ground. Despite the debate around the efficacy of more modern methods e.g. Task-based learning, the Lexical Approach, Suggestopaedia and Total Physical Response (TPR) to name a few, with the admission that none of these is likely to work as a standalone basis for a complete syllabus and approach, there is agreement that these methods contribute to variety and satisfy a theoretical basis for motivated learning.

In terms of empirical evidence regarding the value of learning focused on communicative competence, research carried out by Savignon (1972) and Canale and Swain (1981) can be referred to (cited by Savignon in Celce-Murcia, 2001).

"Test results at the end of the instructional period showed conclusively that learners who had practised communication in lieu of laboratory pattern drills performed with no less accuracy on discrete-point tests of grammatical structure. On the other hand, their

communicative competence as measured in terms of fluency, comprehensibility, effort, and amount of communication in unrehearsed oral communicative tasks significantly surpassed that of learners who had had no such practice." (Savignon, 2001 in Celce-Murcia, p.16).

So where in the world is English proficiency highest? According to the previously mentioned EF report, which has been cited by many educational commentators, Scandinavia and countries in Central Europe (such as Austria, Poland, Hungary, Germany and Switzerland) exhibit very high or high proficiency, with countries such as Singapore and Malaysia faring well too, due to their colonial past and the recognition that English, beyond the establishment of their independence, is pragmatic for business.

How does the report rate Iran? It is ranked 42nd out of the 60 countries who participated, earning a score which indicates low proficiency. Elsewhere, this is corroborated by greater in-depth analyses conducted in the country, describing a number of conditions which explains the plight.

In Iran, although English is placed high up in the national curriculum, paradoxically, EFL approaches have been constrained by a set of political and social factors that tend to regard English speaking countries (especially America and Great Britain) as a threat to Iranian stability. EFL has been neglected, with curriculum development derived from an imposed societal view rather than what the students themselves deem as appropriate. Indeed it is typical that a curriculum reflects national and political trends.

Darhmardeh (2006) has pointed out that even after studying English for seven years through the school system, most Iranians typically cannot communicate effectively in the language. He has concluded that in Iran no real attempt has been made to make the English curriculum communicative. The emphasis is on achievement in exams, and yet these fail to test real communicative competence

Interestingly, he reports that although the stated aims of the ELT curriculum in Iran are often aligned with the principles of CLT, teachers and learners alike tend to agree that those aims are not realistic or attainable in the context of state or private education, due to limitations with time, materials and teaching approaches. Emphases tend to be on reading comprehension and grammar, and, moreover, teachers are reluctant to assert that their students can perform tasks that are communicative in nature, stating that preparing the students for their final exams takes precedence. Furthermore, the teachers themselves lack confidence in their own English and the teaching methods they use.

There is a specific profile to Iran, as well as other countries in the Middle East, that disfavours motivation in English language learning. Even comparing Iran with countries like India and Pakistan, there is the disadvantage that in the former English is a foreign rather than a second language. Iran has created a barrier to International influence due to the policies and attitudes of the Islamic Republic and its clerics. For example, the country does not promote tourism, bans access to English-speaking programmes, and filters the internet so that news, videos and social networking sites are blocked, denying the populace to a wealth of real life English. Furthermore, the government makes it difficult for Iranians to leave the country and travel abroad, though of course this is not impossible. Nevertheless, this has had an impact on exposure to communicating in international settings.

Many researchers (Ellis, 1994; Rost & Ross 1991; Kasper & Schmidt, 1996, Kasper, 1997) in the past have pointed out reasons why EFL learners sometimes face communication problems, especially with native speakers of English. This has been attributed to the fact that such learners have failed to develop pragmatic competence because traditional learning materials and teaching methods offer no pragmatic input (Godleski, 1984). Learners simply possess little or no pragmatic competence: that is, they

have not realized the need to understand contextual information in order to successfully derive the intended meaning of a speaker. Instead, they rely purely on linguistic information (e.g. grammar and lexis) to provide the clues. The result may be ambiguity or even confusion, and without awareness of the usefulness of pragmatic competence, EFL learners will fail to understand how to fully analyse the language they hear to determine their shortfalls.

The division of language competence into grammatical and pragmatic competence suggests a weak relationship between the two (Thomas, 1983). This assumption is based on the fact that the branching of any area of human knowledge into various classes by means of categorization is a way of emphasizing essential differences. On some level, the division of language competence into grammatical competence and pragmatic competence highlights a recognition that the two rely upon essentially different learning processes: one based on form (grammatical), the other based on experience (pragmatic). Many definitions of pragmatic competence state that it goes beyond what grammatical competence can provide, suggesting a different kind of knowledge or awareness (Crozet, 2003). However, having made this assumption, a survey of the literature does not explicitly state that research evidence proves the two competences are completely independent. It is therefore a worthy area of investigation to test this assumption and examine the relationship between the two. If grammatical competence only focuses on form and the meaning is supplied by form, does this knowledge in any way contribute to pragmatic competence? If the two are completely disassociated, is it reasonable to assume that EFL learners with differing levels of grammatical competence will not display corresponding differences in their levels of pragmatic competence? That is, if we compare two learners, one showing a high level of grammatical competence gained through formal instruction, and the other showing a low level of grammatical competence, the assumption is that if their exposure to real life

interactions in English is similarly limited, then we should expect no appreciable difference in their levels of pragmatic competence.

An interesting link to this discussion is the fact that Iranian EFL learners who have only learnt English in Iran are exposed to methods and materials that only focus on developing grammatical competence. A number of studies conducted in Iran attest to this fact. Karimnia and Zade (2007, p. 290) state that "*the only way to learn English in Iran is through formal instruction, i.e. inside the classroom where the language teachers are native speakers of Farsi. There is little opportunity to learn English through natural interaction in the target language. This is only possible when students encounter native English speakers who come to the country as tourists, and this rarely happens.*" In addition, they state "*in order for language learners to use the language more successfully, they should be involved in real-life situations. But in Iran, English is used only as an academic subject*". Finally, they add that EFL teaching methods in Iran focus almost entirely on the "*grammar translation method*". The implication is that many EFL learners from Iran have had little or no exposure to real-life situations in English where they might develop pragmatic competence. The classroom situation is teacher-centred rather than communicative-centred. Iranian learners are, therefore, a useful source of research subjects in order to test whether any relationship between grammatical and pragmatic competence exists.

Pragmatic competence is a diverse and complex skill, so a comprehensive study of all its facets is unrealistic. However, one area where pragmatic competence is required is in the way learners manage common social functions, such as coping with opening and closing conversations, making requests, making suggestions or offers, apologising, and giving compliments. It is also required to recognize the intended purposes behind the speech acts of others who are using language contextually in order to achieve their communicative purposes. The learners may be grammatically competent, but in many cases, they may act

or react inadequately or even inappropriately, and will be prone to violating the social values of the target language group through lack of pragmatic competence (Thomas, 2006).

1.4 Purpose of study

One purpose of the research study is to determine the levels of pragmatic competence among Iranian EFL learners and correlate the findings with their levels of grammatical competence. In order to do this, separate tests will be devised. One set of tests will be aimed at measuring pragmatic competence. Here, the learners will be faced with a number of social situations, as listed above, in an academic context where they have to supply appropriate language in order to achieve some kind of given communicative purpose. They will also have to negotiate various obstacles (e.g. external requirements, conditions, objections) along the way. When the tests are being devised, a set of criteria will be created against which the supplied language (from the learners during test implementation) is compared. This will measure the degree of success of the provided utterances, so that a score can be achieved.

A second set of tests will be devised in order to test grammatical competence. These will be a combination of multiple choice and gap-fill exercises, where successful completion will only depend on knowing correct syntactical forms. However, in order to test a wide range of grammatical competence among all the subjects, it will be necessary to devise tests of increasing complexity and difficulty. Since scores can be obtained from both sets of tests, it will be possible to plot them on a scatter diagram, where the correlation between grammatical and pragmatic competence can be seen.

The second purpose is to establish whether those Iranian students who have higher pragmatic competence levels are able to identify what learning experiences helped their

achievement in this area, as these may well inform future developments in designing materials and devising methods aimed at developing pragmatic competence.

The two underlying assumptions are as follows:

(i) Iranian students are typically not exposed to teaching methods or materials which are associated with developing pragmatic competence (Karimnia & Zade, 2007). This is especially true in academic settings, because research has shown the focus is traditional, concentrating solely on grammatical competence. Therefore, their performance in the 'Pragmatic Competence' tests will generally be expected to be poor, whereas their performance in the 'Grammatical Competence' tests will be expected to be a lot higher.

(ii) It is expected that levels of pragmatic competence will not correlate with levels of grammatical competence, suggesting the link between them is weak.

1.5   Research objectives

The first objective of this study is the comparison of pragmatic and grammar competence of EFL Iranian learners. The results can lead to the evaluation of the suitability of both types of competences in the teaching to EFL learners. In other words, this study attempts to see which category of competences, the pragmatic or the grammar, is better suited to meet the needs of the Iranian EFL learners. The second objective of this study is to investigate the learners' attitudes and tendencies towards different types of learning methods that is to inquire the self-perceptions of learners regarding the weaknesses and strengths of different learning methods. The final objective of this study is to see whether there is any relationship between level of usage of different learning methods and the students' pragmatic and grammar competence.

The three objectives stated above will be achieved by examining (i) the scores of learners in pragmatic and competence tests; (ii) the perceptions of learners with regard to

usage of different learning methods; (iii) the relationship of using different learning methods and the pragmatic and grammar competence of the learners. Specifically, the following research objectives were formulated for the present study:

- To determine whether there is a correlation between EFL Iranian university students' grammatical competence and their pragmatic competence.

- To investigate the learners' attitudes and tendencies towards the different types of learning methods – strengths and weaknesses

- To determine whether there is a relationship between levels of pragmatic competence among EFL Iranian university students with the kinds of learning experience they have been exposed to.

1.6   Research questions

In line with the above objectives, the following research questions are formulated;

- What is the correlation between EFL Iranian university students' grammatical competence and their pragmatic competence?

- What are the differences in the pragmatic competence in English of EFL Iranian university students?

- Do these differences relate to the length and kinds of exposure they have had to different learning methods and materials?

1.7   Significance of the study

The study will show whether there is a correlation between grammatical and pragmatic competence when it comes to managing social interactions or transactions in an academic context, where the learners will have to achieve, using appropriate language, a specified communicative purpose (e.g. request an extension from their supervisor in order to

complete an assignment). If it can be established there is no correlation, the study will suggest that grammatical competence does not contribute to pragmatic competence. If the questionnaires reveal a predominance of traditional teaching and learning practices in Iran, then the study will suggest that there is little if any practical input in preparing students to cope with the kinds of social and academic interactions or transactions that are necessary when dealing with people (peers and supervisors) inside or outside a real academic environment where English is the medium of communication. This, in turn, will suggest the need to propose that English teaching institutions in Iran update their methodologies to include exercises that promote pragmatic competence.

If it can be established that grammatical competence alone has shortcomings in the sense it does not contribute to pragmatic competence and therefore communicative competence, there is some evidence to suggest the way the current curriculum is being implemented is not promoting the integration of Iranian students who study abroad. Given that the political climate is beginning to change in Iran since the change in Presidency, with a newly-professed desire for greater interaction and cooperation with the West, this study may lend some support to argument that the nature of English language teaching should change too.

Finally, the study may suggest some steps which may be taken to promote pragmatic competence, if the groups display a range of abilities in this area. By investigating the kinds of learning experience the learners have been exposed to, it may be possible to determine which experiences have been more successful in promoting pragmatic competence.

1.8   Summary

This chapter first described various forms of language competence, defining the key terms. Following that, the status of language teaching in Iran was explained, elaborating on some of the problems faced by Iranian students learning EFL. Then the problem statement

was clarified and the research questions were stated. Finally, the chapter concludes with the significance of the study. The next chapter discusses the literature review of the study.

1.9   Definitions

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions are used:

GRAMMATICAL COMPETENCE

Grammatical competence is defined as the ability to recognise and produce the distinctive grammatical structures of a language and to use them effectively in communication (Chomsky 1965).

PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE

Pragmatic competence is understood as the knowledge of the linguistic resources available in a given language for realizing particular illocutions, knowledge of the sequential aspects of speech acts, and finally, knowledge of the appropriate contextual use of the particular language's linguistic resources (Kasper & Blum-Kulka, 1993).

SOCIOCULTURAL COMPETENCE

Sociocultural competence refers to the pupil's ability to use language correctly in specific social situations – for example, using proper language forms at a job interview. Sociocultural competence is based upon such factors as the status of those speaking to each other, the purpose of the interaction, and the expectations of the players. How socially acceptable is the person's use of English in different settings? This competency is about appropriateness in using language (Canale & Swain, 1983).

STRATEGIC COMPETENCE

Strategic competence refers to strategies for effective communication when the student's vocabulary proves inadequate for the job, and his or her command of useful learning

strategies. Strategic competence is how well the person uses both verbal forms and non-verbal communication to compensate for lack of knowledge in the other three components. Can the pupil find ways to compensate for areas of weakness? If so, the pupil has communicative efficacy (Canale & Swain, 1983).

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The research topic is premised on a number of underlying observations, one of which is that many learners of English who wish to study abroad at an institute of higher education face communicative problems as a result of inadequate proficiency in the language (Abdulrahman, 2012; Jump, 2011). This does not mean to say that these learners have not studied English. On the contrary, they may have studied the language for a significant number of years. However, one assumption here is that the teaching and study methods employed are not up to the task of preparing the students with the language skills to integrate successfully in an environment where they not only need to study, but they also need to interact with tutors and other students, socialize and be an active member of an educational community.

An underlying issue here is educational planning and the principles/beliefs by which educational policymakers make their decisions about how an English language curriculum should be developed. What guides their choices and what implications does this have on the efficacy of English language instruction.

This review will look at communicative competence, and attempt to arrive at some conclusions as to what a communicatively competent student can do, and what composite skills are involved. It will also look at what research has been carried out to identify the kinds of factors that contribute to communicative competence by analysing theories of second language acquisition (SLA). The review will then look at how these theories are being put into practice in terms of mediation and the contexts created for language instruction. As part of this examination, the specific conditions that tend to predominate in Iran will be covered, comparing what research results have uncovered to the assumption

made in this research paper: that English language teaching in Iran focuses on Grammar Translation – and that this educational bias has a deleterious effect on how learners are able to communicate in English, with specific reference to their pragmatic abilities.

2.2   A definition of communicative competence

A number of research papers have examined the question of communicative competence and how it should be defined. Chomsky (1965) made a definite distinction between competence and performance, with the former characterized by an underlying knowledge of the rules of a system that govern the use of a language, away from any situational context. Performance, on the other hand, related to how that knowledge was applied in recordable language behaviour. Chomsky's view was criticized as early as 1970 (Campbell and Wales), who stated that he had omitted inclusion of real communication ability in his definition, pointing out the exclusion of "*the ability to produce or understand utterances which are appropriate to the contexts in which they are made*". Hymes, in 1971, further contributed to the argument stating that all sociocultural and situational factors relating to language use could not be ascribed only to linguistic competence, suggesting Chomsky's view was restricted. In response, Chomsky (1980) acknowledged that grammatical competence, which embraced knowledge of the structure of a language, was complemented by '*pragmatic competence*'. Taylor (1988) stated that, through his assertions, Hymes had broadened the definition of competence to include not only knowledge of a system, but also the ability to use that knowledge.

Savignon (1972) felt that Chomsky's view was too restrictive in the sense that it lacked applicability in learning, teaching and testing languages where there was a great deal of variation in ability.

Hymes' (1972) view was thought to be more realistic - he defined communicative competence not only as an inherent grammatical competence but also as the ability to use grammatical competence in a variety of communicative situations, thus bringing the sociolinguistic perspective into Chomsky's linguistic view of competence.

