A CONTEXTUAL-SITUATION-BASED STUDY ON RECOGNITION AND EVALUATION TOWARD L2 GRAMMAR AND PRAGMATICS – A CASE STUDY OF YERSIN UNIVERSITY

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ARTICLE INFO		ABSTRACT
Received:	16/6/2022	This study attempts to reveal pragmatic awareness and pragmatic competence by examining the recognition and evaluation of English-majored students (high-leveled and low-leveled) towards grammar and pragmatics. As the subjects of the study are English-majored students who have hardly studied pragmatics before, the aims of the study are to examine their pragmatic awareness and application and to answer the question whether pragmatics should be officially taught in the Teaching Curriculum. Data were collected via DCT (Discourse Completion Tasks) questionnaire (Bardovi-Harlig & Dornyei, 1998). Independent T-Test was employed for the data analysis. The findings show that the students of high proficiency group could recognize the errors (in general) more than those of low proficiency group ($p<.001$). Although the high-leveled students can identify the grammatical errors better than the low-leveled ones, there were no significant differences between the students of two groups in pragmatic identification ($p=0.19$). Hence, both groups have no significant differences in evaluation of the seriousness of pragmatic errors ($p=0.54$). This can reinforce the need of teaching pragmatics for English-majored students in language classes.
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NGHIÊN CỨU VỀ SỰ NHẬN DIỆN VÀ ĐÁNH GIÁ NGỮ PHÁP VÀ NGỮ DỤNG THEO TÌNH HUỐNG CỦA SINH VIÊN CHUYÊN NGỮ ĐẠI HỌC YERSIN

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THÔNG TIN BÀI BÁO		TÓM TẮT
Ngày nhận bài:	16/6/2022	Nghiên cứu này tìm hiểu nhận thức ngữ dụng học và năng lực ngữ dụng học của hai nhóm sinh viên chuyên ngành tiếng Anh (trình độ cao và trình độ thấp) thông qua sự nhận diện lỗi, đánh giá mức độ nghiêm trọng của lỗi thuộc về ngữ pháp và ngữ dụng. Vì đối tượng của nghiên cứu là sinh viên chuyên ngành tiếng Anh trước đây hầu như không học ngữ dụng học, nên các mục đích của nghiên cứu bao gồm: tìm hiểu mức độ nhận thức ngữ dụng học và năng lực ngữ dụng học và trả lời câu hỏi liệu ngữ dụng có nên được chính thức giảng dạy trong chương trình giảng dạy hay không. Dữ liệu được thu thập thông qua Phiếu câu hỏi diễn ngôn (Discourse Completion Task) (Bardovi-Harlig & Dornyei, 1998). Phép kiểm định T-Test độc lập được sử dụng để phân tích dữ liệu. Kết quả cho thấy sinh viên của nhóm thông thạo cao có thể nhận ra các lỗi sai (nói chung) nhiều hơn so với nhóm thông thạo thấp ($p<.001$). Mặc dù nhóm sinh viên trình độ cao có thể nhận biết lỗi ngữ pháp tốt hơn nhóm sinh viên trình độ thấp, nhưng không có sự khác biệt đáng kể giữa hai nhóm về khả năng nhận biết lỗi về ngữ dụng học ($p=0.19$). Do đó, hai nhóm không có sự khác biệt đáng kể trong việc đánh giá mức độ nghiêm trọng của các lỗi sai về ngữ dụng ($p=0.54$). Các kết quả này có thể khẳng định sự cần thiết của việc dạy môn ngữ dụng học cho sinh viên chuyên ngành tiếng Anh trong các lớp học ngôn ngữ.
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Năng lực ngữ dụng học		
Nhận diện lỗi ngữ dụng		
Ngữ pháp		
Đánh giá		
Nhận diện		

