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| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Pragmatic Routines in the Study Abroad Context: Vietnamese Students in the UK

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| ABSTRACT
The study abroad (SA) context is frequently found to provide language learners with ample exposure to pragmatic routines (Roever, 2011), which are fixed or semi-fixed expressions activated in specific communicative situations. This cross-sectional study examined the production of pragmatic routines by three groups of Vietnamese students with varying lengths of stay abroad. A role-play task was used to examine the production of routines by each group in ten situations. Findings suggest that the SA experience cannot guarantee the acquisition of pragmatic routines. The difference is restricted to how participants use their language to perform certain speech acts.

| KEYWORDS
Pragmatic routines, study abroad, role play, pragmatic production, interlanguage pragmatics

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1. Introduction

Pragmatic routines are fixed or semi-fixed expressions that speakers frequently deploy in everyday communicative situations (Taguchi, 2013). In such situations, pragmatic routines carry a distinctive meaning that should not be taken literally (for example, Tell me about it! as a phrase to express agreement vs. Tell me about it! as a freely generated request) (Kecskes, 2014). There is a strong link between routines and their contexts of use. For this reason, scholars have widely claimed that knowledge of pragmatic routines is beneficial to speakers of English as a second language (L2) (Wray, 2012), especially in the study abroad (SA) context (Roever, 2011). This is because the SA context is considered a potential environment where learners of English can gain exposure to pragmatic routines and can develop their pragmatic competence (Isabelli-Garcia et al., 2018).

This cross-sectional study sought to investigate the differences in the production of pragmatic routines by Vietnamese students as they were pursuing higher education in the UK. Findings of this study contribute, albeit rather modestly, to the growing area of pragmatics research in the SA context by employing an underrepresented data collection method. Thus, this study aimed to answer the following research question:

Is there a significant difference in the production of pragmatic routines between participants with different lengths of stay in the UK?

2. Literature review

2.1. Pragmatic Routines

Pragmatics is defined as a line of research that seeks the answers to two main questions in communication: why we choose what we say and why we understand what others meant (Kecskes, 2014). Regarding intercultural interactions, Leech (1983) introduced a fundamental dichotomy between two components of pragmatics: pragmalinguistics, which adheres to the linguistic system, and sociopragmatics, which deals with how language can be used appropriately in a given speech community with specific rules and conventions.

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Pragmatic routines have been the target of multiple studies into formulaic language, which has been examined under four main terms: formula, conventional expression, pragmatic routine, and situation-bound utterance (Bardovi-Harlig, 2019). Scarcella (1979) and Roever (2006) used the term pragmatic routines to imply the high frequency of use when examining L2 speakers' language. While the term formula is widely referred to as formulaic language in general, conventional expression is the term used to refer to the preferred form of expression in a particular situation by native speakers.

In recent studies on formulaic language, "pragmatic routines" has been more frequently used as the cover term (Bardovi-Harlig, 2019). Sanchez-Hernandez and Soler (2018) defined pragmatic routines as "semi-fixed expressions used recurrently by members of a speech community in specific situations of everyday life." This definition highlighted the native speakers' preference for language use and, subsequently, the high frequency of use. "Have a nice day" in service encounters or "Help yourself" when offering food to someone were listed as examples of pragmatic routines (Sanchez-Hernandez and Alcon-Soler, 2018). However, there was still a distinction between pragmatic routines and conventional expressions. As opposed to conventional expressions, which are tied to a particular speech act in a specific context (Bardovi-Harlig, 2009), pragmatic routines are "not tied to a specific situation" (Bardovi-Harlig, 2019, p. 48).

The acquisition of pragmatic routines has been well-proven to be useful for L2 learners of English (Sanchez-Hernandez, 2017). Kecskes (2014) claimed that formulaic language is the heart and soul of native-like language use, especially in brief everyday interactions. Since pragmatic routines are preferred ways of saying things and organising thoughts in a specific speech community, their use allows L2 learners to decrease the processing load in recognition, and to plan responses in interactions due to their framing power (Wray, 2002). Thus, pragmatic routines can facilitate socialisation and integration into the target language community better (Kanagy, 1999). Taguchi and Ishihara's (2018) reconceptualized model of pragmatic competence also indicated that pragmatic routines can potentially improve all sub-competences, since pragmatic routines enable L2 speakers to quickly recognize illocutionary force and align their response with the linguistic act of the interlocutor by deploying appropriate formulaic language.

