



RESEARCH PAPER

Impact of Translanguaging on the Pragmatic Competence of English Language Learners: An Experimental Study at the Higher Secondary Level in Punjab

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ABSTRACT

This is a quantitative study which analysed the impact of translanguaging as pedagogical intervention in development of pragmatic competence among English language learners at higher secondary level. The objective of this study was to analyse the role of translanguaging as a teaching strategy in development of pragmatic competence of English language learners at higher secondary level in Punjab. Using sample random sampling technique, one higher secondary school out of twelve public boys' higher secondary schools was selected. Students enrolled in first years constituted the sample of this study. As this study was experimental in nature, students were assigned into controlled and experimental groups with 45 students in each group. A Discourse Completion Task (DCT) with 15 speech acts was employed as a pre-test and post-test. An independent sample t-test was used to analyse the mean score difference between the two groups. The findings reveal translanguaging as an effective strategy for the development of pragmatic competence at higher secondary level. This study recommends translanguaging as an effective strategy for the development of pragmatic competence at higher secondary level in Punjab.

KEYWORDS Pragmatic Competence, Speech Acts, Communicative Competence

Introduction

English language holds a significant position in all the major fields of life. It serves as a powerful tool for social and personal development and regarded as a symbol of social superiority and status. Those people who are proficient in English enjoy high social status in government departments, organizations, business and many other fields of life. Such people also have access to socio economic prosperity and greater job opportunities because language does not become barrier in their way. English helps them to cross the language barriers which can impede socio economic and personal progress (Rose & McKinley, 2018).

Because of holding a significant position in all the major areas of life, English is being taught as a compulsory subject from primary to graduation level in Punjab. Students are required to demonstrate their communicative competence in English through presentation, assignment and active classroom participation and discussion. This practice is equally prevalent in both public and private sector institutions. To further improve the quality of English, government also tries to uplift the status of English language teaching. For this purpose, teachers' training workshops and seminars are conducted in collaboration with international organizations such as British Council and RELO to raise the standard of English language teaching.

However, this is also evident that despite spending considerable time in learning English and gaining reasonable vocabulary and grammatical knowledge, English language learners in Punjab are not well proficient in English. They still struggle to communicate in real world interaction because of poor pragmatic competence (Ali & Hadi, 2020).

Pragmatic competence refers to the ability of a speaker to use appropriate language to perform various speech acts and to interpret the intentions of others within social and cultural frameworks (Kasper & Rose, 2002). Ali et al. (2020) regards pragmatic competence as an understanding of illocutionary force of utterances which involves understanding of intended meaning behind the spoken discourse. It also involves ability to perform and comprehend speech acts such as requests, order, apologies etc. for effective and successful communication. Yule (1996) defines pragmatics as a study of meaning as communicated by a speaker (or writer) and interpreted by a listener (or reader). Language does not operate in vacuum. In fact, language is a product of society. People use language according to situation, use different arguments, and acts accordingly in different context (Gregory & Carroll, 2018). The appropriate use of linguistics forms in proper social context is also very important for effective communication. Searle (1975) defines pragmatics as how users of a language perform various linguistic acts such as request, apology, suggestion etc. successfully in social context. It is concerned with acquisition, comprehension and production of language. So, for successful and effective communication, both knowledge of language and how to use it in appropriate manners is also important. Native speakers of a language develop their pragmatic competence naturally via socialization in the respective speech community. Linguistics forms and socio-cultural knowledge both develops side by side in natural way thus developing pragmatic competence in their native language (Krisnawati, 2011). Taguchi (2011) argues that acquisition of language and acquisition of social and cultural competence both are dependent upon one another.

Pragmatics is the key component of communicative competence but with very little explored area yet (Li, 2022). There is a lot of research available on the other traditional areas of linguistics such as syntax, phonology, semantics, but in the pragmatics, there are yet a lot of unexplored areas waiting for researchers.