Bruner (1973) also included '*skill*' with '*competence*', arguing against the innateness of competence, and stating that it can be learned, like any other skill. He said "*what is learned is competence, not particular performance*". Corder (1973) acknowledged Chomsky's view that there is an innate component to competence; that there is a body of knowledge already within, but Corder's concern with language teaching led him to propose that it is something which can be constantly developed. This suggests a duality: both a static and a dynamic component to competence.

Corder (1973) viewed competence as having two aspects: one static (akin to Chomsky's native/innate knowledge of a universal grammatical system) and one dynamic, where the innate competence is built on – which he called transitional competence.

Following Hymes' work, Canale (1983, 1984) was involved in writing two influential articles in the development of the concept of communicative competence. The papers presented a framework for the description and assessment of communicative competence, dividing it into four components, which reflect the definitions at the end of Chapter 1 to the extent that sociolinguistic competence is covered by pragmatic competence, and discourse competence becomes linked to grammatical competence to form a higher group called 'Organisational Knowledge':

(1) *grammatical competence*: which is closely akin to Chomsky's original view of linguistic competence.

(2) *sociolinguistic competence*: this addresses the extent to which utterances are produced and understood appropriately in different sociolinguistic contexts.

(3) *discourse competence*: this relates to the correct organization of texts following the rules of coherence and cohesion determined by the genre and purpose of the text.

(4) *strategic competence*: this relates to communication strategies employed by the speaker in which weaknesses are overcome by behaviours such as circumlocution.

However, despite this broadened view, Canale and Swain (1983) were also keen to reinstate Chomsky's position of '*competence*' as being exclusive of '*ability for use*' until more research evidence asserts its consideration for inclusion, as the notion of '*performance*' had not been pursued rigorously enough in any research on communicative competence.

Canale and Swain (1980) and Canale (1983) understood communicative competence as a synthesis of an underlying system of knowledge and skill needed for communication. In their concept of communicative competence, knowledge refers to the (conscious or unconscious) knowledge of an individual about language and about other aspects of language use. According to them, there are three types of knowledge: knowledge of underlying grammatical principles, knowledge of how to use language in a social context in order to fulfil communicative functions and knowledge of how to combine utterances and communicative functions with respect to discourse principles. In addition, their concept of skill refers to how an individual can use the knowledge in actual communication. According to Canale (1983), skill requires a further distinction between underlying capacity and its manifestation in real communication, that is to say, in performance.

Savignon (1983) believed more focus should be given to ability, and that communicative competence is dynamic, reflecting the ability to adapt to communicative settings, engaging in an interpersonal context. Savignon equated communicative competence with language proficiency.

Ellis (1994) supported this view by defining competence as "*a language user's underlying knowledge of language*" and by defining communicative competence as "*the knowledge that users of a language have internalized to enable them to understand and produce messages in the language*".

In an attempt to clarify the concept of communicative competence, Widdowson (1983) made a distinction between competence and capacity. In his definition of these two notions he applied insights that he gained in discourse analysis and pragmatics. In this respect, he defined competence, i.e. communicative competence, in terms of the knowledge of linguistic and sociolinguistic conventions. Under capacity, which he often referred to as procedural or communicative capacity, he understood the ability to use knowledge as means of creating meaning in a language. According to him, ability is not a component of competence. It does not turn into competence, but remains "*an active force for continuing creativity*", i.e. a force for the realization of what Halliday called the '*meaning potential*'.

Another term used to describe a learner's interaction with language is '*proficiency*', which tends to be associated with measurement and testing in SLA, with Stern (1983) noting its use in what levels of ability have been acquired by learners or what levels of ability are required in order to demonstrate academic potential. Canale (1983) then went on to propose three dimensions to proficiency to account for the differences in learners' performance when tackling various tasks: (i) basic language proficiency for information exchange, (ii) communicative language proficiency for social, interpersonal uses of the language through spoken or written channels and (iii) autonomous language proficiency, involved in intrapersonal uses of the language, such as problem-solving, verbal play, poetry or creative writing. Bachman (1990) gave her own definition of communicative language ability, which included the aspect of discourse management, embracing both competence and the capacity for implementing or executing that competence in appropriate,

contextualized communicative language use. She saw three components: (i) language competence, which could be subdivided into organizational (grammatical, textual) and pragmatic competence (illocutionary, sociolinguistic), (ii) strategic competence and (iii) psychophysiological mechanisms. Stern (1983) recognized that proficiency depended upon Chomsky's innate competence, but added that it also involves mastery of the cognitive, affective and sociocultural meanings, as expressed by language forms.

Taylor (1988) proposed to replace the term '*communicative competence*' with the term '*communicative proficiency*'. At approximately the same time and for similar reasons, Bachman (1990) suggested using the term '*communicative language ability*'. Bachman defined communicative language ability as a concept comprised of knowledge or competence and capacity for appropriate use of knowledge in a contextual communicative language use.

Regarding performance, it is not that simple to understand, describe and evaluate the ability for use. It has been assumed that the ability for use refers to the application of different cognitive processes and affective factors in language use (Skehan, 1998). The relationship between competence and performance is not clearly understood or well-researched, but needs to be looked into from a psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic perspective.

With the confusion resulting from so many competing definitions, Llurda (2000) proposed the use of three terms to account for the phenomena exhibited in language use; (i) competence, which aligns with Chomsky's innate view, (ii) performance (the actual use of language in real situations), which really measures the efficacy of specific instances of language behaviour in the context in which it is used, and (iii) proficiency, which looks at the ability to make use of competence, an ability which can develop over time, either in a monolingual or inter-language context.

2.3 Models of communicative competence

By 1983, Canale and Swain had devised the following model:

(1) Grammatical or linguistic competence. According to Canale and Swain, grammatical competence is concerned with mastery of the linguistic code (verbal or non-verbal) which includes vocabulary knowledge as well as knowledge of morphological, syntactic, semantic, phonetic and orthographic rules. This competence enables the speaker to use knowledge and skills needed for understanding and expressing the literal meaning of utterances.

(2) Sociolinguistic competence - knowledge of rules and conventions which underlie the appropriate comprehension and language use in different sociolinguistic and sociocultural contexts.

(3) Canale (1983, 1984) described discourse competence as mastery of rules that determine ways in which forms and meanings are combined to achieve a meaningful unity of spoken or written texts. The unity of a text is enabled by cohesion in form and coherence in meaning.

(4) In the model of Canale and Swain, strategic competence is composed of knowledge of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies that are recalled to compensate for breakdowns in communication due to insufficient competence in one or more components of communicative competence. These strategies include paraphrase, circumlocution, repetition, reluctance, avoidance of words, structures or themes, guessing, changes of register and style, modifications of messages.

The above is deemed to be a simple model that tends be to be used despite more comprehensive models – probably due to its ease of use.

Bachman (1990) and Bachman and Palmer (1996) defined 'communicative language ability', which is broken into language knowledge and strategic competence.

Language knowledge, in turn, comprises (1) organizational knowledge (grammatical, textual) and (2) pragmatic knowledge. In combination, they lead to effective language use.

Within organizational knowledge, grammatical knowledge enables recognition and production of grammatically correct sentences as well as comprehension of their propositional content, whereas textual knowledge enables comprehension and production of (spoken or written) texts. It covers the knowledge of conventions for combining sentences or utterances into texts.

Pragmatic knowledge refers to abilities for creating and interpreting discourse. It includes two areas of knowledge: knowledge of pragmatic conventions for expressing acceptable language functions and for interpreting the illocutionary power of utterances or discourse (functional knowledge) and knowledge of sociolinguistic conventions for creating and interpreting language utterances which are appropriate in a particular context of language use (sociolinguistic knowledge).

Strategic knowledge is conceived in the model as a set of metacognitive components which enable language user involvement in goal setting, assessment of communicative sources, and planning. Strategic competence is seen as the capacity that relates language competence, or knowledge of language, to the language user's knowledge structures and the features of the context in which communication takes place. Strategic competence performs assessment, planning, and execution functions in determining the most effective means of achieving a communicative goal (Bachman, 1990).

Another model exists, known as the Common European Framework model (CEF model) – this is composed of three areas of knowledge: language competence, sociolinguistic competence and pragmatic competence. Each one involves both underlying knowledge and ability.

The subcomponents of language competence are lexical, grammatical, semantic, phonological, orthographic and orthoepic competences. Sociolinguistic competence refers to possession of knowledge and skills for appropriate language use in a social context. Finally, pragmatic competence involves two subcomponents: discourse competence and functional competence. A part of both of these competences is the so-called planning competence which refers to sequencing of messages in accordance with interactional and transactional schemata.

2.4   Theories of second language acquisition (SLA)

The preceding paragraphs grapple with various notions that define language competence. Although agreement on the definition has not been reached, the discussions have fruitfully allowed the exploration to conclude there are multiple facets, and that these include both linguistic and non-linguistic abilities, with a division that caters for grammatical and pragmatic competences. However, if we are keen to understand how these develop, especially, in a second language (L2) context, it is key to expound the theories that look to explain second language acquisition, and explore their status amongst linguists and pedagogues. From that, it will be interesting to examine whether there are ideas around how differently grammatical and pragmatic competences are treated.

There are a number of theories that attempt to account for how learners learn a new language. The most popular are described here. One is behaviorism, which relies on rote learning, and the idea that repetition will eventually lead to an automatic behavior in language if the right stimulus is received and identified. The learning process implied by this view is mechanistic. Thus to acquire a language is to acquire automatic linguistic habits. However, Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991) consider that Stimulus-Response

models offer "*little promise as explanations of SLA, except for perhaps pronunciation and the rote-memorization of formulae.*"

Another theory, '*Acculturation*' relies on "*the social and psychological integration of the learner with the target language (TL) group*". Schumann (1978) came to this conclusion when he observed that within the group of language learners he was studying "*the subject who acquired the least amount of English was the one who was the most socially and psychologically distant from the TL group*".

Yet another theory stresses the importance of innate ability. Proposed by Chomsky, '*Universal Grammar*' (UG) asserts every human being is biologically endowed with a language faculty, the language acquisition device (LAD), which is responsible for the initial state of language development. The UG theory considers that the input from the environment is insufficient to account for language acquisition, as speakers are able to create new sentences never seen or heard before that, by consensus, do not contravene the rules of the language. The language itself is constrained by a set of rules that the mind imposes, and even though different languages exhibit variations e.g. word order rules, all languages exhibit common features and limitations shaped by the way the mind is able to apprehend the world.

Influenced by Chomsky's ideas, Krashen (1987) developed one of the most influential theories of SLA, which, in fact, is a collection of ideas, popularly known as the '*Monitor Model Theory*'. One central concept is the distinction between sub-conscious acquisition, such as when a learner is exposed to authentic input in a L2 setting, and conscious learning, which takes place in a classroom context, where the language is being formally presented, such as when grammar rules are explained. Acquisition takes place when the input is just beyond the learner's current proficiency, but it is still comprehensible because the learner is able to apprehend meaning from the context and associate it with the new language.

Krashen warned, though, that, even with these ideal conditions, acquisition can be compromised by '*Affective Filtering*', whereby social and psychological factors, such as low motivation or poor self-esteem will get in the way of language acquisition. Another aspect of Krashen's model is the way learners will monitor or self-correct their language output. Finally, a more controversial component of Krashen's view is the idea that there is a natural order to the language that learners acquire, and that learning cannot be forced to contravene that natural order.

Another theory, Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH), suggests that by focusing on potential errors through comparing and contrasting the L1 and L2 languages, it is possible to determine what should be included and excluded in a learning situation, as it is natural for a learner to transfer elements of the L1 to the L2 language (Saville-Troike, 2006).

Mitchell and Myles (1998) say that the predictions of CAH, that all the errors made in learning the L2 are due to interface from L1, were shown to be unfounded. They claim that many studies and research explain convincingly that the majority of errors could not be attributed to the L1. In other words, CAH might not predict learning difficulties, and was only useful in the retrospective explanation of errors. This point considerably weakened its appeal. However, the heightened interest in this area did lead to the origin of Error Analysis, which makes a distinction between errors, arising due to a lack of systematic knowledge of L2 language and mistakes, which are made when that knowledge has been made aware – but not fully acquired and production automatic.

Inter-language hypothesizes that while a learner is moving towards L2 language structures, there are a number of interim stages the learner passes through, using one form, such as the Present Simple tense, for a number of uses, before learning the need to incorporate different tenses to accommodate what needs to be expressed.

The 'Interaction Hypothesis', mainly formulated by Hatch (1978), almost turns Krashen's theory of Input Hypothesis on its head, stating that rather than a learner processing a structure prior to use, she will use language in conversation and out of this process an understanding of syntactic structures will develop. When learners interact with native speakers there is a tendency for the latter to notice the shortcomings of what is produced by the non-native speaker and make modifications to assist in a negotiation of meaning, pointing at ways in which inadequacies can be addressed.

In a similar vein, Swain (2006) postulated the idea of lingualisation as the central process at work during acquisition, which disregards Krashen's focus on input, and substitutes it with a focus on output, and the idea that production is key. She claims that practising the language helps learners observe their own production, which is essential to SLA. It is her contention that "*output may stimulate learners to move from the semantic, open-ended non-deterministic, strategic processing prevalent in comprehension to the complete grammatical processing needed for accurate production*". She explains that "*learners may notice a gap between what they want to say and what they can say, leading them to recognize what they do not know, or know only partially*". She highlights that '*noticing*' is essential to SLA and also hypothesizes that output has other two functions: to test hypothesis and to trigger reflection, a metalinguistic function. She explains that learners "*may output just to see what works and what does not*" and that they reflect upon the language they produce when negotiating meaning because the content of negotiation is the relation between the meaning they are trying to express and the language form.

The sociocultural theory regards the view that people are part of a social community as the driver in language acquisition. Mitchell and Myles (1998) stated that "*from a social-cultural perspective, children's early language learning arises from processes of meaning-making in collaborative activity with other members of a given culture*" and that "*the*

individual emerges from social interaction". It is in the social world that the language learners observe others using language and imitate them. It is also with the collaboration of other social actors that learners move from one stage to another. A key concept here is '*scaffolding*', the notion that all '*actors*' in the social community play a role in assisting the learners to build up their language competence.

Finally, within the framework concept of '*Connectionism*', it is postulated that SLA takes place, like all learning, due to connections that occur in neural networks, where simultaneous and parallel processing occurs (rather than just sequential), alluding to the fact learning is a complex process that occurs at different levels, from the individual brain to society. Language learning is understood as the processing of experience and the repetition of experiences causing the strengthening of the connections. Ellis (1994) explains that "*our neural apparatus is highly plastic in its initial state*" during L1 development but that "*the initial state of SLA is no longer a plastic system; it is one that is already tuned and committed to the L1*".

These theories are not exhaustive, and neither are they all-encompassing. The notions they contain cannot claim to explain all the process involved in SLA, and Menezes (2013) regards them all as having some theoretical validity, even if not supported by empirical evidence, stating that they approach SLA at different levels and contexts. She goes on to say that SLA is a complex process that should include all theories in SLA framework.

2.5 Relationship between SLA theories and pedagogical practice

In the previous paragraphs on second language acquisition theory, it is interesting to note that the subdivisions that are found evident in theories of language competence, are not explicitly mentioned. It is difficult to find reference, for example, to certain learning

contexts or even behaviours that seem to be successful in promoting only grammatical competence, and others that work on, say, sociocultural competence.

However, when we look at the different language learning approaches that developed as a result of the evolution of SLA, it is possible to see connections between language learning contexts and their impact on different competences.

