

## **Pragmalinguistic and Sociopragmatic Recognition of High and Low Level EFL Learners**

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### **Abstract**

This study investigated the effects of English as foreign language (EFL) proficiency on what the authors of this study called pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic recognition of EFL learners. To elicit the data, the study used two types of pragmatic measures: a pragmalinguistic recognition (PLR) test and a sociopragmatic recognition (SPR) test. Both tests were developed by the researchers of this study based on the distinction made by Leech (1983) between pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics. Subsequent to the development of the tests, 80 Iranian EFL students were divided into two groups based on their EFL proficiency level: the low level group (n = 41) and the high level group (n = 39). Each participant group was tested on the two pragmatic measures. Pearson correlation results indicated construct differences between PLR and SPR of speech acts. Moreover, independent samples t-test results revealed that there were developmental differences in pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic recognition of speech acts by EFL learners. The findings offer insights to EFL teachers and testers regarding pragmatic instruction and assessment.

**Keywords:** EFL, language proficiency, pragmalinguistic, recognition, sociopragmatic

### **Introduction**

Due to the significance of pragmatics in second language acquisition (SLA), the field of interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) started to explore learners' difficulties in acquiring second language (L2) pragmatics. ILP deals with "the study of nonnative speakers' use and acquisition of linguistic action patterns in a second language" (Kasper & Blum-Kulka, 1993, p. 3). In pragmatics literature, a distinction is made between *pragmalinguistics* and *sociopragmatics*. Pragmalinguistics refers to "the study of the more linguistic end of pragmatics – where we consider the particular resources which a given language provides for conveying particular illocutions" (Leech, 1983, p.11). However, sociopragmatics is concerned with "sociological interface of pragmatics" (Leech, 1983, p. 10). Elaborating on the distinction between pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics, Rose (2013) states that "pragmalinguistics, then, is the study of form-function mappings, while sociopragmatics involves the application of social context information to making the most appropriate choice for a specific context/occasion given the options available" (p.499).

A point of supreme importance in ILP is the assessment of L2 learners' pragmatic knowledge. Hudson, Detmer, and Brown (cited in Enochs & Yoshitake-Strain, 1999) introduce six measures of pragmatics assessment: self-assessment test, listening laboratory production test,

open discourse completion test, multiple choice discourse completion test, role-play self-assessment test, and role-play test are. Mainly drawing on the distinction made between pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics (Leech, 1983), the present study focuses on two pragmatic measures – namely a PLR test and a SPR test. The PLR test is a new type of pragmatic test developed by the authors of this study and the SPR test may be considered as a renaming of multiple choice discourse completion test (MCDCT).

Moreover, individual differences such as gender, age, motivation, social distance, identity, and L2 proficiency play a significant role in L2 acquisition (Robinson, 2002), and pragmatic development is no exception. The effect of individual differences on the development of L2 pragmatic competence has been the concern of numerous researchers (e.g., Kuriscak, 2010; Taguchi, 2013; Takahashi, 2005). Among these individual differences, general language proficiency is an outstanding factor. This study also examines the effect of EFL proficiency on learners' performance on the PLR and SPR measures developed by the authors.

### **Literature review**

There have been mixed findings regarding the effect of EFL proficiency on learners' pragmatic performance. A review of some major studies is presented in this section. Bardovi-Harlig and Do˝rnyei (1998) investigated the recognition and rating of grammatical errors and pragmatic infelicities by ESL and EFL learners and teachers of English. The participants watched twenty video scenes in English, which contained a grammatical error, a pragmatic error, or no error in the last utterance. The participants were asked to indicate whether the last utterance was appropriate/correct and, if it was not, how bad the error was on a six-part scale from "not bad at all" to "very bad". Their findings indicated that three factors play significant roles in the learner's linguistic awareness: the learning environment, the proficiency level, and learner versus teacher status. Concerning the effect of L2 proficiency on pragmatic performance, they found that high-proficiency learners scored significantly higher than low-proficiency learners in pragmatic rating. As a replication of Bardovi-Harlig and Do˝rnyei's study, Niezgodna and Roever (2001) focused on EFL learners in the Czech Republic and ESL learners in Honolulu. They employed the same instruments and procedures as Bardovi-Harlig & Do˝rnyei (1998). Regarding the effect of L2 proficiency on pragmatic performance, they found that, in both ESL and EFL setting, low level learners recognized significantly more pragmatic errors than grammatical errors. However, high level learners showed the opposite tendency. Their results also revealed that for recognition of pragmatic errors and the rating of their severity no significant difference was found between high level and low level groups.

