

An Investigation into Pragmatic Knowledge in the Reading Section of TOLIMO, TOEFL, and IELTS Examinations

Alireza Karbalaee¹ & Mehrnaz Kashkooli Rahmanzade²

¹ Farhangian University, Tehran, Iran

² Department of English, Kish International branch, Islamic Azad University, Kish, Iran

Correspondence: Mehrnaz Kashkooli Rahmanzade, Department of English, Kish International branch, Islamic Azad University, Kish, Iran. E-mail: mehrnazkash@yahoo.com

Received: December 24, 2014 Accepted: March 18, 2015 Online Published: April 23, 2015

doi:10.5539/elt.v8n5p208 URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/elt.v8n5p208>

Abstract

The present study focused on the analysis of listening sections of two international English proficiency tests, i.e. IELTS and TOEFL tests, and one local English proficiency test, i.e. TOLIMO from pragmatic perspective. An attempt was made to explore the areas of pragmatic knowledge presented, and to assess test takers' pragmatic knowledge. For this purpose, 250 items from each of these three proficiency tests were collected and analyzed. IELTS and TOLIMO tests were taken from preparation textbooks available in the market, and TOEFL tests were taken from the tests administered from 2000 to 2004. To elucidate what areas of pragmatic knowledge was involved in each item, Jung's (2002) classification of components of pragmatic knowledge was used. In this study, pragmatic knowledge, included the ability to perform speech acts, the ability to convey and interpret non-literal meanings, the ability to perform politeness functions, the ability to perform discourse functions, and the ability to use cultural knowledge. The results of the study showed that TOLIMO, TOEFL and IELTS tests are able to assess test takers' pragmatic knowledge; however, higher instances of pragmatic knowledge components were involved in TOEFL and TOLIMO test.

Keywords: listening comprehension, communicative competence, pragmatic knowledge, IELTS, TOEFL

1. Introduction

Reading comprehension is the application of a skill that evolved for other purposes (listening or oral comprehension) to a new form of input (text). Whereas oral comprehension seems to develop "naturally" with minimal intentional involvement, reading comprehension is more challenging and requires deliberate instruction. Human beings have been using oral form of languages for 100,000 years or more (Donald, 1991), and almost all humans do it; reading comprehension has only been practiced for 5,000 years, and for most of that time. Most human beings did not do it (Olson, 1994). Thus, one of the sources of the difficulty of reading comprehension is its novelty (Kirby, 2006).

Reading comprehension is the process of constructing meaning from the text. The goal of all reading instructions is ultimately targeted at helping a reader to comprehend a given text. Reading comprehension involves at least two people; the reader and the writer. The process of comprehending involves decoding the writer's words and then using background knowledge to construct an approximate understanding of the writer's message (Kirby, 2006, p. 161).

One of the components of language proficiency knowledge is pragmatic knowledge. To be proficient in a language, EFL learners need to be pragmatically competent. Pragmatic knowledge, previously a neglected area in the realm of SLA, has increasingly taken more and more attention in recent years (Bachman, 1990; Garcia, 2004). That is, because being considered as a proficient second language, a user means not only having grammatical, lexical and phonological aspects but also having pragmatic knowledge (Corsetti, 2010). According to Van Dijk (1977), the pragmatic comprehension is different from linguistic comprehension because it calls for contextual information such as the role played by interlocutors and status of them, the physical setting of the conversation, and the types of communicative acts that may occur in that context. Crystal (2008) defines pragmatics as "the study of language from the point of view of the users, especially of the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction, and the effects their use of language has on the

other participants in an act of communication” (p. 379). Pragmatics is concerned with rules and principles of language use in social contexts (Tan, 1994). Also, pragmatics involves using the language to show the linguistic roles increased by the social functions of language (Brown & Levinson, 1987). According to Flowerdew and Miller (2005), in order to comprehend a spoken message, four main types of knowledge are needed: phonology; syntax; semantics; and pragmatics. Pragmatics means to understand the meaning of produced utterances in particular situations.

In this study, the reading section of Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), International English Language Testing System (IELTS), and a local English proficiency, TOLIMO (The Test of Language by the Iranian Measurement Organizations), were taken into account regarding the involvement of components of pragmatic knowledge.

Uso-Juan and Martinez-Flor (2006) have elaborated the role of reading in communicative competence framework. They believe that linguistic, strategies, intercultural, pragmatic competence, as well as discourse competence are related to reading ability. Another type of competence, which is the most pertinent component, is discourse competence which involves “the knowledge of written discourse features such as markers, cohesion and coherence as well as formal schemata with reference to the particular communicative goal and context of the written text” (p. 268). Linguistic competence is reported to be lowest level of ability required to understand a piece of text. Vocabulary is a subsection of this kind of competence, which is of high importance in the reading ability. Strategic competence deals with both learning and communication strategies. The former deals with metacognitive, cognitive and socioaffective measures which are taken by the reader to have a better understanding of the text, and the latter has to do with using reading strategies to make up for interpretation deficiencies. Intercultural competence refers “to the knowledge of how to interpret written texts appropriately within their sociocultural context” (270). The last and the most relevant competence to the present study is the pragmatic competence, which involves the understanding of the meaning which is beyond the locutionary; in other words, it deals with the illocutionary force of utterances. The knowledge of context is of paramount significance here to attach the right illocutionary force to an utterance.

