

## **Willingness to Communicate, Learner Subjectivity, Anxiety, and EFL Learners' Pragmatic Competence**

Rasoul Mohammad Hosseinpur <sup>1\*</sup>, Reza Bagheri Nevisi <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Assistant Professor, University of Qom, Qom, Iran*

<sup>2</sup> *Assistant Professor, University of Qom, Qom, Iran*

**Received: 2016/05/17**

**Accepted: 2017/10/08**

**Abstract:** Individual learner differences play an integral role in second language acquisition and interested researchers and practitioners cannot get a full appreciation of second language learning if they ignore these significant variables. This study investigated how willingness to communicate (WTC), learner subjectivity, and anxiety in learning the L2 correlate with Iranian students' English pragmatic knowledge. To this end, a total of 140 participants received instruction on request strategy types and their internal and external modification devices for seven weeks through consciousness-raising tasks. The data were obtained through WTC questionnaire, learner subjectivity questionnaire, foreign language classroom anxiety scale, and discourse completion test. The findings indicated that WTC and learner subjectivity correlated positively with the participants' L2 pragmatic competence. However, no relationship was observed between the learners' anxiety and their pragmatic achievement. The results suggest that some personal characteristics such as WTC and learner subjectivity are significant contributors to success in acquiring L2 pragmatic knowledge.

**Keywords** Willingness to communicate, learner subjectivity, anxiety, request, pragmatic competence

---

\* Corresponding Author.

Authors' Email Address:

<sup>1</sup> Rasoul Mohammad Hosseinpur (rmhosseinpur@gmail.com), <sup>2</sup> Reza Bagheri Nevisi (re.bagheri@gmail.com)

ISSN (Online): 2322-5343, ISSN (Print): 2252-0198 © 2017 University of Isfahan. All rights reserved

## Introduction

Individual learner differences are a set of factors that influence the acquisition of a second/foreign language in general and vary from one learner to another and differ according to a learner's inner characteristics (Dörnyei, 2005). As Ellis (2008) notes, individual learner characteristics enjoy a central place in current second language acquisition (SLA) research and language pedagogy and no account of L2 acquisition will be complete without due consideration of these individual learner differences. Authors within the field of SLA distinguish various individual learner characteristics which affect second or foreign language acquisition. The existing literature on learner differences reveals that some personal characteristics such as language aptitude, motivation, or learning styles are very significant contributors to success in internalizing a second or foreign language (Dörnyei, 2005).

Individual learner differences have recently found their way into pragmatic research. However, a cursory look at the existing literature on pragmatic research, especially in foreign language acquisition context, reveals that empirical research into language learner characteristics in this field is still at a nascent stage. Kasper and Rose (2002) believe that second language pragmatic development and individual learner differences is the most under-explored area that requires further attention by researchers and practitioners. It goes without saying that better understanding of the relationship between individual differences in general and some contributing factors such as second language (L2) willingness to communicate (WTC), learner subjectivity, and anxiety in learning the L2 in particular and pragmatic development would positively inform pragmatic instruction.

MacIntyre, Noels, and Moore (2010) asserted that higher WTC is associated with increased language proficiency. In the same vein, Norton (1997) believed that a strong relationship exists between language learning and learner subjectivity. Language learning in a particular social context affects the subjectivities of the language learners, and they take on new subjectivities in the process of learning a new language. It is believed that when language learners' development is congruent with their subjectivities, the learning process will be enhanced (Menard-Warwick, 2005). Therefore, it seems that language learners with higher L2 WTC and those who have managed to shape bicultural learner subjectivity as speakers/writers of second language would consider pragmatic appropriateness as important as grammatical correctness for active participation and interaction inside and outside of the classroom and would attach greater importance to L2 communication. The present study was mainly set up

to account for the relationship between learners' WTC, subjectivity, anxiety and their success in mastering request pragmatic knowledge.

### **Literature Review**

The study of language learner characteristics, or individual differences, has long established itself in second language acquisition studies. Dörnyei (2005) defined them as "enduring personal characteristics that are assumed to apply to everybody and on which people differ by degree" (p.4). A compelling body of research (e.g., Cook, 2002; Dörnyei, 2005; Robinson, 2002) has considered the interaction between individual differences and second language acquisition. However, the role of language learner characteristics in L2 pragmatics development has rarely been attended to (Kasper & Rose, 2002). Within the rather limited number of studies in this area, it seems that, contrary to some variables like attitude and motivation, the literature on the interaction between some variables like WTC, learner subjectivity, anxiety, and pragmatic development is one of the poorest.