Garcia (2004) compared the performances of advanced and beginning English language learners on a listening comprehension task with a focus on linguistic and pragmatic processing. Garcia found significant differences between high and low level learners. The high level group performed significantly better than the low level group on linguistic comprehension, pragmatic comprehension, comprehension of speech acts, and comprehension of conversational implicatures. Garcia also found low correlations between linguistic comprehension and pragmatic comprehension, and between comprehension of conversational implicatures and speech acts.

Roever (2006) developed and validated a web-based test that assessed ESL/EFL learners' pragmalinguistic knowledge, including knowledge of implicatures, routines, and speech acts (apology, request, and refusal). Roever employed multiple-choice items to test implicatures and routines, while he used open discourse completion test (DCT) items to test the learners' speech act knowledge. Comparison was made between test takers with and without exposure to an English-speaking environment. The results revealed that the learners' knowledge of speech acts

increased with proficiency, as did their knowledge of implicature. Their knowledge of routines, however, was found to be strongly dependent on L2 exposure.

Takahashi (2005) examined the relationship of motivation and L2 proficiency with Japanese EFL learners' awareness of L2 pragmalinguistic features. Eighty Japanese college students first completed a motivation questionnaire and a proficiency test. Then they received a noticing-the-gap activity as treatment. The learners' awareness of the pragmalinguistic features was assessed through a retrospective awareness questionnaire after the treatment. The learners' pragmatic awareness was found to be correlated with motivation subscales, but not with EFL proficiency.

Liu (2006) developed and validated three test papers to test the interlanguage pragmatic knowledge of Chinese EFL learners. A comparison was made between two groups, which differed significantly in terms of their English proficiency. No significant difference was found between the two groups in terms of a written DCT and a Discourse self-assessment test (DSAT). This indicated that the learners' interlanguage pragmatic knowledge did not increase substantially with their EFL proficiency. However, the two proficiency groups were significantly different at the .05 level on the multiple-choice DCT. Liu argued that this difference might be due to the effect of the test method.

Geyer (2007) investigated the relationship between the grammatical and pragmatic competence of Japanese L2 learners. Geyer focused on the learners' use of self-qualification in a corpus of oral proficiency interviews. "Self-qualification segments are parenthetical statements within a discursive unit, which can hold pragmatic functions such as mitigating illocutionary force, asserting vulnerability, admitting the face-threatening nature of the speaker's own utterance" (Geyer, 2007, p. 339). Geyer found a close relationship between pragmatic, grammatical, and discourse competence in learner language.

Taguchi (2007) explored the effect of proficiency on the processing dimension of pragmatic competence. Fifty-nine Japanese students of English at two different proficiency levels produced the speech acts of requests and refusals in a role play task. The learners' productions were analyzed in terms of overall appropriateness, planning time, and speech rate. L2 proficiency was found to have a significant effect on appropriateness and speech rate, but not on planning time.

Bardovi-Harlig (2009) used an aural recognition task and an oral production task to explore the source of low use of conventional expressions by L2 learners'. In the aural recognition task, the participants were provided with 60 expressions and were required to indicate how often they hear a given expression (I often/sometimes/never hear this). Lower use of conventional expressions by the learners was attributed to: lack of familiarity with some expressions; overuse of familiar expressions; sociopragmatic knowledge; and level of L2 development. Some recognition and production scores were found to increase across four levels of EFL proficiency.

Xu et al. (2009) examined the effect of length of residence in the target language community and L2 proficiency on L2 pragmatic competence. One hundred and twenty six international students in the US with two distinct English proficiency levels completed a questionnaire consisting of 20 scenarios. The results indicated that both length of residence and overall L2 proficiency had significant effects on L2 pragmatics.