The term translanguageing has its origin in a Welsh word "*trawsieethu*" which refers to a pedagogic practice. Translanguageing was used for the first time by Williams (1996) to refer a pedagogic practice where bilingual students in Welsh classroom were asked to switch between languages for productive and receptive use. Williams (1996) used the term translanguageing as a reaction to the superiority of English over Welsh language as he believed that the superiority of English over Welsh was causing a linguistics inequality and injustice (Lewis et al., 2012). The superiority of English over Welsh was a risk to Welsh language which had even put Welsh language at the risk of endangered language. Translanguageing not only caused revival of Welsh language but it also had cultural and linguistic implications for English and Welsh bilingual speakers by developing a linguistic and cultural relationship between them. As a result, the bilingual speakers with fluency in both English and Welsh language became an asset as the coexistence of these two languages became a matter of linguistics proficiency and the mean of participation in distinct cultural spheres (Lewis et al., 2012).

The effectiveness of translanguageing as a pedagogical strategy for the development of pragmatic competence has been proven in various studies. There are theoretical, social and cognitive grounds which recommend effectiveness of

translanguaging for the development of pragmatic competence. Hong (2023) while elaborating the importance of translanguaging in development of pragmatic competence asserts that as translanguaging lays emphasis on speaker, context and entire linguistics repertoire, it can make second language learners more proficient in pragmatics. Translanguaging according to Falomir & Domínguez (2024) involve authenticity and meaningfulness in communication. To achieve this objective, speakers utilize their entire linguistics repertoire to make communication contextually appropriate. Therefore, translanguaging as a strategy can assist to develop the pragmatic competence of second language learners. Similarly, Otheguy & García (2024) while emphasizing the significance of translanguaging, state that translanguaging allows second language learners to use their home language in communication. Another key feature of translanguaging according to Creese and Blackledge (2010) is that it empowers learners to develop and maintain their identity in communication process. It allows learners of second language to choose the best language forms for successful communication of intended meaning. By choosing the language forms of their choice, they polish their pragmatic competence as they are not confined to the linguistics forms of a specific language (Al Masaeed, 2023).

Literature Review

There are numerous studies (Al-Ghamdi et al., 2019; Asif et al., 2019; Hmouri, 2021; Nicholas et al., 2023) available which empirically witnessed pragmatic failure despite excellent grammatical and lexical competence in second language. To improve the pragmatic competence of second language learners, effectiveness of pedagogical instructions became the center of debate and the answers to the question such as “is pedagogical intervention effective for the development of pragmatic competence in second language?” were started to be sought. There are empirical evidences from the interventional research that pedagogical interventions have positive effects on the pragmatic competence of second language learners. There are studies (Derakhshan & Arabmofrad, 2018; Férahta, 2014; Kim, 2017; Rafieyan et al., 2014) which investigated the effectiveness of pedagogical interventions on pragmatic comprehension and studies (Chalak et al., 2015; Jernigan, 2012; Omar & Razi, 2022) which investigated the effectiveness of pedagogical interventions on pragmatic production in second language learning context. Both types of studies confirmed the effectiveness of pedagogical intervention on pragmatic competence of second language learners.

There is another question that if second language environment is more powerful in fostering pragmatic competence of second language? If this is true then why is there any need of pedagogical intervention to develop pragmatic competence of second language learners in classroom setting? Bouton (1992) suggests that while some learning occurs naturally, it is not entirely automatic or sufficient for development of any competence in a language. Bouton (1992) study on ESL students’ ability to interpret implicatures affirms that non-native speakers improve their ability to interpret implicatures through immersion in an English-speaking environment; still their skills remain significantly different from those of native speakers suggesting that only environment is not sufficient for comprehension of implicatures. . Rose (2005) also suggests that pedagogical instructions can be more effective in developing pragmatic competence than mere second language exposure because in classroom setting learners have better opportunity to learn pragmatic rules and norms whereas they may face pragmatic failure when they infer rules through exposure. Taguchi (2008) argues that second language environment alone is not sufficient for development of pragmatic competence in second language. Rather structured instructions in classroom setting can

better assist in pragmatic competence development. Usó-Juan (2013) suggests that pedagogical interventions play supportive role in developing pragmatic competence in speech act of refusal which is more complex due to face threatening nature. Mere exposure to target language is insufficient as learners are not well aware of the norms governing language use. Simpson (2015) states that many adult immigrants in Britain can speak English fluently but they are not able to gain high level of proficiency in pragmatics. They feel difficulties in inferring hidden meanings and understanding socio-cultural conventions, which are crucial for effective communication. This further highlights the need of pedagogical intervention for development of pragmatic competence. While aligning with the broader findings of previously mentioned studies Economidou-Kogetsidis et al. (2018) also emphasize that mere exposure to target language is not sufficient for development of pragmatic competence further necessitating the need of pedagogical intervention. Similarly Xojidedayeva (2024) states that developing pragmatic competence in second language is not an accidental phenomenon. Rather it requires deliberate and structured educational strategies.