As it was already mentioned, one of the language proficiency components, which is influential in the process of comprehending a text is the pragmatic knowledge. Having syntactic and semantic knowledge does not guarantee students’ second language communicative competence. Students also need to possess pragmatic knowledge in order to be considered as a proficient speaker of a second language. “Inability to match utterances with contexts in which they are appropriate has affected students’ overall communicative competence” (Fakeye David, 2008, p.73). Not having enough pragmatic knowledge leads to misunderstanding and misinterpretation, which may break down the whole communication process? TOEFL, IELTS, and TOLIMO are said to be able to assess testees’ pragmatic competence. But, to what extent and what areas of pragmatic knowledge are assessed in these three proficiency tests? Therefore, the main objective of this study is to investigate to what extent pragmatic knowledge is assessed in reading sections of TOEFL, IELTS, and TOLIMO.

The present study tries to fill the gap in the literature by probing into the pragmatic knowledge assessed in three proficiency tests, namely TOEFL, IELTS, and TOLIMO. No study has ever investigated the ability of reading sections of the international proficiency tests in assessing test takers’ pragmatic knowledge.

1.1 Research Questions

The present study tries to answer the following questions:

- 1) To what extent can reading section of TOEFL assess pragmatic knowledge?
- 2) What areas of pragmatic knowledge are assessed in reading section of TOEFL?
- 3) To what extent can reading section of IELTS assess pragmatic knowledge?
- 4) What areas of pragmatic knowledge are assessed in reading section of IELTS?
- 5) To what extent can reading section of TOLIMO assess pragmatic knowledge?
- 6) What areas of pragmatic knowledge are assessed in reading section of TOLIMO?
- 7) Which test assesses pragmatic knowledge of test takers more? IELTS, TOEFL, or TOLIMO?

2. Literature Review

According to Jung (2002), a person to be considered as a pragmatically competent language user needs to have the following aspects:

- 1) *The Ability to Perform Speech Acts*: speech act was developed by Austin (1962) and later more elaborated by

Searle (1969). At the beginning of “How to Do Things with Words”, J. L. Austin asserts that “the business of a [sentence] can only be to ‘describe’ some state of affairs, or to ‘state some fact’, which it must do either truly or falsely” (1962, p. 6).

A few years later in 1969, Searle worked more on speech acts and give functions to them. He then classified them into five categories, which according to Yule (2000) are as follows:

- a) Declaratives, which are those kinds of speech acts that change the world through the utterances. For example:
 - I now pronounce you man and wife.
- b) Representatives, which are those kinds of speech acts that state what the speaker believes to be the case or not. Statements of fact, assertions, and conclusions belong to this category. For example:
 - William Faulkner wrote *The Sanctuary*.
- c) Expressives, which are those kinds of speech acts that state what the speaker feels. They express various psychological states such as likes, dislikes, joy, sorrow, etc. For example:
 - Wow, how beautiful you are!
 - I really love your new dress.
 - The meal was delicious.
- d) Directives, which are those kinds of speech acts through which the speaker gets someone to do something. Commands, orders, requests, and suggestions belong to this category. For example:
 - Don’t hit your sister.
- e) Commissives, which are those kinds of speech acts that speakers use to commit themselves to some future action such as promises, threats, refusals, etc. For example:
 - I’ll help you.

2) *The Ability to Convey and Interpret Non-literal Meanings*: This ability is directly related to the Grice’s cooperative principles and the meaning of implicature. According to Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy by Wayne Davis (forthcoming), “Implicature denotes either (i) the act of meaning, implying, or suggesting one thing by saying something else, or (ii) the object of that act.” Conversational implicatures have become one of the main issues in the study of pragmatics.

Grice (1975, p. 45) maintains that the dominant principle in conversation is cooperative principle: “Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged.” Grice, who coined the term “implicature,” and classified the phenomenon, developed an important theory to explain and predict conversational implicatures, and describe how they used and are understood.

3) *The Ability to Perform Politeness strategies*: According to Holmes (2008), being polite is a complicated business in any language. It is difficult to learn because it involves understanding not just the language, but also the social and cultural values of the community. She also mentions that “generally speaking politeness involves taking into account the feeling of others.” (p. 281). According to major studies of politeness (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Lakoff, 1973; Leech, 1983), linguistic expressions display different degrees of politeness.

Politeness, sometimes, is attached to indirectness (Austin, 1962; Brown & Levinson, 1987; Srinarawat, 2005). And, Indirectness is prevalent in all human languages (Srinarawat, 2005). Brown and Levinson (1987) classify direct speech acts as Face Threatening Acts (FTAs). In the direct speech act, the speaker employs a sentence whose meaning explicitly provides the hearer with the content of the intended act. Indirectness, on the other hand, refers to the speech act in which the expressed meaning of an utterance does not match the speaker’s implied or intended meaning (Srinarawat, 2005). An indirect speech act necessitates the speaker’s and the hearer’s common background knowledge and the ability to make inferences on the listener’s part (Rabinowitz, 1993).

According to Watts (2003), investigation of directness or indirectness in speech act realizations is pertinent to politeness. Leech (1983) argues that indirectness usually comes hand in hand with politeness and that the “more indirect an illocution is, the more diminished and tentative its force tends to be” (p. 108). In probing into directness/indirectness and its effect on politeness, Blum-Kulka (1987) concludes that direct strategies are often taken as impolite since they lack a concern for face. On the contrary, Brown and Levinson (1987) maintain that the level of directness is to be ruled by universal principles of politeness.