Taguchi (2011) conducted a cross-sectional study to investigate the effect of general proficiency and study abroad experience on the production of speech acts by learners of L2 English. Sixty four Japanese students of English were divided into three groups. Group 1 had lower proficiency and no study-abroad experience. Group 2 and Group 3 had higher proficiency

than Group 1 but differed in their study-abroad experience. The learners completed an oral DCT measuring their ability to produce the speech acts of requests and opinions. The learners' responses were examined for appropriateness, grammaticality, speech rate, and planning time. The results revealed that proficiency had a significant effect on appropriateness, grammaticality and speech rate, but study-abroad experience had no effect on any of the dependent variables.

Finally, Taguchi (2013) examined the effects of three individual difference factors (proficiency, orientation towards English study, and lexical access skill) on changing pragmatic abilities among 48 Japanese EFL students. The participants completed an oral DCT that assessed their ability to produce the speech acts of requests and opinions. The DCT was given three times during one academic year. Speech acts were evaluated for appropriateness and fluency. Regarding proficiency, a TOEFL test was given three times at about the same timing with the oral DCT. Different versions of the test were used to avoid practice effect. The results indicated that pragmatic abilities did not change over time with changes in EFL proficiency.

### **The Present Study**

The majority of the above-mentioned ILP studies have employed the measures of L2 pragmatics introduced by Hudson et al (cited in Enochs & Yoshitake-Strain, 1999) to examine the effect of L2 proficiency on learners' pragmatic performance. However, in the present study, the authors developed a new form of PLR test and a SPR test based on the distinctions made between pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics (Leech, 1983, p. 10) and pragmalinguistic failure and sociopragmatic failure (Thomas, 1983). As noted earlier, pragmalinguistics refers to "the study of the more linguistic end of pragmatics" (Leech, 1983, p.11), whereas sociopragmatics is considered as "sociological interface of pragmatics" (Leech, 1983, p. 10).

Thomas (1983), based on Leech's (1983) distinction between pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics, discusses two kinds of "pragmatic failure": pragmalinguistic failure and sociopragmatic failure. She maintains that while pragmalinguistic failure is basically a linguistic problem caused by differences in the linguistic encoding of pragmatic force, sociopragmatic failure stems from cross-culturally different perceptions of what constitutes appropriate linguistic behavior. She argues that sociopragmatic failure is concerned with miscalculation of size of imposition, cost/benefit, social distance, and relative power, which may be caused by cross-cultural differences in understanding certain social values.

Drawing on Thomas's (1983) definition of pragmalinguistic failure, the researchers of this study defined PLR as the learners' ability to map onto a given utterance the pragmatic force (i.e., function) that is assigned to it by native speakers of the target language. It needs to be noted that this definition is different from *recognition* as operationally defined by Bardovi-Harlig (2008) in her study of recognition and production of pragmatic formulas. Bardovi-Harlig focused on self-report recognition. In her study, the learners were provided with a list of conventional expressions (i.e., pragmatic routines), and they were required to circle all the expressions that they knew or recognized. Moreover, Bardovi-Harlig (2009), making a change in Bardovi-Harlig's (2008) definition of recognition, operationally defined recognition as "the determination of how often participants heard a string of words" (p. 762), and she argued that "this is consistent with Schmidt's (1995, p. 29) formulation of noticing, a low level of awareness" (p. 762). However, in the present study, the above definition of PLR is consistent with Schmidt's (1995) definition of a higher level of awareness (namely, understanding), which "implies recognition of a general principle, rule, or pattern" (Schmidt, 1995, p. 29). PLR, as defined in this study, is concerned with the patterns underlying form-function mappings. The PLR measure, as used in this study, is based on the fact that certain pragmatic routines and strategies are used for

performing certain pragmatic functions. The PLR test developed in the present study is supposed to tap the learners' knowledge of the pragmatic patterns underlying form-function mappings.

Moreover, the term SPR, in this study, refers to the learners' ability to make native-like judgments about the appropriateness of certain utterances in given situations as defined in scenarios. This is the same concept that, for instance, Rose and Ng (2001) refer to as metapragmatic assessment. The SPR test may also be considered as a renaming of MCDCT (Hudson et al, cited in Enochs & Yoshitake-Strain,1999). The authors of the present study preferred to use the term SPR to distinguish it from what they called PLR.

