Reverse discourse completion task as an assessment tool for intercultural competence[1]

Mehmet Kanik
University of Houston, USA
mehmetkanik@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper proposes a prototypic assessment tool for intercultural communicative competence. Because traditional discourse completion tasks (DCTs) focus on illocutionary competence rather than sociolinguistic competence, a modified version of a DCT was created to target sociolinguistic competence. The modified DCT employs speech acts as prompts and asks respondents to write about a situation in which a given speech act would be appropriate. This new tool is named a reverse discourse completion task (R-DCT). The task was given to learners of Turkish as a second language. Data from 12 participants were analyzed for their provision of sociopragmatic factors such as power, distance and imposition and also with respect to whether the situation was relevant to a given speech act. Responses from the participants show that R-DCTs can be used to assess intercultural competence as they help reveal respondents' knowledge of sociolinguistic context in which a given speech act may be appropriate. By removing the need for comparison with native speaker data and the limitations that emerge from the lack of linguistic formula at respondents' disposal, R-DCT is a promising elicitation task to assess sociolinguistic competence, an integral part of Byram's (1997) model of intercultural communicative competence.

Keywords: discourse completion task, reverse discourse completion task, intercultural competence, sociolinguistic competence

---

[1] An earlier version of this paper was published in the proceedings of the Third International Conference on the Development and Assessment of Intercultural Competence.

In today's globalized world, people from different cultures are in contact with one another more than ever. This can be seen in statistics such as the number of international tourists and the number of passports. For instance, according to the World Tourism Organization, the number of international tourist arrivals increased from 278 million in 1980 to 1,035 million in 2012 (United Nations World Tourism Organization, 2013). There was also an increase in the number of passports. For example, in 1989 there were 7,261,711 Americans with passports and this number increased to 113,431,943 in 2012 according to the State Department's website travel.state.gov. In addition to international travel, the Internet made intercultural communication possible without travelling abroad by opening up the door for new communication technologies like email, teleconference and video chat. This contact between people from different cultures has made intercultural competence an important aspect of communicative competence. Fantini (2009, p. 458) defines intercultural competence as "complex abilities that are required to perform *effectively* and *appropriately* when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself." In an attempt to clarify the multitude of conceptions and definitions of intercultural competence, Deardorff (2004, 2006) conducted a study with university scholars and administrators as participants, which she refers to as "the first study to document consensus" (Deardorff, 2011, p. 66). She found in her study that intercultural scholars agree on a definition similar to Fantini's definition. The definition in her study is "the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (Deardorff, 2006, pp. 247-248). Two models also came out of her study. She categorized the elements that received 80% or more agreement by intercultural scholars under requisite attitudes, knowledge and comprehension, skills, desired internal outcome and desired external outcome in a pyramid model, with attitudes at the base followed by the other skills respectively to the top, which is the desired external outcome. Attitudes include respect, openness, curiosity and discovery, while knowledge and comprehension consist of cultural self-awareness, deep understanding and knowledge of culture, culture-specific information and sociolinguistic awareness. Skills that interact with knowledge and comprehension are listening, observation, interpretation, analysis, evaluation and relating. She argues that improving the elements at the lower level will improve the ones above them. When the outcomes are considered, she categorized elements such as adaptability, flexibility, ethnorelative view and empathy under desired internal outcome, whereas she designated desired external outcome to include the competence of behaving and communicating effectively and appropriately to achieve one's goals to some degree. A person needs to improve most of the elements mentioned below the desired external outcome to be competent in an intercul-

tural setting (Deardorff, 2006, p. 254). She also depicted these functions and skills in a process model according to which developing intercultural competence is an ongoing and lifelong process (Deardorff, 2006, p. 256).

