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Jelena Ilić Plauc

ASSESSING PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE IN BOSNIAN LEARNERS OF ENGLISH

In the field of pragmatics, a considerable amount of research has been conducted on the development of pragmatic competence in non-native speakers. While Chomsky (1980) distinguished between linguistic competence and broader aspects of language use, defining the latter as “knowledge of conditions and manner of appropriate use, in conformity with various purposes” (1980: 224), the concept of pragmatic competence has fully developed in subsequent frameworks. In the field of second language (L2) acquisition, there has been growing interest in how non-native speakers develop pragmatic competence (He & Yan 1986; Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper 1989; Oxford 1990; Bardovi-Harlig 1999; Kasper & Rose 2002). This study was prompted by numerous examples of spoken pragmatic failure observed during English lectures at the beginning of the 2017/2018 academic year, involving non-native speakers of English. In addition, due to the limited availability of empirical data on pragmatic competence and failure in Bosnia and Herzegovina, this study aims to examine the overall L2 pragmatic competence of Bosnian learners of English at the University of Tuzla. Specifically, it explores the relationship between learners’ pragmatic competence and sociolinguistic parameters, including gender, age, and duration of English language study. Together relevant data, a modified version of He’s Pragmatic Competence Questionnaire (1988) was administered. The instrument, comprising multiple-choice questions and various interactive scenarios, was distributed to undergraduate students of Journalism, Technology, and English at the University of Tuzla (Bosnia and Herzegovina). This study offers insight into the general level of pragmatic competence of Bosnian speakers of English. Furthermore, it identifies notable differences in sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic performance across gender and academic discipline.

Keywords: pragmatic competence; sociopragmatic competence; pragmalinguistic competence; pragmatic failure; gender; age; duration of English language study

1. INTRODUCTION

Pragmatic competence has been recognized as a crucial component of second and foreign language acquisition. Mastering a language implies attaining a high level of pragmatic competence, based on considering and respecting certain conventions for establishing and maintaining effective, contextually appropriate communication in the target language.

In the field of pragmatics, considerable research has been conducted on non-native speakers' development of this competence, including both its theoretical understanding and its practical application in language learning (Thomas 1983; He & Yan 1986; Ellis 1986; Kasper 1997; Bardovi-Harlig 1999; Dörnyei & Skehan 2003). While Chomsky (1980) distinguished between linguistic competence (specifically syntax and formal grammar) and broader aspects of language use, defining the latter as "knowledge of conditions and manner of appropriate use, in conformity with various purposes" (1980: 224), the concept of pragmatic competence has been further refined in later theoretical models, especially within the field of second language (L2) contexts (Canale & Swain 1980; He & Yan 1986; Bachman 1990; Kasper & Rose 2002). Since the adoption of the communicative approach in second and foreign language learning, pragmatic competence has been recognised as a critical component of language proficiency, with an emphasis put on the learner's ability to use language effectively in various contextually appropriate situations. Failure to develop such competence can result in miscommunication, misunderstanding, or even communication breakdowns. Moreover, such pragmatic failures can have serious interpersonal consequences, leading to perceptions of a speaker as impolite, egocentric, or socially unaware.

This study is inspired by observations from English language classrooms, where instances of spoken pragmatic failure were noted among non-native speakers of English at the start of the 2017/2018 academic year. Given the limited research on pragmatic competence and failure in Bosnia and Herzegovina, this study aims to investigate the L2 pragmatic competence of undergraduate English learners. Specifically, it examines the relationship between pragmatic competence and sociolinguistic parameters, such as gender, age, and length of English language study.

The findings will hopefully contribute to our understanding of how pragmatic competence develops, highlight common patterns of pragmatic failure, and suggest strategies for improving instruction in applied and intercultural pragmatics, second language acquisition, and English language teaching.

2. PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE

In contemporary linguistic theory, pragmatic competence is now recognized as a vital factor in communicative proficiency in a second or foreign language. The initial distinction between linguistic and pragmatic competence can be traced back to Chomsky's work, where he introduced the concept of pragmatic competence for practical and methodological reasons, as "the ability to explore and discover the pure, formal properties of the genetically pre-programmed linguistic system" (Kecskes 2014: 62). Thus, he positioned it outside the scope of his generative grammar framework, primarily from theoretical, cognitive perspective.

A much closer interest in the issue was paid by Leech (1983), who stated that linguistic competence is composed of grammatical and pragmatic competence. This was a more functional and communicative perspective, emphasising the role of pragmatics in achieving communicative goals.