There are a number of language learning approaches that promote language learning: The *Creative Construction Theory, Communicative Language Teaching* and the *Cognitive Approach.*

(1) Creative Construction Theory or the Naturalistic Approach – this is based on Chomsky's idea, principally the '*language acquisition device*' (LAD), that "*governs all human languages, and determines what possible form human language may take*". Krashen claims that there are three internal processors that operate when students learn or acquire a second language: the subconscious '*filter*' and the '*organizer*' as well as the conscious '*monitor*'. The '*organizer*' determines the organisation of the learner's language system, the usage of incorrect grammatical constructions as provisional precursors of grammatical structures, the systematic occurrence of errors in the learner's utterances as well as a common order in which structures are learnt.

(2) Communicative Language Teaching – this is a learner-centred approach favoured by British pedagogues and popularized throughout Europe, where the goal of language teaching is communicative competence, leading to a communicative syllabus design headed by the Council of Europe

According to Littlewood (1981), one of the most important aspects of communicative language teaching is that it pays systematic attention to functional as well as structural aspects of language. One of the most important aspects is pair and group work. Learners should work in pairs or groups and try to solve problematic tasks with their available

language knowledge. In this way, language is acquired through communication (theory of lingualisation), suggesting a relationship between CLT and the interactionist ideas of SLA. Today there is still a wide acceptance of the communicative approach, frequently described as '*learning by doing'* or '*the experience approach*' (Richards & Rogers, 1986). Communicative Language Teaching focuses on communicative and contextual factors in language use and it is learner-centred and experience-based.

(3) The Cognitive Approach. Cognitive psychologists claim that one of the main features of second language acquisition is the building up of a knowledge system that can eventually be called on automatically for speaking and understanding. At first, learners have to build up a general knowledge of the language they want to understand and produce. After a lot of practice and experience they will be able to use certain parts of their knowledge very quickly and without realising that they did so. Gradually, this use becomes automatic and the learners may focus on other parts of the language. What is transferred first to that knowledge bank deserves greater discussion but may depend on how a piece of language interacts with the current state of a learner's knowledge – is it a piece that fits or seems to be beyond the level of what it considers comprehensible. If it fits, the theory goes, it may be a piece of the jigsaw that restructures knowledge, allowing passage to new forms of language expression.

Also embodied in this approach is the idea of different cognitive states – and implicit or explicit knowledge, where explicit knowledge is what is consciously known about the language system, whereas implicit knowledge is *"information that is automatically and spontaneously used in language tasks"* (Brown, 2002). Implicit processes enable a learner to perform language but not necessarily to cite rules governing the performance. These models also relate closely to McLaughlin's model, which talks about four different categories of attention, differentiating between automatic and controlled processes, the

former meaning processing is a more accomplished skill where the brain is able to deal with numerous bits of information simultaneously.

For learning to occur, the learner needs to occupy a position where 'language awareness' can take place (van Lier, 1991). The learner must notice the object of learning. Paying attention is focusing one's consciousness or pointing one's perception powers in the right direction and making '*mental energy*' available for processing. Processing involves linking something that is perceived in the outside world to structures (patterns of connection) that exist in the mind. Krashen follows this model by talking about two sub-conscious processes: the '*filter*' (and the need to remove any obstacles that divert attention), the '*organizer*', which determines the organization of the learner's language system as well as the usage of transitional constructions as provisional precursors of grammatical structures, and a conscious process, the '*monitor*', which allows conscious linguistic processing. That means that learners correct or edit their speech influenced by the task they are required to fulfil.

Van Lier (1991) proposes that three principles need to be attended to for language learning to occur: Awareness, Autonomy and Authenticity. In terms of '*Awareness*', he identifies several preconditions such as *receptivity, access, investment and commitment that* lead to a number of simultaneous processes such as *exposure, engagement, intake and proficiency.* As a result, the author describes the possible outcomes as *perception, cognition, mastery and creativity*. Moreover, van Lier regards *social interaction* as a vehicle of central importance to start the whole process of learning and keep it going. Exposure talks about the quality of the language and the contextual information needed to make it comprehensible. However, he also talks about '*language engagement*', reflecting a learner's perspective – that the input has to relate to the learner's needs and experiences. Teaching needs to guide the setup of these preconditions. To come '*from engagement to*

intake an *investment of effort'* in the language process has to be made by the student. This suggests a distinction between non-verbalised knowing and comprehension which can be analysed and expressed. Finally, to reach *proficiency* "*mental structures or networks must be activated*" (van Lier, 1996). In order to remember the learnt information an amount of rehearsal is necessary.

By introducing four different types of practice van Lier uses *control* and *focus* as defining parameters. Firstly, '*controlled and narrowly focused practice'* includes mechanical drills, fill-in exercises etc. Secondly, not controlled but focused practice describes the learner's inner speech, private rehearsal and language play. Role play, drama-activities and information-gap tasks are elements of the third, which is called '*controlled but not (narrowly) focused practice'.* Last but not least, not controlled and not focused practice equals real communication (cf. van Lier, 1996).

Eventually the author gives several examples of practice. He points out that some features such as the "*... natural sequence or 'flow' of utterances ...*" (van Lier, 1996), the freedom for students to decide whether to keep close to the task or to use their own imagination, the difficulty level which can be decided by the learners, but also the teacher's attempt to facilitate the student's access to the activity, are likely to create a conversational structure of the exercises used for practice.

The main difference between Krashen and van Lier is that Krashen organizes comprehensible input from a perspective of language, believing that language input follows a natural order, whereas van Lier's view derives from a learner's perspective, taking into account the learner's needs, learning styles and strategies. Also, Krashen talks about a '*silent period*' in which a learner concentrates on comprehension before production should take place. From van Lier's point of view the teacher should, in order to overcome the fundamental communicative obstacle, guide the learner to the starting point of his/her

learning process by taking into account several preconditions such as receptivity, curiosity, access, investment and commitment into account. That means that according to van Lier, the responsibility for the learning process shifts from the teacher to the learner. Moreover, the teacher attempts to facilitate the learner's access to the activities performed.

2.6 Teaching approaches and the development of grammatical and pragmatic competence

In the era of language teaching (disregarding the study of the classical languages, such as Latin and Greek), the grammar-translation method took early prominence. The main goal for learning a language was not for speaking and/or communication. The driving force was to exercise the mind and at the same time to be able to read in that language. The name of the method, grammar-translation, captures the main emphases of this method (i.e. the study of grammatical aspects of language and the use of translation as a means of ascertaining comprehension). Communicating in the language was not a goal, so classes were taught primarily in the students' native language, and the teacher made no effort to emphasize correct pronunciation of the language. Grammar study was the focus of the lessons, with much rote memorization of grammatical aspects such as verb conjugations and recitation of rules that described language functions. In the US and Europe this method has largely been superseded by more progressive methods that take into account the language theories that have evolved over the last century. However, the method still exists today in varying degrees of practice in other parts of the world. It is not difficult to appreciate that this method had some benefit on grammatical competence, but there are no accounts that there it promoted other aspects of communicative competence.

In commercial schools, who wanted to promote greater immersion in the language being taught/learnt, there was an about-face in approach, leading to the Direct Method, where the

native language was avoided and understanding of the target language was facilitated by the association of objects, visuals and realia to concepts. The primary goal here was to think and speak in the language. Instruction revolved around specific topics and grammar was learnt inductively through the handling of the topic.

After the Second World War, the US realized its students could not speak foreign languages well, and through its application of behavioural psychology, which was gaining ground as a theory that explained much about behaviour in general, it adopted the Audio-Lingual Method (ALM). In the audio-lingual method, the emphasis was on the memorization of a series of dialogues and the rote practice of language structures. The basic premises on which the method was based were that language is speech, not writing, and language is a set of habits. It was believed that much practice of the dialogues would develop oral language proficiency. The use of the native language was avoided.

The method became very popular in the 1960s. Language laboratories began to surge, and students were required to listen to audiotapes and repeat dialogues that captured aspects of daily living. In addition, specific structural patterns of the language studied were embedded in those dialogues. Students were required to participate in a number of practice drills designed to help them memorize the structures and be able to plug other words into the structure. The belief was that students, through much practice, would form a "habit" and be able to speak the language when needed. Although the intent was to develop fluent and proficient speakers by providing much oral practice of the dialogues and the use of numerous drills to help in this endeavour, the reality was that language proficiency was not the outcome. The method was too prescriptive; there was no opportunity provided for "true" communication to take place in the ALM classroom.

Tracy Terrell developed The Natural Approach based on Krashen's monitor model. The main goal of this method is to develop immediate communicative competency. For this

reason, most, if not all, classroom activities are designed to encourage communication. Terrell (1977) suggested that the entire class period be devoted to communication activities rather than to explanation of grammatical aspects of language. In this method, the key to comprehension and oral production is the acquisition of vocabulary. Thus, much opportunity for listening/speaking (when ready) is afforded to students. Class time is not devoted to grammatical lectures or mechanical exercises. It is imperative, in this method, that teachers provide comprehensible input at all times. The use of visuals (graphs, charts, pictures, objects, realia), gestures, demonstrations, and motherese/parentese (slower speech, simpler language repetition, rephrasing, clear enunciation) is required. In addition, the use of yes/no type questions, either/or type questions, and questions that require short answers is strongly suggested in the beginning stages of second language acquisition.

The communicative approach to language teaching is based on several theoretical premises:

1. The communication principle: Activities that involve communication promote the acquisition of language.

2. The task-principle: Activities that engage students in the completion of real-world tasks promote language acquisition.

3. The meaningfulness principle: Learners are engaged in activities that promote authentic and meaningful use of language.

The main goal in this approach is for the learner to become communicatively competent. The learner develops competency in using the language appropriately in given social contexts. Much emphasis is given to activities that allow the second language learner to negotiate meaning in activities that require oral communication in the second language. In the communicative approach, it is important to create an "information gap" between speakers. Thus, the need to communicate is authentic because communication must take

place to narrow the gap and accomplish the task. Classroom activities must be varied and must include interactive language games, information sharing activities, social interactions, need for impromptu responses, and the use of authentic materials, such as the newspaper for oral discussions on current events.

Savignon (1983, 1997, 2002) suggests designing the curriculum to include language arts (or language analysis activities), language-for-a-purpose (content-based and immersion) activities, personalized language use, theatre arts (including simulations, role-plays, and social interaction games), and language use *"beyond the classroom"* (including planning activities that take the learners outside the classroom to engage in real-world encounters). The communicative approach embraces the principle of *"learning by doing,"* encouraging the use of English from the beginning of instruction. Thus, language acquisition takes place as a result of using the second language in meaningful communication from the onset in the process.

There are other methods, such as Suggestopedia, The Silent Way and Total Physical Response, but whatever merits they may have, they have not been adopted wholesale by state or private schools as the basis for a national curriculum, and due to the specialized training needed for teachers, these methods tend to be used by individual advocates who may manage to incorporate some of the techniques into their own brand of teaching style, but not more.

2.7   Factors in determining L2 pragmatic competence

No method has explicitly been developed to address '*specific*' language competences, as described through the communicative competence models already covered, though many of them have direct paths to developing grammatical competence. Even in the communicative

approach, the Presentation, Practice, Production technique is widely used in order to contextualize grammar and relate form to meaning.

Specifically, the methods so far described have no formal component that explicitly aims to address the development of pragmatic competence, though the communicative approach has principles which allow the inclusion of pragmatic development. One of the principles of the communication approach is intercultural awareness, and to that end, authentic material including literary texts are used in the classroom. Literary texts contain information gaps, since such writing presupposes knowledge the reader has, and presupposes the readers can follow all the connections the writer has made – between the inter-textual elements and the text and the real world. This aspect of implicitness means that such writing exerts illocutionary force (one major aspect of pragmatics), and, therefore, different readers will make different interpretations. Discussing these interpretations allows focus on the language in context, linking it to various possible meanings.

Bardovi-Harlig (1996) posits that the following factors have a direct influence on the acquisition or pragmatic competence: input, instruction, level of proficiency and length of stay living in the L2 culture, and the L1 culture. In addition, Lafford (2006) suggests that the study abroad environment serves as an unparalleled context for language learning and therefore serves as the ideal venue for the learner to truly become pragmatically competent, as it provides a direct link between language and culture.

Another factor that influences pragmatic competence is the learner's level of proficiency. Though only a limited amount of research has been done in this area, some studies reveal that advanced learners are more likely to perform a speech act that is considered more appropriate in a given context. A study conducted by Koike (1996) to evaluate the pragmatic knowledge of EFL and ESL learners from Hungary, found that both sectors of advanced learners were undoubtedly more pragmatically competent than intermediate

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students. Bardovi-Harlig (1996) also asserts that the longer the learner interacts with native speakers or is immersed in a community of speakers of the L2, the more pragmatically aware the learner becomes.

Kasper and Blum-Kulka (1993) defines pragmatic transfer as "*the use of L1 pragmatic knowledge to understand or carry out linguistic action in the L2*" and clarifies that, in a language learning situation, a positive or negative transfer may occur. A positive transfer takes place when the learner successfully communicates the message s/he is trying to convey because of a perceived similarity between the L1 and L2. On the other hand, a negative transfer occurs when the learner incorrectly uses a speech act, linguistic form of a speech act, or opts to omit a speech act where it is needed based on his/her comparison of the L1 and L2 (Bardovi-Harlig, 1996).

2.8   Theories of pragmatics: Speech act theory

A speech act can be defined as linguistic action, or an utterance that serves a function in communication. It "*can exist only if there is a match between manifested intention and a display of uptake, either in non-verbal reaction to what has been said or more often in what another speaker says next. Speech acts, then are created by the joint action of the participants in a conversation*" (Mühlhäusler & Harré, 1990).

J. L. Austin was the first to design a classification system of the various speech acts. These language related speech acts can be classified into three main categories: locutionary acts, illocutionary acts, and perlocutionary acts (Austin, 1962). A locutionary act can be defined as the act of saying something meaningful, or the actual utterance that is expressed by the speaker. This act embodies the linguistic aspect of speech performance which is associated with the syntactic and semantic aspects of the utterance. An illocutionary act goes beyond the mere speech of the utterance by materializing itself as the actual

performance of that utterance. It encompasses the notion that a certain force or function is being conveyed through the utterance. The final component of a speech act, the perlocutionary act, can be described as the intended effect as a result of the utterance. The speaker's goal, then, is to clearly communicate his/her intentions in an attempt to achieve something. It is important to note, however, that the speaker's attempt to convey a particular message may not successfully be communicated to the hearer. An indicator of the success of the utterance can be measured by analyzing the '*uptake*' of the utterance. The uptake can be interpreted through observation of the hearer's reaction in the form of a verbal or non-verbal response (Márquez & Placencia, 2005, p. 13).

It is with the illocutionary acts that many language pedagogues are concerned in recent literature. This is due to its direct correlation with communicative competence. To begin with, it is clear that a locutionary act shares many of the same features reflected in linguistic competence, chiefly in its interrelation with grammatical features of the language. Therefore, it is clear that a locutionary act is linked to only one aspect of the communicative spectrum. In contrast, an illocutionary act is concerned with the real, intended purpose of using the speech act. In this way, an illocutionary act also concerns itself with the contextual factors of the communicative act. This notion fundamentally parallels the goals of pragmatic competence in its consideration of extra-linguistic factors as well as the utterance itself. Fraser illustrated the concept with his categorization of 'directives', speech acts that intend to motivate the hearer into specific action by means of an appeal to the hearer's sense of moral obligation, sense of pride, sense of mutual cooperation, sense of well-being, etc., appreciating that these appeals and the language used may differ from one culture to another. Understanding that various speech acts reveal specific intentions depending upon context and culture suggest the need for introducing a sociocultural dimension to language teaching/learning.

Recently, many studies in second language learning have been conducted to examine the topic of pedagogical intervention and its relevance to pragmatic competence (such as Félix-Brasdefer, 2008). Implemented specifically in interventional studies, pedagogical intervention takes place through the explicit teaching of pragmatic themes at hand. In practice, the instructor pointedly discusses the relationship between the language form and function of the pragmatic feature.

