

## **Cultural Awareness and its Role in Pragmatic Competence. A study in EFL**

### **Abstract**

Based on numerous instances of culturally based misunderstanding between interlocutors from different backgrounds, it has been seen that sociolinguistic and cultural variability provides fertile grounds for miscommunication problems among the learners and speakers of any foreign language. It is the aim of this study to investigate the aspects of such socio-culturally based miscommunication made by the Yemeni EFL learners when they are encountered in social communicative events in English. For this purpose, the current study investigated the request strategies in English used by Yemeni undergraduates majoring in English in the Faculty of Education, Tamar University, compared to those strategies used by American native speakers of English. Data for this study was elicited from the samples through the Discourse Completion Test (DCT). This DCT involved six natural situations to which the respondents are expected to re-act making requests. This inter-cultural pragmatic research study found that the learners in question struggled to communicate appropriately when they were encountered in social communicative contexts in the target language. In spite of the fact that they had a high level of general language proficiency, their grammatical competence did not show a corresponding level of pragmatic competence.

## **Introduction**

The scientific study of communication and miscommunication across cultures is a relatively new area of research and one that holds much promise both in terms of language learning and, in general, in terms of intercultural communication. The need for more research in this aspect of interchanging communication exists from the mutual relationship between language competence and the required pragmatic competence. Interactants' imposing the social rules of one culture on their communicative behavior in a situation where the social rules of another culture would be more appropriate lead to pragmatic and communicative failure, consequently. The fact that there is great variability across cultures with respect to sociolinguistic norms and behavior patterns has been investigated and approved by various studies in second language acquisition. According to Mahadi and Jafari (2012) there is a very close relationship between language and culture in general, and a specific language and its culture in particular. That is, culture has a direct effect on language. In fact, the two issues are closely correlated and interrelated. Language is the symbolic presentation of a nation or a specific community. In other words, language is the symbolic presentation of a culture.

Striving for intercultural competence does not mean assimilation into the target culture. Rather, intercultural language learning involves the development of a "third place" between the learner's native culture and the target culture, i.e. between self and other (Liddicoat, Crozet & Lo Bianco, 1999, p. 181). Language learners need to understand what native speakers mean when they use the language, even if they do not choose to replicate native speakers' behavior (Liddicoat, 2000). Cook (1999) highlights the importance of conscious noticing of linguistic forms, functional meanings, speech styles and relevant contexts. Trosborg (1995) and Kasper and Rose (2002) also advocate the sharpening of learners' awareness of appropriate pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic behaviour through explicit teaching and metapragmatic treatment of pragmatic features by way of description, explanation, and discussion. More specifically it is suggested that pragmatic and grammatical awareness are largely independent, and that "high levels of grammatical competence do not guarantee concomitant high levels of pragmatic competence" (Bardovi-Harlig, 1999, p. 506). Thomas (1983) concurs in suggesting that pragmatic competence

cannot be simply grafted on to grammatical competence and that there may even be cases of pragmatic fossilization.

### **Review of Related Literature**

Languaculture in the linguistic system is regarded by Risager (2007) as a discursive superstructure on the linguistic system, a continuum ranging from semantic and pragmatic potential (denotative aspect accounted for in dictionaries) to encyclopedic information. The relationship between language and culture when the language in question is a foreign language, researchers stress, is specific due to the interplay of L1 and L2 languages and languacultures. Due to L1 interference learners develop an amalgam of their L1 and L2 languages/languacultures (interlanguage) despite their awareness of some semantic and pragmatic distinctions between their L1 and L2. Even highly competent L2 speakers are reported to manifest traces of what Risager regards as their L1 languaculture. According to Le Page (1978, p. 41; In: Deda, 2013)

“When we come to the central question of ‘competence’ we have to ask: ‘What is it an individual needs to know, in order to operate as a member of this society?’ A society only exists in the competence of its members to make it work as it does; a language only exists in the competence of those who use and regard themselves as users of that language, and the latter competence is the essential mediating system for the former.”

Here, the term competence is regarded as a living social action which affects social behavior in order for the latter to be achieved clearly and to avoid misunderstandings. While some studies (e.g. Albirini, 2009; Saricoban & Caliskan, 2011) found language learners’ positive attitudes toward learning target language culture, others (e.g. Jabeen & Shah 2011) indicated language learners’ negative attitudes. Most recently, Rafieyan et al. (2013) concluded that familiarity with the cultural features of the target language society, on the one hand, and interest toward learning those cultural features, on the other hand, play a significant role in the development of pragmatic comprehension ability in English as a foreign language context.

