

# STUDENTS' PRAGMATIC AWARENESS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR ENGLISH CLASSROOM TEACHING AT THUONG MAI UNIVERSITY

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**Abstract:** This study was carried out to examine Thuong Mai non-English major students' awareness of two speech acts of requesting and greeting, their pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic understanding based on these speech acts. The participants were 5 Americans and 50 non-English major freshmen at Thuong Mai University (TMU). Two survey questionnaires were employed as research instruments. The results show that the students' awareness of speech acts was low. The speech act of requesting comes to the fore with the larger number of participants having the correct answers, whereas the speech act of greeting enjoyed the lower correct response rate. The students' understanding of pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic aspects was still limited. The aspect of politeness was paid the most attention to while that of cultural norms was least focused on. A number of suggestions for promoting students' pragmatic awareness were given to TMU teachers and students of English.

**Key words:** Intercultural communication, pragmatic awareness, speech acts

## 1. Introduction

As a teacher of English at TMU, from her own observations and experience, the researcher has noticed that TMU students often experience difficulties in communicating in English when involved in different communication situations in the classrooms as well as in real-life encounters. Many of them do not employ appropriate strategies and do not use relevant linguistic forms to perform a speech act. They engage in communication activities without paying attention to factors that influence the communication such as the relationship with the other interlocutor. The situation is worse when they interact with native speakers. As they have not been exposed much to real-life situations, they often feel stuck. They may not understand what native speakers mean or are unable to make appropriate utterances in different situations. Especially, they often violate politeness or cultural norms, thus leading to their difficulty or even failure in intercultural communication. This may be due to the fact that they are not really aware of pragmatic aspects or do not put enough emphasis on them.

Such a situation has inspired the author to conduct research into "*Students' pragmatic awareness and implications for English classroom teaching at Thuong Mai University*" with a focus on TMU first-year non-English major students' pragmatic awareness. Some pedagogical implications are also discussed to help raise the students' pragmatic awareness and increase English teaching effectiveness.

The study aimed at answering two research questions:

1. How much are TMU first-year non-English major students aware of English pragmatic aspects?
2. What should be done to improve the students' pragmatic awareness?

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## **2. Theoretical framework**

### **2.1. Pragmatics**

Since its introduction by Morris (1938, p. 6-7) up to the present time, pragmatics has been defined in various ways by many scholars (Leech, 1983; Levinson, 1983; Mey, 1993; Rose & Kasper, 2001; Stalnaker, 1972; and Yule, 2006). Though these scholars define pragmatics differently, they all address their attention to what the speakers or writers mean. For this reason, pragmatics can be defined as “the study of the use of context to make inferences about meaning” (Fasold, 1990, p. 119).

Out of numerous definitions of pragmatics, one of interest in second language pedagogy has been proposed by Crystal (in Kasper, 2001, p. 2) as “the study of language from the point of view of users, especially of the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction and the effects their use of language has on other participants in the act of communication.” In other words, pragmatics is defined as the study of communicative action in its sociocultural context. Kasper (2001, p. 2) indicates that communicative actions includes not only using speech acts (such as apologizing, complaining, complimenting, and requesting) but also engaging in different types of discourse and participating in speech events of varying length and complexity.

In this study, the researcher follows the division of pragmatics by Leech and Thomas (in Kasper, 2001), who classified pragmatics into two components, namely pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics. These two aspects of pragmatics will be discussed along with the employment of speech acts.

### **2.2. Speech acts**

#### ***2.2.1. Definitions***

The speech act theory is attributed to Austin (1962), who claimed “many utterances, termed performatives, do not only communicate information, but are equivalent to actions” (p. 22). In other words, by these utterances, people do things or have others do things for them; they apologize, promise, request, refuse and complain. Utterances that may be used to realize the above functions are known as speech acts.

#### ***2.2.2. Categories of speech acts***

Searle (1979, p. 12) provided a classification of speech acts according to their functions, dividing them into five categories, including

(i) representatives, which commit the speaker to the truth of expressed proposition (paradigm cases: asserting, concluding, etc.)

(ii) directives, which are attempts by the speaker to get the addressee to do something (paradigm cases: requesting, questioning, etc.)

