

## Teachers' Perceptions of the Teaching of Speech Acts and Pragmatics in the EFL Classroom at the Algerian Higher Education Institutions

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### Abstract

The present research aims to investigate the Algerian higher education teachers' attitudes towards the teaching of pragmatics, in general, and speech acts, in particular, in the English as a foreign language classroom. Specifically, it examines the teachers' views with regard to the teaching of speech acts and their related pragmatic knowledge in their classrooms. To help achieve the research goal, a sample population of 39 teachers participated in this study and answered a 25-item questionnaire. Findings revealed that the majority of teachers found that the teaching of speech acts and their associated pragmatic elements is important as part of teaching English; however, when it comes to the inclusion of these elements in their classrooms, they do not incorporate them frequently and on a regular basis. Thus, more efforts should be made to ensure the teaching of these pragmatic issues and the development of the learners' pragmatic competence.

**Keywords:** Pragmatics; English as a foreign language learning; pragmatic competence; speech act theory; pragmatics instruction.

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### Résumé

La présente recherche vise à étudier les attitudes des enseignants Algériens du supérieur envers l'enseignement de la pragmatique, en général, et des actes de parole, en particulier, en classe d'anglais comme langue étrangère. Plus précisément, elle examine les avis des enseignants vis-à-vis l'enseignement des actes de parole et de l'information pragmatique qui les accompagne. Pour atteindre l'objectif de cette recherche, 39 enseignants ont participé à cette étude et ont répondu à un questionnaire de 25 questions. Les résultats ont révélé que la majorité des enseignants trouvent que l'enseignement des actes de parole et les éléments pragmatiques liées à ces actes est important dans le cadre de l'enseignement de l'anglais ; cependant, quand il s'agit de l'inclusion de ces éléments dans leur classe, ils ne les intègrent pas fréquemment. Donc, davantage d'efforts devraient être faits pour assurer l'enseignement de ces éléments pragmatiques et le développement de la compétence pragmatique des apprenants.

**Mots clés:** La pragmatique; apprentissage de l'Anglais comme langue étrangère; compétence pragmatique; théorie des actes de parole; enseignement de la pragmatique.

### ملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة الى تقييم اراء أساتذة التعليم العالي بالجزائر فيما يخص تدريس البراغماتية، بشكل عام، وأفعال الكلام، بشكل خاص، في فصل اللغة الإنجليزية. على وجه التحديد، تحاول الدراسة البحث في آراء المعلمين فيما يتعلق بتدريس أفعال الكلام والمعرفة البراغماتية التي لها صلة بها في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية. للمساعدة في تحقيق هدف البحث، شارك في هذه الدراسة عينة من 39 معلماً وأجابوا على استبيان مكون من 25 سؤال. كشفت النتائج أن غالبية المعلمين يجدون أن تدريس أفعال الكلام والعناصر البراغماتية المرتبطة بها يعتبر جزءاً مهماً من تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية؛ ومع ذلك، عندما يتعلق الأمر بإدراج هاته المعارف في فصولهم الدراسية، فإنهم لا يفعلون ذلك بشكل متكرر ومنتظم. وبالتالي، ينبغي بذل المزيد من الجهود لضمان تدريس المعلومات البراغماتية وتطوير الكفاءة البراغماتية لمتعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** البراغماتية؛ تعلم الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية؛ الكفاءة البراغماتية؛ نظرية أفعال الكلام؛ تدريس البراغماتية.

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## I- Introduction

Nowadays, the learning/teaching of English at the Algerian higher education level is gaining more and more interest and students are becoming more motivated to learn it regardless of their field of study. It is worth indicating that the positive attitudes of the Algerian government towards English as a foreign language (EFL) have been because of its usefulness to learners, the new changes in the field of language learning (the communicative approach), and also the recent wave of globalization. So, English is deemed so important by educational authorities and all students are encouraged to achieve the minimum proficiency in this language.

It is believed that the best way to produce successful and proficient users of English is to bring pragmatics and teaching/pedagogy together. Research in interlanguage pragmatics revealed that students, no matter what their level of grammar competence is, are struggling with pragmatics and speech act behaviour, and a good example of this are the Algerian students of English in higher education who show some deficiency in speaking and speech act production or/and interpretation. Therefore, in order to help them overcome their weaknesses, pragmatically adequate input and activities should be imparted within the content of the English course syllabus.

The current methods of teaching and the principles underlying those methods are of great help in achieving the goal of teaching pragmatics and speech acts, in particular, as well as facilitating the development of learners' pragmatic competence. Language classrooms are increasingly growing learner-centered, learners are seen as knowers and discoverers, and teachers function as facilitators. The classroom input can never represent fully the target language, so learners should learn more by themselves to delimit the eventual competence. This study is aimed to explore the teachers' attitudes towards the teaching of speech acts and pragmatic knowledge in the EFL classroom. The question that needs to be asked is: to what extent do teachers of English at the higher education level think well of the teaching of speech acts and pragmatics and how far do they implement it in their classrooms?