This study investigates two main points. The first point to explore is the relationship EFL pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic recognition of speech acts. The purpose is to empirically determine if there is any construct difference between them. The second point is to determine if there are developmental differences in pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic recognition of speech acts by EFL learners. To this end, the following research questions were formulated:

RQ1. To what degree do EFL learners' scores on the pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic recognition tests of speech acts correlate?

RQ2. Do the high level and low level groups perform differently from each other on the pragmalinguistic recognition of speech acts?

RQ3. Do the high level and low level groups perform differently from each other on the sociopragmatic recognition of speech acts?

## Methodology

### Participants

The participants taking part in the pilot study included 33 native speakers of British English (20 males and 13 females) with an average age of 30.2, and 33 EFL learners (15 males and 18 females) with an average age of 27.6. The participants in the main part of the study were 80 Iranian EFL students (48 males and 32 females), with an average age of 26.3. All the participants were selected through convenience sampling procedure, i.e., using available intact classes (Best & Kahn, 2006). The latter were divided into two groups: low level and high level. The participants' scores on Oxford Placement Test (OPT; Allen, 2004) were used as the criterion for assigning them into the groups, i.e. those receiving scores below 120 (below the lower intermediate level of the OPT) were categorized as low-proficiency students, and those obtaining a score of 120 or above as high-proficiency students. The results of an independent samples t-test confirmed that the two groups were statistically different in terms of EFL proficiency level.

### Instrumentation

Three instruments were employed in the present study: the OPT, a pragmalinguistic recognition (PLR) test and a sociopragmatic recognition (SPR) test.

**Oxford Placement Test:** The researchers administered the OPT to the EFL learners to measure their EFL proficiency level. This test consists of listening and grammar parts with 100 items in each part. As Allan (2004) maintains, the OPT has been calibrated against the proficiency levels in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEF), the Cambridge ESOL Examinations (KET, PET, FCE, CAE, and CPE), and other major international examinations such as TOEFL, and IELTS. The OPT calibrations have been based on direct and indirect data from multilingual populations of test takers and expert judgments.

**Pragmalinguistic recognition test:** The PLR test was to measure the learners' ability to map onto a given utterance the pragmatic force (i.e., function) that is assigned to it by native speakers of the target language. This multiple-choice test presented the test-takers with 50 items consisting of certain pragmatic strategies and pragmatic routines. The test takers were asked to match the items with the purposes (i.e., functions) which they are used for. The purposes (i.e., functions) included:

- (1) To thank somebody for a favor that he or she has done to you (= thanking)
- (2) To apologize for an offence that you have caused (= apologizing)
- (3) To refuse somebody's request, invitation, offer or suggestion (= refusing)

Moreover, the participants were asked to mark "*non-English*" if they realized that an item was not used in English. Regarding non-English items, Persian pragmatic strategies and routines which are not acceptable in the English language were incorporated in the PLR test (e.g., Thanks a lot. You bothered. = *Kheili mamnoon. Zahmat keshidin.*). The participants were informed of the fact that all the items were grammatically accurate. Theoretically, use of non-English items in the PLR test was based on the concept of pragmalinguistic failure as presented by Thomas (1983): Pragmalinguistic failure is said to occur:

... when the pragmatic force mapped by S onto a given utterance is systematically different from the force most frequently assigned to it by native speakers of the target language, or when speech act strategies are inappropriately transferred from L1 to L2. (Thomas, 1983, p.99)

The researchers administered the constructed PLR test (see Appendix A for sample items) to 18 native speakers of British English to identify the key for each item based on frequencies. The native speakers were asked to choose one of the four choices for each item: thanking, apologizing, refusing, or none-English. They were also asked to write their comments about the items, if they had any, in the special space provided.

One respondent had stated that some of the items were formal, and were not used in everyday conversations. With respect to this comment, it should be noted that the PLR test was designed to include items with different degrees of formality. Moreover, two of the respondents had rightly maintained that the functions of some of the items were vague and they depended on the context in which the items were used. Regarding this comment, it should be noted the one purpose of administering the PLR test to native speakers was to identify and eliminate such items from data analysis.