2.2. Pragmatic Routines in the SA Context

First, studies on pragmatic routines are often conducted in the SA context, where access to routines is abundant but often "hidden in plain sight" (Bardovi-Harlig, 2019, p. 47). These studies examined both external and internal factors of pragmatic competence and development. External factors include the effect of length of stay and intensity of interaction on recognition and production of pragmatic routines (Sanchez-Hernandez and Alcon-Soler, 2018). In this regard, the length of stay abroad can be beneficial in terms of exposure to input (Roever, 2012). However, the intensity of interaction is proven to have a more direct impact on the development of pragmatic routines acquisition (Bardovi-Harlig and Bastos, 2011). Internal factors concern individual differences among learners (such as proficiency, social distance, motivation, and age) as well as their willingness to adapt to the target culture. Proficiency was widely studied in relation to pragmatic gains in the SA context due to the hypothesis that higher proficiency leads to more significant development in recognition and production.

However, findings from this line of research were mixed (Taguchi, 2013). Soler and Sanchez-Hernandez (2017) examined the impact of proficiency in a semester abroad on 122 participants and found no significant difference between the three groups. This finding was similar to Taguchi's (2013), in which proficiency was found to have a significant effect only on fluency. Appropriateness - or native-like selection - only improved in combination with the SA experience, and it was suggested that exposure and intensity of interaction were the determining factors.

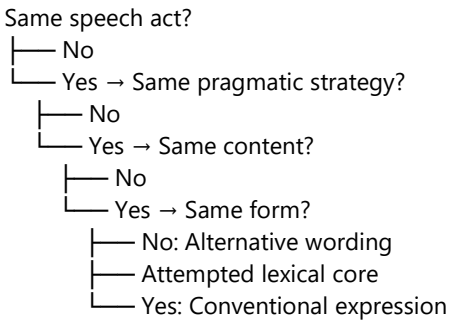
Second, the majority of studies on pragmatic routines measured production data (Bardovi-Harlig, 2019). Only a few studies addressed the development of both recognition and production of routines in the SA context (Bardovi-Harlig and Bastos, 2011; Sanchez-Hernandez, 2017). Production data were predominantly collected using discourse completion tasks (DCTs), either in written or spoken form (Xiao, 2015). In pragmatics, DCTs have been receiving heavy criticism from researchers due to their lack of authenticity and representativeness (Roever, 2011). Regardless, the tool is still frequently used because of its convenience and its ability to measure knowledge of pragmatic routines (Taguchi, 2015). Another reliable tool is the discourse role-play task (DRPT). The DRPT also allows researchers to elicit "discourse-level data instead of utterance-level data" (Kecskes, 2014) which can give researchers insights into how L2 pragmatic competence develops. Nevertheless, few studies use this tool as the primary data collection instrument; only Bataller's (2010) study uses DRPT to measure the development of request-making strategies in Spanish.

Finally, there is an issue concerning how production data were analysed and rated in recent studies. As mentioned before, almost all studies on pragmatic routines used data from native speakers as the baseline to assess the responses from L2 speakers. This preference implied the importance of native-like use of pragmatic routines as the ultimate goal for L2 learners. Bardovi-Harlig and Bastos (2011) identified the pragmatic routines by the high frequency (more than 50%) of use elicited from native speakers. Similarly, Taguchi (2015) employed native speakers of Japanese in the process of rating pragmatic performance of L2 learners. Taguchi (2013) prefers to measure production data based on speech rate (in words per minute), planning time, and appropriacy. Scoring for appropriateness of use was conducted through a band score description with the highest band assigned to native-like norms of use. Bardovi-Harlig (2019) and Bardovi-Harlig and Bastos (2011) rated production data on a binary scale consisting of "1" and "0" scores depending on whether the routines are realised (with a certain degree of

grammatical variation). This holistic scoring approach, though beneficial for assessment and placement purposes, can lead to a lack of depth in data analysis, particularly on how pragmatic development progresses in each dimension (for example, content, strategies, form) (Taguchi et al., 2017). Thus, a more comprehensive description of felicitous use of pragmatic routines can potentially allow researchers to gain deeper insights into ILP development. Bardovi-Harlig (2019) suggested a model of analysing multiple levels of pragmatic routine realisation.