In a highly cited model, Byram (1997) proposes that intercultural (communicative) competence comprises linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse and intercultural components. Byram states that he bases his model on Van Ek's (1986) model of communicative competence. Byram's model is different from that of Van Ek's, which is based on native speaker competence. Unlike Van Ek's model, Byram's model is based on intercultural speaker competence. According to Byram, there are two major reasons for criticizing models such as Van Ek's. The first reason is that by using native speaker competence as a model, they set an unrealistic goal for learners. The second reason is that such a competence is a "wrong kind of competence," leading to the abandonment of one's native competence to attain the competence of other native speakers (Byram, 1997, p. 11). In Van Ek's model, learners are expected to rely only on the unattainable competence of native speakers; however, in Byram's model, an intercultural speaker would rely on his or her competence in two or more languages to function well in an intercultural setting.

Byram's model of intercultural communicative competence is similar to the communicative competence model of Canale and Swain (1980), which includes grammatical, sociolinguistic, strategic and discourse competences (Canale, 1983). Bachman (1990) proposed a model of communicative language ability, which has overlapping components with Byram's and Canale and Swain's models. Bachman's model is outlined in Table 1 together with the parallel components of the other models. As can be seen in the table, according to Bachman's model of communicative competence, pragmatics is a subcomponent of language competence and is comprised of sociolinguistic and illocutionary competences; the former is also addressed in Canale and Swain's and Byram's models, neither of which includes illocutionary competence.

Table 1 Communicative competence models

Bachman (1990)	Canale and Swain (1980), Canale (1983)	Byram (1997)
1. Language competence		
A. Organizational competence		
a. Grammatical competence	Grammatical competence	Linguistic competence
b. Textual competence	Discourse competence	Discourse competence
B. Pragmatic competence		
a. Illocutionary competence		
b. Sociolinguistic competence	Sociolinguistic competence	Sociolinguistic competence
2. Strategic competence	Strategic competence	Intercultural competence
3. Psychophysiological mechanisms		

When it comes to the assessment of intercultural competence, scholars agree that this kind of competence is a complex phenomenon and the assessment should be achieved by employing a variety of measures (Fantini, 2009; Deardorff, 2009, 2011). Since intercultural competence has a multitude of components, they agree that one tool cannot measure it. Deardorff (2006, p. 249-250) lists 22 components of intercultural competence and elsewhere (Deardorff, 2011) she asserts that "given how daunting intercultural competence assessment can seem, it is important to start with manageable portions" (p. 74). Fantini (2009) mentions areas to assess such as attributes, building relationships, communicating, collaborating, awareness, attitudes, skills, knowledge, host language proficiency, and developmental indicators over time. He also lists 44 assessment tools for intercultural competence. The focus of tests varies depending on the goal of the assessment. The tests, some of which are self-assessment tools, aim to measure components such as language proficiency, understanding and awareness of self and others, cross-cultural sensitivity, cross-cultural behavior and skills, personality analysis, cultural profile and preferences, world knowledge, readiness and potential for international assignment, unconscious prejudices and so on.

One of the assessment tools that Fantini (2009) lists is the MAXSA instruments. They include a strategies inventory for learning culture, a language strategy survey and a speech act measure. The following is an example from the MAXSA speech act measure taken from Cohen, Paige, Shively, Emery and Hoff (2005, p. 346):

During dinner with a friend's family in the host community you accidentally spill your glass of red wine on the table cloth.
You:
Friend's mother: Oh, dear!
You:
Friend's mother: No, no. Don't worry about it. You don't have to do that. The stain will probably come out in the wash.
You:

This is an example of a discourse completion task (DCT), which was initially employed in studies in pragmatics in the 1980s (see Blum-Kulka, 1982; Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984; Cohen & Olshtain, 1981). These early studies employed a written DCT and this tool has been used in the field of pragmatics ever since. In these studies, respondents of a written DCT receive situations and are expected to write utterances they think would be the most appropriate for a given sociocultural context. Most frequently, they target a specific speech act or speech acts. For example, Cohen and Olshtain (1981) focused on

apology performance, Blum-Kulka (1982) investigated directives, and Blum-Kulka & Olshtain (1984) elicited requests and apologies. This data collection tool was employed both in cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatics. The focus was either on the comparison of uses of speech acts in different languages (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984; Cohen & Olshtain, 1981) or the comparison of learner output with that of native speakers (Blum-Kulka, 1982). Normally, DCT prompts include information regarding the speakers to give a sense of the power relationship between the two speakers, the social distance between them and, finally, the reason for the speech act. For example, the following item from Blum-Kulka and Olshtain's (1984, p. 198) study establishes the contextual features for the respondent.

