The Effects of Sex and Culture on the Apology Performance of Native English Speakers and Learners

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By

Elaheh Nosratirad

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing

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This book first published 2023

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-5275-0202-3
ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-0202-4

This book was first published in 2021 as a PhD dissertation at Leuphana Universität Lüneburg

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

App.	Appendix
AQ	Assessment Questionnaire
BNC	British National Corpus
BNS	British Native Speaker
BNSs	British Native Speakers
CLT	Communicative Language Teaching
CCSARP	Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realisation Patterns
DCT	Discourse Completion Task
EE	Expression of Embarrassment
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ELT	English Language Teaching
ER	Expression of Regret
ESL	English as a Second Language
FTA	Face-Threatening Act
FTAs	Face-Threatening Acts
F	Female
FL	Foreign Language
Fr.	Frequency
GTM	Grammar Translational Method
IFID	Illocutionary Force Indicating Device
IrEFL	Iranian English as a Foreign Language
H	the Hearer
H1/2/3/4	Hypothesis one/two/three/four
IELTS	International English Test System
ILP	Interlanguage Pragmatic(s)
L1	First or Native Language
L2	Second Language
LGBT	Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals & Transgenders
MET	Multimedia Elicitation Task
M	Male
NNS	Non-Native Speaker
NS	Native Speaker
NSs	Native Speakers
NOD	Natural Occurring Data
OMET	Online Multimedia Elicitation Task

OA	Offer of Apology
OR	Offer of Repair
P	Social Power
PNS	Persian Native Speaker
PNSs	Persian Native Speakers
RQ	Research Question
RF	Request for Forgiveness
RNSs	Russian Native Speakers
S	The Speaker
SA	Speech Act
Sn	Scenario
SD	Social Distance
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
TEFL	Teaching English as a Foreign Language
WDCT	Written Discourse Elicitation Task

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This monograph is a revised version of my PhD thesis, and as with most empirical PhD research projects, mine would not have been possible without the help and support of a myriad of people, to whom I would like to express my sincerest gratitude.

First and foremost, I would like to offer special thanks to Prof. Dr. Anne Barron of Leuphana University Lüneburg (Germany) for supervising my thesis and for her generous support throughout writing this monograph. I have learnt a great deal from her over my PhD years and this book has greatly benefited from her constructive review and her insightful comments.

I would also like to thank the committee members, Prof. Dr. Anne Barron of Leuphana University, Prof. Dr. Gila A. Schauer of Erfurt University (Germany) and Prof. Dr. Zohreh Eslami of Texas A&M University (USA), for serving as my reviewers. Thank you for taking the time to read my thesis and for providing insightful comments and feedback. I am honoured to have had you as my examiners.

Another thank you goes to the participants of the study. This study would not have been possible without the British students, graduates and employees in the U.K. including those 2015-2016 Bachelor's and Master's students of the Queen Mary University of London, Aberdeen University and the Iranian university students of Tehran University, Alborz University and many more Iranian university students, graduates and employees in Iran who participated in this study as the Iranian EFL learners and the Persian native speakers.

Many thanks also go to the writing centre of Leuphana University Lüneburg, specifically to Mr. Micha G. P. Edlich for helping me to write this monograph. Thanks, also goes to those individuals I consulted on statistical questions.

I would also like to express my special thanks to my husband, Amir for his understanding and support along the road, particularly in the final stages. And last but by no means least, special thanks go to my parents and my siblings for their constant support and encouragement from Iran on my PhD journey in Germany and for always being there for me in time of need. I dedicate this book to the memory of my father, Hamzeh Ali, who is gone but his support for me and his belief in me has made this PhD journey possible.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Since the late 1980s, researchers in the field of pragmatics have examined the language use of individual language users in different contexts and have highlighted the influence of both micro- and macrosocial factors on language use; microsocial or situational factors such as social distance and social dominance or power[1] may affect the way that individuals use language in different social contexts or conversational settings (Trosborg, 1995; Deutschmann, 2003; Martínez-Flor, 2004). Studies in the field of variational pragmatics, a recent sub-field of pragmatics, have examined language use by native speakers (henceforth NSs) across macrosocial factors such as region, ethnicity, age and gender (Xiao & Tao, 2007; Barron & Schneider, 2009; Barron, 2015; 2017; Fuchs, 2017). Gender differences have been recognised as potentially having an influence on language use, particularly speech act[2] performance across languages (Tannen, 1990; Aijmer, 1995; Ogiermann, 2008; Su & Chang, 2019).

