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**The Interface between Linguistic and Pragmatic Competence:  
The Case of Disagreement, Scolding, Requests, and Complaints**

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**Abstract**

Second language learners often develop grammatical competence in the absence of concomitant pragmatic competence (Kasper & Roever, 2005) and the exact nature of the relationship between the two competences is still indistinct and in need of inquiries ( Bardovi-Harlig, 1999; Khatib & AhmadiSafa, 2011). This study is a partial attempt to address the lacuna and aims to see if any relationship can be found between English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' lexico-grammatical and interlanguage pragmatic competences and if such a relationship is found, whether the gender variable affects it or not. A group of 110 male/female senior university EFL students took a standardized lexico-grammatical proficiency test and a researcher made and validated multiple choice pragmatic discourse completion task test including four speech acts of disagreement, scolding, request and complaint at four levels of formality and familiarity. The results indicate that there is a positive correlation between the learners' lexico-grammatical and pragmatic competences. Furthermore, the correlation is stronger for female EFL learners than the male participants though the pragmatic competence level of the male and female participants was not significantly different. The results imply that grammatical competence is not in itself sufficient for the EFL learners' pragmatic competence but it can definitely constrain the development of interlanguage pragmatic competence.

**Keywords:** Lexico-grammatical competence, Interlanguage pragmatic competence, Speech acts, Gender.

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## **Introduction**

Studies have shown that second language learners often fail to communicate appropriately even when they are at a high level of general language proficiency (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1990; Kasper & Blum-Kulka, 1993; Bardovi-Harlig, 2001). The appropriate communication failure is evident when such learners make errors of appropriateness i.e. pragmatic errors in their communication, the consequences of which are potentially more serious than those resulting from grammatical errors. While native speakers are usually able to identify a grammatical error produced by a non-native speaker as a language problem, they are less likely to identify a pragmatic error as such; instead the non-native speaker may be seen as rude (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001). Possible reasons for these failures and difficulties include transfer of inappropriate norms or language forms from the first language and misconceptions about the target language (Crandall & Basturkman, 2004). In addition, for most learners of a foreign or second language gaining pragmatic competence in the target language is challenging. This is due in part to the fact that "pragmatic competence cannot be clearly judged as correct or incorrect according to prescriptive rules" (Nakajima, 1997, p. 50), which may also be one of the reasons why pragmatic issues receive relatively little attention in the language classrooms (Kreutel, 2007). Yet, the importance of pragmatic competence development for successful second language (L2) use has been emphasized in recent years, and many researchers and instructors are arriving at the conclusion that "besides acquiring elements of the target language, students must be able to function within the total meaning system of that language" (Lo Castro, 1986, as cited in Kreutel, 2007, p.5).

It has also been shown that cultures vary regarding what speech acts can be performed in different settings due to different perceptions of factors such as relationship patterns, rights, and obligations (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989). Such language-specific perceptions do not develop at the same pace as the other aspects of language including grammatical competence. Although L2 learners are believed to develop grammatical competence in the absence of the concomitant pragmatic competence (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1990, 1993) there

is evidence to suggest that the development of pragmatic competence is closely linked to grammatical competence (Barron, 2003), but the exact nature of this relationship is still unknown and in need of further research (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1996; Bardovi-Harlig, 1999; Kasper, 2000). Against this backdrop, the present study aimed to investigate the nature of the link between the lexico-grammatical and interlanguage pragmatic competences of the advanced learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Interlanguage pragmatic competence includes four speech acts of disagreement, scolding, request and complaint for the purpose of this study.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Pragmatic competence and ILP***

Due to the extensive use of the term "Pragmatics" in a wide variety of contexts, it is of utmost importance to delineate what is meant by the term. According to Yule (1996, p.34) pragmatic competence is "the ability to deal with meaning as communicated by a speaker and interpreted by a listener and to be able to interpret people's intended meanings, their assumptions, their purposes and goals". In this definition the central element of communicative interaction is meaning; moreover, both the expression and interpretation have received equally essential importance.