While most studies have assessed language proficiency solely based on grammatical competence, one cannot assume that the learner is equally proficient in the grammar and appropriate pragmatic usage of the language. That is to say, while learners may exhibit a high degree of grammatical competence, this does not guarantee a corresponding level of pragmatic development when compared to native speakers (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1990, 1991, 1993). The terms '*advanced*' and '*intermediate*' in this study refer to the particular course level of the learner.

2.9 The learning context of Iranians in Iran including past studies

According to Dahmardeh (2006, 2009) Iran has a specific political and cultural perspective in the world, one that is suspicious of America and the UK. This has placed constraints on foreigners entering the country and Iranians leaving the country. It has also led to other limitations, ones that have a direct impact on learning English – news programs in English, news on the Internet, as well as video and social networking sites, such as YouTube and Facebook are banned, limiting access to a wealth of authentic material. In an educational context, the restrictions on movements have meant most English language teachers are Iranian and have not learnt their English in an English-speaking country.

In explaining the way the national curriculum for English language instruction has developed in Iran, Dahmardeh (2009) investigated the success or failure of the apparent

intention to base the national curriculum on based on Communicative Language Teaching. However, the investigation led to the conclusion that both the willingness and the mechanisms needed to implement that intention were sadly lacking, with the result that teachers were mainly untrained in communicative teaching methods and did not have access to materials or the time to create the materials that reflected a communicative approach. When Dahmardeh (2009), through a collaborative approach with scholars and pedagogues, agreed a list of 18 principles that reflect a communicative learning context, such as purposeful communication in task-based exercises, intercultural awareness, inclusion of semantic notions and social functions, pair and group work, use of authentic materials to create access to real-life situations, integrated skills learning, regarding comprehension as an active process, learner-centredness and others, and then researched to what extent these principles were practiced, it was found that they were largely missing from the curriculum and the learning contexts created – and a reliance on traditional methods, such as grammar-translation were asserted.

The basis of this paper's research makes the assertion that pragmatic competence is particularly lacking among Iranian L2 English language learners and that it should be as much as an equal focus in learning objectives as grammatical competence. What do past studies in Iran reveal about the levels of pragmatic competence among L2 learners, and can we comment about the need for developing pragmatic competence as a pedagogic aim?

To the latter question, Bachman (1990) said that in order to be successful in communication, it is essential for language learners to know not just grammar and text organization but also pragmatic aspects of the target language. The importance of pragmatics in terms of its contribution to meaning in social interactions is emphasized by Dash (2004), who also states the need for considered intervention in the L2 classroom in order to tackle cross-cultural pragmatic failure. Jung (2001) proposed well-orchestrated role

play and videos representing authentic successful pragmatics across different cultural lines as well as examples of more frequent cross-cultural pragmatic failure as a place to start, introducing students to successful pragmatic strategies.

Bardovi-Harlig, 1996; Kasper, 1997 have argued that although pragmatic rules may possess some universality, and that pragmatic awareness is a common phenomenon in any language group, and that therefore, we might expect language learners to try their luck and attempt to transfer their L1 pragmatic conventions to the L2 context, either language learners lack the necessary confidence to test that due to natural cautiousness, or the transfer simply does not work, and pragmatic failure is the result. Kasper (1997) expounds the former point further, quoting the findings of educational psychology which recognise that students do not always transfer their L1 knowledge and strategies to new tasks. Learners often tend towards surface interpretation, taking utterances at face value rather than inferring what is meant from what is said and under using context information.

In answer to the question about the levels of pragmatic competence among Iranian learners of English and its inclusion in the curriculum as a well-identified learning objective, a recent spate of past studies in Iran tend to corroborate the findings of Dahmardeh (2009) which reveal that English language teaching methods in Iran are traditional in nature, despite the recognition at policy level that more communicative approaches are required. They also propose a need for pragmatic instruction, and show that Iranian learners respond quite readily to it, especially when that instruction is explicit in nature. This metapragmatic intervention is deemed necessary despite the poverty of natural language interaction inside the classroom, because the salient features of pragmatic language are difficult to be noticed by L2 learners outside the classroom (Schmidt, 1993).

Mirzaei and Rezaei (2012), in a recent study, reported evidence that pragmatic teaching in the L2 classroom in Iran is severely underrepresented. EFL teachers tend to isolate the

mechanical aspects of the language. focusing on grammar, reading skills and new vocabulary, as these tend to be emphasized in the curriculum. Typically, Farsi was the language of instruction, and predominant teaching strategies employed were summarizing and L1 translation.

Jalilifar (2009) noted that when a group of Iranian subjects were observed making requests in a variety of contexts, those with lower language proficiency tended to negatively transfer their pragmalinguistic forms of directness, thereby reflecting the sociocultural norms in Iran, in situations where indirect strategies and their associated linguistic forms were called for. Moreover, even learners with advanced language proficiency, who had developed the ability to use more indirect forms, were unable to manage the equation between social dominance and social distance, tending to overuse indirectness. They concluded that L2 learners need to be made aware of second language socio-cultural constraints on speech acts in order to be pragmatically competent.

Allami and Naeimi (2011) derived a similar conclusion in a study on how Iranian upper-intermediate users were able to manage refusals. The transfer of L1 socio-pragmatic forms to the L2 performance tended to result in social inappropriacy. However, when Farrohki and Atashian (2012) repeated a similar study on refusals, they inserted explicit and implicit instruction as a prior step with two of the groups, and found that the group that had received explicit instruction performed better.

In another study, Azarmi and Behnam (2012) looked at how Iranian students coped with making direct complaints in English. They selected two groups, one at intermediate and another at upper intermediate level, assuming the performances would vary, with the upper intermediate students being able to shape their face-threatening complaints in a way that found better levels of politeness. However, they found that this level did not transfer their

L1 knowledge and did not demonstrate sufficient socio-pragmatic skills that qualify them to produce appropriate complaints in English.

Strategies for producing suggestions showed both similarities and differences between native speakers of English and Iranian non-native speakers, although, in this case, pragmatic failure was not a focus of the study (Pishghadam & Sharafadini, 2011). Interestingly, the strategies found lacking in the non-native speakers reflected a similar lack in the course books they had been using in their studies.

Based on these past studies, it has therefore been assumed that if pragmatic competence is to be developed among L2 learners, it needs to be done explicitly, in a teaching context where the sociocultural norms of the L2 language are presented and practiced.

Bardovi-Harlig and Griffin (2005) found that receiving instruction and engaging in classroom activities are crucial factors in raising learners' pragmatic awareness and empowering their pragmatic productive skills in L2. It is implied that L2 classrooms serve a critical function in the realm of L2 pragmatics instruction, particularly, because of the fact that they possess an extremely high potentiality to provide learners the opportunity for an explicit, attentive, and practical language learning in the foreign language context.

The notion of attentiveness or conscious attention in language learning as a critical success factor has been reported by Nassaji and Fotos (2004). It seems to provide the rationale for the explicit teaching of pragmatics in second language context. Farahian, Rezaei and Gholami (2012) tested this assertion by comparing the efficacy of two groups in their ability to express refusals politely. One group received explicit instruction in tactfully saying 'no' to a variety of requests, suggestions, invitations and offers, whereas the control group did not. The results showed that the former group showed greater and swifter attunement to a number of situations where refusal was called for. Kia and Salehi (2013) conducted a similar type of study with respect to the speech acts of thanking and

complimenting, but this time the instructional techniques employed compared explicit and implicit approaches in the classroom. It was found that the explicit mode of teaching made a much greater impact on the learners' ability to respond to situations appropriately, as again the need for directing learners' attention to the role of speech acts and the associated cultural specificity of some of the language contributes to successful language uptake.

What has not been yet been established with certainty is whether pragmatic awareness and competence always require explicit input or whether there is potentially a transfer from the language learning that takes place where pragmatic consideration is lacking. That transfer, in the case of the current study, is from grammatical competence. No studies have been found which directly attempt to assess a correlation between grammatical and pragmatic competence, and so it is hoped the results of this research paper will contribute to the discussion. The reason for this is that the focus has centred on two questions: is pragmatic competence a focus of study in L2 learning contexts in Iran and what evidence is there to assess the levels of pragmatic competence among L2 learners? What is not clear is whether pragmatic competence is affected by factors other than direct metapragmatic intervention in the classroom.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1   Introduction

The research was carried out at Limkokwing University over a period of four months from February to June 2012. This University was chosen, as the researcher, through part-time employment as a teacher of English there, had established ties with both the teaching staff as well as many of the students. It also afforded her certain privileges in terms of support through expertise input, and access to facilities, such as classrooms, in which to conduct the questionnaire survey and written tests. Moreover, it was a good source of Iranian students with which to perform the study.

No other institute was considered, as this would have exacerbated the logistical effort involved for no foreseeable benefit. The criterion for student selection was that they were Iranian and had recently arrived from Iran in order to participate in their studies overseas in an English-speaking context.

The research is exploratory in nature. Although the literature in the field has hypothesized a number of contributing components when it comes to describing language competence, such as grammatical and pragmatic competence, and although there is a wealth of literature on how language may be acquired, whether as a first or second language, there is actually little research on the way the specific competences may be developed and supported by learning contexts or teaching methods; on this matter language development tends to be viewed holistically rather than as a set of separate and distinguishable competences.

The specific relationship explored here is the one between grammatical and pragmatic competence – does the development of one influence the development of the other? If student scores suggest such a relationship, this research will hopefully prompt further

research into the reasons why, as this area of investigation is beyond the scope of this research.

However, if there is no correlation in student scores, then there is evidence to suggest the two competences develop separately, and that different learning contexts are needed to develop them. If this is the case, what learning contexts help the development of pragmatic competence? The emphasis is on this question because there are already numerous studies on the development of grammatical competence. Moreover, it is recognized that pragmatic competence is required in order for learners of English to integrate better at a social level, an important facet of university existence. The notion that pragmatic competence is an integral component of communicative competence has been discussed in Chapter 2. In summary: pragmatic ability in a second or foreign language is part of a non-native speakers' (NNS) communicative competence and therefore has to be located in a model of communicative ability (Savignon, 1991). In Bachman's model (1990), *'language competence'* is subdivided into two components, *'organizational competence'* and *'pragmatic competence'*.

To answer the question about learning contexts, the results of a questionnaire survey into the learning backgrounds of the students was conducted to see if patterns exist between pragmatic competence and the kinds of learning experience the students had gone through.

3.2   Research design

The research was organised around three stages, with the first two stages very much focused on the design of the instruments, as well as proving their reliability and validity. The instruments in question, which will be elaborated on later in this chapter are (i) a survey questionnaire, aimed at collecting data on the learning methods of the respondents

(ii) a grammatical test and (iii) a pragmatic test, both aimed at measuring the respective competences of the respondents.

Stage 1: Two focus groups were set up: (i) a group of 15 Iranian students was organised in order to help design the survey questionnaire, and (ii) a group of 15 teachers helped to validate the content of the grammatical and pragmatic tests.

Stage 2: A pilot study with 15 Iranian students was conducted in order to establish the reliability of the research instruments: both the survey questionnaire and the grammatical and pragmatic tests.

Stage 3: A full study was conducted with 105 Iranian students, who participated in two phases: (i) completing the survey questionnaire and (ii) completing the two competence tests.

In this study, there is one independent and two dependent variables as well as controlling ones. The independent variables, which may have changed the outcome of the treatment i.e. the test scores (dependent variables) are the learning methods about which information was obtained through the use of a survey questionnaire. The dependent variables of the study are the grammatical and pragmatic competence scores. In fact, the study examines whether the learning methods that the respondents have been exposed to affect their pragmatic and/or grammatical competence scores.

The relationship between the grammatical and pragmatic competences will be examined in order to see whether there is any significant correlation between them. If the correlation is significant, then it can be hypothesised that pragmatic competence tends to develop as grammatical competence improves. Alternatively, if the correlation is not significant, then it can be concluded that pragmatic and grammatical competence develop independently of one another, and one does not tend to influence the other.

3.3   Sample selection

In Stage 1 and Stage 2, both 15 Iranian students and 15 English language teachers, all from Limkokwing University were approached and engaged with both the design and the testing of the instruments. For these design and pilot stages, 15 participants were selected based on the recommendations of previous research. Julious (2005) based his recommendation on a sample size of 12, with justifications for this sample size based on rationale about feasibility and precision about the mean and variance. Justification for sample size in both focus group and pilot studies also hinge upon their underlying purpose. In this case, the intention was to obtain information on the logistical aspects of conducting the research, to gain agreement on the selection and design of the items included in both the survey questionnaire and the competence tests, and to gain statistical evidence for their reliability. To achieve the first two objectives, Krueger (2000), stated that group sizes of 10% of the actual population under survey should suffice, but that larger samples would be required to establish reliability. However, a test-retest method was applied to gain credibility in this regard.

For stage 3, the full study, a sample size of 105 finally took part from an original selected student population of 190, who were identified as meeting the criteria of the study: that they were Iranian, were studying at a higher institute, had been engaged in previous significant English studies (proof obtained is mentioned below), and had recently arrived in the country (within 6 months). Those who had spent considerable time overseas in an English speaking country were discounted from the final group, so as to avoid interference from language acquisition through absorption in an English-speaking environment. The aim was to focus on the impact of conscious learning methods, although this did include conversations with native speakers, but through a consciously sought learning objective.

Finally, a proportion of the originally identified sample size either did not volunteer or they subsequently dropped out from the study.

The students were chosen based on the principles of non-probability, specifically convenience sampling, as these participants were willing and available to be studied. Creswell (2008, p. 155) states that this type of sampling is logical and happens because "*The researcher has the permission of the principal and can gain consent from that (particular) group of students to participate in the study. This is a convenience sample because the participants are convenient to the researcher and are available for the study*." Creswell added that this type of sampling is appropriate and "*It can provide information for addressing the research question and testing hypotheses*".

The final 105 students that participated in the study had a fairly good knowledge of English. Communicative events, such as greetings or small talk, asking the social status of the interviewees and their age, and naming the objects around the examination hall formed the contents of the background interview (see Appendix B). In order to be certain about the homogeneity of the students, the researcher administered a simple test, which had previously been validated by a private institution/university and was mostly used as a placement test to see the initial differences existing between and among the groups. The reliability and validity of this test were also considered during the piloting. The results of the test were not statistically very insightful but it showed the homogeneity of the 105 participants.

3.4   Research instruments

Following the design phase with focus groups to validate the instruments, three data collection instruments were used: a survey questionnaire, a grammatical test and a

pragmatic test. These are describe below and their main characteristics can be seen in Table 3.1 below.

(I) Survey questionnaire

A survey questionnaire (see Appendix C) was designed in order to ascertain information relating to the learning methods the respondents had been exposed to during their English studies. In order to allow the assignment of a quantitative score to each respondent, each of the 7 questions in the survey questionnaire employed a 10-point Likert scale. The scoring permitted the potential establishment of a relationship with the test scores on the grammatical and pragmatic tests.

The 10-point Likert scale was selected to measure the scale of exposure to each learning method. Chaudhary (1991, p. 119) states that:

> *The Likert Scale is a method of ascribing a quantitative value to qualitative data to make it amenable to statistical analysis. Used mainly in training course evaluation, the Likert scales usually have five potential choices, on a scale of continuum 1 – 5 (strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree) but sometimes go up to ten or more, depending on the sample size. For smaller samples a three-point scale may be more dependable. A numerical value is assigned to each potential choice and a mean figure for all the responses is computed at the end of the evaluation or survey. The final average score represents overall level of accomplishment or attitude toward the subject matter.*

In order to achieve a potential correlation between the survey results and the test scores, the questions were devised in a way to attract low scores for learning contexts or methods that were considered traditional in approach and were aimed at improving grammatical competence, whereas higher scores were obtained for learning contexts or methods considered to be aimed at exposing the respondents to language in a range of sociocultural settings. The survey questionnaire underwent design considerations through the employment of a focus group and the final design was administered orally to a sample of Iranian students (see Pilot Study).