## II. What is pragmatics?

The field of pragmatics is deemed a recent field within linguistics which has generated different branches: cross-cultural pragmatics, contrastive pragmatics in addition to interlanguage pragmatics. Morris (1938) was the first to define pragmatics as the study of the relationship between the signs and their interpreters. Researchers, after him, gave a multitude of definitions; for instance, Stalnaker defines pragmatics as 'the study of linguistic acts and the contexts in which they are performed' (1972, p. 383). That is to say, it considers the linguistic acts (speech acts) and the social context that shapes their performance. Crystal (1985), on the other hand, claimed that pragmatics focuses on the users of language (i.e., the speakers), the linguistic choices they make, the social factors that affect these choices as well as the effects their language use has on the participants (i.e., the hearers) in the social interaction.

Leech (1983, p.6) also referred to the user of the language and thought of pragmatics as 'the study of meaning in relation to speech situations'. For him, understanding the nature of language itself requires understanding 'how language is used in communication' (1983, p.1). Leech divided pragmatics into two components: pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics. Pragmalinguistics is concerned with the linguistic side of pragmatics and takes into account '... the particular resources which a given language provides for conveying particular illocutions' (Leech, 1983, p. 11). In other words, it is related to the linguistic resources from which speakers of the language make their choice to perform a given speech act, i.e., the linguistic realization of a particular illocution.

Sociopragmatics, on the other hand, was defined by Leech (1983, p. 10) as 'the sociological interface of pragmatics'. To put it another way, sociopragmatics has to do with the interface of linguistic action and social structure (Barron,2003). Specifically, it examines the way such constraints such as, degree of imposition, social distance, and social status (Brown & Levinson, 1987) affect the choice of linguistic forms or strategies used to realize a particular illocution. That is to say, it deals with the impact

of such contextual factors as status, familiarity, and the degree of imposition of a given speech act on speech act performance. In fact, the linguistic realization **of speech acts and the contextual factors governing it represent the core of analysis and discussion in this study.**

Pragmatics can be distinguished from two points of view: micro pragmatics and macro pragmatics. Micro pragmatics involves the study of reference, implicature, and speech acts whereas macro pragmatics entails discourse analysis and metapragmatics (Barron,2003). It should be mentioned that the present study addresses the micro pragmatic side since the focus is based on speech acts.

## **II. 1. Pragmatic Competence**

Given that the main goal of this paper is to shed light on the close relation between pragmatics teaching and the development of the EFL learners' pragmatic competence, a clear definition of pragmatic competence needs to be included. However, since pragmatic competence is a sub-concept of communicative competence, it is of great importance to introduce what is meant by the broad notion of 'communicative competence'.

### **II.1.1 Communicative Competence**

The term of communicative competence was first coined by the sociolinguist Hymes (1972) in response to Chomsky's (1965) notion of linguistic competence which involved the knowledge of the grammatical rules and disregarded the contextual meaning. According to Hymes (1972), communicative competence is grammatical competence in addition to knowledge of the sociocultural rules of language use. Breen and Candlin (1980, p. 92) also defined it as the ability 'to share and negotiate meanings and conventions'. Douglas (2007, p. 219), in turn, stated that Hymes made reference to communicative competence as 'that aspect of competence that enables us to convey and interpret messages and to negotiate meanings interpersonally within specific contexts'.

Other researchers such as Canale (1983) and Canale and Swain (1980), Bachman (1990) and Bachman and Palmer (1996), conducted similar studies in an attempt to define communicative competence. As noted by Barron (2003, p. 9), 'it was not until Bachman (1990) that pragmatic competence came into its own'. Bachman (1990) introduced a three-part theoretical framework of communicative competence. Communicative competence, for him, consists of language competence, strategic competence, and psycho physiological mechanisms. Language competence comprises two types of knowledge: pragmatic and organizational competence. Organizational competence has to do with grammatical and textual competence, which is the same as Canal's (1983) concept of discourse competence. Discourse competence, for Canal, refers to the knowledge which enables a speaker or writer to achieve coherence and cohesion in both written and spoken discourse.

Pragmatic competence, in turn, is broken down into illocutionary competence and sociolinguistic competence (Bachman, 1990). While illocutionary competence involves the knowledge of speech acts and language functions, sociolinguistic competence is conceptualized as the knowledge of contextual appropriateness of linguistic forms used for conveying particular illocutions. That is to say, pragmatic competence is one's sensitivity to the language and context of its use. Strategic competence and psycho physiological mechanisms, on the other hand, do not concern knowledge but ability. while the former is conceived as the ability to assess the communicative situation, to organize and utter the utterances, the latter is related to the neuromuscular skills that are so important to the speech act performance (Ibid).

## **III. Speech Act Theory: A Brief Sketch**

Speech act theory turns around the idea of doing actions, or simply actions (Holtgraves, 2002). People when they speak, they are not just producing words or

sentences, they are, in fact, performing some linguistic action, e.g., criticizing, requesting, blaming and so on. The British philosopher Austin (1962) was the first to introduce speech act theory, a theory which marked the dawn of the field of pragmatics. Austin claimed that one is always doing something with one's words.

For Austin, when issuing an utterance, the speaker does three different acts: The locutionary act, the illocutionary act, and the perlocutionary act. When one says something (the locution), one is also performing an act (the illocution) with the intention of producing effects upon the thoughts and the feelings of the hearer (the perlocution). The illocutionary act represents the focus of speech act theory and is named by Austin as the 'speech act'. Apart from Austin, Searle (1969, 1979) developed speech act theory in a variety of ways. He introduced the felicity conditions which need to be met for an act to be performed, his classification of speech acts and also the idea of indirect speech acts.