The introduction of the concept of cultural interference to second language acquisition theory was a significant contribution of Hymes (1972). He believed that people fall back to their native culture when communicate in another language and what is regarded as communicative competence in one speech community could be regarded differently in another:

Even the ethnographies that we have, though almost never focused on speaking, show us that communities differ significantly in ways of speaking, in patterns of repertoire and switching, in the roles and meanings of speech. They indicate differences with regard to beliefs, values, reference groups, norms and the like, as these enter into the ongoing system of language use and its acquisition by children (Hymes, 1972, p. 33).

Culture or non-linguistic conventions not only affect linguistic productions, but also are reflected in them as well and it is commonly accepted that culture plays a noticeable role in language behavior. According to LoCastro (2003), in cross-cultural communication, the successful interpretation of speakers' intended meanings basically depends on interactants' own cultural conventions of interpretation. Thus, cultural schemata, i.e. pre-existing knowledge structures based on experience in their first-language culture, affect the interpretation and production of pragmatic meaning of utterances. In addition, LoCastro (2003) claims that manifestations of cultural models of thought are implanted in discourse both at micro and macro levels. While micro-level includes prosodic features, listener behavior, turn-taking, conversational routines, conventional indirectness and speech act realization, macro-level consists of features which have an effect on cross-cultural communication like attribution of illocutionary force, perception of politeness, and violation or adherence to co-operative principle. Issues such as mismatches between form and function, the transfer of socio-pragmatic conventions from the first language culture and unawareness of offensive topics in a second language culture might hinder cross-cultural communication (LoCastro, 2003).

Interactants' acquaintance with the cultural conventions and normal rules of a particular language is highly significant for successful communication in the TL. This does not imply the adherence to these norms all times, but if the interlocutors wish to respond in a polite or appropriate manner, they need to be aware of what actually constitutes appropriate behavior. What is considered appropriate or inappropriate by speakers of a particular language is closely related to their cultural norms. Consequently, without knowledge of the target language's cultural conventions, a speaker will not be able to adapt his utterances according to the cultural framing. In this concern, Yule (1996, p. 87) states "we all develop what is referred to as cultural schemata. These schemata are based on background knowledge structures and will be culturally determined". Similarly, Müller (1981 in Kasper 1997, p. 13) refers to what he called cultural isomorphism, "which is an interpretive strategy used to make sense

of the world (...) [and] can be described as a combination of assimilation and spot-the-difference". Background knowledge and previous experience are used to classify new experiences as familiar or unfamiliar. According to both Yule and Müller, the interpretation of the world and the encountered situations is thus linked to someone's cultural background. Culture difference between the first language and the target language might pose a challenge to the development of pragmatic competence in the target language.

### **Objectives of the Study**

This study aims to achieve the following objectives:

- Analyzing the socio-cultural pragmatic competence of the Yemeni EFL learners when they request in English .
- Finding out the Yemeni EFL learners' degree of adherence to or violation of the pragmatic norms of requesting in English.

### **Questions of the study**

This study is intended to answer the following two questions:

**Question One:** Do the Yemeni EFL learners incorporate the target language socio-cultural pragmatic norms in requesting in English?

**Question two:** To what extent do the Yemeni EFL learners approximate to the pragmatic norms of requesting in English?

### **Methodology**

#### **Data Collection**

It is demonstrated that speech acts, a set of circumstances in which people interact in some conventional way to arrive at some outcome, e.g. how does one make a request, a compliment, express disagreement or a complaint etc. are governed by a systematic set of community specific rules (Yule, 1996). These rules are always confined to a cultural context (the interpretation of language codes results from the social and cultural semantic systems). Violations or ignorance of these rules is bound to create some serious communication problems and widen the social gap between the interacting individuals and groups.

Accordingly, this study intended to investigate the request strategies in English used by Yemeni undergraduates majoring in English in the Faculty of Education, Tamar University, compared to those strategies used by American native speakers of English. Data for this study was elicited from the samples through the Discourse Completion Test (DCT). The DCT is a form of questionnaire depicting some natural situations to which the respondents are expected to re-act making requests. This test was originally designed by Blum-Kulka (1982) and used by many researchers as Olshtain and Cohen (1983) in their study of apologies in Hebrew and English, Beebe, Takahashi and Uliss-Wiltz (1990) in their work on refusals in Japanese and English, and Eisenstien and Bodman (1993) in their investigation of expressions of gratitude among native and NNSs of English. The questionnaire of the this study involved six dialogues that denote six different situations. In each situation there are participants (acquaintance or stranger) and their dominance over each other (high, equal, low). Participants in each group were then asked to complete each dialogue by writing suitable requests in English. The following situations are carefully selected in the sense they happen in everyday interaction:

Situation one: Asking the waiter for the bill.