In order to identify and discard such items and to determine the key for the remaining items, the researcher analyzed the data obtained from the 18 native speakers. The most frequently selected choice by the native speakers served as the key for each item. Overall inspection of the responses revealed that some of the items failed to produce options agreed upon by all the native speaker respondents. Therefore, the researchers applied Chi-square test to determine the key to those items based on choice distribution (i.e., frequencies with which each alternative was chosen). The chi square results revealed that, in three of the items, there was no alternative with a significantly higher frequency. Therefore, those three items were discarded from statistical analysis. This reduced the number of items from 50 items to 47 items. The items included two none-English items, and 45 English items. The English items consisted of 14 thanking items, 15 apology items, and 16 refusing items.

The second purpose for administering the PLR test to the native speakers was to examine its construct validity. To this end, the data related to the remaining 47 items were taken in to consideration. The differential groups strategy was used to investigate the construct validity of this PLR test. The differential groups strategies "compare the performance of two groups on a test, that demonstrate how the test scores differentiate between groups: one group has the

knowledge or skills that are assessed on the test (**masters**) and another group lacks them (**non-masters**)” (Brown, 2005, p.287).

Since the construct this test was supposed to tap was the test takers’ pragmalinguistic recognition, the test scores were expected to differentiate between the native speakers and EFL learners. The PLR test was also administered to 18 EFL learners (a pilot group). However, the directions, and scenarios were written in Persian, and the learners were not asked to make comments about the items. Then the EFL learners’ responses were scored based on the *keys* which were determined based on the frequencies of the responses provided by the native speakers.

To examine the construct validity of this test, the researcher compared the mean score of the eighteen native speakers (i.e., masters) with the mean score of the eighteen EFL learners (i.e., non-masters). The results of independent sample t-test revealed that the native speaker group ( $M = 42.56$ ,  $SD = 2.33$ ) significantly outperformed the EFL learner group ( $M = 29.17$ ,  $SD = 6.63$ ;  $t(34) = 8.09$ ,  $p < .001$ , two-tailed). This differential performance of the groups can be interpreted as evidence of the construct validity of this pragmalinguistic recognition test.

Another point of concern was the content validity of the PLRT. Content validity can be determined in terms of the "representativeness and comprehensiveness" of the test based on specifications (Hatch & Lazaraton, 1991, p. 540). As mentioned above, based on the native speakers’ responses, three of the items were discarded. Therefore, the test was left with 47 items including 2 none-English items, and 45 English items. The 45 English items consisted of 14 thanking items, 15 apology items, and 16 refusing items. This reveals that each function has almost an equal number of items in the test, indicating that the test enjoys reasonable content validity.

Moreover, all the items marked as English were found to be mapped by the native speakers to one of the language functions in question (i.e., thanking, apologizing, or refusing). This indicates that, regarding content relevance of the test (Bachman, 1990), the PLR test had content validity. Regarding internal consistency reliability, the analysis of the pilot group learners’ performance revealed that the test had a high reliability of 0.84, as indicated by Cronbach’s Alpha value.

**Sociopragmatic recognition test:** In this study, the SPR test was to measure the learners’ ability to make native-like judgments about the appropriateness of certain utterances in given situations as defined in scenarios. This multiple-choice test presented the test-takers with 21 speech act scenarios, which were either constructed by the researchers or taken from the literature (Bardovi-Harlig, 2009; Bataineh & Bataineh, 2006; Beebe, Takahashi, & Uliss-Weltz, 1990; Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984; Cheng, 2005; Eisenstein & Bodman, 1986), with minor modifications made by the authors. Each scenario was followed by three grammatically correct response alternatives to choose from. The choices were different in terms of speech act strategies, and phrasing. It should be noted that, as opposed to the PLR test, in SPR test no L1 pragmatic strategies were used as response alternatives. As Thomas (1983) maintains, transfer of L1 pragmatic strategies to L2 is related to pragmalinguistics rather than sociopragmatics.

To construct the SPR test, the researchers administered the scenarios as a written DCT to 15 native speakers of British English and 15 EFL learners. The choices of the SPR test items were constructed based on the data collected from native speakers and the EFL learners through the written DCT, and the researchers’ intuition and judgment. The tentative *keys* were either taken from the responses provided by the native speakers or constructed by the researchers themselves based on the criterion of social appropriacy. Some of the tentative distractors were

taken from the learners' pragmatically inappropriate responses to the written DCT items. However, the researchers modified them, when necessary, to make them linguistically accurate. Moreover, some of the tentative distracters were constructed by the researcher based on the criterion of contextual appropriateness.