A number of variational pragmatic studies, mainly conducted in the 1990s and 2000s, have examined sex or gender differences[3] in the

[1] These situational factors are explained in detail in chapter 4.4.3.

[2] Linguistic utterances are not only used to convey their lingual meaning but also to fulfil certain functions or to perform an act, that is the performative acts or the *speech acts* (Austin, 1962: 52). For instance, apologising is an expressive act to express a psychological state of being sorry about something. A detailed definition and categorisation of speech acts are provided in chapter 4.1.

[3] The terms sex and gender are not used as synonyms in this monograph. The term *sex* refers to biological or physiological characteristics (e.g., male and female characteristics, Tablot, 2010: 7; Litosseliti, 2013: 10), whereas the term gender designates the social and cultural construction of sex (Cameron, 2005; cf. chapter 3). Some pragmatic studies have mentioned sex differences and others gender differences in the analysis and interpretations of the language use of male and female respondents. A detailed discussion of studies on the gender and sex influence on language use is provided in chapters 3.1 to 3.3. The present study focuses on the sex differences and speech act performance of ENSs and EFL learners. However, it also considers the social context of gender when interpreting any possible differences in the speech act performance of male and female participants (chapter 3.1).

speech act performance of male and female English NSs (henceforth ENSs). This is also true for the speech act of apology (e.g., Deutschmann, 2003; Gonzales et al., 1990; Bataineh & Bataineh, 2005; Ogiermann, 2008). While some variational pragmatic studies have shown that there are differences in the direct and indirect apology performance (4.4.2) of male and female ENSs, including British NSs (henceforth BNSs; e.g., Ogiermann, 2008), others did not (e.g., Deutschmann, 2003; Hatipoğlu, 2012). Such disagreement in the findings could point to the methodological shortcomings in some of these studies which examined the gender differences and speech act performance of ENSs. Some of the variational pragmatic studies providing evidence for gender differences on the apology performance of BNSs did not conduct any inferential statistical analysis[4] to ensure whether the observed gender differences are statistically significant (e.g., Aijmer, 1995; Ogiermann, 2008; Qari, 2019). Moreover, some of the variational pragmatic studies did not consider the gender differences and the use of modifications, for example, apology modifications by BNSs (e.g., Deutschmann, 2003; Ogiermann, 2008; Qari, 2019; 3.3.1).

The impact of gender has been examined by a limited number of studies in the field of interlanguage pragmatics (henceforth ILP), a field which primarily focuses on the pragmatic competence of language learners, and the acquisition and use of a second or foreign language (henceforth L2 or FL; e.g., Chamani, 2014; Chen, 2017; Shabani et al., 2017). Similar to the variational pragmatic literature, there is also some disagreement in the findings of those ILP studies which have examined the gender differences and language use of learners, including speech act performance. These divergent findings could be related to methodological shortcomings in such studies which examined the gender differences and speech act performance of English as a foreign language (EFL) learners. Some of the ILP studies providing evidence for gender differences on speech act performance did not conduct any inferential statistical analysis to ensure whether the observed gender differences are statistically significant (e.g., Bagherinejad & Jadidoleslam, 2015 on Iranina EFL (henceforth IrEFL) learners' apologies; Abu Humei, 2013 on Arabic EFL learners). Moreover, some ILP studies limited their analysis to direct and indirect strategies of performing speech acts such as apologies, thus not considering modifications, for example, intensifications (e.g., Tamimi Sa'd & Mohammadi, 2014; Ghorban Abdolmaleki & Abdul Ghani, 2016 on apologies; 3.3).

The present study adds to the ILP and variational pragmatic literature by offering a comprehensive investigation of the impact of sex on the

[4] Inferential or descriptive statistical analysis such as chi-square or Fisher's exact test.

speech act performance of BNSs and IrEFL learners through analysing responses given to comparable apology situations tested cross-culturally and conducting inferential statistics. Analysing individual speech act performances can shed light on the interplay between individual factors such as gender and linguistic and cultural norms, for example those governing apologies. Apologies reflect similarities and differences in the cultural realisations and politeness[5] norms of a nation to a considerable extent (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Deutschmann, 2003). Simultaneously, individual differences and contextual variation can also be closely examined through apology performance (Holmes, 1990; Ogiermann, 2009; Abu Humei, 2013; Salehi, 2014). The present study aims to investigate the differences between the apologies of male and female BNSs and IrEFL learners by examining their use of direct and indirect apology strategies and apology modifications in same-sex and cross-sex interactions (5.5.4).