Situation two: Asking your younger brother to fetch bread from the bakery.

Situation three: Asking your friend to lend you his notebook.

Situation four: Asking your neighbor to give you a lift to the hospital.

Situation five: Asking your father to give you some money.

Situation six: Asking your manager for one-day leave.

## **Subjects**

There were two groups of subjects participated in this study; Yemeni undergraduate learners of English as an FL (YEFLLs) and American English native speakers (AENSs). The first group consisted of eighty Yemeni native speakers of Arabic pursuing their Bachelor degree in English in the faculty of Education, Tamar University. These students receive instruction in English at the university level for four years in order to be prepared to teach English language in the Yemeni schools where they are desperately needed, especially in the rural areas. Before joining the

English departments across the country these learners receive six years of English instruction in preparatory and secondary schools. Before these students get admitted into the English departments, it is obligatory for them to appear for an entrance exam prepared and administered by the department.

The second group consisted of forty subjects. They served as the TL norms informants for this current study. They were from different disciplines studying and doing research other than English or Linguistics. This was done in order to avoid any unwarranted influence from their field of study.

### **Situational Variation**

The instrumental list of this study was constructed in such a manner to allow for the variations of the main social parameters in the two cultures (Arabic and English). These parameters are culture-specific. Each situation contained two variables, social distance (SD), and social power (SP). Social distance was sub-divided into (+SD), (=SD) and (-SD). (+SD) indicates that requester and requestee do not know each other well, while (-SD) indicates that requester and requestee know each other very well and there is an affiliation between them. (=SD) means that the requester and requestee know each other to some extent, but not so well. The significance of such a distance factor between interlocutors in different cultures has been well documented by Scollon and Scollon (1995). Interaction between outsiders (interlocutors who do not have a close relationship) is more / less direct than interaction between insiders (interlocutors who have personal relationship) according to their culture norms.

Similarly, social power (SP) was sub-divided into three levels: (a) requester (X) with more power than requestee (Y) ( $X > Y$ ), (b) requester and requestee with same social power ( $X = Y$ ), (c) requester with less power than requestee ( $X < Y$ ). The aspects of social power considered were of age such as (senior vs. junior) and social status such as (professor vs. student). Age is an important factor for the YEFLLs. There is a strong Yemeni tradition in which younger people show respect to older people. Title is also treated as another power variable in Yemen. Therefore, age and title are embedded with power as a variable. Based on a study by Billmyer and Varghese (2000), a detailed description including social and contextual information was embedded in each situation to make subjects fully understand the situation as much as

possible. The following table displays distribution of the three dimensions of social power and the three dimensions of social distance in the six situations of requesting.

Table 1. Distribution of social power and distance variables in the requests situations

Request Situation	Social Distance	Social Power
S1	+SD	$X > Y$
S2	-SD	$X > Y$
S3	-SD	$X = Y$
S4	=SD	$X = Y$
S5	-SD	$X < Y$
S6	+SD	$X < Y$

### Procedures of Data Analysis

The data in this study included two sets of responses to similar situations of requesting in English by the two groups of respondents, the YEFLLs and the AENSs. The content analysis of subjects responses was used to analyze the data in conjunction with some quantitative methods (chi-square test). In order to do content analysis, the following scheme designed by Blum-Kulka , House and Kasper (1989) was used.

#### A) Directness Level

This refers to the directness level of the semantic strategy used in the head act or request act proper. Based on the coding scheme established in the CCSARP, the head act of each request has been identified and counted. In the CCSARP, the head act is defined as the minimal unit that can realize a request. A requester may choose to make a direct request, to make a conventionally indirect request, or to hint. According to the degree of directness, the CCSARP lists nine exclusive request strategies, (cf. Appendix A). In the CCSARP directness is defined as the degree to which the speakers' illocutionary intent is apparent from the location.

To answer the first research question, the two groups' use of request strategies was divided into three main categories of directness as: 1) direct, 2) conventionally indirect and 3) non-conventionally indirect, which were compared in each situation.

The order of the above mentioned nine request strategies reflects decreasing directness as follows.

**(i) Direct Request**

- Imperative is considered the most direct strategy in which the intention is carried very explicitly.
- Performative expresses the requesters' intention clearly but in a less direct way than the imperative.
- Hedged performative modifying the illocutionary force by hedging expression such as I'd like to.
- Locution derivable utterance states the obligation of the hearer by using a modale verb such as you have to.
- Want statement conveys the desires of the requester for the requestee to carry out the act.

