

ANALYZING PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE OF PAKISTANI ENGLISH LEARNERS IN REALIZING SPEECH ACTS OF ADVICE AND SUGGESTION

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the current study was to analyze pragmatic competence of Pakistani English learners (here onwards PELs) in realizing two very important, frequently used and lesser investigated speech acts namely advice and suggestion. Specifically speaking the current study attempted to ascertain the differences in terms of semantic formulas and mitigation devices in the responses of both PELs and native speakers (here onwards NSs) from Britain. In order to meet the objectives of the study quantitative research approach was applied. As far as the samples of the study were concerned, 80 students (60 PELs and 20 native students from England) took part in the study. The samples were selected through non-random purposive sampling. Discourse Completion Task (DCT) was used as an instrument to collect data. The analysis of the data suggested that PELs realized speech acts of advice and suggestion differently as compared to native speakers. It was also noticed that PELs were not as pragmatically competent as that of NSs. PELs were found using different strategies for the above mentioned speech acts. They were using directness in their responses while native speakers were demonstrating indirectness in their responses. PELs were also found using fewer mitigation devices and politeness marker 'please' contrary to NSs.

Key words: Advice, Directness, Indirectness, Pragmatic Competence, Suggestion

INTRODUCTION

English communication has increased manifold due to different factors. In the past with the expansion of British Empire English language spread wherever Britain established its colonial rule (Ali et al., 2020). Economic and political and political augment of Unites States to the status of world power also contributed to the immense diaspora of English language (Ali et al.,2020). Lately, the phenomena of information technology and communication, having English as medium of communication, has enhanced the use of communication in English tremendously (Ali et al., 2022). Another important factor which has increased intercultural and cross cultural communication is the economic interdependence of various nations. El Shazly (2017) while supporting the argument claims that globalization and speedy economic progress have made effective communication in English language inevitable.

Effective communication in English language is a complex process, particularly for those who speak English as a foreign/second language (Ali et al., 2021). According to Thomas (1983) second language speakers despite having extraordinary grammatical and lexical command on English language remain unable to communicate appropriately. What makes communication in English language difficult according to Taguchi (2017) is the form-function-context mapping. Whong (2011) holds that language is a complicated system of form and function. The former relates to internal grammatical structures of the words, phrases, clauses and sentences while the latter concerns functional and contextual aspects of language.

The ability to use functionally and contextually appropriate language is called pragmatic competence. With the passage of time the role of pragmatic competence in appropriate communication was acknowledged and linguists like Canale and Swaine (1980), Bachman and Palmer (1982), Bachman (1990) etc. incorporated it in their models of communicative competence.

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According to Celce-Murcia (2007) pragmatic competence is not at all secondary to grammatical and organization competence. She emphasized that in order to develop L2 ability the learners must improve their pragmatic competence.

As far as analysis and improvement of pragmatic competence is concerned Interlanguage Pragmatics (ILP) researchers have conducted a large number of research studies where they have recommended different ways of analyzing and improving pragmatic competence. As the focus of the present study is analyzing pragmatic competence ILP researchers have used two methods excessively in their investigations. These methods are raters' evaluation of responses of EFL/ESL speakers and researchers' finding approximation between the responses of native and non-native speakers. In raters' evaluation () method raters are normally native speaker while in approximation method the responses are analyzed by non-native speakers, having a strong background in teaching pragmatics. The present study adopted approximation method for analyzing pragmatic competence of PELs in comparison with the responses of native speakers. The analysis aimed at finding similarities and differences between the responses.

A number of empirical ILP research studies claim that EFL/ESL speakers despite having excellent grammatical competence demonstrate pragmatic failure in their responses. According to Beeb et al. (1990) realization of appropriate speech acts, considered as part of pragmatic competence, is a grave problem confronted by EFL/ESL speakers. They remain unable to form appropriate sentences, grammatically as well as pragmatically, because they don't have proper understanding of the underlying pragmatic function of speech acts.