Building on this, Canale and Swain (1980) were the ones who introduced the term pragmatic competence embedded within their applied linguistic model of communicative competence. In other words, they proposed a multidimensional model that explicitly included sociolinguistic competence – closely aligned with pragmatic competence – as one of its core components, alongside grammatical competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence (Canale 1983). Thus, the nature and patterns of pragmatic competence have been analysed and discussed ever since, with some linguists arguing that grammatical competence is a prerequisite of pragmatic competence (Thomas 1983; Bachman 1990; Kasper & Rose 2002; Barron 2003) and others claiming that high levels of grammatical competence do not guarantee concomitant high levels of pragmatic competence (Bardovi-Harlig 1999; Taguchi 2011; Roever 2015).

Generally speaking, the concept of pragmatic competence is widely recognized among linguists and researchers as a central component in SLA, being defined as "the knowledge of the condition and manner of appropriate use" (Chomsky 1980: 225). Indeed, such a competence calls for the speaker's ability to understand another speaker's intended meaning, or as recognition and knowledge of 'how to say what to

whom when' (Bardovi-Harlig 1999). In practical terms, pragmatic competence involves selecting and modifying language according to communicative goals, social norms, relationships, etc. Whether performing speech acts such as requests, apologies, expressions of gratitude, or complaints, the effectiveness of communication itself depends on the speaker's ability to align the linguistic choices with appropriate forms of politeness, directness, and formality. Additionally, it is up to a language user to recognise the dimensions that belong to the realm of social appropriateness and awareness. Bardovi-Harlig (2001) calls these notions "the secret rules of language", or as Garcia (2004: 8) puts it, these core components are about "the full complexity of social and individual human factors, latent psychological competences, and linguistic features, expressions, and grammatical structures, while maintaining language within the context in which it was used". In addition, to present and understand the secret rules of language, Thomas (1983) proposed a division of pragmatics into sociopragmatics and pragmalinguistics, the first one underpinning the cultural values and expectations of speakers and referring to "the social perception of the communicative action" (Kasper 1997: 1), and the latter including "strategies like directness and indirectness, routines and a large range of linguistic forms which can intensify or soften communicative acts" (Ibid.). Both of these aspects vary across cultures, situations and time; however, it is exactly these secret natures of the sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic conventions that may be potentially hazardous for L2 learners (Yates 2004).

2.1. Pragmatic Failure

Failing to understand and adopt the underlying rules of sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic norms can lead to miscommunication, often due to differences between the sociopragmatic expectations and pragmalinguistic patterns of one's native language (L1) and those of the second language (L2). Thus, pragmatic failure may be simply defined as "the inability to understand what is meant by what is said" (Thomas 1983: 22). Pragmatic failure is not solely the speaker's fault – the hearer, whether native or non-native, also plays a role, as they are to interpret the speaker's intended meaning (Padilla Cruz 2013). In addition, pragmatic failure is commonly categorised into two types: sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic, the first one being caused by the cross-cultural differences in social norms and perceptions, and the second stemming from mismatches in linguistic forms across languages (Thomas 1983: 99). For example, when a learner says 'Give me the salt' intending to make a

polite request, but fails to use a more appropriate form like ‘Could you pass the salt, please?’, it constitutes a pragmalinguistic failure, as the sentence is grammatically correct, but pragmatically too direct in English. On the other hand, ‘Hey, what’s up, professor!’, represents a sociopragmatic failure, as the form may be linguistically correct, but violates social norms of formality expected to be used in academic contexts. Many linguists regard sociopragmatic failure as more serious and potentially damaging than pragmalinguistic failure, and consequently, correcting it poses a subtle and delicate challenge for language teachers. For learners, overcoming sociopragmatic difficulties requires a continuous process of sustained exposure to comprehensive L2 input that accompanies both sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic aspects.

Some authors (He 2004) proposed the trichotomous nature of pragmatic failure, suggesting that there is a cross-cultural pragmatic failure that appears to be quite complex and distinctive due to the huge cultural differences between the speakers. Such a pragmatic failure would usually take place in four situations: (1) when speakers choose unsuitable topics due to cultural differences in values and taboos; (2) when speakers use expressions which have different implications in the L2; (3) when the utterance made by a speaker to express certain ideas does not conform to the convention of the L2; (4) when speakers are giving culturally inappropriate responses due to different values and norms existing in their L1 and their tradition and culture (Lihui & Jianbin 2010). In other words, pragmatic failure can occur when speakers choose topics that are taboo or sensitive in the target culture (talking about money, sex, personal success, etc.), use expressions that carry different implications in the L2, produce utterances that violate the norms in the target language or give responses that are culturally inappropriate due to various values and expectations in one culture.