> *At the professor's office*
> A student has borrowed a book from her teacher, which she promised to return today. When meeting her teacher, however, she realizes that she forgot to bring it along.
> Teacher: Miriam, I hope you brought the book I lent you.
> Miriam: _____
> Teacher: OK, but please remember it next week.

Among many possible factors which may influence the performance from the gender of the speakers to the setting in which the speech act is performed, three, namely social distance between the speaker and the hearer, relative power of speakers in relation to each other and the ranking of imposition, are considered to be the major defining sociopragmatic factors in the use of speech acts (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Hudson, Detmer, & Brown, 1995). These three factors are commonly considered in collecting data in pragmatics research. The speech act measure of the MAXSA instruments mentioned above was also designed based on these three sociopragmatic factors. Cohen et al. (2005, p. 49) say that "because factors such as social status, social distance, and degree of severity (apologies) or degree of imposition (requests) can affect the kind of language that is pragmatically appropriate in a speech act, such factors are identified in the description of the vignette." As they further explain

> Three primary variables were used to provide a set of varied vignettes: social status, social distance, and severity of the infraction (apologies) or degree of imposition of the request . . . Although degree of severity and degree of imposition may be perceived differently by each individual and perhaps in different cultures, we attempted to vary severity/imposition in the ten vignettes in the Speech Act Measure. (p. 50)

By design, DCTs expect the respondent to write an appropriate response after analyzing the sociopragmatic factors implied in the situation prompt. The responses are analyzed by coding them into strategies used to create a speech act. This strategy use has been the major focus of research. Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989) and Hudson, Detmer and Brown (1985) provided useful guidelines in analyzing strategy use for request, refusal and apology speech acts.

The ease of implementation and the ability to standardize have been important factors triggering the common use of elicitation tasks such as DCTs in pragmatics research. In an attempt to collect naturally-occurring data, researchers face challenges as they often lack control over variables. It becomes difficult to collect speech acts that are uttered based on the same sociocultural factors such as setting, power, distance and imposition. In contrast, a DCT allows researchers to collect many samples of the same speech act based on the predefined sociocultural factors and in a relatively much shorter time. Another difficulty of collecting natural data lies in the challenge of collecting data from the same users for different situations or for a second time (Cohen, 2004). Considering these factors, it is not hard to imagine why elicitation tasks have been commonly used. However, since such tasks do not bring natural data, they have brought with them questions regarding their validity and thus such elicitation tasks have been examined by some scholars and some others suggested modifications (e.g., Bou Franch & Lorenzo-Dus, 2008; Cohen & Shively, 2002; Golato 2003; Hinkel 1997; Johnston, Kasper, & Ross, 1998; Roever, 2006; Rose, 1992, 1994; Rose & Ono, 1995; Sasaki, 1998; Varghese & Billmyer, 1996; Yuan, 2001; Zuskin, 1993). These investigations and suggestions varied from comparison of elicitation tasks with each other to adding more descriptions to the DCT situation, giving the situation in video format, adding (multiple) rejoinders to the DCT, focusing on the effect of the type of rejoinder and the difference between oral and written DCTs as well as the difference between natural and elicited data. Suggestions in these works aim to make the measures of pragmatics more valid and reliable. However, as Cohen (2004) says, "while any enhancement may make the task more authentic, we must remember it is still a task attempting to simulate reality" (p. 317). Considered in this way, a DCT does not prove that a learner can perform speech acts appropriately in a natural situation, but it shows the potential and the linguistic formulas a person has and sheds light on his/her sociopragmatic awareness.