English is taught as a second language in Pakistan so PELs too face difficulties while communicating with people belonging to native speaking countries. According to Anwar et al. (2020) PELs contrary to native speakers were found deficient in using directive speech acts. They were using direct and less polite strategies. The speech acts of advice and suggestion are considered important directives. In Pakistani context there is hardly any study which has operationalized the speech acts of advice and suggestion. So the current study aims at analyzing pragmatic competence of PELs in realizing the speech acts of advice and suggestion. The research questions under study are as follows:

Q1. How do PELs and native English speakers realize speech acts of advice and suggestion?

Q2. How differently PELs and English native use mitigation devices while realizing speech acts of advice and suggestion?

The current investigation deems significant as it helps ESL learners in general and PELs in particular to identify the phenomenon of pragmatic failure and to improve their pragmatic deficiencies in order to become appropriate in their conversation. The study also assists ESL teachers to know the importance of pragmatic competence as well as the use of speech acts like advice and suggestion and align their teaching methodology accordingly. The study may provide insight to educational planners and curriculum designers in Pakistan to incorporate pragmatic teaching side by side grammatical teaching while setting learning outcomes in national curriculum.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Rintell (1979) is considered as the first researcher who conducted a research study on the speech acts of requests and suggestions. Her focus was on the degree of deference while realizing the said speech acts. She investigated how age and sex of the interlocutors, Spanish ESL learners, affected the degree of deference. The study found that the learners used more deferent language while speaking in their native language.

Another research study on the speech act of suggestion was conducted by Banerjee and Carroll (1988) who explored the difference between the responses of 28 Chinese and Malay speakers and English native speakers. DCT was used as an instrument for data collection. The analyzed data indicated similarities and differences between both types of responses. In terms of frequency and level of directness similarities were found while in terms of number and types of politeness strategies difference was noticed.

Alcon (2001) investigated the speech act of suggestion under the framework of status congruence in an ESL setting. The researcher analyzed the suggestions of 15 Spanish students as regards both frequency and form. The study indicated that the responses were not up to the mark. They lacked the use of mitigations and their responses were more direct. So they need pedagogical intervention for improvement.

Matsumra (2001, 2003) worked on the perception of the speech acts of advice and suggestion. The longitudinal study compared two groups of Japanese learners and observed the degree of change in ESL and EFL settings over a period of time. Multiple-choice test was used as an instrument. The test consisted of 12 scenarios with four response choices for each scenario. The test was administered to the participants four times during the whole academic year. The study recommended that ESL learners' comprehension ability to recognize the under-investigated speech acts improved more as compared to EFL learners.

Li's (2010) focus was on analyzing syntactic and pragmatic strategies in realizing speech act of suggestion by a group of Chinese learners in English with both a group of Australian students and another Cantonese group as control group. The analyzed data suggested that Cantonese students in their L2 used almost the same pragmatic strategies. They adopted few syntactic types and their sentences tended to be complex.

Heidari-Shahreza (2013) investigated the pragmatic strategies used by 30 Americans and 30 Iranian students in realizing the speech act of suggestion in English and Persian languages respectively. DCT and role-plays were used as research instruments. The data collected through DCT and role-plays were analyzed at macro and micro levels. Macro level data included perspective, level of directness and politeness while micro level data entailed speaker or hearer (S/H) dominance, directness and with/without redressive action. The data showed that the participants made suggestion from perspective of both the speaker and the hearer(S+H) using almost direct language and redressive action. Significant differences were observed between the three groups of participants.

Pishghadam and Sharafadini (2011) conducted a contrastive analysis of the responses of suggestion speech act. The responses in both English and Persian languages were gleaned from Iranian university students through a DCT consisted of 6 hypothetical situations. The findings of the study were compared with that of the previous research conducted by Jiang (2006) for ascertaining similarities and differences. The results showed variations in using suggestion types. Moreover, gender proved to be a significant factor in the production of suggestion strategies.

