The Effectiveness of A Proposed Computer – Mediated Communication (CMC) Program In Developing the Pragmatic Competence of Efl Secondary Stage Students

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Introduction and Background:

in particular communicative contexts—is undeveloped or faulty (Asher & Simpson, 1994). Pragmatic incompetence in the second or foreign language can lead to misunderstanding and miscommunication and can even leave the native-speaker with the opinion that the second or foreign language speaker is impolite.

The importance of communicative competence has been successfully recognized as a goal of language teaching and learning in the field of second language acquisition since the concept of communicative competence was introduced by Hymes. He maintained that learners must learn to speak not only grammatically, but also appropriately to achieve communicative goals. Therefore, learners must acquire not only linguistic rules such as morphology, syntax, phonology, and vocabulary, but they must also acquire sociocultural rules of language use (Anderson, 1990;

In order to be successful in communication, it is essential for second and foreign language learners to know not just grammar and text construction but also pragmatic aspects of the target language (Bachman 1990). Nonnative speakers may acquire considerable grammatical or lexical knowledge of the target language but still fail to communicate effectively in certain situations due to their lack of pragmatic knowledge of the target language, in other words, when to use what appropriately. (Rintell, 1981; Blum-Kulka,1983; Asher & Simpson,1994 ; Cohen,1996).

Any successful communicative event will require that foreign language speakers have developed some mastery of the syntax, morphology, phonology and lexis of the English language. Yet, speech acts that are grammatically and phonologically correct sometimes fail because the learner's pragmatic competence—his or her ability to express or interpret communicative functions

competence in second language teaching, pragmatics features clearly (Kasper, 1996).

There are two important theories that compose the theoretical frameworks for assessing pragmatic competence in learning environments. The first theoretical framework, Speech Act Theory, was developed from a notion first put forward by J.L Austin in his paper *How Do Things with Words* (1962). Later Jhon Searle further expanded on the theory, most significantly with *speech acts: An Essay In The Philisophy Of Language* (1969) and *A Classification Of Illocutionary Acts* (1976). There are many areas to speech act theory, but a useful explanation is provided by Cohen. He approaches Speech Act Theory from the context of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and states that "[according to Austin] utterances have three kinds of meaning" (Cohen 1996: 384) those being Locutionary, Illocutionary and Perlocutionary. Very simply, locutionary meaning is the actual or literal meaning of the words uttered. For example, in saying "It's raining" I am commenting on the weather and stating that water is falling from (clouds in) the sky. Illocutionary meaning is the "social function" of the words or the way they are intended to be understood. For example "It's raining" may

Olshtain & Cohen, 1983; Wolfson, 1981).

Pragmatic competence has been conceptualized by many scholars. However, most of these attempts to explain pragmatic competence reflect more or less the same conceptions without radical changes. According to Levinson (1983) pragmatics basically means the study of language usage, or in Wolfson (1989) pragmatic competence involves not only linguistic or grammatical knowledge but also the ability to comprehend and produce socially appropriate language functions in discourse. For Robert, Davies and Jupp (1992), pragmatics is mainly concerned not only with syntax and the literal meaning of words but with meaning intended by the speaker and interpreted by the listener. In Lightbown and Spada (1999), communicative, or pragmatic competence is the ability to use language forms in a wide range of environments, dealing with the relationships between the speakers.

In theories of language acquisition, pragmatics has often been neglected under the umbrella of syntactic knowledge and has gone unrecognized as a significant knowledge component in language learning. That tendency has begun to change significantly, however. In recent theories of communicative

deficits, in that they fail to convey or comprehend the intended illocutionary force or politeness value'. Therefore, there is a need for foreign language instruction to focus on teaching the pragmatics of the language (Kasper 1997).

