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Delving into Speech Act of Suggestion: A Case of Pakistani EFL Learners

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ABSTRACT

Pragmatic instruction specially related to speech acts focuses on providing awareness to the language learners to determine language functions in different social contexts for the enhancement of their pragmatic skills. This study examines the use of suggestion strategies in English by Pakistani EFL learners. The results of the study show some differences in the pragmatical and grammatical appropriateness as well as in the use of some suggestion strategies between first year and final year EFL Pakistani learners at bachelor's level. The study reveals no significant difference in the preferences of major suggestion strategies by both male and female Pakistani EFL learners. Interestingly, the female learners were observed to use more softened categories of suggestions than the male students, whereas the male students were observed to use more direct categories of suggestions than the female learners. The study also indicates that Pakistani EFL learners often suggest in English and are aware of the status differences for using suggestion strategies in English. The study implies the incorporation of pragmatic instruction of speech acts in ESL courses in Pakistan.

Introduction

English language presently is the most used foreign language which is considered as a lingua franca (Firth, 1996; Seidlhofer, 2001; McKay, 2002; Crystal, 2003; Jenkins, 2007). English language has been an important part of the official, educational, economic, and social life since the creation of Pakistan (Mahboob, 2009). It has the position of an official language and is also considered to be the second language in Pakistan (Warsi, 2004; Akram & Mahmood, 2007; Farooq, Uzair-ul-Hassan & Wahid, 2012). As second language learning is a demanding task (Nawaz, Amin, & Tatla, 2015), and such contexts require the learners to be competent in both linguistic and pragmatic abilities to evade communication breakdowns, so the function of English in Pakistani educational institutions is also perilous. It is considered that the existing portion of the present-day population of Pakistan that is efficient in spoken and written English is less than two percent (Khalique, 2008). The students in Pakistan learn English as a mandatory subject from their first grade in school until their bachelor's degree (Jalal, 2004), however, they are not skilled in speaking, understanding, writing, or reading English language proficiently (Warsi, 2004). Therefore, different researchers have discussed the issues and challenges in English language learning in Pakistan and focused on the intense need of Pakistani students to learn English appropriately (Rahman. 1990; Mansoor, 2005; Shamim, 2008).

In the 1970s, the requirement of the learning of communicative roles of a language by its learners was considered. Presently, linguists on communicative competence have concluded that linguistic proficiency is not an assurance to communicative competence (Eslami- Raskh, 2005; Meier, 1997). Pragmatic competence is the skill to communicate the proposed message with all its tinges in any socio-cultural situation and to interpret the intended message of the interlocutor (Fraser, 2010). The organization of the learning prospects for the development of pragmatic competence is not less than a challenge in a second or foreign language teaching contexts (Kasper, 1997). The inclusion of pragmatic instruction in a classroom for second language learners can facilitate the learners in the development of their pragmatic competence and communicative abilities (Da Silva, 2003; Krisnawati, 2011).

Pragmatic competence consists of the knowledge of speech acts (Nguyen, Pham & Pham, 2012). Speech acts are verbal actions that are completely dependent upon the context in which these actions are performed. The teaching of speech acts is a useful task in raising the awareness of learners about the appropriate speech act behavior (Olshtain & Cohen, 1990). Suggestions can be studied in both comprehension and grammar classes and a teacher should provide awareness to students about the subtle differences in meaning between similar words or phrases when they learn to use different syntactic structures (Banerjee & Carrell, 1988). Likewise, many linguists have argued that pragmatic awareness in the form of the development of pragmatic features is required for English language learners and the teaching of suggestions can effectively contribute in the enhancement of learners' pragmatic competence (Jiang, 2006; Rezvani, Eslami-Rasekh, & Dastjerdi, 2014; Ghavamnia, Eslami-Rasekh, & Dastjerdi, 2018).

It is necessity to teach pragmatic aspects in English in second language situations (Krisnawati, 2011; Da Silva, 2003), besides grammatic and lexical aspects. However, the common method used in Pakistan for English language learning is the rote memorization of grammatical and lexical components of language. Consequently, Pakistani ESL learners are not proficient in speaking English in both educational and social contexts (Mansoor, 2005; Rahman, 2004). This failure is the result of the lack of understanding regarding pragmatic aspects in English. The literature on speech act of suggestions is quite limited and there is no study that delved into different aspects including instruction, gender, and strategies together in Pakistan. Hence, the present study explores the relationship between Pakistani EFL learners' proficiency levels and their use of suggestions in English along while considering gender, instruction, and social status as different factors.