Figure 1

Levels of Pragmatic Alignment Prompting Felicitous Use of a Pragmatic Routine (from Bardovi-Harlig, 2019, p. 54)



Three dimensions of felicitous use were identified as content, form, and strategies. At the most basic level, the elicited routine must perform the same head act as in the use of the target language community (for example, No, I'm stuffed as an offer refusal). The next two levels examined whether similar conventional strategies were deployed (for example, provide an explanation or express gratitude for the offer) and whether the content of the utterance aligned. At the surface level of form, the utterance was assessed by the degree to which it matches the preferred expressions of the target language community (for example, No, I'm stuffed. Thanks for your offer). Learners might attempt to produce the preferred expressions, though there might be grammatical (for example, No, I stuffed) or lexical errors (for example, No, I'm stuff). Bardovi-Harlig (2019) recommended assigning scores for each discrete level, which would later be combined and compared for a more in-depth analysis of ILP development. This approach enables researchers to measure the development of four sub-competencies of Taguchi and Ishihara's (2018) model by acknowledging the performance of L2 speakers in separate but interconnected dimensions.

This brief review of literature suggests that there are three research gaps in factors influencing pragmatic competence and development, data collection and data analysis. Thus, this study aimed to address such gaps by answering the following question:

Is there a significant difference in the production of pragmatic routines between participants with different lengths of stay in the UK?

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

A quantitative approach was adopted for the design of this study to answer the research question. The quantitative approach was implemented in this study through a cross-sectional sequential explanatory design. Riazi and Candlin (2014) suggested that the sequential design enables the study to expand its explanatory power by providing more explanation for trends and patterns reported in the survey and assessment data.

3.2. Data Collection

The study employed a role-play task as a primary tool of data collection. The task was delivered to participants through a Skype video call. The role-play task consisted of 10 scenarios to elicit the target pragmatic routines. This study chose the role-play task because of its ability to collect naturalistic spoken data. As opposed to written DCTs, role-plays have been widely regarded as a standardised data collection instrument that can elicit natural interactive production data (Taguchi and Roever, 2017). Proponents of role-plays listed the ability to measure on-going performance and to capture individual variations in pragmatic development as the main advantages (Xiao, 2015). This study adopted the scenarios for the role-play task in Bardovi-Harlig (2019) and Sanchez-Hernandez (2017). Findings from these two studies validated the community-wide use of routines in the scenarios. Thus, participants were unlikely to be under pressure to adopt unfamiliar roles (for example, as a customs agent) or imagining an unfamiliar situation (for example, interrogating witnesses).

There were 6 scenarios in which participants had to initiate the interaction, and the remaining 4 required them to respond to a prompt. Subsequently, a short description of the scenario (or a role-play card) was delivered to the participants through the "Conversation" window in the Skype video call interface. Such a description informed participants of the role of interlocutors (for example, "a close friend" or "an academic mentor"), the degree of social distance, as well as the context of the interaction (for example, "at your messy house" or "in a bank"). Participants had around 4 to 5 seconds to read through and

familiarise themselves with the description. Once the scenario started, participants were expected to produce the target routine within the first turn; however, they were encouraged to continue the dialogue. Four example scenarios preceded the role-play task so that participants could familiarise themselves with the data collection procedure. Participants were encouraged to draw upon their experience (preferably during the SA sojourn) when preparing to enter each scenario. Except for the interaction in each scenario, the language for task delivery, instruction, and participant training was Vietnamese, the participants' mother tongue.

3.3. Sampling Criteria

The target population for the study comprised Vietnamese students in three groups: (1) those preparing to enter a Master's program in the UK—the at-home group; (2) those who had been participating in a Master's program in the UK since September 2025—the sojourning group; and (3) those who had been living and studying in the UK for more than 2 years—the extended-stay group. The decision to target this homogenous population was motivated by the lack of investigation into the experience of Vietnamese students in the U.K. The three groups represented three time points for cross-sectional comparison of pragmatic performance. Since longer stays might incur more significant interaction (Bardovi-Harlig, 2019), the study was motivated to recruit participants with varying lengths of stay in the U.K. The cross-sectional design was chosen because of its feasibility.