One of the controversial questions is whether 'pragmatics' can be taught in the language classroom, especially in an EFL setting. As pragmatic competence has a close relationship with sociocultural norms of the country or the community where the target language is spoken, ESL learners surely have an advantage in acquiring this knowledge. ESL learners have a better chance of having appropriate and abundant input than EFL learners. Kasper (1997) and Rose and Kasper (2001) extensively discuss results of previous studies on pragmatic instruction and concludes that pragmatics can indeed be taught. Tateyama et al. (1997) examined the effects of instruction in pragmatics and demonstrated that Japanese pragmatic routines, which are commonly used for getting attention, apologizing, and expressing gratitude, are teachable to beginning foreign language learners. Kondo (2001) administered Oral Discourse Completion Tasks both before (pre-test) and after (post-test) explicit pragmatic instruction. Comparison

actually be a round-about way of saying "I don't feel like going to the zoo today. The Perlocutionary meaning or Perlocutionary Force (Austin 1962) is the effect or the aim of the utterance. To continue the example above the Perlocutionary force of the utterance would possibly be that we decide to stay in and drink hot chocolate rather than going out in the rain. If doing so was my intended or desired outcome from the words the perlocutionary force (result or aim) matches the illocutionary meaning (intention). This may not always be the case, which has been termed as Perlocutionary failure (Leech, 1983).

An important question is whether learners need to be taught pragmatics. It can be argued that perhaps pragmatic knowledge simply develops alongside lexical and grammatical knowledge, without requiring any instruction. However, research into the pragmatic competence of adult foreign and second language learners has demonstrated convincingly that the pragmatics of learners and native speakers are quite different (Kasper 1997). Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper (1989) report that, 'Even fairly advanced language learners' communicative acts regularly contain pragmatic errors, or

pragmatic competence are quite limited (Kasper, 2000). Researchers have also found that certain aspects of pragmatics in an EFL setting are not automatically acquired (Edmondson, House, Kasper, and Stemmer, 1984). The result is that even those who have studied English for years may still find it difficult to use language appropriately in communicative contexts.

The role of instruction in pragmatics becomes even more important in foreign language classrooms because it is the main way by which most learners explore the target language. Learning English is rather difficult in an EFL environment compared to ESL environment because EFL learners do not interact with native speakers as ESL learners do. Cook (2001) stated that in foreign-language classrooms, the target language tends to be viewed as an object of study instead of a means of communication. Language activities in EFL classes often focus on language practice, which does not expose learners to the types of sociolinguistic input that facilitate competence. For a non-native English speaker, linguistic forms can be learned by practicing and learning the rules and structures. However, there are no definite rules for appropriate language use although

of the results of the tests indicated the instructional effects on the development of refusal performance by Japanese EFL learners.

In the recent history of foreign language instruction, the issue of pragmatic competence was largely ignored. Traditionally, foreign language instruction was based on standard language (Kramsch, 2002). As a result, learners were taught the idealized type of language that gave invariant linguistic usage (Mougeon & Rehner, 2001, p. 398), and largely differed from how the language was actually used. However, with the shift from grammar-based to communicative approaches, views towards teaching language variation have somewhat changed. There is now a growing tendency among researchers and language teaching professionals that the study of pragmatic competence should be an integral part of the foreign language curriculum (Blyth, 2003; Gass, Bardovi-Harlig, Magnan, & Walz, 2002).

Despite the plenty of research that supports the need for pragmatics instruction, EFL instruction mainly focuses on grammar and ignores the pragmatic development of language learners. Studies have found that when pragmatics is not offered, opportunities for developing

focus on the features of the target language. The implicit teaching method does not provide this opportunity. In fact, there is a critical need for pragmatics instruction in foreign-language classrooms. Explicit instruction is thus considered one of the ways in which foreign language learners can most efficiently develop pragmatic competence.

Several studies have examined the effect of instruction in the development of pragmatic knowledge. These studies have covered pragmatic fluency (House, 1996), pragmatic routines (Tateyama et al., 1997; Tateyama, 2001;Wildner- Bassett, 1994), conversation closing (Bardolvi-Harlig et al., 1991), apologies(Eslami, 2005;Olshtain and Cohen, 1990), compliments (Billmyer, 1990; Rose and Kwai-fun, 2001), conversational implicature (Bouton, 1994; Kubota, 1995) and requests (Eslami, et al., 2004; Rose, 1994; Fukuya, 1998). Most of these studies found a positive effect on language learners' pragmatic competence, which supports the notion that pragmatic competence can be developed through systematic instruction.