The reviewed literature of ILP research studies indicated that Rintell (1979) investigated the degree of deference by operationalizing the speech acts of request and suggestion while Banerjee and Carroll (1988) explored similarities and differences between responses, Alcon (2005) investigated frequency and form between the responses of native and non-native speakers, Li (2010) focused on syntactic and pragmatic strategies, Heidari-Shahreza (2013) analyzed the data at macro and micro level. Macro level data included perspective, level of directness and politeness while micro level data entailed speaker or hearer (S/H) dominance, directness and

with/without redressive action, Pishghadam and Sharafadini (2011) conducted a contrastive analysis of the responses. All the above mentioned research studies except Rintell's (1979) operationalized the speech act of suggestion only. There is only one longitudinal investigation i.e. Matsumra (2001, 2003) which operationalized the speech acts of advice and suggestion and attempted to find the degree of change in the responses of ESL learners. There is hardly any investigation that operationalized speech acts of advice and suggestion analyzing the strategic formulae and mitigation devices used by NS and PELs. The current research study aimed at analyzing pragmatic competence of Pakistani English learners in terms of using strategies and mitigation devices in producing speech acts of advice and suggestion.

METHODOLOGY

The present research utilized quantitative research paradigm. Quantitative Analysis is the most important in descriptive research Ali, Yasmin and Anwar (2020). The study involved both PELs and NSs as participants. Quantitative data analysis procedures adopted in the current study are explained as under:

A number of 80 students participated in the current study. The details of the subjects are as follows:

- a. Out of the 80 participants 60 students were PELs who were studying in BS English (4 years program) in three public-sector colleges of Lahore, Pakistan. The names of the colleges were Govt. College of Science, Wahdat Road Lahore, Govt. MAO College Lahore and Govt. Islamia College Civil Lines Lahore. The participants were aged between 19 to 23. They had Punjabi as their L1 and were learning English as an L2.
- b. The rest of the 20 participants were native students from The Sheffield College, South Yorkshire, England. They were aged between 18 to 22. They were studying English as major subject.

The participants of the current study were selected through non-random purposive sampling technique. Such samples are expected to carry certain features which are related to the purpose of the investigation (Dorney, 2007).

DCT as an instrument was designed in the light of the modalities as mentioned in Billmyer and Varghese (2000). It was adapted, modified and developed from Martine-Flor, A. (2003) and Heidari-Shahreza (2013) by the researchers. The DCT was used to collect data. The researchers themselves administered DCTs to the subjects. The participants were given related instructions prior to the administration of the instruments. Instructions were given so that they might fill in the DCT carefully and patiently. Instructions were explained verbally during instruction session which lasted for 10 minutes. This was done so that relevant responses might be elicited. The DCT consisted of 12 hypothetical situations coded as S1 to S12. S1 to S6 belonged to the speech act of suggestion while S7 to S12 were aimed at seeking responses of advice. As far as rate of imposition was concerned S1 to S9 were for higher (H) level while S10 and S12 were for equal (E) level situations. In order to make the instrument reliable and valid it was administered to 10 Pakistani EFL learners and 3 native speakers prior to the conduct of the main study as part of pilot study. S1, S5 and S12 were improved in the light of the responses gleaned from the participants of the pilot study.

In order to analyze the coded responses in realizing the speech act of suggestion Matinez-Flor's (2005) framework was utilized. The framework was used because it is a detailed one covering strategies at direct, indirect conventional and indirect non-conventional levels. It was

also used because it was employed by various researchers like Farnia, Sohrabie, and Sattar (2014), Jayantri (2014) etc. The framework is as under:

Table 1. Coding framework of suggestion.

Serial Number	Type	Strategy	Example
1	Direct	Performative verb Noun of suggestion Imperative Negative imperative	I suggest you... My suggestion is to... Follow the instructions... Don't buy this atlas...
2	Indirect conventionalized	Interrogative forms Let's Possibility/probability Conditional	Why don't you wear a mask? Let's have a cup of tea. You can/could/may/might/should... If I were you, I would...
3	Indirect non-conventionalized	Impersonal Hints	One thing that you could do would be... There are a number of options... It would be better if... I've heard that...

Developed by the authors based on: Martinez-Flor (2005)

The framework was used for the purpose of coding the fine-tuned responses of the participants. The framework has three types of semantic formulae i.e. direct, indirect conventional and indirect non-conventional. The direct linguistic expression includes performative verb, noun of suggestion, imperative and negative imperative strategies. The indirect conventionalized linguistic expression entails interrogative forms, let's, possibility/probability and conditional strategies. The indirect non-conventionalized linguistic expression had impersonal and hints strategies.