Informed by Dawes's (2008) point of view and in accordance with the written comments of the participants, the 10-point Likert scale survey questionnaire was selected to be used in the pilot study to identify the learning methods the respondents were exposed to and to what degree they impacted on their language skills. Examples of such methods included attending school, language classes, watching movies and talking to native speakers. The questionnaire items were adapted from Dörnyei and Csizér (1998), Roever and McNamara (2007), and Eslami and Eslami-Rasekh (2008).

In the full study, the survey questionnaire was administered in paper form, as this was logistically more convenient, allowing the respondents to complete the form in the same context as completing the grammatical and pragmatic tests. The questions used in the survey questionnaire survey can be found in Appendix C.

(II) Grammatical and pragmatic tests

Two tests were devised, each comprising 20 items, one to measure the respondents' ability in grammar and the other to measure their pragmatic awareness or competence. The tests were adapted from test items taken from reliable resources such as the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and the Iranian University Entrance Examination (IUEE) and adapted to suit the participants. The adaptation was not more than 50 percent of the tests. In order to establish their validity, they were presented to a focus group of fifteen English language teachers at Limkokwing University, all of whom had administered tests and were familiar with language testing protocols. By adopting the '*Delphi Method*', and conducting three successive sessions, the test items were scrutinized and evaluated for suitability, taking into account their respective aims of testing grammatical or pragmatic competence. The

pragmatic test items can be found in Appendix D and the grammatical test items can be found in Appendix E.

Table 3.1: Measuring instruments and scoring

Quantitative	
Measuring Instruments:	Scoring:
1. Survey Questionnaire	Likert scale indicating exposure to learning methods favouring grammatical or pragmatic competence
2. Tests	Measuring the scores of the students based on their grammatical and pragmatic abilities

3.5 Data collection, coding and categorisation

After the data was collected, the overall scores of the learners were considered in order to determine the degree of their pragmatic and grammatical competence. For statistical analysis of the raw scores of the quantitative tests (grammatical and pragmatic) and the computation of their differences, the *t*-test technique and one way ANOVA were conducted using SPSS. The qualitative data related to the learning methods was collected through the focus group of 15 Iranian students, and in the full study, by means of a survey questionnaire, this was quantitatively collected and analysed through logistic regression.

Both the survey questionnaire and the competence tests were completed in a classroom setting at Limkokwing University, with respondents grouped into batches of 10-15 to ensure comfort as well as exam-style separation (i.e. no talking or copying allowed and opportunity to do so discouraged). All participants, regardless of group, were allowed 60 minutes to complete the survey questionnaire and competence tests. The times of the sessions were scheduled in the morning to minimise the effects of tiredness potentially skewing the results. The respondents were encouraged to book a session that was

convenient for them and did not fall in a period where other study commitments suggested excessive pressure.

Although the survey questionnaire focused on collecting qualitative data, the Likert scale allowed the data to be represented quantitatively, each question being scored from 1 to 10. The scores from each respondent for each of the seven questions were recorded separately and then summed for each category, so that they could be correlated with the competence test scores. The seven categories reflected the learning contexts covered by the questions in the survey.

The competence tests were composed of 20 (Pragmatic test) and 21 (Grammatical test) multiple choice questions, with each question having a correct answer (validated by the teachers' focus group). Therefore, the scores could potentially range from 0 to 20 or 21. The answers and scores were independently marked by the researcher and two assistants, using a pre-prepared answer sheet and a scoring card. Any discrepancies recorded prompted a re-check of the relevant respondent's question paper.

3.6 Designing the survey questionnaire and competence tests

15 Iranian students from the sample pool at Limkokwing University came together as a Focus group in order to help design the survey questionnaire. An initial discussion was facilitated by the researcher into the learning methods the group were aware of or had experienced directly, where they were encouraged to express their views on the strengths and weaknesses of those methods. Considerations were given to the impacts these methods had on their abilities in speaking, listening, reading and writing, and their ability to integrate with native speakers in different contexts. In this first task, the test-takers were required to respond to questions about the methods they used to learn English around the group, their answers being audio recorded. The results of this investigation lead to the

design of the survey questionnaire, which the researcher chose to follow the format of items employing the Likert scale, allowing the coding of qualitative data into quantitative results.

The 'Delphi Method' or focus group method was employed to select and modify the grammatical and pragmatic tests and ensure the validity of these measuring instruments. To pursue the goal, the researcher organized three focus group sessions, comprising 15 experienced teachers who were familiar with teaching and testing the materials being used. The 'Delphi Method' has been defined by Rowe and Wright (1999, p. 1) as follows:

> *The 'Delphi method' is a systematic, interactive forecasting method which relies on a panel of independent experts. The carefully selected experts answer questionnaires in two or more rounds. After each round, a facilitator provides an anonymous summary of the experts' forecasts from the previous round as well as the reasons they provided for their judgments. Thus, experts are encouraged to revise their earlier answers in light of the replies of other members of their panel. It is believed that during this process the range of the answers will decrease and the group will converge towards the "correct" answer. Finally, the process is stopped after a pre-defined stop criterion (e.g. number of rounds, achievement of consensus, and stability of results) and the mean or median scores of the final rounds determine the results.*

The final versions of the tests were sent to two English language experts, both academics and practising English language instructors, working in Malaysia. One, an Australian at Limkokwing University, had 15 years' experience as a postgraduate, and was versed in English language assessment methods. The other was a British Director of Studies, with over 18 years' experience, and 8 years' experience as a British Council manager, whose focus of study as a Ph.D student and beyond was in developing methods of teaching that promoted sociocultural competence. They responded, stating that with a few minor modifications, which were implemented, both the grammatical and pragmatic tests were fit for purpose.

3.7 The pilot study

The overall objectives of this stage were threefold: a) to prepare and verify the content of the instruments to be used during the tests, b) to schedule appropriate times for each test, based on observations of how the pilot unfolded and c) to prepare valid, practical, and reliable measuring instruments of the study

Creswell (2008, p. 402) describes the characteristics and the advantages of pilot tests as follows:

> *A pilot test of a questionnaire or interview survey is a procedure in which a researcher makes changes in an instrument based on feedback from a small number of individuals (similar to the main sample) who complete and evaluate the instrument. The participants in the pilot test provide written comments directly on the survey, and the researcher modifies or changes the survey to reflect those concerns.*

Thus, before conducting the full study, a two-stage pilot study was conducted. The goal of the first stage was to design both the survey questionnaire and the grammatical; and pragmatic tests (covered in section 3.5). In the second stage, the effectiveness of the instruments, in terms of measuring the impact of learning methods and testing the level of grammatical and pragmatic competences of the learners, was determined. The pilot study was also aimed at assessing the reliability and validity of the measuring instruments used during the two phases of the main study, namely the survey questionnaire and the test protocols.

To make appropriate decisions regarding the students' survey questionnaire and tests, and to assess their validity and reliability, 15 respondents were selected on the basis of their overall similarities with the main sample. To measure the validity and reliability of the instruments, the test-retest method was employed. Initially, the instruments were distributed to the respondents to see whether the they could be answered successfully.

The findings revealed that participants were successful in answering the pragmatic and grammatical items in the test. At this stage, the test content, its reliability, criterion-related validity, concurrent and face validity were determined. A criterion validity of 0.66 was established by correlating the scores obtained during piloting with another reliable and valid test of the same level and type constructed by Oxford University. To sum up, the overall results relating to the reliability and validity of the measuring instruments used for the two phases of the study were computed and are illustrated in Table 3.2. This assessment was conducted because the original valid and reliable versions of the questionnaires, from Dörnyei and Csizér (1998), Roever and McNamara (2007) and Eslami and Eslami-Rasekh (2008), were adapted.

Table 3.2: Reliability and validity of measuring instruments

Phases	Instruments	Reliability & related formula	Validity
1) Survey phase	Learners' Questionnaire	R: .70.01 Cronbach alpha	Content V -Delphi method
2) Test phase	i) Grammatical competence test	R: .71.5 -inter-rater Pearson product	Criterion V= 0.66 Content V -Delphi method)
	ii) Pragmatic competence test	R: .78 – inter-rater Pearson product	Content V -Delphi method

From the results shown in Table 3.2, it can be seen that the consistency of the instruments is moderately good and acceptable from the perceptions of experts of the field, including Cohen (1988) and Cohen and Manion, (1994). As cited in Creswell (2008, p. 365) Cohen and Manion (1994) consider the correlation coefficiency within the range of .65-.85 to be acceptable: *"when correlations fall into this range, good prediction can result from one variable to the other"*.

While different levels of reliability are required, depending on the nature and purpose of the scale, Nunnally (1978) recommends a minimum level of 0.7. Cronbach Alpha; values

are dependent on the number of items in the scale. Since the Alpha Chronbach measure (0.7001) is higher than 0.70 it is concluded that the questionnaire is reliable.

3.7.1 Summary of the pilot study

During piloting, the different types of instruments were examined, and one validated survey questionnaire and two tests were finally adopted. Finally, decisions were made regarding the suitability of the questions, and the reliability and validity of the measuring instruments. On the whole, the results of the pilot study were favorable in the sense that they indicated that the research method was appropriate for application on a larger sample, and paved the way for the commencement of the main treatment of the study.

3.8 Reliability and validity scoring procedures

The reliability and the validity of the measuring instruments were under consideration during the pilot study. For instance, the reliabilities calculated through intra-rater and inter-rater methods were 0.76 and 0.715 respectively. According to Cohen (1988), reliability is acceptable when it is within the range of 0.50 to 1.0. These assessments pertained to Stage 2 of the study, meaning the raw scores of the participants concerning the test. However, it should be noted that the main test of the study was totally based on surveys, and the analysis of the data pertaining to Stage 3 was done via SPSS using inferential tests such as the T-Test, and ANOVA techniques.

3.9 Characteristics of the main exam tests

3.9.1 Validity

As mentioned earlier (cf.3.5), the 'Delphi method' was used for the construction of a valid test. This technique is based on the assumption that decisions made by a group of

experts in the field are better than those made by a single decision maker. In order to ensure the face, content and construct validities and appropriateness of the test, 15 experienced English teachers as well as two highly-experienced academics were consulted. To do this, the researcher organized a three-session focus-group meeting that comprised 15 English language teachers (professionals who were teaching the materials used for the experiment) as a panel of experts.

During the first session, in order to familiarize the group with the goals of the study and the research method, the researcher briefly described the characteristics of the research samples. Then, she asked each member of the group to select 20 items related to the grammatical competence and 20 items related to pragmatic competence from the bank of test items from IELTS, TOEFL and IUEE tests. Later, common items produced by the various group members were selected.

During the second and third sessions, the researcher played the role of facilitator, but the experts made the necessary decisions and adaptations regarding the appropriateness of the selected items, and prepared more than were necessary. The completed test was then presented to two highly-experienced academics familiar with the issues of teaching and testing, and their suggestions were taken into account. Consequently, the final list of items selected by the focus group was considered to be valid and appropriate. (For further information regarding the measuring instruments of phase (ii) of Stage 3, refer to Appendices D and E).

3.9.2 Reliability

The reliability of the tests was computed through a pilot study using the procedures of intra-rater and inter-rater reliability through Pearson product formula. At the end of the pilot study, the tests taken by the learners was rated twice by two assistants; the reliability or the

stability of the scores was then computed. The rating procedure used for computing inter-rater reliability was adopted for scoring the same test in the research project as well. Therefore, two assistants, both trained raters, independently assessed each participant's answers, and individually assigned a score for each learner. The inter-rater reliability was then computed based on the two rows of scores. The intra- and inter- rater reliability scores were 0.76 and 0.715 respectively.

3.10 Statistical tests

The first hypothesis relates to the correlation of scores gained in the pragmatic and grammatical tests. Both the *t*-test and analysis of variance were used to test this first hypothesis. The second hypothesis concerns relating the effect of learning methods on the learners' pragmatic and grammatical competence. To test this second hypothesis, logistic regression and analysis of variance were used. The findings of the above tests will be discussed in the following chapter.

3.11 Summary

The research was conducted in different stages over a period of 4 months. The first stage was aimed at designing the competence tests and establishing their validity through a focus group of practising English language teachers and two language experts in the field. A similar approach was adopted for the design of the survey questionnaire – a focus group of Iranian students was set up in order to discuss learning contexts and methods so that the scope of the questionnaire could be ascertained. The second stage formed a pilot study, where a sample of Iranian students took the competence tests and answered the survey questionnaire. The reliability of these instruments was established through inter-rater and intra-rater evaluations. Finally, the third stage of the study was to arrange a number of

sessions whereby the full sample of students (105) completed the tests and questionnaire. The competence test scores were analysed via SPSS through a t-test and one-way ANOVA in order to establish whether a correlation existed, and the survey results were analysed by logistic regression and analysis of variance in order to establish the existence of relations between learning methods and their impacts on the test scores.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter is divided into two sections: the first examines the results of the competence tests, both grammatical and pragmatic, with a view to supporting or rejecting the idea that both competences develop together in tandem, and that a learner of English who has attained a particular level of grammatical competence will also have gained a relative level of pragmatic competence, and that the correlation between the two can be statistically shown. Whether such a relationship suggests a causal connection is beyond the scope of this research, especially as the relationship between grammar and pragmatics is both complex and contentious (Arial, 2008).

Given that pragmatic competence covers a wide range of pragmatic categories and theories, it seems sensible to narrow this research to the language of common everyday functions, where expressions are selected to get things done whilst maintaining harmonious and respectful relationships. Broadly, these are 'functions' in the parlance of many English language course books, but, in the area of pragmatics, this type of language is covered by Speech Act Theory. This theory was first propounded by Austin (1962), but then developed by Searle (1975). Speech acts are utterances that do more than simply convey information; they also count as actions, and as they perform social functions, they are considered 'performative' i.e. they have 'force' as well as content (Grundy, 2008). These 'performatives' cover many social functions e.g. requesting, offering, suggesting, making an apology, and their precise selection will be based on context, taking into account social appropriacy. This is a reasonable theory with which to align this study, as speech acts are extremely common and of fundamental importance in social interactions, and many of the speech act functions have a set of recognizable syntactic forms e.g. Requests: 'Could

you…?', 'Would you mind…?'; Suggestions: 'How about…?', Let's…'. Therefore, it is interesting to explore whether grammatical competence may have a direct impact on using these forms appropriately.

Speech Acts have three components: locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts, which broadly relate to what is said, what is done and the effect the words have. These can be illustrated by a simple example, such as when a son disturbs his mother a second time to get her help in doing his homework. He simply asserts '*It's me again*!'. Here, locution refers to the expression's literal meaning, in this case, the proposition that a person has returned to a place he/she was in previously – it has a truth value. In this example, the illocutionary act has the force of an apology. The utterance represents the intention of the speaker to apologise. The perlocutionary act relates to how the son's mother feels and behaves in response. Of course, the son's intention is that his mother will feel mollified by his meek approach and provide him with help, but the consequences are not always foreseeable and may not have the desired effect. For example, she may become angry.

The second section examines the findings of the survey questionnaire, which extracted information from the respondents on the learning contexts they felt had had an impact on the their level of English language competence. Where there are differences in the pragmatic competence in English of EFL Iranian university students, the question of how this relates to the length and kinds of exposure they have had to different learning methods and materials is analysed. However, the question of whether a learning context or method had identifiable effects on specific abilities or competences, including grammatical or pragmatic, was not directly taken up with the respondents for one main reason: discussions on different language competences and their acquisition with a sample of 105 participants might have been problematic and certainly would have been too time-consuming. Instead, the researcher made predictions on what learning methods were more likely to promote

grammatical or pragmatic competence, based on known central characteristics of the competences in question, and then determine whether there were significant correlations between certain learning contexts and the respondents' grammar or pragmatic scores, suggesting possible impacts.