(iii) commissives, which commit the speaker to some future course of action (paradigm cases: promising, threatening, offering)

(iv) expressives, which express a psychological state (paradigm cases: thanking, apologizing, welcoming, congratulating)

(v) declaratives, which affect immediate changes in the institutional state of affairs and which tend to rely on elaborate extra-linguistic institutions (paradigm cases: excommunicating, declaring war, christening, firing from employment)

### **2.3. Pragmalinguistics**

Pragmalinguistics refers to the resources for conveying communicative acts and relational or interpersonal meanings. Such resources include pragmatic strategies such as directness and indirectness, routines, and other range of linguistic forms which can soften or intensify communicative acts. The term pragmalinguistic can be applied to “the study of the more linguistic end of pragmatics - where we consider the particular resources which a given language provides for conveying particular illocution (Leech, 1983, p. 11). In short, pragmalinguistics refers to knowledge of the linguistic means to perform speech acts (Schmitt, 2002, p. 80).

Pragmalinguistics includes two aspects, namely, *conventions of means* (strategies for realizing speech intentions) and *conventions of forms* (the linguistic items used to express speech intentions) (Kasper & Roever, 2005). The former refers to the semantic devices (or semantic formulas) by which a speech act is performed. The latter involves the exact wordings used. For example, a request can be realized by means of different semantic formulas, from a direct statement expressing obligation to an indirect statement expressing wishes. A request can be realized by means of different wordings such as “You must lend me your car.”, “I would like to borrow your car.”, “Could you lend me your car?”, or “My car has broken down.” and so on.

### **2.4. Sociopragmatics**

#### **2.4.1. Definitions**

Sociopragmatics has been described by Leech (1983, p. 10) as the sociological interface of pragmatics, referring to the social perceptions underlying participant’s interpretation and performance of communicative action. Speech communities differ in their assessment of speaker’s and hearer’s social distance and social power, their rights and obligations, and the degree of imposition involved in particular communicative acts (Holmes, 2001). Sociopragmatics is about proper social behavior. Learners must be made aware of the consequences of making pragmatic choices.

Schmitt (2002, p. 80) states that sociopragmatic perspective focuses on the socially based assessment, beliefs and interactional principles that underlie people’s choice of strategies. For example, a speaker who is a dinner guest wanting to reach the salt which is at the other side of the table could say: “Pass the salt, will you?” or “Can you pass the salt?”, depending on the relationship between that speaker and the hearer (close or distant, equal or unequal) or the social acceptability of reaching for food in such a context. Such social judgments are the focus of sociopragmatics.

#### **2.4.2. Aspects of sociopragmatics**

Based on Brown and Levinson’s division (1987), in which sociopragmatics can be used to refer to knowledge of relative power, social distance, and imposition and knowledge of mutual rights and obligations, taboos, and conventional courses of action, the present researcher determines two aspects of sociopragmatics, namely, politeness and cultural norms.

Politeness: according to Brown and Levinson (1987), there are three independent variables that have a systematic effect on the choice of politeness strategy in the social context. They include the *social distance* between two interlocutors, the *relative power* one interlocutor has over the other, and the absolute *ranking of impositions* in the culture in which the two are in. Social distance reflects the degree of familiarity and solidarity that both the hearer and speaker share. Relative power indicates the degree of imposition that the speaker may inflict on the hearer due to the power differential between the two parties. Finally, absolute ranking refers to the weightiness of impositions relative to a given culture's expectations and modes. This includes "the right of the speaker to perform the act, and the degree to which the hearer welcomes the imposition" (Brown & Levinson, 1978, p. 74). With these variables in mind, the speaker must choose specific linguistic forms that reflect particular politeness strategies relative to the variables that are involved in a specific context.

Cultural norms: in Malinowski's opinion (1994), language forms depend on cultural background; language is the carrier of culture, as well as a part of culture. Malinowski argues, "one language must be deep-rooted in a given culture. Conversely, the social culture is unavoidably reflected by context."

In a given setting of culture, when people use language to communicate with each other, they must follow certain conventional rules for social communication. If learners have no knowledge about the cultural components a given language carries, they would not be able to adjust the language forms according to the context of situation, even less likely to master the language, let alone to apply the language in an appropriate way.