4) *The ability to carry out discourse functions*. Since the last few decades, linguists have recognized that

communication is not based solely on sentence-level (lexis and sentence structure) and that the investigation of language and language learning should incorporate longer stretches of text or what is known as discourse. Many linguists have investigated the relationship between sentences in a text and labeled this relationship as texture. A set of sentences constitute a text if there is a relationship within and between the sentences; otherwise, they would be only a group of unrelated sentences. "The connections between sentences are called cohesive relations" (Yule & Brown, 1989, p. 191). Different parts of a text (or a conversation or any stretch of language) are interrelated in different forms. Sometimes the underlying semantic relations between the sentences and propositions have the cohesive power and indicate texture (coherence); however, in many cases there are some linguistic elements which manifest the relationship between the facts and propositions in a text (cohesion). The most frequently studied markers signaling coherence relations are discourse markers.

Fraser (1999) has defined DMs "as a pragmatic class, lexical expressions drawn from the syntactic classes of conjunctions, adverbials, and prepositional phrases." He asserts that with certain exceptions, they signal a relationship between the segment they introduce, S2, and the prior segment, S1. Their core meaning is not conceptual but procedural, and their more specific interpretation is 'negotiated' by the context, both linguistic and conceptual.

Fraser (1999) has divided DMs in four important groups: Contrastive Discourse Markers (CDM), Elaborative Discourse Markers (EDM), Inferential Discourse Markers (IDM), and Temporal Discourse Markers (TDM).

5) *Cultural knowledge*: Culture is what people "must know in order to act as they do, make the things they make, and interpret their experience in the distinctive way they do" (Quinn & Holland, 1987, p. 4). According to Bloch (1991), culture, which is studied in the realm of anthropology, is defined as what people must be acquainted with in order to function reasonably and effectively in their social environment. Social environment consists of social organizations and behaviors that are the instruments through which people relate to each other. "A society's culture consists of whatever it is one has to know or believes in order to operate in a manner acceptable to its members, and to do so in any role that they accept for anyone one of themselves" (Goodenough, 1957, p. 167). So, cultural knowledge is "socially acquired: the necessary behaviors are learned and do not come from any kind of genetic endowment" (Wardhaugh, 2008, p. 216).

When exploring culture, we have to consider concepts such as schema (plural, schemata), frame, and script. Yule (2000) argues that "a schema is a pre-existing knowledge structure in memory, (p. 85)" which can be either static or dynamic. When schema is fixed and static, it is called a frame. A frame is shared within a social group, which is like a prototypical version. For instance, in a frame for a restaurant, tables, plates, fork, spoon, and food will be come into mind. According to Yule (2000), a more vibrant type of schemata is called scrip, which is a pre-existing knowledge arrangement involving event sequences. Scripts are used to construct interpretations of accounts of what happened, and is a way of recognizing some expected sequence of actions in an event.

Since this study is the first in the pragmatic area of evaluating reading sections in TOEFL, IELTS, and TOLIMO tests, the researcher did not find any related empirical studies neither in TOEFL, IELTS, and TOLIMO, nor in any other type of universal language proficiency tests.

3. Methodology

In order to collect data for the purpose of this study, qualitative method was used. Regarding the design, descriptive design was taken into account for data collection.

3.1 Material

Materials used in this study included reading sections of two internationally-accepted English proficiency tests, IELTS and TOEFL, and a local proficiency test, TOLIMO.

IELTS Reading Section: Because the original IELTS tests were not accessible, the researcher used and analyzed IELTS preparation tests available in the market. Five series of reading comprehension tests were adopted from Practice Tests for IELTS 1 (Jakeman & McDowell, 1997), Practice Tests for IELTS 3 (2004), and insight into IELTS (Jakeman & McDowell, 2002). In general, 250 items were taken and analyzed in this study.

TOEFL Reading Section: The Reading Comprehension section included 50 questions on reading passages. To determine test takers' ability to understand written English, they must answer multiple questions about the ideas and the meanings of words in reading passages. In this study, five series of TOEFL from 2000 to 2004 were investigated. As a whole, 250 questions were used and analyzed.

TOLIMO Reading Section: This test is similar to TOEFL. The Reading Comprehension section included 50 questions about reading passages. There are 5-6 passages and 8-12 questions about each passage. To determine test

takers' ability to understand written English, they should answer multiple-choice questions about the ideas and the meanings of words in reading passages. In this study, 5 series of preparation tests for TOLIMO were investigated. As a whole, 250 questions were under full scrutiny.

3.2 Procedure

In this study, the reading sections of IELTS, TOEFL, and TOLIMO tests were analyzed according to the five areas of pragmatic knowledge mentioned in Jung (2002). Each item of these tests was analyzed one by one. In this section, the five areas of pragmatic knowledge are explained and exemplified. One of the main features of a research is a high degree of consistency. To estimate the inter-coder reliability, Spearman Correlation test was run. These tests were analyzed by three experts to make sure that the coding process is done precisely.

3.3 Data Analysis

To answer the seven research questions, a series of Chi-square was calculated. As we were dealing with frequency of types of levels, two types of chi-square tests were used. A chi-square test for goodness of fit was used for variables with one category and chi-square test of independence was utilized for variables with more than one category.

4. Results

Before data analysis, we should know that, for all statistical analyses in this study, .05 was used as the alpha level at which findings were considered to be significant. Several statistical tests were employed to address the different research questions. The data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 16).