Kasper & Rose (2002) brought into notice another issue that is the lack of experimental studies which may limit the ability to make causal claims about the effect of the environment on pragmatic development. Most of the studies on L2 pragmatics have been observational or correlational in nature, focusing on learners' experiences in naturalistic settings without manipulating environmental exposure as an independent variable. Secondly without creating control and experimental groups with pre-testing and post-testing, it is difficult to ascertain whether the environment itself, or some other factor such as motivation, personality, or language aptitude, is responsible for any observed gains in pragmatic competence. Learners in immersive contexts may not always benefit equally. Factors such as individual learner differences, the quality of interaction, and the availability of native speaker input may mediate the impact of the environment, making it difficult to generalize results while making the role of environment rather doubtful (Taguchi, 2015). So, while it is generally assumed that immersion in an L2 environment naturally fosters pragmatic development, this assumption lacks evidence supported with empirical data.

After having discussed the need of pedagogical intervention for development of pragmatic competence, the researcher decided to use translanguaging as a pedagogical intervention to assess its effectiveness in development of pragmatic competence of English language learners at higher secondary level in Punjab.

Material and Method

The current study is quantitative study in nature with an experimental research design. The population of current study consists of twelve boys' higher secondary schools in Chakwal district. Following the simple random sampling technique, one public higher secondary school out of these twelve schools was selected for this research. Students enrolled in first year constituted the sample of the research. There were total 90 students enrolled in first year. Researchers had already taken permission from the school principal for the experiment. However, willingness of students was also obtained from students. 45 participants which were half of the entire research constituted experimental group and rest of the half constituted the controlled group.

Researches utilize pre-test and post-test to gauge the impact of experimental interventions. To assess the impact of translanguaging on English language learners' pragmatic competence on experimental group, a discourse completion task (DCT) was

utilized as a pre-test and post-test. Discourse completion task (DCT) is an instrument used in interlanguage pragmatics and cross-cultural pragmatic to assess pragmatic competence. It requires participant to read a written situation and write what they would say in the given situation. The situation in DCT is designed in such a way that specific speech act is elicited (Nurani, 2009).

However, before administering DCT to the actual sample, a pilot study was conducted to ensure validity and reliability of instrument. The initial version of DCT was piloted on ten students of another school in the same locality sharing the characteristics similar to the actual sample. They were asked to give their feedback on any item which they feel is not clear, difficult or suitable. There was total fifteen items in DCT eliciting speech acts (advice, apology, complaint, compliment, disagreement, greeting, invitation, opinion, offer, permission, promise, questioning, refusal, request, and suggestion) which were focused during intervention period with thirty minutes allowed to complete the test. Based on the feedback of participants in pilot study, another version of DCT was constructed with time allowed forty-five minutes as participants in pilot study showed their concern on the shortage of time in attempt of test. However still it was not clear whether the students would be able to answer the questions in DCT without any difficulty in real practice. The researcher therefore administered revised version of DCT to another group of fifteen students with similar characteristics at the school where initial version was piloted. It is pertinent to mention that researcher used two different but parallel versions of DCT one for pre-test and other for post-test. Using two parallel versions is methodologically sound and recommended to minimize practice effects and test-retest bias. It also ensures that any observed improvement in learners' performance is due to intervention, rather than familiarity with the test items (Falleti et al., 2006).

The experimental group received thirty English lessons on pragmatics based on translanguaging, while the control group received same number of pragmatics lessons through the conventional method already in practice at the school. A set of thirty lesson plans for pragmatic competence was developed and delivered by researcher himself during the intervention period. The intervention period lasted for eight weeks, with four hours of teaching per week.