Logistical constraints also motivated the convenience sampling procedure used in the participant recruitment process. The convenience sampling procedure required the study to be cautious when making claims about the results (Gass and Mackey, 2014). Also, the snapshot nature of the cross-sectional design prevented the study from generalising its findings (Riazi, 2016). Participants were recruited within the author's social circle, though they were encouraged to invite other participants within their circles. A total of 26 participants agreed to participate in the data collection procedure. The at-home and the sojourning groups each had 11 participants, while 4 participants were grouped in the extended-stay category. The at-home participants were recruited on the basis that they all had received an offer to study on an MA/MSc course in the U.K. in September 2026, under the condition that this was their first SA program. The sojourning participants also had to have started their first SA program in September
2025. The extended-stay participants varied in terms of lengths of stay (from 24 months to a maximum of 4 years in the U.K).

3.4. Data Analysis

The current study examined data from the role-play task on the utterance and the discourse layers, accounting for Kecskes' (2014) suggestion to analyse ELF talk from the bottom up. At the utterance level, a routine rating guide was constructed based on the theoretical basis of Bardovi-Harlig's (2019) model of felicitous realisation of pragmatic routines. The model suggests four layers of alignment for a pragmatic routine to be realised: speech act alignment, strategy alignment, content alignment, and formal alignment. For this study, only two levels of analysis were rated: speech act alignment and formal alignment, due to time constraints. At the discourse level, role-play data were imported into Nvivo Pro 12 for coding purposes. In particular, the study examined strategies in realising particular speech acts (for example, request) that participants produced in interaction. Nodes were named using the format "[Speech act X]-Strategy Y" (for example, Request-Mitigators or Apology-Intensifiers) for categorization and quantification purposes.

The routine rating guide allowed the study to rate the routine production on two discrete levels: speech act realisation and formal alignment. The list of target head acts was adapted from Sanchez-Hernandez (2017). As for the form of the routines, a list of target routines was compiled based on the findings of Bardovi-Harlig and Bastos (2011) and Sanchez-Hernandez (2017) when piloting the routine test with native speakers. As this study aimed to elicit naturalistic spoken data, allowances should be made for variations in participants' responses, both in terms of grammatical and lexical differences. However, variations of tense were not to be accepted, as the change might suggest a freely generated expression (Horn and Kecskes, 2013) instead of a formulaic string. In each scenario, responses that realised the intended head act received the score of "1", whereas a score of "0" was assigned to responses that did not. The example in Table 1 illustrates the rating strategies for speech act realisation:

Table 1

Rating Speech Act Realisation

Intended head act	Role-play data	Realisation score
Apology	P11: so sorry to let you see this mess (.) I'll clean it up a little bit for you	1
	P12: oh it's quite messy here so please uh:: um:: uh:: so please don't mind uh:: so don't mind it	0 (the head act misaligns completely, as it is a request)

Note. Transcription convention following Jefferson's (2004) system of transcription notation.

Similarly, responses received the score of "1" if they aligned with the target routine forms (with limited variation), or "0" if the response completely misaligned. The rating scheme was adapted from Bardovi-Harlig and Bastos (2011), intending to smoothen the analysis of quantitative data. The current study also acknowledged findings from Taguchi (2013) on the importance of L2 learners' attempts to produce the target form, even when they fall short due to interlanguage deficiency. Thus, a score of "0.5" was assigned to cases where participants produced the entire lexical core of the target routine, but the use of grammar was not aligned. The targeted routine forms must be fully realised without significant pauses to receive a "1"; otherwise, a "0.5" would be given. Table 2 provides a sample of the rating process.