The teachability of pragmatic knowledge and rooting out of pragmatic failure are possible and effective, even in language classrooms. The ultimate goal of L2 teaching is to produce communicatively competent speakers who can express themselves both efficiently and acceptably. Thus, scholars and practitioners in the field of SLA advocate for the implementation of a targeted set of activities and tasks that L2 teachers would give their learners to sensitise them to when, how, where, and to whom to communicate efficiently and appropriately across a range of social situations. Many studies have shown that one of the main factors in acquiring and perfecting pragmatic knowledge includes the impact of the learning environment and the length of exposure to the target culture (Dörnyei 1998; Kasper & Rose 2002; Taguchi 2011). Furthermore, it is not only the exposure and social contact that play a decisive role in acquiring pragmatic competence, but there are also some internal factors, such as the learners’ motivation,

willingness to communicate, and their ability to assume L2 sociocultural beliefs and norms. However, as Kasper (1996) points out, the major emphasis should be placed on adequate pragmatic instruction for the development of pragmatic competence in language classes, as such input is considered a stimulating factor in language learning.

2.2. Impact of Individual Differences (IDs) on Pragmatic Competence

After defining individual differences (IDs) as “characteristics or traits in respect of which individuals may be shown to differ from each other” (Dörnyei 2005: 1), it is important to note that numerous second language (L2) studies have explored the relationship between these differences and language learning (Dörnyei 1998, 2005; Dörnyei & Skehan 2003; Ellis 2004). Several IDs have been found to exert a strong influence on the successful L2 acquisition, such as gender, age, personality, aptitude for language learning, motivation, language styles (e.g., visual learners preferring videos to textbooks), and language strategies (e.g., using flashcards to retain vocabulary). However, each of these IDs gives a different contribution to the success or failure of L2 acquisition. Researchers and practitioners generally agree that most children show great success in the acquisition of their first language (L1), given that these children were raised in a stable, supportive, and healthy environment. On the other hand, when it comes to acquiring a second or foreign language, success becomes an undertaking, “a complex process involving many interrelated factors... pertaining to the learner on the one hand and the learning situation on the other” (Ellis 1986: 4). Thus, it has been concluded that there are several more or less important factors influencing L2 acquisition, among which the demographic variables of age and gender are considered to affect every aspect of the SLA process, including virtually all other ID variables (Dörnyei 2005).

Age is considered one of the key variables in language learning, particularly in relation to learners’ cognitive development and learning strategies. While young learners may benefit from cerebral plasticity and more intuitive language acquisition, older learners tend to rely on analytical approaches and cognitive strategies (Ellis 2004). Although the concept of a critical period for language acquisition remains debated, research suggests that age influences how language is processed, with proficiency in older learners more closely linked to motivation, instruction, and other core or marginal IDs (Skehan, as cited in Dörnyei 2005: 44-45).

The variable of *gender* has been claimed to play a significant role in L2 acquisition. Like the variable of *age*, it has been shown that *gender* influences the entire language learning process. As Oxford (1996) explains, learners' gender is related to cognitive style, influencing other IDs, such as language learning strategies and styles. There is a widespread belief that females are better language learners than males, although many consider this view a stereotypical construct. However, it needs to be emphasised that gender difference does not imply that one gender is superior to the other. Moreover, these differences reflect a range of abilities that both males and females share, with some traits more common or typical for a specific gender (Halpern 2004).

Furthermore, certain empirical studies have shown that females tend to apply a wider range of language learning strategies than males (Oxford 1990; Peacock & Ho 2003). Additionally, some psychologists (Kimura 1999) have pointed out that females excel on tests that measure recall of words (verbal memory) or on tests that challenge the person to find words that begin with a specific letter (verbal fluency). Compared to males, females generally perform better in speech articulation, writing, and retrieval from long-term memory.

Conversely, males have been found to perform better in certain analytical and spatial language tasks, such as understanding explicit grammar rules and spatial descriptions (Kimura 1999). Additionally, some studies suggest that males may be more inclined to take communicative risks in certain contexts, which can sometimes facilitate language practice (Norton & Pavlenko 2004). Thus, the existence of gender differences in strategy use has been confirmed, with females using more memory, cognitive, compensation, and affective learning strategies than males (Kaylani 1996). Recent research also indicates that the selection of language learning strategies is significantly influenced by factors such as learners' ethnic and cultural backgrounds, as well as the characteristics of the language learning environment.

A key question this study aims to explore is whether *the duration of learning English* is strongly linked to the development of pragmatic competence, and whether language classes have provided sufficient pragmatic input throughout the students' years of studying English as a foreign language (EFL). In other words, the core motivation for this study stems from several instances of spoken pragmatic failure observed during English language lectures at the University of Tuzla at the beginning of the 2017/2018 academic year. In addition, there has been very little data on EFL students' pragmatic competence and pragmatic failure in Bosnia and Herzegovina, making this study potentially pioneering in examining the overall L2 pragmatic competence of Bosnian learners of English.