### **Willingness to Communicate**

The concept of WTC was originally concerned with first language acquisition and general psychology. Drawing on the notion of the term unwillingness to communicate by Burgoon (1976), McCroskey and Baer (1985) first employed the term WTC to refer to an individual's inclination to get involved in first language verbal communication if free to do so. MacIntyre, Clement, Dörnyei and Noels (1998) reconceptualized the term and introduced it to the field of second/foreign language acquisition. They asserted that communication and willingness to communicate by language learners are the whole points of a language program and suggested that creating willingness to communicate should be the main purpose of the language education.

MacIntyre, Baker, Clement, and Conrad (2001) defined the term WTC briefly as "the intention to initiate communication, given a choice" (p. 369). Ellis (2008) defined this construct as "the extent to which learners are prepared to initiate communication when they have a choice. It constitutes a factor believed to lead to individual differences in language learning" (p. 983). It is believed that WTC is a complex construct and, in addition to psychological and linguistic preparedness, some individual difference factors like L2 attitude, perceived communication competence, L2 communicative confidence, and communication anxiety could have a bearing on it (Ortega, 2009). MacIntyre et al. (1998) proposed the Pyramid Model of variables affecting WTC which comprises six layers. *Communication behavior, behavioral intention, and situated antecedents* are included within the first three

layers and are regarded as context-specific, inconstant and unstable factors which may have a direct bearing on WTC. The last three layers incorporate *motivational propensities*, *affective-cognitive context* and *social and individual context*, respectively, which are more constant, stable, intricate, and long-lasting variables affecting WTC. Most L2 WTC research, however, have been carried out in western countries and in second language acquisition context, in particular among Canadian Anglophone students learning French (Peng, 2007). In EFL context, most of the studies on WTC have been conducted in a limited number of countries such as Japan, Korea, and China. It is believed that higher WTC is associated with increased language proficiency (MacIntyre, et al., 2010).

### **Learner Subjectivity**

The concept of subjectivity is virtually synonymous with social identity; however, it is preferred by most researchers and practitioners within the field of SLA because it highlights the prominence of the emotional, affective, and sociocultural dimensions of the construct under investigation (Ochs, 1993).

The idea of identity as a theoretical construct was originally developed within the field of psychology. Initially, under the influence of the traditional structuralist view of identity, psychologists assumed that an individual's identity was a stable construct that changed only 4-5 times during his or her life, usually when that person entered a new age group (Tajfel, 1981). Later on, motivated by poststructuralism, more advanced and dynamic understanding of identity was put forward by psychologists which was inspired by "the desire and the possibility of expanding the range of current identities and reaching for wider worlds" (Kanno & Norton, 2003, p. 242). Tajfel (1981) defined the term social identity as "[T]hat part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the emotional significance attached to that membership" (p. 69).

Weedon's (1987) concept of subjectivity has influenced many researchers within the field of second language acquisition. She defines the term as "the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself, and her ways of understanding her relation to the world" (p. 32). Weedon argues that subjectivity is subject to constant change and struggle as one encounters a wide range of discourses. This British feminist scholar proposes "a subjectivity which is precarious, contradictory and in process, constantly being reconstituted in discourse each time we think or speak" (p. 32).

The significance of learner subjectivity has come to light in the field of applied linguistics by contributions of Norton (2000). In her case studies of immigrant women in Canada, she demonstrated that the learner subjectivity that her subjects accepted or insisted upon influenced their opportunities for learning English. Norton (2000) drew upon the term learner subjectivity to refer to "how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how that person understands possibilities for the future" (p. 5). Norton (1997) believed that a strong relationship exists between language learning and learner subjectivity. Language learning in a particular social context affects the subjectivities of the language learners, and they take on new subjectivities in the process of learning a new language. It is believed that when language learners' development is congruent with their subjectivities, the learning process will be enhanced (Menard-Warwick, 2005).

### **Anxiety**

Anxiety, as one of the affective variables among individual differences, plays a central part in second language acquisition. Spielberger (1983) defined anxiety as a "subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of autonomic nervous system" (p. 15). Traditionally, anxiety has been categorized into three different types: Trait anxiety which refers to a stable predisposition or a personality trait in which the individual is anxious and nervous in a wide range of situations; state anxiety which is typically a transient feeling of anxiety or nervousness that one experiences at a particular moment in time (MacIntyre, 1995); and situational anxiety which represents a situation-specific apprehension or anxiety felt in particular contexts or situations (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). The anxiety mainly experienced in language learning contexts is a form of situational anxiety (MacIntyre, 1998).