Literature Review

Pragmatics includes an understanding of the cultural and linguistic diversity. Pragmatics is the study of speaker and hearer meaning formed in their combined actions that contain both linguistic and non-linguistic signs considering socio-cultural actions (LoCastro, 2003). The modern decades have witnessed a gush of interest in Interlanguage Pragmatics (ILP), that aims to study the way non-native speakers accomplish a specific speech act in a target language (Kasper, 1992). The research in ILP has frequently occupied the use of speech acts (Campillo, Jorda, & Espurz, 2009). As Pragmatics is concerned with language use in consideration to the relevance of utterances in specific settings, utterers, and content (Bardovi-Harlig & Dornyei, 1998), so the necessity of pragmatic instruction for the development of learner's communicative ability cannot be ignored in second or foreign language contexts (Rezvani, Eslami-Rasekh, & Dastjerdi, 2014). Banerjee and Carrell (1988) argued that it is impossible to separate Pragmatics from other aspects of language teaching.

The instruction of pragmatic features of language is required even for learners of high language proficiency (Jeon & Kaya, 2006; Takahashi, 2010). In an investigation of fifty-eight studies, the twenty-eight studies exhibited better performance of instructional group over non-instructional group in pragmatics (Taguchi, Naganuma, & Budding, 2015). The beneficial effects of pragmatic instruction in classroom have been observed (Nguyen, Pham, & Pham, 2012; Soler, 2015). The explicit instructional approach is focused on providing pragmatic awareness along with meta-pragmatic simplifications and explicit correction of forms and meanings as a productive practice (Nguyen, Pham, & Pham, 2012).

Language learning is much more than just attaining the knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, or its characteristic sounds (Guerra & Martinez-Flor, 2006). A balance should be maintained between grammatical and pragmatic competence while learning as sociolinguistic aspects of a language should not be neglected for communicatively appropriate interaction (Canale & Swain, 1980; Bardovi-Harlig & Dornyei, 1998). Pragmatic competence being a component of communicative competence (Gu, 2014), deals with the strategies of language use (Kasper & Rose, 2001). According to Kim and Hall (2002), pragmatic competence involves the understanding to link utterances to locally set situations (p. 332).

The enhancement of pragmatic competence of the learners at different levels through instruction in ESL contexts should not be taken for granted (Takahashi & Beebe, 1987; Rose, 1994; Bardovi-Harlig & Griffin, 2005; Tateyama, 2007). Recent focus of different ILP is on the production of different speech acts (Pishghadam & Sharafadini, 2011). It is necessary for non-native language learners to be aware of the sociocultural constraints of the target language on speech acts to become pragmatically competent (Allami & Naeimi, 2011; Gu, 2014). Manes and Wolfson (1981) argued that the awareness of suitable choices of pragmatic strategies is vital for developing speech act ability.

Speech acts are significant components of communicative competence (Pishghadam & Sharafadini, 2011). Searle (1976) proposed a list of the categories of illocutionary acts. According to Searle (1969), a suggestion is a directive act that is focused on the utterer's reliance on helping the hearer. Suggestions are used to enhance one's probabilities of being esteemed as a cooperative and caring person (Banerjee & Carrell, 1988).

Suggestions and advice acts have been employed interchangeably (Searle, 1969; Banerjee & Carrell, 1988; Tsui, 1994; Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1996; Mandala, 1999). Suggestions can be observed as elements of a comprehensive speech act that contains the act of advice (Martínez-Flor, 2005; Heidari, 2013). However, suggestions are also different from advice. Suggestions carry a lesser force than advice and the propositional focus of advice is usually towards the listener as an agent, whereas the propositional focus of suggestion is either towards the listener or both the listener and speaker (Heidari, 2013).

