

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PRAGMATIC TRANSFER AND SECOND LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

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Pragmatic transfer is considered one of the most important areas in the field of interlanguage pragmatics (Kasper & Blum-Kulka, 1993). Research into pragmatic transfer has highlighted the impact of learners' first language pragmatic knowledge on that of their second language pragmatic knowledge (Kasper, 1992). To date, a small number of studies have been conducted which principally investigated the correlation between pragmatic transfer and second language proficiency. Their findings further identified both positive and negative correlation. Positive correlation occurs when highly proficient L2 learners are more likely to undertake pragmatic transfer. Conversely, negative correlation occurs when low proficiency L2 learners are more likely to undertake pragmatic transfer (Takahashi & Beebe, 1987). Therefore, more work on this issue is needed.

This cross-sectional study examined incidents of pragmatic transfer in ESL requests made by adult Arabic speaking learners' of English during role play scenarios and primarily focused on the relationship between second language proficiency and pragmatic transfer. Twenty eight learners were assigned to four proficiency groups (beginning, low-intermediate, high-intermediate, and advanced) based on their IELTS test scores and C-test results (Klein-Braley, 1997). They then performed three role plays, which varied Power, but kept constant Distance and Imposition. Head acts were identified by using Roever & Al-Gahtani's (2009) criteria according to which head acts may be identified through a next-turn proof procedure, in which the first speaker's utterance treated by the interlocutor as a request is classified as the head act. Roever & Al-Gahtani (2009) classified head acts according to their function rather than their directness or indirectness, and identified four requestive strategies: imperatives/want statements, modal (can/could/would), if-clauses, or complex requests. Instead of looking at supportive moves or external modification, the utterances that precede or follow head acts (pre- and post-head act moves) were examined in order to investigate the speech act of requests as a whole process rather than in segmented form (Al-Gahtani, 2007).

The findings of request strategies, pre- and post-moves, and the influence of the social variable (power) indicate that negative pragmatic transfer at the pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic levels were identified in the corpus. As second language proficiency increased, learners were more likely to undertake pragmatic transfer. High-intermediate and advanced learners negatively transferred considerably more L1 pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic norms into the L2 context than beginning and low-intermediate learners. The findings of the current study support Takahashi & Beebe's (1987) hypothesis that the more proficient L2 learners are, the more likely they are to negatively transfer L1 norms into L2 contexts.

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