Two seminal papers by Scovel (1978) and Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) have been substantially influential in the history of anxiety in language learning. Scovel (1978) drew a distinction between facilitative and debilitating anxiety and argued that the inconsistency and controversy over the role of anxiety on second language achievement could be resolved by considering these two conceptualizations of anxiety. Horwitz et al. (1986) coined the idea of foreign language anxiety and differentiated foreign language anxiety from other types of anxiety and contributed a Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale to the field of SLA that triggered a large number of studies. They described communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative social evaluation as the three components of

foreign-language anxiety. The results of further studies conducted on foreign language anxiety were indicative of the fact that teachers' and learners' attitudes towards teaching and learning a foreign language, classroom techniques and implementational procedures, testing and assessment tools used in the classrooms, learners' own personal and impersonal anxieties, course level, learners' proficiency level, and cultural and motivational factors might also play a crucial role in triggering and provoking anxiety in EFL learners (Oxford, 1992; Price, 1991; Sparks & Ganschow, 1991; Young, 1991).

### **Consciousness-Raising Tasks**

Consciousness-raising (C-R) tasks are meaning-based activities that integrate instruction of problematic linguistic features within a communicative framework. These activities provide language learners with the opportunity to process formal linguistic features, with the goal of eventual, not immediate, mastery. Ellis (2003) defines C-R task as "A task that engages learners in thinking and communicating about language. Thus, a language point becomes the topic that is talked about" (p. 341). C-R tasks draw learners' attention to target language features and advocate a task-based approach that emphasizes discovery learning. It has been argued that C-R tasks contribute indirectly to second language acquisition by enabling learners to develop explicit knowledge of second language rules, which will later facilitate the acquisition of implicit knowledge (Ellis, 2002). Ellis (2003) states that C-R tasks have the following characteristics:

1. There is an attempt to isolate a specific linguistic feature for focused attention.
2. The learners are provided with data that illustrate the targeted feature and they may also be provided with an explicit rule describing or explaining the feature.
3. The learners are expected to utilize intellectual effort to understand the targeted feature.
4. Learners may be optionally required to verbalize a rule describing the grammatical structure. (p. 163)

C-R tasks can be either inductive or deductive. According to Ellis (2002) both approaches offer useful and effective means for instruction of formal linguistic features. In the inductive approach, the learners are provided with examples and exercises and are invited to make up an explicit rule from those data on their own. In the case of the deductive approach, the learners are presented with an explicit language rule or structure and, then, are asked to use that rule or structure to carry out some tasks or activities.

### The Speech Act of Requesting

Requests, as one of the subcategories of the speech acts, are one of the most face-threatening acts which are frequently used in our daily interactions and are governed by universal principles of cooperation and politeness (Uso-Juan, 2010). According to Brown and Levinson (1987), the social distance between the interlocutors, the inherent imposition associated with the request act, and the relative power or status of the speaker and the hearer are three important variables that speakers should consider in performing request speech act. Many language learners fail to perform request speech act appropriately and deviate from target norms because this speech act demands considerable cultural and linguistic knowledge on the part of the language learners (Uso-Juan, 2010).

As Martinez-Flor (2007) describes, request speech act is made up of two main constituents: the request head act or the core request, which is the major utterance and serves the function of requesting and can stand by itself, and the modification devices or optional elements which can follow and/ or precede the request head act and are used to modify or mitigate the illocutionary force of the utterance. These Modification devices can be divided into internal and/ or external modifiers and are used by the speakers to mitigate or intensify the force of their requests. Internal modifiers are placed within the request head act, and external modifiers are employed in the immediate linguistic context around the request head act and can precede or follow it. These modification elements do not alter the propositional meaning of the requests but can decrease or increase the requestive pragmatic force.

Kasper and Rose (2002), as two influential figures in the field of interlanguage pragmatics, stated that the interaction between second language pragmatic development and individual learner differences is the most under-explored area that requires further attention by both researchers and practitioners. The present study was set up to react to this concern and aimed to explore the relationship between some individual learner characteristics such as L2 WTC, learner subjectivity, and anxiety and language learners' pragmatic knowledge. More specifically, the following research questions were investigated in this study:

1. Is there any significant relationship between EFL learners' WTC and their pragmatic production of English requests?
2. Is there any significant relationship between EFL learners' subjectivity and their pragmatic production of English requests?
3. Is there any significant relationship between EFL learners' language classroom anxiety and their pragmatic production of English requests?

## Methodology

### Participants

The study was conducted with 140 male and female undergraduate students. Owing to administrative difficulties of randomization, convenient or available sampling was employed. The participants were second-year university students majoring in English language and literature at University of Qom. The learners were mainly at intermediate level of proficiency, and they had studied English academically between 7 to 10 years in secondary school and various English language institutes. Their ages ranged between 19 to 30 years old. Moreover, the students declared that none of them had ever been to an English-speaking country before, and that they had little or no contact with the English language and culture outside the classroom.