Analysis of Speech Acts in TOEFL: Speech acts were assessed in 49.6% of items (N=124). Commissives had the lowest number of speech acts (N=13). Representatives were used in 29 items and expressives in 40 items. And the highest test number of assessed speech acts belonged to directives (N=42). Also, there was a significant difference in the frequency of speech act categories, $\chi^2=17.097$, $df=3$, $p=0.001$.

Table 1. Chi-square for the distribution of speech acts in TOEFL

	Speech acts
Chi-Square	17.097
Df	3
Asymp. Sig.	.001

Analysis of Discourse Markers in TOEFL: Discourse markers were used in 132 items of TOEFL (52.8%). Elaborative discourse markers were assessed in 33 items (13.2%). Contrastive discourse markers had 64 instances in TOEFL test (25.6%). and temporal discourse markers had the frequency of 22 (8.8%). The least discourse markers used was inferential (N=13, 5.2%). There was a significant difference between the category of discourse markers used in TOEFL ($\chi^2=44.909$, $df=3$, $p<0.05$).

Table 2. Chi-square tests for the distribution of discourse markers in TOEFL

	Discourse Markers
Chi-Square	44.909
Df	3
Asymp. Sig.	.000

Analysis of Politeness Strategies in TOEFL: In 7.2% of items in TOEFL, politeness functions were included (N=18). Direct strategies had been used in 8 items (3.2%) and indirect strategies in 10 items (4%). As a whole there were 18 instances of using politeness strategies in TOEFL tests. However, as can be seen in Table 3, there was no significant difference in inclusion of politeness strategies. ($p>0.05$)

Table 3. Chi-square tests for the distribution of politeness strategies in TOEFL

	Politeness
Chi-Square	.222
df	1
Asymp. Sig.	.637

Analysis of Implicature in TOEFL: In TOEFL test, only in 113 items non-literal meaning has been assessed (45.2%). The maxim of quantity was assessed in 23 items (9.2%), and the maxim of manner in 31 items (12.4%). Maxims of quality 22 (8.8%) and relevance 37 times were used in TOEFL tests (14.8%). Yet, no significant difference was found in the category of implicature ($\chi^2=0.222$, $df=1$, $p>0.05$).

Table 4. Chi-square tests for the distribution of implicature in TOEFL

	Implicature
Chi-Square	5.336
df	1
Asymp. Sig.	.149

Analysis of Speech Acts in IELTS: Speech acts were assessed in 22.4% of items (N=56). Commissives had the highest number of speech acts (N=26). Representatives were used in 21 items and expressives in 6 items. And, the lowest number of assessed speech acts belonged to directives (N=3). Also, there was a significant difference in the frequency of speech act categories ($\chi^2=27.000$, $df=3$, $p=0.00$).

Table 5. Chi-square for the distribution of speech acts in IELTS

	Speech acts
Chi-Square	27.000
df	3
Asymp. Sig.	.000

Analysis of Discourse Markers in IELTS: Discourse markers were used in 33 items of IELTS (13.3%). Elaborative discourse markers were assessed in 15 items (6%). Contrastive discourse markers and inferential discourse markers each had the frequency of 8 (3.2%). The least discourse markers used was temporal (N=2, 0.8%). There was a significant difference between the category of discourse markers used in IELTS ($\chi^2=10.723$, $df=3$, $p<0.05$).

Table 6. Chi-square tests for the distribution of discourse markers in IELTS

	Discourse Markers
Chi-Square	10.723
df	3
Asymp. Sig.	.016

Analysis of Politeness Strategies in IELTS: In 11.6% of items in IELTS, politeness functions were included (N=29). Direct strategies had been used in 16 items (6.4%) and indirect strategies in 13 items (5.2%). As a whole there were 29 instances of using politeness strategies in IELTS tests. However, as can be seen in Table 7, there was no significant difference in inclusion of politeness strategies. ($p>0.05$)

Table 7. Chi-square tests for the distribution of politeness strategies in IELTS

	Politeness
Chi-Square	.310
df	1
Asymp. Sig.	.577

Analysis of Implicature in IELTS: In IELTS test, only in 19 items non-literal meaning has been assessed (7.6%). The maxim of quantity was assessed in 10 items (4%), and the maxim of manner in 9 items (3.6%). Yet, no significant difference was found in the category of implicature ($\chi^2=0.053$, $df=1$, $p>0.05$).

Table 8. Chi-square tests for the distribution of implicature in IELTS tests

	Implicature
Chi-Square	.053
df	1
Asymp. Sig.	.819

Analysis of Speech Acts in TOLIMO: Speech acts were assessed in 45.6% of items (N=114). Commissives had the lowest number of speech acts (N=22). Representatives were used in 29 items and expressives in 30 items. And the highest number of assessed speech acts belonged to directives (N=33). Also, there was no significant difference in the frequency of speech act categories ($\chi^2=17.097$, $df=3$, $p=0.426$).

Table 9. Chi-square for the distribution of speech acts in TOLIMO

	Speech acts
Chi-Square	2.788
df	3
Asymp. Sig.	.426

Analysis of Discourse Markers in TOLIMO: Discourse markers were used in 122 items of TOLIMO (48.8%). Elaborative discourse markers were assessed in 59 items (23.6%). Contrastive discourse markers had 20 instances in TOLIMO test (8%). and temporal discourse markers had the frequency of 24 (9.6%). The least discourse markers used was inferential (N=19, 7.6%). There was a significant difference between the category of discourse markers used in TOLIMO ($\chi^2=35.967$, $df=3$, $p<0.05$).