In terms of language education policy in Bosnia and Herzegovina, English has been given top priority, being taught as the primary foreign language (EFL). Since 2009, it has been fully integrated into the curricula at the primary, secondary, and tertiary school levels and introduced as an optional starter course in kindergartens. Primary school students are typically exposed to English once or twice a week (through English for General Purposes – EGP), with teaching methods designed to develop all four skills. Secondary school students typically receive two to four classes per week (EGP taught in grammar schools; EGP combined with ESP (English for Specific Purposes) taught in some vocational and technical schools). Given the extended exposure to English language learning, one might assume that overall pragmatic competence would be at a high level, especially since many students have studied English for over ten years. Finally, as students enter the tertiary educational level, they are offered an ESP course as an obligatory or elective course at all departments and faculties at the University of Tuzla. There is also an English and Literature department established within the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, whose main purpose is to educate future English language teachers for all levels of education. It needs to be pointed out that the majority of the courses offered at the English department are delivered entirely in English.

Thus, on the one hand, there are non-native speakers of English who have been studying the language for more than 10 years, and, on the other, there are many instances of spoken pragmatic failures occurring in English language classes. Considering that pragmatic competence is a crucial part of L2/foreign language education, this study seeks to explore how *the length of English study* relates to the types of pragmatic failures exhibited by learners. In light of the broader sociocultural shifts in Bosnia and Herzegovina – where Western educational practices are increasingly influencing values, behaviours, attitudes, and interactional norms – this study also investigates whether students can succeed in effectively interpreting the pragmatic input provided by their instructors and whether their pragmatic competence aligns with the expected academic or communicative standards.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. The Participants

The survey involved 109 first-year undergraduate students from the University of Tuzla, demonstrating a B level of English proficiency. There were two faculties

selected for the study: the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (including two departments: the Department of the English Language and Literature and the Department of Journalism, and the Faculty of Technology (consisting of several departments: the Department of Environmental Engineering and Safety at Work, Chemical Engineering and Technology, Nutritional Technology, and Agronomy). Overall, there were 58 respondents from the Faculty of Philosophy (23 from the English department, 35 from the Journalism department) and 51 respondents from the Faculty of Technology. The group consisted of 65 female and 44 male students, with an average age of 19 years. All participants were native Bosnian speakers and were divided into two groups based on the duration of their English study: those who had been learning English for less than 10 years (63 participants, or 57.8%), and those with more than 10 years of study (46 participants, or 42.2%). While the 10-year threshold is used as a general dividing point (approximately representing the duration of English study before entering tertiary education), it is acknowledged that significant differences in pragmatic competence may exist within the group due to various factors throughout students' schooling, such as attending private vs. public schools, taking additional language classes, international experience, travelling, and more. All participants voluntarily consented to participate in the survey.

3.2. The Instrument

Pragmatic competence and instances of pragmatic failure were examined through a questionnaire created by He Ziran (Pragmatic Competence Questionnaire 1988), which is widely recognised for its high reliability and validity in measuring levels of pragmatic competence. The instrument was slightly modified to accommodate the Bosnian context, with efforts made to preserve its validity by ensuring that the adapted items accurately reflect pragmatic competence relevant to this sociocultural environment. It consisted of 25 multiple-choice items representing different interactive situations, including greetings, expressions of apology and gratitude, taking leave, etc. The questionnaire also gathered demographic data about the respondents (gender, age, mother tongue, the faculty enrolled, the type of secondary school finished, and the length of studying English). Approximately half of the items measured the undergraduates' pragmalinguistic competence, which refers to ability to appropriately use linguistic forms, such as syntax, vocabulary, and conventional expressions (modals, pragmatic markers, speech act strategies, formulaic expressions), and the other half assessed sociopragmatic competence, defined as the learner's awareness

of the sociocultural norms, values and interpersonal dynamics (e.g. power relations, social distance, degree of imposition) that govern language use in the target language community.

3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

The data were collected during regular English classes at the aforementioned faculties of the University of Tuzla. It was administered to first-year undergraduate students and was conducted individually in the English-scheduled classrooms. The participants had not been informed in advance about the survey administration. Anonymity was ensured in the questionnaire to promote candid and reliable responses. Before the questionnaire was administered, the students were informed that its purpose was solely to evaluate their pragmatic competence for this research and that it would not affect their final course grades.

Data analysis was performed using descriptive statistics and Pearson's correlation to establish relationships among the questionnaire's dimensions. It was analysed by the statistical software SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science) version 25.0. Data analysis included the following steps:

- (1) Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviation, etc., to evaluate the students' present pragmatic competence level.
- (2) Independent-samples T-test, to test the specified parameters within the study.

4. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Table 1 shows that participants' scores on the pragmatic competence questionnaire ranged from 20 to 80, with a mean score of 53.58, as reported in Table 2. Given that the maximum possible score was 100, and that these learners had received approximately ten or more years of English language instruction, this result indicates a lower-than-expected level of pragmatic competence.