### Instruments and Treatment Materials

A written discourse completion test (DCT), WTC questionnaire, learner subjectivity questionnaire, and foreign language classroom anxiety scale (FLCAS) were utilized to elicit the required information from the participants.

The DCTs were taken from Takahashi (2001) and Jalilifar (2009) and included 15 scenarios. These scenarios varied according to social status and imposition and intended to assess the participants' ability to produce appropriate request expressions for the target situations.

The WTC questionnaire was adapted from MacIntyre, et al. (2001) and some slight changes were made to accommodate it for the Iranian EFL context. The questionnaire was composed of some statements concerning participants' feelings about communication with other people in English. Participants were asked to indicate the frequency of time they choose to speak in English in each situation. For each item, the participants rated the frequency of time they choose to speak in English on a 5-point Likert scale (1= Almost never willing, 5= Almost always willing). Higher scores indicated higher levels of WTC in English. The questionnaire consisted of 27 items measuring students' willingness to engage in L2 communication inside and outside the classroom.

The original learner subjectivity questionnaire was adapted from LoCastro (2001). However, since her study was conducted in the Japanese context, some small modifications were made in the questionnaire in order to accommodate it for the Iranian context. The questionnaire consisted of 30 items. The participants were presented with some statements



about English language. They were required to specify, on a 5-point Likert scale, whether they agree or disagree with those statements. (1: strongly agree; 5: strongly disagree).

Foreign language classroom anxiety scale is a self-report questionnaire that was developed by Horwitz et al. (1986). The questionnaire consists of 33 items measuring the degree and sources of learners' classroom language anxiety. For each item, the participants were required to indicate, on a 5-point Likert scale, whether they agree or disagree with the statements. (1: strongly agree; 5: strongly disagree).

As for the treatment materials, deductive and inductive C-R tasks focusing on request strategy types and their internal and external mitigation devices were utilized as the instructional materials. The instructional materials, following Schauer's (2009) taxonomy, incorporated the three groups of request strategy types (direct, conventionally indirect, non-conventionally indirect and their subgroups such as imperatives, performatives, want statements, locution derivables, suggestory formula, availability, prediction, permission, willingness, ability, and hints) internal modifiers which could be further subdivided into lexical modifiers (downtoner, politeness marker, understater, past tense modals, consultative device, hedge, aspect, and marked modality) and syntactic modifiers (conditional clause, appreciative embedding, tentative embedding, tag question, and negation) and finally external modifiers (alerter, preparator, grounder, disarmer, imposition minimizer, sweetener, promise of reward, small talk, appreciator, and considerator).

In the deductive C-R tasks, the learners were initially presented with explicit sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic information which were then used to carry out some tasks. In the case of the inductive C-R tasks, the participants were provided with different acceptable/unacceptable or appropriate/inappropriate instances and exercises and were invited to form an explicit rule to describe the pragmatic feature that the data illustrated.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

The written DCT was administered as a pretest to assess the participants' pragmatic production of request speech act prior to the instruction. After the pretest, the students underwent a ten-week period of treatment. As a first step, they were presented with an outline of what would be carried out in the course of the instruction. Following this introductory movement, the researchers of the study started teaching request speech act and its internal and external modification devices for ten 40-minute sessions through deductive and inductive C-R tasks. After the last instructional session, the same written DCT was administered again as the posttest. The following session, the participants were invited to complete the WTC

questionnaire, learner subjectivity questionnaire, and foreign language classroom anxiety scale.

### Data Analysis

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was employed to analyze the obtained data. Taguchi's (2006) rating scale of pragmatic competence, which evaluates the respondents on the basis of appropriate and correct production of the speech act, was utilized to rate the respondents' performance on the pretest and posttest by the researchers of the study. This scale rates the respondents' performance on a 6-point rating scale ranging from "no performance" (0) to "excellent" (5) in each situation. The Pearson correlation was used to establish the interrater reliability ( $r = .90$ ). A t-test was conducted to shed light on the participants' performance on the DCT before and after the instruction. Finally, Pearson product-moment correlation was performed to explore if there was a statistically significant relationship among the independent variables and Iranian EFL learners' L2 pragmatic competence. However, to come up with more robust analysis, regression analysis was employed after correlation analysis.

### Results

The analysis of the data resulted in the following findings. As Table 1 illustrates, the participants' performance on the posttest DCT ( $M = 3.94$ ) shows a considerable progress in comparison with their performance on the pretest DCT ( $M = 3.01$ ).