Researchers in the field of pragmatics have conducted empirical research on the language use of different nations focusing on the historical, social and cultural norms which form the politeness norms in a given language (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Evans, 2014; Mills & Grainger, 2016). In particular, inter- and cross-cultural pragmatic research focusing on social and cultural norms across languages and cultures has contributed greatly to the literature in the field of pragmatics by ascertaining the similarities and differences in the language use across nations and cultures (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989; Wagner, 1999; Matsumura, 2001; Golato, 2002). The importance of such research becomes more obvious given the considerable differences in the politeness formulas and appropriate language use of Western and Eastern nations (Sugimoto, 1998; Ogiermann, 2009).

Since the cross-cultural study of Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989), many studies have revealed new insights on the culture-specific features of politeness and speech act performance of NSs and learners with a different cultural background (Koutlaki, 1997; Deutschmann, 2003; Ogiermann, 2009; Tajeddin et al., 2014; Izadi & Zilaie, 2014; Dendenne, 2017). From the perspective of cross-cultural pragmatics, speech act realisation and performance such as requests, refusals and apologies may vary across languages and cultures (Afgari, 2007; Ogiermann, 2009; Chamani & Zareipur,

[5] Politeness is a concept closely associated with pragmatics and speech act performance. Politeness refers to "one of the constraints on human interaction, whose purpose is to consider others' feelings, establish levels of mutual comfort and promote rapport" (Hill et al., 1986: 349). The concept of politeness, the popular politeness model of Brown and Levinson (1987) based on Goffman's (1967) notion of face (self-image) and the differences between the notion of face and politeness in English and Persian languages and cultures are explained and discussed in chapter 4.2.

2010; Arani & Tehrani, 2013; Yazdanfar & Bonyadi, 2016). A number of studies have examined apology realisations in either Persian or English (4.4.3); there are, however, many fewer investigations of the similarities and differences between two groups of ENSs with a Western Anglo-Saxon cultural background and PNSs[6] (5.3.2) hailing from Middle Eastern, Persian cultures (Afghari, 2007 on Persian and American English; Chamani & Zareipur, 2010 on Persian and British English). In addition, a few pragmatic studies have comprehensively examined whether and to what extent any cultural differences across a Middle Eastern and a Western language and culture, such as the Persian and English languages, might affect the pragmatic performance and the perception of politeness of the IrEFL learners when performing apologies (Salehi, 2014; Tajeddin et al., 2014; Abedi, 2016; Alipour et al., 2019).

In addition to the limited number and scope of the studies mentioned, there seem to be some methodological shortcomings and open questions in the cross-cultural pragmatic studies conducted to date on the apology performance of ENSs and PNSs. The only cross-cultural study in the literature to date on Persian and British apologies (Chamani & Zareipur, 2010; 4.4.3), compared the differences and similarities between British and Persian languages and cultures through a comparison of politeness features in apology performance. In Chamani and Zareipur's (2010) study, corpus data were used with observational field notes and elicited data. The apology situations used to collect data from British and Persian samples were, however, non-identical; thus, they did not allow for a proper comparison or combined analysis (see 4.4.3 for details on the limitations of Chamani and Zareipur's (2010) study). More specifically, this study was conducted using data from the British national corpus and a field note method to yield data through unidentical apology situations and situational variables across samples that could not be compared. Also, this study relied on the observational data collection method of field notes taken in different apology situations with different situational variations. In addition, the examination of apology modifications in Persian and British English and also a comparison of apology modifications performed by PNSs and BNSs based on social and situational variation were left unexamined in the cross-cultural pragmatic studies

[6] PNSs are those Iranians whose L1 or mother tongue is Persian (Farsi). It should be mentioned that some Iranians who are PNSs might also speak an L1 other than Persian such as Turkish, Kurdish or Luri, as they come from Turkish, Kurdish or Luri tribes of Iran where their local language and culture also affect their identity. As in the case of the present study, the majority of the participants are from those cities in Iran with Persian as the only L1/mother tongue and culture informing their identity (5.3.2).

conducted to date. Moreover, some of the indirect apology strategies and the apology modifications in utterances of PNSs and BNSs were not examined. While this study was an important first step, the methodological shortcomings of the study and the open questions on the realisation of apology modifications across the two languages and cultures point to a number of possibilities for further in-depth research on the similarities and differences in British and Persian apologies.