Data in the form of speech acts was assessed using rating scale adapted from (Taguchi, 2011). This rating scale is largely used to assess appropriateness of language in second language context. This scale measures appropriateness with six-point rating ranging from no response (0) to excellent (5). The scale evaluated whether the learners used appropriate language in term of directness, formality and context. Researcher himself rated response of participants which were further rechecked by two raters who had PhD degree in linguistics and also had experience in teaching cross cultural setting. An independent sample t-test was employed to compare the mean scores of both control and experimental group.

Results and Discussion

This section provides findings of study by analyzing learners' performance across fifteen speech acts which had been focused in the experimental part of current research. Each speech act was analyzed in detail, highlighting the differences between the experimental and control groups and the observed improvements in the experimental group due to the translanguaging intervention.

Table 1
Summary of Independent Sample T-Test

Speech Act	Test Type	Group	Mean Score	SD	Mean Difference	t-value	p-value
Advice	Pre-test	Experimental	1.867	0.344		0.297	
		Control	1.844	0.367	0.023		0.767
	Post-test	Experimental	4.222	0.420		10.443	< .001
		Control	3.267	0.447	0.955		
Apology	Pre-test	Experimental	1.867	0.344			
		Control	1.844	0.367	0.023		0.767
	Post-test	Experimental	4.222	0.420		5.512	< .001
		Control	3.711	0.458	0.511		
Complaint	Pre-test	Experimental	1.800	0.405		-0.266	0.791
		Control	1.822	0.387	0.022		
	Post-test	Experimental	4.311	0.468		9.074	< .001
		Control	3.356	0.529	0.956		
Compliment	Pre-test	Experimental	1.778	0.420			0.799
		Control	1.800	0.405	0.022		
	Post-test	Experimental	4.644	0.484		10.66	< .001
		Control	3.533	0.505	1.111		
Disagreement	Pre-test	Experimental	1.756	0.435		-0.247	0.806
		Control	1.778	0.420	0.022		
	Post-test	Experimental	4.733	0.447		10.443	< .001
		Control	3.778	0.420	0.956		
Greeting	Pre-test	Experimental	1.667	0.477		-0.451	0.653
		Control	1.711	0.458	0.044		
	Post-test	Experimental	4.489	0.506		9.383	< .001
		Control	3.489	0.506	1		
Invitation	Pre-test	Experimental	1.756	0.435		-0.247	0.806
		Control	1.778	0.420	0.022		
	Post-test	Experimental	4.644	0.484		9.391	< .001
		Control	3.711	0.458	0.933		
Offer	Pre-test	Experimental	1.756	0.435		0	1
		Control	1.756	0.435	0		
	Post-test	Experimental	4.533	0.505		9.008	< .001
		Control	3.533	0.548	1		
Opinion	Pre-test	Experimental	1.844	0.367		0.28	0.78
		Control	1.822	0.387	0.022		
	Post-test	Experimental	4.444	0.503		8.415	< .001
		Control	3.511	0.549	0.933		
Permission	Pre-test	Experimental	1.778	0.420		-0.256	0.799
		Control	1.800	0.405	0.022		
	Post-test	Experimental	4.378	0.490		7.901	< .001
		Control	3.511	0.549	0.867		
Promise	Pre-test	Experimental	1.756	0.435		-0.502	0.617
		Control	1.800	0.405	0.044		
	Post-test	Experimental	4.400	0.495		9.160	< .001
		Control	3.400	0.539	1		
Questioning	Pre-test	Experimental	1.800	0.405		-0.546	0.586
		Control	1.844	0.367	0.044		
	Post-test	Experimental	4.378	0.490		6.703	< .001
		Control	3.622	0.576	0.756		
Refusal	Pre-test	Experimental	1.289	0.458		0	1
		Control	1.289	0.458	0		
	Post-test	Experimental	4.267	0.447		8.824	< .001
		Control	3.356	0.529	0.911		
Request	Pre-test	Experimental	1.400	0.495		-0.212	0.833
		Control	1.422	0.499	0.022		
	Post-test	Experimental	4.267	0.447		8.824	< .001
		Control	3.356	0.529	0.911		