Table 10. Chi-square tests for the distribution of discourse markers in TOLIMO

	Discourse Markers
Chi-Square	35.967
df	3
Asymp. Sig.	.000

Analysis of Politeness Strategies in TOLIMO: In 6.4% of items in TOLIMO, politeness functions were included (N=16). Direct strategies had been used in 9 items (3.6%) and indirect strategies in 7 items (2.8%). As a whole, there were 16 instances of using politeness strategies in TOLIMO tests. However, as can be seen in Table 11, there was no significant difference in inclusion of politeness strategies. ($p>0.05$)

Table 11. Chi-square tests for the distribution of politeness strategies in TOLIMO

	Politeness
Chi-Square	.250
df	1
Asymp. Sig.	.617

Analysis of Implicature in TOLIMO: In TOLIMO test, only in 110 items non-literal meaning has been assessed (44%). The maxim of quantity was assessed in 23 items (9.2%), and the maxim of manner in 31 items (12.4%). Maxims of quality 20 (8%) and relevance 36 times were used in TOLIMO tests (14.4%). Yet, no significant difference was found in the category of implicature ($\chi^2=5.855$, $df=1$, $p>0.05$).

Table 12. Chi-square tests for the distribution of implicature in TOLIMO tests

	Implicature
Chi-Square	5.855
df	1
Asymp. Sig.	.119

5. Analysis of Different Categories in TOEFL, IELTS, and TOLIMO

The following table reveals the frequency of different categories of speech acts, expressive, representatives, directives, and commissives, in TOEFL, IELTS, and TOLIMO.

Table 13. Frequency of speech acts in TOEFL, IELTS, and TOLIMO

	Expressives	Representatives	Directives	Commissives	Total
TOEFL	40	29	42	13	124
IELTS	6	21	3	26	56
TOLIMO	30	29	33	22	114
Total	76	79	78	61	294

A chi-square test for independence indicated that there was a significant difference between TOLIMO, TOEFL, and IELTS with regard to assessing speech acts, ($\chi^2=46.674$, $df=6$, $p<0.05$).

Table 14. Difference between TOLIMO, IELTS, and TOEFL with regard to speech acts

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	46.674	6	.000
Likelihood Ratio	48.385	6	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	.924	1	.337
N of Valid Cases	293		

5.1 Discourse Markers

Table 15 shows a sharp contrast between frequency of items in TOLIMO, TOEFL, and IELTS with regard to discourse markers. As can be seen in Table 15, in TOEFL out of 250 tests 124 items assessed discourse markers, while only 56 out of 250 items of IELTS were involved in assessing test takers' knowledge of discourse markers. Also, 114 instances of discourse markers were found in 250 TOLIMO tests.

Table 15. Frequency of discourse markers in IELTS, TOEFL, and TOLIMO

		Discourse markers				Total
		CDM	EDM	IDM	TDM	
Test	TOEFL	64	33	13	22	132
	IELTS	8	15	8	2	33
	TOLIMO	20	59	19	24	122
Total		62	44	19	25	287

A chi-square test for independence indicated that there was a significant difference between TOLIMO, IELTS, and TOEFL tests with regard to assessing discourse markers ($\chi^2=38.238$, $df=6$, $p<0.05$).

Table 16. Difference between TOLIMO, IELTS, and TOEFL with regard to discourse markers

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	38.238	6	.000
Likelihood Ratio	39.564	6	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	10.960	1	.001
N of Valid Cases	287		

Table 17 depicts the frequency of each politeness strategies in IELTS and TOEFL. There are two kinds of politeness principles: direct and indirect.

Table 17. Frequency of politeness strategies in IELTS, TOEFL, and TOLIMO

		Politeness		Total
		Direct	Indirect	
Test	TOEFL	8	10	18
	IELTS	16	13	29
	TOLIMO	9	7	16
Total		33	30	63

A chi-square test for independence indicated no significant difference between the frequency of IELTS and TOEFL in terms of assessing politeness function $\chi^2=0.641$, $df=2$, $p>0.05$ (see Table 18).

Table 18. Difference between TOLIMO, IELTS, and TOEFL with regard to politeness functions

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	0.641	2	.726
Likelihood Ratio	0.641	2	0.726
Linear-by-Linear Association	0.003	1	0.954
N of Valid Cases	63		

5.2 Implicature

Table 19 shows the frequency of category of non-literal meaning.

Table 19. Frequency of implicature in IELTS, TOEFL, and TOLIMO

		Implicature				Total
		Flouting Quality	Flouting Quantity	Flouting Relation	Flouting Manner	
	TOEFL	22	23	37	31	123
Test	IELTS	0	10	0	9	19
	TOLIMO	20	23	36	31	110
Total		42	56	73	71	242

A chi-square test for independence indicated that there was a significant difference between IELTS, TOEFL, and TOLIMO tests in terms of assessing non-literal meaning, $\chi^2=17.790$, $df=6$, $p<0.05$.

Table 20. Difference between IELTS, TOEFL, and TOLIMO with regard to non-literal meaning

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	17.790	6	0.007
Likelihood Ratio	23.930	6	0.001
Linear-by-Linear Association	0.524	1	.469
N of Valid Cases	242		

5.3 Pragmatic Knowledge

Table 21 depicts the frequency of category of pragmatic knowledge in TOEFL and IELTS.