## **2.5. Pragmatic awareness**

Pragmatic awareness is defined as conscious notice of or attention to particular pragmatic functions and utterances in the language input based on the noticing hypothesis (Schmidt, 1990, 1994) and research of awareness as well as consciousness of input in second and foreign language learning (Bardovi-Harlig & Griffin, 2005; Garcia, 2004). Pragmatic awareness (Garcia, 2004) has been used to refer to a hearer's ability to correctly infer an interlocutor's intended meaning. Bardovi-Harlig and Griffin (2005), and Schauer (2006) defined pragmatic awareness as learners' recognition of pragmatic infelicities. In Cook and Liddicoat's (2002) study, pragmatic awareness was operationalized as the learner's ability to interpret different request expressions. More specifically, in his own research, Hinkel (1997) defined it as learners' ability in identifying the most appropriate advice options (direct, hedged, or indirect) from the multiple-choice questionnaire.

Pragmatic awareness plays an important role in developing pragmatic competence. 'Pragmatic competence' can be specifically defined as "knowledge of communicative action and how to carry it out, and the ability to use language appropriately according to context" (Kasper, 1997, p.?). Kasper (1996) listed three conditions for the acquisition of pragmatic knowledge: "There must be pertinent input, the input has to be noticed, and learners need ample opportunities to develop a high level of control" (p. 148). In other words, to develop pragmatic competence, the learner has to notice the pragmatic information in the input and understand its function in the surrounding context (i.e., pragmatic awareness).

Based on the aforementioned theories, it can be summarized that pragmatic awareness refers to conscious notice of or attention to particular pragmatic aspects and can be divided into two types: pragmalinguistic awareness and sociopragmatic awareness.

### **3. Methods and materials**

In consideration of the research's purposes, this study was done in the light of both qualitative and quantitative methods.

#### **3.1. Participants**

The participants in the study were five Americans and 50 first-year non-English major students at TMU. Two male and three female Americans in the survey were living in Vietnam. They were from 24 to 35 years old. The group of the students to answer the questionnaire was constituted by 35 female and 15 male freshmen from five faculties at TMU. The number of participants was equally distributed among these faculties. The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 22 years old. Most of them had been learning English for at least four years. Especially, one student had 13 years experience in learning English. Therefore, the students had their mastery of necessary grammatical knowledge to accomplish the survey. Notably, none of the participants had lived in an English speaking country prior to taking part in the research. To increase the reliability and validity of the research study, a random sampling procedure was applied.

#### **3.2. Instruments**

A descriptive research design incorporating both qualitative and quantitative instruments was used to accomplish the objectives of the study. Two questionnaires, which had the similar contents, were adopted in this research. Among them, one was distributed to five native speakers to elicit their answers, which were considered as a basis to evaluate the appropriateness of TMU students' answers. The other was translated into Vietnamese and used to assess TMU students' pragmatic awareness.

#### **3.3. Data collection**

After the revision, the English version of the questionnaire was administered to the sample of five native speakers of English who were American to find the native speakers' norms in selecting the appropriate expressions. As there is no concrete standard for what is considered appropriate language, the most valid and practical way to judge the appropriateness of an utterance in a particular context may rely on the native speakers' norms in language use.

Altogether 50 copies of the questionnaire in Vietnamese were distributed to 50 students at TMU. Before the questionnaires were distributed to the students, it was made clear to them that the purpose was to test their pragmatic awareness and all the data collected would be used for research only. Thus the students could concentrate themselves on the pragmatic aspects of the utterance when making their choices. All was explained to the students in Vietnamese, their native language, in order to increase the students' comfort and understanding. The students were allowed to consult dictionaries as well as the researcher for new words they had in understanding the answer options, which could ensure that there was no linguistic barrier for the subjects. However, they were required to do the questionnaire individually. None were allowed to leave before the scheduled time so as to avoid them trying to rush to fill out the questionnaire in order to leave the class early. They finished the questionnaire within forty-five minutes. The response rate was 100% and all of the questionnaires were valid.