Suggestion	Pre-test	Experimental	1.889	0.318	0	1
		Control	1.889	0.318	0	
	Post-test	Experimental	4.422	0.499	8.238	< .001
		Control	3.511	0.549	0.911	

The findings provide strong evidence in the favor of translanguaging as a strategy for development of pragmatic competence of English language learners at higher secondary level in Punjab. Quantitative data demonstrated statistically significant improvement in pragmatic competence of English language learners in experimental group across all speech acts included in this study as a result of translanguaging validating the hypothesis that translanguaging has significant impact on development of English language learner's pragmatic competence at higher secondary level. These improvements reflect learners' ability to internalize and apply English pragmatic norms in various contexts further validating effectiveness of translanguaging for development of pragmatic competence of English language learners.

The results clearly indicate that translanguaging improved the pragmatic competence of the experimental group across all speech acts. There were significant improvements in giving advice ($t = 10.443$, $p < .001$), apologizing ($t = 5.512$, $p < .001$), making complaints ($t(88) = 9.074$, $p < .001$), giving compliments ($t(88) = 10.660$, $p < .001$), expressing disagreement ($t(88) = 10.443$, $p < .001$), and greeting others ($t(88) = 9.383$, $p < .001$). Similar improvement was also revealed in invitations ($t(88) = 9.391$, $p < .001$), offers ($t(88) = 9.008$, $p < .001$), sharing opinions ($t = 8.415$, $p < .001$), asking for permission ($t(88) = 7.901$, $p < .001$), making promises ($t(88) = 9.160$, $p < .001$), and asking questions ($t(88) = 6.703$, $p < .001$). When it came to refusals, the experimental group performed better than the control group ($t(88) = 8.224$, $p\text{-value} < 0.001$). They also showed significant improvement in making requests ($t(88) = 8.824$, $p < .001$) and suggestions ($t(88) = 8.238$, $p < .001$). These findings make it clear that translanguaging had a meaningful and statistically positive effect on the learners' pragmatic skills across all the different speech acts.

The greatest improvement was observed in speech act of compliment as the mean score for experimental group was 4.644 ($SD = 0.484$) whereas mean score for control group was 3.533 ($SD = 0.505$). There was the mean difference of 1.111 ($p < 0.001$) suggesting that English language learners improved their pragmatic competence in speech act of compliment at greatest level as a result of translanguaging intervention.

The pragmatic competence was least improved in speech act of apology with experimental group mean score 4.222 ($SD = 0.420$) whereas control group mean score was 3.711 ($SD = 0.458$). The means score differences 0.511 ($p < 0.001$) suggested that although experimental group improved pragmatic competence significantly in this speech act but it was the least improved speech act.

The analysis reveals that effectiveness of translanguaging varied across various speech acts as improvement ranged from 0.511 (Apology) to 1.111 (Compliment). This variation in improvement levels suggests that translanguaging as a pedagogical strategy may be particularly well-suited for certain types of communicative functions.

Translanguaging proved to be most effective for socially interactive and relationship-building speech acts. Speech act of compliments showed the highest improvement (mean difference = 1.111), followed by greetings, offers, and promises (each with mean difference = 1.000). These speech acts share common characteristics that make them particularly responsive to translanguaging approaches. They require more cultural sensitivity and contextual awareness, than other speech act which learners can

draw from their first language experiences. They also involve positive social interaction and relationship maintenance, areas where learners' existing cultural knowledge can enhance their pragmatic performance. These speech acts often rely on formulaic expressions that can benefit from L1 cultural knowledge transfer, allowing students to adapt familiar social scripts to the target language context.

Speech acts like complaints (0.956), disagreements (0.956), and suggestions (0.911) showed moderate level of improvement, possibly because they require more complex negotiation of face-threatening acts and cultural norms.

Speech act of apology (0.511) and questioning (0.756) showed the smallest improvements among all speech acts. This may be because these particular pragmatic functions present unique challenges that are less responsive to translanguaging strategies. Making apology involves complex cultural scripts that vary across languages. Direct transfer from L1 pragmatic knowledge may potentially be problematic or even counterproductive in some contexts. Similarly, questioning strategies may be more structurally dependent on L2 syntax and grammatical conventions, making them less responsive to L1 pragmatic transfer. These speech acts appear to require more language-specific learning that goes beyond the cultural and pragmatic knowledge that can be effectively transferred through translanguaging approaches.