This study's Hypothesis 1 states that there are no significant differences between EFL Iranian university students' grammatical competence and their pragmatic competence scores. In other words, it is assumed that Iranian students do not perform differently on tasks such as answering pragmatic and grammatical competence questions. Hypothesis 2 states that presumably some of the weaknesses of the learners may be grounded in learning approaches.

To test the first hypothesis the students' scores in the pragmatic and grammatical tests are compared using both the t-test and one-way ANOVA. The second hypothesis is tested using logistic regression and analysis of variance to determine the effect of learning methods on pragmatic and grammatical competences. The findings of the above tests will be discussed in the following sections.

4.2 Analysis of the tests results

The following two sections present the result of the tests. Part A compares the pragmatic and grammar scores, whereas Part B presents the results of the analysis of the methods of learning.

4.2.1 Grammatical and pragmatic test scores (Part A)

The students' scores from the pragmatic and grammar tests were collected and analysed. Tables 4.1 and 4.2 show detailed information about the dependent variables from the tests. Due to the fact that just two means were involved, the t-test technique was applied (see

Table 4.1). Interval scales were selected for the measurement of the dependent variables and the representative typical scores of each group are on a scale of 0 to 20. Since there is no treatment in this study, a pre-test was not conducted.

Table 4.1 t-test results of the mean scores

T-Test Results of the means scores of the grammatical and pragmatic tests (N: 105)

	No:	Mean	Standard Deviation	t obs	t cri	Result
PT	105	9.96	2.06	10.79	1.96	t observed > t critical H_0= Rejected
GT	105	12.42	2.11			

Key: PT: respondents of pragmatic test
              GT: respondents of grammatical test

Table 4.1 shows the comparison of the two mean scores of the two tests which indicates that the *'t' observed* is greater than the *'t' critical* (10.79 >1.96); therefore, it is safe to reject the first hypothesis which says, "*There are no significant differences between the scores of young Iranian EFL learners in grammatical and pragmatic tests*." In other words, since the mean for the responses for the grammatical test is higher than the mean for responses for the pragmatic test, it can be deduced that the Iranian EFL learners achieved better results in their grammatical than in their pragmatic test. The achievement of the higher scores in grammar tests also supports the Eslami and Fatahi (2008) finding that the Iranian language education system is mainly focused on vocabulary development and the grammatical structure of the language. To see whether there were differences among the mean scores of the respondents in the grammatical and pragmatic test, the one-way ANOVA was applied. Table 4.2 shows the result of ANOVA which indicates that there was a significant difference between them.

Table 4.2 Differences among the mean scores

Differences among the mean scores of the respondents in the pragmatic and grammatical tests (N: 105)

Mean Values	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F observed	Sig.	Result
Between Groups	222.507	1	222.507	49.820	0.000	H_0= rejected
Within Groups	1022.765	208	4.466			
Total	1772.99	209				

Table 4.2 indicates that the p-value of the observed scores (the amount of statistical significance), 0.000, is lower than the predetermined alpha level (probability = .05), meaning that the students obtained higher scores in the grammar test than in the pragmatic test, and the difference is statistically significant. The means of the overall distribution of scores of the two tests as can be seen in Figures 4.1 and 4.2 indicate that the students' scores in the grammatical test are higher than their scores in the pragmatic test. The lowest possible pragmatic test score is 0 and the highest is 20, whereas the lowest possible grammar test score is 0 and the highest is 21. Consequently, the overall results of the students' scores support the first hypothesis.
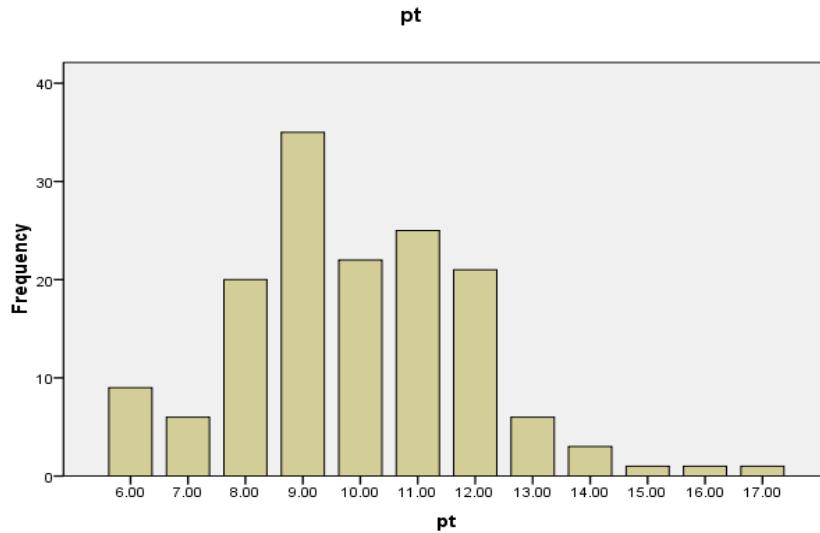
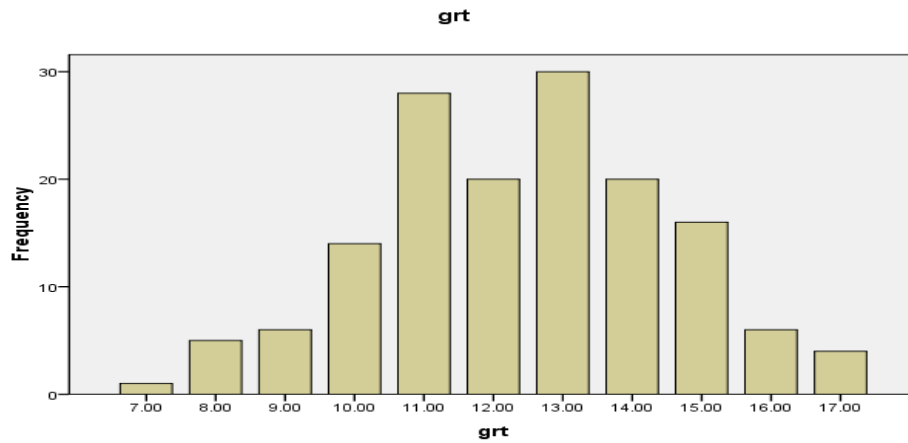**Figure 4.1: Distribution of students' scores in the pragmatic test (pt)**

Figure 4.2: Distribution of students' scores in the grammar test (grt)

4.2.2   Analysis of the methods of learning (Part B)

The second hypothesis is about testing the effect of learning methods on pragmatic and grammatical competence. Hypothesis 2: learning methods have significant effect on the pragmatic and grammar competence. To test this hypothesis, logistic regression was used to see whether different methods of learning led to the difference in the scores of the

pragmatic and grammatical tests. In this section, the scores of the learners in the pragmatic and the grammatical tests was regressed on the methods of learning, namely school, language institute, self-study, university, multimedia, talking to native speakers and years of study. The dependent variable (test score) is whether the grammar test score is the higher score = 0 or the pragmatic test score is higher or equal to the grammar test score (score = 1). The independent variable is the ranking that the participants assigned to each of the methods of learning. Therefore, the independent variable would be ratio. According to Erickson and Nosanchuk (1992), when the independent variable is ratio and the dependent variable is dummy (a dummy variable is a variable for which all cases falling into a specific category assume the value of 1 and all cases not falling into that category assume a value of zero). Logistic regression is a suitable method to analyse the effect of an independent variable on a dependent variable, so logistic regression was used to analyse the data. The findings are shown in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3 Logistic analysis of students' scores

Logistic analysis of students' scores in the pragmatic and grammar tests and methods of learning

Dependent Variable: *(score=1)* if pragmatic score is higher than or equal to 0.8 of grammatical score and (score=0) if pragmatic score is far lower than grammar score.			
Model	$Prob(Score=1)= F(\alpha_0+\alpha_1 SC+\alpha_2 LI+\alpha_3 SS + \alpha_4 UNI+\alpha_5 MU+\alpha_6 TALKNA + \alpha_6 Years+\varepsilon)$		
Variable	**Predicted Sign**	**Coefficient**	**P-value**[a]
constant	?	-1.044	0.017*
School	-	-0.690	0.001**
Language institute	+	0.596	0.005**
Self-study	?	-0.018	0.746
University	-	-0.038	0.493
Multimedia	+	0.707	0.038*
Talking to native people	+	0.063	0.279
Years of studying	?	0.016	0.762
Log Likelihood	97.832	**Hosmer Lemeshow**	
Chi-square	102.338	Pearson Chi	4726.44
P-value	0.000	Prob	0.3028
No. of observations			
Meet/Exceed	63		
Did not meet	42		
Total	105		
a. p-values are one-tailed.			
*, **. P-values are significant at 5%, and 1% significance level.			
Dependent Variable: score=1 if pragmatic score is higher than or equal to 0.8 of grammatical score and (score=0) if pragmatic score is far lower than grammar score.			

Although some of the coefficients in Table 4.3 are not significant, we are able to establish a good understanding of the direction of the relationship between the learning methods and the degree of good performances in the pragmatic and grammatical competence tests. According to Table 4.3, the coefficients of both school and university are negative and significant. This indicates that when language learning of the students is mainly based on school or university education, the students perform higher scores in grammatical competence. On the other hand, the coefficients of language institute and

multimedia are positive and significant, as is the coefficient of talking to native speakers. This shows that learning through language institutes, watching movies and talking to native speakers led to higher pragmatic competence.

The marginal effects are analogous to the slope coefficients in an OLS regression (Pallant, 2005). The marginal effect of school is 0.35, suggesting that moving from the first to the third quartile of weight of school the probability of higher relative grammatical competence increases around 65 % respectively.

The coefficients of multimedia and talking to native speakers are positive, indicating that the more learning is gained through multimedia or talking to native people, the greater the improvement will be made in pragmatic competence. The value of the marginal effects of watching movies and talking to native speakers are 2.028 and 1.065 respectively, showing that the students who learned English through watching movies and through talking to native speakers performed 102% and 6% higher in pragmatic tests than the other students. Also the coefficients of the Hosmer and Lemeshow test were used to test the fitness of the models. The result of the Hosmer and Lemeshow test which is shown in the lower part of Table 4.3 is not significant for any of the models confirming the goodness of fit of the models.

According to Pallant (2005, p. 150) a commonly used cut-off point for determining the presence of multicolinearity is a Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) value of above 10. The VIF for the independent variables are indicated in Table 4.4 which indicates no sign of high correlation between independent variables.

Table 4.4 Measure of variance inflation factor (VIF)

Measure of VIF for Multicolinearity between the independent variables.

Variables	SC	LI	SS	UNI	WM	TALKNA	YEARS
VIF	3.55	4.35	1.45	1.74	1.15	1.16	1.02

The results of the analysis of the variance in the degree of learning method between the students that have high and low relative pragmatic competence are presented in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5: Degree of learning method

including (school (SC), language institute (LI), self-study (SS), university (UNI), Multimedia (MU), and talking to native speakers (TALKNA) between the students that have high and low relative pragmatic scores to grammar scores.

		Mean	F	Sig.
SC	Score=1	4.086		
	Score=0	6.326	15.348	0.039818
	Total	5.460		
LI	Score=1	5.985		
	Score=0	4.312	18.242	0.001251
	Total	4.960		
SS	Score=1	4.865		
	Score=0	5.221	0.947	0.322
	Total	4.906		
UNI	Score=1	5.926		
	Score=0	5.394	1.084	0.299
	Total	5.860		
MU	Score=1	6.501		
	Score=0	3.402	16.722	0.002
	Total	4.600		
TALKNA	Score=1	3.438		
	Score=0	4.016	1.417	0.235
	Total	3.586		
Years	Score=1	7.404		
	Score=0	7.754	0.386	0.535
	Total	7.547		

According to Table 4.5 there is a difference between the levels of school education between those who have had higher relative grammar to pragmatic scores. Analysis of variance was used to test the difference between the levels of school education on those who had relatively higher grammar to pragmatic scores. For those who exhibited higher

pragmatic competence, the school grade was 4.086, whereas those who had higher grammar competence the school grade was 6.328, with this difference being significant, where F= 15.348 and P-Value = 0.039. That is, those who had learnt English through school had higher grammar than pragmatic scores. On the other hand, the students who exhibited higher pragmatic competence when compared with their grammatical competence also achieved higher scores in the learning contexts of language institute and multimedia (5.985 and 6.501 versus 4.312 and 3.402 respectively), a picture which was reflected for those who learnt English through language institutes and watching movies.

According to the Table 4.5, there is no difference in the other means of the scores of the learning methods between the students who have high and low relative pragmatic competence suggesting the other learning methods do not have a significant effect on the Iranian students' pragmatic and grammar competence.

4.3   Conclusion

In this chapter, the analysis of the data was handled with regard to the first null hypothesis. In Part A, the raw scores obtained from the tests were statistically and holistically computed, and the results revealed that the students obtained better scores on the grammatical test rather than on the pragmatic test. The difference between the results of the two scores was significant, thus the first null hypothesis of the study was rejected, suggesting there was no correlation between the grammatical and pragmatic scores.

In Part B, the students chose their method of learning from among six different options that had been obtained through a focus group interview. They were asked to score the effectiveness of each method from 0 to 10. The analysis of the variance and the logistic regression was used to regress the pragmatic and grammatical scores to the method of learning. The results revealed that the coefficient of multimedia and language institute is

higher for those who had high pragmatic score and it was significant. However, the coefficient of school is higher for those who had higher grammar scores. Since those who learnt English in school have the highest grammar scores, the findings revealed that teaching English in the schools in Iran is mainly based on learning grammar.

From the results of the analysis of the scores in the pragmatic and competence tests, it can be concluded that the performance of the students in the grammatical test is much better than in the pragmatic test. However, it should be noted that in the latter, the students also performed moderately well.

Also in this chapter, the scores of the learners were analyzed to compare and contrast their performance in the pragmatic and grammatical tests. However, as reported in Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei (1998), both pragmatic and grammar competence play important roles in language education of the new learners. In ratification of this point, Tudor (2001, p. 9) contends, "*Understanding the reality of teaching involves exploring the meaning it has for students, for teachers, and for the others who, in one way or another, influence what is done in the classroom*". In line with this thought, it is deemed necessary to improve pragmatic skills in the Iranian English education system. In the next chapter, in addition to the analysis of the main findings, the importance of pragmatic learning and its improvement in Iran will be discussed.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter summarizes the results and findings discussed in the preceding chapter. It also contains recommendations for future studies and highlights the practical and theoretical implications of the findings for policy makers involved in the English education system in Iran. This will be followed by a description of the limitations of the research. The chapter closes with a summary of the study.

As stated in Chapter 1 (Introduction), this research was carried out over two phases: (1) the grammatical and pragmatic competence tests and (2) the survey questionnaire. Chapter 2 (Literature Review) provides a historical perspective of how communicative competence has been defined along with its theoretical underpinnings. It also dwells on the theories regarding second language acquisition and how this has impacted on language learning methodology, also considering how this may affect competence development. It finally looks at the context of this research paper, which focuses on the learning contexts of Iranian EFL learners, and how these are likely to influence their capabilities. Chapter 3 presents the research methods used for the study. The first part of Chapter 4 reports on Phase 1, which investigated the correlation between EFL Iranian university students' grammatical and pragmatic competence. The findings of Phase 1 of the study are discussed in relation to the first hypothesis: *There is no significant correlation between EFL Iranian university students' grammatical competence and their pragmatic competence*. The second part of Chapter 4 looks at Phase 2 of the study, which attempted to shed light on Research Question 2. Throughout this section, learners' perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of different kinds of learning experiences, and their relationship with levels of pragmatic competence are discussed in relation to the relevant hypothesis: *There is no relationship*

between levels of pragmatic competence among EFL Iranian university students with the kinds of learning experience they have been exposed to.

