Assessment of EFL learners' Sociolinguistic and Pragmatic Competence and Performance

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Abstract

Communicative competence has been a fundamental issue for foreign/second language teaching methodology and a cornerstone of language classrooms for about four decades. Its two essential components - sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences, though ubiquitously acknowledged as crucial for language teaching/learning, are not adequately, according to modern methodological requirements, taught and learned. The present article aimed to succinctly review the main aspects of the two competences as presented by linguists and educators, to draw a line between language performance and competence, to revisit the major forms of testing and assessing language learners' sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences, corresponding performance and oral proficienc . It was intended to test sociolinguistic and pragmatic knowledge and performance of L2 learners; to assess the learners' overall oral proficiency in the target language and to compare the results of the two above procedures. The aim of the undertaking was to define what relationship exists between the three tested and assessed phenomena, i.e., whether or not acquiring the competence in the target language entails performance and enhances learners' fluenc . Implementing all the tasks scheduled enabled the researcher to elicit the necessary data and to draw conclusions concerning the interdependence between language competence and performance/pro ciency; to suggest recommendations for refinement of L2 learner evaluation practice, for improving language programs in terms of teaching/ learning communicative competence and its components and for better understanding of cognitive processes which take place in L2 learners when dealing with performance and competence in the target language.

Keywords: Competence, performance, sociolinguistics and pragmatic competences, testing and assessing language L2 competence/ performance and oral proficiency.

Introduction

Several decades ago introduction of the notion of communicative competence shattered foreign/ second language classrooms which were grammar-laden and did not provide real interaction. The effect of the advent was instantaneous. The triumphant march of the concept as spontaneous as it might have seemed had the ground paved both linguistically and methodologically, and the fundamental trend-setter of the field of teaching foreign/second language methodology was destined to be indispensably connected with it (Canale, 1983: 2).

The term emerged as Hymes' (Hymes, 1972) counteraction to the Chomskean linguistic competence, i.e. knowledge of language as a system by an individual (Chomsky, 1965), as the logical link of the continuum, as a complement of it. The notion proved to be unwieldy. On the surface though as straightforward and fathomable it appeared at first (meaning for a person to be competent to communicate), so much complicated it evolved to be later.

Communicative competence viewed by linguists for (socio) linguistic purposes was laid out in strict definitive terms. According to Hymes, "it is competence for language use and not only "the tacit knowledge of language structure" in the Chomskean sense. It is competence of language use appropriate to the other participants of the communicative interaction and appropriate to the given social context and situation" (Hymes, 1972).

Communicative competence involves not only knowing the language as a code of verbal /non-verbal interaction and its syntactic, phonetic, phonological rules and its lexis, but also the knowledge of what is proper and not so in any given context. In other words, it embraces the knowledge of what to tell a particular person, or when to opt for silence, how to talk appropriately in any given situation, how to address people of different statuses, ages and/or gender, how to command, how to express criticism, how to accept or reject offers, how to make requests, etc. Shortly, the term encompasses all aspects of verbal language use, and in some

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cases non-verbal means as well (posture, gestures, silence, etc.) in specific social contexts (Hymes, 1971).

The notion had a great attraction for educational, namely, foreign/second language teaching and these very fields attached all the possible attributes to it, making the concept multi-dimensional and multi-purpose. Thus, the concept was charged with the maximum of facets as it had to encompass social, cultural, and pragmatic aspects of communication.

At first sight the rhetoric seemed to be a game of words. Deep down, though, the process of making the concept of communicative competence can be discerned. The most salient trend was certain uncertainty and lack of unanimity where to seed definite language abilities, functions, and variations - into sociolinguistic, pragmatic, strategic, discourse, linguistic or some other competences as essential constituents of communicative competence as a whole, or even to eliminate one at the expense of the other(s).

Canale and Swain in 1980 and 1983 respectively break down communicative competence into four parts:

(1) linguistic competence, knowledge of and ability to use the linguistic code, grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary correctly;

(2) discourse competence, the ability to maintain coherence and cohesion between segments of discourse;

(3) strategic competence, which is the ability to repair and work around communication gaps in his or her knowledge of the target language; and finall

(4) sociolinguistic competence, the ability to use language appropriately in various social situations.