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics for the Pretest and Posttest DCT

	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>	<b>Std. Error Mean</b>
Pretest DCT	140	3.01	0.499	0.042
Posttest DCT	140	3.94	0.647	0.055

An independent t-test was run to see whether there exists a significant difference between the performances of the participants during the pretest and posttest. As it is clear from the following table (Table 2), the results of the independent t-test demonstrated that there was a significant difference between the mean scores of the participants before and after the instruction.

**Table 2.** T-test for the Pretest and Posttest DCT

	Paired Differences					T	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference			
				Lower	Upper		
Pre DCT/ Post DCT	0.8816	0.1838	0.0155	0.8509	0.9124	56.74	0.000

Investigating the relationship between the participants' pragmatic knowledge and their WTC in English, subjectivity, and anxiety in learning the L2 was the main purpose of this study. Table 3 presents descriptive statistics on the learners' WTC, subjectivity, and language learning anxiety.

**Table 3.** Descriptive Statistics for the learners' WTC, Subjectivity, and Anxiety

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
WTC	140	3.91	0.570	0.048
Subjectivity	140	2.67	0.511	0.043
FLA	140	3.02	0.483	0.041

To shed light on the degree of relationship between the participants' pragmatic knowledge and their WTC, subjectivity, and anxiety and to account for the research questions of the study, Pearson correlation coefficient was employed.

**Table 4.** Correlation Coefficient between post DCT and WTC, learner subjectivity, and anxiety

		WTC	Learner Subjectivity	Anxiety
Post DCT	Pearson Correlation	.702**	.518**	.121
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.154
	N	140	140	140

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4 demonstrates a significant correlation between posttest DCT and L2 WTC ( $r = .70$ ;  $R^2=0.49$ ;  $p = .0001$ ) and learner subjectivity ( $r = .51$ ;  $R^2=0.26$ ;  $p = .0001$ ). However, it came to light that no significant relationship could be considered between the learners' performance on the DCT and Anxiety questionnaire ( $r=.12$ ;  $R^2=0.01$ ;  $p=.154$ ). In the

following, as the data allowed for more robust analysis, regression analysis was conducted for the participants' WTC and subjectivity.

**Table 5.** Analysis of variance for WTC

S.O.V	df	SS	MS	F	Sig.
Regression	1	28.42	28.42	132.803	0.000
Residuals	138	29.58	0.214		
Total	139	58			

The linear regression slope was 0.79 suggesting that there was a positive relationship between learners' WTC in English and their pragmatic knowledge. Another regression analysis was performed to examine the relationship between the participants' subjectivity and their pragmatic knowledge.

**Table 6.** Analysis of variance for learner subjectivity

S.O.V	df	SS	MS	F	Sig.
Regression	1	15.08	15.08	48.488	0.000
Residuals	138	42.92	0.311		
Total	139	58			

Table 6 shows a positive relationship between learners' subjectivity and their pragmatic knowledge. The linear regression slope was 0.64 for this analysis which confirmed the results of the correlation coefficient between posttest DCT and learner subjectivity ( $r = .51$ ;  $R^2=0.26$ ;  $p = .0001$ ).

## Discussion

This study was undertaken in an attempt to respond to the concern of some scholars like Kasper and Rose (2002) who believe that the relationship between second language pragmatic development and individual learner differences is the most under-explored area that requires further attention by researchers and practitioners. More specifically, the study was designed to investigate how WTC in English, learner subjectivity, and anxiety in learning the L2 correlate with EFL learners' pragmatic knowledge. The findings of this study, in line with many other studies (e.g., Ishihara, 2010; Martinez-Flor, 2012; Martinez-Flor & Uso-Juan, 2010; Takahashi, 2010), support the position that formal instruction of pragmatic features is facilitative for the L2 pragmatic development.

However, with regard to the main objective of the study, it came to light that WTC and learner subjectivity correlated positively with the participants' L2 pragmatic competence. This finding is basically in line with previous research findings that higher WTC is associated with increased language proficiency (MacIntyre et al., 2010). In the same vein, Norton (1997) asserted that a strong relationship exists between language learning and learner subjectivity. In response to Norton's claim, many other studies also came up with a positive relationship between learner subjectivity and language learning (Block, 2007; Norton & Toohey, 2011; Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000).

An explanation for the obtained results could be the fact that L2 WTC and learner subjectivity are important and undeniable impetus in stimulating language learners to persevere in both L2 learning and L2 communication. Usually some language learners who enjoy higher L2 WTC and those who have managed to construct their subjectivity as speakers/writers of second language would attach greater importance to L2 communication. These learners are more inclined to make use of any situation to practice the target language and would seek out more opportunities, both in class and out of class, to engage in L2 communication. Such learners do know that grammatical as well as pragmatic knowledge are the indispensable requirements of communication, and familiarity with speech acts and strategies associated with learning and using them is essential for successful L2 communication.