Since the introduction of Austin's taxonomy of speech acts, Searle's classification (1979) remains the most popular. Five classes are presented in the following:

- Assertives: In performing assertives, the speaker is committing themselves to something being the case. For example, stating, suggesting.
- Directives: In performing directives, the speaker tries to get the hearer to do something. For example, ordering, requesting.
- Commissives: In performing commissives, the speaker is committing themselves to a future course of action. For example, promising, offering.
- Expressives: In performing expressives, the speaker expresses their psychological attitude towards a state of affairs provided in the expressed proposition. For example, thanking, congratulating.
- Declarations: In performing declarations, the speaker creates a correspondence between the propositional content and the world. These illocutions are, in fact, performed by someone with complete authority within a given institution. For example, appointing, resigning.

Speech acts can also be distinguished in terms of being direct or indirect. Direct speech acts are acts in which '... the speaker says what he means...'; indirect speech acts, on the other hand, are acts by means of which the speaker '... means something more than what he says'. (Searle et al., 1980: VIII). In fact, Searle (1979) stated that there are two kinds of indirect speech acts: conventionally indirect and non-conventionally indirect acts. While the conventionally indirect speech acts are conventionally intended to perform an act different from that represented by the literal meaning of the utterance and need little inference, the non-conventionally indirect speech acts require, in fact, some process of inference.

#### **IV. The Importance of Teaching Pragmatics**

The chief goal of bringing pragmatics into the classroom is increasing the learners' pragmatic awareness (Bardovi-Harlig, 1996). Ishihara and Cohen (2010) argued strongly about the necessity of teaching the principles of pragmatics in both second language (SL) and foreign language (FL) contexts. It is not the teacher-centered classroom where the teacher conveys the information and learners receive it, which helps in achieving such an endeavour (Bardovi-Harlig, 1996). By raising pragmatic awareness, a number of goals are meant here. Teaching pragmatics enables the learners to listen to authentic exchanges, to look for or pay attention to reactions, and to take into account the effects resulting from the choice of one word rather than another. Also providing a model of the way a speech act is performed by a native speaker; for

example, an American, is one part of increasing pragmatic awareness. In addition to this, learners are offered the tools to comprehend and respond to speech acts when these are addressed to them (Ibid).

The classroom plays a significant role as a source of input. To facilitate the development of the learners' pragmatic competence, pragmatically appropriate input should be provided. Classrooms are the only source of input for foreign language learners (Bardovi-Harlig, 1996). Textbooks are the central key of the classroom curriculum (Vellenga, 2004). Bardovi-Harlig (1996), in this respect, claimed that pedagogical materials or published materials represent high prestige sources of input to the learners and are readily available. By and large, coursebooks were criticized as to their appropriacy for providing learners with accurate communicative functions (Boxer & Pickering, 1995). In other words, these textbooks including conversations or dialogues do not provide pragmatically accurate examples of speech acts. However, there are some new books which help to present appropriate information to learners; for example, *Speaking Effectively: Strategies for Academic Conversation*, by Kayfetz, J.L., which provides a good model of what should be considered when choosing a textbook for a course or when developing pedagogical materials (Bardovi-Harlig, 1996).

Research, in turn, plays an important role in the development of pragmatically appropriate materials. Cross cultural pragmatics research and interlanguage pragmatics research has yielded quite reasonable descriptions of potential target languages as far as specific speech acts and conversational exchanges are concerned (Bardovi-Harlig, 1996). Cohen and Olshtain (1993, p. 34) stated that 'the research literature provides relatively detailed descriptions of realization strategies for perhaps eight speech acts in a variety of situations (i.e., apologies, requests, complaints, disapproval, refusals, disagreement, gratitude, compliments)'. English is deemed the best represented language (Bardovi-Harlig, 1996). This research data is not exhaustive, yet they are accessible and useful (Ibid). Omar (1995) in Kiswahili and Takenoya (1995b) in Japanese, for instance, have already used the results of their research in the foreign language classroom.

As materials cannot provide the linguistic realization of every speech act in all the social situations, it is also impossible for teachers to bring to learners all the knowledge of every speech act explicitly. The authentic language and representative cases will boost learners to acquire more by themselves, and these learners, in fact, take a chief role in the discovery process (Bardovi-Harlig, 1996). It is also worth noting that pragmatics is an area of language instruction where teachers and students can genuinely learn together (Bardovi-Harlig & Taylor, 2003). That is to say, teachers act as co-learners with their students. In this respect, Bardovi-Harlig made a strong case for the role of the teacher in implementing pragmatic issues in the classroom (1996) by stating:

The real responsibility of the classroom teacher is not to instruct students specifically in the intricacies of complimenting, direction-giving, or closing a conversation, but rather to make students more aware that pragmatic functions exist in language, specifically in discourse, in order that they may be more aware of these functions as learners. We as teachers must be knowledgeable of these speech acts and their component parts in order to determine what is naturalistic input for our students. (p.31)