Canale and Swain's model for communicative competence serves to emphasize that partly non-linguistic aspects of language, such as sociolinguistic competence, would be paid enough attention to in the understanding of the broader concept of communicative competence. Despite the simplicity of the model by Canale and Swain, it is used most frequently to defin the term. It has also been dominating the language teaching circles for the last decades, even after another researcher, Lyle F. Bachman, who mostly looked at the concept from language testing perspective, proposed his own model in 1990.

Bachman (1990), proposed a new model of communicative competence which evolved from that of Canale and Swain's (1983). He preferred to name it communicative language ability, a broader term which included communicative competence and language proficienc . He divided the concept into several components, such as language competence, strategic competence and psychophysiological mechanisms. The article will focus on the language competence. Language competence is composed of two parts:

Organizational competence: a) grammatical competence; b) textual competence.

Pragmatic competence: a) illocutionary competence; b) sociological competence.

According to Bachman, organizational competence is subdivided into grammatical and textual competences. His view of grammatical competence is consonant with the Canale and Swain's model (1983), which in its turn is in line with the Chomskian (1965) view. It includes knowledge of the form of a language and its components such as syntax, morphology, vocabulary and so on. Textual competence is a combination of Canale and Swain's discourse competence and strategic competences, because it includes techniques for maintaining cohesion in utterances/sentences and conventions for starting, maintaining and closing conversations.

Pragmatic competence, on the other hand, is comprised of illocutionary and sociological competences. Illocutionary competence enables the speaker to convey messages (both spoken and written) serving a variety of functions and a hearer to interpret the utterances/sentences correctly as required of him or her. However, one needs the knowledge of appropriateness based on the speech community he or she finds him/herself in as well, in order to perform an act to intend a certain communicative function. The knowledge of this appropriateness is called sociolinguistic competence and it is the other component of pragmatic competence.

The model was revised later by Bachman and Palmer (1996) in the mid-1990s, though there were no major changes. Illocutionary competence was renamed as functional knowledge, and lexical knowledge which was part of grammatical competence before, now went under the pragmatic competence as a separate component.

The last model that we shall look into is the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) 2001 model. Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment, abbreviated as CEFR is an important document developed by the Council of Europe between 1989 and 1996 in order to standardize language teaching, learning and assessing across Europe. However, it is increasingly being used as a reference in other parts of the world as well. It is a main part of the "Language Learning for European Citizenship" project and was designed to serve as a main guideline in developing language teaching syllabi, curricula, textbooks and testing. It introduces Common Reference Levels, used for rating one's proficiency level in a foreign language, along with the key concepts in language teaching and learning, necessary skills, strategies and competences a learner acquires when learning a foreign language.

In the CEFR document the confusion concerning the allocation of communicative competence components is solved by seeding abilities and functions separately in order to facilitate using the document as a guideline and reference for educational purposes.

In it communicative competence is divided into three segments: linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences.

Linguistic competence allows clear-cut division into the following sub-competences: lexical, grammatical, semantic, phonological, orthographic competence and orthoepic (CEFR, 2001:109).

Cases of sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences are more complicated, according to the CEFR. Sociolinguistic competence is concerned with the knowledge and skills required to deal with the social dimension of language use. As it was remarked with regard to sociocultural competence, since language is a sociocultural phenomenon, much of what is contained in the Framework, particularly in respect of the sociocultural, is of relevance to sociolinguistic

competence. The matters treated here are those specically related to language use and not dealt with elsewhere:

- linguistic markers of social relations;
- politeness conventions;
- expressions of folk-wisdom;
- register differences
- and dialect and accent (CEFR, 2001:118).

Pragmatic competences are concerned with the user/learner's knowledge of the principles, according to which messages are:

a) organized, structured and arranged ('discourse competence');

b) used to perform communicative functions ('functional competence');

c) sequenced according to interactional and transactional schemata ('design competence') (CEFR, 2001:123).

