

**LENGTH OF STUDY AND STUDENTS' COMPREHENSION  
OF ENGLISH CONVERSATIONAL IMPLICATURE**

**Hendi Pratama<sup>1</sup>; Joko Nurkamto<sup>2</sup>; Sri Marmanto<sup>3</sup>; Rustono<sup>4</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Doctoral Student of Universitas Sebelas Maret, Surakarta, Indonesia

<sup>2,3</sup>Universitas Sebelas Maret, Surakarta, Indonesia

<sup>4</sup>Universitas Negeri Semarang, Semarang, Indonesia

hendi.edu@gmail.com

**ABSTRACT**

This research aims to find the correlation between students of English education program's length of and their pragmatic comprehension especially dealing with conversational implicature. The design of this research is cross-sectional comparison between different batches of student groups. There are 141 students from semester 2, semester 4 and semester 6 involved in this research. They are given a Pragmatic Acceptability Judgment Task (PAJT) to test their comprehension on conversational implicature in English. The result shows that students pragmatic comprehension develop along with the students' level of education i.e their length of study.

**Keywords:** motivation; pragmatic comprehension, interlanguage pragmatics, conversational implicature

**1. Background**

English education program at the university aims to produce teachers who are competent in using the language they study i.e. English. That is why the students at the program are to learn various subjects related to the competence in the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Unfortunately, pragmatic competence is not explicitly included in the curriculum of the program. This tendency of pragmatic exclusivity of the curriculum is well recorded by Bardovi-Harlig 1996, Eslami-Rasekh (2005) and Kasper & Rose (2001). They agree that the trend of English teaching nowadays highlights only on grammar and lexical items instead of pragmatic development. At the university where this study is conducted, pragmatics is not explicitly included in the curriculum so that the students are not given sufficient hours to study the pragmatics of English intensively. On the other hand, pragmatic competence is too important to neglect. Failing in developing pragmatic competence will lead to: (1) communication failure; and (2) pragmatic competence transfer failure from the teachers to their future students.

Through this research, we would like to display the following question to be investigated via a statistic observation: do the students comprehension of English conversational implicature develop during their study?

**2. Reviews of Related Literature**

**2.1 Pragmatic Competence**

Many experts have defined pragmatic competence in various ways. Thomas (1983: 94) in Ionel (2011) mentions that pragmatic competence is the ability to use language effectively in order to achieve a specific goal and to understand language in context. Fraser (2010) states that pragmatic competence is the ability to communicate message along with its atmosphere in any social context. According to Canale (1988: 90) in Rueda (2006), pragmatic competence includes illocutionary competence or the knowledge about pragmatic convention to show acceptable language function and sociolinguistic competence or knowledge about sociolinguistic convention to perform language functions according context. Bachman (1990) in Rueda (2006) mentions that the core component of pragmatic competence include the skills to use language to deliver different functions and try to understand illocutionary force in discourse context.

Those definitions have been used for sometimes. Unfortunately, in this study some problems occur in the definition. The first problem is the fact that those definitions are full of jargon and terminologies such as ‘atmosphere’, ‘illocution’, ‘sociolinguistic’ and ‘convention’. Those terminologies need to be further explained in order to understand the definition at large. The second problem is that those definitions are realized within the assumption that the speaker of language is both qualified in grammatical and lexical aspects of the language. This phenomenon may be common in the countries with English as second language but such case is difficult to be realized in a country like Indonesia which English is regarded as a foreign language.

Experts, then, create classification of pragmatic into sociocultural situations. Bardovi-Harlig (1996) creates one of the classifications of pragmatic into speech acts. They are apologies, request, complaints, disapproval, refusal, disagreement, gratitude and compliment. A number of studies in speech acts have followed suit. Bataller (2010) conducted a study on speech act of request. He investigates the development of making requests in Spanish by English native speakers. Using role play, he is able to gather data from 32 speaker before he analyze it using *Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project* platform developed by Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989). He finds that there is a significant development in making a request performed by English native speaker.

## 2.2 Foreign Language Pragmatic Understanding

After the discussion about ideal pragmatic competence above, the discussion then continues to the pragmatic understanding in a foreign language. Despite the importance of pragmatic competence, many experts found that pragmatic competence is often ignored in language teaching and learning process. Teachers focus more on grammar and the structure of the text rather than on pragmatic competence. It is supported by Jianda (2006) who states that teachers tend to treat grammar as the center of language teaching and learning process.