Table 2

Formal Alignment Rating

Target routine form with variations	Role-play data	Alignment score
(I'm/I am) {so} sorry I'm late	P1: ah:: uh I'm so sorry I'm late	1
	P4: I'm so sorry I was late I (1) I'm so sorry I was late	0.5 (misalignment of the tense)
	P2: uh I'm sorry sir (.) I'm a little bit a little bit late sorry (.) I won't repeat the same mistake	0 (complete misalignment of the routine form)

Note. Transcription convention following Jefferson's (2004) system of transcription notation.

Scores in speech act realisation and formal alignment were recorded separately to measure the differences among the three groups quantitatively. Simultaneously, the reported scores enabled the study to identify scenarios that indicated a significantly different performance across the three groups.

4. Results and Discussion

A one-way analysis of variance was carried out to determine the difference between the at-home, sojourning, and extended-stay groups in terms of formal alignment. The result suggested no statistical difference in the total scores of each group [$F(2,23) = 0.661$; $p = 0.551$]. The finding suggested that the SA context does not have a strong impact on the acquisition of pragmatic routines in the three groups of participants. This finding stood in contrast with results from Roever (2012), Bardovi-Harlig and Bastos (2011) and Taguchi (2015). One interpretation is that this study required participants to orally produce their responses in face-to-face interactions, as opposed to multiple-choice/ written/ oral DCTs. Thus, it is questionable whether there is evidence of development in pragmatic production.

A closer examination of participants' performance in each scenario revealed five points of interest. In the Messy House scenario, the at-home group performed particularly poorly in speech act alignment: $M = 0.36$ ($SD = 0.48$), whereas all sojourning participants accurately realised the intended head act. The majority of the at-home responses realised a request instead of an apology. This alignment failure can be explained by the lack of the individual trait of private experience (Kecskes and Zhang, 2009). The majority of the at-home group reported that living by themselves was a desired experience in the SA context, suggesting that having private accommodation remains unexplored territory for them.

In terms of formal alignment, two scenarios - Being Late and At the Store - recorded a significant deficit between the at-home group and the sojourning group, with the former reporting $M = 0.27$ ($SD = 0.39$) and $M = 0.09$ ($SD = 0.19$) while the latter reported $M = 0.64$ ($SD = 0.31$) and $M = 0.32$ ($SD = 0.32$) for the two respective scenarios. However, the at-home group reported a higher mean score of formal alignment in the Before a Puddle scenario, with $M = 0.77$ ($SD = 0.39$) compared to the sojourning group's ($M = 0.50$, $SD = 0.48$).

At the discourse level, the refined transcription of the role-play data was imported into Nvivo Pro 12 for coding purposes. The study paid particular attention to the following two head acts: request (scenario Pen) and apology (scenario Being Late). Since various strategies were frequently realised in speech acts, it was worth looking into the difference in the usage of those with and those without SA experience. To realise a request, speakers can deploy mitigating devices (or mitigators) to soften the weight of imposition placed on the hearers. Alternatively, speakers can use grounders to justify the request they are making by offering an explanation (Thomas, 1995). To realise an apology, speakers often use intensifying devices (e.g., adverbs such as "really", "very", or "sincerely") to acknowledge the severity of the act. Similar to requests, apologies are often accompanied by an account of why the speaker has to apologise in the first place (Ishihara and Cohen, 2010). Results of the coding process were summarised in Table 3.

Table 3
Speech Act Realisation Strategies Used by the At-Home and Sojourning Groups

Strategies	**At-home**	**Sojourning**	**Sample utterance**
Request-Mitigator	6 utterances (Pen) 8 utterances (Messy house)	2 utterances (Pen) 1 utterance (Messy house)	At-home: P1: ... is there any chance that you have any spare pen that I can borrow Sojourning: P11: ...can I borrow your pen please (.) just for a moment
Request-Grounders	9 utterances (Pen)	7 utterances (Pen)	At-home: P9: … may I borrow your pen (.) I forgot it at home Sojourning: P10: … do you have one more pen (.) uh I think I forget it (.) back at my house so
Apology-Intensifiers	5 utterances (Late)	15 utterances (Late)	At-home: P8: ... I'm very sorry Sojourning: P7: ... I sincerely apologise that I'm late today
Apology-Account	6 utterances (Late)	6 utterances (Late)	At-home: P12: I'm sorry I'm late because of (.) uh my (0.2) broken bike Sojourning: P10: sorry teacher (.) I just got a stomach ache ...