For the purpose of analyzing the responses realizing the speech act of advice Martinez-Flor's (2003, p. 144) framework was used because it covered every possible strategy. Moreover it was extensively used by the researchers such as Darweesh and Al-Aadili (2017), etc. The coding scheme is as follows:

Table 2. Coding framework of advice.

Serial Number	Type	Strategy	Example
1	Direct	Imperative Negative imperative Declarative Performative	Be careful, Wear a mask Don't buy a book from here. You should/ought to/must... I advise you to.../ My advice to you is...
2	Indirect conventionalized	Conditional Probability Interrogative Declarative	If I were you... It might be better for you... Why don't you...? You can/could/might...
3	Indirect non-conventionalized	Hints	You want to get a cheaper book, don't you?

Developed by the authors based on: Martinez-Flor (2003).

The framework was employed to code the fine-tuned responses of the participants. The framework has three types of pragmatic strategies namely direct, indirect conventionalized and indirect non-conventionalized. The direct linguistic expression has imperative, negative imperative, declarative and performative strategies. The indirect conventionalized linguistic expression consists of probability, conditional interrogative, declarative, strategies. The indirect non-conventional linguistic expression includes hints strategies.

As the speech acts of advice and suggestion are face threatening acts, NSs are presumed to use modification strategies to make advice or suggestion milder and more acceptable. The data gleaned through DCT was also coded and analyzed through modification strategies framework adapted from Flor and Juan (2010:28). The table is as follows:

Table 3. Framework of modification strategies.

Name, Function, and example of external modification strategies	Type, name, function, and example of external modification strategies
Grounder: Gives reason, explanations, and justifications e.g. I really don't understand this topic here.	<u>Syntactic downgraders</u> Conditional Clause: Statement distancing the speaker from advice or suggestion e.g. I would like to ask, if you could do this?
Preparator: Short statement meant to prepare the hearer for advice or suggestion e.g. Should I advise you? May I suggest you something?	Interrogative: Statement appealing to the consent of the hearer to downtone FTA e.g. Can't you be careful in this covid situation?
Imposition minimizer: Statement decreasing the imposition e.g. I am not asking you put on mask even in your bedroom.	Negation: statement indicating speaker's lowered expectation of advice or suggestion being given to downtone FTA e.g. You couldn't repeat what you have explained please?
Disarmer: Statement removing any possible object the hearer might raise e.g. I am not trying to be clever, but I just need you to...	<u>Lexical/Phrasal downgraders</u> Appealer: Statement appealing the hearer's benevolent understanding e.g. You know yourself, how much dangerous smoking is in this covid situation.
	Hedge: statement showing tentativeness, possibility and lack of precision e.g. Is it possible that you teach while standing in front of the class?
	Politeness marker: Statement bidding for hearer's cooperation e.g. Could you wear mask, please?
	Subjectivizer: Statement showing speaker's subjective opinion e.g. I believe you should submit assignments within due date.
	Understater: Statement having adverbial modifiers to underrepresent the state of affairs e.g. That might be better for us than the expensive Atlas to buy from another shop.

Developed by the authors based on: Flor and Juan (2010:28)

Table 3 shows the coding framework of modification strategies employed to code the fine-tuned responses of the participants. The framework has two types of strategies i.e. external modification strategies and internal modification strategies. The external modification strategies are grounder, preparator, imposition minimizer and disarmers while internal modification strategies has two major types i.e. syntactic downgraders and lexical/phrasal downgraders. Syntactic downgraders include conditional clause, interrogative and negation while lexical/phrasal downgraders entail appealer, hedge, politeness marker, subjectivizer and understater.

Once the DCT is pilot tested with a target like participants the instrument was administered to the real samples of the study. All the target participants were informed about the aims and objectives of the study. Then the researchers themselves visited the colleges where the students were studying. The researchers, after an instructional session, distributed the DCTs. The participants were made to imagine themselves in the given situation and then respond. This was done to glean more authentic data. Once all the situations were responded to the DCTs were collected back. All the responses were codified and analyzed with the help of coding frameworks and results were drawn to answer the research questions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The first objective of the research study was to ascertain how differently PELs and NSs realize speech acts of advice and suggestion. Figure 1 analyzes the realization of advice speech acts by both PELs and NSs.