Koike (1989) defines pragmatic competence as the speakers' knowledge and use of the rules of appropriateness and politeness which dictate the way the speaker will understand and formulate speech acts. Taken one step further, interlanguage pragmatics (ILP), as is defined by Kasper and Schmidt (1996, cited in Sykes & Cohen, 2008, p.145) is the development and use of strategies for linguistic action by nonnative speakers. This definition of ILP integrates both development and application of linguistic action strategies into a single competence and hence the field of ILP has been regarded as a second generation hybrid since it belongs to two disciplines of pragmatics and second language acquisition (SLA) (Kasper & Blum-Kulka, 1993).

Concerning the first discipline i.e. pragmatics, it has been argued that most of the studies conducted to date have been comparative and cross sectional, given its closeness to cross-cultural pragmatics (Blum-

Kulka et al., 1989). Since speech acts or language functions being communicated are central components of the ILP definition, an important part of literature is devoted to comparative studies of a wide range of speech acts. Fe'Lix-Brasdefer (2004) refers to a number of studies that have focused on speech acts, including those on apologies and requests (Achiba, 2003; Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989; Carrell, 1981; Cohen & Olshtain, 1993; Hassall, 2003; House & Kasper, 1987; Koike, 1989; Le Pair, 1996; Maeshiba, Yoshinaga, Kasper, & Ross, 1996; Ma´rquez-Reiter, 2000, 2002; Placencia, 1998; Scarcella, 1979; Trosborg, 1987, 1995; Walters, 1979 ; as all cited in Fe'Lix-Brasdefer, 2004 ), refusals/disagreements (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1990, 1991; Beebe & Takahashi, 1989; Beebe, Takahashi, & Uliss-Weltz, 1990; Fe´lix-Brasdefer, 2002, 2003a; Garcı´a, 1992, 1999; Gass & Houck, 1999; Robinson, 1992; Takahashi & Beebe, 1987 ; as all cited in Fe'Lix-Brasdefer, 2004) and complaints (Olshtain & Weinbach, 1993; Trosborg, 1995; as both cited in Fe'Lix-Brasdefer, 2004). As Fe'Lix-Brasdefer (2004) indicates, the theoretical framework of the studies was based on various models of pragmatics, including Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness model, Grice's (1975) theory of conversation, Leech's (1983) politeness theory, mitigation and epistemic modality (Coates, 1987; Fraser, 1980), and discourse analysis (Edmondson, 1981; Labov & Fanshel, 1977).

Concerning the SLA perspective, scholars have claimed the need to carry out more studies addressing developmental issues that affect learners' acquisition of pragmatics (Kasper & Schmidt, 1996; Bardovi-Harlig, 1999, 2002; Kasper & Rose, 2002). Kasper (1996, p.148) cites three conditions for the acquisition of pragmatic knowledge: "there must be pertinent input, the input must be noticed and the learners need ample opportunity to develop a high level of control", later Kasper (2001) adds the provision of the appropriate feedback to the previous three conditions. From another point of view, Schmidt (1993) considers the attention to linguistic forms, functional meanings, and the relevant contextual features as the most necessary aspects of pragmatic development. He further believes that linguistic forms can serve as intake for language acquisition provided that learners notice them.

In order to approximate native speaker (NS) level of pragmatic competence, in addition to what Kasper (1996) and Schmidt (1993) mentioned, learners need to acquire the rules of politeness in the target culture and to develop interaction skills: knowing not only what to say but how and when to say it, in relation to whom they are speaking, what nonverbal behaviors are appropriate for them to use in various contexts, what routines they should use for turn taking in conversation and how to perform and comprehend speech acts such as requesting or apologizing (Saville-Troike, 1996). That is, interlocutors must have a sense of both pragmalinguistic and sociolinguistic norms of the speech community in order to successfully perform language functions. Pragmalinguistic norms entail the linguistic forms used to perform speech acts while sociolinguistic norms encompass the speakers' knowledge about when, why, and with whom the different linguistic forms are used (Sykes & Cohen, 2008). ILP literature shows that learners at various proficiency levels lack the pragmalinguistic knowledge necessary to mitigate face-threatening acts such as refusals, disagreement or requests by means of various expressions of epistemic modality including lexical or syntactic mitigation (Fe'Lix-Brasdefer, 2004).