Or in other terms:

- Flexibility
- Taking the oor (turn-taking) – repeated
- Thematic development
- Coherence
- Propositional precision
- Spoken uency (CEFR, 2001:223).

CEFR clearly specifies what sort of performance is expected from L2 learners at all the stages of learning separately based on the sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence aspects listed in the document, e.g., level B1

Sociolinguistic appropriateness

• Can perform and respond to a wide range of language functions, using their most common exponents in a neutral register.

• Is aware of the salient politeness conventions and acts appropriately.

• Is aware of, and looks out for signs of, the most signicant differences between the customs, usages, attitudes, values and beliefs prevalent in the community concerned and those of his or her own (CEFR, 2001:122).

Flexibility

• Can adapt his/her expression to deal with less routine, even difcult, situations.

• Can exploit a wide range of simple language exibly to express much of what he/she wants.

Turn-taking

• Can intervene in a discussion on a familiar topic, using a suitable phrase to get the oor.

• Can initiate, maintain and close simple face-to-face conversation on topics that are familiar or of personal interest (CEFR, 2001:124).

Thematic development

• Can reasonably uently relate a straightforward narrative or description as a linear sequence of points.

Coherence

• Can link a series of shorter, discrete simple elements into a connected, linear sequence of points (CEFR, 2001: 125).

Spoken fluency

• Can express him/herself with relative ease. Despite some problems with formulation resulting in pauses and 'cul-de-sacs', he/she is able to keep going effectively without help.

• Can keep going comprehensibly, even though pausing for grammatical and lexical planning and repair is very evident, especially in longer stretches of free production.

Propositional precision

• Can explain the main points in an idea or problem with reasonable precision.

• Can convey simple, straightforward information of immediate relevance, getting across which point he/she feels is most important.

• Can express the main point he/she wants to make comprehensibly (CEFR, 2001: 129).

Long lists of sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence components of the CEFR document (p.118-129) are narrowed down to function, social English, politeness in L2 textbooks, language syllabi and curricula.

Interwoven with all modern trends in TEFL/TESL is the influence of sociolinguistics and pragmatics (as sub-fields of linguistics proper established some decades ago) on foreign / second language teaching which has been sized as paramount by researchers. The newly formed sub-fields of linguistics infused fresh blood into language teaching. Neither linguistics nor language teaching methodology stand still; moreover, there is mutual interdependence between the two, the former mostly being a pace-setter (McKay & Hornberger, 1996; Kasper & Rose, 2001).

The two sub-fields of linguistics with innumerable postulates have updated the language science, which made language educators and researchers revisit what the end product of learning and teaching foreign/second languages must be:

Individual knowledge of language is not enough for a speaker to perform speech fluentl . Nor is individual knowledge of sociolinguistic conventions concerning politeness or discourse coherence enough. The fluent speaker must also know how to read listener successfully, during online production of talk, and equally important- the listener must know how to read the speaker. Without such mutual reading ability neither speaker not auditor can act in ways that form an articulated interactional environment for each other. (McKay & Hornberger, 1996, p. 291)

The above-mentioned controversy concerning communicative competence ingredients is further complicated by

the competence-performance dichotomy.

Noam Chomsky (1965) drew a distinct line between the terms 'performance' and 'competence' in his influential work "Aspects of the Theory of Syntax". In his work he states: "We thus make a fundamental distinction between competence (the speaker-hearer's knowledge of his/her language) and performance (the actual use of language in specific settings)" (ibid, p. 4). Thus, competence refers to the knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and other aspects of language, while performance refers to the ability of the actual use of that knowledge. This competence is sometimes referred to as "linguistic competence" (Stern, 1992). Soon after Chomsky postulated and defined terms "competence" and "performance", followers of the communicative approach in applied linguistics, such as Stern (1992) and Savignon (1972), disapproved strongly of the concept of using idealized and purely linguistic competence as a theoretical basis for methodology for language learning, teaching and testing. They soon found an alternative to Chomsky's view of competence in Hymes's notion of communicative competence, which was accepted as a more complete and realistic view of the term (Savignon, 1972).