Activities are important to raise pragmatic awareness because materials alone are not sufficient. Bardovi-Harlig and Taylor (2003) presented a series of pedagogical activities for teaching speech acts and conversational practices in L2 contexts (e.g., closings and openings). A number of speaking activities were suggested by Bardovi-Harlig (1996) to achieve that goal. For example, to ask the student to examine how a speech act functions in his/ her native language and culture, and this is going to provide them not only with a basis of comparison but also with the opportunity to share their

speech act and explore the pragmatic rules governing their native language. Another example which can be used with intermediate and advanced learners is data collection, and here students can collect examples of speech acts from recorded resources such as, the radio, movies, books, plays and then they analyse and compare the different ways of performing for instance a good bye in different contexts (Ibid). There is also initial evidence that pragmatics instruction has desirable effects. Morrow (1995) showed that instruction in complaints and refusals enabled learners achieve long-term goals in clarity as to the use of politeness markers. This, in fact, stresses the idea that teaching pragmatics and the development of pragmatic competence in learners are closely related (Kasper & Rose, 2001).

## **V. Research Methodology**

### **V.1. Sample Population**

In the present study, the participants are all teachers of English working at eleven Algerian higher education institutions. These include: The Teachers' Training School of Constantine, Les Frères Mentouri Constantine 1 University, Larbi Ben M'hidi University, 8 May 1945 University, Batna 2 University, Mohamed Boudiaf University, Abd El Hafid Boussouf University, Larbi Tebessi University, Algiers 1 University, Algiers 2 University, and Kasdi Merbah University. The sample of population includes 39 teachers holding either an MA (Master / Magistère) or a PHD (Doctorate) degree. The majority are full time teachers and have a teaching experience ranging from 5 to 10 years. Most of the other remaining teachers (12) have taught English more than 10 years (from 11 to 30 years). The teachers were chosen purposefully because they all taught different subjects including oral expression or speaking and Phonetics in which English language use can manifest itself a lot in the different tasks assigned to students either implicitly or explicitly. It is also worth mentioning that a good number of teachers (11) have been to an English-speaking country, which means that they were at least once active participants in conversational exchanges be it with native speakers or with non-native speakers living there, and they are, thus, supposed to be more aware about the importance of pragmatic knowledge to communicate effectively in English.

### **V.2. Research Tool**

To achieve the aim of this research paper, which is an investigation of the teachers' perceptions of the importance of pragmatics instruction in EFL contexts, a questionnaire was used to collect answers from Algerian higher education teachers of English during the academic year 2020/ 2021 (see appendix). The questionnaire consisted of 25 items and was divided into two sections: one on personal information and the other on pragmatic knowledge and teaching. All the 39 teachers filled it in though there were some teachers who left few questions unanswered but they remained a minority. It should be mentioned that the main purpose in this study was to address a large number of subjects to have a clearer idea about their perspectives on teaching pragmatics in the EFL classroom and the researcher did their best to send the questionnaire via email to the Algerian higher education institutions and to post it in the different social media groups of Algerian university teachers and researchers. Unfortunately, only 39 teachers responded to the questionnaire.

## **VI. Findings of the Research**

The questionnaire examines, specifically, the importance of the teaching of speech acts and the associated pragmatic knowledge at the level of the English departments of higher education institutions; the teachers' beliefs about teaching speech acts and the relevant pragmatic knowledge; and their opinions about the students' attitudes towards teaching speech acts and pragmatics. The findings of the study were represented in the form of percentages and some were reported in graphs for the sake of clarity. Data analysis and discussion were provided together because the

researcher thinks that they are closely connected and this would be better to suit the nature of the research question.

## **VI.1. Data Analysis and Discussion**

### **Pragmatic Knowledge and Teaching Teachers' Understanding of Speech Acts**

To start, this question requests from the teachers to indicate what is meant by pragmatic concept of speech acts and gave them four options:

- a. Sociopragmatic knowledge: knowledge of a community's social and cultural norms related to speech acts (i.e., knowledge about familiarity between interlocutors, social status, etc., in addition to knowledge of the cultural cues necessary to understand and perform speech acts).
- b. Pragmalinguistic knowledge: knowledge of the linguistic conventions associated with speech acts (i.e., knowledge of the linguistic forms and strategies for realising speech acts).
- c. Both
- d. Others. Please specify.

76.92 % of the teachers gave the correct answer and said that the pragmatic knowledge of speech acts entails both the sociopragmatic knowledge and pragmalinguistic knowledge of speech acts; however, 15.38 % of them thought that this pragmatic knowledge related to speech acts includes only the sociopragmatic knowledge. Few teachers (7.69 %) opted for choice 'b', i.e., the pragmalinguistic knowledge. No one chose 'd'. These findings may be due to two possible factors. The nature of the module the teachers taught may play a role in their conceptions and teaching practices. For example, teachers of linguistics except for two only, as shown in their responses, chose the correct definition of pragmatic knowledge of language functions, which means that they were aware of the existence of 'pragmatics' as a recent sub-field in the field of linguistics, a branch in which speech acts and other pragmatic aspects are the focus of research. Atamna, (2008) argued that the nature of the subject the teachers teach may have influenced their teaching behaviour and their views about culture, in which is embedded the knowledge of speech acts. As cited by the same researcher, Pajares (1992) also found that there is a close connection between the teachers' views and their classroom practices. A considerable number of teachers who taught a variety of modules including research methodology, pedagogical trends, academic writing, literature, etc., did not teach linguistics and could also provide the right answer and this may be because they were familiar with the recent developments in the field of linguistics and research carried out in foreign language teaching.