### ***The Interface between Grammatical and Pragmatic Competences***

Interlanguage pragmatics studies have been essentially cross-sectional or longitudinal. The cross-sectional ones were mainly comparative, comparing nonnative speakers or learners' linguistic production with that of the native speakers (Kasper, 1996; Kasper & Roever, 2005) and the bulk of research questions and methods in the field are derived from empirical, particularly cross-cultural, pragmatics (Bardovi-Harlig, 1999). Typical issues addressed in data-based studies are whether Non-Native Speakers (NNS) differ from Native Speakers (NS) in the a) range, b) contextual distribution, c) strategies, d) linguistic forms used to convey, e) illocutionary meaning, and f) politeness (Kasper, 1992). On the other hand, developmental ILP studies have been conducted using both longitudinal and cross-sectional designs to examine learners' pragmatic competence at various stages of their pragmatic development (Fe'Lix-Brasdefer, 2004). Whereas longitudinal studies have examined the systematic

development of speech acts among the language learners (for example Achiba, 2003; Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1993; Ellis, 1992), cross-sectional studies have focused on pragmatic development among learners at various proficiency levels. This cross-sectional group of studies has shown that higher levels of linguistic proficiency often correlate with higher levels of pragmatic competence (Carrell, 1981; Koike, 1996, cited in Felix-Brasdefer, 2004; Maeshiba et al., 1996; Takahashi & Beebe, 1987; Trosborg, 1987). However, there have been contradictory results reported in the literature about the same correlation. On the other hand, some studies have revealed neither strong nor significant correlations between grammatical and pragmatic proficiency (Kreutel, 2007). Considering the second group of results, Bardovi-Harlig (1999) maintains that it seems logical to assume that a higher lexico-grammatical proficiency facilitates pragmatic proficiency, though it cannot be assumed that the former automatically gives rise to the latter.

Barron (2003, p. 46) delineates two positions in this regard:

I. Grammatical and pragmatic competences are independent entities i.e. although a lack of grammatical competence in a particular area may cause a particular utterance to be less effective, it does not necessarily represent a pragmalinguistic error.

II. On the other hand research has shown that a lack of a grammatical competence can restrict a learner's capacity to produce linguistic action. Indeed Hassall (1997, cited in Barron, 2003, p. 46) claims in this regard that : "... while grammatical competence is not in itself sufficient for pragmatic competence ... it is likely to greatly constrain the development of pragmatic competence (Barron, 2003, p.46)

Researchers have further shown that grammatical development does not guarantee a corresponding level of pragmatic development. Even learners who exhibit high levels of grammatical competence may exhibit a wide range of pragmatic competence weaknesses when compared with NSs in conversations (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1990, 1991, 1993) and elicited conditions (Faerch & Kasper, 1989; House & Kasper, 1987; Takahashi & Beebe, 1987; Takenoya, 1995; as all cited in Bardovi-Harlig & Dornyei, 1998). In other words, even advanced language learners often show a marked imbalance between

their grammatical and pragmatic knowledge or more specifically between the lexico-grammatical micro-level and the "macro level of communicative intent and socio-cultural context" (Celce-Murcia, Dornyei & Thurrell, 1995, p.13) of their communicative competence, with pragmatic competence lagging behind grammatical competence (Olshtain & Blum-Kulka, 1985 cited in Bardovi-Harlig, 1999). Even several studies have suggested how L2 grammatical knowledge does not develop at the same pace as L2 pragmatic knowledge, implying that it is inherently different from grammatical knowledge (Koike & Pearson, 2005). Bardovi-Harlig (1999) concludes that from these and many other studies which have investigated advanced NNSs, we learn that interlanguage grammatical competence is not a sufficient condition for interlanguage pragmatic competence, but she enquires if it is a necessary condition. Asked another way, is pragmatic competence built on a platform of grammatical competence? As she believes (1999), very few studies make the link between pragmatics and interlanguage system.