The question of what DCTs are actually assessing emerges at this point. If we go back to the models of intercultural and communicative competences, we see that they all included sociolinguistic competence or awareness as part of the (intercultural) communicative competence. Bachman's (1990, p. 90) model also includes illocutionary competence, defined as "the knowledge of

the pragmatic conventions for performing acceptable language functions," whereas sociolinguistic competence is "the knowledge of sociolinguistic conventions for performing language functions appropriately in a given context." To illustrate this, Bachman (1990) says:

> Imagine a context in which I wish to get someone to leave. To accomplish this, I use my illocutionary competence, which indicates that a simple statement can function as a request. (I will also use my sociolinguistic competence . . . to determine which of several possible statements is the most appropriate in this specific context). (p. 90)

In this respect, Bachman's definitions of illocutionary and sociolinguistic competences resemble Leech's (1983) definitions of pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics respectively. Leech (1983, p. 11) refers to the level of pragmatics in which politeness, appropriateness, power relations, distance between speakers, and imposition of speech acts are interpreted as sociopragmatics. Leech defines this level as "the sociological interface of pragmatics." By pragmalinguistics, on the other hand, he refers to "the particular resources which a given language provides for conveying particular illocutions." For example, knowing the form *I deeply apologize* entails pragmalinguistic competence, whereas knowing when to use it requires sociopragmatic competence. When the definitions of illocutionary and sociolinguistic competences are considered, it seems that a DCT targets illocutionary competence, which is not addressed in Byram's model. DCTs give the researchers only an indirect access to sociopragmatic competence of the respondents while providing direct access to their pragmalinguistic repertoire. It is, of course, arguable whether these particular competences are mutually exclusive. It could be argued that sociolinguistic competence includes illocutionary competence. One may think that a person who has sociolinguistic competence should be able to find the necessary illocutions to perform appropriately during interaction. It could also be argued that what is more essential here is sociolinguistic competence rather than illocutionary competence, as a person can learn all the formulas in a target language but may still fail to use them appropriately if he or she does not develop sociolinguistic competence. However, the DCT, which was proposed as one of the assessment tools of intercultural competence, targets the knowledge of illocutionary items more than sociolinguistic competence. To increase the focus of the instrument on sociolinguistic competence, modifications to DCTs are needed. From this perspective, I believe that reversing the DCT will give one a more direct idea of the sociolinguistic awareness or competence of test takers. In a reverse discourse completion task (R-DCT), test takers are provided with speech acts and asked to write a situation in which that given speech act could be uttered.

Reverse Discourse Completion Tasks

As mentioned above, while different models of communicative competence have a sociolinguistic competence component, traditional DCTs ask respondents to provide illocutionary (pragmalinguistic) items. However, DCTs focus more on illocutionary competence in Bachman's model as they give one a good idea of the pragmalinguistic repertoire of speakers. On the other hand, R-DCTs will focus more on sociolinguistic competence, which is addressed in models of communicative competence and intercultural communicative competence models mentioned in this paper. With this characteristic, a R-DCT will assess the sociolinguistic competence component of intercultural competence and pragmatic competence. It does not mean a R-DCT is assessing sociolinguistic or illocutionary competences as mutually exclusive competences. What is significant about R-DCTs is that they are changing the focus of the measure to understand how test takers would interpret utterances. Deardorff's (2006) model, for instance, includes skills such as listening, observing, interpreting, analyzing, evaluating, and relating. Interpreting utterances and understanding in what kind of situations they may be appropriate is a component of intercultural competence. By asking testees to write situations for utterances given, we will be able to assess their sociolinguistic competence directly, rather than indirectly, without limiting the measure to the knowledge of illocutionary items, as is the case with traditional DCTs. Given this facet of R-DCTs, I propose that they can aspire to test intercultural competence as well as pragmatic competence. They can be used in addition to other measures to assess one aspect of intercultural communicative competence.