Banerjee and Carrell (1988) conducted the first study that specifically focused on suggestions in ESL context by involving native Chinese or Malay speakers and native American English speakers. The study observed that the native speakers were to some extent more frequent and less direct in making suggestions than the non-native speakers. Later, Suzuki (2009) investigated the use of suggestion strategies in English by native English speakers of United States of America. and revealed the effectiveness of such corpora for language teaching and learning with natural expressions in specific contexts. Pishghadam and Sharafadini (2011) investigated the use of suggestions of Iranian EFL learners and explored a significant effect of gender in the use of suggestion strategies. Bu (2011) studied pragmatic transfer in suggestion approaches by Chinese learners of English

and found that the pragmatic effect was shifted from Chinese culture and teaching made mistakes. Mahmoudi-Gahrouei (2013) conducted a socio-pragmatic study on the suggestion strategies of Persian EFL learners and viewed significant effect of social distance and dominance between the interlocutors on the frequency of the intensifier in different conditions. Heidari (2013) compared the use of suggestions of Iranian EFL learners and Americans and observed the effect of gender on making suggestions. Farnia, Sohrabie, and Sattar (2014) examined the realization of speech act of suggestion by Iranian native speakers of Farsi and revealed the frequent use of several mitigating devices. Ahmadi, Kargar, and Rostampour (2014) investigated the use of suggestion strategies in English by Iranian EFL learners and found no significance difference in the use of suggestion strategies at different proficiency levels and observed no relationship between gender and EFL learners' use of suggestion strategies. Gu (2014) compared the linguistic features of suggestions of Chinese EFL learners and native English speakers and noticed significant use of conventionalized and indirect suggestion strategies by Chinese EFL learners than the native English speakers.

Considering the lack of opportunities for Pakistani English learners to the high levels of proficiency and the limited number of the studies on suggestion strategies (Martínez-Flor, 2005; Jiang, 2006; Heidari, 2013; Gu, 2014), the present study delved into the speech act of suggestion considering the case of Pakistani EFL learners. There was a dire need of a study considering the role of instruction and social factors together on the use of suggestions in English by Pakistani learners and this study tried to fill in the gap.

Material and Methods

The current study employed quantitative research design. The data was composed qualitatively using open-ended responses of Discourse Completion Test (DCT) and examined quantitatively through SPSS software ver. 29.

Participants

The study included a sample of two hundred (200) EFL learners, both males and females, enrolled in BS English program at five Pakistani universities by means of convenience sampling procedures.

Tools

The instruments used in the present study were arranged in three steps following Salemi, Rabiee, and Ketabi (2012), as, i. Pre-instruction tools (i.e., Oxford Placement Test and Pre-test), ii. While-instruction tools (i.e., Lectures, Activities, Conversation Practice, Role-play), iii. Post-instruction tool (i.e., Post-test). A proficiency test (OPT) was administered in the beginning of the study for the confirmation of the participants' proficiency at bachelor's and master's level as determined by their institutes. A pre-test in the form of Discourse Completion Test (DCT) was given separately to all the participants of the study to measure the pre-existing knowledge of the students related to the use of suggestions in English. Two levels of status as, equal status (student to student interaction) and higher status (student to teacher interaction) were considered for the eight (8) concisely defined suggestion-eliciting situations in the DCT (Jiang, 2006; Mahmoudi Gahrouei, 2013; Rezvani, Eslami-Rasekh, & Dastjerdi, 2014; Chalak & Abbasi, 2015). DCT was administered as post-test with a shuffling of the items in the pretest that caused the difference of the serial numbers of the situations with the purpose of avoiding the learners' remembering responses from the pre-test.

Procedures

After the administration of language proficiency test, a pre-test was administered. The participants were given explicit pragmatic instruction for two months (20 hours approx.) during the normal classes at their own universities. The instruction involved talks on different topics of pragmatics and speech acts from LoCastro (2003) along with some activities, conversation practices and role plays. The linguists have applied a variety of activities for developing pragmatic competence of the learners (Ahmadi, Kargar, & Rostampour, 2014; E). The activities designed by the researchers are exhibited in the following table:

Table 1
Activities for Learning Suggestions

Sr. No.	Activity	Related Question	Skill emphasized
1	Identifying Illocutionary Acts	Identify the illocutionary acts in the following statements and write in the blank space provided.	Differentiation of different types of Speech Acts
2	Role Play Cards	Read the role play cards that you have been given (A or B). Think about what you would say and perform the role-play with your partner.	Role Plays
3	Making suggestions in pairs	Read the problems from the sheets provided (A or B) to your partner and listen to his/her suggestions.	Realizing suggestion situations
4	Suggesting the Best Ways of Doing Things in Groups	Suggest the best way to do different things from your best way topic cards (A or B).	How to make suggestions
5	Practicing Suggestion Strategies	Make suggestions in groups using the phrases provided to you on the Sheets (A, B or C).	Using suggestion forms while suggesting
6	Using Expressions in Different Situations	Use these expressions to suggest in the given situations.	Considering context differences while suggesting
7	Classification of Suggestion Strategies	Identify the given suggestions as Direct, Conventionalized, or Indirect and write in the space provided.	Distinguishing different forms of suggestions
8	Choice of Correct Suggestion Form	Choose the correct expressions for suggesting to your classmate and teacher.	Using correct suggestion strategy considering social distance and dominance

The activities for the intervention were designed ensuing Farahian, Rezaee, and Gholami (2012). The instructional approach focused on introductory, practicing, and interactive phases (Salemi, Rabiee and Ketabi, 2012). After delivering same type of instruction separately in the five institutes, a posttest was administered to assess the understanding of the participants related to suggestions in English.

Instructional Goals of the Study

The study adopted pedagogical targets for explicit instructional mode for suggestions from Martinez-Flor and Fukuya (2005), and Ghavamnia, Eslami-Rasekh, and Dastjerdi (2018). The focus of the instruction was on twelve head acts (HAs) and seven downgraders for providing a softer effect to this speech act. Considering status differences, the target forms as the twelve (12) HAs were explicitly taught (Ghavamnia, Eslami-Rasekh, & Dastjerdi, 2018). The seven downgraders are underlined below in Table 2.

Table 2
Blends of Suggestions according to Social Status Differences

Equal Status	Higher Status
Why don't you . . .?	I would <u>probably</u> suggest that . . .

Have you tried . . .?	Personally, I would recommend that . . .
You can just . . .	Maybe you could . . .
You might want to . . .	It would be helpful if you . . .
Perhaps you should . . .	I think it might be better to . . .
I think you need . . .	I'm not sure, but I think a good idea would be . . .

(Source: Ghavamnia, Eslami-Rasekh, & Dastjerdi, 2018

Data Analysis

Two English instructors were hired as raters to assign the scores to the 6,400 responses of the DCT conferring to the grading system of Martinez-Flor (2004) as shown in Table 3.

Table 3
Assignment of Scores

Examples	*Score*	*Explanation for the Score*
You can buy this pen	0	the state when Combination 2 is utilized as HA is a target form in Combination 1
You should buy this pen	1	the state when Combination 1 is utilized as HA is one of the chosen target forms in this combination
Perhaps, you should buy this pen	1.5	considering both HA and the downgrader are the chosen target forms
It was helpful if you go to this clinic	0	since the pragmalinguistic form is Incorrect
It would be helpful if you are going to this clinic	1	since the pragmalinguistic part is correct, but linking part is incorrect
It would be helpful if you go to this clinic	1.5	since both the pragmalinguistic form and connecting part are correct

(Source: Martinez-Flor, 2004)

After assigning scores, the data obtained for suggestions was sorted in the three main strategies of Direct, Conventionalized Forms, and Indirect and their micro strategies (Martinez-Flor, 2005, p. 175) to analyse the data sets statistically.

Results and Discussion

To answer the first research question, the test scores of the two levels of English students were compared using Independent Samples t-test. The responses were analysed first for equal status (8) and then for higher status (8) in all the situations focusing on pragmatically and grammatically appropriate suggestions. Moreover, to evaluate the differences in the use of suggestion strategies between the two groups of participants, the data was analysed in view of the taxonomy of Martinez Flor (2005). The statistical results therefore acquired are tabulated in Table 4 for explanation.