The research project presented here also aims to address the abovementioned gaps in the cross-cultural pragmatic literature on the apology performance of BNSs and PNSs through an in-depth investigation of NSs' apologies to ascertain how their native culture may affect their apology realisation via comparable data collection methods and apology situations. In other words, this study investigates the differences and similarities in the apology realisation of BNSs and PNSs and relates the results of this analysis to cultural values underlying the performance of what is known as polite and appropriate apologies by BNSs and PNSs.

Such findings might also feed into language education given that an awareness of potential cultural differences between the British English and Persian culture and language could help both IrEFL learners and BNSs to avoid pragmalinguistic and intercultural misunderstandings (Sharifian, 2011; Hashemian, 2012). From the perspective of researchers in the field of ILP, acknowledging cultural differences between learners' native or first language (henceforth L1) and second language (henceforth L2) can facilitate L2 acquisition and L2 competence (Taguchi, 2008; Takahashi, 2010; Hashemian, 2012; Zhou, 2017). Language learners should acknowledge the cultural differences between their L1 and L2 and develop pragmatic competence, that is, the ability to communicate efficiently in a specific context (Barron, 2003; Taguchi, 2009). In other words, in addition to mastering grammar, vocabulary or pronunciation, L2 or FL learners also have to acquire culturally specific interpersonal communication skills in the target language (TL, the language which is intended to be learned) and to decode the function of speech acts in social contexts and gradually acquire the ability to adapt to the target culture (Ishihara & Cohen, 2010; Leech, 2014). Failure to do so may result in cross- or intercultural misunderstandings or miscommunications when individuals do not properly acknowledge the conditions which give meaning to speakers' and hearers' intentions and interpretations (Leech, 2014). For this reason, researchers have emphasised the importance of more comprehensive studies on the pragmatic performance of learners with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds and to examine how learners use and acquire pragmatic competencies in the target language.

The study at hand aims to contribute to the ILP literature by offering a comprehensive investigation on IrEFL language, and pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic competence when performing apologies in response to situations in a university context and also an investigation of the cultural and linguistic differences between learners' L1 and L2 apology differences. More specifically, the study compares the learners' apologies to those performed by BNSs and PNSs to examine any possible positive or negative pragmatic transfer of native language norms in the apology performance of IrEFL learners. The present investigation, then, is a British-Persian cross-cultural and ILP study which also contributes to the literature on the learners' language competence and pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic aspects of IrEFL learners' apologies when compared to BNSs.

It is beneficial to collect and analyse data on learners' cultural background, sex differences and L2 proficiencies[7] in this manner because doing so could ultimately lead to a more comprehensive and nuanced explanation of potential differences observed in the pragmatic performance of male and female EFL learners. More specifically, in the ILP context, the influence of gender on language use is seen as a complex issue because gender may influence language use in different ways, and the relationship might vary across contexts and cultures. Hence, the focus of pragmatic studies should be, then, on both gender and cultural differences, as in the present study, which considers the influence of gender both in the L1 and L2 cultures on language use conventions. Any gender differences in EFL learners' apologies might be the result of the possible pragmatic transfer of social and cultural norms from L1 to L2 (Sharifian, 2011; Leech, 2014; 2.2.1). Such a pragmatic transfer, which occurs as a result of a number of factors, including learners' insufficient L2 proficiency, causes insufficient pragmatic competence (Liu, 2004; Ishihara & Cohen, 2010; 2.2.2).