Table 1. Respondents' Scores for Pragmatic Competence

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	20	1	.9	.9	.9
	24	2	1.8	1.8	2.8
	28	2	1.8	1.8	4.6
	32	2	1.8	1.8	6.4
	36	6	5.5	5.5	11.9
	40	3	2.8	2.8	14.7
	44	13	11.9	11.9	26.6
	48	15	13.8	13.8	40.4
	52	10	9.2	9.2	49.5
	56	13	11.9	11.9	61.5
	60	11	10.1	10.1	71.6
	64	13	11.9	11.9	83.5
	68	10	9.2	9.2	92.7
	72	3	2.8	2.8	95.4
	76	3	2.8	2.8	98.2
	80	2	1.8	1.8	100.0
	Total	109	100.0	100.0	

Table 2. Statistics of Respondents' Pragmatic Competence

N	Valid	109
	Missing	0
Mean		53.58
Std. Error of Mean		1.207
Median		56.00
Mode		48
Std. Deviation		12.602
Variance		158.820
Range		60
Sum		5840

The pragmatic competence of the participants is centralised within the span from the score of 44 to the score of 68, indicating a moderate but limited level of performance. Considering that these learners have studied English for more than 10 years, and in light of communicative and competence-oriented goals outlined in the English language curricula, such results were lower than anticipated. Consequently, these low results raise several important questions regarding the development of pragmatic competence in English classes. In other words, the test results were analysed to identify whether the participants' performance more strongly reflects sociopragmatic or pragmalinguistic competence. Differentiating between these two components provides a clearer picture of the learner's strengths and weaknesses in pragmatic use.

As shown in Tables 3 and 4, there is a noticeable difference between the two dimensions of pragmatic competence demonstrated by the participants. Moreover, the respondents' sociopragmatic competence seems to be stronger ($M = 57.31$, $SD = 14.61$) than their pragmalinguistic competence ($M = 47.81$, $SD = 16.42$). In other words, such results suggest that learners are more adept at interpreting social norms and that they fairly understand cultural values and various communicative behaviours. This also indicates a stronger ability to navigate and understand the roles of politeness, status, and social distance. In contrast, participants face greater difficulty with competence, which involves the use of appropriate modal verbs, hedges, and formulaic expressions in a context. These difficulties may result in pragmalinguistic failures, where misinterpretations in cross-cultural interactions take place.

Nevertheless, the relatively higher level of sociopragmatic awareness among learners may serve as a compensatory strength despite their limitations in pragmalinguistic performance.

Table 3. Statistics of Respondents' Pragmalinguistic Competence

N	Valid	109
	Missing	0
	Mean	47.81
	Std. Error of Mean	1.573
	Median	54.00
	Mode	54
	Std. Deviation	16.418
	Variance	269.546
	Range	81
	Sum	5211

Table 4. Statistics of Respondents' Sociopragmatic Competence

N	Valid	109
	Missing	0
	Mean	57.31
	Std. Error of Mean	1.399
	Median	57.00
	Mode	57
	Std. Deviation	14.611
	Variance	213.476
	Range	71
	Sum	6247

4.1. Gender Differences

As mentioned earlier, the variable of *gender* may play a significant role in affecting overall language learning success, influencing the whole SLA process. The present study included 65 female and 44 male students, and, notably, female students demonstrated higher pragmatic competence compared to their male counterparts, as reflected in the questionnaire results (Tables 5 and 6). Above all, this gender-based difference was evident in both dimensions of pragmatic competence, pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic, where female students outperformed males in each.

Table 5. Statistics of Respondents' Gender and Pragmatic Competence

Respondents' gender	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Median	Sum	Grouped Median	Std. Error of Mean
female	57.48	65	11.458	60.00	3736	58.22	1.421
male	47.82	44	12.107	48.00	2104	48.00	1.825
Total	53.58	109	12.602	56.00	5840	53.91	1.207

Table 6. ANOVA Table: Respondents' Gender and Pragmatic Competence

			Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Respondents' pragmatic competence * respondents' gender	Between Groups	(Combined)	2447.826	1	2447.826	17.812	.000
	Within Groups		14704.761	107	137.428		
	Total		17152.587	108			

The findings show a statistically significant difference in pragmatic competence questionnaire scores between male and female participants ($p < .001$). Furthermore, when the variable of gender was cross-referenced with the two types of pragmatic competence, using a T-test for small samples, the results revealed that statistical differences were more conspicuous with sociopragmatic competence compared to pragmlinguistic competence. Specifically, the difference in sociopragmatic competence was statistically significant ($t(df) = 4.95; p < .001$), whereas the difference in pragmlinguistic competence was weaker and not statistically significant at the conventional level ($t(df) = 1.70; p = .093$). These findings suggest that female respondents performed better not only in overall pragmatic competence but also in sociopragmatic competence. This supports the observation that male respondents tend to exhibit more pragmlinguistic failures than females. Overall, this finding reinforces the hypothesis that gender-related differences in pragmatic competence are not merely stereotypical assumptions, but rather empirically grounded and statistically supported (Tannen 1987; Holmes 1992).