5.2   Grammatical and pragmatic competences

The first research question of the study was "*What is the correlation between EFL Iranian university students' grammatical and pragmatic competence?*" To address this question, a sample of Iranian students who had just started studying at a private university was selected. They were asked to take a test, comprising questions that aimed to provide a measurement of their grammatical and pragmatic competence. Following its administration, the participants' scores were collected and analyzed, and several conclusions were drawn from this analysis, as described below.

In general, there is weak or no correlation between EFL Iranian university students' grammatical competence and their pragmatic competence. This was evident from a comparison of the mean scores of the two groups of students in the grammatical and pragmatic competence tests (which were 12.42 and 9.96 for grammatical and pragmatic competence respectively, as shown in Table 4.1). The grammatical competence of Iranian EFL Learners is not only relatively better than their pragmatic competence, but the difference in capabilities is statistically significant. The better achievement of the learners in grammatical competence seems to support Allami and Naeimi (2011) who found that "*Iranian upper-intermediate learners tend to transfer L1 sociocultural norms to L2 and make high pragmatic errors. Their results indicate that refusing in an L2 is a complex task as it requires the acquisition of the sociocultural values of the target culture.*" The results were also in congruence with the findings of Jalilifar et al (2011) who showed Iranian EFL learners as having not acquired sufficient sociopragmatic knowledge to display proper social behavior in the English language.

The better performance of the respondents in the grammatical test also ratifies Piaget's (1972) findings which state that "*learners possessing lower levels of grammatical and sociolinguistic competence in the second language need explicit instruction both on sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic preferences of the native speakers; that is, they will not be able to understand the differences between the two languages without being exposed to instructions.*" These views, as well as the findings of this study, suggest that Iranian students tend to gain better knowledge of English grammar rather than developing any other aspects of communicative competence since they have been learning English in a traditional system.

The results of this study suggest potential support for the assertions of Girard and Sionis (2004), who believe that grammatical competence is a temporary stage of acquisition which, among other aspects, enables the speaker to reach idiomaticity in his or her L2 and thereby, able to hold efficient communication with native speakers. In other words, the limitations set for many Iranian learners in their own country may mean that they never get the opportunity to go beyond developing grammatical competence, and they never pass over the threshold where pragmatic or sociocultural competence is provided the context to develop.

The role played by the different kinds of learning experiences was also highlighted in this study, revealing that those students in the group of respondents who had been exposed to English movies and native speakers performed better than those who had been exposed to other types of teaching (the analysis by logistic regression and ANOVA shows this). This is in line with the ideas of Canagarajah (2007) who believes that pragmatic competence cannot be taught explicitly, but can develop through exposure to a range of sociocultural contexts. Kasper (1997) espouses the same view: "*Competence, whether linguistic or pragmatic, is not teachable. Competence is a type of knowledge that learners possess,*

develop, acquire, use or lose. The challenge for foreign or second language teaching is whether we can arrange learning opportunities in such a way that they benefit the development of pragmatic competence in L2."

5.3   Pragmatic competence and learning experience

To address Research Question 2 (as well as Hypothesis 1: There *is no relationship between levels of pragmatic competence among EFL Iranian university students with the kinds of learning experience they have been exposed to*), 15 respondents were selected for a focus group discussion in order to elicit and establish the factors that played major contributory roles in the development of their English language competence.

The results of the focus group discussion highlighted some interesting findings which had not been identified previously. Generally speaking, in most of their responses they emphasized that language institutes, watching movies and working with interactive software (multimedia) were the main factors behind their learning and practice earning 65 and 63 percent respectively.

In the frequency test, the students who achieved higher scores in pragmatic competence also had significantly higher frequency when it came to usage of multimedia and interactive software, when compared to the students who attained a lower grade of pragmatic competence. In contrast, the significance of the frequency of usage of school textbooks between the low and high level of pragmatic competence was not significantly different. In addition, the level of scores for pragmatic competence was checked for those students who had experienced language instruction at a private language institute and those who had not had such exposure. The findings indicate that the students who learned English through private language institutes achieved significantly higher pragmatic competence marks than those who were not using such methods. By contrast, however, the pragmatic competence

marks of the students who practised self-study were not that different from those students who were not using this method. It would be interesting to explore this further. Perhaps the interactive nature of the private institutes afforded opportunities for social interaction that helped develop pragmatic awareness, provided this was consciously channeled, whereas self-study naturally inclines the learner to the elements of language structure rather than the elements of negotiated meaning in social discourse, as there are no partners to practice with.

This result contradicts the findings from Blanche and Merino (1989), who claim self-learning methods may not be useful for foreign language learning unless they are monitored to a varying degree by an appropriate level of supervision and feedback.

Talking to native speakers ranked highly for students who performed better in the pragmatic test. In the focus group, they confirmed that the experiences encouraged higher levels of confidence in their social interactions, as they confirmed or rejected hypotheses about what seemed to work or not work in social discourse. They had a feedback channel.

A picture emerges that tells a story; that those Iranian learners who achieved most of their learning at school, university or through self-study, the pragmatic abilities are less developed This bears a suggestive relationship with the views of Kasper (1997), who believes that pragmatic competence cannot be simply taught as an add-on to linguistic competence. It needs to be coordinated with language development, acknowledging its integral role. The implication may be that pragmatic competence develops alongside grammatical competence, without any conscious pedagogic intervention.

5.4 Conclusions

(1) Across the sample of Iranian EFL learners selected for the study, there appears to be no correlation between grammatical and pragmatic competence, prompting the question as

to whether this lack of correlation would be applicable across all groups of EFL learners. The theoretical underpinning for this assertion is that the two competences develop independently of one another, and that different kinds of input and mental processing are required to trigger acquisition. Grammar is considered to be a set of formal codes or structural building blocks, which, more or less, through their syntactic relationships, contribute to meaning which is predictable and premised on logic. Pragmatics, on the other hand, is a set of non-logical inferences derived from those codes (Ariel, 2008). "*Pragmatics is 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*" (Crystal, 1985, p. 240). In other words, pragmatics is the study of communicative action in its sociocultural context. With these sorts of definitions in circulation, a more common view has grown which states that grammar and pragmatics are absolutely distinct from one another (Ariel, 2008). Where one (grammar) is grounded in formal learning and the recognition of patterns in language, which, in theory at least, can be learnt without the need for social contact, the other is dependent on social learning and experience, where culture and context come together, providing clues for interpretation. It is possible to reach a conclusion that the results of this study support that view.

However, the interface between grammar and pragmatics is a complex one, according to Ariel (2008), and there needs to be the accommodation that the pragmatics of yesterday can become codified into the grammar of today, accounting for the accepted notion of grammaticisation. The suggestion is that, over time, the same processes that allow grammatical development in a learner will also allow absorption of pragmatic content, but perhaps, in accordance with Krashen's ideas of a predictable sequence of what coded forms of language are acquired, what we consider to be pragmatic in nature can only be processed

much later in a learner's journey toward communicative competence. However, with this in mind, it is difficult to account for the fact that some members of the sample scored low on grammar but more impressively on pragmatics.

Perhaps a relevant observation to account for that paradox is the idea that although an L1 learner during the course of language development will become more pragmatically aware as social experience accrues, an L2 learner (of mature age) is potentially able to transfer that pragmatic awareness from an L1 to an L2 context, and in Kasper's words, learners can "*get a free ride*". This is because some pragmatic knowledge is universal, and other aspects may be successfully transferred from the learners' L1. To start with the pragmatic universals, learners know that conversations follow particular organizational principles - participants have to take turns at talk, and conversations and other speech events have specific internal structures. Learners know that pragmatic intent can be indirectly conveyed, and they can use context information and various knowledge sources to understand indirectly conveyed meaning (Kasper 1997).

To complicate the matter further, not all learners will take advantage of that 'free ride'. It is well known from educational psychology that students do not always transfer available knowledge and strategies to new tasks. This is also true for some aspects of learners' universal or L1-based pragmatic knowledge. L2 recipients often tend towards literal interpretation, taking utterances at face value rather than inferring what is meant from what is said and underusing context information. This may even be a case of blocking, or what Krashen describes as the interference from an affective filter. If a learner tends to lack social confidence generally, any potential pragmatic tuning in an L2 context may be switched off. These sorts of phenomena are likely to have complex effects on language competence and behaviour , and do suggest that any link between the development of grammatical and pragmatic competence is likely to be blurred.

(2) Phase 2 of the study looked at the impact of learning experiences and contexts on how the learners scored both grammatically and pragmatically, and it was possible to correlate findings. For example, learners who underwent much of their language instruction in a school or university setting tended to do better in the grammar rather than the pragmatic test. If we accept Dahmardeh (2009) and his contention that schooling in Iran is traditional, focusing on the grammar-translation method, in classes with Farsi speakers, it is not difficult to accept that the exposure to spoken English in realistic social settings is severely limited. By contrast, those learners who had access to multimedia sources, such as English TV programmes and movies, as well as interactive software that promoted language learning, and who recorded that these inputs played a major role in their own English language learning programme performed relatively better in the pragmatic test to those groups whose main source of instruction came from school or university-based courses. Interestingly, the lack of formal sources of instruction did not seem to damage their scores on the grammatical tests. In other words, those learners attending school or university-based courses did not perform significantly better in the grammatical tests than those who based their English language learning on multimedia inputs. The same is true for the learners who identified talking to native speakers as a principal means of gaining exposure to English language input and practice. They performed relatively better on the pragmatic tests compared with those who identified school or university-based courses as their major instructional input. However, their scores on the grammatical tests were a bit lower, though not that significantly. The learners who attended private institutes also did better in the pragmatic tests and this is a finding that certainly merits further investigation, as it would be interesting to probe into what happens in private institutes that differs from what is taught at school or university. Does it relate to the curriculum, the standard of teachers, the teaching methods employed or even the different motivations of the learners?

(3) An underlying assumption of this study is that pragmatic awareness and competence are key to successful communicative competence, and this is based on the way language competence is theoretically broken down into constituent competences. In Bachman's model (1990, p. 87ff), 'language competence' is subdivided into two components, *'organizational competence'* and *'pragmatic competence'*. Organizational competence comprises knowledge of linguistic units and the rules of joining them together at the levels of sentence (*'grammatical competence'*) and discourse (*'textual competence'*). Pragmatic competence subdivides into *'illocutionary competence'* and *'sociolinguistic competence'*. Illocutionary competence can be glossed as "*knowledge of communicative action and how to carry it out*". This places pragmatics on an equal footing with grammar. It is not subordinated to knowledge of grammar and text organization but co-ordinated to formal linguistic and textual knowledge and interacts with 'organizational competence' in complex ways (Kasper 1997).

(4) However, is there any research evidence to highlight how pragmatic inadequacies may materially impact on non-native speakers (NNS) in terms of communicative success? In an academic setting, it was shown from data that non-native speakers (NNS) and native speakers (NS), when compared, behaved differently with their tutors when it came to making suggestions about what they did for their coursework (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford 1990, 1993; Bardovi-Harlig, 1996). They noted that NNS students tended to leave suggestions about their coursework to their advisor and then react to them, whereas NS were more confident at being able to proffer suggestions and negotiate appropriately. Sometimes, NNS showed an inappropriate abruptness when making suggestions, leading to serious miscommunication and compromising the NNS's goals. Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (1990) found that when students' contributions were pragmatically inappropriate, they were less successful in obtaining their advisor's consent for taking the courses they

preferred. In a cross-sectional study of Iranian EFL Learners' request strategies, in terms of managing social distance with various groups, it seems that the Iranian EFL learners had not acquired sufficient sociopragmatic knowledge to display proper social behaviour (Jalilifar et al., 2011). The development of pragmatic competence is therefore important for language learners. It is necessary to understand and create language that is appropriate to the situations in which one is functioning, because failure to do so may cause users to miss key points that are being communicated or to have their messages misunderstood . Worse yet is the possibility of a total communication breakdown and the stereotypical labelling of second language users as people who are insensitive, rude, or inept .

(5) A concern which prompted the study is the belief that, in Iran, EFL students are not being provided with any appreciable pragmatic input, and that teaching methods are mired in traditional approaches. Furthermore, other social and political restrictions do not permit EFL learners wider access to English on television, or even via the internet. This seems to be borne out by a significant study by Mirzaei and Rezaei (2012) on the underrepresentation of pragmatics in the L2 classroom, reporting that their results indicated that L2 classrooms did not provide language learners with the required information, instruction, and practice in L2 pragmatics. It was evidenced that EFL teachers in Iran generally emphasized the isolated, mechanical aspects of language as these have been given special emphasis in the school curriculum. Their observations in the classroom revealed that no time was assigned to help engage the students in role playing, discussions—even teacher-fronted ones—or problem-solving activities with an orientation towards L2 pragmatics awareness and development. The major emphasis was confined to covering those aspects and elements included in the content of the teaching textbooks, that is, isolated vocabulary, reading skills, word-formation, and grammar. An interesting point was

that L1 was the dominant language in transferring teaching materials and eliciting responses during classroom instruction and practice.

(6) The study above suggests that in L2 classrooms there is little or no pragmatic instruction, but a corresponding question is even if pragmatic competence is regarded as a vital component of overall language competence, is there a role for teaching pragmatics in the classroom? A number of studies have been conducted using sample and control groups where pragmatic instruction was given, either explicitly or implicitly, to the sample groups and then testing their pragmatic competence in conversations. The results were positive in that pragmatic abilities could be improved by such instruction. Interestingly, also, was that pragmatic instruction was also given to learners at a beginner level, and this also proved effective (Wildner-Bassett, 1994; Tateyama, Kasper, Mui, Tay & Thananart, 1997). This finding is important in terms of curriculum and syllabus design because it dispels the myth that pragmatics can only be taught after students have developed a solid foundation in L2 grammar and vocabulary.

House (1996) examined instructional effects on pragmatic fluency - the extent to which students' conversational contributions are relevant, polite, and overall effective. And finally, while most studies focus on aspects of production, two studies examined pragmatic comprehension: in Bouton (1994), students were taught different types of implicatures. The research supports the view that pragmatic ability can indeed be systematically developed through well-planned classroom activities.

5.5   Implications of the study

The study has reported a predominance of traditional teaching and learning practices in Iran. This is confirmed by the fact that in Iranian schools, teachers and lecturers mainly teach in Farsi. In addition, the study suggests that there is little, if any, practical input in

preparing students to cope with the kinds of social interactions or transactions that are necessary when dealing with people (peers and supervisors) inside or outside a real academic environment where English is the medium of communication. This, in turn, will suggest the need to propose that English teaching institutions in Iran update their methodologies to include exercises that promote pragmatic competence.

If the responsibility of teaching pragmatic aspects of language use falls on teachers of the language, Ehrman, Leaver and Oxford (2003) recognise that they face challenges such as ineffective materials and training. This suggests the intervention of a more enlightened educational approach, with policymakers not only recognising the importance of pragmatic instruction, but actively changing the curriculum to include pragmatics as a key component of language instruction. This has implications also for teacher training, the development of materials and a concerted effort to either bring in teachers from abroad or to ensure Iranian teachers are confident enough to use English as the main language in the classroom. In addition to this, though, is that this study suggests further steps which may be taken to promote pragmatic competence, by encouraging learners to use alternative methods outside the classroom, such as watching movies, using interactive software and, where possible, talking to native speakers. To a degree, these will become more possible if the Iranian government starts to lift the current restrictions on broadcast material and access to social networking and other (e.g. YouTube) sites.

