

A pragmatic study of developmental patterns in Mexican students making
English requests and apologies

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to analyse the pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic development of language groups at different proficiency levels and investigate the relationship between interlanguage pragmatics and grammatical competence. For this study, 36 native Spanish speaking EFL learners at different proficiency levels were asked to respond in English to 24 different situations which called for the speech acts of request and apology. Their English performances were compared to those of 12 American English native speakers in order to provide base-line cultural data. Thirty six Mexican Spanish native speakers also participated as a control group in order to analyse the role of the mother tongue in the performances of the EFL learners. The data, collected using a carton oral production task (COPT), were analysed quantitatively and qualitatively. Results showed three important findings that illuminate the relationship between pragmatic development and grammatical competence and lent support to Kasper and Rose's (2003) claim of a universal pragmatic principle. The first finding suggested that basic adult learners possess a previous pragmatic knowledge in their L1 that allows them to focus on the intended meaning and, in most cases, and to assemble (from the linguistic structures available to them) an utterance that conveys a pragmatic intention and satisfies the communicative demands of a social situation. The second finding revealed that there are two essential conditions to communicate a linguistic action: the knowledge of the relevant linguistic rules and the knowledge of how to use them appropriately and effectively in a specific context. Without an elementary knowledge of the linguistic rules, it is impossible to select the forms to realize a speech act in a target-like manner. The findings further suggested that advanced learners possess the grammatical knowledge to produce an illocutionary act, but they need to learn the specific L2 pragmatic conventions that enable them to know when to use these grammatical forms and under what circumstances.

STATEMENT OF CANDIDATE

I certify that the work in this thesis entitled “**A pragmatic study of developmental patterns in Mexican students making English requests and apologies**” has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree to any other university or institution other than Macquarie University.

I also certify that the thesis is an original piece of research and it has been written by me. Any help and assistance that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself have been appropriately acknowledged.

In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

The research presented in this thesis was endorsed by Macquarie University Ethics Committee, HE24OCT2008-DO6136.

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