Billmyer's (1990) studied the effectiveness of instruction on compliment. The participants, all at the advanced levels of English language competence, were divided communicating effectively is the main aim of learning English as a foreign language.

Over the past two decades, computers have become common instructional tools in English-as-a-second-language or foreign-language classrooms. Electronic communication has been found to have a number of features that are beneficial for language learning. Research has indicated that electronic communication can enhance students' motivation (Warchauer, 1996) and improve writing skills (Cononelos and Oliva, 1993). Cifuentes and Shih (2001) further stressed that computer-mediated communication (CMC) provides an authentic context for learning functional abilities by providing EFL learners with opportunities to interact with native English speakers. With explicit instruction in how to communicate in the virtual environment, CMC may enhance intercultural teaching and learning (Cifuentes and Shih, 2003).

Review of Related Studies

Research into pragmatic instruction has mainly been divided into two categories: *explicit* teaching, or *deductive* teaching, and *implicit* teaching, known as *inductive* teaching (Rose, 1997). Under the explicit teaching method, learners engage in activities that

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explicit group received pragmatic information about the conversational routines and their uses. In contrast, participants in the implicit group did not receive explanations of the pragmatic rules. House found that participants in both treatment groups improved their fluency in terms of initiating and changing topics. However, participants in the explicit group demonstrated a wider set of strategies for rejecting a previous request.

Takahashi (2001) studied the role of input enhancement in developing pragmatic competence and learning request strategies. In her study, input was enhanced by classroom tasks intended to make the learners focus on the target strategies in a particular way. Participants were 138 Japanese college students who had received between seven and ten years of formal classroom instruction in English. The results of a quasi-experimental pretest/posttest indicated that the students in the explicit teaching group showed greater use of the target forms than those in the other three groups.

Eslami et al. (2004) explored the effect of explicit pragmatic instruction on the comprehension of EFL students of requesting, apologizing, and complaining. Classroom activities included teacher-fronted discussions,

into two groups. One group received six hours of explicit instruction on English compliments, and the other was a control group that did not receive this instruction. The study found that learners who received the instruction offered a greater number of compliments and made more spontaneous compliments than members of the control group.

Lyster (1994) examined the use of the French *tu/vous* in formal and informal contexts for both oral and written tasks. The participants were in Grade 8 French immersion classes. They had opportunities to practice using formal and informal registers of French in role-playing activities and in writing letters of request or invitation to different individuals. Lyster's study had three groups and a control group consisting of two classes at the same level. The study found that the learners in the treatment classes significantly improved their ability to use the formal *vous* when required in written and oral communication.

House (1996) examined the teaching of conversational routines in English communication courses for advanced learners. She compared the effects of implicit and interactions such as gambits, greetings, and discourse strategies as a measure of pragmatic proficiency. Participants in the

As this review of the literature indicates, the development of pragmatic competence plays a significant role in the learning of a second or foreign language. In addition, there is a need for including instruction on pragmatics in language learning settings. Findings from studies exploring the development of pragmatic competence in a second or foreign language were also taken into consideration especially in the EFL classroom, where opportunities for developing target language pragmatic competence is limited. In addition, realizing the potential benefits of computer technology and CMC, educators have become increasingly interested in their use in foreign-language teaching.

Statement of the Problem:

Based on the literature review, it is stated that even advanced second language proficiency learners still face challenges in using the appropriate forms while performing speech acts. Similarly, the opportunities for EFL learners to develop pragmatic competence are limited, creating a need for including explicit instruction on pragmatics in language learning settings. Thus, the problem of this research can be stated as follows:

cooperative grouping, role playing, and other pragmatically oriented tasks that promoted learning of the intended speech acts. Participants were Iranian undergraduate students in the field of teaching English as a foreign language. This study applied the pre-post control group design. The results indicated that students' speech act comprehension improved significantly.