### **Is Pragmatics Part of Teaching English as a Foreign Language?**

Most of the teachers (89.74%) thought that the teaching of English as a foreign language includes the teaching of pragmatics, and very few (5.12%) reckoned that this is not the case and that the teaching of pragmatics is not part of teaching English. Others, who represent a minority, (5.12%) did not answer the question. One is inclined to think that most of the teachers were aware of the close connection between teaching pragmatics and teaching the English language. Hence, they were more willing to involve it in their teaching and enhance their learners' pragmatic competence.

### **Teachers' Experience of Pragmatic Instruction as Students**

53.84% of the participants said they received pragmatic instruction when they were BA (Licence) students; the other remaining teachers (46.15%) said that they were not taught any pragmatic knowledge as BA students. Both types of answers apply to teachers with more than ten years of work experience and teachers who have ten years or less. This shows some divergence in their views and suggests that the term 'pragmatic instruction' is confusing among teachers. With regard to the first sub-category of teachers who said they were taught pragmatics; their answers raise some doubt. This is supported by the evidence that there was no explicit teaching of culture in which pragmatic issues are a sub-component since the implementation of the English

course syllabus in 1972 (Atamna, 2008). The content of the syllabus has not changed since then except for the reforms of 2004 which affected the form and not the content (Ibid). Bouchikhi and Barka (2017) confirmed this when they stated that the recent policy reform which marked Algeria's higher education sector was the one that had been in place since 2004, and they added that policy makers in Algeria when trying to imitate European policies for higher education had focused on form and ignored substance. It is also worth mentioning that if these teachers of the first sub-category had learnt some pragmatics, they might have done so implicitly or from the materials some teachers used in their attempt to adapt the English course syllabus. For the second sub-category of teachers who revealed that they were not taught pragmatics, it seems that they were aware about the then situation where there was no module devoted to the explicit teaching of pragmatics.

### **The Importance of Learning Speech Acts to Students**

In response to this question which asks whether learning speech acts is important to the students, 58.97% of the participants believed that learning speech acts was very important, 38.46% said it was important, and only 2.56% answered negatively. This question aims to see the attitude of students towards pragmatics learning. As stated by Ellis (1994), a student's foreign language learning ability could be affected by their attitudes towards the target language. Nearly all teachers said that their students have a positive attitude towards learning pragmatic aspects.

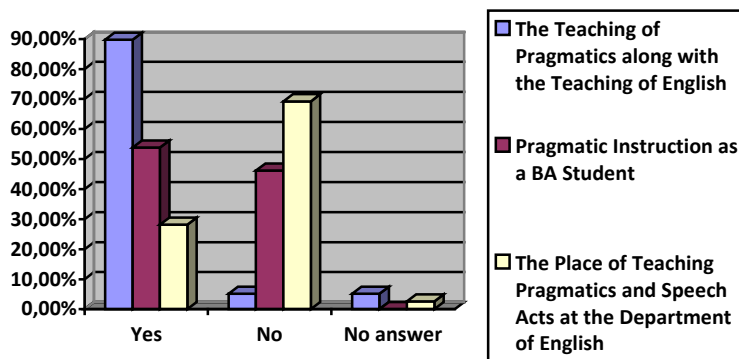
### **Students' Problems when Communicating in English**

In trying to gain insights into this question which enquires into the nature of students' problems in communicating in English, 74.35% of the teachers said that the problems students faced were both of a linguistic and pragmatic nature, 20.51% believed that they were of a linguistic nature, and 5.12% thought they were of a pragmatic nature. More important is the fact that among 11 teachers who had been to an English-speaking country (28.20%), 20.51% believed that the students' communication problems could be linguistic or pragmatic, 5.12% thought that they were linked to linguistic factors, and 2.56% thought they were attributed to pragmatic factors. The reason behind the choice of most of the teachers of the latter sub-class is the fact that they had direct contact with the target culture, they knew more about the difficulties of the target language in terms of both its linguistic and pragmatic elements and, thus, they were in a good position to identify the source of the language problems that students faced.

### **The Place of Pragmatics and Speech Acts at the Investigated Algerian Higher Education**

This question requires teachers to say whether the teaching of the pragmatics of speech acts has an important place within the English language course at the higher education level. The answers generated by the survey revealed that the majority of the participants (69.23%) said that the teaching of speech acts and pragmatics was not given an important role when teaching the English language. 28.20 % of them, however, believed that the latter has its valuable place within the English course syllabus. One teacher (2.56%) left the question unanswered. It is worth mentioning that all the teachers of the first category believed that the teaching of pragmatics is important (question 14) and 64.10 % of them thought that pragmatics and speech acts should be taught (question 15).





