

Analysis of Speech Act Between SA and AH Chinese L2 Speakers of English—With Regard to Request Refusal, and Apology Strategies

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Abstract—This research examines the effect of study abroad experience on L2 English learners' pragmatic competence in terms of strategies used in the speech act of request, refusal and apology. The Discourse Completion Task was administrated among 16 Chinese graduate students who were divided into two groups, including the study-abroad (SA) group and at-home (AH) group. The results do not reveal any evident improvements in the pragmatic competence of learners who have study-abroad experience compared to those who study English at home in China, but some of their strategies of using speech acts do have differences. In terms of requests, the conventionally indirect level strategy is the most frequently used request strategy among both groups of learners, and SA learners are more direct in making requests than AH learners. In terms of refusal strategies, both AH and SA learners prefer indirect refusal strategies. There is no obvious difference in apologies between SA learners and AH learners, and their apologies tend to be more direct. Based on these findings, it is suggested that more emphasis and importance should be placed on the pragmatic knowledge, which should be explicitly taught in the classroom because of the limited chance to enhance pragmatic competence outside the classroom.

Index Terms—speech act, second language pragmatics, request, refusal and apology strategies, study abroad

I. INTRODUCTION

With the process of globalization, the association between countries has become more and more vital than before and the world has become culturally mixed with cultural differences which might lead to dissatisfaction if individuals have limited knowledge of the target culture. In the field of cross-cultural communication and language learning, the difference in language use is an essential factor that might cause failure in communication or pragmatics. The relationship between language forms and meanings varies in different languages, while the specific language used in culture is evident in speech acts (Chen, 1996). Austin (1962) proposed the term speech act with the meaning of a significant characteristic of language. Speech acts are considered to be essential functions of language that exist cross-linguistically all over the world. Refusal, request, and apology are the three crucial subjects of cross-cultural and speech-act studies. These acts have the potential risk of destroying the relationship between interlocutors. As cross-cultural communication grows because of the boost of travel and globalization, it is more likely to cause intercultural communication breakdowns through misinterpreted and misunderstood speech acts. In the study of refusal, the coding measure in Beebe et al.'s (1990) analysis is widely used. Beebe et al. (1990) divided refusal strategies into three parts: direct, indirect, and adjuncts. The coding system was used by other scholars (Chen, 1996; Moafian, 2022) in analyzing the refusal strategy cross-culturally. Similarly, in request and apology studies, the notion of Cross-Cultural Study of Speech Act Realization Patterns (CCSARP) is used to analyze the specific strategy from different aspects, which include the addressing terms, the head act, and the adjunct to the head act within the direct or indirect frameworks.

In the context of different cultural environments influencing the pragmatic competence of individuals, studying abroad has been considered as the most critical factor affecting the development of pragmatic competence. Many studies have been conducted to discuss the routine formulae and use of speech acts. Roever (2012) investigates the relationship between receptive knowledge of English routine formulae and the length of residence in English-speaking countries. Felix-Brasdefer (2004) conducted a study on the politeness strategies in refusals among Spanish students. Taguchi (2008) explores the development of pragmatic competence of Japanese learners of English with a background of studying abroad. Other than academic papers, there is also a trend in teaching pragmatics in classrooms worldwide. Even though great attention has been drawn to pragmatics, it is still not considered necessary in some countries' language education systems (e.g. China). Most language classrooms adopt the task-based approach only for the purpose of passing certain exams, which leads to insufficient pragmatic learning because most exams only contain a limited amount of pragmatic content. International standard English proficiency tests, such as International English Language Testing System (IELTS) and Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOFEL) do not assess pragmatic knowledge in the

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rating criteria as well. China, as a country with a large number of English learners, is facing the same situation of lacking pragmatic education in English.

Thus, the current study focuses on the differences between two groups of Chinese students with or without a study abroad background. Speech acts data of request, refusal, and apology are collected through Discourse Completion Task (DCT) and analyzed on the basis of Beebe et al. (1990) and CCSARP.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. *Speech Act Theory*

The development of speech act theories may be considered to be originated from Austin's (1962) idea that language is performative; whether explicitly or implicitly, speakers perform an act through what they say. A speech act refers to an act uttered and performed by a speaker (Searle et al., 1980), such as making statements, asking questions, giving orders, thanking, and so forth. A speech act can be not only one word but also a sentence, a movement, or a gesture that expresses the meaning of communication, whether directly or indirectly. Alzeebaree and Yavuz (2017) mention that speech acts are regarded as the functional aspects of language. Speech acts are strongly associated with the language's culture and social norms. A conversation may be a failure and may lead to misunderstanding between individuals because of a lack of cultural, social, and pragmatics identification. Therefore, research into pragmatics is highly related to cultural and social studies based on the target language context.