Note. Transcription convention following Jefferson's (2004) system of transcription notation.

Table 3 indicated opposite tendencies in using mitigators and intensifiers between the two groups. Participants in the at-home group tended to use mitigating devices such as "is there any chance," "for a little bit" or "would you mind" in a communicative situation when the degree of imposition was low, whereas those from the sojourning group produced significantly fewer (only 2 utterances). The following extracts illustrated instances where participants deployed mitigating devices.

Extract 1:
P1: hey (.) I've just realised that I have left my pen at home (.) is there any chance that you have any spare pen that I can borrow
I: oh yeah of course (.) here you go
P1: thank you (.) that is so nice of you
I: you're welcome

Extract 2:
P10: oh uh:: I forgot my pen (.) can-can I borrow your pen for (0.1) a little bit
I: yeah sure (.) here you go
P10: thank you very much (.) just-just a little bit (.) I'll uh give it back to you right away

Extract 3:
P12: excuse me (.) may I borrow your pen
I: yeah of course (.) uh I've a spare one here you go
P12: okay thank you so much (.) I'll buy you something later

A closer look at the role-play data revealed that at-home participants tended to maintain a high degree of politeness in their second turn. As can be seen from the examples below, at-home participants continued to use a range of politeness strategies despite the low-imposition nature of their request and the informal nature of the prompt. This extensive use of mitigators could potentially result in the speaker coming off as overly formal. The following extracts depicted a more moderate use of mitigating devices by the sojourning group.

Extract 4:
P2: do you have a spare pen that I can borrow (.) I need to write this down
I: oh yeah uh:: here you go
P2: kay thank you

Extract 5:
P4: mate (.) do you have a pen (.) I forgot it at home
I: oh yes of course (.) you can use this one
P4: cheers thank you

Extract 6:
P5: hey um do you have a pen that I can borrow
I: sure let me go have a look (.) here you go
P5: thank you

Extract 7:
P8: oh hey I forgot my pen (.) Can you-can I borrow yours
I: yeah sure you can use this one
P8: okay thank you

From Extracts 4 to 7, it can be inferred that the low-imposition nature of the request was well acknowledged by the participants in the sojourning group. Indeed, since the SA context provides ample opportunities for communication in the academic context, the routine request of borrowing a pen is more likely to be significantly more salient to the sojourning participants. Low-imposition situations require shorter utterances and less complex linguistic forms (for example, mitigating devices) to encode the intention of the speaker (Li, 2016).

The trend was reversed for the use of intensifiers in apology. Participants in the sojourning group used intensifiers extensively in the Being Late scenario. The total for the sojourning group was 15 instances, three times as many as that of the at-home group. The following extracts illustrated utterances in which the sojourning participants used intensifiers for being late.

Extract 8:
I: good morning come on in
P3: hi sorry-sorry (.) sorry so much I'm late.
I: oh that's fine (.) no problem please sit down
P3: thank you (.) I'll try not to be late next time

Extract 9:
I: good morning come on in
P5: hi (.) morning (.) I'm really sorry I'm late
I: yeah (.) no problem please sit down
P5: (okay)

Extract 10:
I: good morning (.) come on in
P6: morning I'm so sorry for being late I have problem with the bus I missed the bus so I have to wait 10 more minutes for the next bus (.) so (0.1) that's the reason why I come late I'm so sorry

I: that's terrible to hear (.) but no problems I don't mind waiting anyway (.) please sit down
P6: thank you I'm so sorry again (.) next time I promise I will not be late anymore

Extract 8 and Extract 9 demonstrated a different pattern of responding to the prompt. In these extracts, the participants acknowledged the prompt's intention by showing their appreciation and ending the turn. Extract 10 illustrated that the participant chose to ignore the prompt's intention by apologising once again in combination with a promise of forbearance. This move unnecessarily lengthened the interaction and can potentially prevent the conversation from moving forward (Thomas, 1995). The extracts indicated that participants tended to use intensifiers at the nearest position to the head act of apologising. This tendency was similar to that of the at-home participants, as can be seen from the extracts below.