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1. Introduction

The era of globalization makes the demand of learning a foreign language vital. As an international language in a variety of fields such as economy, society, science, education and culture, English is said to be the most common foreign language in Vietnam; hence, teaching and learning English to achieve effective communication in the trend of international integration is increasingly important today. However, the mastery of the grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation of a language does not always guarantee success in communication as one may still be unable to produce language that is socially and culturally acceptable [1]. Chomsky [2] highlighted the differences between language competence and language performance. While the former refers to what one knows, the latter refers to how one uses it. Therefore, language learners need to be well equipped with not only the language but also the knowledge of how to use it. In other words, pragmatics is the study of the use of natural language in communication. Bardovi-Harlig and Dornyei [3] points out that grammatical development does not correspond to pragmatic development and that even advanced learners may not understand or communicate their intentions correctly. For example, one utterance may be appropriate in this culture but may not be accepted in other cultures or situations. This kind of knowledge is called "pragmatic competence". According to Bachman [4], pragmatic competence plays an important role in one's success in communication. That a good command of language is not equivalent to successful communication shows the essential role of pragmatic competence. Thus, a number of linguists have been interested in the issue of pragmatic competence and pragmatic awareness of language learners. In a later study, Bardovi [5] uses video recording method combined with the analysis of discourse completion tasks (DCT) for students and lecturers of 2 groups: using English as the native language and learning English as a foreign language. The results of this study suggest that the group of native students and lecturers consider pragmatic errors more serious than grammatical errors, while the other group ranks grammatical errors as more serious than pragmatic errors. This result has given some suggestions regarding the teaching of English as a foreign language, one of which is to raise the awareness of pragmatics among learners to achieve the best communication effect. Eslami- Rasekh [6] also employs the DCT to study the students' pragmatic awareness and proposed approaches to teaching pragmatics effectively. Moghaddam et al [7] studies the pragmatic competence as a regulator of foreign language speaking proficiency. It stresses the need to foster learner's understanding of language and context in order to achieve effective performance in IELTS speaking test. A recent study by Terkourafi [8] attempting to answer the question "How do we understand the meaning of other people's words?" has raised several new conclusions about pragmatics in non-verbal aspects and beyond implicature. The research also mentions the multicultural and social aspects of pragmatics. In the setting of Vietnam, Nguyen et al [9] measures the impact of explicit and implicit form-focused instruction on the development of L2 pragmatic competence and finds out that the group with explicit strategy outperform the group with implicit strategy. Vu [10], in his research on teaching pragmatics at university level in Vietnam, has shown that there is still a lack of literature on pragmatic teaching plus little empirical research on cognitive pragmatics of teachers and students at the university level in Vietnam. Nguyen [11] investigates the attitudes of English-majored students at a university in Vietnam towards pragmatic awareness and concludes that the majority of students are aware of the role of pragmatics in their language classes.

At Yersin University of Dalat (hereafter "YU"), the training program for English-majored students emphasizes the application-oriented objective. This means that learners are required to have the ability to apply the target language at a proficient level of communication, which is highly responsive to the employment market after graduation. Nevertheless, pragmatics is not currently taught separately as a subject but is integrated in Linguistics modules for students to grasp concepts and situations to a limited extent. In fact, little has been known about the English-majored students' pragmatic competence and awareness. In this study, we employ SPSS, with the

analysis of Independent T-Test to assess the awareness and application of pragmatics of YU English-majored students based on the contextual situations. We hope that the findings of this study can provide significant implications and suggestions for language teaching and learning. We propose two research questions as follows:

1. Are there significant differences between YU English-majored freshmen and seniors in pragmatic competence and awareness?

2. Should "Pragmatics" be officially taught as a course in the teaching curriculum for English-majored students at YU in the future?

2. Methods

2.1. Research design

Both quantitative and qualitative approaches were applied in the study. First, quantitative method was employed to collect the data and produce the output based on SPSS software. Next, qualitative method was also used to explain and analyze the result to clarify the significance of the study.

2.2. Participants

The participants of the study were English-majored students at YU in Vietnam. They came from two groups. The first group consisted of 45 freshman students who just started the English Studies major at the university. The second group consisted of 55 senior students who were about to graduate. The second group were able to understand the notions of pragmatics to a limited extent due to the course Linguistics they had taken. It is also essential to add that the size of data could not be bigger as the humble numbers of English-majored students at YU at present.

2.3. Instruments

The Discourse Completion Task (DCT) adapted from Bardovi-Harlig & Dornyei [5] which consisted of 20 scenarios was employed. They are the situational contexts for the participants to read and response accordingly (see Appendix 1 for more information). The questionnaire included 4 tasks. The first was to check their awareness of appropriacy. The second was to test their identification of the grammatical or pragmatic errors. The third was to ask about their perspective on the seriousness of the errors based on the Likert scale. The fourth was for them to provide corrections (see Appendix 1 for more information).

We started the study at the serious outbreaking of the Covid 19 pandemic in Vietnam; thus, schools and students throughout the country went through the period of online teaching and learning. We designed the online questionnaire via google forms; however, as the DCT was not a short and simple questionnaire for the participants to fulfill, we decided to postpone it until school life got back to normal. Not only did we spend time explaining the significance of the study as other researchers do, but we also clearly explained the situational contexts and presented the Vietnamese version of the DCT (see Appendix 2 for more information).

2.4. Data analysis

The SPSS software, version 20, was used to analyze the data. Independent T-Test was applied to see the differences between the two groups:

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Students' responses to appropriacy and error recognition

Table 1 indicates students' responses on appropriacy and error recognition. As can be seen, there was a significant difference in the identification of appropriacy and error recognition between freshmen (low proficiency) (M = 0.9191, SD = 0.32752) and seniors (high proficiency)

(M =1.1644, SD = 0.18329); t (98) = 4.481, p <.001. In other words, the students of high proficiency were able to recognize the errors in the scenarios better than those of low proficiency. This can reflect the English proficiency of the participants in general.