B. *The Speech Act of Refusal*

As a variety of speech acts, refusal is not speaker-initiative because it is a response to another person's invitation, request, or offer. A proper refusal format is necessary because employing inappropriate strategies might lead to misunderstandings or even irreparable contradiction between individuals (Hassani et al., 2011). In other words, a refusal is a face-threatening act that is in high demand for a certain level of pragmatic competence to achieve a successful performance because it is risky to the speakers' relationship. Therefore, strategies like redress, mitigation, and politeness should be employed in refusal as a face-threatening act. As stated by Brown and Levinson (1987), three factors have influenced refusals and other face-threatening acts:

1. The power which refers to the relative power of the speaker over the hearer
2. The distance which refers to the social distance between individuals
3. Rank which refers to the weight of the imposition

As Beebe et al. (1990) point out,

"Refusals...reflect fundamental cultural values... (and) involve delicate interpersonal negotiation. Refusals, in that they involve telling a listener something he or she does not want to hear, require the speaker to build support and help the listener avoid embarrassment. They require a high level of pragmatic competence" (p. 68).

In this study, the researchers investigate the refusal strategies of Japanese English learners. The participants are provided with four different situations which vary from the relationship and status between speakers and hearers. Findings show that Japanese learners would transfer their refusal patterns from their native language to English in the aspects of type, order, and frequency of the semantic formulae. In another recent study conducted by Moafian et al. (2022), the researchers analyze more semantic formulas based on the frame of Beebe et al.'s (1990) study with Persian, English, and Balouchi speaking participants. The findings reveal the existence of significant differences in all refusal strategy categories due to social status in each language.

C. *The Speech Act of Request*

Request refers to the efforts and attempts initiated by speakers to ask other people involved in the conversation to do something for them. It is another variety of speech acts that occur everywhere and every time in daily conversations as one of the most typical and frequent speech acts, especially among language learners during their language learning process (Alzeebaree & Yavuz, 2017). Compared with other types of speech acts, requests have been studied deeply by linguists in the domain of second language learning as it requires the interlocutors to follow some specific strategies to complete the desired intentions with the need for extra attention to alleviate the possibility of breaking the face of the hearers simultaneously. According to Goffman's face theory, the face is used to describe a person's perception of the positive or negative situation during the interaction and communication with other speakers (Goffman, 1955). The request strategies used and involved in each interaction would directly influence the hearers' faces and perceptions (Tatton, 2008); thus, a request's result critically depends on the appropriate request strategies in the speech acts. Based on the notion of CCSARP, requests contain three types: the addressing terms, the head act, and the adjunct to the head act within the direct or indirect frameworks (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984). The directness in the request speech act will possibly present the interlocutor's imperativeness and even imposition with less mitigation performance. In contrast, the indirectness of a request speech act aims to show friendliness and politeness and prevent the risks of threatening (Alzeebaree & Yavuz, 2017) by using conventional modals or nonconventional forms, such as hints within a request (Tatton, 2008). Moreover, previous studies claim that sociocultural factors, such as cultural and ideological differences, are essential for explicating the different speech act strategies.

D. The Speech Act of Apology

Besides the refusal and request speech acts, an apology is fundamental and quite frequently used by people in everyday situations. An apology is defined as the behavior and performance in which the interlocutors express their regret and apologetic feelings for doing something that may cause problems, issues, or unhappiness towards others. Expressing apologies timely and appropriately in daily communications is essential and fundamental for people to keep harmonious and friendly relationships with others (Alzebaree & Yavuz, 2017).

Unlike the request speech acts, an apology is more corpus-based (McAllister, 2015) and depends on taking advantage of Illocutionary Force Indicating Devices (IFIDs), which means there are many popular and frequent used linguistic tools and patterns, such as sorry, excuse, pardon, and so forth included in apologies (Jucker, 2018). Therefore, learning and obtaining the knowledge and competency of apology strategies and patterns is essential for everyone. According to Goffman's (1955) face theory, similarly, in an apology, the interlocutors endeavour to make face-saving communications and performances for the hearers with the corresponding extent to exhibit a face-threatening act for themselves simultaneously. Likewise, strategies used in apology to express appropriately are critical for interlocutors to achieve a successful and workable speech act; thus, many variables such as considering different social distances and social status of the people involved in the situation should be considered carefully before addressing the apology (Alzebaree & Yavuz, 2017). Moreover, apology speech acts require specific strategies, either exploiting the different degrees of directness or addressing indirectness to show the interlocutors' attitudes towards the situations.

E. The Development of L2 Pragmatic Competence and Study Abroad

Recent studies of L2 pragmatic development and competence have increased considerably. Many internal and external factors of learners have been investigated to reveal the relationship between the development of L2 pragmatic competence and these factors. The context of studying abroad, which has been considered to be one of the most important external factors that influence L2 pragmatic competence, has been investigated by many researchers. According to Deng and Ranta (2019), researchers focus on the effect of studying abroad experience on L2 learners' sociolinguistic and pragmatic development, such as routing formulae, address terms, and speech act.