Based on the results of this study, females outperformed their male counterparts on the pragmatic competence tests, demonstrating slightly stronger performance in both pragmlinguistic and sociopragmatic components. These differences were statistically significant, particularly in the area of sociopragmatic competence. While this study did not investigate underlying causes for these differences, the results

underscore the need for further empirical research to explore and validate potential gender-related patterns in second language pragmatic development.

4.2. Age Differences

Given that *age* is a key factor influencing learners' abilities, tendencies, thinking, and behaviour, this study has also taken it into account when examining the acquisition of pragmatic knowledge. The average age of the examined respondents was 19 years (73 respondents, or 67%), while the remaining 33% (36 respondents) were over 20 years old.

Although statistically significant differences were anticipated between the age groups, the analysis showed no meaningful variation in the pragmatic competence questionnaire scores across age groups ($p = .216$). Furthermore, when age was cross-referenced with pragmalinguistic competence, no statistical differences were found between the parameters ($p = .255$). The same results were obtained for the sociopragmatic competence of the examined age groups ($p = .396$). The high p -value from the T-test indicates that age does not have a strong impact on pragmatic competence within this sample, contrary to initial expectations, suggesting that age alone cannot be considered a decisive factor in determining pragmatic competence.

4.3. Length of Studying English

Among the various factors examined, the length of time spent studying English was considered particularly relevant to the development of pragmatic competence. English language teachers and practitioners have long debated whether students receive sufficient pragmatic input during their 10 years of learning English as a foreign language. To explore this, the study divided participants into two groups: one comprising 63 participants (57.8%), who had studied English for less than 10 years, and the other consisting of 46 participants (42.2%) who had studied English for more than 10 years.

The obtained results showed no significant differences in pragmatic competence scores between the two groups ($p = .431$). In addition, no significant differences were observed when the length-of-study groups were analysed separately for pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic competences. To sum up, further investigation is required with a larger sample size to confirm the impact of the length of study of the English language. Therefore, future research on pragmatic competence should continue to explore the effect of this potentially influential factor.

4.4. Additional Parameters in English Pragmatic Competence

This study also examined additional parameters that may hold relevance and value in relation to overall pragmatic competence. A notable contribution in this area is the study by Takkaç Tulgar (2017), which investigated faculty members' perceptions and attitudes toward teaching and assessing pragmatic competence in the EFL context. Her research explored how faculty characteristics, such as academic background and teaching experience, relate to their perceptions of pragmatic competence. Although the parameter of academic degree of the faculty members did not reveal significant differences among the participants, it was recognized as the one deserving greater academic attention.

Building on this, the present study incorporated the parameter of the type of secondary school a respondent completed and the type of department a respondent enrolled in, as potentially relevant contributors to pragmatic competence. At first, the type of secondary school did not appear to be statistically significant when related to overall pragmatic competence. Moreover, given the diversity of the sample, with twelve distinct types of secondary schools represented, it proved challenging to identify any correlations and patterns within the groups.

However, Table 7 reveals a near statistically significant relationship between the type of secondary school respondents completed and their sociopragmatic competence ($p = .052$). In contrast, no significant differences were observed for overall pragmatic competence ($p = .316$) or pragmalinguistic competence ($p = .579$). These findings suggest that the type of secondary school may influence sociopragmatic competence specifically. However, to draw more definitive conclusions, future research should consider a larger and more balanced sample, focusing on the most commonly attended secondary schools, to obtain more reliable results.

Table 7. ANOVA Table: Respondents' Secondary School and Sociopragmatic Competence

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	4048.221	11	368.020	1.878	.052
Within Groups	19007.173	97	195.950		
Total	23055.394	108			

In addition, similar results were obtained for the cross-reference of the type of department in which respondents were enrolled and their levels of pragmatic competence. When the evaluation of the students' pragmatic competence level was completed, no statistically significant results were identified across the department types in the current sample. Furthermore, when the T-test for small samples was applied, some results approached statistical significance, such as for the pragmalinguistic competence.

In other words, the comparison between two groups, two different faculties (the Faculty of Technology and the Department of English Language and Literature), yielded p-values of $p = .090$ for overall pragmatic competence and $p = .085$ for pragmalinguistic competence. Although these values do not reach the conventional threshold for statistical significance, they may indicate a trend worth further investigation. This finding is unsurprising, as students majoring in English would naturally be expected to demonstrate a higher level of pragmatic competence.

However, slightly different results were received when applying the T-test between the Departments of Journalism and English. In this comparison, students from the English department outperformed their Journalism counterparts only in pragmalinguistic competence ($p = .069$). Thus, it can be concluded that Journalism students demonstrated a notably high level of pragmatic competence, particularly in sociopragmatic competence.