Table 4
Differences in the test scores of Pakistani EFL first year and final year learners in a bachelor's program

Status			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Equal status	PA	M	0.980	1.010	0.850	0.830	0.840	0.860	0.790	0.820
		SD	0.543	0.529	0.599	0.558	0.566	0.525	0.554	0.551
		t	-1.985	-0.978	-2.150	-2.742	-1.682	-2.529	-3.108	-4.214
		Df	95.4	98	97.5	97.9	98	97.9	97.9	95.3
		p	0.050	0.331	0.034	0.007	0.096	0.013	0.002	0.000
	GA	M	1.450	1.190	1.150	1.110	1.120	1.370	1.100	1.110
		SD	1.969	0.245	0.231	0.209	0.215	1.976	0.202	0.209
		t	-0.605	-2.666	-2.694	-4.637	-3.421	-0.284	-4.929	-5.439
		Df	98	97.9	97.3	95.9	95.8	98	94.9	97
		p	0.546	0.009	0.008	0.000	0.001	0.777	0.000	0.000

Higher status	PA	M	1.030	1.030	0.990	0.990	0.970	0.990	0.960	1.040
		SD	0.538	0.592	0.575	0.575	0.592	0.575	0.587	0.542
		t	-2.999	-3.105	-2.869	-3.680	-2.585	-3.259	-3.306	-3.196
		Df	95.5	83.9	93.7	89.3	96.6	90.2	89.6	92.1
		p	0.003	0.002	0.005	0.000	0.011	0.002	0.001	0.002
	GA	M	1.210	1.250	1.220	1.210	1.210	1.210	1.200	1.220
		SD	0.249	0.252	0.250	0.249	0.249	0.249	0.247	0.250
		t	-5.105	-3.280	-3.681	-5.445	-4.187	-4.187	-3.877	-4.537
		Df	87.9	93.4	94.9	84.7	93.9	93.9	96.2	90.1
		p	0.000	0.001	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000

(PA= Pragmatic Appropriateness, GA=Grammatical Appropriateness)

The above table displays differences in the test scores of Pakistani EFL first year and final year learners in a bachelor's program. The results highlight the five situations with significant differences (p = 0.034; 0.007; 0.013; 0.002; 0.000) in the two levels, except for only three situations i.e., one, two, and five (p = 0.050; 0.331; 0.096). Similarly, the results of the grammatical appropriateness in equal status establish six situations with significant differences (p = 0.009; 0.008; 0.000; 0.001; 0.000; 0.000), apart from only two instances i.e., first and sixth situation (p= 0.546; 0.777). Moreover, the findings of pragmatic appropriateness in higher status report significant differences in all the situations (p = 0.003; 0.002; 0.005; 0.000; 0.011; 0.002; 0.001; 0.002) that refer to the difference in the development of pragmatic abilities between the two levels of English students in Pakistan. Furthermore, the statistical results of grammatical appropriateness in higher status present all the situations with significant differences (p = 0.000; 0.001; 0.000; 0.000; 0.000; 0.000; 0.000; 0.000). So, apart from only five instances, the respondents have shown significant improvements in their pragmatic abilities in rest of all situations. The results with meaningful differences between the scores of first year and final year learners have clearly confirmed the differences of proficiency of the two levels in the development of pragmatic competence because of the factor of the instruction of the speech act of suggestion. This finding is consistent with Rajabia, Azizifara, and Gowhary (2015) that observed significant difference between the development of two levels of learners. Hence, it attests that proficiency level and grammatical competence influence pragmatic appropriateness of the learners.

Additionally, the following table presents the frequencies of the use of suggestion categories by Pakistani EFL first year and final year learners in bachelors' program.

Table 5
Frequencies of the use of Suggestion Strategies in all situations

Strategy	Equal Status		Higher Status	
	1st year	Final year	1st year	Final year
Direct	136	136	0	2
Performative Verb	80	73	0	2
Imperative	16	14	0	0
Negative Imperative	40	49	0	0
Conventionalized Forms	264	264	79	74
Specific Formulae	47	20	3	0
Possibility/Probability	85	119	68	59
Should	96	86	0	1
Need	17	35	3	1
Conditional	21	9	36	13
Indirect	0	0	291	324
Impersonal	0	0	275	290
Hints	0	0	16	34