In a traditional DCT, a situation is provided to test takers or participants and they are asked to provide utterances that they think would be appropriate in this situation. In such a measure, they may evaluate the situation well, but may not have the illocutionary items at their disposal and may fail to respond appropriately because of a lack of knowledge of formulas. In a R-DCT, utterances are provided and participants are asked to write about a situation in which a given utterance would be appropriate. Considering that power, social distance and imposition are commonly accepted sociopragmatic factors that influence the way people speak in social context, these contextual features will be looked for in participants' descriptions. Of course, there are many factors that may influence the context of speech and hence the choice of language such as gender or age of the interlocutors or even the location in which the conversation is taking place. However, as mentioned above, power, social distance and imposition are considered to be the major social factors influencing choices of speakers in social interaction. They can

even be considered as the primary factors to focus on before others. Thus, they are used in the proposed R-DCT. Here is an example of an R-DCT item:

> Write a situation in which the below statement could be uttered. Also, provide information regarding the setting, who the speaker is, who the listener is and what is asked. Speech act: 'I know you came from another city but to reach a final decision about you I need to see you again next week.'
>
> Situation:
>
> _____
> _____
> _____
>
> Setting: _____
> Speaker: _____
> Hearer: _____
> Request: _____

One challenge of this task is to select the utterances provided. They need to be authentic or elicited from the speakers of the language in which the test is given (not necessarily native speakers), and they need to be examples of successful (intercultural) communication. They also need to have a potential to represent the targeted situation (e.g., a request situation in which the power of the speaker is higher than that of the hearer, the distance between the speaker and the hearer is high, and the imposition of the act on the speaker is high for a speech act originally used in such a situation). As could be seen, the novelty of R-DCTs is to reverse the traditional DCT in which a situation is given to the participants in order to provide them with utterances and ask them to interpret them and write about a situation in which they think the utterance would be appropriate.

Method

The first part of the study was the creation of a prototype of an R-DCT. As seen in the example item, an R-DCT uses speech acts as the prompts for which test takers describe situations in which a given speech act may be appropriate. In an ideal case such a speech act sample comes from naturally-occurring successful intercultural communication. However, for this prototypic study, earlier data retrieved from 65 native Turkish speaking college students using a written DCT were used in selecting the speech acts to be included in the R-DCT. The portion of data from students who received their college education in English was excluded as Kanik (2011) found that receiving education in a foreign language may influence speakers' native languages. For the R-DCT, four scenarios from the earlier data were chosen. Situation 1 includes a speaker who is a human re-

sources manager and is asking an applicant from another city to come again next week for a second interview. This scenario reflects higher power of the speaker in relation to the hearer and both the social distance and the imposition of the request are high. In Situation 2, the speaker, a manager in a factory, has higher power in relation to the hearer, who is a worker. The request to work overtime on the day of the request reflects high imposition and the distance is low. In the third situation, an employee in a restaurant speaking to a customer has lower social power and the social distance is high. The request to move to another table from the one which the customer specifically reserved for a special evening represents high imposition. Finally, a college student has lower social power in relation to his or her professor in Situation 4. The distance is considered to be low in such a situation and the request to extend the deadline for a project, while the deadline for submitting grades is near, represents high imposition. The requests chosen as prompts while creating the R-DCT were used for these situations in the earlier data. Table 2 lists these situations.

Table 2 Situations

	Speaker	Hearer	Request
Situation 1	A human resources manager	An applicant	Come again next week for a second interview
Situation 2	A manager in a factory	A worker	Work overtime
Situation 3	An employee in a restaurant	A customer	Move to another table
Situation 4	A college student	A professor	Extend deadline for a project

Then, requests that are believed to represent appropriate use in these situations were chosen. The process of choosing them was based on the frequency of the strategies used in the request speech acts written by the respondents. First, the average number of strategies used to form requests was calculated and the most commonly used strategies were identified. For example, if the average of the strategies employed was three, than the most commonly used one of the three strategies was identified. The next step was to pick requests composed of these identified strategies. After four requests were identified, they were used as the prompts in the R-DCT. The instrument created included these four requests (see the appendix for requests used as prompts in the R-DCT). The next step was asking the respondents to write about a situation that they thought would be appropriate for each of the requests given. For this phase of the study, the instrument was given to learners of Turkish as a foreign language at a university in Istanbul, Turkey. Responses from 12 participants were included in the data. Initially, there were data from more than 12 participants. However, some of the data did not reveal role relationships, and thus they were excluded since this study depended on role relationships in situations written about by the par-

ticipants. These 12 students came from six different countries, namely Afghanistan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, China, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Ukraine. Seven of them were male and 5 were female. The mean age of the participants was 23.8. At the time of data collection, they were aiming to study in Turkey and thus they were learning Turkish at a university language center. These students took the R-DCT within the last month of their first academic year in Istanbul. Table 3 shows participants' age profiles.