Thomas (as cited in Taguchi, 2008) defines pragmatic competence as the ability to communicate one's intentions appropriately in communicative situations and to interpret the explicit or implicit intentions of others. Pragmatic competence is a key to maintaining good social relations and building rapport with speakers of the target language, so it should be considered as important as learning grammar and vocabulary.

Although there is a trend of teaching pragmatics in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms worldwide, the curriculum of teaching pragmatics is still insufficient in many countries, especially in China. Liu (as cited in Deng & Ranta, 2019) reveals that most EFL teachers' intercultural sensitivity and pragmatic awareness fall far behind their grammatical and lexical knowledge because they barely have contact with English speakers. The situation is similar for language learners. Schauer (2009) finds that professional learners who are studying to be translators or interpreters in the at-home context have less pragmatic awareness than grammatical inappropriateness, mainly when learners' input is limited to classroom instructions. Therefore, many studies are conducted to examine the influence of study abroad experience on the development of pragmatic competence.

Many aspects of pragmatic competence, such as the knowledge of routine formulae and the use of speech acts, are investigated. Roever (2012) investigates how the length of residence influences learners' receptive knowledge of English routine formulae in an English-speaking country by conducting a web-based test that assesses learners' understanding of routine formulae. English as a Second Language (ESL) and EFL learners from four countries are recruited, ranging from beginners to upper-intermediate level learners. The study finds that routine formulae correlate with the length of residency in the target language country. However, routine formulae can be acquired both in the classroom and in target language settings.

Another study by Felix-Brasdefer (2004) explores the politeness strategies in refusals of 24 learners of Spanish and the influence of the length of residence on the ability to negotiate and mitigate refusals by using role-play and verbal-report data. The findings reveal that learners who spend more time in the target community tend to delay the primary refusal; they have more frequent negotiation attempts, better use of lexical and syntactic mitigation, and a preference for solidarity and indirectness.

For pragmatic competence, Taguchi (2008) studies the development of pragmatic competence of forty-four Japanese learners of English in a study abroad context. The study shows that learners who have taken full advantage of opportunities to use a second language become better at the processing dimension of pragmatic comprehension. However, Taguchi's (2011) study partially supports his study in 2008 in which different aspects of pragmatic comprehension, including conventional and non-conventional meaning, accuracy, and comprehension speed, are affected by L2 proficiency and study abroad experience. Moreover, the study finds that study abroad experiences only impact learners' comprehension of routine formulae rather than influencing the comprehension of indirect refusals.

Although there are abundant studies on speech acts, the impact of study abroad experience on learners' pragmatic competence and speech act strategies in the context of Chinese native speakers has not yet been studied. The goal of this study is to investigate the impact of the study abroad experience on learners' pragmatic competence and strategies with regard to the speech act of request, refusal, and apology.

F. Research Questions

Based on the previous analysis, it is found that (1) most studies on the effect of study abroad experiences on pragmatic competence recruit L2 learners from countries such as Japan, German, or Spain, while the study of L2 learners from China was limited; and that (2) studies on speech act mainly focus on one or two kinds of speech act and the literature on the combination of three kinds of speech acts is limited. To fill these gaps, this study aims to examine the effect of study abroad experience on L2 English learners' pragmatic competence in terms of the speech act of request, refusal, and apology. This study focuses on English L2 learners from China by comparing the pragmatic competence of SA (study abroad) learners and AH (at home) learners. The following research questions are to be addressed:

- (1) Does the study abroad experiences of L2 learners affect their pragmatic competence in English?
- (2) Do SA learners and AH learners perform the speech act of request, refusal, and apology differently?

III. METHODOLOGY

In order to investigate and shed light on the different performances of speech acts between the study-abroad (SA) Chinese students and staying-at-home (SH) Chinese students, a random sampling and questionnaire survey are applied to collect quantitative and qualitative data in this study.

A. Participants

In this research, 16 Chinese graduate students are employed as the participants, with eight SA students and eight SH students whose first language is Chinese Mandarin and English as their second language. The eight SH students have never been to English-speaking countries to obtain any study-abroad experiences. In contrast, the other eight SA students have been either studying or working in English countries such as Australia and America. To assess their English second language proficiency, their English College English Test band 4 (CET-4) scores and IELTS test scores as references are collected to guarantee that the two groups of participants' proficiency levels are above medium to a high level in English interactions. Among all the SH group students, the lowest CET-4 score is 513, and the highest CET-4 score is 564. Meanwhile, all the SA group students have their IELTS overall scores of at least 6, and one received 7.5 as the highest score among all the participants. The SA group students have been in English-speaking countries for at least six months; the most extended period is about forty-eight months, and their staying-abroad period is twenty months on average.