Prior to Bardovi-Harlig (1999), Koike (1989) had addressed inconsistent research findings, stating that we must recognize that learners' interlanguage is made up of several components and that the components may develop toward native like L2 fluency in different ways. The nature of learners' interlanguage is then more complex than previously described.

Pragmatic competence is the distinguishing factor which makes the NNSs distinct from NSs. While all nonnative learners are open to potential misunderstandings (Bardovi\_Harlig, and Hartford, 1990), advanced learners are actually more at risk than lower proficiency learners since for these learners grammatical proficiency is no longer seen as an excuse for problems of formality and impoliteness. This was shown in a study by Enomoto and Marriot (1994). They asked six Japanese native speakers to assess two Australian tour-guides' pragmatic competence in Japanese. They found that the native speaker judges were more critical of the advanced speakers' level of politeness than that of the lower proficiency speakers. In other words, it appears that when grammatical competence is not seen as a relevant explanation, native speakers generally attribute any deviations from

conventional usage to personality issues rather than to issues of language use (Barron, 2003).

The nonnative speakers' pragmatic failure and misunderstandings have been attributed to a variety of sources. Koike (1989), for example, suggests that despite an excellent command of the L2 grammar and lexicon, learners may fail to convey pragmatically appropriate expressions, in part because they transfer L1 pragmatic rules in their L2 production. In addition, insufficient knowledge of the range of syntactic forms of utterances they can use to express particular speech acts is another reason since they must know and exactly identify the appropriate situations in which they are used.

Alcon (2005) maintains that some features of the EFL contexts prevent pragmatic learning and an appropriate use of language in the appropriate contexts. Among these features are the narrow range of speech acts realization strategies, and the typical interaction patterns in the EFL classroom which restrict pragmatic input and opportunities for practicing discourse organization strategies (Lorscher & Schulze, 1988). Moreover, Rose (1999) adds to the mentioned features, the large classes, limited contact hours, and little opportunity for intercultural communication as the other features of the EFL classroom which hinder pragmatic learning. Still other aspects of the EFL context which have been found as debilitating for pragmatic learning are the kind of input available (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1996; Nikula, 2002) and pedagogical materials (Alcon & Safont, 2001; Bardovi-Harlig, 1996; Crandall & Basturkmen, 2004). These studies have also shown that presenting a list of linguistic forms is highly unlikely to result in pragmatic development. Instead, pragmatic instruction has been shown to be both effective and necessary.

### **Purpose of the Study**

As it is stated above, the nature of the interrelationship between the lexico-grammatical proficiency and interlanguage pragmatic competence is believed to be an area in need of further inquiries. The present study addresses the issue through an investigation of the kind of relationship between the advanced male/female Iranian EFL university students' lexico-grammatical proficiency and their



interlanguage pragmatic competence. For this purpose the following four research questions were raised.

### **Research Questions**

**Q1:** Is there a significant correlation between lexico-grammatical competence and the ILP competence of advanced EFL learners?

**Q2:** Is there any difference in the correlation patterns of the advanced EFL learners' lexical versus grammatical competences and their ILP competence?

**Q3:** Does the gender variable significantly affect the relation pattern between the lexico- grammatical and ILP competencies of the advanced EFL learners?

**Q4:** Is there any gender difference in the ILP competence of advanced EFL learners?

### **Hypotheses**

**H1:** It is hypothesized that a correlation exists between lexico-grammatical competence and interlanguage pragmatic competence.

**H2:** There is no difference in the correlation pattern of advanced EFL learners' lexical versus grammatical competences and ILP competence.

**H3:** Correlation between the two competences is not gender sensitive.

**H4:** No significant difference can be found in the ILP competence of the male and female advanced EFL learners.

### **Method**

As the study was to enquire into interface between pragmatic competence and the lexico-grammatical competence of the EFL learners, the main challenge of the study was the development and validation of a pragmatic multiple choice discourse completion task test. The next stage was the adaptation of a lexico-grammatical test and finally, the administration of both pragmatic and lexico-grammatical tests on the intended sample of participants.