Addressing the above-mentioned limitations in the variational pragmatics, cross-cultural pragmatics and ILP literature and the contradictory findings in the literature regarding the influence of sex and cultural background on the apology performance of NSs and learners, the present study aims to contribute to the knowledge of the impact of sex and native culture on the apology performance of BNSs, IrEFL learners and PNSs. To this aim, the present study as a variational, cross-cultural and ILP study, employs a contrastively comparable data collection method, statistical analysis and a combination of quantitative and qualitative data analysis resulting

[7] Bachman (1990) defines language proficiency as the "knowledge, competence or ability in the use of language irrespective of how, where, or under what conditions it has been acquired" (p. 16).

in a comprehensive and comparable analysis of apologies performed by 60 BNSs, 60 PNSs and 60 IrEFL learners of both sexes (5.3).

Finally, in addition to the above-mentioned contributions to the literature, the present study aims to keep the advantages of the existing data collection methods in pragmatic studies such as close role-play, oral discourse completion tasks (DCTs) and the multimedia elicitation task (MET; 5.4), but also to exploit technological advances by developing a method for collecting large amounts of oral data in an easily-accessible cyber zone. Hence, the present study attempts to address the shortcomings in its methodological setup by improving oral DCTs and MET to an easily available online version (OMET; 5.5.3) that can be used to collect a large amount of data for cross-cultural and ILP studies.

This book is structured as follows: research questions (RQs) and an analytical framework for analysing and interpreting data are derived based on comprehensive literature reviews in chapters 2 to 4. Chapter 2 is devoted to the theoretical groundwork of communicative and pragmatic competence and reviews ILP and cross-cultural pragmatics research, which represents the basis for the empirical study presented here. Chapter 3 reviews studies which have investigated and applied theories dealing with the intersection of gender, sex and language use and, more specifically, empirical studies on the effect of gender on the apology performance of ENSs, EFL learners and PNSs. Chapter 4 provides the theoretical background of speech act theory, focusing on the speech act of apology, describes the nature of apologies, direct and indirect apology strategies and modifications and presents a framework for apology performances in English and Persian. Adding to the theoretical background developed in the first four chapters, chapter 5 describes the methods used for data collection and analysis. Starting with the RQs and hypotheses (5.1), this chapter deals with the study's cross-sectional design (5.2), the participants (5.3), an overview of research instruments in pragmatics (5.4), the data collection instrument (5.5), and the data coding and analysis procedure of the study (5.6). Starting with an overview of the valid responses collected via the data collection instrument of the study, chapter 6 presents the results regarding the sex differences and direct and indirect apology strategies and modifications (RQ1), similarities and differences observed between the apology realisation of PNSs and BNSs based on their native culture (RQ2) and the positive and negative pragmatic transfer of IrEFL learners from their L1 norms to apologies they performed in English (RQ3). Chapter 7 discusses the results and presents the main findings of this study. It also proposes suggestions for future research and discusses pedagogical implications for researchers and practitioners.

CHAPTER 2

PRAGMATICS

Since its inception in the broader field of linguistics in the 1970s, pragmatics has received a great deal of attention. In general, the field of pragmatics is concerned with language users' assumptions and purposes, the language expressions they use, the restrictions they face when using language in social contexts and the types of linguistic routines (i.e., speech acts, such as requests, apologies, refusals, and so on) that they choose when speaking a language (Crystal, 1997: 301). The study of pragmatics encompasses many research areas, such as investigating speech acts that are performing actions through utterances; (cf. 4.1) and, to a lesser extent, the conversational implicatures and structures. The study of pragmatics across different languages and cultures comprises various sub-fields, such as contrastive, cross-cultural, variational, intercultural, and interlanguage pragmatics. ILP studies have mainly focused on examining the L2 or FL language use of L2 or FL learners. Cross-cultural pragmatic studies examine the language features and politeness principles of languages and investigate the differences in encoding pragmatic aspects, such as politeness and in/directness, into speech. The literature of both ILP and cross-cultural pragmatics is dominated by studies which have investigated the speech act performance of NSs and learners of languages. The present study adds to the growing body of such research in the ILP and cross-cultural pragmatic literature. This chapter is devoted to laying the theoretical groundwork for the empirical study presented in this investigation. The chapter begins with an explanation of pragmatics and ILP from a theoretical perspective and introduces the state-of-the-art ILP research on individual differences and communicative and pragmatic competence in language learning, and explains the status of pragmatic competence among IrEFL language learners and how pragmatic norms are presented in IrEFL textbooks. Following this step, the native speaker (NS) traditional teaching method and English as a lingua franca (ELF) are also discussed as two related concepts to language learning and pragmatic competence. Finally, the way in which the study of learners' native culture can facilitate ILP research is explained.