B. Instruments

In the data collection, we have designed a questionnaire with two parts for each participant. The first part is about pre-interview questions, including basic information such as name and gender, and collecting their IELTS test or CET-4 scores to assess their English proficiency levels. As for the SA group students, they also need to fill in their detailed period of studying-abroad length.

After finishing the personal information pre-interview questions, all participants are asked to complete our specifically designed written DCT with the inspiration from the role-play tasks (Demeter, 2007). There are 12 speech act contexts, including refusal, request and apology settings in random sequences to eliminate the participants' notice of the aim of the settings with more focus and attention on the tasks per se to elicit their authentic answers and responses. Each speech act setting is provided with sufficient details and descriptions about the social distance and interpersonal relationships. The roles involved in the settings and enough background information are provided for the participants to get into the context immersively.

C. Data Collection Procedure

The SA group and SH group students are asked to complete the questionnaire, starting with answering the basic pre-interview questions related to their personal information, i.e., their names, genders, and English test scores. The SA group students also need to provide their studying-abroad period in detail. After finishing the pre-interview questions, all participants are required to finish the following written DCT, which contains twelve different speech act contexts, including refusal, request, and apology but rendered in random sequences to prevent participants' extra attention to each different setting category.

The written answers are put in various visualized charts through the perspective of CCSARP (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984) to analyze the participants' answers and data collected in the questionnaires. For a better and deeper analysis of each of the three speech acts, some of the most specific categories are adopted on the basis of the framework of CCSARP. For the request speech act strategies discussion, the AH and SA group participants' performance is analyzed in terms of their either direct or indirect levels. Furthermore, the more nuanced details about the head act syntactic downgraders strategy and adjuncts to the head act strategies will also be rendered as follows.

Then, the analysis of the refusal speech act is based on similar categories, including direct and indirect strategies in refusal behaviors. The direct refusal strategies in this research contain performative and non-performative statements, and indirect refusal strategies is analyzed through the notion of statements of regret, wish, explanation and promise of future acceptance, following the adjuncts to refusal strategies with more details.

The last analysis is focused on the apology speech acts, with chosen categories including the most typical Illocutionary Force Indicating Device (IFID) strategy, intensification strategy, and other detailed methods such as concerns for the hearers, explanation, offer a repair, and so forth to assess and collect all participants' answers from the two groups about their preferences in the apology speech act, preparing for later discussion on whether any differences or similarities are exhibited among those Chinese students. All the data are collected and processed into the chart after our decoding based on the CCSARP categories, explicitly picking out the most prominent and typical features and characteristics among the AH and SA group participants. This is to compare visually and relate to their differences or similarities shown in the speech acts based on their different educational backgrounds. By addressing the previous research gaps, the research questions of whether the studying-abroad experiences within English exposure would benefit the second language pragmatic awareness and appropriateness in authentic speech acts, specifically in the request, refusal, and apology contexts.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Results

(a). The Frequency of Request Strategies Used by the SA Group and the AH Group

TABLE 1
THE FREQUENCY OF DIRECTNESS OF REQUEST STRATEGIES

	SA (n=8)	%	AH (n=8)	%
Most direct, explicit level	8	25%	5	15.6%
Conventionally indirect level	20	62.5%	25	78.1%
Nonconventional indirect level	3	9.4%	2	6.2%

Table 1 shows the frequency of three primary levels of the directness of requesting strategies produced by both the SA group and the AH group. The data show that the use of request strategies by the SA group follows the pattern of conventionally indirect level (62.5%)> most direct explicit level (25%)> nonconventional indirect level (9.4%). Similarly, the use of request strategies in the AH group has the same pattern that the conventionally indirect level (78.1%)> most direct, explicit level (15.6%)> nonconventional indirect level. This pattern is the same as the native speakers' use of request strategies in the study by Deng and Ranta (2019). The AH group tend to use more conventionally indirect strategies than the SA group, while the SA group use more direct and nonconventional indirect strategies than the AH group. The conventionally indirect level strategy is the most frequently used request strategy among both SA and AH learners. The expressions "Could you (do it)" or "Would you (do it)" are the most frequently used sentence patterns in the use of conventionally indirect strategies.

TABLE 2
THE FREQUENCY OF REQUEST STRATEGIES

Strategies	SA (n=8)	AH (n=8)
Head act		
Syntactic Downgraders		
Interrogative	18	23
Embedded "if" clause	4	4
Other Downgraders		
Consultative devices	4	5
Understaters	6	6
Hedges	1	1
Upgraders		
Intensifier	1	3
Adjuncts to the Head act		
Sweetener	7	2

Note: the figures in the table represent the frequency of every kind of strategy used in the four request scenarios by each group.