#### **3.4. Data analysis**

The quantitative data were expressed in percentages and presented in the form of tables. The quantitative data were used to measure the student participants' awareness of each speech act. Then, only qualitative data given by the participants who had the correct answer to each question were analyzed using a content analysis technique to find general patterns or aspects of pragmatic awareness raised by the participants (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002). Then, these aspects were recorded together with the number of participants mentioning each aspect. Student answers (in Vietnamese) were translated by the researcher. Relevant quotations were then grouped together. To avoid inconsistency or potential bias, data were analyzed and categorized by the researcher alone.

#### 4. Findings and discussions

Research findings from the questionnaire for native speakers show that all of them had the same answer to each question. They all chose the most appropriate utterance from those given in each situation.

The result of the research on students' pragmatic awareness will be analyzed and discussed, from the following seven speech acts, namely greeting, addressing, introducing, requesting and responding, inviting, parting, and thanking and responding and one pragmatic aspect - choosing conversation topics. Aspects of pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic awareness concerning these speech acts were also reported by the students who had the correct response to each question.

The average percentage of appropriate responses by speech acts is shown in Table 1 below.

**Table 1.** Average percentage of appropriate responses by speech acts

<b>Speech acts</b>	<b>Correct answer rate</b>
Greeting	15.3%
Addressing	42%
Introducing	24%
Requesting and responding	56.5%
Inviting	23%
Parting	47.5%
Thanking and responding	29%
Conversation topics	38.7%
<b>Mean</b>	<b>34.5%</b>

It can be seen clearly from Table 1 that the average percentage of appropriate responses to all speech acts addressed in the questionnaire was relatively low (34.5%). This indicates that the students' awareness of speech acts was below average. It is also reflected from table 1 that the speech act of requesting and responding experienced the highest correct answer rate (56.5%) in the questionnaire. This result was rather surprising because this kind of speech act is often a big challenge to learners and it is a directive speech act which intrinsically threatens the hearer's face and, therefore, it calls for considerable cultural and linguistic expertise on the part of the learners (Brown and Levinson, 1987). The lowest correct answer rate (15%) fell on the speech act of greeting which is a very common one.

#### 4.1. Awareness of greeting

**Table 2.** Students' awareness of greeting

Speech act	Item	Correct answer rate	Pragmalinguistic		Sociopragmatic	
			Convention of forms	Convention of means	Politeness	Cultural norms
Greeting	2	44%	-	4%	40%	-
	5	2%	-	2%	-	-
	6	0%	-	-	-	-
Mean		15.3%				

As can be seen from Table 2, a small proportion of students (15.3%) had the correct answer. For example, in question 2, only 44% of the students chose the correct answer, B. When asked to give a brief explanation for their choice, only two students who had the correct answer addressed their pragmalinguistic awareness of conventions of means. Examples of their explanations were translated into English as follows: *"I chose B because it is a conventional greeting."*, *"This is the way of greeting that I have learnt and I often use."* The rest of the students who had the correct answer to this question showed their sociopragmatic awareness when they indicated the relationship between two interlocutors and the speaking setting: *"B is the most appropriate to greet our friend for the first time in a day."*

#### 4.2. Awareness of addressing

The average percentage of students who chose the correct answer was 42%.

**Table 3.** Students' awareness of addressing

Speech act	Item	Correct answer rate	Pragmalinguistic		Sociopragmatic	
			Convention of forms	Convention of means	Politeness	Cultural norms
Addressing	4	24%	-	-	12%	-
	17	60%	-	10%	16%	2%
Mean		42%				

For example, in question 17, 40% of the subjects thought that it was inappropriate for Pham Hung to address Mr. Black by his given name. The questioned Americans stated that in the situation if after hearing "My friends call me Andy", Pham Hung still insists on using his surname, Mr. Black may regard him as aloof, excessively formal or unwilling to be friendly. In their explanation, many subjects agreed that Mr. Black was older and in higher status than Pham Hung, so if Hung addressed him this way, this would show his disrespect to Mr. Black. Among 30 students who found Hung's statement appropriate, 8 students claimed that this could express closeness, informality between Hung and Mr. Black. One student (2%) seemed outstanding when explaining:

*When Mr. Black wants Pham Hung to call him Andy, he wants Pham Hung to consider him as a friend. Therefore, it is appropriate for Pham Hung to address Mr. Black as an intimate name, Andy.*

Pragmalinguistic aspect concerning conventions of means was mentioned by 5 participants, who stated:

*“It is appropriate for Pham Hung to introduce himself in return.”, “I think it is OK because Pham Hung should greet Mr. Black, introduce himself and then exchange his card.”*

The rest of the students who had the correct answer gave either incorrect or no explanations at all.