**ii) Conventionally indirect request**

- Suggestion formula contains a suggestion to the requestee, using How about?
- Query preparatory utterance contains a reference to preparatory conditions such as can / could you?

**iii) Non-conventionally indirect request**

- Strong hint includes an utterance containing partial reference to the object.
- Mild hint does not include any reference to the object at all.

**B) Request Strategies**

To answer the second question of the study i.e. to measure the degree of approximation to the TL norms by YEFLLs, the nine strategies of requesting, based on the framework of the CCSARP are coded. Then the distribution of these strategies among the two groups, YEFLLs and AENSs was compared in each situation.

Each request situation was analyzed within the above mentioned set of strategies, however, not all of the categories are expected to be found in the data. The total frequency of the given directness levels and the used strategies was calculated for each situation as made by each of the two groups participating in the study. Then, the calculated frequencies were divided by the total number of responses for each situation by each group and their percentages were calculated. The percentages were

used to facilitate comparison between the two groups and to look for trends in the data.

### **Results and Analysis**

To examine the research questions, the collected data which includes one set of responses to the similar six situations in the same language (English) by the two groups of respondents, AENSs and YEFLLs are presented in tables. The contents and frequency analysis is used to investigate the data in conjunction with some statistical quantitative methods (Chi-square test). In particular, this analysis involves directness levels and the used request strategies, which refers to the directness level of semantic strategy used in the head act or request act proper. SPSS program is used for its extensive help in processing the collected data; its inbuilt capacities and features can help to create cross tabulation, tables and figures so as to ensure a clear presentation of the data.

#### **Situation one: Asking the waiter for the bill (+SD, X>Y)**

Data generated by this situation, which represents higher to lower-ranking relation with the social distance the requester has over the requestee is summarized in tables 2 and 3. For clear presentation of the data, some examples of the responses given by the subjects to situation one are given below.

#### **Sample responses given by the YEFLLs in situation one:**

- 1.1. Please, give me my bill.
- 1.2. Excuse me, can you prepare my bill?
- 1.3. Can you prepare my bill?
- 1.4. Could you please give me my bill?

#### **Sample responses given by the AENSs in situation one:**

- 1.5. Please, get me the bill.
- 1.6. Excuse me, may we have the bill?
- 1.7. May I have my bill please?
- 1.8. What about the bill?

Table 2. Group-wise directness level between AENSs and YEFLLs in situation-1

Level of Directness	AENSs		YEFLLs	
	F	%	F	%
Direct request	21	52.5	47	58.75

Conventionally indirect	19	47.5	30	37.5
Non-conventionally indirect	0	0	3	3.75

Table 3. Request Strategies used by the AENSs and YEFLLs for situation 1

Strategy		AENSs		YEFLLs	
		F	%	F	%
1	<b>Imperative</b>	15	37.5	30	37.5
2	<b>Performative</b>	0	0	0	0
3	<b>Hedged Performative</b>	6	15	4	5
4	<b>Locution Derivable</b>	0	0	0	0
5	<b>Want Statement</b>	0	0	13	16.25
6	<b>Suggestory formula</b>	15	37.5	0	0
7	<b>Query Preparatory</b>	4	10	30	37.5
8	<b>Strong hint</b>	0	0	3	3.75
9	<b>Mild hint</b>	0	0	0	0

The results in table 2 and table 3 above reveal that the YEFLLs and the AENSs tend to use the same kind of direct strategies with similar frequencies. The same percentages are given by both groups, 37.5% for imperatives. However, the YEFLLs are found to use some other direct strategies that the AENSs do not use. Whereas none of the AENSs has used want statement, 16.25% of the YEFLLs used this strategy, which in this case shows a significant difference between the two groups. AENSs, on the other side, show different strategy of directness in this situation by using hedged performatives for six times, that is 15%, whereas the YEFLLs' use of the same strategy reaches only 5%. However, this difference is not of any significance according to the chi-square reading and the P value where  $P > .05$ . The main difference between the two groups strategies is found in the second level of directness, i.e. conventionally indirect. The AENSs strategies are given to suggestory formula with 37.5% and the YEFLLs prefer to use query preparatory with the same percentage. Only 3.75% of the YEFLLs have tried to be less direct by using strong hints for three times only. According to table 4.4 and graph 4.3 the level of directness of the two groups in this situation looks similar with different types of strategies.