Table 2 shows the frequency of request strategies in the Head act and Adjuncts to Head act segments. The frequency of request strategies used by the SA group and AH group is very similar, except for Interrogative and Sweetener. As for the Head act of request, the AH group use the syntactic downgrader “Interrogative” most frequently. However, regarding Adjuncts to the Head act, the SA group use more of the “Sweetener” strategy. Other frequencies of request strategies are nearly the same, which means there is only a little difference in the use of request strategies between the SA group and AH group.

TABLE 3
THE FREQUENCY OF REFUSAL STRATEGIES

	SA	AH
Total	62	71
Direct	2	3
Indirect	46	38
Adjuncts	14	30

Note: the figures in the table represent the total frequency of the main categories of the refusal strategies used by participants of the three languages.

The DCT data of refusal strategies are analyzed based on the taxonomy first proposed by Beebe et al. (1990). According to the study, the refusal strategies are divided into three main groups which are direct, indirect, and adjuncts. Each group contains several semantic formulas, which could be a word, phrase, or sentence. As table 3 demonstrates, the total frequency of refusal strategies used by the SA and the AH group slightly differ, with a gap of 9. Generally speaking, the AH group employ more strategies when refusing others. Both SA and AH groups employ indirect strategies most frequently but do not use direct strategies frequently. The frequency of adjuncts used by the AH group is significantly more than the SA group (see Table 3).

(b). *The Frequency of Refusal Strategies Used by the SA Group and the AH Group*

TABLE 4
STRATEGIES USED IN THE FOUR REFUSAL SCENARIOS

Refusal Strategies	SA (n=8)	AH (n=8)
Direct		
Performative	0	0
Non-performative statement	2	3
Indirect		
Statement of regret	12	4
Statement of wish	9	8
Excuse/reason/explanation	20	18
Promise of future acceptance	5	8
Adjuncts to refusal		
Statement of positive opinion	10	14
Addressing with intimacy	4	9
Addressing with respect	0	7

Note: the figures in the table represent the frequency of every kind of strategy used in the four refusal scenarios by each group.

Based on the study of Beebe et al. (1990) and Moafian et al. (2022), several semantic formulas are analysed in detail in the current study. As listed in Table 3, in the category of direct strategy, neither SA nor AH group employ the performative way, such as saying no directly in a refusal. The frequency is also found to be low in both groups' non-performative statements of refusal. Only a few participants would use the term "I can't..." or "I don't want to...". However, the results of indirect and adjunct strategies in refusal differ significantly. The most frequently employed strategy is excuse/reason/explanation by both SA and AH groups, with a slight difference in data. Most participants

would give a reasonable excuse or explain the reason. Using the statement of regret is found to be more frequently employed by the SA group. The SA group use the statement of regret eight times more than the AH group. These results show that the participants in the SA group would be more willing to refuse with the expression of feeling regret; for example, most participants would apologize first before they refuse others. In the category of adjuncts, the AH group apply more strategies in all three. More specifically, the results are different on the strategy “addressing with respect”. This strategy is not used at all in the SA group, whereas the strategy is used seven times in the AH group. Many participants in the AH group would use “dear boss” or “my boss” as their opening to a refusal (see Table 4).

(c). *The Frequency of Apology Strategies Used by the SA Group and the AH Group*

TABLE 5
STRATEGY USED IN THE FOUR APOLOGY SCENARIOS

Strategies	AH (n=8)	SA (n=8)
IFID: “sorry” or “apologize” or “forgive”	30	27
Self-blame	5	9
Explanation	15	14
Offer a repair	28	30
Promise of forbearance	1	2
Intensification: adverbials “so”, “very” or repetition	15	18
Concerns for the hearers	7	5
Indirect apology (no IDIF appeared)	0	4

Note: the figures in the table represent the frequency of every kind of strategy used in the four apology scenarios by each group.

In the apology speech act settings, both AH and SA group participants have performed high-frequency use of the IFID strategy in their apology interlocations with straightforward and explicit expressions of “sorry”, “apologize”, and “forgive” at about 30 times for each group. Besides expressing through the IFID, another very frequently appeared strategy used by both the AH and SA Chinese students is that they choose to offer repair for the hearers to make up for their mistakes in the apology context. Moreover, the other two popular apology strategies among the AH and SA participants are the explanation and intensification of the apology, with a similarly high frequency of more than 15 times for each strategy. Most participants choose to explain the detailed reasons why they make mistakes before offering their repairs. Moreover, they also exploit the intensification strategy accompanied by the IFID, such as adding adverbials “very” and “so” before saying “sorry” and “apologize” in their speech acts to intensify their emotions and emphasize their sincerity. Besides that, some of the participants emphasize their apologizing feelings to the hearers through repetitions in their speech acts such as “so so sorry” and “sorry again” right after expressing “sorry”. As for other typical apology strategies, such as the concerns for the hearer and promise for the forbearance, only little frequency has been shown in participants’ speech act answers of the AH and SA groups. Another noticeable difference between the AH and SA group participants is that all the AH group participants adopt the direct apology strategies by saying “sorry” and other typical types of IFIDs; whereas some participants adopt the indirect apology strategy in the SA group without expressing IFID “sorry” in their speech acts. Furthermore, two participants from the AH group use the addressing terms in their speech acts inappropriately. In contrast, all the SA participants do not show any mistakes in using appropriate addressing terms.