Concerning differences of the use of suggestion strategies, it was found that Conventionalized Forms were more often used by first year learners (264, 79) than final year learners (264, 74), whereas the use of Indirect suggestions was more common by final years' learners (0, 324) than first year learners (0, 291). However, Direct suggestions were more used by final year learners (136, 2) than first year learners (136, 0). The finding with greater use of Conventionalized forms is in line with the results of Toprak (2020). The four results where the respondents of both levels show no significant differences in the use of pragmatically and grammatically appropriate suggestions. is in line with the finding of Aminifard, Safaei, and Askari (2014), who have established that the participants at different proficiency levels have no significant differences in production of suggestion speech act. In addition, considering the use of suggestion strategies, it was found that the learners at both levels preferred to use Conventionalized Forms the most, while Indirect suggestion strategies have been used more than Direct suggestion strategies. This outcome is in line with the findings of the other studies (Pishghadam & Sharafadini, 2011; Aminifard, Safaei, & Askari, 2014), as the learners at different proficiency levels can utilize almost the same suggestion strategies. The findings have highlighted that the students at different levels of proficiency perform differently, and formal instruction of pragmatic rules provides better platform for Pakistani learners.

To answer the second research question, the collected responses of male and female participants were compared using Martinez-Flor's (2005) suggestion strategies and their frequencies of use were analysed using SPSS. Table 6 represents the frequencies of the use of suggestion strategies in English by Pakistani EFL male (100) and female (100) university students in all the situations of the DCT.

Table 6
Frequencies of the use of suggestion categories by Pakistani EFL male and female students

Strategy	Males	Females
Direct	139	135
Performative Verb	77	78
Imperative	15	15
Negative Imperative	51	32
Conventionalized Forms	344	360
Specific Formulae (Interrogative Forms)	29	28
Possibility/Probability	167	169
Should	91	92
Need	31	25
Conditional	26	46
Indirect	319	305
Impersonal	295	270
Hints	37	29

The findings in the above table reveal that Pakistani male students (319) use more Indirect strategies than female students (305) for making suggestions. This finding is in contrast with Sharqawi and Anthony (2020) where the females were found more indirect in their suggestions. The findings show that Pakistani female students (360) use more conventionalized forms of suggestions than the male students (344), while the male students (139) adopt more direct forms for making suggestions than the female students (135). Overall, the findings highlight that the same pattern of preference is followed by both male and female Pakistani students in the use of major suggestion strategies, which may be the result of the linguistic homogeneity of the respondents. However, the difference rests in the use of micro strategies for making suggestions. These results reveal that gender plays a significant role in Pakistani culture and the results are in harmony with other studies (Pishghadam & Sharafadini, 2011; Aminifard, Safaei, & Askari, 2014; Alfghe

& Mohammadzadeh, 2021) where students reveal a significant effect of gender in the use of suggestion strategies. Moreover, the finding that shows the preference of the male participants for the use of direct suggestion strategies is in line with the findings of Heidari (2013) in which the male students employed more direct suggestions. It seems that Pakistani female students prefer to use more softened forms of suggestions than the male students, whereas the male students are more direct than their female counterparts. Overall, it can be established that both male and female Pakistani learners of English follow the same pattern of preference for the use of major suggestion strategies, while they differ in the use of micro strategies for making suggestions.

To answer the third question, the frequencies of the use of suggestion strategies of post-tests of the participants were analyzed according to the taxonomy of Martinez-Flor (2005) in consideration of status difference. The results are tabulated in the following table.

Table 7
Frequencies of the use of suggestion strategies by Pakistani EFL learners

Strategy	Equal	Higher
Direct	502	0
Performative Verb	176	0
Imperative	33	0
Negative Imperative	293	0
Conventionalized Forms	1035	733
Specific Formulae (Interrogative Forms)	60	51
Possibility/Probability	434	456
Should	372	11
Need	101	96
Conditional	68	119
Indirect	63	848
Impersonal	15	797
Hints	48	51