Graph 1. Teachers' Answers to Questions 8, 9 & 13

### The Importance of Teaching Pragmatics and Speech Acts

This question aims at finding out about the importance teachers attribute to the teaching of speech acts and pragmatics at the English department. All the respondents believed in the importance of teaching the pragmatics of speech acts together with English teaching, and their answers varied between 'very important' (64.10%) and 'important' (35.89%). This emphasizes the close relationship between the teaching of the English language and that of Speech acts and pragmatics. As claimed by Bardovi-Harlig (1996), 'One of the Goals in facilitating the development of Pragmatic competence is providing pragmatically appropriate input. And classrooms are indisputably good sources of input' (P.23-24). So, the Provision of Pragmatics in language classrooms helps in enhancing learners' acquisition of pragmatic competence in English.

### Teaching Speech Acts and Pragmatics to Improve Pragmatic Behaviour

This question is a follow up to the previous question and addresses the teachers who chose option 'a'. It explores the teachers' views as to whether they deem the teaching of speech acts a must to improve the learners' speech act production and comprehension. The answers to this question revealed that 64.10% of the respondents said 'yes' and none said 'no'. It should be mentioned that three respondents from those who selected 'b' also said 'yes'. Actually, the teaching of speech acts is a prerequisite for the content of the English syllabus.

### Pragmatics and Speech Acts Frequency in Lectures

This question asks the participants about how often they included pragmatics and speech acts in their lectures. The responses showed that 15.38% of the teachers often included speech acts and their associated pragmatic elements, 41.02% sometimes dealt with these pragmatic features, 35.89% rarely provided their learners with those aspects, and 7.69% never did. Given these results, one is inclined to say that the teachers at the English departments thought of the teaching of speech acts and its relevant pragmatic knowledge positively; however, when it comes to their implementation in their lectures, a considerable percentage (84.60 %) did not incorporate them on a regular basis and frequently.

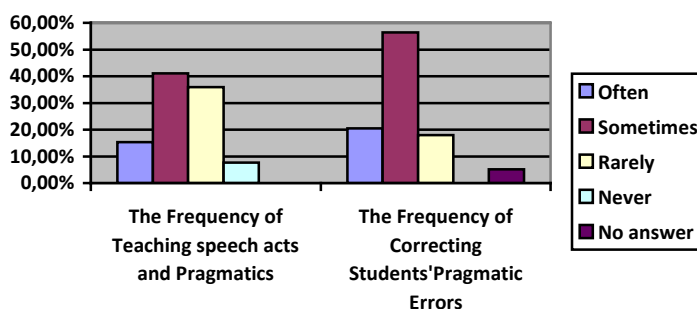
### The Technique (s) Used to Teach Speech Acts

The question explores the technique(s) applied by teachers in teaching speech acts and gives them a number of options from which to choose one or more possibilities. The responses provided by the survey revealed that 76.92% of the participants selected 'the video' as a teaching technique, 35.89% of them chose 'ethnographic methods', 58.97 % opted for 'controlled practice', and 48.71 % chose

‘contrastive analysis’. The other answers ranged from ‘negative feedback’ (25.64%), ‘focus on form’ (25.64%) to ‘noticing and awareness’ (48.71%). Two of the participants did not answer the question. Two conclusions can be drawn from these answers. One has to do with the fact that teachers seemed to focus mainly on the use of videos, controlled practice, noticing/ awareness, and contrastive analysis as techniques in their attempt to teach speech acts. More important is the fact that the teachers’ answers seemed contradictory with their views to Question 17 which seeks to find out about the materials they used to teach speech acts. The materials they assigned to students, except for role-plays and discussion of topics related to society and culture, tended to sensitize them with knowledge about the English culture in general and did not encourage engaging the learners as active participants in the learning process. Materials such as videos, audios, proverbs, quizzes, authentic dialogues, articles, short stories, idioms, authentic selections (hand-outs), etc., were meant to favour the traditional way of teaching and to neglect the pragmatic competence-oriented teaching. This is not to say that these materials cannot be applied to teach speech acts, but it is all about the teaching method used. The focus in pragmatics, as stated above in the literature, is to help learners listen to conversations, to watch for reactions, and to take into account what may result from the choice of some linguistic forms over others. Learners should also be encouraged to think by themselves of what is pragmatically appropriate when expressing particular language functions. Therefore, the teachers’ views about question 19 seemed misleading and these teachers need, indeed, to reconsider their teaching practices when trying to refer to speech acts in their teaching.

### Students’ Speech Act Production Correction Frequency

This question enquires into how often teachers correct their students’ production of speech acts as to its pragmatic appropriateness. The responses demonstrated that 20.51% of the teachers often corrected their students’ speech act production, 56.41% sometimes gave feedback on the students’ utterances when expressing speech acts, and 17.94% rarely did that. However, two of the teachers left the question without an answer. One thing that should be mentioned about this is that the teachers’ answers to this question and to question 19 which asks them about the techniques they used when teaching speech acts showed some inconsistent views. While most teachers said that they corrected their students’ utterances in terms of their pragmatic appropriacy, only 25.64% of them said that they used ‘negative feedback’ as a technique when dealing with these pragmatic aspects, a technique which entails providing the learners with tools and information to make pragmatically appropriate linguistic choices.