Overall, both the AH and SA groups’ participants prefer the direct and explicit apology strategy by expressing their regret and sorry by using IFID directly, sometimes accompanied by an intensification strategy to strengthen their emotions. Only a few participants from the SA group adopt the indirect apology strategy in their speech acts in some changing circumstances.

B. Discussion

This study compares the impact of study-abroad experience on the pragmatic competence of L2 learners in terms of their use of request, refusal, and apology strategies. The result shows that most requests are performed at the conventionally indirect level, regardless of the experience abroad. However, when comparing the conventionally indirect strategies of AH learners and SA learners, it is found that AH learners use more conventionally indirect strategies than SA learners. This can be explained by the possibility that AH learners’ use of requests is more fixed and their expressions are limited because their learning process is only conducted in the classroom settings. The expressions

of request taught by the language teachers are usually limited to “Could you...” and “would you...”, so they tend to avoid using expressions that they are not familiar with. The participants are intermediate language learners, so they should have basic pragmatic awareness and common pragma-linguistic tools. The conventionally indirect strategy is their first choice when they try to be polite but have limited expressions to perform requests. As for the SA learners, their use of request is more direct than AH learners. Although Deng and Ranta (2019) believe native speakers of English disprefer direct requests, this result might be due to their interaction with native speakers who are intimate rather than strangers who have distant social relationships with them, and the impact of the direct way of thinking in English-speaking countries. Another possibility is that the SA learners only stay in the Chinese community and gain little socio-pragmatic knowledge.

In the analysis of strategies of request Head act, the result shows that the Interrogative is the most frequently used syntactic downgrader when SA and AH learners are making requests. The reason for this result is the same as mentioned above, requests are taught in the classrooms in interrogative sentences. Using an interrogative sentence is also the most common way of making requests in the study abroad context. SA learners and AH learners have no apparent difference in other Head act request strategies. However, SA learners perform better at request strategies in the Adjuncts to the Head act, especially the “Sweetener” strategy. According to Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984), Sweetener is the strategy that the speakers use to reduce the imposition by expressing exaggerated appreciation of the hearer’s ability to comply with the request. The result shows that SA learners use the Sweetener strategy more frequently than AH learners. It means SA learners are better at making a request more appropriate by complimenting the addressee. The compliments of others are more common in English-speaking countries; therefore, this strategy might be learned by the SA learners from the study-abroad context.

In addition, it is found in the data that both AH and SA learners use apologies before the request very frequently. Typically, they begin the conversation with apology expressions such as “Sorry to interrupt you” or “I am sorry to bother you” before or after their Head act of request. The apology is also used as a strategy to mitigate requests and gain more understanding from the hearer. This might be the cultural influence that Chinese people consider requests to bother the hearer, so no matter how the request is performed, an apology should be expressed. Unlike Blum-Kulka and Olshtain’s (1984) defining apologies as post-event acts, this kind of apology is only a strategy to mitigate requests.

The analysis of refusal reveals a significant difference between the study abroad group and the study at home group. The findings show the existence of significant differences among the two groups within both total frequency, indirect strategy, and adjuncts, while the results in direct strategy do not differ between the two groups. These results are partially aligned with the study conducted by Moafian et al. (2022) which shows statistically significant results in not only the total number but also the three main refusal types. Regarding the total number of refusal strategies, the study at home group overweighs the study abroad group, but the gap is not huge. This can be explained that studying abroad, in English-speaking countries more specifically, has influenced the refusal strategy of participants. As a matter of fact, most cultures in English-speaking countries are known as individualistic while Chinese cultures are categorized as collectivistic. Thus, the way of interaction differs between different types of cultures. In Chinese culture, face is considered to be a very important component of interaction. The interlocutor would try their best to save their face and also leave a positive impression even in refusal. A direct refusal could be considered to be rude and inappropriate in Chinese culture because it might damage the relationship between individuals. However, in English culture, refusing directly might not have a negative influence on the relationship because self-comfortability and personal privacy are important (Moafian et al., 2022).