Competence itself (conscious knowledge of the language), if opposed to performance (ability to produce utterances), poses a dilemma for language teaching, what threads - mental, cognitive, habitual and other tie the two together? And whether acquiring one automatically presupposes the existence of the other? The answer may be straightforwardly simple - interdependence between performance and competence is individual, on the one hand, and instruction-specific, on the other. If explicit, theorized teaching of sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences is exaggerated and outweighs its practice, production, personalization, learners' competence will exceed their performance.

Method

The aim of the study is to review the types of tasks for testing sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences to embrace more components of both and to define what relationship exists between L2 learners' sociolinguistic/pragmatic competences and corresponding performance and, besides, their overall oral performance, i.e., whether or not acquiring the competence in the target language entails automatically performance and enhances learners' fluency and .v.

Findings of the research will contribute to:

• refinement of E learner evaluation practice;

• improving EFL/ESL programs in terms of teaching/learning communicative competence and its components;

• better understanding of cognitive processes which take place in L2 learners when dealing with performance and competence in the target language.

The research was conducted intensively using quantitative methods at all stages:

1. Testing sociolinguistic and pragmatic knowledge and corresponding performance of EFL/ESL learners.

2. Assessing the learners' overall oral performance/ proficiency in the target language

3. Comparing the results of the two above procedures.

The oral assessment stage was partly observational and partly test-based. Literature concerning teaching sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence clearly states what optimal ways of testing the above competences are. These are found as most effective assessment mechanisms:

• the Written Discourse Completion Tasks (WDCT),
• Multiple-Choice Discourse Completion Tasks (MDCT),
• Oral Discourse Completion Tasks (ODCT),
• Discourse Role Play Talks (DRPT),
• Discourse Self-Assessment Talks (DSAT),
• and Role-Play self-assessments (RPSA) (Kasper & Rose, 2001 :301, 302).

These tests are organized so that in them different variables, e.g., power, social distance, and imposition are involved and thus create a genuine from sociolinguistic and pragmatic points of view language situations and language itself for accurate assessment of L2 learners. If scrutinized in more details, certain types of L2 learner evaluation are applicable for definite speech acts, functions, etc.

Requests may be effectively assessed through a discourse completion test, whereas apologies may not. Further, apologies that involve such power relationships as a worker apologizing to an employer may be more effectively evaluated through role-play than when the power relationships are different. (Kasper & Rose, 2001: 284, 285

To accurately differentiate between wrong and correct answers, when administering sociolinguistic and pragmatic tests, the following marking method is considered to be most relevant (Underhill, 1987, p. 59). We used this method to rate the answers in the discourse completion activities in our tests.

Marking speech acts like apologizing, requesting, etc.:

• appropriate and correct
• relevant, but not entirely acceptable
• inappropriate or seriously incorrect

An additional requirement for better understanding of L2 learner's sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence and performance and overall oral proficiency is their self-assessment. If properly planned and arranged, this procedure may serve as a reliable method of diagnostic, formative purposes in L2 learning and teaching for learners themselves and for teachers as well. The former in this way critically revisit their L2 learning history, deficiencies of their current language ability. It is also recommended to organize peer-assessment as well, though subjectivity and lack of mutual trust may act as obstacles on the way of obtaining reliable results.

The following methods and principles (Underhill, 1987: 24, 25) are enacted when compiling self-assessment statements and questions:

Type 1 – non-defined general scales - the learner rates him/herself from 0 - I speak no English at all to 20 - I am completely fluent

Type 2 – non-defined specific scales - invite the learner to consider his/her likely language performance in a particular hypothetical situation. For example, "imagine you need to ask for a pair of shoes to be changed in the shop you bought them from. How well will you cope?" answer from 0 – I could not cope at all to 10 – I would have no difficul .

Type 3 - defined general scales - these scales have explicit descriptions at every level, but they are expressed in terms of general language abilities rather than specific examples:

I can only talk about a very small number of topics. 1-10

I can hold an ordinary social conversation with some difficult , but I am occasionally lost for words. 1-10

Self –assessment scales can take the form of multiple-choice questions, such as:

Fluency and naturalness: When you speak English, do you —

a) always construct the whole sentence in your head first

b) frequently have to think about what you are going to say?

c) speak with occasional hesitations?