A number of researchers have found that the absence of pragmatic teaching can be fatal. Susikaran (2013) finds that students are not aware that the failure of pragmatic reference can result in their characters. The absence of pragmatic teaching is also caused by teaching material deprivation. Bardovi-Harlig (1996) has observed various language teaching materials available and she finds that there is no authentic language situation displayed in those books. The conversation samples provide in the books are more often than not, staggeringly different from the real life situations.

Lacking of appropriate materials and instructions in teaching lead experts to conduct research on pragmatic instruction. Eslami-Rasekh (2005) focuses on how to increase students’ pragmatic awareness. Eslami-Rasekh involves both students and teachers in the sense of (1) teachers’ presentation and discussion; and (2) students. The first direction of research depends on teachers’ ability underlining pragmatic features of target language and presenting them. The second direction let the students to do mini-research by giving them challenging materials.

Yoshimi (2010) in Farahian et.al (2012) follows the procedures below to increase pragmatic competence:

- (1) Learning target presentation
- (2) Learning target explanation
- (3) Planning session
- (4) Communicating session
- (5) Feedback

Farahian et.al (2012) involves control group and experiment group in an experiment using the procedure above. At the end, he finds that there is significant increase in the post test result of the students.

Another research is done by Jernigan (2012) taking the advantages of technology application. Jernigan investigates students’ pragmatic development after given video treatment. There are 12 short videos used. Four pragmatic situations are included in the video: request, refusals, compliment response, advice giving and invitations. Discourse Completion Test (DCT)

and pragmatic acceptability judgment task (PAJT) are used to measure students' pragmatic before and after treatment and it was found that there is an increase in students' pragmatic competence.

### 3. Research Methodology

This study used cross-sectional comparison design. There are two types of research instruments which are popular in pragmatic research: Discourse Completion Test (DCT) and Pragmatic Acceptability and Judgment Task (PAJT). DCT was first introduced by Blum-Kulka to investigate speech acts (Ahn, 2007). It consists of a set of questions used to elicit speech act response from the participants. The second instrument, PAJT consists of dialogues from native speaker and four answer choices. There is only one appropriate answer that has to be chosen by the participants. Jernigan (2012) mentions that Gracia (2004) uses this instrument. This research uses the latter, because this study only deals with comprehension and not production. There were 60 items of PAJT tested for tryout. After a reliability test, 51 items were used and other 9 items were omitted.

The data were taken from 141 students from English education program. There were 57 freshmen, 41 sophomores and 43 students from junior year. These students were given the test in 70 minutes and all of them finish the items before the time is out.

### 4. Students Pragmatic Comprehension of Implicature in English

Pragmatic competence is quite different from lexical competence. Students may understand all lexical items in a sentence it does not guarantee that the students get the illocutionary force of the sentence. The following conversation is one of the PAJT items given to the participants:

Woman : *Your parents' business has done very well.  
Does your father have an M.B.A.?*  
Man : *My father never went as far as college.*

The words or lexicons in the exchange above are simple to understand but we cannot be sure if the students understand the context discussed by the speakers. The students have to understand that the major theme of the conversation is university degree. Secondly, students have to understand the contradiction displayed by both speakers. The woman praises the man's parents and asks him if his father has a master degree in business management. The man responses that his parents did not have any chance to go to the university. The conversation above is one example of items used to know students' pragmatic competence especially in conversational implicature. The result from the test can be summarized as follows:

Table 1. Average Scores of Students' Pragmatic Competence

Participants	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Minimum	Maximum
Semester 2	57	35.6842	7.33669	.97177	14.00	49.00
Semester 4	41	37.1707	6.93146	1.08251	20.00	49.00
Semester 6	43	39.7674	5.43287	.82850	28.00	49.00
All	141	37.3617	6.85907	.57764	14.00	49.00

The table shows the total score is 37.36 with standard deviation of 6.86. In general, it can be observed that the pragmatic comprehension of the freshmen (mean = 35.68) is less than the sophomore's average score (mean = 37.17). The pragmatic comprehension score of the sophomores is less than the students from the junior year (mean = 39.76). One Way ANOVA test is done to calculate the significance of that difference.