### ***Participants***

One hundred and twenty senior (at the 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> academic semester of BA studies) male and female EFL university students were selected. The participants were students of Bu Ali Sina State University and Islamic Azad University of Hamedan. Ten students out of 120 were absent during at least one of the testing sessions, so the ultimate number used for the analyses was reduced to 110. The number of male participants was bound to 41, and the female participants' to 69. The age range was 22-24.

### ***Instrumentation***

In order to address the linguistic proficiency and interlanguage pragmatic competence interrelationship the present study applied two instruments: a lexico-grammatical test and an interlanguage pragmatics test.

The lexico-grammatical test was an adapted sample TOEFL test. The practicality considerations as well the relative construct irrelevance of the listening skill to the intended lexico-grammatical competence were the reasons why the researcher decided to leave out the listening part of the sample TOEFL.

The second test used was a researcher made and validated Multiple choice Discourse Completion Task (MDCT) test. It tested four speech acts of disagreement, scolding, request, and complaint. Each speech act was tested at four levels of familiarity and formality using scenarios of formal familiar, formal unfamiliar, informal familiar and informal unfamiliar situations.

The internal consistency reliability estimate for both TOEFL lexico-grammatical and MDCT tests was acceptable ( $\alpha=0.87$  for lexico-grammatical and  $\alpha=0.79$  for MDCT test)

### ***Data Collection Procedure***

The first data collection stage was the development of the pragmatic MDCT test. It tested four speech acts of disagreement, scolding, request, and complaint at four levels of familiarity and formality using scenarios of formal familiar, formal unfamiliar, informal familiar and informal unfamiliar situations. Once the earliest version of the MDCT test was designed, it was given to two native English speakers to comment on the paragrammatic accuracy and sociolinguistic appropriateness of the developed scenarios. The second version was improved based on the obtained comments from the two native English speakers.

To ensure the validity of the improved version of the test, it was given to a group of 15 native speakers of English. This version of the MDCT test which was given to the NSs included 20 scenarios. The results gained from the native speakers test performance proved four items (out of 20) as poor ones since only 50 percent of the NSs had chosen the researchers intended option as their choices, so those items were discarded. The validity of the intended responses for 14 items was proved to be 1.00 (100 percent of native speakers chose the intended correct choice of the scenarios as the most appropriate response in the given situations). The validity of the responses for the remaining two test items was found to be 0.90 and 0.87 (90 and 87 percent respectively of the NSs had confirmed the appropriateness of the intended choice), both of which were kept in the final MDCT test version. Once the final version of the MDCT was available the participants took the adapted TOEFL test as the lexico-grammatical test and two weeks later they took the researcher made pragmatic MDCT test and the researcher could obtain the required data for the analyses.

## Results

The analysis of the data was carried out through different statistical procedures like T-test, Pearson correlation analysis, and Analysis of Variances. The data analysis and the description of the results of the analyses for each research question is presented in the following part.

The first research question was whether there is a significant correlation between lexico-grammatical competence and the ILP competence of the advanced EFL learners. To answer this question a Pearson correlation analysis was run on the two tests results and the descriptive results of this analysis is presented in Table (1).

**Table1.** *Descriptive Statistics of the Two Tests*

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
lexGr.P	27.24	6.28	110
Prag.P	8.13	2.30	110

The mean score of the 110 male and female participants of the study in the lexico-grammatical test is 27.24 and the standard deviation of the test is 6.28. While the mean score of the sample in the pragmatic MDCT test is shown to be 8.13 and its standard deviation is 2.30. The correlation analysis result is presented in Table (2).

**Table2.** *Correlation Analysis of the Two Tests*

	lexGr.P	Prag.P
lexPearson Correlation	1	.414**
Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
N	110	110

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As it is evident in table 2, a strong and significant correlation is found between the lexico-grammatical competence and the pragmatic competence of the participants ( $r = .414$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Based on this analysis, the two competences are strongly correlated and the first hypothesis of the study that supported the existence of such a relation is confirmed.