Figure 1. Realization of speech acts of advice by PELs and NSs.

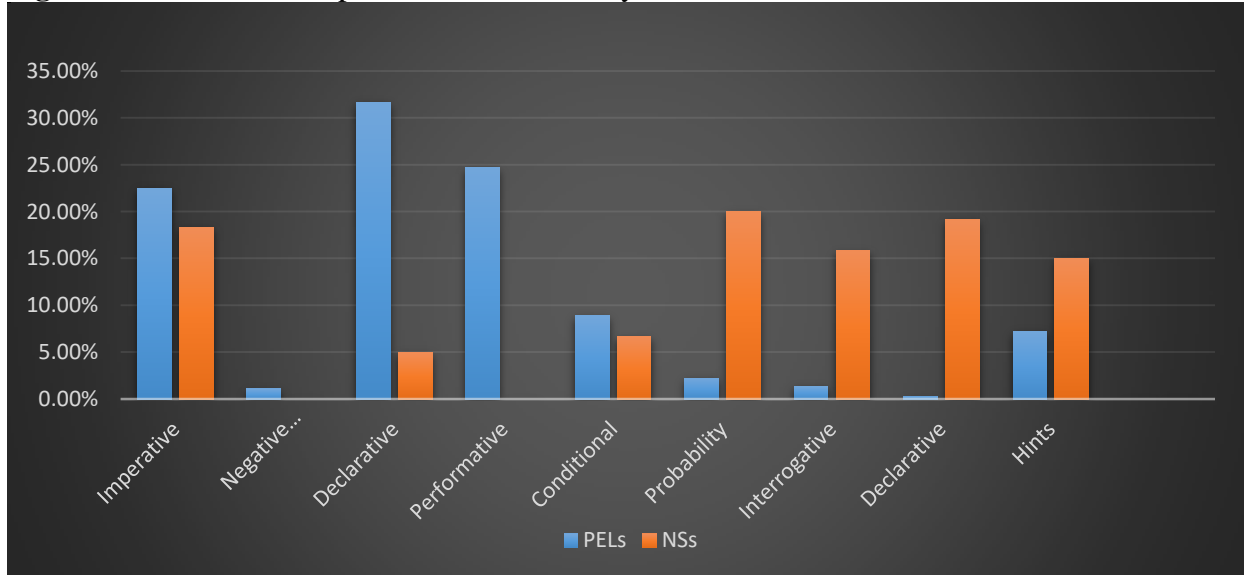


Figure 1 categorically indicates that PELs employed direct type of strategies more than the NSs. They used imperative, negative imperative, declarative, and performative strategies more as compared to NSs. Imperative (22.5%), declarative (31.66%) and performative (24.72%) expressions were used markedly by PELs. As far as imperative type is concerned NSs too employed it in their responses i.e. 18.33% but they used the word “please” with majority of the pieces of advice they gave to their hearers. PELs, however, were found employing this type without using any kind of politeness marker. NSs while responding to DCT employed

declarative (5.00%) strategy and did not use negative imperative (0.00%) and performative (0.00%) types of strategies.

On the other hand, NSs used indirect and non-conventional indirect strategies more than that of the PELs. The most significant results, in this regard, are that NSs significantly employed the strategies like probability (20.00%), indirect declaration (19.16%), interrogative (15.83%), hints (15.00%), and lets' (6.66%) while PELs' percentages of using these strategies remained lesser significant e.g. they used conditional (8.88%), hints (7.22%), probability (2.22%), interrogative (1.38%) and declarative (0.27%).

Figure 2. Realization of suggestion speech acts by both PELs and NSs.