However, most of the YEFLLs' requests, 70% are softened by using the mitigators 'please' or 'excuse me'.

**Situation two: Asking your younger brother to fetch bread from the bakery (-SD, X>Y)**

Data given by this situation which represents higher to lower-ranking but without social distance between the requester and the requestee is summarized in tables 4 and 5. Some examples of the responses given by the subjects in this situation are given below.

**Sample responses given by the YEFLLs in situation two:**

- 2.1. Go and fetch some bread from the bakery.
- 2.2. Take money and buy some bread from the nearby bakery.
- 2.3. Go to the bakery and bring some bread.
- 2.4. Ali, go to the bakery and bring bread.

**Sample responses given by the AENSs in situation two:**

- 2.5. Hey, go pick up some bread.
- 2.6. Hey, can you get some bread from the bakery?
- 2.7. Please, go and get some bread from the bakery, Tom?
- 2.8. If you don't mind dear, can you bring some bread?

Table 4. Group-wise directness level between AENSs & YEFLLs in situation-2

Level of Directness	AENSs		YEFLLs	
	F	%	F	%
Direct request	20	50	63	78.75
Conventionally indirect	20	50	17	21.25
Non-conventionally indirect	0	0	0	0

Table 5. Request Strategies used by the AENSs and YEFLLs for situation 2

Strategy		AENSs		YEFLLs	
		F	%	F	%
1	<b>Imperative</b>	20	50	33	41.25
2	<b>Performative</b>	0	0	0	0
3	<b>Hedged Performative</b>	0	0	12	15
4	<b>Locution Derivable</b>	0	0	0	0
5	<b>Want Statement</b>	0	0	18	22.5

<b>6</b>	<b>Suggestory formula</b>	0	0	0	0
<b>7</b>	<b>Query Preparatory</b>	20	50	17	21.25
<b>8</b>	<b>Strong hint</b>	0	0	0	0
<b>9</b>	<b>Mild hint</b>	0	0	0	0

The results given by the two groups in this situation are quite different from situation one in the degree of directness. As given in tables 4 and 5, the YEFLLs tend to be more direct in their requests than the AENSs. While 78.75% of the YEFLLs show a higher degree of directness by using different direct request strategies i.e. imperatives 41.25%, hedged performatives 15% and want statements 22.5%. AENSs, on the other hand, intend to be less direct by making 50% of their requests in imperative strategy, i.e. direct request and 50% in query preparatory strategy i.e. conventionally indirect which is less direct and more polite form. It means that the social relationship between the interlocutors has its effect on the way a request is made. The YEFLLs are found to be more direct when there is no social distance as they are close to the requestee. This is apparent from their 22.5% responses in want statements, which is considered as an explicit direct request in their native culture. Unlike situation one, only 30% of the YEFLLs respondents tend to mitigate their requests using please or excuse me. Their social dominance over the requestee leads them to be more direct. The Chi-square test used on the frequency data shows that only in direct request imperative strategy there is statistically no significant difference ( $\chi^2 = 0.83$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $P>.05$ ).

### **Situation Three: Asking your friend to lend you his notebook ( -SD, X= Y)**

Requests made to this situation which represent an equal social status between the two interlocutors and closer relationship they have are summarized in tables 6 and 7. These are some examples of the two groups responses made in this situation.

#### **Sample responses given by the YEFLLs in situation three:**

- 3.1. Can you give me your notes please because I missed the lecture yesterday?
- 3.2. Excuse me Nadia, May I borrow your notebook?
- 3.3. Can you lend me your notebook?
- 3.4. I didn't attend yesterday. Please, I want to borrow your notebook.

#### **Sample responses given by the AENSs in situation three:**

- 3.5. Lukus, could I borrow your notes from yesterday?
- 3.6. If it is possible, I would like to borrow your notes from yesterday.
- 3.7. Hey, do you mind if I borrow your notebook?
- 3.8. Can I get your notebook, please? I will give it to you very soon.