The second research question posed the possibility of the existence of differential correlation patterns between the pragmatic competence and the two components of the lexico-grammatical competence. In other words, the question is to explore if there is any difference in the correlation patterns of the EFL learners' lexical versus grammatical competences and their pragmatic competence. The correlation analysis for this research question and the related descriptive statistics are presented in tables (3) and (4).

**Table3.** *Descriptive Statistics: Grammar, Lexical and Pragmatic Tests*

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Gr.P	14.27	3.68	110
Lex.P	12.94	3.49	110
Prag.P	8.13	2.30	110

Table 3 presents the mean score and the standard deviation of the participants' lexical, grammatical, and pragmatic competences' tests. The mean score and standard deviation of the lexical test is shown to be 12.94 and 3.49 respectively, 14.27 and 3.68 for grammar test, and 8.13 and 2.30 for pragmatic competence MDCT test. Table (4) presents the results of the correlation analysis.

**Table 4.** *Correlations Among the Three Tests*

	Gr.P	Lex.P	Prag.P
Gr.P Pearson Correlation	1	.554**	.405**
Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
N	110	110	110
Lex.F Pearson Correlation	.554**	1	.316**
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.001
N	110	110	110
Prag.P Pearson Correlation	.405**	.316**	1
P Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.001	
N	110	110	110

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Both lexical and grammatical competences are shown to be significantly, though distinctively, correlated with pragmatic test; however, the correlation coefficient of the grammatical competence and pragmatic competence is evidently higher ( $r = 0.4$ ) than the correlation coefficient of lexical and pragmatic competences ( $r = 0.31$ ). Despite the fact that the obtained results statistically confirm the second hypothesis of the study, there is a difference in the correlation coefficients of the grammatical versus lexical competences and pragmatic competence.

The third research question seeks to see if there is any gender difference in the correlation pattern between lexico-grammatical competence and the ILP competence of the advanced EFL learners. Table (5) presents the descriptive statistics of the female participants' tests results. Their mean score in the lexico-grammatical test is 26.15 and standard deviation of the test is 5.77 while the mean score of the sample for the pragmatic test is 7.82 and the standard deviation is 2.26.

**Table.** *Female Sample's Descriptive Statistics*

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Lexigr	26.15	5.77	69
pragcom	7.82	2.26	69

The analysis revealed a strong and highly significant correlation between the female EFL learners tests results. As it is evident in table (6), the significance of the correlation in a 2- tailed distribution is 0.00.

**Table5.** *Correlation Analysis of Female Sample Tests*

		Lexigr	pragcom
Lexigr	Pearson Correlation	1	.483**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	69	69

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

The correlation analysis of the male participants yielded a rather different result. Table 7 includes the male group's descriptive statistic results.

**Table6.** *Male Sample's Descriptive Statistics*

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Lexigr	29.07	6.75	41
Pragcom	8.65	2.30	41

The mean score of the male group of participants in the Lexico-grammatical test is shown to be 29.07 and the standard deviation is 6.75 while the pragmatic test's mean score is 8.65 and its standard deviation is 2.30. The correlation analysis of this group's tests results is provided in table (8).

**Table7.** *Correlation Analysis of Male Sample*

		Lexigr	Pragcom
Lexigr	Pearson Correlation	1	.261*
	Sig. (1-tailed)		.050
	N	41	41

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed).

The analysis ( Table 8) proved the existence of a statistically significant correlation between the lexico-grammatical and pragmatic competences of the advanced EFL male participants; however, the p value (  $P= 0.050$ ) is quite at the border line of significance and the correlation is significant only for 1-tailed distribution at the 0.05 level of significance. A rough comparison of the correlation pattern of male and female participants' tests results reveals the difference between the two and helps the researcher to reject the third null hypothesis of the study that assumes no gender difference in the correlation pattern of the two competences.

The last research question of the study was about the probability of the existence of gender related difference in the pragmatic competence of the participants. Independent samples T-test revealed the following results. Table 9 presents the mean and the standard deviation of the two groups performance on pragmatic MDCT test.