Connecting sentences: How easy it is for you to speak several sentences together in a connected way?

a) impossible
b) hard
c) easy

The concern and efforts to compile alongside sociolinguistic and pragmatic tests performance assessment / measurement procedures in order not to have L2 learners' real (in)ability neglected and not to be misled, while applying various tests during EFL/ESL learning/teaching process and to use them effectively as formative, diagnostic, achievement, progress tests led to the following results: SOPI- Simulated Oral Proficiency Interview, OPI -Oral Proficiency Interview, SOLOM- Student Oral Language Observation Matrix.

SOLOM (Wright, 2010: 162,163) is a frequently used rubric, which facilitates it for teachers to make learners' oral proficiency assessment during the classroom process, serves formative evaluation purposed and focuses on five aspects of a learners' verbal abilities:

• Comprehension
• Fluency
• Vocabulary
• Grammar
• Pronunciation

Meticulously detailed are the criteria for assessing oral proficiency of L2 learners, it encompasses: ubiquitous fl -ency vs. accuracy issue, the issue of sociopragmatic appropriacy and flexibilit , etc.

• size (how long are the utterances produced?)

• complexity (how far does the speaker attempt complex language?)

• speed (how fast does he speak?)

• flexibil ty (can the speaker adapt quickly to changes in topic or task?)

• accuracy (is it correct English?)

• appropriacy (is the style and register appropriate?)

• independence (does the speaker rely on a question or stimulus, or can he initiate speech on his own?)

• repetition (how often does the question or stimulus have to be repeated?)

• hesitation (how much does the speaker hesitate before and while speaking?) (Underhill, 1987:96)

SOPI and OPI have gained a great importance due to their usage for renowned English examinations. They make examinees face multiple speech acts with a variety of social situations. The performance learners are expected to demonstrate reveal at the same time their sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence (Kasper, Rose, 2001: 245).

All the principles of oral assessment were taken into account when conducting verbal interviews and implementing the SOLOM matrix. During both processes sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences were emphasized and heeded most. Students had to role-play, take part in debates, etc. Examples of test tasks are given in the appendix.

Participants

We selected 36 participants, from two existing classes at intermediate level from Ishik University's Preparatory School, all of whom took Oxford computerized test, administered by the school, to determine their level before they started their courses at the school. Participation was voluntary. The 36 university prep-school students at an intermediate level in English were tested with various tasks discussed above, evaluating their sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences and performance. Participation was voluntary. Randomness of the selection process was guaranteed by the fact that students' origin, age, educational background, previous EFL learning experience were not heeded.

Procedure

Students were given self-assessment questionnaires to define their level of verbal proficiency and performance in the above competences and had oral interviews with their English instructors. In addition, EFL teachers made observations of peculiarities of L2 learners' sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence, performance and oral proficiency during the educational process. Students were also given a written test containing discourse completion tasks as well as rating questions, where the learners had to rate the statements in accordance with their level of formality, politeness, alongside proverb completion tasks, and a task involving interpretation of the tone of the statement.

Results

As a result the following picture was obtained (Table 1).

The average 1≥3 can be viewed as positive for items 3-10, while the average 3≥5 – negative, so the results on the whole are good enough, however, many enough students feel they can talk on a limited number of topics (average 2.5)

and have some difficulties while speaking (average 2.47

Students' Self Assessment, Part I (1-Strongly Agree, 2-Agree, 3-Neutral, 4-Disagree, 5-Strongly Disagree)

#	statements	Average
1	I can only talk about a very small number of topics.	2.5
2	I can hold an ordinary social conversation with some difficulty, but I am occasionally lost for words.	2.4722
3	I can introduce myself.	1.638
4	I can greet a peer.	1.83
5	I can greet an adult.	2.11
6	I can identify myself and spell my name.	1.77
7	I can find out when something occurs.	2.16
8	I can express agreement and disagreement.	2.02
9	I can express preference about food, sports, leisure, etc.	1.94
10	I can express likes and dislikes.	1.91

The lower the average, the more self-confident the students feel. We can see that the students feel most confident at introducing themselves (item 6, average 1.77, while they are least confident, expressing agreement and disagreement (item 8, average 2.02). Thus, functions that get low points should be paid more attention to, to improve the situation (Table2).