Figure 1. ANOVA Test of Students' Pragmatic Competence Average

Test of Homogeneity of Variances

Pragmatic

Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
2.185	2	138	.116

ANOVA

Pragmatic

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	410.758	2	205.379	4.589	.012
Within Groups	6175.795	138	44.752		
Total	6586.553	140			

It can be seen that from the Levene Test that data is appropriate to be tested ANOVA because the sample is homogenous (Sig > 0.025). It can be concluded that the difference between the three results is significant. The following Post Hoc test is, then, conducted to confirm the difference between semesters.

Figure 2. Post Hoc Test of Students' Pragmatic Competence Average

Multiple Comparisons

Dependent Variable: Pragmatic

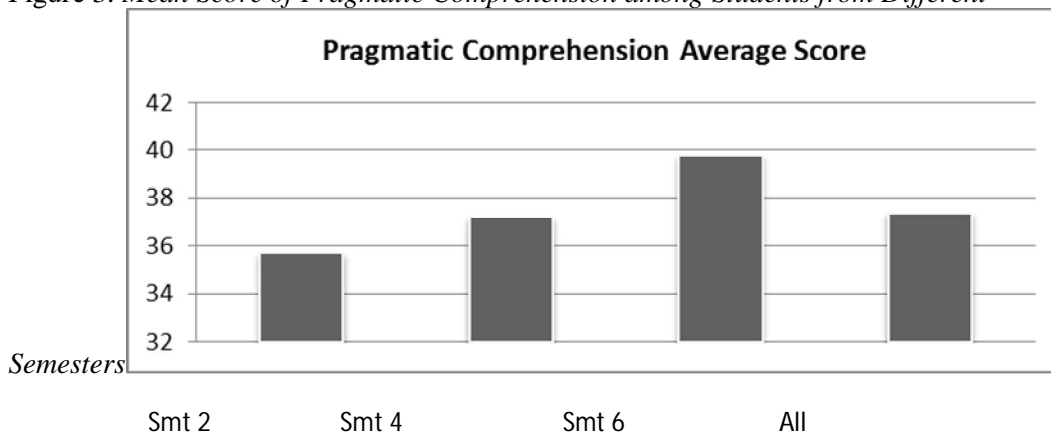
LSD

(I) Semester	(J) Semester	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Semester 2	Semester 4	-1.48652	1.36991	.280	-4.1952	1.2222
	Semester 6	-4.08323*	1.35125	.003	-6.7551	-1.4114
Semester 4	Semester 2	1.48652	1.36991	.280	-1.2222	4.1952
	Semester 6	-2.59671	1.46023	.078	-5.4840	.2906
Semester 6	Semester 2	4.08323*	1.35125	.003	1.4114	6.7551
	Semester 4	2.59671	1.46023	.078	-.2906	5.4840

\*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

LSD test above shows that the difference between scores of the students from semester 2 and 4 is not significant. Apparently the difference between the students' scores from semester 4 and 6 is also not significant. The only significant mean score difference is found between semester 2 students and semester 6 students. The following graph describes this difference.

Figure 3. Mean Score of Pragmatic Comprehension among Students from Different



In short, the pragmatic comprehension of English education program students has increased along with the period of study they have. However the difference in pragmatic comprehension is only statistically significant in a two-year gap. The increase in one year gap is not significant according to the post-hoc test.

## 5. Conclusion

Experts have complained that very little attention given by the curriculum makers to include explicit pragmatic loaded materials in second language teaching (Bardovi-Harlig 1996; Eslami-Rasekh, 2005; Kasper & Rose, 2001). This research is to confirm that the absence of explicit pragmatic instruction would hamper the pragmatic development of the second language learners. This study has proven that pragmatic comprehension development still occurs albeit explicit pragmatic instruction is absent. This development is observable on the students from different years. However, the development is only significant after two years. There are some notes to limit our finding:

- (1) Using cross-sectional design, this study is not immune from cohort bias (raw student input in certain years can be randomly better than in certain other years).
- (2) The participants of this study come from a single university. Future research can be validated using multiple universities.
- (3) We cannot draw conclusion whether explicit pragmatic exposure will give better results or worse results than status quo. This question is out of the coverage of this study.

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