Table 6. Group-wise directness level between AENSs and YUFLs in situation 3

Level of Directness	AENSs		YEFLLs	
	F	%	F	%
Direct request	9	22.5	15	18.75
Conventionally indirect	31	77.5	65	81.25
Non-conventionally indirect	0	0	0	0

Table 7. Request Strategies used by the AENSs and YEFLLs for situation 3

Strategy		AENSs		YEFLLs	
		F	%	F	%
<b>1</b>	<b>Imperative</b>	4	10	0	0
<b>2</b>	<b>Performative</b>	0	0	0	0
<b>3</b>	<b>Hedged Performative</b>	5	12.5	7	8.75
<b>4</b>	<b>Locution Derivable</b>	0	0	0	0
<b>5</b>	<b>Want Statement</b>	0	0	8	10
<b>6</b>	<b>Suggestory formula</b>	0	0	0	0
<b>7</b>	<b>Query Preparatory</b>	31	77.5	65	81.25
<b>8</b>	<b>Strong hint</b>	0	0	0	0
<b>9</b>	<b>Mild hint</b>	0	0	0	0

Findings from responses to this situation given in tables 6 and 7 above, show another trend of directness between the two groups with people who are very close i.e. with no social distance between the requester and requestee, and with the same social power. The AENSs are found to be more direct than the YEFLLs. None of the YEFLLs use imperative or performative strategies in this situation whereas 10% of the AENSs use imperative strategy which is counted by the chi-square as significantly different ( $\chi^2 = 5.46$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $P<.05$ ). However, both groups are found similar in using hedged performatives with 12.5% for the AENSs and 8.75% for the YEFLLs where the chi-square value is found insignificant ( $\chi^2 = 0.42$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $P>.05$ ). Again in this

situation the two groups are found to show the same degree of directness by using the same request strategy, query preparatory, which is the most used strategy in this situation. 77.5% of the AENSs and 81.25% of the YEFLLs are registered to use the same strategy. The Chi-square reading in this strategy gives insignificant value of difference between the two groups ( $\chi^2 = 0.23$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $P>.05$ ). In general, it can be assumed that the directness level of the two groups is very similar in this situation.

**Situation four: Asking neighbor to give a lift to the hospital (=SD, X=Y)**

Data generated in this situation to realize the requests strategies, which represent equal social power without any social distance between the interlocutors, is summarized in tables 8 and 9. Examples of the two groups' responses made in this situation are given below.

**Sample responses given by the YEFLLs in situation four:**

- 4.1. Can you give me a lift to the hospital?
- 4.2. I want to visit our neighbor who has been in the hospital; can you drop me there please?
- 4.3. Ahmed, are you free to come with me to visit our neighbor Nasser?
- 4.4. Please, can you come with me to the hospital to visit our neighbor?

**Sample responses given by the AENSs in situation four:**

- 4.5. I need a ride to the hospital. Would I be able to catch a ride with you?
- 4.6. Would you mind giving a ride to the hospital?
- 4.7. Lift please. I also would like to visit our neighbor.
- 4.8. I would like to visit our neighbor in the hospital, if you would not mind, may be we could travel together.

Table 8. Group-wise directness level between AENSs and YEFLLs in situation 4

Level of Directness	AENSs		YEFLLs	
	F	%	F	%
Direct request	4	10	11	13.75
Conventionally indirect	27	67.5	45	56.25
Non-conventionally indirect	9	22.5	24	30

Table 9. Request Strategies used by the AENSs and YEFLLs for situation 4

Strategy	AENSs		YEFLLs	
	F	%	F	%

<b>1</b>	<b>Imperative</b>	4	10	0	0
<b>2</b>	<b>Performative</b>	0	0	0	0
<b>3</b>	<b>Hedged Performative</b>	0	0	0	0
<b>4</b>	<b>Locution Derivable</b>	0	0	0	0
<b>5</b>	<b>Want Statement</b>	0	0	11	13.75
<b>6</b>	<b>Suggestory formula</b>	3	7.5	0	0
<b>7</b>	<b>Query Preparatory</b>	24	60	45	56.25
<b>8</b>	<b>Strong hint</b>	5	12.5	24	30
<b>9</b>	<b>Mild hint</b>	4	10	0	0

Results from this situation show that the two groups are different in two levels of directness according to the results presented in tables 8 and 9 above. AENSs are found to be more direct than their YEFLLs counterparts by percentage of 10% for direct imperative. YEFLLs, on the other hand, use the least direct strategy to realize their request in this situation with a percentage of 13.75 for want statement. Both the two strategies used above are of significant difference according to the chi-square test ( $\chi^2=0.019$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $P<.05$ ) for imperative and ( $\chi^2 = .014$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $P<.05$ ) for want statement. In the second level of directness, conventionally indirect, the two groups are found to be similar. No chi-square significant difference is registered in this level. Only 7.5% of the AENSs use suggestory formula and both groups use query preparatory with 60% for AENSs and 56.25% for YEFLLs without significant differences. Once again, the two groups show differences in the most indirect level, non-conventionally indirect. Whereas 30% of the YEFLLs use strong hints, only 12.5% of the AENSs do so. AENSs, on the other hand, show preference to mild hints with a percentage of 10%.