SOLOM and self-assessment test act as cross- or double-check mechanisms for teachers, they clarify what stands behind the façade of students' speaking L2 - whether there are mental, self-confidence or emotional issues students struggle to cope with, e.g., the second part of students' self-assessment indicates that students experience fear that they will not be able to speak at all- 13.88 % think so, while 58 % find it complicated to manage, 22.23 % construct the whole sentence in their head (supposedly trying to translate the flow of words from their L1, which greatly hinders speech production), 61.11 % monitor their speech as they declare that they often have to think before uttering something which inhibits spontaneous speech; understanding difficultie is made even easier for teachers as they have at hand scores of all the aspects: vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, fl -ency and comprehension which either hinder or enhance speech production (Table3,4).

From the socio-pragmatic test it is evident that students cope with congratulations best of all, compared with all other speech acts – 25 % produce appropriate and correct versions of it; requests, apologies and invitations present no obstacles as well and relevant, though not entirely acceptable forms of it are used by L2 learners – 52 , 50, 63 % respectively; however, the number plunges dramatically, when it comes to requesting, apologizing, and inviting appropriately- 0, 2.7, and 8.3 % respectively.

The test, which involves recognizing and differentiating between styles, reveals even a worse picture and discloses the lack of explicit conscious sociolinguistic and pragmatic knowledge among L2 learners; greeting and thanking forms are easily seeded into groups (average of 7.3 correct answers out of 10 items and 3 correct answers out of 4 items respectively), while politeness strategies are harder to grasp - the average of 1.69 points out of maximum 5, and finally, completing a well-known saying and guessing the tone of a speaker makes them fail altogether – average 0.6 and 0 points out of 5 and 2 respectively.

SOLOM - student oral language observation matrix

Criteria	Average
Comprehension	4.027
Fluency	3.11
Vocabulary	3.305
Pronunciation	3.25
Grammar	3.416
Total	**17.055**

Discussion

One of the first conclusions that can be made based on the testing and assessment results is that L2 learners develop sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences and corresponding performance in a haphazard way, i.e., either by means of various activities (not necessarily aimed at learning/ teaching these aspects) at an L2 lesson or acquire them outside it through extensive listening or reading, which indicates the lack of consistency and consecutiveness in teaching and acquiring the above competences and performance. It was deduced and reconfirmed by the teacher observations and the analysis of the data obtained from individual learners.

Student self-assessment revealed that whereas learners are confident about performing simple speech acts like introducing oneself (the mean of 1.92 - see table 1), they are still hesitant whether they can manage a flow of several sentences connected - 72 % find it either hard or impossible (table2).

Learners are formidably deficient in social English, i.e., they lack sociolinguistic competence, socio-cultural knowledge of the target language. Presumably many of the correct responses are given at the expense of universal pragmatic knowledge, i.e., what is ubiquitous in the modern world for communication among contemporaries, what is

Table 3: *Students' Self-Assessment, Part 2*

No				Average
1.	Rate your spoken English from 0-(*I speak no English at all*), to 20 –(*I am completely fluent*)			12.61
2.	Imagine you need to ask for a pair of shoes to be changed in the shop you bought them from. How well will you cope? Answer from 0- (*I could not cope at all*) to 10-(*I would have no difficulty*)			7.66
3.	When you speak English do you-	Always construct the whole sentence in your head first?	Frequently have to think about what you are going to say?	Speak with occasional hesitations?
		22.23%	61.11%	16.66%
4.	How easy it is for you to speak several sentences together in a connected way?	Impossible	Hard	Easy
		13.88%	58.33%	27.77%