Table 21. Frequency of component of pragmatic knowledge in IELTS, TOEFL, and TOLIMO

		Pragmatic knowledge				Total
		Speech acts	Discourse markers	Politeness functions	Implicature	
	TOEFL	124	132	18	123	397
Test	IELTS	56	33	29	19	137
	TOLIMO	114	122	16	110	362
Total		204	287	63	253	896

A chi-square test for independence indicated that there was a significant difference between the TOEFL, IELTS, and TOLIMO with regard to assessing pragmatic knowledge, $\chi^2=64.088$, $df=6$, $p<0.05$.

Table 22. Difference between IELTS, TOEFL, and TOLIMO with regard to pragmatic knowledge

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	64.088	6	.000
Likelihood Ratio	53.688	6	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	2.843	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	896		

6. Discussion

Q1. To what extent can reading section of TOEFL assess pragmatic knowledge?

The purpose of this research question was to find the frequency and the percentage of the involvement of pragmatic knowledge in reading section of TOEFL test. This research question tries to find that in how many of

items in the reading section of TOEFL test pragmatic knowledge has been assessed. In this study 250 items of TOEFL test were analyzed. In 68.4 percent of the test items pragmatic knowledge has been evaluated at least once (N=171). The results showed that pragmatic knowledge categories were used 397 times. It was found that in 62 items, pragmatic knowledge has been used once (24.8%). It has been shown that in TOEFL test there are items in which more than one areas of pragmatic knowledge has been assessed (N=109, 43.6%). A test which assesses pragmatic knowledge in 68.4% of its items can be considered as a pragmatic test. Therefore, it is clear that TOEFL test is a pragmatically-oriented English proficiency test.

Q2. What areas of pragmatic knowledge are assessed in reading section of TOEFL?

In this study, attempts have been made to show the categories and subcategories of pragmatic knowledge involved in TOEFL test.

Speech acts: With regard to the first category, the researcher used Searle's (1975) taxonomy of illocutionary speech acts in order to consider this area of pragmatic knowledge. For TOEFL test, out of 250 items, 124 instances of speech acts were found. So nearly in the half of the items speech acts were used.

Discourse markers: With regard to the category of discourse functions, the researcher used Fraser's (1999) classification of discourse markers. Out of the 250 items in TOEFL test, there were 132 instances of discourse markers. Contrastive discourse markers have been used more than other types of discourse markers (N=64). Inferential discourse markers with frequency of 13 was the least assessed discourse markers. In 33 items, elaborative discourse markers were assessed. And, temporal discourse markers were used in 22 items in TOEFL test.

Politeness strategies: Politeness strategies are another component of pragmatic knowledge which were analysed based on directness and indirectness. Among 250 items in TOEFL test, there were 18 items which were related to the politeness functions. Direct strategies were used in 8 items; in 10 items indirect strategies were included.

Non-literal meaning: In a conversation if a speaker deliberately flouts one of the Grice's maxims, the speaker may be directing the listener to look for a meaning that is different from the meaning that is verbally articulated. So, flouting the maxims of quality, quantity, manner and relation results in implicature. Among the 250 tests of TOEFL analyzed in this study, nearly half of them assessed non-literal meaning (N=123). Relation maxim was flouted more than any other maxims (N=37). Maxims of quality in 22 items and quantity in 23 items were flouted. Flouting the maxim of manner was used in 31 items.

Cultural knowledge: With regard to the use of cultural knowledge in reading section of TOEFL tests, test developers did not attempt to include this element of pragmatic knowledge in assessing test takers' proficiency knowledge.

Q3. To what extent can reading section of IELTS assess pragmatic knowledge?

The purpose of this research question was to learn about the amount of pragmatic knowledge assessment in reading section of IELTS tests. In this study 250 items were analyzed and it was revealed that in 106 items pragmatic knowledge has been used (42.4%). It was also shown that 137 times pragmatic knowledge components appeared in the items of IELTS tests. In 39 items of IELTS test pragmatic knowledge components were used once (15.6%). In some of the items, more than one area of pragmatic knowledge were assessed (N=67, 26.8%). And in 144 items (57.6%) of items of IELTS, no trace of pragmatic knowledge was found. It can be concluded that IELTS is a proficiency test which can assess test takers' pragmatic knowledge in 42.4% of its items.

Q4. What areas of pragmatic knowledge are assessed in reading section of IELTS?

Speech acts: Out of 250 IELTS items analyzed, speech acts have been assessed 56 times. Commissives had the highest number of speech acts (N=26). Representatives had been used in 21 items and expressives in 6 items. And the lowest number of assessed speech acts belongs to directives (N=3).

Discourse markers: Discourse markers were used in 33 items of IELTS (13.3%). Elaborative discourse markers were assessed in 15 items (6%). Contrastive discourse markers and inferential discourse markers each had the frequency of 8 (3.2%). The least discourse markers used is temporal (N=2, 0.8%).

Politeness strategies: In 11.6% of items in IELTS, politeness functions were included (N=29). Direct strategies have been used in 16 items (6.4%) and indirect strategies in 13 items (5.2%).

Non-literal meaning: In IELTS test, only in 19 items non-literal meaning has been assessed (7.6%). The maxim of quantity was assessed in 10 items (4%), and the maxim of manner in 9 items (3.6%). Maxims of quality and relevance were not used at all.

Q5. To what extent can reading section of TOLIMO assess pragmatic knowledge?