**Situation Five: Asking your father to give you some money (-SD, X<Y)**

Request strategies used in this situation where the requestee is dominating the requester in social power with social distance between them are listed in table 10 and 11. These are some of the example responses given in this situation by the two groups: -

**Sample responses given by the YEFLLs in situation five:**

- 5.1. Dad, I want some money to buy a new book.
- 5.2. Can you give me some money please?
- 5.3. Please give me some money.
- 5.4. Excuse me my father; give me some money to buy a new book.

**Sample responses given by the AENSs in situation five:**

- 5.5. May I have some money for a new book?
- 5.6. Dad, I need money for a new book.
- 5.7. Hey dad, can I have some money?
- 5.8. Dad, I have to buy some books, so please give me money for some books.

Table 10. Group-wise directness level between the AENSs and YEFLLs in situation 5

Level of Directness	AENSs		YEFLLs	
	F	%	F	%
Direct request	6	15	55	68.75
Conventionally indirect	27	67.5	25	31.25
Non-conventionally indirect	7	17.5	0	0

Table 11. Request Strategies used by the AENSs and YEFLLs for situation 5

Strategy		AENSs		YEFLLs	
		F	%	F	%
<b>1</b>	<b>Imperative</b>	6	15	36	45
<b>2</b>	<b>Performative</b>	0	0	0	0
<b>3</b>	<b>Hedged Performative</b>	0	0	4	5
<b>4</b>	<b>Locution Derivable</b>	0	0	0	0
<b>5</b>	<b>Want Statement</b>	0	0	15	18.75
<b>6</b>	<b>Suggestory formula</b>	0	0	0	0
<b>7</b>	<b>Query Preparatory</b>	27	67.5	25	31.25
<b>8</b>	<b>Strong hint</b>	7	17.5	0	0
<b>9</b>	<b>Mild hint</b>	0	0	0	0

The gap between the two groups, AENSs and YEFLLs is still pragmatically wide. Both of them are found to use different strategies with different degrees of differences. They never met in this situation according to the chi-square test results. Whereas only 15% of the AENSs give their demands in direct request forms as

imperatives, YUEFL learners have given 68.75% to direct request by using the strategies of imperatives 45%, hedged performatives 4% and want statement 18.75%. YEFLLs are also found to underuse the query preparatory strategy that creates another degree of difference in the second level of directness, conventionally indirect. Against 67.5% of the AENSs, only 31.25% of the YEFLLs make query preparatory. Tables 10 and 11 show the degrees of differences between the two groups. They show differences in the non-conventionally indirect requests as well. 17.5% of the AENSs use strong hints but none of the YEFLLs do so. The chi-square frequency test shows that the difference between the two groups is found statistically non-significant only in hedged imperatives where ( $\chi^2 = 0.81$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p>.05$ ). The YEFLLs are found to use the request softeners like please, excuse me more often than their AENSs counterparts. The other group seems to avoid such softeners with such interlocutors of no social distance like a father.

**Situation Six: Asking the Manager for one day leave (+SD, X<Y)**

The strategies of requests and their frequencies used in this situation which represent lower to higher rank with some social distance are given in tables 12 and 13. The ways the two groups make their demands are supported with some of the example responses given to this situation.

**Sample responses given by the YEFLLs in situation six:**

- 6.1. I can't come to the job tomorrow, please, give me one day leave.
- 6.2. Dear Sir, tomorrow I cannot come to my job because I am very sick.
- 6.3. Excuse me sir, could I have one-day leave tomorrow.
- 6.4. Please I want one day leave because I do not feel well

**Sample responses given by the AENSs in situation six:**

- 6.5. Tessie, do you mind if I take the day off tomorrow? I'm not feeling well.
- 6.6. Sir, I'm not feeling well. May I have tomorrow off?
- 6.7. I request that you give me a one-day leave, as I'm not feeling well.
- 6.8. Hello, I'm really sorry but I won't be able to make it in tomorrow, I'm not feeling well at all.