Table 4: *Socio-pragmatic test – part 1*

Item description	0-Left blank	1 -Inappropriate and/or seriously incorrect	2 - Relevant but not entirely acceptable	3- Appropriate and correct
1. Making a Request	2.77%	44.44%	52.77%	0%
2. Apology	2.77%	22.22%	50%	2.77%
3. Congratulation	13.88%	41.66%	19.44%	25%
4. Invitation	8.33%	19.44%	63.88%	8.33%

Table 5: *Socio-pragmatic test – part 2*

Item Description	Average	Number of items	Explanations
5. Greeting	7.33	Out of 10 possible items	Students were required to mark statements *Formal* or *Informal*
6. Politeness	1.6944	Out of 5 items	Students were required to rank items from 1-*least polite* to 5-*most polite*
7. Completing a well-known saying	0.61	Out of 5 items	Students were required to complete a well-known phrase/saying
8. Thanking	3	Out of 4 items	Students were required to mark statements *Formal* or *Informal*
9. Guessing the tone of a speaker	0	Out of 2 items	Students were required to guess whether statements were *serious ironic humorous other*

passed from language to language, no matter what cultural patchwork the language is sewn from. The proof of the conclusion is found in the fact that in discourse completion tasks more learners give relevant, but not entirely appropriate answers than fully appropriate ones - 52, 50, 63 % and 0, 2, 8 % respectively; supposedly, they intuitively transfer their universal knowledge to L2 and lack the cultural knowledge in it. The conclusion can be reinforced by the fact that "completing an English saying" part was done poorly by students (although the teaching contained these proverbs). Such pre-fabricated expressions can serve as a way out when being in a dialogue and create the impression of native-likeness from the speaker, however students and/or teachers tend to ignore them.

Fluency development is not entirely tied to refining socio-pragmatic competence, i.e. L2 learners achieve an average degree of fluency at the expense of ignoring sociolinguistic and pragmatic conventions of L2 usage. Or, formulated otherwise, speaking more or less fluently does not necessarily mean that learners observe socio-pragmatic rules and do not violate them, the tests indicate that the opposite is the truth. The students' level of comprehension revealed to be solid, their grammatical competence is sound as well (table 5) that indicates grammar-orientedness of L2 classrooms. So, as the communicative goal has been more or less reached, students and even teachers tend to disregard the importance of sociolinguistic and pragmatic conventions of L2 usage.

For students formulaic expressions like greeting and thanking are the easiest to cope with (tables 3 and 4), whereas politeness strategies, skills of congratulation and apology usage are feeble and speech acts like invitations and requests are the most complicated for them. This fin - ing points to failures that L2 classrooms experience in terms of teaching communicative competence. None of the students was able to answer the question how they perceive certain utterances -humorous, serious, ironic, etc. It means that they acutely lack the skill of understanding the intonation, the situation, etc., which indicates deficiencies in the pragmatic competence. Slightly better, still an extremely low point 0.6 out of 2 was obtained in testing proverbs and well-known English sayings, again indicating competence deficiency in cultural aspects of L2.

Recommendations

• Sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence need purposeful teaching, it is rarely created automatically while dealing with linguistic competence.

• It is highly recommended to use the suggested tests and assessment to complement each other and to elicit a more realistic picture of L2 learners' sociolinguistic and pragmatic performance and competence, to use them as formative, diagnostic, progress tests. It is essential to avoid a superficial assessment of L2 learners' communicative competence and not to miss many nuances of it.

• It can be observed that fluency precedes sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence, which means that a non-native English speaker will inevitably be hindered when facing real interaction requiring cultural awareness, knowledge of rules of interaction and the ability to interpret a speaker.

• It is highly recommended to include sociolinguistic and

pragmatic tests in the format of those English examinations which due to organizational difficultie do not comprise oral interviews with examinees. Such tests with high probability measure the real level of language learners' speaking skill.

Conclusion

There is a clear interdependence between sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences and corresponding performance and oral proficiency in learners as the detailed analy-sis of individual learners' results revealed. The best ones score the most points in most aspects and vice versa, the weakest learners score low in most aspects. If the compe-tences are taught systematically and consecutively, hence, develop appropriately with proper activities in learners, the process will entail equal improvement of corresponding per-formance and overall oral proficiency.

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