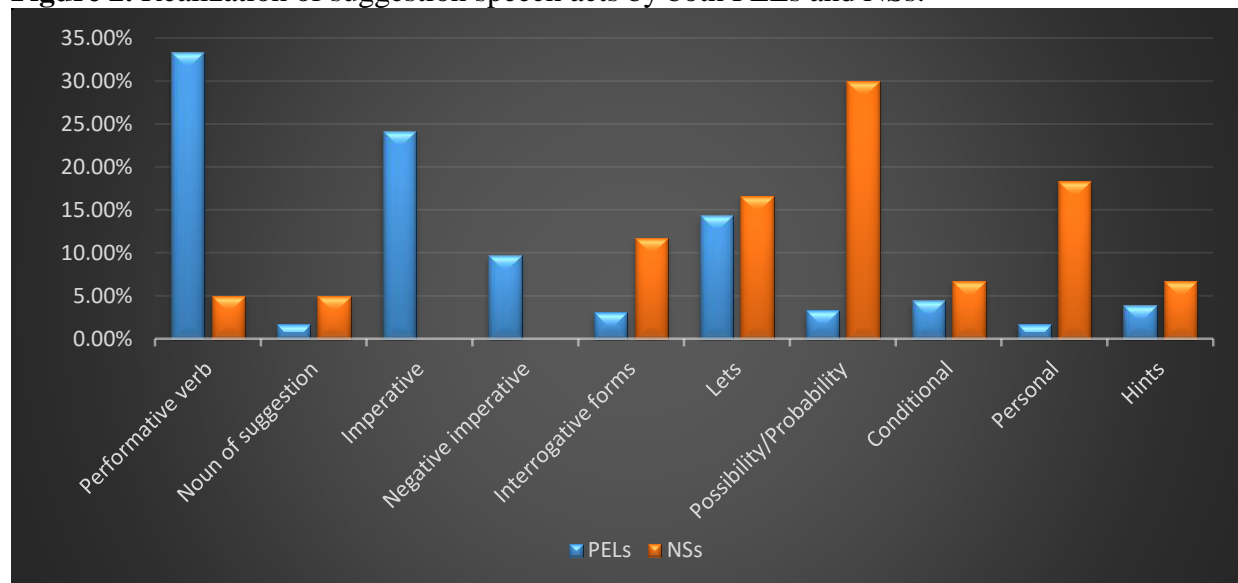


Figure 2 clearly shows that PELs used direct strategies more than that of NSs. As far as direct strategies are concerned PELs employed performative verb (33.33%), imperative (24.16%), and negative imperative (9.72%) while NSs used these strategies in a lesser frequency e.g. performative verb (5%), noun of suggestion (5%), and imperative (0.00%), and negative imperative (0.00%).

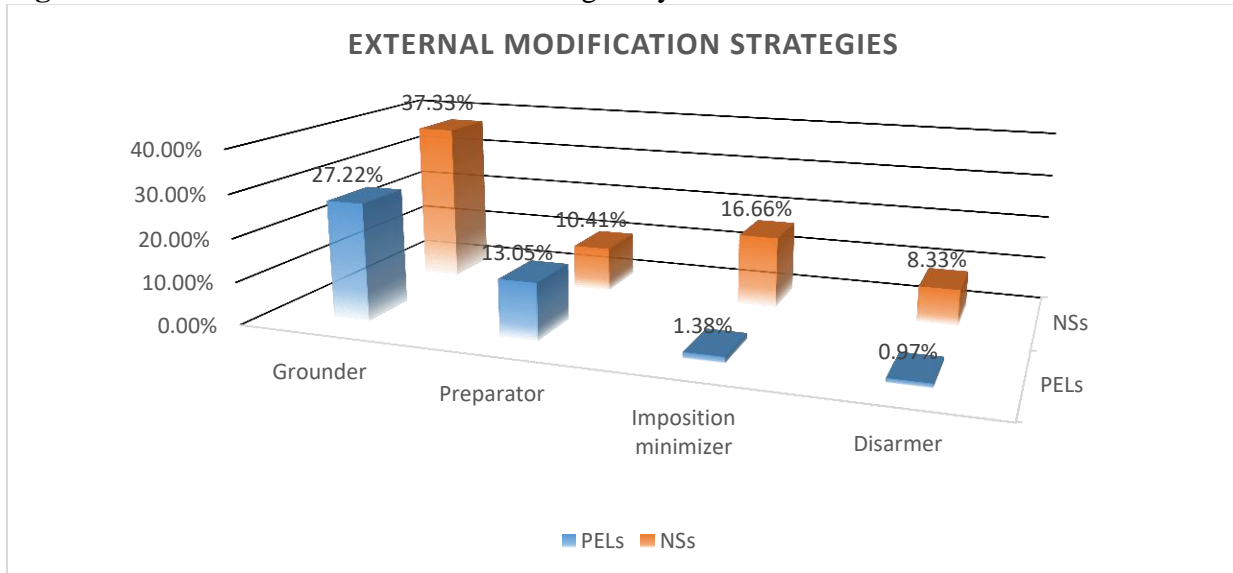
Alternatively, NSs, while responding to the DCT eliciting suggestion speech act, employed indirect and non-conventional indirect strategies more than that of the non-native Pakistani speakers. The most significant results, in this respect, are that NSs pointedly made use of strategies like probability/possibility (30.00%), impersonal (18.33%), lets' (16.66%), interrogative (11.66%), and hints (6.66%). Conversely, PELs' frequency of employing these strategies was noticed lesser e.g. they used probability/possibility (3.33%), impersonal (1.66%), lets' (14.36%), interrogative (3.05%), and hints (3.88%).