Table 12. Group-wise directness level between the AENSs and YEFLLs in situation 6

Level of Directness	AENSs		YEFLLs	
	F	%	F	%

Direct request	9	22.5	23	28.75
Conventionally indirect	11	27.5	27	33.75
Non-conventionally indirect	20	50	30	37.5

Table 13. Request Strategies used by the AENSs and YEFLLs for situation 6

Strategy		AENSs		YEFLLs	
		F	%	F	%
1	<b>Imperative</b>	5	12.5	15	18.75
2	<b>Performative</b>	4	10	0	0
3	<b>Hedged Performative</b>	0	0	0	0
4	<b>Locution Derivable</b>	0	0	0	0
5	<b>Want Statement</b>	0	0	8	10
6	<b>Suggestory formula</b>	0	0	0	0
7	<b>Query Preparatory</b>	11	27.5	27	33.75
8	<b>Strong hint</b>	17	42.5	30	37.5
9	<b>Mild hint</b>	3	7.5	0	0

In this situation, the YEFLLs seem to approximate, to some extent, the way their AENSs counterparts realize their requests. This approximation is apparent in the two groups' use of the same degree of indirectness. Tables 12 and 13 above show that non-conventionally indirect strategies are given the most lot in this situation with 50% for AENSs and 37.5% for the YEFLLs. The chi-square test shows that there are no significant differences between the two groups in this level of directness. However, the other used strategies like performatives, want statements and query preparatory represent the degrees of differences between the two groups with statistical significant differences according to the chi-square and P-values tests. To make their requests more polite, the AENSs tend to use strong hints and mild hints but without softeners like please, excuse me as they think that to get one day leave is part of their right. YEFLLs, on the other hand, are found to use the same kind of softeners, excuse me and please that seem to be the only formulaic expressions they can use to show more degrees of indirectness.

## Conclusion

Given the extent of cross-cultural variations, it is not difficult to imagine that inter-cultural encounters can be a challenge for interlocutors with the potential risk of inter-cultural pragmatic failure. This research study of the inter-cultural pragmatic competence of the YEFLLs concluded that the learners in question struggle to communicate appropriately when they were encountered in social communicative contexts in the TL. In spite of the fact that they have a high level of general language proficiency, their grammatical development did not show a corresponding level of pragmatic development. Although they were advanced learners of English, they were found unable to convey or understand the intended illocutionary force or politeness norms of the TL successfully. For both groups, non-conventionally indirect strategy was the least used strategy where the social distance between the requester and requestee is high (i.e., where they don't know each other). This means that they preferred to be less direct with interlocutors whom they did not know very well. Direct request, on the other hand, was found to be the most preferred degree of directness by the two groups with similar kinds of strategies given by the two groups. The two groups' respondents used more direct request strategies in such situations where the requestee was unknown to them. However, a different tendency was found in the case where the interlocutors were close to each other. YEFLLs were found to be more direct in this kind of encounters with preference of direct strategies. AENSs, on the other side, showed preference to the second level of directness, conventionally indirect. In the last value of the social distance variable where the requester and requestee knew each other to some extent, the data given by the two groups showed another degree of differences between the kinds of the used strategies. Whereas AENSs were found to outnumber the YEFLLs in the first level of directness, the latter were found to outnumber the former in the last degree of directness, i.e. non-conventionally indirect. In the second level of directness, conventionally indirect, both groups gave similar amount of responses. In counting the second variable, social power, the two groups were found more similar in forming their requests with people of the same social power like peers. However, in the other values of social power where  $X > Y$  or  $X < Y$ , the given responses showed differences between the two groups. In the one hand, the AENSs equally made requests to the first two levels of directness but less in the last level of directness as they were involved in situations with less-in-

power ( $X > Y$ ) interactants. YEFLLs, on the other hand, were observed to be more direct in this type of encounters by giving most of their requests in direct levels. It means that the YEFLLs showed higher degree of directness than AENSs.

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Appendix A. Nine request strategy types (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989, P.278)

Strategy	Definition	Example
1) Imperative	The grammatical mood of the locution conventionally determines its illocutionary force as a request.	Clean up the kitchen.
2) Performative	The illocutionary intent to make a request is explicitly named by a relevant verb.	I ask / request you to clean up the kitchen.
3) Hedged Performative	The illocutionary intent is modified by some modal verb or verbs expressing intention.	I'd like to ask you to clean up the kitchen.
4) Locution derivable (obligation statement)	The illocutionary intent is directly derivable from the semantic meaning of locution	You should / have to clean up the kitchen.
5) Want statement	The utterance expresses the speakers' desire (that the required act be carried out).	I'd like / want / wish you to clean up the kitchen.
6) Suggestory formula	The illocutionary intent is phrased as a suggestion.	How about cleaning up the kitchen?
7) Query preparatory	The utterance contains reference to preparatory condition such as ability or willingness.	Can / could you clean up the kitchen?
8) Strong hint	The location refers to relevant elements of the request.	The kitchen is in a mess.
9) Mild hint	The utterance contains no immediate relevance as request to the intended illocution.	Whose duty is it today?