In summary, while the applied parameters did not yield strong and statistically significant differences in pragmatic competence development, they revealed near-significant values, which might be interesting to monitor and analyse in the future. Such findings highlight the importance of testing these parameters on a larger sample of respondents that could enhance the reliability of the results.

5. DISCUSSION

Based on the findings presented, it is evident that the overall level of pragmatic competence among the respondents remains limited, particularly when evaluated against relevant benchmarks (the mean of the participants' overall pragmatic competence is 53.58). Indeed, the overall score suggests that there is room for improvement and enhanced pragmatic training in the classrooms, especially considering that students study English for a long period of time and in light of competence-oriented goals outlined in the English language curricula.

Moreover, there are noticeable differences between the students' pragmatic competences, i.e., between students' sociopragmatic competence (mean score of 57.31) and students' pragmalinguistic competence (mean score of 47.81). This finding indicates that students are generally more proficient in understanding social norms and language use in context than they are at selecting appropriate linguistic forms. Thus, more pragmatic failures were found within the scope of pragmalinguistic than sociopragmatic competence.

To illustrate these pragmatic difficulties more concretely, several common types of pragmalinguistic failures identified in students' responses are presented below:

- Example 1 (item 22):

Bill: Why don't you ask Pete Todd to play? I know he's not very good, but there's no one else to ask, is there?

John: Well, to be honest, Bill, I've already asked him. He wasn't interested.

Bill: That's a blow.

This example illustrates a pragmalinguistic failure where students misunderstood the idiomatic expression 'That's a blow', which means 'a disappointment' or 'a shock'. Many students interpreted it literally, or confused it with the meaning of 'lie' or 'pity', or 'strange'. This reflects difficulty in mapping the intended meaning onto the linguistic form – a core aspect of pragmalinguistic competence. The better performance of female students, especially those studying English, suggests that greater language exposure supports pragmatic understanding. Such pragmatic failures highlight the need for more explicit instruction in idiomatic and non-literal language use.

Similarly, other examples of pragmalinguistic failure seem to be similar to the previous one, in which students failed to recognize the meaning and function of the phrase 'have/get to go', which is typically used to signal the end of a telephone conversation, as can be seen in Example 2:

- Example 2 (item 24):

After talking on the phone with Jack for some time, Harris says, 'I've got to go now. Goodbye.'

In this case, most students interpreted the phrase 'have/get to go' as referring to 'leaving the office' or 'going home', rather than understanding it as a cue to 'stop

talking on the phone', or specifically, Harris finishing the telephone conversation with John.

On the other hand, typical sociopragmatic failures were less frequent than pragmalinguistic ones. However, in cases where such failures occur, it can be assumed that students simply wish to demonstrate their familiarity and awareness of polite English expressions used in conversations. Following is an example of a typical sociopragmatic failure students commit when they introduce themselves:

- Example 3 (item 10):

When introducing yourself to someone you don't know at a party, what would you say?

In this case, a substantial number of participants selected the phrase 'May I introduce myself to you and at the same time I make your acquaintance?', rather than a simple and more contextually appropriate phrase, such as 'Hi, I'm ...' or 'Hi, my name's ...'. In doing so, they violated Grice's maxim of quantity by providing more information than necessary. However, the motivation behind this failure may lie in the students' desire to demonstrate their knowledge of complex and highly polite expressions, which, unfortunately, are inappropriate in this context.

The example below illustrates a typical sociopragmatic context: visiting a doctor's office, when a doctor's directness is not only acceptable but also highly expected. Therefore, a question such as 'What seems to be the problem?' is considered highly appropriate for initiating the conversation between a doctor and a patient. In contrast, proposed responses such as 'Good morning, may I help you' or 'Do you have anything to declare', and similar expressions, appear to be pragmatically odd in this context and may result in sociopragmatic failures.

- Example 4 (item 11):

One patient goes to see a doctor. At first sight of the patient, the doctor would say ...

Generally speaking, this study has demonstrated that pragmatic failures by female students were less frequent than those made by males, and that they exhibited a slightly better understanding of pragmatic rules and conventions. Additionally, the duration of studying English appears to be associated with pragmatic competence, particularly sociopragmatic competence ($p = .083$). This finding suggests that English

teachers may place greater emphasis on sociopragmatic input in their classes, which seems to be more strongly represented than pragmalinguistic input in their language instruction. It is implied that, over time, English teachers have likely focused on teaching content related to the cultural values, norms, and expectations of English speakers, reflecting an awareness of the importance of meaningful communication between natives and non-natives.

This trend is evident among secondary school teachers, with respondents showing a stronger command of sociopragmatic competence than pragmalinguistic competence. A comparable pattern emerges among students from various departments, where English majors exhibit relatively higher pragmalinguistic competence compared to their counterparts in Journalism and Technology.