Sayed (2008), designed a pragmatic based program to develop fourth year EFL majors pragmatic competence at the New Valley Faculty of Education, Assuit University. The study investigated the effectiveness of the program on the students' pragmatic competence. The researcher adopted one group pretest-post test design on 35 students. The results of the study showed improvement of the participants' post assessment scores in their pragmatic competence.

Results of the above studies strongly support the need of pragmatics instruction in language classrooms and provide strong evidence for the benefits of instruction in pragmatics. The findings also suggest that explicit teaching of pragmatics rules to non native speakers is more effective than mere exposure to the target language.

3- Enriching literature concerning the effectiveness of CMC in developing language learning.

4- Using the already existing computer labs in our schools in enhancing the students' English language competence.

Limitations of the study:

This study was limited to:

1- A sample of second year secondary stage female students from Aga secondary School for boys at Aga, Aga Directorate, Dakahlia, Egypt.

2- Speech acts necessary for the sample of the study.

3- Some suitable activities for teaching second year secondary students the selected speech acts.

Hypotheses of the study:

The study verified the following hypotheses:

1- There will be statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental group students and that of the control group students on the post application of the Discourse Completion Test (DCT) in favor of the experimental group students.

2- There will be statistically significant differences between the mean scores of

"There is a difficulty in EFL students' language use in communicative contexts."

Questions of the study:

The problem of the study led to the following main questions:

1- What is the proposed CMC program for developing secondary stage students' EFL pragmatic competence?

2- What is the effectiveness of using the proposed CMC program in developing secondary stage students' EFL pragmatic competence?

Purpose of the study:

This study aims at:

1- Designing a proposed CMC program for developing secondary Stage students' EFL pragmatic competence.

2- Studying the effectiveness of the proposed CMC program in developing secondary Stage students' EFL pragmatic competence.

Significance of the study:

This study contributes in:

1- Designing a CMC program to develop students' pragmatic competence.

2- Shedding the light on the importance of using computer programs in the teaching and learning processes.

literature of explicit pragmatic teaching and computer mediated communication to develop the Discourse Completion Test and the Students' Perception questionnaire .

2- Presenting the Discourse Completion Test and the Students' Perception questionnaire to a group of jurors for validation.

3- Designing the proposed program as follows:

- Identifying the goals of the program

- Designing the activities of the program.

- Presenting the plan of the program to a group of jurors for validation.

- Modifying the plan according to the recommendations of the jurors.

4- Choosing the sample of the study.

5- Applying the Discourse Completion Test to the two groups.

6- Teaching the proposed program to the experimental group while control group study with the usual way.

7- Applying the Discourse Completion Test to the two

the pre- and post- application of the Discourse Completion Test (DCT) of the experimental group students in favor of the post- test.

Method:

Participants:

The sample of the study consisted of two randomly selected second year secondary stage classes from Aga Secondary School for boys at Aga, Aga Directorate, Dakahlia, Egypt. in the academic year 2017/2018. One class was selected randomly to be the experimental group and the other to be the control group.

Instrument:

A Discourse Completion Test.

Design:

This study adopted the quasi-experimental Approach utilizing a pre – post with two intact groups design, where one class served as the experimental group and studied the selected speech acts through the proposed CMC program. The other class was the control group, and studied the selected speech acts with the traditional way of teaching that is suggested in the Teacher's Guide.

Procedures :

1- Reviewing the literature of pragmatics instruction in foreign language teaching as a whole, and the

The pre- application of the DCT was administrated to the two groups of the study (control and experimental) to establish the homogeneity of the groups. *t*-test for independent samples was used to compare the means of the two groups marks in the Discourse Completion Test (DCT). Table ( ) shows results of *t*-test of the control and experimental groups on the pre-administration of the DCT.

groups to detect improvement.

8- Applying the Students' Perception questionnaire to the two groups.

9- Analyzing the data statistically.

10- Reaching conclusions and offering recommendation.