**Table8.** *Male and Female MDCT Test Descriptive Statistics*

Gender		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Prag.P	Male	41	8.65	2.30	.36
	Female	69	7.82	2.26	.27

The statistical comparison of the two groups' means produced the results that are shown in table 10. It is evident that the two groups mean scores on the pragmatic test do not differ significantly from each other as the significance is well above the critical 0.05 level.



**Table9.** Pragmatic Competence Comparison in the Male and Female Groups :Independent Samples T-test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
							Lower	Upper
Prag.P	Equal variances assumed	.002	.966	1.84	108	.067	-0.060	1.72
	Equal variances not assumed			1.84	82.98	.069	-.067	1.73

The obtained results confirm the last research hypothesis which assumed no significant difference between the male and female advanced EFL learners' pragmatic competence. In order to further examine the possibility of any gender related difference in the pragmatic competence of the male and female participants, both male and female participants' test results on each one of the componential speech acts of the pragmatic MDCT test were compared through ANOVA analysis.

**Table10.** Analysis of Variances of the Four Speech Acts

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Disag.P	Between Groups	2.18	1	2.18	2.42	.12
	Within Groups	97.31	108	.90		
	Total	99.50	109			
Scol.P	Between Groups	1.11	1	1.11	1.41	.23
	Within Groups	85.14	108	.78		
	Total	86.26	109			
Req.P	Between Groups	.105	1	.105	.09	.75
	Within Groups	118.15	108	1.09		
	Total	118.26	109			
Comp.P	Between Groups	2.27	1	2.27	2.42	.12
	Within Groups	101.68	108	.94		
	Total	103.96	109			

The analysis revealed that the means differences of the male and female learners' test results of the four speech acts of disagreement, scolding, request and complaint were not significant (table 10) and hence it can be stated that the pragmatic competence is not proved to be gender sensitive in its development.

## **Discussion**

There are two positions regarding the relationship between Lexico-grammatical and pragmatic competences. First, the cross-sectional studies that have focused on pragmatic development among learners at various proficiency levels have shown that higher levels of linguistic proficiency often correlate with higher levels of pragmatic competence (Carrell, 1981; Koike, 1996 cited in Fe'lix-Brasdefer, 2004; Maeshiba et al., 1996; Takahashi & Beebe, 1987; Trosberg, 1987). On the other hand, other studies have revealed neither strong nor significant correlations between the grammatical and pragmatic proficiency implying that these two seem to be independent entities (Kreutel, 2007). The results obtained in the present study side with the first position and the assumed interrelationship is confirmed. However, the findings not only reveal the interrelation but also indicate that the correlation is of positive nature. This might imply that the learners' higher lexico-grammatical proficiency is accompanied by a higher level of pragmatic proficiency and one might radically even assume the two competences to be the same. This radical interpretation goes against the first position Barron (2003) presents concerning the kind of relationship between the lexico-grammatical and pragmatic competences. He believes that either the two are independent entities or grammatical competence is not in itself sufficient for pragmatic competence, but is likely to constrain its development. Based on the results gained in this work and many other studies (for example Bardovi-Harlig & Dornyei, 1998; Bardovi-Harlig, 1999; Kasper & Roever, 2005; Khatib & Ahmadi Safa, 2011) one might be in safer side if he gives more credit to the second choice Barron (2003) presented. The idea gains strength given the abundance of the studies in the ILP literature that have shown that language learners even at advanced levels of grammatical proficiency show a marked imbalance

between their grammatical and pragmatic knowledge (Celce-Murcia, Dornyei & Thurrell, 1995) or L2 learners do not develop pragmatic competence at the same pace as other language competences including grammatical competence (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1991, 1993).

Concerning the first position of Barron (2003) that holds the two competences as distinctive and independent, the present study alongside with the other aforementioned studies verify a correlation between the ILP and lexico-grammatical competences and hence conclude that their total independence is not supported.