Graph 2. Teachers’ Answers to Questions 16 & 20

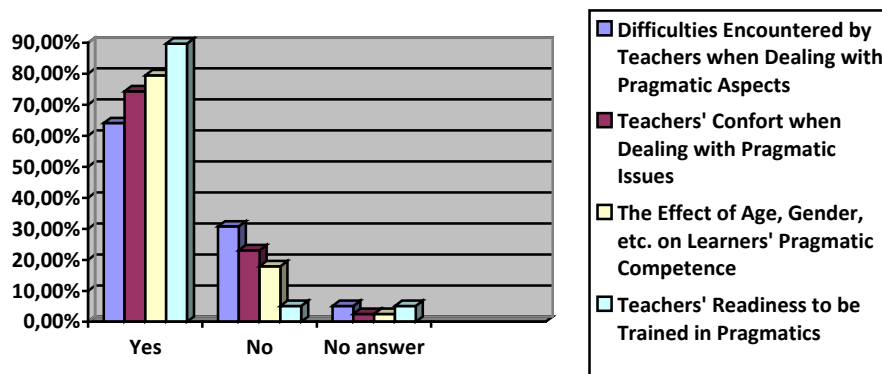
### The Difficulties Encountered by Teachers Regarding Pragmatic Issues

This question asks teachers about whether they face any difficulties in dealing with speech acts and their related pragmatic knowledge and gives them two options: a. ‘yes’ and b. ‘no’. In response to the question, 64.10% of the subjects answered ‘yes’ and

30.76% said 'no'. Two participants did not answer the question. Given the data obtained, one can say that most of the teachers admitted that they had problems when dealing with the pragmatic elements of the language. More important is the fact that the majority are relatively experienced as can be seen clearly from the background information; however, this does not ensure a native-like linguistic proficiency and an excellent mastery of the pragmatic knowledge necessary to use the English language. These difficulties can be due to two reasons. First, 20.51% of the teachers had direct contact with the target language during their stay in the English-speaking country, but it was only temporary except for one who stayed longer (5years and 5 months); the remaining teachers had no direct contact with the English culture and language at all. Second, the majority confirmed that students' errors are attributed to pragmatic along with linguistic factors, so it would be unlikely to bring all the pragmatic knowledge of every speech act explicitly, as stated in the literature. In this respect, it is also worth mentioning that 74.35 % of these teachers said that they felt comfortable when dealing with the teaching of speech acts and 79.48% of them thought that gains in students' pragmatic competence are related to factors such as, age, gender, and native language, etc.

### Teachers' Readiness to be Trained in English Pragmatics and Speech Acts

This question aims to find out whether teachers felt the need to receive training in the pragmatics of speech acts and to introduce new changes to their teaching experience. Nearly all the teachers (89.74%) agreed to take the training and this concerned teachers who visited the English-speaking country and those who had never been there. In addition, teachers who are highly experienced as well as novice ones showed interest in training. More importantly, not only teachers who had encountered difficulties when dealing with the pragmatic issues but also those who had no problem in tackling them were willing to take the training. It should be also noted that two teachers left the question unanswered. Based on this data, one can say that almost all the participants in this study are ready to adapt their teaching practices and promote the learning of pragmatics and speech acts in order to help facilitating their students' pragmatic development.



Graph 3. Teachers' Answers to Questions 21, 22, 23 & 24

## VII. Conclusion

This study explores the Algerian higher education teachers' perceptions of the teaching of pragmatics and speech acts in the EFL classrooms. The questionnaire showed some inconsistency in the teachers' views. The majority of teachers revealed that the teaching of the pragmatics of speech acts was not given any important place within the English course; they had an understanding about speech acts and their relevant pragmatic knowledge, and more importantly, they believed in the significance of teaching these pragmatic aspects to their students. However, when it comes to the implementation of these aspects in their classrooms, a considerable number did not

include them on a frequent and regular basis. Besides, the materials that the majority of them used to teach those pragmatic issues were meant to familiarize the learners with the English culture and authentic language in general and not to increase students' noticing of the pragmatic issues. A further point that includes some contradiction is that most of the teachers said that they did correct their students' speech act production with regard to its pragmatic appropriateness whereas a small number showed that they used negative feedback when dealing with these pragmatic features.

In order to improve the quality of learners' outcomes in the field of English language teaching and learning, teachers need to become more active decision-makers and engage in the development of new educational reforms that call for pragmatics teaching. The content of the English course syllabus used in the Algerian higher education institutions should be backed up with detailed descriptions from research conducted on speech act production for the sake of boosting learners' pragmatic development. Addressing the teaching of English pragmatics and speech acts as part of language pedagogy will certainly and truly empower students to become competent users of the language.

**Appendix  
Teachers' Questionnaire**

Your timely completion of this questionnaire will help bring to fruition a research work. I will be utterly grateful if you could share your experience and ideas. Your input is very important and will be greatly appreciated.

**Guidelines:** For each item, please tick the right box or write in the space provided.

**Personal information**

1.Name of your school /university: .....

2. Degree(s) held:  
 BA (Licence)   
 MA (Master/Magistère)   
 PhD (Doctorate)

3. Employment Status:  
 Full time  Part time

4.Experience:(Number of years) .....

5.Subjects Taught:  
 .....

6. Length of living/staying in English-speaking countries (indicate the duration in days, months or years):

- a) I have never been to English-speaking countries   
 b)I have lived for..... I have stayed for .....