Extract 11:
I: good morning (.) come on in
P1: I'm terribly sorry for this (.) I've just got (.) some trouble with my car
I: oh, no problem (.) come sit down
P1: thank you for understanding

Extract 12:
I: good morning come on in
P8: good morning (.) I'm very sorry [sorry
I: no problem (.) [no problem
please sit down
P8: ah yeah (.) I'm really sorry though

Extract 13:
I: good morning (.) come on in
P11: good morning so sorry I came here late today
I: no problem (.) please sit down
P11: (0.5)

Similar numbers of utterances were recorded in the strategy of providing an account for an apology (six utterances). However, while the majority of the at-home group cited traffic-related issues as an explanation, the sojourning group provided various types of excuses, from "stomach-ache" to "an emergency job to do." As the socio-cognitive approach would suggest, the use of traffic issues as an explanation can be attributed to the shared background knowledge of the interlocutors. Since traffic in Vietnam has been frequently perceived to be unreliable or even dangerous (Hung, 2006), citing traffic-related incidents provided participants with the legitimacy needed for the account.

To sum up, statistical analyses found no significant difference in the routine production of the three groups of participants, either at the speech act realisation level or the formal alignment level. An examination of the mean score of each scenario suggested that most at-home participants failed to realise the apology speech act in the Messy House scenario. In terms of formal alignment, the at-home group's mean scores were significantly lower than those of the sojourning group in the Being Late and At the Store scenarios. The trend was reversed for the Before a Puddle scenario. An analysis of the speech act realisation strategies indicated the opposite tendency in the use of mitigators (in a request) and intensifiers (in an apology) between the at-home and the sojourning groups. While the use of providing an account in an apology suggested a similarity between the two groups, the content of the excuse given by the at-home group involved the topic of traffic.

5. Implications and Limitations

Findings suggest only minor differences in routine production across the three groups. At the levels of speech act realisation and formal alignment, the study reports no statistically significant difference in the responses elicited from the role-play task. This finding is broadly consistent with previous studies that report a nuanced picture of pragmatic development in the SA context (Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford, 1993; Barron, 2006). However, as the role-play allows for a more enriched set of pragmatic data, a closer examination reveals traits of ILP development towards the norms of the target language community. In particular, compared to the at-home group, the sojourning group demonstrated a higher frequency of intensifiers used in apologies made towards a speaker of higher social status. In a similar comparison, the sojourning group produced fewer mitigators in making a low-imposition request (borrowing a pen). Also, lack of formulaic language use is found to result in unnecessarily prolonged responses as a compensation strategy. This finding is in line with results reported by Kecskes (2003) on the lack of use of formulas.

Findings from this study suggest that the SA context alone cannot guarantee that learners can use pragmatic routines effectively, as signs of compensation strategies are still frequent. Therefore, the instruction of pragmatic routines should be

implemented in language courses for those who are planning to partake in an SA program so that the pressure from the integration process can be partially relieved. Pragmatic competence has been widely reported to be successfully enhanced through either explicit or implicit instruction (Taguchi, 2015). However, studies that focus on the instructional effects of routine acquisition are still limited. The insignificant influence of the intensive academic program on pragmatic development carries two significant implications for language learners and course developers. Participants in SA programs are advised to devote more effort to socialisation should they wish to accomplish gains in language use. At the same time, students' needs to enhance their language should be acknowledged so that a positive SA experience can be promoted.

There are two significant limitations of this study. First, the study did not use a longitudinal design when tracking gains in routine production. The cross-sectional design was incapable of measuring the complex linguistic development of international students across multiple time points. Furthermore, as three distinct groups of participants were recruited for data elicitation, individual differences (for example, personal experience or opportunities for practice) could potentially influence the way data can be interpreted (Xiao, 2015). It would be interesting to explore the personal experience of the learners in SA programs in closer detail to identify critical points at which they encounter culture shock. Such accounts can add depth to the complex nature of linguistic development in the target language culture. Second, this study did not directly address the knowledge and recognition of routines. In recent studies, the knowledge of routines was found to play a positive role (Taguchi et al., 2016). Thus, future studies are encouraged to examine whether prior knowledge of routine forms and contexts of use can improve production.

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