Then the SPR test was checked by a native speaker of British English. This indicated that all the response alternatives were English in terms of grammatical accuracy, and pragmatic strategies. After that the researcher administered the constructed SPR test (see Appendix B for a sample item) to 18 native speakers of British English to identify the most appropriate response (i.e., the key) for each item based on frequencies. The native speakers were asked to choose the most appropriate alternative. They were also asked to write their comments about each item in the spaces provided if they had any. However, there were no comments from the native speakers. This SPRT was administered to the native speakers for two purposes: (1) to verify the tentative keys that were prepared by the researcher, and (2) to examine its construct validity.

With respect to the first purpose, the most frequently selected choice by the native speakers served as the *key* for each item. Overall inspection of the responses naturally revealed that fourteen of the scenarios did not have options agreed upon by all the native speaker respondents. Therefore, the researcher applied Chi-square test to determine the *key* to each item based on choice distribution (i.e., frequencies with which each alternative was chosen). The chi square results revealed that in two of the items (two thanking scenarios), there was no alternative with a significantly higher frequency. Therefore, those two scenarios were discarded from statistical analysis. This reduced the number of items (i.e., scenarios) from 21 items to 19 items.

Regarding the second purpose, it needs to be noted that for investigating the construct validity of the SPR test, the data related to the remaining 19 items were taken into consideration. The differential groups strategy was used to examine the construct validity of this test.

Since the construct this test was supposed to tap was the test takers' sociopragmatic recognition, the test scores were expected to differentiate between the native speakers and EFL learners. The SPR test was also administered to the pilot group (i.e., the eighteen EFL learners). However, the directions were written in Persian, and the learners were not asked to make comments about the items. Then the EFL learners' responses were scored based on the keys, which were determined on the basis of the frequency of the native speakers' responses.

To examine the construct validity of this test, the researcher compared the mean score of the eighteen native speakers (i.e., masters) with the mean score of the eighteen EFL learners (i.e., non-masters). The results of independent sample t-test revealed that the native speaker group ( $M = 16.39$ ,  $SD = 1.72$ ) outperformed the EFL learner group ( $M = 11.56$ ,  $SD = 1.92$ ;  $t(34) = 7.96$ ,  $p < .01$ , two-tailed). The significant difference between the two groups indicated the construct validity of this SPR test.

Another point of concern was the content validity of the SPR test. In this regard, there were seven scenarios related to each of the three speech acts involved in this study (i.e., thanking, apologizing, and refusing). However, as mentioned above, two of the items (two thanking scenarios) were discarded from analysis based on the results of the chi square test conducted on the native speakers' responses. This left the researchers with five thanking scenarios, seven apologizing scenarios, and seven refusing scenarios (Total number: 19). This indicates that the criterion of comprehensiveness was perfectly met as the test included all the three speech acts. However, the criterion of representativeness was partially met, as the number of thanking scenarios was not exactly the same as the number of apologizing and refusing scenarios.

With respect to internal consistency reliability, the analysis of the 18 EFL learners' performance revealed a reliability of 0.48, as indicated by Cronbach's Alpha value, which is not a



high reliability value. There have been controversial results for the reliability of multiple-choice pragmatic tests. For instance, Liu (2007), Roever (2006), and Shimazu, (cited in Liu, 2007) demonstrated acceptable levels of reliability for this method. However, similar to the present study, some other studies (e.g., Brown, 2001; Yamashita, 1996) found that Multiple-choice DCT was not a very reliable method for testing pragmatic competence.

The rather low internal consistency reliability observed in this study may be attributed to two factors: (1) the low number of items ( $n = 7$ ) associated with each of the three speech acts, (2) difficulty of test item, which resulted in lower test score variance (Bachman, 1990). However, it should be noted that the issues of validity and practicality should receive priority over reliability. A test is not useful if it is not valid, no matter how reliable it is. As discussed above, this SPR test was found to meet the content validity and construct validity requirements. Moreover, regarding the issue of practicality, administering a longer test to the participants was not practical due to time limitation and administrative factors. Furthermore, a longer test could make the participants tired causing them not to cooperate in taking the tests.