### 4.3. Awareness of introducing

Table 4 shows that on average, only 24% of the participants could perform this speech act properly.

**Table 4.** Students’ awareness of introducing

Speech act	Item	Correct answer rate	Pragmalinguistic		Sociopragmatic	
			Convention of forms	Convention of means	Politeness	Cultural norms
Introducing	18	18%	-	-	-	8%
	27	30%	-	-	-	12%
Mean		24%				

In question 18, Hoa runs into Mai when Mai is talking with her foreign boss. Mai introduces Hoa to her boss, 78% of the subjects considered Mai’s introduction *“Hoa, this is Mr. Smith, the manager of our department. Mr Smith. This is my friend, Hoa.”* appropriate, because Vietnamese people often introduce their boss or the elders to their friends first in order to show respect to them. However, in western culture, people first introduce persons of lower status to those of higher one and then persons of higher status to those of lower one. Therefore, Mai’s introduction is improper in such a situation. Two students did not decide whether the introduction was proper or not. Among nine students (18%) who had the correct answer, four could explain it soundly, *“Mai should introduce Hoa to the boss before introducing the boss to Hoa.”*

### 4.4. Awareness of requesting and responding

**Table 5.** Students’ awareness of requesting and responding

Speech act	Item	Correct answer Rate	Pragmalinguistic		Sociopragmatic	
			Convention of forms	Convention of means	Politeness	Cultural norms
Requesting and responding	1	84%	18%	-	68%	-
	3	84%	-	32%	68%	-
	7	64%	-	20%	42%	-
	8	34%	10%	-	24%	-
	15	16%	-	-	-	-
	16	90%	-	28%	38%	-
	20	70%	10%	26%	22%	-
	25	10%	2%	10%	2%	-
Mean		56.5%				

The respondents were not conscious of selecting suitable request strategies in different situations. Most subjects assumed that the more formal the expression was, the more polite he or she would be in the encounter with a native speaker. In fact, politeness is a relative concept and how polite and appropriate an utterance is in a given context depends on a number of factors. Among these factors, relative status, social distance between the speaker and the hearer and ranking of imposition are the social variables that



directly contribute to politeness decisions. In question 25, only 5 students (accounting for 10%) had pragmatic awareness when indicating that the expression was not appropriate. The rest found it appropriate because they judged the relative power or social distance between a taxi driver and a passenger differently from a native speaker. According to the surveyed Americans, Hong had better not speak to a taxi driver in such a formal way as, *“Excuse me, would you please take me to the airport?”* The right utterance should be *“Airport, please.”* In this situation, over-politeness is not tactful, thus inappropriate. Among 5 students who had the correct answer, one was aware of politeness and pragmalinguistic facet regarding convention of forms: *“It is not necessary to use the structure ‘Would....please...’ because it is too polite in this situation.”* The facet of convention of means was mentioned by 5 students. Some explanations are as follows, *“I think it is too long.”*, *“Hong only needs to mention the destination. That’s enough.”*

#### 4.5. Awareness of inviting and responding

**Table 6.** Students’ awareness of inviting

Speech act	Item	Correct answer rate	Pragmalinguistic		Sociopragmatic	
			Convention of forms	Convention of means	Politeness	Cultural norms
Inviting and responding	10	14%	-	4%	2%	-
	19	32%	-	-	-	10%
Mean		23%				