Table 1. *Students' responses to appropriacy and error recognition*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig	t	df	Significance (2-tailed)
High Proficiency	45	1.1644	.18329	.000	4.481	98	.000
Low Proficiency	55	.9191	.32752				

3.2. Students' evaluation of the seriousness of the errors

Table 2 shows students' evaluation of the seriousness of the errors. There was a significant difference in the evaluation of the seriousness of the errors between freshmen (low proficiency) (M = 1.2216, SD = 0.61928) and seniors (high proficiency) (M =1.6556, SD = 0.46801); t (98) = 3.894, p <.001. The figures show that the highly proficient students evaluated the errors (both grammar and pragmatics) more seriously. This can reflect the extent they understand the language. The high-leveled students tend not to accept errors.

Table 2. *Students' evaluation of the seriousness of the errors*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig	t	df	Significance (2-tailed)
High Proficiency	45	1.6556	.46267	.095	3.894	98	.000
Low Proficiency	55	1.2216	.61928				

3.3. Students' grammar identification

Table 3 shows students' grammar identification. There was a significant difference in students' grammar identification between freshmen (low proficiency) (M = 0.9091, SD = 0.55873) and seniors (high proficiency) (M =1.2417, SD = 0.46267); t (98) = 3.182, p =0.002. The highly proficient students could identify the grammatical errors better. This finding can be explained by the fact that students of high proficiency often have a better knowledge of grammar when studying English.

Table 3. *Students' grammar identification*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig	t	df	Significance (2-tailed)
High Proficiency	45	1.2417	.46801	.012	3.182	98	.002
Low Proficiency	55	.9091	.55873				

3.4. Students' pragmatic identification

Table 4 shows students' pragmatic identification. It is remarkable that no significant difference was found between the two groups: freshmen (low proficiency) (M = 0.9932, SD = 0.51506) and seniors (high proficiency) (M =1.1250, SD = 0.46082); t (98) = 0.13182, p = 0.185. This turned out to be an expected finding since the students participating in the study had not really learned pragmatics and merely had the pragmatic knowledge in some courses. A thorough reading and analysis of all the DCTS revealed a number of the participants not being able to identify the correct names of the mistakes though they were aware of the errors and able to give a suitable correction.

Table 4. *Students' pragmatic identification*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig	t	df	Significance (2-tailed)
High Proficiency	45	1.1250	.46082	.286	1.334	98	.185
Low Proficiency	55	.9932	.51506				

3.5. Student's grammar evaluation

Table 5 shows students' grammar evaluation. There was a significant difference in the grammar evaluation between freshmen (low proficiency) (M = 1.1545, SD = 0.84367) and seniors (high proficiency) (M =1.8556, SD = 0.97006); t (98) = 3.864, p = 0.000.

As can be seen, the students of high proficiency considered grammatical errors are more serious than the students of low proficiency did. This is because the high proficiency group could identify more grammatical errors than the low proficiency group could.

Table 5. *Student's grammar evaluation*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig	t	df	Significance (2-tailed)
High Proficiency	45	1.8556	.97006	.474	3.864	98	.000
Low Proficiency	55	1.1545	.84367				

3.6. Student's pragmatics evaluation

Table 6 illustrates student's pragmatics evaluation. There was no significant difference in the evaluation of the seriousness of pragmatics errors between freshmen (low proficiency) (M = 1.5773, SD =0.88829) and seniors (high proficiency) (M =1.6778, SD = 0.75259); t (98) = 0.602, p = 0.548. This finding reinforces the finding of table 4 that the participants in the present study had little knowledge of pragmatics, thereby not being able to identify as well as evaluate pragmatic features.

Table 6. *Student's pragmatics evaluation*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig	t	df	Significance (2-tailed)
High Proficiency	45	1.6778	.75259	.488	.602	98	.548
Low Proficiency	55	1.5773	.88829				

4. Conclusion

In sum, the findings of this study could address 2 issues:

1. There are significant differences between YU English-majored freshmen and seniors in recognizing errors in the scenarios and the evaluation of the error seriousness. In other words, the seniors could recognize the correct and the incorrect responses and evaluate the errors more seriously. However, it is still controversial to conclude if there are significant differences in pragmatic competence and awareness between the two groups since a deeper analysis into the pragmatics identification and evaluation revealed no significant differences.

2. The findings of the study could raise the issues of teaching "Pragmatics" as a course in the teaching curriculum or teaching English with a focus on pragmatics in the future. This will definitely improve students' pragmatic competence and awareness in order to achieve successful communication.

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