The insight drawn through the data-set of this part of the study suggested that PELs, while responding to hypothetical situations in the DCT, advised and suggested with lesser degree of directness. They showed lesser deference in their responses even while advising and suggesting to the one who is at higher level either in age or status. However, NSs, in their responses, manifested indirectness and deference. The features of PELs' responses indicate that their pragmatic competence is not up to the mark. The pragmatic insufficiency may be attributed to L1 influence, lack of sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic knowledge of English, and lack of contextual and cultural knowledge which drives English language. The results of the current

study agree to the results drawn by Rintell (1979), Banerjee and Carroll (1988), Alcon (2005), Heidari-Shahreza (2013), and Pishghadam and Sharafadini (2011). The study, however, does not agree with Li's (2010) results who suggested that during research process Cantonese students in their L2 used almost the same pragmatic strategies as used by Australian learners.

The second objective of the current investigation was to determine how many mitigation devices PELs and NSs use while realizing speech acts of advice and suggestion. Figure 3 analyzes external mitigation devices.

Figure 3. Use of external modification strategies by PELs and NSs.



As can be seen in figure 3 NSs, while producing speech acts of advice and suggestion, used more external modification strategies than that of PELs. The most significant results of the figure are the use of 'grounder' strategy where NSs' frequency is 37.33% while PELs' frequency is 27.22%. The use of strategy 'preparatory' showed lesser difference. NSs' percentage of using this strategy is 10.41% while PELs' percentage amounts to 13.05%, slightly higher than NSs. A marked difference can be noticed between the usages of 'imposition minimizer' strategy where NS (16.66%) surpass PELs (1.38%). So far as 'disarmer' strategy is concerned NSs (8.33%) again outnumber PELs (0.97%).

Figure 4. Use of internal modification strategies by PELs and NSs.