**Pragmatic Knowledge and Teaching**

7. What is your understanding of pragmatic knowledge related to speech acts or language functions such as requests, refusals, etc.?

a. Sociopragmatic knowledge: knowledge of a community's social and cultural norms related to speech acts (i.e., knowledge about familiarity between interlocutors, social status, etc., in addition to knowledge of the cultural cues necessary to understand and perform speech acts).

b. Pragmalinguistic knowledge: knowledge of the linguistic conventions associated with speech acts (i.e., knowledge of the linguistic forms and strategies for realizing speech acts).

c. Both

d. Others. Please specify.  
 .....  
 .....

8. Do you think that teaching English as a foreign language includes the teaching of pragmatics?

- a. Yes  b. No

9. Did you yourself receive any pragmatic instruction when you were a BA (License) student of English?

- a. Yes  b. No

10. In case you have been to an English-speaking country (Britain or the US), during your stay, do you think that the pragmatic knowledge you had (whether British or American) helped you to communicate appropriately in English?

- a. Yes  b. No

11. How important is learning speech acts to your students?

- a. Very important  b. Important  c. Not important

12. In case your students face problems in communicating effectively in English, these are:

- a. of a linguistic nature   
b. of a pragmatic nature   
c. both   
d. Others

.....  
.....

13. Do you think the English department gives much importance to the teaching of the pragmatics of speech acts when teaching the English language?

- a. Yes  b. No

14. How important, in your opinion, is the teaching of pragmatics and speech acts as part of teaching English?

- a. Very important  b. Important  c. Not important

15. If you have answered (a), do you think that speech acts and their related pragmatic aspects should be taught to improve the learners' production and comprehension of pragmatic behaviour?

- a. Yes  b. No

16. How often do you yourself include pragmatics, in general, and speech acts, in particular, in your lectures?

- a. Often  b. Sometimes  c. Rarely  d. Never

17. If you have selected (a) or (b), what teaching materials (including hand-outs) do you use to teach pragmatics, in general, and speech acts, in particular? Give examples.

.....  
.....  
.....

18. If you were to teach speech acts and pragmatic issues as part of teaching English, which of the following would be the most important to include? (Rank the answers from 'a' to 'i' in order of preference using 1 to 9 in the squares provided, after filling in answer 'i' with whatever additions you have. In case, you have no addition, rank them from 1 to 8).

- a. Lectures   
b. Sitcom video scenes or clips   
c. Pragmatic awareness-raising activities   
d. Discussion of cultural clues   
e. L1 vs. L2 contrastive analysis tasks   
f. Role plays   
g. Data collection and analysis activities   
h. Activities incorporating spoken corpora   
i. Others

.....  
.....  
.....

19. When teaching English, which technique do you use to teach speech acts? Please tick the appropriate box (you can tick more than one).

- a. Video: Through the use of sitcoms, pragmatic awareness can be raised due to the students' ability to isolate specific target speech acts in a variety of contexts.   
b. Ethnographic Methods: a learners-as-researchers approach, which involves analysing speech act performance in realistic contexts. Students are asked to perform their own data collection and analysis and are made active investigators of native and target language speech act performance; for example, asking the learners to find a realistic situation which includes speech act utterances and these situations can be noticed in

classroom materials, television and movies, and, where possible, observation of naturally-occurring language. □

c. Controlled practice activities: Guided practice includes delimited tasks with clear goals that are designed to focus on particular areas of competence; for example, students are provided with a role play activity which has clear goals such as identifying the situation of the scenario and its contextual features, coming up with a response (speech act production) to the scenario provided, and providing feedback to their classmates. □

d. Negative Feedback: Instructors evaluate the target language production for its pragmatic appropriateness, so that students are provided with the information and tools to make pragmatically appropriate choices. □

e. Focus on Form: Pragmatic instruction in focus on form has to do with mapping the forms and functions of the speech acts, as well as the forms with their contextual distribution. For example, asking the students to analyse the linguistic forms used to realize a particular speech act and bring the situation where they can be used or found. □

f. Noticing /awareness: Students are asked to identify and discuss relevant contextual factors as well as the linguistic forms for particular situations, which is particularly relevant to pragmatics instruction. Therefore, they will focus on noticing linguistic forms, functional meanings and contextual features associated with the speech act performance. □

g. Contrastive analysis: This type of instruction involves a comparison of the native and target language speech act performance, including contextual factors, linguistic forms, and the semantic moves associated with speech act performance and culturally-specific strategies. For example, asking students to provide examples from their native language that show and raise their awareness about how speech act production can differ from that of the foreign language. □

20. In case you correct your students' target speech act production for its pragmatic appropriateness, how often do you do that?

a. Often □                      b. Sometimes □                      c. Rarely □

21. Do you encounter any difficulties when dealing with the English language pragmatic issues?

a. Yes □                      b. No □

22. Do you feel comfortable when dealing with the teaching of speech acts and the associated cultural cues?

a. Yes □                      b. No □

23. Do you think that gains in students' pragmatic competence are related to certain factors like: age, gender, native language, etc.?

a. Yes □                      b. No □

24. Are you ready to receive teacher training in English pragmatics and speech acts?

a. Yes □                      b. No □

25. Please feel free to add any further comments.

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