Discussion

The purpose of current study was to analyze the impact of translanguaging on pragmatic competence of English language learners at higher secondary level in Punjab. This study analyzed the impact of translanguaging on pragmatic development of English language. The findings of current study reveal that translanguaging enhances pragmatic competence of English language learners by addressing broader linguistic, cultural, and cognitive issues associated with pragmatic competence.

Translanguaging emerged as a transformative tool in developing pragmatic competence of English language learners at higher secondary level in Punjab. Translanguaging theory García (2009) advocates utilizing the entire repertoire of language with fluidity between languages enabling the learners to draw on their native language to process and internalize pragmatic conventions and norms of English languages. This dual use of languages plays crucial role in development of pragmatic competence in English language because English language learners internalize the pragmatic norms and convention by utilizing various translanguaging strategies in comprehension and production of various speech acts.

Translanguaging strength also lies in its ability to develop sociolinguistic adaptation and meaning making. Speech act theory emphasizes that effective communication requires both grammatical accuracies along with understanding of the intended illocutionary force and the perlocutionary effects of utterances (Searle et al., 1980). It means that understanding of cultural values and conventions is also important along with structural proficiency in English language. Translanguaging reinforces both linguistic proficiency and sociocultural awareness by providing them opportunities to process and internalize both linguistic principles and sociocultural norms. It enhances pragmatic competence of learners in English language by playing this dual role.

The results clearly demonstrate that translanguaging enhances learners' ability to use language appropriately in social contexts. By allowing students to draw on their

entire linguistic repertoire, teachers can create a more participatory, and pragmatic learning environment. Pragmatic competence, which includes understanding politeness, speech acts, implicature etc. is often difficult to teach explicitly. However, translanguaging naturally scaffolds these competencies by enabling students to connect known cultural norms with English expressions. Hence, teachers are encouraged to intentionally integrate translanguaging practices into classroom discourse through techniques such as bilingual dialogues, code-switching during explanations, role-plays that include both L1 and English, and contrastive analysis of social expressions. Doing so not only improves learners' comprehension but also builds their confidence in using English in context-sensitive ways.

Conclusion

The findings of this study provide empirical evidence in the favor of translanguaging as a pedagogical intervention for the development of pragmatic competence of English language learners at higher secondary level in Punjab. The significant improvement across all fifteen speech acts indicates that allowing learners to utilize the entire linguistics repertoire help them understand sociocultural norms, contextual appropriateness, and interpersonal communication skills. Translanguaging helps in internalizing pragmatic norms of English as well as the meaningful transfer of culturally grounded L1 knowledge. In this way it enables learners to perform context-sensitive speech acts with greater accuracy and confidence. The level of improvement across all speech acts remained varied which highlights the important role of translanguaging in supporting both socially oriented and face-threatening communicative functions. Overall, this study reinforces translanguaging as a powerful, contextually relevant pedagogical strategy that can bridge linguistic gaps, enrich learner participation, and promote more authentic and effective communication in English.

Recommendations

This study considered pragmatic competence in term of speech acts. It is recommended that impact of translanguaging on other aspects of pragmatic competence such as implicature, politeness strategies, non-verbal pragmatic cues, and politeness in digital communication should also be investigated. This would help build a more detailed theoretical model of pragmatic development under translanguaging instruction.

To further validate the findings, comparative studies across different provinces in Pakistan such as Sindh, Balochistan, or Khyber Pakhtunkhwa or even in other multilingual countries with similar educational challenges, like India, Bangladesh, or South Africa are also recommended. This could help assess whether the positive effects of translanguaging on pragmatic competence are context-specific or universally applicable.

Finally, there is a clear need for the development of localized, culturally relevant tools to assess pragmatic competence in multilingual learners. It is therefore, recommended to design rubrics, observation protocols, and performance tasks that account for the influence of L1 and cultural norms in pragmatic use. Such tools would help provide more accurate measurements and reduce the bias of monolingual English assessments.

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