An important point of the results of the present study was the differential correlation strength the analyses revealed for the subcomponents of the lexico-grammatical competence i.e. grammatical and lexical competences. The grammatical subcomponent was much more strongly correlated with the pragmatic competence than the lexical competence. This point highlights the closer link between grammatical competence and the pragmalinguistic subcomponent of the pragmatic competence.

Another revealing point of the study was the much stronger correlation between the lexico-grammatical and pragmatic competences of the female EFL learners than the male participants. While the comparison of the total pragmatic competence level of the two genders did not prove any significant difference between them and the further comparison of the two genders' performance on the componential four speech acts of pragmatic competence through analysis of variances did not reveal any difference between the male and female advanced EFL learners, the stronger correlation between the female's lexico-grammatical and pragmatic competences might be justified if one considers the fact that female language learners especially at higher levels of language proficiency are more keen at and perceptive of pragmatic infelicities than the male language learners (Bulut, 2007; Walters, 1979). On the other hand, as the highly proficient non-native speakers who make pragmatic mistakes are more seen as rude than non-proficient (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001) and their personality might be misconceived, and considering the point that female non-native language learners are more attentive to politeness issues (Beebe, Takahashi, and Uliss-Weltz, 1990; Walters, 1979), it can be claimed that the stronger correlation found in this study

between the Lexico-grammatical and pragmatic competences of the female advanced EFL learners is because of the fact that female language learners are more attentive to pragmatic norms than the male EFL learners.

### **Conclusion**

This study does not support the idea that linguistic proficiency in general and lexico-grammatical proficiency in particular are independent entities from the pragmatic competence (see Barron, 2003), rather, based on the results of the study, it seems more logical to hold the position that the two competences are interrelated. Moreover, the evidence shows that the grammatical competence constrains the development of pragmatic competence (Hassall, 1997; as cited in Barron, 2003). Meanwhile, it was evident in different phases of the study that the interlanguage pragmatic competence lags behind the grammatical competence, though this point was not the main focus of the study and needs to be carefully considered in further studies. One of the pedagogical implications of the study is that the development of pragmatic competence should not be taken for granted and considered as a natural byproduct once grammatical competence is put at the center of attention in the foreign language learning programs, instead it deserves its own distinctive and independent status in the language education curriculum.

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**Appendix: MDCT Test (3 Exemplar Items)**

**Dear respondent: Choose the most appropriate option for each one of the following situations.**

1. Context: Ayu is 18 years old. She wants to have a cosmetic surgery on her face but her mother disagrees:

**Mother:** Honey you should attract people with your inner beauty, your personality,

your intelligence –not your looks!

**Ayu:** Mom, you don't understand! People aren't attracted by intelligence and your wit.

The first thing they see is your looks. If you're not beautiful they won't approach

you at all then how are they to know if you have intelligence or wit?

**Mother:** You can't do this!

**Ayu:**

.....  
.....

**Mother:** I think you're doing a terrible mistake.

a. Mom, it's really a matter none of your business. It's my own body!

b. Mom, when do you want to stop being such a nuisance!

c. Mom, I'm doing it whether you like it or not!

2. Context: Sarah is calling James to invite him over a friendly reunion party.

**J:** Hello, Simpson's Travel Agents.

**S:** Hello, James. This is Sarah Jackson. How are you?

**J:** Sarah, hello! How lovely to hear from you!

**S:** Sorry to distract you at work!

**J:** Oh, don't worry; I'm only pleased to be interrupted.

.....  
..... Never mind,  
how is everything with you.

a. Customers will have more time to fabricate their foolish complaints while I'm speaking with you

b. May God damn all these customers and their humble complaints! These real killers!

c. Anything to stop me having to deal with customers and their complaints!

3. Context: Jane and Carole are to take an important exam. Jane is overly stressed out while Carole, furious with Jane's words, is asking her to relax.

**Jane:** What if I forget everything in the exam? What if my pen runs out?

**Carole:**

.....  
.....

a. Well, you re really choking me with all these ifs, can you stop nagging this much?

**b. For Goodness' sake, stop worrying! You'll be fine. Just don't panic.**

c. Well, with all this pestering of yours, if you ask me I'd say you deserve it if your pen runs out with.