5.6   Limitations of the study

Despite a consensus among the teachers of English employed during the study, as well as from the two language experts, all mentioned in Chapter 3, that the questions in the test used for measuring pragmatic competence were valid, it needs to be acknowledged that pragmatic competence is a complex skill that underpins communicative success in a wide

range of social settings. By this, I refer to the fact that the questions used in the study were constrained by the multiple choice format, and focused on the respondents' ability to understand implicatures or the function of speech acts in the situations presented. For the sake of brevity and straightforwardness these were necessarily decontextualized, yet real social situations are often very rich in context. Although the tests were still valid, this meant that they did not allow the examination of appropriate spoken responses to social situations. The difficulty here would have been setting up such situations in a natural, consistent way for the respondents to react spontaneously. And even if this were possible, any recordings of the events and the subsequent evaluation of the responses would have been too time-consuming, and subject to more subjective evaluation. Under the circumstances, the acceptance of the limitation seems justified. These limits are discussed further in the article '*Can Social Pragmatic Skills Be Tested?*' (Vicker, 2003), which lists the range of skills typically employed in responding pragmatically:

- Note the current social situation in which the communication interaction is occurring, including the nonverbal cues.

- Pay attention and receive the complete verbal message delivered by the speaker.

- Analyse the meaning of the verbal and nonverbal messages within the context of the conversational situation.

- Check the tentative interpretation of the messages against one's bank of social knowledge.

- Formulate a response inside one's head based on the above, after considering several possible options.

- Draw upon one's knowledge of vocabulary and grammar.

- Speak or generate the message in a manner that is understandable to others.

- Be prepared to receive and analyze the new incoming message response, complete with its nonverbal and hidden messages.

- Begin the cycle all over again

A similar limitation can be found in Phase 2 of the study, which looked at the impact of learning contexts on the test scores. A limitation here was time, not just for the researcher but for the respondents too. In ideal conditions, it would have been desirable to interview the respondents one at a time, and explore the circumstances around their learning history and their feelings and perceptions about it. This would also have led to greater challenges about coding and categorizing the data accumulated.

5.7   Future Recommendations

One recommendation would be to address the complexities listed in the limitations and design more thorough tests for measuring pragmatic competence, allowing learners the opportunity to not only show comprehension of implicature, but also to produce responses in social settings that reflect the need to satisfy a communicative goal – with particular emphasis on the '*how*' rather than the '*what*'.

It would be desirable to collect further statistics on the relationship between grammatical and pragmatic competence by collecting results from a number of other samples – both in and outside Iran, if we limit the study to Iranian EFL learners. To clarify the impact of learning contexts it would also be desirable to consider some kind of stratified sampling technique so that all learning contexts are equally represented. This could lead to greater understanding in terms of measuring the impact of different learning approaches or contexts. In order to do this more effectively, it is recommended that the survey questionnaire be complemented with interviews, aimed at probing more deeply into the learning experiences of the learners and the attitudes and methods they have adopted. For

example, are they concerned about how they respond to social situations and if so, how do they go about learning what to say. Are they more concerned with grammar, reading, listening, speaking, writing? Are they able to identify the constraints they face, and what may be done to overcome them? Included in this investigation could be the extent of pragmatic awareness they already have, by using s few example situations.

As part of the study, if it is abroad, it is recommended that staff at the university where the learners are studying are also interviewed, to collect their views on how well they think Iranian students communicate in order to achieve their goals. Are there any particular shortcomings they can identify?

5.8   Summary

This chapter has briefly summarized the overall results of the study, looking at correlation between grammatical and pragmatic competence within a sample of Iranian EFL learners, recognizing that there is no evidence for such a correlation, and suggesting that the two competences develop independently. This state of affairs is in line with the theoretical framework around language competence (see Chapter 2), which treats the competences as focusing on different aspects of language use, even if it is also recognized that they need to be coordinated to achieve communicative success. The results also investigated the role of learning experiences and their impact on pragmatic competence, suggesting stronger relationships between pragmatic competence with learning contexts outside the traditional classroom setup.

The focus on pragmatic competence stems from the level of interest it has garnered over recent decades, particularly as it is recognized as an integral aspect of communicative competence yet often ignored in teaching approaches. Its relative difficulty as a taught component when compared to grammar has raised the question as to whether it is worth

teaching and whether, in fact, it is teachable. However, recent research suggests both are true.

The situation in Iran, or rather the situation facing Iranian learners when they go on to further studies abroad reflects a lack of focus on pragmatic instruction or awareness with the possible consequence of difficulties in academic integration. This study calls for further investigation in this area and hopes that educational policymakers in Iran will recognize the need to shift the teaching focus to include pragmatic instruction, as this would benefit the Iranian student population.

This chapter has also covers the limitations of the current study and suggests what could be done in the future to collect further evidence to support the cause of pragmatic instruction.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A – Invitation letter

Dear respected respondent

I am a Master's student in Linguistics at the University of Malaya and I am doing research in the area of pragmatic and grammatical competence, specifically, the relationship between them.

I would like to invite you contribute to this research study by taking part in the following tests. This study will require 20 to 30 minutes of your time to complete a questionnaire, respond to the test and provide any additional comments you feel would be helpful.

All information will be treated in the strictest confidence and the aggregate data will be analysed for academic purposes only. Your active participation is greatly appreciated.

In answering questions, please remember the following points
1- Please answer each of the statements by ticking □ alongside the item that you think is right.

2- Please read each question carefully and make sure you answer all items - do not omit any.

3- This questionnaire has three parts. Please make sure you answer every part of the questionnaire.

Thank you very much for your time and cooperation.

Yours sincerely,

Sepideh Mojabi

If you have any enquiries please contact sep.mojabi@gmail.com

Appendix B – Background questionnaire

Background information
Section A: In this section, please answer the following questions about _**yourself**_. Please tick
( ) only one answer in each part as required.

1. Age range	☐ below 25 ☐ 20 to 29 ☐ 30 to 39 ☐ 40 to 49 ☐50 or greater
2. Gender	☐1 Male ☐2 Female
3. Education	☐1 Primary/Secondary school ☐2 Diploma ☐3 Undergraduate ☐4 Masters ☐5 PHD
4 English Speaking Country	Have you ever been to any English speaking country? Yes ------- No ----------- If yes, How long? -------------
5. Language Education Background	How did you mainly learn English? (Can choose more than one) At school ----- Language Institutes--------- Self Study ------ Watching movies ---------
6. Living in Malaysia	How long have you been living in Malaysia? State in months or years -------------

Appendix C - Survey questionnaire – Learning methods

Think about your level of English language proficiency i.e. how well you speak and write English, as well as understand English when you listen or read. Which of the following contexts (there may be more than one) played a large role in developing your proficiency.

Please give a rating from 1 to 10 to each of the following statements.
A score of 1 indicates the learning context played NO role in your English language proficiency; a score of 10 indicates the learning context played a LARGE role.

For example:
1. What role did daily state schooling play in your English language abilities:

NO role   **LARGE role**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
○	○	○	○	○	⊗	○	○	○	○

In the above example, the respondent scored a 6, meaning that state schooling play a fairly significant role in the his/her learning of English, but not a major role.

Now give a score to the following statements:

1. What role did daily state schooling play in your English language abilities:

NO role   **LARGE role**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

2. What role did attending a private English language institute play in your English language abilities:

NO role   **LARGE role**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

3. What role did self-study play in your English language abilities:

NO role   **LARGE role**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

4. What role did attending university play in your English language abilities:

NO role   LARGE role

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O

5. What role did watching TV& movies, listening to music, using the internet play in your English language abilities:

NO role   LARGE role

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O

6. What role did talking to native speakers of English play in your English language abilities:

NO role   LARGE role

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O

7. How many years have you been studying English?

<1	1-2	3-4	5-6	7-8	9-10	11-12	13-14	15-16	>16
O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O

Appendix D – Pragmatic test

Fill the blanks with one word only.

Hi! I am having a great time (0) -------- Rome. It's hot and sunny and the people (1) ---------

very friendly. Yesterday, we (2) ----------- to the Coliseum. It was very old (3) ------------

really interesting. This afternoon we're going shopping in the local markets. Tomorrow

we're (4) -------- to leave Rome in (5) ---------- morning and travel (6) --------- train to

Venice. We've got some friends there. They're going to take (7) -------- to St Mark's Square.

I'd also like a trip on a gondola! See you soon.

Read the short conversations and select the correct answer from the options below:

> *Man:* We went to that new Italian restaurant the other day.
>
> *Woman:* What – er… Antonio's?
>
> *Man:* Yeah.
>
> *Woman:* What's it like?
>
> *Man:* It's good – I had some really nice pasta. The waiter wasn't that great, but it
> was all pretty cheap.
>
> *Woman:* Was it busy?
>
> *Man:* No, hardly anybody there. It was really quiet.

8. A man is talking about a restaurant he went to. What does he say about it?

a) The meal was expensive.

b) The service was quick.

c) The place was noisy.

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d)   The food was good.

Jack is talking to his housemate Sarah about another housemate.

Jack: 'Do you know where Frank is, Sarah?'
Sarah: 'Well, I heard music from his room earlier.'

9. Which one is correct? (i.e. Which one is closest to Sarah's meaning?)

   a) Frank forgot to turn the music off.

   b) Frank's loud music bothers Sarah.

   c) Frank is probably in his room.

   d) Sarah doesn't know where Frank is.

The teacher asks Peter to help with the plan for the class trip.
T: OK, so we'll go by the 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

10. Was the last part of the above conversation appropriate/grammatical?
          Yes ------
           No ------

If you marked 'No' above, what do you think the problem was:
a) socially inappropriate or b) grammatically incorrect
If you marked (a) above, can you provide some explanation for it?

Read the dialogues. Then select the correct answer from the options below:
Woman: Can I talk to you?
Man: Well, I have to leave in five minutes.

11. What does the man mean?

   a) I don't like talking to you

   b) I will talk to you in five minutes

   c) I don't have very long to talk to you.

Waitress: What can I get you?
Customer: I'd like chicken salad.

12. What does the customer mean?

    a. I will have a chicken salad.

    b. I really like chicken salad.

    c. I always have chicken salad

Man: This is the second time I have been turned down as a teaching assistant. It is so depressing.
Woman: Well, you are certainly qualified. I wish there were more positions open.

13.   What does the woman mean?

    a) She is not certain that the man is qualified

    b) The position has not been filled

    c) There was more openings than were needed

    d) There are not enough teaching assistant jobs available.

Woman: I thought you could check that article out of the library.
Man: I could, if I had my card with me.

14. What does the man mean?

    a) He used his card to get an article

    b) He needs to check on an article

    c) He let his card in the library

    d) He does not have his library card with him

Man: I am heading to the cafeteria now. Do you want to come with me?
Woman: I'd love to if I weren't right in the middle of a chapter.

15. What can be understood about the woman?

   a) She needs to finish her reading

   b) The ideas in the chapter are too powerful for her

   c) She hasn't reached the middle of the chapter

   d) Her head is too full of ideas

Woman: 150 dollars! Can you believe how much they are charging for this conference?
Man: Yes, but if we had pre-registered, we could have saved thirty dollars.

16. What does the man mean?

   a) They saved some money by preregistering

   b) They failed to register early

   c) They were overcharged on the registration fee

   d) They had to pay a total of $180

Woman: You are always in the library. Don't you get out sometimes to relax?
Man: The only way I can see myself getting ahead is to spend this much time on my studies

17.   What is the man trying to do?

   a) Learn how to relax

   b) Get his spending under control

   c) Achieve success

   d) Head for home

Man: I can't believe that the professor assigned us so many maths problems for tonight. This is going to take hours to do.
Woman: We are all in the same boat and no one is happy about it.

18. What does the woman mean?

    a) They will soon be taking a trip by boat.

    b) Everyone is in the same situation

    c) The professor has made everyone happy

    d) They are going to maths class in a few hours.

Man: Congratulations! They offered you the job.
Woman: Thanks. But I am not sure if I should accept this job offer or not. Maybe I should wait and see if another offer comes my way.
Man: Well, I think that you should strike when the iron is hot.

19. What is the man suggesting?

    a) Be careful of the hot iron

    b) Strike out on her own

    c) Wait for another offer to come her way

    d) Take the opportunity that has been offered

Woman: You look like you are a bit under the weather. Are you going to be able to get this paper done?
Man: I have certainly come down with something. I hope I can keep working on the paper

20. What does the man say about himself?

    a) He is coming downstairs now

    b) He is feeling rather sick

    c) He is certain he can keep going

    d) He thinks bad weather is on the way

Appendix E - Grammatical test

Please select the correct answer form the 4 options.

Yesterday, Mary's brother let her 1._____ his car. Mary goes to school.

2._____ studies English. She 3. _____ class every day.

Her classmates are very 4. _____. Jane and Mary work at the same place.

They see each other every day and meet for lunch.

Jane: Hello! How are you today?

Mary: I'm fine. What do you have for lunch?

Jane: I have a turkey sandwich, an apple and a cookie.

5. _____ do you have?

Mary: I   6. _____ to bring it. I guess I   7. _____ buy something

in the cafeteria

Jane: That's OK. I will 8. _____ with you.

Mary: Great! I'll see you in the cafeteria later.

1. A. to drive   B. drive   C. driving   D. drove

2. A. She   B. She's   C. He   D. Her

3. A. attends   B. goes   C. like   D. going

4. A. study   B. kindness   C. work   D. kind

5. A. How   B. What   C. Food   D. This

6. A. Forget   B. Forgot   C. Forgetting   D. Forgotten

7. A. must to   B. having   C. have to   D. going

8. A. going   B. buy   C. went   D. go

Directions: Questions 9-18 are incomplete sentences. Beneath each sentence you will see four words or phrases, marked (1), (2), (3), and (4). Choose the one word or phrase that best completes the sentence. Then mark your answer sheet.

9- Billy's mother advised him ----------- too near the lion's cage in the zoo.
   1) not go   2) not to go   3) to not go   4) does not go

10- The people ----------- in line to get into the theatre were cold and wet.
   1) stood   2) stand   3) standing   4) to stand

11- A: "I need to talk to you about something."
B: "Sorry, but I'm ----------- to talk."
   1) so busy   2) too busy   3) very busy   4) busy enough

12- A: "Tina went to sleep very early last night."
B: "She --------- very tired then."
   1) must be   2) should be   3) should have been   4) must have been

13- In our family, the ----------- between father and his children is of high value.
   1) project   2) measure   3) friendship   4) assignment

14- They are still ----------- the missing child.
   1) calling up   2) pointing out   3) making up   4) searching for

15- Tokyo and New York are major ----------- centres.
   1) financial   2) economical   3) proud   4) artificial

16- There are many species of plants and animals in danger of -----------.
   1) pollution   2) vehicle   3) extinction   4) climate

Directions: Questions 17-21 are related to the following passage. Read the passage and decide which choice (1), (2), (3), or (4) best fits each space. Then mark your answer sheet.

Mother Teresa was a kind woman who devoted her time to helping poor people.   Mother Teresa, whose (17) -------- name was Agnes Gencha Bejaxhiu, was born in Skopje, Macedonia, the daughter of a grocer. (18) -------- she was 18 years old, she (19) -------- the Order of the Sisters of Our Lady of Loreto, in India. For 20 years she taught wealthy girls at the Order's

school in Calcutta, which stood within sight of the city's worst slums. Then one night, she (20) -------- what she herself described as "a call within a call." To Sister Teresa the (21)------- was clear. She must go among the poor and help them.

17- 1) final   2) regular   3) central   4) original

18- 1) As   2) When   3) Since   4) Whether

19- 1) entered   2) attached   3) imagined   4) caused

20- 1) placed   2) handled   3) forwarded   4) received

21- 1) resource   2) comment   3) message   4) interest