Finding out the frequency and the percentage of the involvement of pragmatic knowledge in reading section of TOLIMO test is the purpose of this research question. In this study 250 items were analyzed and it was revealed that in 153 items pragmatic knowledge has been used (61.2%). It was also shown that 362 times pragmatic knowledge components appeared in the items of TOLIMO tests. In 59 items of TOLIMO test pragmatic knowledge components were used once (23.6%). In some of the items, more than one area of pragmatic knowledge were assessed (N=94, 37.6%). And in 97 items (38.8%) of items of TOLIMO, no trace of pragmatic knowledge was found. It can be concluded that TOLIMO is a proficiency test which can assess test takers' pragmatic knowledge in 61.2% of its items.

Q6. What areas of pragmatic knowledge are assessed in reading section of TOLIMO?

For TOLIMO test, out of 250 items, 114 instances of speech acts were found. So in a little less than half of the items speech acts were used. Declaration was not part of the study, because no case of declaring, cursing, sentencing, naming, pronouncing, and blessing was found in these five series of reading section of TOLIMO.

Discourse markers: Out of the 250 items in TOLIMO test, there were 122 instances of discourse markers. Elaborative discourse markers have been used more than other types of discourse markers (N=59). Inferential discourse markers with frequency of 19 was the least assessed discourse markers. In 20 items, directive discourse markers were assessed. And, temporal discourse markers were used in 24 items in TOLIMO test.

Politeness strategies: Among 250 items in TOLIMO test, there were 16 items which were related to the politeness functions. Direct strategies were used in 9 items; in 7 items indirect strategies were included.

Non-literal meaning: Among the 250 tests of TOLIMO analyzed in this study, nearly half of them assessed non-literal meaning (N=110). Relation maxim was flouted more than any other maxims (N=36). Maxims of quality in 20 items and quantity in 23 items were flouted. Flouting the maxim of manner was used in 36 items.

Q7. Which test assesses pragmatic knowledge of test takers more? IELTS, TOEFL, or TOLIMO?

TOEFL and IELTS are considered as globally-accepted English proficiency tests. also TOLIMO is a proficiency test which is administered locally in IRAN. It is claimed that these three tests assess linguistic knowledge and grammatical knowledge, as well as pragmatic knowledge of test takers. But which one assesses test takers' pragmatic knowledge more?

In this section of the study, components of pragmatic knowledge used in these two tests are compared.

Speech acts: With regard to overall speech acts, a significant difference was found between the items used in TOEFL, IELTS, and TOLIMO. It was found that speech acts are used in 124 items out of 250 items in TOEFL test (49.6 %), and 114 times in TOLIMO (45.6%), while 56 out of 250 items of IELTS test assessed speech acts (22.4%). So it is evident that TOEFL and TOLIMO are more able to assess test takers' pragmatic knowledge with regard to speech act categories.

Discourse markers: There was a significant difference between the frequency of IELTS, TOEFL, and TOLIMO tests with regard to assessing discourse markers. In TOEFL test 132 out of 250 items assessed discourse markers (52.8%), while only 33 out of 208 items of IELTS were involved in assessing test takers' knowledge of discourse markers (13.3%). Also, in 122 items of TOLIMO discourse markers were used (48.2%). As it is clear, for this category of pragmatic knowledge, TOEFL and TOLIMO had more instances of discourse markers than IELTS did.

Politeness functions: No significant difference between the frequency of IELTS, TOEFL, and TOLIMO in terms of assessing politeness function. The frequency of politeness strategies assessed in TOEFL was 18 (7.2%), and In TOLIMO 16 (6.4%), while in 29 items of IELTS politeness strategies have been assessed (11.6%). IELTS is a little more able to assess politeness functions of test takers than TOLIMO and TOEFL.

Non-literal meaning: There is a significant different between the frequency of IELTS, TOEFL, and TOLIMO test in terms of assessing non-literal meaning. While Grice's maxims in TOEFL tests have been flouted 123 times (45.2%) and in TOLIMO 110 times (44%), in IELTS test just less than 8 percent of the items assessed implicature (N=19, 7.6%). Whereas TOEFL and TOLIMO in which the four maxims have been violated, in IELTS two maxims of quantity and manner have been flouted.

Finally, there is significant difference between the frequency of TOEFL, IELTS, and TOLIMO with regard to assessing overall pragmatic knowledge. 518 times pragmatic knowledge has been used in 250 items of TOEFL tests, and while the frequency of pragmatic knowledge elements used in IELTS is 130. Also, 362 times different areas of pragmatic knowledge have been assessed in TOLIMO. So it is clear TOEFL and TOLIMO are more

pragmatically oriented than IELTS.

7. Conclusion and Implication

In this study, it was found that there was a significant difference between the frequency of TOEFL, IELTS, and TOLIMO with regard to assessing overall pragmatic knowledge. The results showed that to some extent these three tests are designed to assess test takers' pragmatic knowledge, but TOEFL and TOLIMO are more able to tap students' pragmatic knowledge. Also, it was found that all the components of pragmatic knowledge are involved in these tests except cultural knowledge. Moreover, among subcategories of speech act, declarations are not assessed in these English proficiency tests.