The correct answer rate by these speech acts was surprisingly low. For example, in question 19, 68% of the subjects thought that it was inappropriate for Phuong to invite his American colleague by saying *“I’m going to give a dinner party this Friday night. Come if you want to”*. Most of them stated that Phuong was not sincere and enthusiastic enough by saying *“Come if you want to”*. This choice can be explained with differences between Vietnamese and American cultures. In Vietnamese culture the act of inviting conveys great politeness for it always manifests good will on the part of the inviter. Normally, the inviter is always ready to repeat his/her invitation many times to show his/her sincerity, and the addressee will generally not decline the invitation at last because the refusal is supposed to threaten the speaker’s face. However, according to the surveyed Americans, in their culture, repeated invitations are considered improper and even rude. In their view, others should not impede their freedom even though the invitations are made politely. Therefore, the inviters always use the pattern *“I will have a..., come if you want to”* or *“How about...?”* or *“Would you like to...?”*. Among 32% of the students who considered this invitation appropriate, five were aware of this difference between the two cultures. One example is *“I think it is an invitation which shows that Phuong does not impose his will on his colleague but gives options to make him feel free and not awkward.”*

#### 4.6. Awareness of parting

**Table 7.** Students' awareness of parting

Speech act	Item	Correct answer rate	Pragmalinguistic		Sociopragmatic	
			Convention of forms	Convention of means	Politeness	Cultural norms
Parting	11	68%	-	30%	26%	2%
	12	16%	-	4%	-	2%
	23	64%	4%	20%	6%	-
	24	42%	-	16%	16%	-
Mean		47.5%				

For example, in question 11, 68% of the students chose the correct answer, A (Thank you for a lovely afternoon.), 13 informants (26%) could explain their choice clearly by mentioning politeness:

*I think A is the choice because it is polite and appropriate to the situation, showing the guest's gratitude for the host's hospitality.*

One student claimed:

*I think the setting here is in America, so the guest should do what Americans do. Therefore, A is the correct answer.*

The facet of pragmalinguistic awareness concerning conventions of means was reported by 15 students. Examples are given as follows:

*"It is a conventional ritual to separate.", "Before parting, we should thank the host for a lovely time spent in his house.", "Thanking the host is the most suitable to show our gratitude."*

However, there were three students who could not give out their explanations. The reason might be that their choice was dictated by feeling without their understanding of this pragmatic aspect.

#### 4.7. Awareness of thanking and responding

**Table 8.** Students' awareness of thanking and responding

Speech act	Item	Correct answer rate	Pragmalinguistic		Sociopragmatic	
			Convention of forms	Convention of means	Politeness	Cultural norms
Thanking and responding	13	68%	2%	4%	36%	2%
	21	10%	4%	-	-	-
	14	22%	-	6%	4%	-
	22	16%	2%	-	-	-
Mean		29%				

The Vietnamese pattern of responses to thanks is different from that of American. In Vietnam, people often say "No, no" or "It's my duty" when replying to thanks, whereas American speakers often say something like "It's my pleasure" or "You are welcome". In cross-cultural communication, an American speaker may feel confused or unhappy when a Vietnamese replies his thanks by saying "It's my duty to do that". Having learned English for many years, most of the subjects are familiar with the

English formulae of responding to thanks and can accept thanks naturally in most cases. As indicated in question 13, 68% of the subjects chose the correct answer A (You're welcome.). Among them, 18 students were aware of politeness. One student addressed convention of forms when saying, "*You're welcome*" is suitable because it means "*Không có gì*" in Vietnamese." The aspect of strategies was recognized by two students: "*It is a popular response.*" or "*It is a polite response to "Thank you"*". One student chose A based on her experience in watching films. The researcher put this into the cultural norm section.

#### 4.8. Awareness of conversation topics

**Table 9.** Students' awareness of conversation topics

Speech act	Item	Correct answer rate	Pragmalinguistic		Sociopragmatic	
			Convention of forms	Convention of means	Politeness	Cultural norms
Conversation topics	9	60% 20%	-	-	-	10%
	26	36%	-	-	10%	4%
Mean		38.7%				