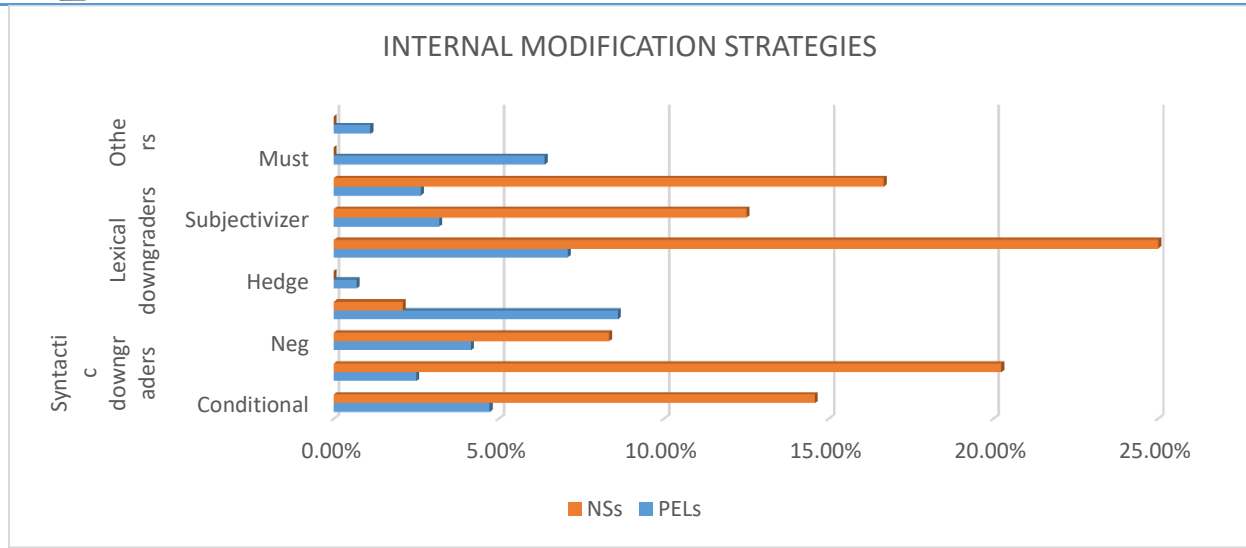


Figure 4 clearly indicate that NSs, in response to DCT realizing speech acts of advice and suggestion, used markedly more internal modification strategies than that of the PELs. The most significant results represented in the figure 4 relate to strategies like ‘politeness marker’, ‘interrogation’, ‘conditional’, ‘understater’, and ‘subjectivizer’. NSs’ use of politeness markers is 25% while PELs’ use is only 7.08%. The difference can also be seen in the use of statements showing interrogation (NSs: 20.24% & and PELs: 2.5%), conditional clauses (NSs: 14.58% & and PELs: 4.725%), understatement (NSs: 16.66% & and PELs: 2.63%), and subjectivizer (NSs: 12.5% & and PELs: 3.19%). The differences between the rests of the mitigation devices are not noticeable. However, PELs, contrary to NSs, used other strategies like ‘must’ (6.38%) and ‘have to’ (1.11%).

The understanding gained through the second part of the study holds that PELs, while advising and suggesting used lesser modification strategies than that of the NSs. It may be due the lack of pragmatic awareness regarding rate of imposition. While responding to others who have varied age or status PELs did not remain polite, formal and deferent. On the other hand NSs’ responses indicated that they were aware of rate of imposition and they were showing politeness, formality and deference. The lack of pragmatic knowledge and awareness in Pakistani L2 learners may be associated with defective focus of English language teaching and learning (grammatical competence of learners is focused more than pragmatic competence), L1 influence, and unawareness of pragmatic rules. The results of the study are consistent with the results of the previous research studies like Rintell (1979), Banerjee and Carroll (1988), Alcon (2005), Heidari-Shahreza (2013), and Pishghadam and Sharafadini (2011).

CONCLUSION

The purpose of the present study was to analyze the pragmatic competence of PELs in terms of realizing two lesser investigated speech i.e. advice and suggestion. Pragmatic competence of PELs was determined through ascertaining the differences between the responses of both native and non-native speakers. The differences were recorded with regard to semantic formulas and mitigation devices. As far as semantic formulas are concerned although there were some similarities yet significant differences were noticed between the responses of PELs and NSs. PELs were found more direct. Their responses showed lesser formality and politeness. The

deference to the scale of imposition was also lacking in their responses. As regards mitigation devices PELs used lesser mitigation devices as compared to NSs.

The study had to be delimited owing to the restriction of time and money. First, the data of the study were gleaned only from 60 students studying in three public-sector colleges (offering BS 4 Years Program) of Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan. If the sample size has been large and representative of both public and private sector colleges, the results would have been more insightful. Secondly, the study was based on the realization of two speech acts namely advice and suggestion. If more speech acts belonging to directive category like request, order, forbidding etc. have been made the part of the investigation, the outcomes would have been more illustrative.

Based on the findings of the current study, it may be suggested that the future researchers conduct a comprehensive study, involving large representative sample of native as well as non-native speakers. In future researchers may initialize more than two speech acts in order to gain overall discernment regarding existing pragmatic competence of PELs. The upcoming research scholars, with the same research objectives and research design, may conduct study aiming to find the pragmatic difference between male and female Pakistani L2 learners and students belonging to different proficiency levels e.g. intermediate and advanced.

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