The present study was conducted to raise the students' awareness concerning the linguistic and sociolinguistic skills in identifying and analyzing the hidden meaning of the writers and to get them familiar with norms of pragmatic knowledge in English. The results of the study can be beneficial to many stakeholders. The results of this study can be helpful to those who are involved in the process of constructing high stakes test and proficiency tests such as IELTS, TOEFL, and TOLIMO. Furthermore this study can be useful for teachers and test developers who are making low stake decisions. Also by comparing these three English proficiency tests (IELTS, TOEFL, and TOLIMO) according to their ability of each one to assess pragmatic knowledge, proficiency test users and administrators can be in a position to choose the best test that can assess communicative competence and pragmatic knowledge of test takers. Moreover, the results will show the students and test takers which parts of pragmatic knowledge are assessed more in proficiency tests, so that they can focus on those parts. For example, if test takers and students were aware that, in proficiency tests, directive speech acts are assessed more, they would study these kinds of speech acts more. Or if they knew that cultural knowledge is not part of the assessment in universal proficiency tests, they would stop memorizing geographical names or customs in the United States. Also, curriculum developers and textbook writers can benefit from this study.

8. Limitations of the Study

Like any other study, this thesis is restricted in a number of ways:

- 1) The IELTS tests available in the market which were used in this study were for preparation and were not the original test administered in IELTS. Although, it is claimed that preparation tests enjoy a high index of reliability and validity, and correlation to the original tests. The preparation tests which are used in present study are claimed to have been written based on the components of communicative competence which are assessed in IELTS. This limitation is also correct for TOLIMO, too.
- 2) Since TOEFL test from 2005 up to present were not published and available in the market, the researcher was forced to use TOEFL test from 2000 to 2004.

References

- Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to do things with words*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bachman, L. F. (1990). *Fundamental Considerations in Language Testing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bloch, M. (1991). Language, anthropology and cognitive science. *Man*, 26, 183-197.
- Blum-Kulka, S. (1987). Indirectness and politeness in requests: Same or different? *Journal of Pragmatics*, 11, 145-160.
- Brown, P., & Levinson, S. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Corsetti, C. R. (2010). Pragmatic competence in the listening paper of the certificate of proficiency in English. *BELT Journal*, 1(1), 14-25.
- Crystal, D. (2008). *A dictionary of linguistic and phonetics*. Oxford: Blackwell publishing.
- David, O. F. (2008). Socio-Psychological Determinants of ESL Pragmatic Competence in Nigeria. *The Social Sciences*, 3(2), 73-77.
- Donald, M. (1991). *The origins of the modern mind: Three stages in the evolution of culture and cognition*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.
- Educational Testing Service. (2005). *TOEFL iBT Tips*. Retrieved February 8, 2006, from http://upload.mcgill.ca/applying/TOEFL_Tips.pdf
- Flowerdew, J., & Miller, L. (2005). *Second language listening: Theory and practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Fraser, B. (1999). What are discourse markers? *Journal of Pragmatics*, 31, 931-952.
- Garcia, P. (2004). Pragmatic comprehension of high and low level language learners. *TESL-EJ*, 8(2), 1-15.
- Goodenough, W. H. (1957). Cultural Anthropology and Linguistics. In P. L. Garvin (Ed.), *Report of the Seventh Round Table Meeting on Linguistics and Language Study*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.
- Grice, H. P. (1975). Logic and conversation. In P. Cole, & J. Morgan (Eds.), *Syntax and Semantics* (Vol. 3, pp. 41-58). New York: Academic Press.
- Holmes, J. (2008). *An introduction to sociolinguistics*. Harlow: Pearson Education limited.
- IELTS. (2004). *IELTS Explained*. Retrieved November 28, 2011, from <http://www.ielts.org/mediacentre/ieltsexplained/default.aspx>
- Jakeman, V., & McDowell, C. (1997). *Cambridge practice tests for IELTS 1*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jakeman, V., & McDowell, C. (2002). *Insight into IELTS*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jung, J. Y. (2001). Issues in Acquisitional Pragmatics. *Working paper in TESOL & Applied Linguistics*, 2(3), 1-13.
- Kirby, J. R. (2006). *Reading Comprehension, What have we learned about reading comprehension?* Faculty of Education, Queen's University.
- Lakoff, R. (1973). The logic of politeness: Or minding your p's and q's. *Chicago Linguistic Society*, 9, 292-305.
- Leech, G. (1983). *Principles of Pragmatics*. London: Longman.
- Olson, D. R. (1994). *The world on paper: The conceptual and cognitive implications of writing and reading*. Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Quinn, N., & Holland, D. (1987). *Cultural Models in Thought and Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rabinowitz, J. D. (1993). *A Descriptive Study of the Offer as a Speech Behavior in American English* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Pennsylvania, Michigan.
- Searle, J. R. (1969). *Speech acts: An essay in the philosophy of language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Srinarawat, D. (2005). Indirectness as a politeness strategy of Thai speakers. In R. Lakoff, & S. Ide (Eds.), *Broadening the horizon of linguistic politeness* (pp. 175-193). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Tan, P. (1994). Key concepts in ELT. *ELT Journal*, 48(1), 100.
- Usó-Juan, E., & Martínez-Flor, A. (2006a). Approaches to language learning and teaching: Towards acquiring communicative competence through the four skills. In E. Usó-Juan, & A. Martínez-Flor (Eds.), *Current Trends in the Development and Teaching of the Four Language Skills* (pp. 3-26). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Van Dijk, T. (1977). *Text and Context*. London: Longman.
- Wardhaugh, R. (2008). *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Watts, R. J. (2003). *Politeness*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Yule, G. (2000). *Pragmatics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Yule, G., & Brown, G. (1989). *Discourse Analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>).