The respondents showed limited knowledge of the target culture in this respect. Question 9 posed a situation in which the students had to choose more than one topic to continue a conversation with a strange person. 46% of the subjects chose A (Do you have any problems at work?), 32% chose B (Can you tell me about your family?), 4% chose D (How much you earn a month?), 12% chose E (How old are you?), 24% chose G (Are you interested in religion?) without knowing that these topics are all privacy to westerners. One student did not know what topic is suitable. There is a great difference in the students' options of conversation topics. While over half of the students (60%) chose C (Would you like something to drink?), only one-fifth of them (20%) chose H (What do you do?) as suitable topics to discuss in their conversation. Only five students were aware of sociopragmatic aspect concerning cultural norms. Examples are as follows:

*"It is not acceptable to talk about private things such as age, marital status or sensitive ones like religion or problems. In this case, offering a drink can help the speakers prolong their conversation."*  
*"Talking about careers may be suitable in conversations with a person you meet for the first time."*

#### 5. Implications

Since the students' low pragmatic awareness resulted from their lack of pragmatic knowledge and cultural information associated with the target language, this research presents some suggestions for TMU English teachers and students in the areas of teaching and learning pragmatics and cultures. First, teachers should raise students' pragmalinguistic awareness by providing their students with necessary language structures and expressions to convey a speech act and reminding students that a speech act (function) can be expressed in many forms and one form can convey many functions. Second, students' awareness of politeness should be improved. Students should be taught how to perform different speech acts in English in different situations of social status, social distance, and ranking of imposition between interlocutors. Teachers should design different contextualized activities to get students engaged in. Third, it is advisable for teachers to enhance their learners' awareness of cultural norms by integrating culture into language teaching, enforcing the teaching of British and American cultural background, creating culture-rich

learning environment, designing a cultural syllabus, providing more authentic teaching materials, improving the pragmatic teaching in the way of holding tests and exams and developing teachers' competence. For example, when teaching the speech act of greeting, teachers should introduce cultural aspects related to this speech act and point out cultural differences between Vietnamese and the target language such as: how to greet a person for the first time, how to greet a friend, ways of greetings, etc. In addition to introducing linguistic and cultural knowledge to learners, teachers should exert more effort to help their students to apply what they have learnt in practice. Teachers can create real situations for students to participate in. For instance, the teacher first lets the students read a passage named "Dining Customs", and then asks the students to act as waiters and customers at a restaurant in the US. Students are required to talk with each other independently. This provides a great opportunity for them to think and speak in accordance with foreign social conventions and at the same time they have to understand what other people say so as to make the conversation continue smoothly and properly. This role-play activity increases students' awareness of the appropriate application of cultural information learnt in class and prepares them for real communication with native English speakers. Besides, in order to make sure that students fulfill the activities successfully, teachers should convey enough information about the foreign culture to students beforehand. Teachers should adopt different kinds of modern teaching aids and methods in order to strengthen the leading-in of culture, to make students have an immersed sense and learn English naturally. For instance, they could let students see English original movies, and be associated with language training program and making multimedia courseware. They can invite some foreign teachers to give a lecture and some experts to give a report, which widens the students' outlook about culture and access a great deal of real English in order to intensify the understanding of cultural differences between Vietnam and western countries.

## **6. Conclusion**

In conclusion, by investigating students' awareness of different facets of pragmatics, this study has been able to contribute to our knowledge of pragmatic awareness of speech acts in general and pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic awareness in particular in ways that will benefit not only teachers but students of English as well.

There are some limitations of the study that are worth mentioning. First, the scope of the study is still limited. Regarding participants, only first year students were in concern of the study. Therefore, the research results could not reflect fully students' pragmatic awareness at TMU in general. Moreover, the small sample size (50 students) in the study can affect the generalizability of the research findings. Also, the research was done based entirely on the Americans' responses. Therefore, only American cultural norms were of interest. Another limitation of the present study is that part of the questionnaire is multiple-choice questions. The advantage of this method is that it is relatively inexpensive, can be administered quickly to a large number of participants and allows the researcher to describe scenarios in detail. However, although a greater amount of contextual information can be provided, participants only receive written instructions, which, even if they are very precise, rely on a high degree of imagination on the participants' part, since they can neither hear nor see the conversation in its context. As a consequence, participants have to imagine the speakers' tone and facial expressions, which might lead to different assessments of the scenarios based on the individual participants' ideas of how an utterance was intended by the speaker.

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