2.1 Pragmatics and Interlanguage Pragmatics

Interlanguage pragmatic (ILP) studies focus on an L2 or FL, as well as the way in which they develop pragmatic competence (Kasper & Rose, 1999: 82). Research in the domain of ILP encompasses cross-sectional, single-moment, longitudinal and instructional research. While longitudinal studies observe pragmatic development over a particular period of time, thus tracing pragmatic development, cross-sectional studies follow a one-time data collection method and compare pragmatic competence across different language users with different proficiency levels (Litosseliti, 2010: 57). The cross-sectional method is a frequent research design for studies focusing on both language acquisition and use (Trosborg, 2010: 334). Cross-sectional studies contribute to the study of NSs and learners, the production and comprehension of learners' pragmatic features and the speech act performance of NSs and learners, as well as comparing the pragmatic performance of different groups of learners. Single-moment pragmatic studies focus mainly on the comparison of two languages and on learners' FL or L2 use using a one-time data collection method (Rose, 2000; Kasper & Rose, 2002). Instructional research examines the pragmatic competence and development of L2 learners using pre- and post-instructions on aspects of pragmatics that are teachable (Kasper & Rose 1999; Taguchi, 2015).

ILP research considers a range of aspects, such as how learners acquire communicative competence, the effects of individual differences on the use of language, factors affecting the process of language learning, L2 learning development, and examining the realisation and performance of speech acts or illocutionary acts (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969, 1976; Barón & Ortega, 2018; Taguchi, 2017) by learners in both written and verbal communications (e.g., requests, apologies, refusals, and compliments).

2.2 Communicative and Pragmatic Competence

As pragmatic competence is a sub-field of communicative competence, it is necessary to first provide an explanation of this area. Hymes (1972: 283) defines communicative competence as "the learners need to have a knowledge of something else than just words and grammar rules to learn and use a language." Since Hymes, a number of other scholars have elaborated on the concept of communicative competence to date and have assimilated models of language competence (Bachman, 1990; Alcón, 2000; Martínez-Flor & Usó-Juan, 2006; Celce-Murcia, 2007). Hymes' (1972) model of communicative competence focuses on both grammatical

knowledge and the ability to use such knowledge in an appropriate manner according to the context.

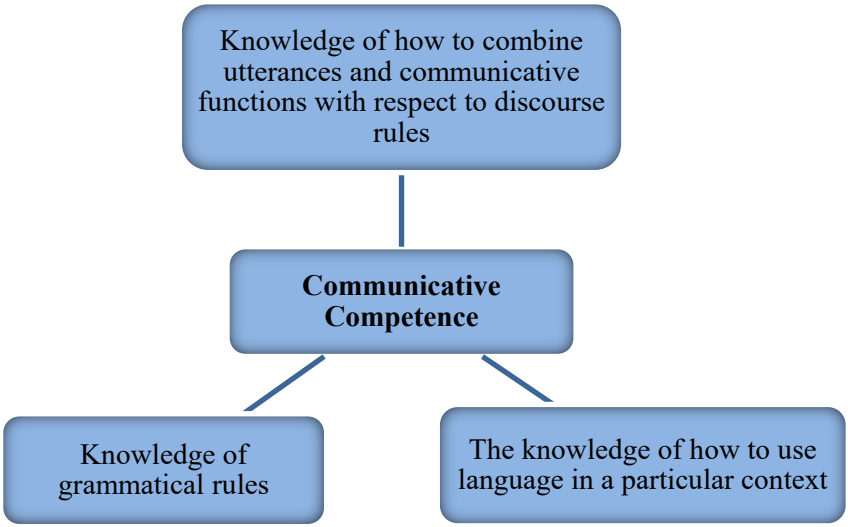

Figure 2.1 Communicative Competence (Hymes, 1972)

Bachman (1990) categorised communicative competence under the concept of language competence or the ability to communicate linguistically. He divided language competence into pragmatic competence and organisational competence (grammatical and textual knowledge) which complement each other and are considered to have the same importance. This indicates that both language-use rules (pragmatic knowledge) and linguistic rules of the TL such as syntax, phonology, morphology, and graphology (organisational competence) are equally important and should be mastered in parallel (Bachmann, 1990: 89). Hence, these two important elements of language competence contribute to the appropriate use of language features in socially-situated discourse. Bachmann's (1990) model of language competence is demonstrated in figure 2.2 as follows:

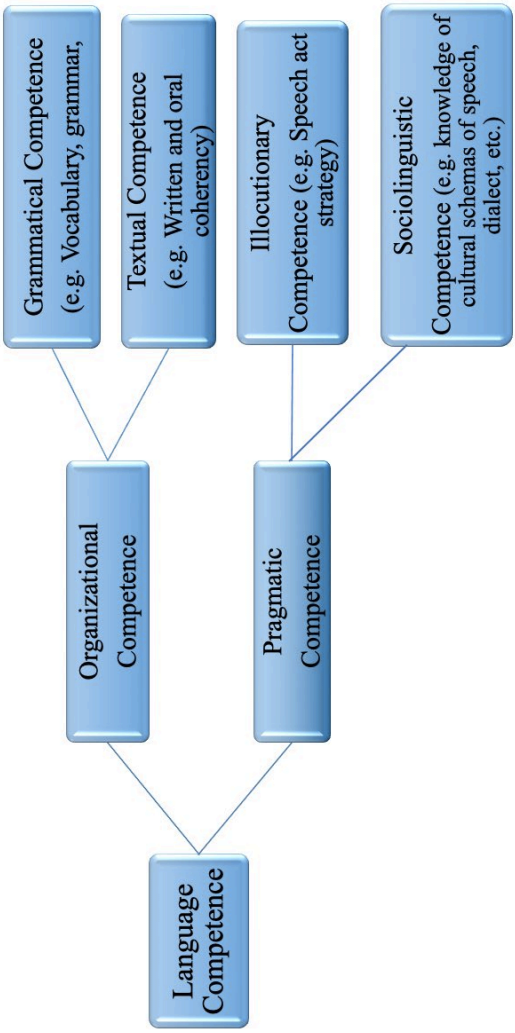

Figure 2.2 Components of Language Competence (adapted from Bachman [1990: 87])

Based on Bachman's (1990) model of language competence, organisational competence and pragmatic competence are important elements of communicative competence. Pragmatic competence is divided into illocutionary competence and sociolinguistic competence (Figure 2.2). Illocutionary competence is knowledge of the language functions which are necessary for doing things with language (e.g., use of appropriate speech strategies for requesting something). Sociolinguistic competence is knowledge of appropriate language use based on the social context and culture in which the language is used (Bachman, 1990).

Faerch and Kasper's (1984) categorisation of pragmatic competence into procedural and declarative knowledge can be related to Bachmann's (1990) taxonomy of pragmatic competence (Barron, 2003: 10). Declarative knowledge is a part of pragmatic knowledge or the knowledge of illocutions and grammatical rules. In contrast, procedural knowledge can be defined as the use of declarative knowledge to achieve a conversational goal, to use the most appropriate linguistic knowledge in a particular context and to understand and record feedback in a conversation (Faerch & Kasper, 1984: 215; Barron, 2003: 10). Learners who are able to use their pragmatic knowledge, that is, to interpret and to use linguistic resources in a language appropriately in the context in which the conversation takes place, can be described as pragmatically competent (Barron, 2003; Taguchi, 2012). Accordingly, pragmatic competence as a sub-field of communicative competence is defined as "the ability to convey and interpret meaning appropriately in a social situation" (Taguchi, 2012: 6).

The social situation and the context of a conversation affect the meaning of what interlocutors are attempting to express and help them to understand each other. The appropriate use of linguistic resources refers to the illocutions or knowledge of speech act realisation and performance in a particular context (pragmatic knowledge; Barron, 2003: 10). This definition of pragmatic competence is suitable for ILP studies, including the present one, which examines the speech act performance of L2 and EFL learners. To be able to use knowledge of speech acts in a given language, learners first need to acquire linguistic knowledge and to develop the ability to use such knowledge in a specific social context. The two types of knowledge are categorised as pragmalinguistic and sociolinguistic knowledge, respectively (Leech, 1983; Barron, 2003). Pragmatic competence encompasses the successful use of these types of knowledge in any particular context (Baron, 2003: 10).