Contrary to many previous studies which have indicated the negative role of anxiety in language classes (e.g., Batumlu & Erden, 2007; Horwitz, 2001; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994), no relationship was observed between the learners' foreign language classroom anxiety and their pragmatic achievement in this study. This inconsistency along with some other studies like Brown, Robson, and Rosenkjar (2001) and Eslami-Rasekh and Jin Ahn (2014) that reported a positive correlation between language anxiety and the language learners' pragmatic performance highlights this fact that further investigation is required in this area.

A possible interpretation for this finding might be the shift of attention from grammatical correctness to pragmatic appropriateness which seems to have exerted some anxiety on the participants in this study. The results of the previous studies have demonstrated that language learners in EFL context, in contrast with their ESL counterparts, are mostly preoccupied with language form and grammatical correctness and due to the lack of awareness, pragmatic appropriateness is not their main concern (Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998; Bardovi-Harlig & Mahan-Taylor, 2003; Eslami-Rasekh, Eslami-Rasekh, & Fatahi, 2004;

Niezgoda & Roever, 2001; Yu, 2008). In the process of this study, the researchers of the study tried to redress this balance through C-R activities and highlighted the significance of pragmatic appropriateness in successful communication in L2. Contrary to the positive and friendly atmosphere of the classes, this shift from an already-established norm to something new might have been a source of anxiety for the participants.

## **Conclusion**

Individual learner differences play an integral role in second language acquisition and interested researchers and practitioners cannot get a full appreciation of second language learning if they ignore these significant variables. Individual learner differences have found their way into pragmatic research. It goes without saying that better understanding of the relationship between individual differences in general and some contributing factors such as L2 WTC, learner subjectivity, and anxiety in particular and pragmatic development would positively inform pragmatic instruction, and no real progress in understanding of pragmatic development will be made without due consideration of these contributing factors in learners' pragmatic development.

Communication is the ultimate goal of second/foreign language learning and instruction, and generating a WTC is the whole point of communicative language teaching (Macintyre et al. 1998; Savignon, 2005). When in an anxiety-free atmosphere, which is a crucial factor for L2 acquisition (Brown, 2007), WTC becomes congruent with learner subjectivity, or the image that language learners form in their mind of who they are as the speaker of the new language, acquisition of the target language is enhanced. In other words, unconcerned language learners who have managed to shape bicultural learner subjectivity, in Lamb's (2004) terms, and those who enjoy a strong WTC are more successful language learners and communicators.

Due to the poor and impoverished environment of the EFL context and the lack of appropriate input, feedback, and opportunities for contextualized practice for the acquisition of pragmatics (Kasper & Roever, 2005), most EFL learners are mainly preoccupied with grammatical correctness rather than pragmatic appropriateness (Niezgoda & Rover, 2001). The results of this study can improve our understanding of the construct of the pragmatic competence in an EFL context and can help teachers, practitioners, material developers, and syllabus designers have better appreciation of the contributing factors or variables that positively or negatively affect learners' pragmatic knowledge. Getting a full appreciation of

the factors and variables that culminate in willing, cooperative, and independent language learners, who actively seek opportunities to use language accurately and appropriately not only inside the classroom but also in real life context, would broaden our understanding and knowledge about pragmatic competence. With regard to L2 WTC, learner subjectivity, and foreign classroom anxiety, the results of the present study will hopefully highlight the possible relationship between these variables and learners' pragmatic knowledge.

While interpreting the findings of this study, it should be noted that questionnaire survey was employed to collect data. Some qualitative data collection approaches such as daily diary, observation or interview could be considered for further future studies. Moreover, the speech act of request and its internal and external modification devices as well as three individual learner differences- WTC, learner subjectivity, and foreign language anxiety- were taken into account in this study. Other speech acts and individual learner variables could be considered in future studies to highlight the interaction between learners' pragmatic knowledge and individual learner variables.

## References

- Bardovi-Harlig, K., & Dörnyei, Z. (1998). Do language learners recognize pragmatic violations? Pragmatic versus grammatical awareness in instructed L2 learning. *TESOL Quarterly*, 32(2), 233-262.
- Bardovi-Harlig, K., & Mahan-Taylor, R. (2003). *Teaching Pragmatics*. Washington, DC: United States Department of State. Retrieved May 7, 2015, from [http://exchanges.state.gov/education/engteaching/pragmatics\\_hm](http://exchanges.state.gov/education/engteaching/pragmatics_hm)
- Batumlu, D. Z., & Erden, M. (2007). The relationship between foreign language anxiety and English achievement of Yildiz technical university school of foreign languages preparatory students. *Journal of theory and practice in education*, 3(1), 24-38.
- Block, D. (2007). The rise of identity in SLA research, post Firth and Wagner (1997). *The Modern Language Journal*, 91, 863-876.
- Brown, H.D. (2007). *Principles of language learning and teaching (5th Ed.)*. New York: Pearson education, Inc.
- Brown, P. & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Brown, J. D., Robson, G., & Rosenkjar, P. R. (2001). Personality, motivation, anxiety, strategies, and language proficiency of Japanese students. In Z. Dörnyei & R. Schmidt