To sum up, despite the rapid changes in values, behaviours, attitudes, and interaction norms occurring in Bosnia and Herzegovina, all of them continuously reshaping what is considered appropriate language use, it can be concluded that English language teaching and assessment in the country have helped students partially acquire pragmatic input, with relatively greater success in developing sociopragmatic knowledge. Therefore, one cannot claim that the pragmatic competences of students have yet reached a desirable level. Nonetheless, mutual understanding among speakers will presumably rely upon the linguistic context, which forms the basis for appropriate language use and interpretation. While pragmatic failures in interactions may have a varying degree of impact on the overall effect of communication, they inevitably influence the overall effectiveness of the exchange.

6. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study offer several important implications for English language teaching, particularly regarding the development of learners' pragmatic competence. They also highlight the broader role of English language instruction, which must incorporate both pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic components. In this regard, a language awareness approach, where learners are encouraged to notice and reflect on how language functions in context, is highly effective. In other words, students need to be exposed to authentic listening and reading materials and excerpts that reflect real-life language use, enabling them to develop a deeper understanding of contextually appropriate communication.

Empirical research supports that the teachability of pragmatic knowledge in a classroom setting is possible and effective, as well as the identification of a pragmatic

failure. As Kasper (1996) emphasised, pragmatic knowledge is teachable even in language classrooms, provided that instruction is explicit, contextualised, and supported by meaningful input. Instruction that systematically addresses pragmatic failures and facilitates learner reflection can promote significant gains in pragmatic awareness.

In parallel, the impact of the learning environment, as well as the role of immersion in the target culture, could bring non-natives' pragmatic competence to perfection, or close to native pragmatic competence. While classroom instruction provides a structured foundation for studying English, it is the responsibility of tertiary education programs to encourage students' mobility within the studies, international workshops, conferences, internships, and academic exchanges. These experiences facilitate situated learning, where pragmatic norms are acquired through meaningful participation in social practices.

In conclusion, the development of pragmatic competence in English as a foreign language requires a complex approach: one that integrates explicit classroom instruction with learning opportunities in real-life contexts. Such a combination can result in the development of the pragmatic awareness and flexibility needed in diverse communicative situations.

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O PRAGMATIČKOJ KOMPETENCIJI BOSANSKOHERCEGOVAČKIH STUDENATA U ENGLESKOM JEZIKU

Sažetak

U području pragmatike postoji značajan broj istraživanja o razvoju pragmatičke kompetencije kod neizvornih govornika engleskog jezika. Dok je Chomsky razlikovao jezičnu kompetenciju od širih aspekata upotrebe jezika, definirajući potonje kao „znanje o uslovu i načinu prikladne upotrebe jezika u različite svrhe“ (osobni prijevod – Chomsky 1980: 224), koncept pragmatičke kompetencije u potpunosti se razvija tek kasnije. Posebice je razvoj koncepta pragmatičke kompetencije primjetan u domeni usvajanja drugog jezika (L2), kod neizvornih govornika engleskog jezika (He i Yan 1986; Blum-Kulka i House i Kasper 1989; Oxford 1990; Bardovi-Harlig 1999; Kasper i Rose 2002). Ovaj je rad inspirisan brojnim primjerima pragmatičkih grešaka u govoru, zapaženim na kolegijima engleskog jezika početkom akademske 2017/2018. godine, kod studenata dodiplomskog studija kojima engleski nije maternji jezik. S obzirom na nedostatak empirijskih istraživanja o pragmatičkoj kompetenciji i pragmatičkim greškama u Bosni i Hercegovini, cilj ovog rada je ispitati opću pragmatičku kompetenciju studenata koji pohađaju kolegij engleskog jezika na Univerzitetu u Tuzli. Istraživanje se fokusira na povezanost između pragmatičke kompetencije studenata i sociolingvističkih parametara, kao što su spol, dob i dužina učenja engleskog jezika. Za prikupljanje relevantnih podataka korištena je prilagođena verzija Heovog *Upitnika za pragmatičku kompetenciju* (1988). Isti čine pitanja s višestrukim izborom odgovora i različitim interaktivnim scenarijima, koji je distribuiran među studentima dodiplomskog studija novinarstva, tehnologije i engleskog jezika na Univerzitetu u Tuzli (Bosna i Hercegovina). Rad daje uvid u opću razinu pragmatičke kompetencije ove skupine studenata u engleskom jeziku. Također, rad identificira značajne razlike u sociopragmatičkoj i pragmalingvističkoj kompetenciji u odnosu na spol i akademsku disciplinu.

Ključne riječi: pragmatička kompetencija; sociopragmatička kompetencija; pragmalingvistička kompetencija; pragmatička greška; spol; dob; dužina učenja engleskog jezika

Author's address

Adresa autorice

Jelena Ilić Plauc

University of Tuzla

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

jelena.ilic@untz.ba