### Procedure

First, 33 native speakers of British English and 33 EFL learners participated in pilot studies conducted for preparing the sociopragmatic recognition and pragmalinguistic recognition tests. The reader can refer to the instruments section for a detailed account of the procedure followed in the development (including validity and reliability studies) of the PLR test, and the SPR test. Then the researcher administered the OPT to the EFL learners to determine their EFL proficiency level. The learners at lower intermediate level of OPT and above were treated as high-level learners, and learners below lower intermediate were considered as low-level learners. Next, the PLR test and SPR test were administered to the participants in both groups. Each test took about 20-25 minutes to complete. The PLR test was administered prior to the SPR test. This order was followed to minimize instrument effect from the SPR test to the PLR test. In fact, SPR test included language items with identified speech act scenarios, and EFL learners could potentially use them in responding to PLR test items. However, using the above mentioned order, the researcher minimized the instrument effect. The learners' responses in both tests were scored based on the keys which were determined on the bases of native speakers' responses in the pilot study.

### Results

The data consisted of the participants' responses to the OPT, the PLR test, and the SPR test. The data were analyzed by means of SPSS version 22. The descriptive statistics in Table 1 provides an overall view of the participants' performance on the three tests.

**Table 1:** *Descriptive Statistics Related to the Three Tests*

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
OPT	low	41	102.7317	11.41057	1.78203
	high	39	135.5641	12.25775	1.96281
	Total	80	118.7375	20.27141	2.26641
PLR	low	41	27.4634	7.49366	1.17031
	high	39	34.5385	5.58591	.89446
	Total	80	30.9125	7.49041	.83745

SPR	low	41	11.2927	2.22760	.34789
	high	39	12.4615	2.95444	.47309
	Total	80	11.8625	2.65646	.29700

With respect to the first research question, the relationship between the pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic recognition tests scores was determined by Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. The results yielded a medium positive correlation between the two sets of scores,  $r = .36$ ,  $n = 80$ ,  $p < .01$ . According to Cohen (cited in Pallant, 2013), a correlation coefficient of .30 to .49 is considered as medium correlation. The moderate correlation indicates that the two tests tap related, but not exactly the same constructs. This conclusion is drawn based on Roever's (2006) finding and interpretation of moderate correlations among speech acts, conversational implicature, and routines.

As to the second research question, first, an independent samples t-test was used to examine the difference between the two groups in terms of EFL proficiency. The results of the independent samples t-test revealed that there was a statistically significant difference between the high level group ( $M = 135.56$ ,  $SD = 12.26$ ) and the low level group ( $M = 102.73$ ,  $SD = 11.41$ ) in terms of EFL proficiency level ( $t(78) = 12.4$ ,  $p < .001$ , two-tailed). Then two independent-samples t-test were conducted to examine the effects of the independent variable (EFL proficiency level) on the participants' pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic recognition: one for the pragmalinguistic recognition test scores and one for the sociopragmatic recognition test scores. The results of the t-test related to the pragmalinguistic recognition test are presented in Table 2, and results of the t-test related to the sociopragmatic recognition test appear in Table 3.

**Table 2: Independent Samples T-test Results for Pragmalinguistic Recognition**

	Levene's Test		t-test for Equality of Means				Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i> (2-tailed)			
Equal variances assumed	4.901	.030	-4.77	78	.000	-7.07	1.48	
Equal variances not assumed			-4.80	73.85	.000	-7.07	1.47	

**Table 3: Independent Samples T-test Results for Sociopragmatic Recognition**

	Levene's Test		t-test for Equality of Means				Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i> (2-tailed)			
Equal variances assumed	1.754	.189	-2.00	78	.049	-1.17	.58316	
Equal variances not assumed			-1.99	70.60	.050	-1.16	.58723	

As demonstrated in Tables 2 and 3, the variable EFL proficiency had a significant effect on the learners' PLR and SPR at a .05 level of significance. However, in the PLR test, the effect

size (eta squared = ) was  $r = 0.49$ , while in the SPR test the effect size (eta squared ) was  $r = 0.22$ . The conclusion follows that the effect of EFL proficiency level on the PLR test was greater than that on the SPR test.