- (Eds.), *Motivation and second language acquisition* (pp. 361-398). Honolulu: University of Hawaii.
- Burgoon, J. K. (1976). The unwillingness to communicate scale: Development and validation. *Communication Monographs*, 43, 60-69.
- Cook, V. (2002). *Portrait of the L2 user*. Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2005). *The psychology of the language learner: Individual differences in second language acquisition*. London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Ellis, R. (2002). Grammar teaching: Practice or consciousness-raising? In J. C. Richards & W.A. Renandya (Eds.), *Methodology in language teaching: An anthology of current practice* (pp. 167-174). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ellis, R. (2003). *Task-based language learning and teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ellis, R. (2008). *The study of second language acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Eslami-Rasekh, Z., Eslami-Rasekh, A. & Fatahi, A. (2004). Using metapragmatic instruction to improve advanced EFL learners' pragmatic awareness. *TESL EJ*, 8(2), 1-12.
- Eslami-Rasekh, Z., & Jin Ahn, S. (2014). Motivation, amount of interaction, length of residence, and ESL learners' pragmatic competence. *Applied Research on English Language*, 3(1), 9-28.
- Horwitz, E. K. (2001). Language anxiety and achievement. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 21, 112-126.
- Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M. B., & Cope, J. (1986). Foreign language classroom anxiety. *Modern Language Journal*, 70 (2), 125-32.
- Ishihara, N. (2010). Instructional pragmatics: Bridging teaching, research, and teacher education. *Language and Linguistics Compass*, 4(10), 938-953.
- Jalilifar, A. (2009). Request strategies: Cross-sectional study of Iranian EFL learners and Australian native speakers. *English Language Teaching*, 2(1), 46-61.
- Kanno, Y., & Norton, B. (2003). Imagined communities and educational possibilities: Introduction. *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education*, 2(4), 241-249.
- Kasper, G. & Roever, C. (2005). Pragmatics in second language learning. In E. Hinkel (Ed.), *Handbook of research in second language teaching and learning* (pp. 317-334). Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Kasper, G., & Rose, K. R. (2002). *Pragmatic development in a second language*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, Inc.



- Lamb, M. (2004). Integrative motivation in a globalizing world. *System*, 32(1), 3-19.
- LoCastro, V. (2001). Individual differences in second language acquisition: attitudes, learner subjectivity, and L2 pragmatic norms. *System*, 29(1), 69-89.
- MacIntyre, P. D. (1995). How does anxiety affect second language learning? A reply to Sparks and Ganschow. *The Modern Language Journal*, 79(1), 90-99.
- MacIntyre, P. D. (1998). Language anxiety: A review of the research for language teachers. In D. J. Young (Ed.), *Affect in foreign language and second language learning* (pp. 24-45). Boston: McGraw-Hill.
- MacIntyre, P. D., Baker, S. C., Clement, R., & Conrod, S. (2001). Willingness to communicate, social support, and language learning orientations of immersion students. *Studies in second language acquisition*, 23(3), 369-388.
- MacIntyre, P. D., Clement, R., Dörnyei, Z., & Noels, K. A. (1998). Conceptualizing willingness to communicate in a L2: A situational model of L2 confidence and affiliation. *The Modern Language Journal*, 82, 545-562.
- MacIntyre, P. D., & Gardner, R. C. (1991). Anxiety and second language learning: Towards a theoretical clarification. In: E. K. Horwitz & D. J. Young (Eds.), *Language anxiety: From theory and research to classroom implications* (pp. 41-54). Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- MacIntyre, P. D., & Gardner, R. C. (1994). The subtle effects of language anxiety on cognitive processing in the second language. *Language Learning*, 44, 283-305.
- MacIntyre, P. D., Noels, K. A. & Moore, B. (2010). Perspectives on Motivation in Second Language Acquisition: Lessons from the Ryoanji Garden. In *Selected Proceedings of the 2008 Second Language Research Forum*, ed. Matthew T. Prior et al., 1-9. Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Proceedings Project.
- Martinez-Flor, A. (2007). Analyzing request modification devices in films: Implications for pragmatic learning in instructed foreign language contexts. In E. Alcon Soler & M. P. Safont Jorda (Eds.), *Intercultural language use and language learning* (pp. 245-280). Dordrecht: Springer.
- Martinez-Flor, A. (2012). Examining EFL learners' long-term instructional effects when mitigating requests. In M. Economidou-Kogetsidis & H. Woodfield (Eds.), *Interlanguage request modification* (pp. 243-274). Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