Results and discussion:

Table (1):Results of t-test of the control and experimental groups on the pre-administration of the DCT

Speech Acts	Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	T Value	Df	Sig
Request	Experimental	45	8.17	2.68	0.841	88	Not Sig
	Control	45	8.67	2.94			
Apology	Experimental	45	8.1	2.73	1.068	88	Not Sig
	Control	45	8.78	3.18			
Total	Experimental	45	16.3	4.78	1.113	88	Not Sig
	Control	45	17.44	5.15			

The above table indicates that the *t*-value is not significant in the score of the test on the two targeted speech acts. This proves that there are no significant differences between the mean scores of the control and experimental groups on the pre-test. In other words, the two groups are equivalent in their knowledge of the targeted speech acts before applying the experimental treatment. Thus, homogeneity between groups was established.

After conducting the experimental treatment, the DCT was re-administered to both the control and the experimental groups. The following table shows results concerning the first hypothesis .

Table (2): Results of t-test of the control and experimental groups on the post-administration of the DCT

Speech Acts	Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	T Value	df	Sig
Request	Experimental	45	20.3	2.4	20.261	88	0.01
	Control	45	9.5	2.64			
Apology	Experimental	45	19.4	2.67	16.619	88	0.01
	Control	45	9.8	2.81			
Total	Experimental	45	39.6	3.805	21.978	88	0.01
	Control	45	19.3	4.903			

T-test for independent samples was used to compare the mean scores of the control and experimental groups. Table (2) shows that the estimated *t*-value is significant at .01 level. This indicates that there are statistically significant differences between the experimental and the control groups on the post-administration of the DCT in favor of the experimental group.

In other words, the experimental group outperformed the control group in their achievement of the targeted speech acts. The significant differences between the experimental and the control groups shown in table (2) support the effectiveness of the CMC program on developing students' pragmatic competence in favor of the experimental group. Consequently, the first hypothesis of the study is verified.

T-test for dependent samples was used to test the second hypothesis of the study. Table (3) shows the results.

Table (3):Results of t-test of the experimental group on the pre- post-administration of the Discourse Completion Test

Speech Acts	Measurement	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	T Value	df	Sig
Request	Pre	45	8.2	2.69	31.814	44	0.01
	Post		20.3	2.4			
Apology	Pre	45	8.1	2.73	27.509	44	0.01
	Post		19.4	2.67			
Total	Pre	45	16.3	4.79	47.639	44	0.01
	Post		39.6	3.805			

Results in the above table illustrate that the estimated t-value is significant at .01 level. This reflects that there are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the pre- post-administration of the discourse completion test (DCT) in favor of the post-test. This means that CMC program was effective in developing EFL pragmatic competence of the experimental group students.

To get the effect size of the CMC program, the square of eta (η^2) was estimated after estimating the t-value.

Table (5): Converted value of (η^2) into (d) value and Levels of Effect Size

Independent variable	Dependent variable	Values of (η^2)	Values of (d)	Levels of Effect Size
CMC program	Request	0.958	9.55	High
	Apology	0.945	8.29	High
	total	0.981	14.37	High

Results in the previous table reflect that the effect size of the CMC program on pragmatic competence of the experimental group students is high.

The results mentioned earlier reveal that there is an obvious improvement in the experimental group students' pragmatic competence. This significant improvement could be attributed to administering the CMC program to the experimental group.

Recommendations of the study:

Based on the results of the current study, the following recommendations are suggested:

1. Pragmatic competence should be a major concern in teaching EFL in our classes. It has been argued that the lack of Pragmatic competence affects communicating in English negatively.

2. CMC programs should be used to supplement or complement pragmatics teaching and learning.

3. It is recommended that the suitable CMC programs complement the textbooks of EFL.

4. It is recommended that EFL teachers try to design and develop their own CMC programs that suit their students' needs and educational levels.

5. The program that was designed in this study should be accessible to EFL teachers in Egyptian schools.

Suggestions for further research:

The following suggestions are recommended to be considered for further research:

1. To study the effectiveness of using CMC in developing other speech acts such as invitations, compliments, and suggestions.
2. To study the effectiveness of using CMC programs for developing pragmatic competence with different samples and settings.
3. The gender difference when using CMC programs should be studied to determine whether CMC programs have the same impact on girls and boys.

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