### Discussion

The first research question explored the relationships between pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic recognition. The results revealed that there was a medium correlation between the two sets of test scores ( $r = .36$ ). The coefficient of determination ( $r^2 = .13$ ) indicated that there was a 13% overlap of ability. These results support the idea that PLR and SPR are distinct components of pragmatic competence.

In answer to the second and the third research questions, t-test results showed that there were statistically significant differences between high and low level learners' abilities of both PLR and SPR. The high group significantly outperformed the low group on both PLR and SPR. These results are compatible with the previous research on pragmatic performance (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig, 2009; Garcia, 2004; Geyer, 2007; Roever, 2006; Taguchi, 2011; Xu, Case, & Wang, 2009), which showed that high language proficiency learners had better performance in tests of pragmatics than low language proficiency learners. The superiority of high level learners over low level learners in PLR test and SPR test in this study suggests that learners' pragmatic competence can develop with their general EFL proficiency. Moreover, these results also support the utility of the PLR and SPR tests in discriminating between EFL learners with different general proficiency levels.

As noted above, effect size values revealed that EFL proficiency had a greater effect on PLR than on SPR. It may be attributed to the fact that the SPR test was more demanding than the PLR test as it required the learners to make the most appropriate choice for a specific context given the options available. This involved not only knowledge of pragmatic routines and semantic formulas but also knowledge of their appropriacy in a given context. However, in the PLR test the participants were required to map the forms with their functions – i.e., form-function mapping, as Rose (2013) calls it. In other words, the PLR test was concerned with form-function mapping, whereas the SPR test had to do with form-function-context mapping. Similarly, Thomas (1983, p.92) suggests that pragmalinguistic failure is concerned with highly conventionalized usage of language and is fairly easy to overcome, whereas sociopragmatic failure involves the student's knowledge of the language and system of beliefs, which makes it much more difficult to deal with.

### Conclusion

The findings of this study contribute to the literature on pragmatic competence, particularly speech acts. An empirically supported distinction was made between what the authors of this study called PLR and SPR. The findings of this study offer at least two implications for EFL instruction. Firstly, the empirically supported distinction between PLR and SPR of speech acts implies that EFL learners can benefit from lessons with distinct focuses on these two aspects of pragmatic competence. Such lessons can be provided by using native speaker speech act samples with a focus on and analysis of form-function and form-function-context mapping. Focus on pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic aspects will provide EFL learners with a fuller understanding of speech acts. Secondly, the greater effect of EFL proficiency on PLR than on SPR revealed that learners' SPR ability does not improve with their EFL proficiency as much as their PLR ability does. This indicates that EFL learners require more

practice on sociopragmatic aspects to enhance their speech act performance, at least as far as pragmatic recognition is concerned.

The small sample size may be considered as a limitation of this study. Further replication studies can be conducted using a larger sample and factor analysis for construct examination of PLR and SPR. Furthermore, other studies can be carried out to explore the PLR and SPR of speech acts other than the ones investigated in the present study. This study added one technique, namely PLR test, to the speech act performance assessment techniques available in the literature. More studies can be conducted to introduce other possible techniques of speech act performance assessment.

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**Appendix A**

No	Items	Functions			
1	Thanks. Have a nice day.	Thanking	Apologizing	Refusing	Non - English
2	You really helped me a lot. God forgives your father.	Thanking	Apologizing	Refusing	Non - English
3	Yes, Ms. Jones. I fully understand and I take full responsibility.	Thanking	Apologizing	Refusing	Non - English
4	Thanks for inviting me, but I have an exam tomorrow and I can't join you.	Thanking	Apologizing	Refusing	Non - English

**Appendix B**

You are a university professor. After your class, you get into your car to go home. As you drive out of the campus, you hit and seriously damage a car. You get out of the car and realize that the other driver is a new student of yours. You know that it's your fault.

**Student:** Hello professor.

**You:** A. I'm very sorry about this, Wilson. It was my fault. I'll put it on my insurance.

B. I'd like to apologize for the damage I caused.

C. Oh, I'm sorry.