- Martinez-Flor, A. & Uso-Juan, E. (2010). The teaching of speech acts in second and foreign language instructional contexts. In A. Trosborg (Ed.), *Pragmatics across languages and cultures* (pp. 423-442). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- McCroskey, J. C., & Baer, J. E. (1985). Willingness to communicate: The construct and its measurement (Non Journal Document No. 1985-11-00). Paper presented at the *Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association* (71st, Denver, CO, November 7-10, 1985). Denver, CO. (ERIC Document Service No. ED265604).
- Menard-Warwick, J. (2005). Both a fiction and an existential fact: Theorizing identity in second language acquisition and literacy studies. *Linguistics and Education, 16*, 253–274.
- Niezgoda, K. & Roever, C. (2001). Pragmatic and grammatical awareness. In K. R. Rose & G. Kasper (Eds.), *Pragmatics in language teaching* (pp. 63-79). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Norton, B. (1997). Language, identity and the ownership of English. *TESOL Quarterly, 31* (3), 409-429.
- Norton, B. (2000). *Identity and language learning: Gender, ethnicity, and educational change*. Harlow: Longman.
- Norton, B., & Toohey, K. (2011). Identity, language learning, and social change. *Language Teaching, 44*(4), 412-446.
- Ochs, E. (1993). Constructing social identity: A language socialization perspective. *Research on Language & Social Interaction, 26*(3), 287–306.
- Ortega, L. (2009). *Understanding second language acquisition*. London: Hodder Education.
- Oxford, R. (1992). Who are our students? A synthesis of foreign and second language research on individual differences with implications for instructional practice. *TESL Canada Journal, 9*, 30 – 49.
- Pavlenko, A., & Lantolf, J. P. (2000). Second language learning as participation and the (re) construction of selves. In J. P. Lantolf (Ed.), *Sociocultural theory and second language learning* (pp. 155-177). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Peng, J. E. (2007). Willingness to communicate in an L2 and integrative motivation among college students in an intensive English language program in China. *University of Sydney Papers in TESOL, 2*(2), 33-59.
- Price, M. L. (1991). The subjective experience of foreign language anxiety: Interview with highly anxious students. In E. K. Horwitz & D. J. Young (Eds.), *Language anxiety:*

- From theory and research to classroom implications.* (101-108). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Robinson, P. (Ed.). (2002). *Individual differences and instructed language learning*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Savignon, S. J. (2005). Communicative language teaching: Strategies and goals. In E. Hinkel (Ed.), *Handbook of Research in Second Language Teaching and Learning* (pp. 635-652). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Schauer, G. A. (2009). *Interlanguage pragmatic development: The study abroad context*. London: Continuum.
- Scovel, T. (1978). The effect of affect on foreign language learning: A review of the anxiety research. *Language Learning*, 28(1), 129-142.
- Sparks, R. L., & Ganschow, L. (1991). Foreign language learning differences: Affective or native language aptitude differences? *Modern Language Journal*, 75, 3-16.
- Spielberger, C. D. (1983). *Manual for the state-trait anxiety inventory*. Palo Alto: Consulting Psychological Press.
- Taguchi, N. (2006). Analysis of appropriateness in a speech act of request in L2 English. *Pragmatics*, 16(4), 513-533.
- Tajfel, H. (1981). Social stereotypes and social groups. In J. C. Turner & H. Giles (Eds.), *Intergroup behavior* (pp. 144-167). Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Takahashi, S. (2001). The role of input enhancement in developing pragmatic competence. In K. R. Rose & G. Kasper (Eds.), *Pragmatics in language teaching* (pp. 171-199). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Takahashi, S. (2010). Assessing learnability in second language pragmatics. In A. Trosborg (Ed.), *Pragmatics across languages and cultures* (pp. 391-423). Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton.
- Uso-Juan, E. (2010). Requests: A sociopragmatic approach. In A. Martinez-Flor & E. Uso-Juan (Eds.), *Speech act performance: Theoretical, empirical and methodological issues* (pp. 237-256). Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Weedon, C. (1987). *Feminist practice and poststructuralist theory*. London: Blackwell.
- Young, D. J. (1991). Creating a low-anxiety classroom environment: What does the language anxiety research suggest? *Modern Language Journal*, 75(4), 426-437.
- Yu, M. (2008). Teaching and learning sociolinguistic skills in university EFL classes in Taiwan. *TESOL Quarterly*, 42(1), 31-52.