In a smaller scope, results are significantly different in indirect and adjuncts between the two groups. The most frequently used indirect strategy is giving a reason for both groups. This result indicates that explanation is accepted and widely used in both Chinese and English culture for it can reach the goal of protecting the relationships between interlocutors. However, statistic shows that the study abroad group overweighs the study at home group in the strategy of statement of regret. This result coordinates with Chen’s (1996) study that regret is not found in the refusal patterns of the Chinese group as it is in other groups such as German. Different from the strategy of explanation, which is a universally used strategy, expressing regret is not what Chinese people will normally do in refusal but it is common in the English culture. Another unexpected finding is that in the category of adjunct, the frequency of addressing with respect to study at group overweighs the study abroad group. No participants in the study abroad group use this strategy while “dear boss”, or “hi boss” can be frequently found in the response of the study at home group. This phenomenon is related to the cultural difference between China and English-speaking countries, especially in the workplace. As proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987), power, distance, and rank are the main factors that influence refusal. In China, the power of the boss is considered to be huge, which means the employees should respect their boss. Also, it is considered to be rude to call someone more powerful with their first name. Therefore, students in China prefer to call their boss by title instead of calling their name.

Regarding the analysis of apology speech acts between the AH and SA group, the result above shows that there are not very obvious differences between the two groups of Chinese students in their apology speech acts in the same settings. On the contrary, many similarities have been discovered and revealed in this research process among the AH and SA participants.

Based on the CCSARP (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984), the cultural differences need to be considered with diverse conventional patterns when the speech acts occur across various cultures. However, in the apology context, there are still many shared cultural norms, criteria, and apology strategies across different cultures such as the IFID and offer repair strategies (Tajeddin et al., 2014). As the result shows above, both the AH and SA groups' participants have performed in similarity that they adopt the high-frequency use of the explicit and direct IFID strategy in apology speech acts. All the sixteen participants prefer to open their apology illocution by saying "sorry" or "apologize" directly to express their regret for their mistakes. Some knowledge and common senses are shared that when people do something wrong, they need to say "sorry" at first. That is why all the participants choose the explicit IFID strategy in all the apology settings without hesitation. Specifically, some of the participants in the two groups have adopted the structure of "apologizer + intensifier + apologizing" such as "I'm so sorry..." (Su & Wei, 2018) to emphasize their more sincere attitudes and regret their mistakes, which has been showcased in the result that is frequently accompanied by the use of self-blame strategy simultaneously in the apology speech acts. Furthermore, according to the corpus-based analysis (Jucker, 2018), the IFID is one of the most popular and high-frequently used strategies to express an apology in a specific context. For instance, "sorry" and "please" are more likely to be adopted to retrieve apologies in illocution (Jucker, 2018). However, sometimes the IFID "sorry" can also be used in the request settings as the opening. Thus, it is necessary to figure out other tools or strategies in the illocutions to determine the apology speech acts. And it can explain the reason why all the involved participants have also combined at least one other apologizing strategy in their apology speech acts rather than only saying "sorry" in each of the apology settings to prevent speech act ambiguity or less politeness. For instance, participants at least choose the strategy of offering a repair accompanied by the IFID to express an apology to the hearers in this research.

Another interesting difference between the two groups shown in the result is the differences in the addressing terms among participants. Some AH participants even misuse the inappropriate addressing terms in their DCT answers. In the Q12 apology setting, one of the AH participants use "dear" to address the old lady in the context, which is inappropriate and a bit weird; however, none of the SA participants exhibit any inappropriateness in addressing terms in each of the apology settings. Compared with the AH group participants, SA group participants adjust the addressing terms more frequently in their DCT answers in different apology settings. Their use of addressing terms varies from different hearers depending on the changing personal relationships. This can be explained by the English studying-abroad experiences which are beneficial for their linguistic correctness and pragmatic appropriateness in an authentic illocution context (Schauer, 2009).

V. CONCLUSION

A. Implications of the Study

In this study, the effect of study-abroad experience is investigated on the pragmatic competence of Chinese learners of English, with regard to the use of speech acts strategies including request, refusal, and apology. The results do not reveal any evident improvements in the pragmatic competence of learners who have study-abroad experience compared to those who study English at home in China, but some of their strategies of using speech acts do have differences.