As exhibited in the above table, different suggestion strategies in English have been frequently used by the respondents in consideration to the status difference. It was found that for equal status situations, the students most frequently used Conventionalized Forms (1035) of suggestion strategies. The findings reveal that the students in Pakistan most frequently utilize the micro strategy of Possibility/Probability (434, 456) and least frequently utilize the micro suggestion strategy of Specific Formulae (60, 51) in both equal and higher status conditions. Moreover, the respondents have utilized Indirect forms of suggestions as the most used suggestion strategy for higher status (848) conditions and the least used suggestion strategy for equal status (63) conditions. The findings demonstrate that the students most frequently use Impersonal micro suggestion strategy (797) for higher status situations. Moreover, it was observed that the students in Pakistan use Direct suggestions as the second most frequent form for equal status (502) situations and least frequent form for higher status (0) situations. Within Direct category, the respondents have utilized Negative Imperative as frequently used micro strategy for both equal (293) and higher status (0) conditions. The results have maintained that the respondents have also frequently utilized Performative Verb for equal status (176) conditions, while they have completely avoided this strategy for higher status (0) situations. Similarly, Imperative strategy of suggestion has been noticed as almost ignored form of suggestion in both equal (33) and higher status (0) situations by the respondents. Imperatives are often viewed as the most direct and rude kinds of suggesting (Koike, 1994; Hinkel, 1997) as they have the most literal pragmatic force as in 'Try using electric machine' or 'Don't try to work on this mobile'. Interestingly, the patterns of suggestion strategies by the students for equal status situations follow the order of Conventionalized Forms, Direct and, Indirect, and for higher status situations it comes in the order of Indirect, Conventionalized Forms and Direct forms. However, Hint strategies (48, 51) have been observed as the least utilized form of

suggestions by the respondents. The finding of the more frequent utilization of Impersonal strategy than Hints is consistent with the findings of other research studies (Ekin (2013; Farnia, Sohrabie, & Sattar, 2014). It seems that Pakistani learners of English usually communicate indirectly while suggesting to elders. These findings of the present study witness the significant effect of social distance between the interlocutors on the choice of the suggestion strategy. The influence of social dominance and distance has been established in the findings of Mahmoudi-Gahrouei (2013).

Apart from the above categorized strategies, the university students of English have also employed some new forms of suggestions, such as, 'If it pleases you . . ., It would be preferable to . . ., May I suggest you . . ., I would like to help you . . ., Sorry to say but . . ., and, Let me suggest you . . .'. It has been noticed from the collected responses that the learners of English in Pakistan make the frequent use of Inclusive We, such as, 'We can . . ., We have to . . ., and, We need to . . .'. The frequent use of modals such as 'have to' and 'need to' by Pakistani learners is in harmony with the findings of Mahmoudi-Gahrouei (2013). Frequent use of some lexical descriptions, such as, 'think', 'don't' 'about', 'maybe' and 'really' has been observed in the collected responses. This finding is consistent with Suzuki (2009) for the frequent use of nearly same lexical structures such as, 'why don't we', and 'why don't you' for making suggestions. Considering the obvious effects of explicit instruction, the researchers perceive helpful impacts of making speech acts such as suggestions a part of teaching syllabus for the English language learners in Pakistan.

Conclusion

This research study endeavoured to create the ways to incorporate pragmatic elements in English language education and explored the differences in the development of pragmatic competence after the instruction of the speech act of suggestion between Pakistani EFL learners at different proficiency levels and with different genders. The results of the study show some differences in the pragmatical and grammatical appropriateness as well as in the use of some suggestion strategies between first year and final year EFL Pakistani learners at bachelor's level. The results show helpful effects of explicit instruction of pragmatic elements of English language to Pakistani learners for making them functionally proficient in English. The observed effects of social distance and dominance between the interlocutors reflects the choice of the suggestion strategies in Pakistan. The lack of pragmatic ability of Pakistani learners of English is also evident from their incomplete understanding and knowledge of the use of a few suggestion strategies in English. The helpful effects of explicit instruction through pragmatic exercises are recognised in the study that proposes the challenge of developing pragmatic awareness through such instruction approaches.

Recommendations

The study suggests the compilation of courses by the syllabus designers to focus on authentic lessons with pragmatic activities to enhance functional proficiency of students in English. In addition, the policy makers should focus on the incorporation of pragmatic instruction of speech acts in ESL courses in Pakistan. Consequently, the significant pedagogical implication for the learners is to have conscious focus on various language forms, functional meanings and significant contextual features of a target language to develop their pragmatic competence.

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