First of all, in terms of requests, conventionally indirect requests are the most frequently used type of request, and SA learners use more direct requests than AH learners. The interrogative is the most frequently used syntactic downgrader for both SA learners and AH learners. SA learners use more exaggerated compliments to lower the imposition of the request, which is called the "Sweetener" strategy, than the AH learners. Moreover, both SA learners and AH learners use apology before the request very frequently as a strategy to mitigate the request. In addition, instead of direct strategy, both AH and SA learners prefer the indirect strategies of refusal, in which the strategy of excuse/reason/explanation is the most frequently used. As for the differences between the AH group and the SA group, SA learners tend to use the statement of regret such as "I am sorry" to refuse others. However, in terms of the strategy of promise of future acceptance, AH learners usually choose to make the promise of giving presents as compensation. The AH group uses more adjuncts than the SA group, especially the strategy of addressing with respect. Last but not least, there is no obvious difference in apologies between AH learners and SA learners. In general, all learners are more likely to use direct apologies than indirect apologies. Compared with AH learners who do not use any indirect strategies, some of the SA learners are capable of using indirect apologies. Both groups of SA and AH learners use the strategy of illocutionary force devices frequently. The offering a repair strategy and intensification strategy are also strategies used by the SA group and AH group.

B. Limitations and Suggestions for Further Study

There are some limitations to the current study. Firstly, the research only focuses on intermediate-level learners and the sample size is limited, the results in the studies that recruit different participants might be different due to the learner's variability. Secondly, the survey can only be taken through the internet without following-up interviews to validate the participants' perspectives in case of neglecting anything noteworthy. Moreover, the CCSARP model cannot fully represent the strategies used by the learners. Therefore, future research should further be placed on exploring the

effect of studying abroad experience on the learners' pragmatic competence of different proficiency level in China with a deeper focus on the strategies used in speech acts.

From the pedagogical perspective, although the results do not reveal any evident improvement in pragmatic competence for students who have study-abroad experience, every student may show some strategies in their speech acts, but their pragmatic competence is still not high. Therefore, it is suggested that more emphasis and importance should be placed on the pragmatic knowledge, which should be explicitly or implicitly taught in the classroom because the chance to enhance pragmatic competence and learn pragmatic knowledge is limited outside the classroom.

APPENDIX

Pre-interview questions

English name:

Gender: male/female/Non-binary

IELTS/CET-4 score:

Time abroad: 0 (never been abroad) / _____month(s)

The written DCT

1. It is 10 am in the morning, you are studying for an English test that will be held tomorrow. You decide to study until midnight. Unfortunately, you heard that your neighbors have decided to hold a very loud party this night, which will make you unable to concentrate at all. Although you are living next to your neighbors, you are not familiar with each other. You decide to visit them and ask them to stay quiet tonight. What would you say?

2. Your roommate asks if he/she could use your car to go to Chicago. You just got this new car last month and you liked it a lot. Knowing that the roommate is a careless and unskillful driver who has damaged another person's car before, you don't want to lend your car to this roommate. What would you say?

3. You are very short of money. your best friend always lends you some in such situations. But this time you know it may be hard as you haven't given back the money you borrowed before. Anyway, you have no choice. You decide to ask your best friend to lend you some money. What would you say?

4. Your boss is having a farewell party next Saturday evening at a restaurant in town and is inviting you and other members of the company to celebrate his promotion. He invites you to celebrate this important occasion with him, but you are unable to attend. What would you say?

5. You attend classes regularly and take good notes. One person in your class who doesn't show up very often asks to borrow your notes. Since you have to compete with the rest of the class to earn a good grade, you don't feel like sharing the results of your hard work with someone who doesn't work for it. What would you say?

6. You are supposed to submit your assignment next Wednesday. But you are feeling unwell since yesterday. You think you might be ill and will not be able to finish the assignment before next Wednesday. You know that your teacher said there is very little room for extension, but you have no choice. You decide to send a message to her and ask for an extension for the assignment. What would you say?

7. You borrowed your sister's (or brother's) new outfit to make a good impression at a job interview. You washed it with a washing machine before you returned it but unfortunately, it was dry clean only and was not able to wear anymore. It was a limited edition and was already sold out. What would you say?

8. You have a cute little puppy. When your colleague Zoe came over, he chewed Zoe's rather expensive shoes. Zoe is your partner at work, and you know each other for a while in the company for about three months, and you know Zoe loves your puppy very much. You feel very sorry. What would you say?

9. You're in the cinema. The person sitting in front of you is wearing an enormous hat making it impossible to watch the movie. You don't know each other at all, but you decide to ask him to take off his hat and let you watch the movie clearly. What would you say?

10. You were in a hurry to go to work and accidentally run into an old lady who was walking slowly, making her drop her groceries and break her eggs. You didn't know this old lady and she was too old to bend down for picking up the things. She was very upset. What would you say?

11. A friend invites you to a housewarming party tomorrow after work because they have just moved into a new house, but the house is really far from you, and you have to go to work very early the next morning. You just want to relax and have a good rest instead of going to the party. What would you say?

12. You were supposed to meet your friend Jack at 8:00 in the morning for a concert later but you overslept. And it's 11:30 and your phone shows four missed phone calls from Jack. And Jack is the new friend who you just met recently, you two are not quite familiar and intimate with each other very much yet. What would you say?

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