Table 3 Participants' age

Group	M	N	Mdn	Minimum	Maximum	Range
Female	23.2	5	24	20	25	5
Male	24.2	7	22	21	33	12
Total	23.8	12	23.5	20	33	13

After the data were gathered, the situations written about by the participants were analyzed for role relationships and the requests made in the situations. Based on the role relationships and requests made, the ranking of power relationships, distance and the imposition of requests was created. Based on the role relationships and the relevance of the situation to the utterance, the situations were judged to be either satisfactory or unsatisfactory. See Figure 1 for the instrument used while assessing the responses.

Figure 1 Assessment rubric

As the assessment rubric shows, the responses were scored based on the sociopragmatic factors described by the respondents and also on whether the situation written about was relevant, because a situation may reflect the sociopragmatic factors a given speech act was used for but it may be irrelevant. Those situations that described factors matching the targeted design and were relevant were given a score of 10. If a respondent provided a situation that

would reflect the intended sociopragmatic factors and was relevant for each prompt, than that respondent received 40 points in total.

Results

Scoring based on the sociopragmatic factors and the relevance of the situations revealed that 3 participants wrote about situations that were relevant and would be appropriate for the utterances given in all four scenarios. Seven of them were able to write relevant and appropriate situations in three of the four scenarios. Two of them were able to provide situations for the utterances given satisfactorily in only two scenarios. Table 4 shows the descriptive statistics representing results for each scenario. They show that Scenario 2 resulted in the lowest mean score, while Scenario 4 resulted in the highest mean score. It could be concluded that students had the most difficulty in designating roles for Scenario 2 and the least difficulty in Scenario 4. The next four sections summarize the role relationships created by the participants for each scenario. Samples from the data are also given.

Table 4 Descriptive statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	M	SD
Scenario 1	12	.00	10.00	7.5000	4.52267
Scenario 2	12	.00	10.00	6.6667	4.92366
Scenario 3	12	.00	10.00	7.5000	4.52267
Scenario 4	12	.00	10.00	9.1667	2.88675
Score	12	20.00	40.00	30.8333	6.68558

Scenario 1

The utterance was used for a situation in which a human resources manager asks an applicant who is from another city to come again next week for a second interview. The sociopragmatic variables in this situation were originally rated by educated native speakers of Turkish and their ratings reflect the power of the speaker, the distance between the speaker and the hearer and the imposition as high. The Turkish utterance that was chosen and that reflects the strategies most commonly used for this situation is "Biliyorum başka bir şehirden geldiniz ama sizinle ilgili kararımı netleştirebilmem için haftaya tekrar sizinle görüşmek istiyorum" [I know that you came from another city but to clarify my decision about you I need to see you again next week]. Table 5 summarizes the role relationships and the ranking of sociopragmatic factors in the situations created by the participants.

Table 5 Role relationships provided by the participants in Scenario 1

Speaker	Hearer	# (%)	Power	Distance	Imposition
Employer	Applicant	8 (66.6)	High	High	High
Doctor	Patient	1 (8.3)	Low	High	High
Police (immigration officer)	Foreign resident	1 (8.3)	High	High	High
Student	Student	1 (8.3)	Neutral	Low	Low
Business representative	Business representative	1 (8.3)	Neutral	High	High

For this speech act, 8 of the 12 respondents provided situations with an employer as a speaker and an applicant as a hearer, resulting in a high ranking of power and distance. Another participant chose the roles of a police (immigration) officer and a foreign resident to reflect high ranking of power and distance. All 9 participants included a request for a second appointment to an applicant from another city, creating high imposition. In the assessment of intercultural competence or pragmatic competence, those test takers who wrote about a situation in which the utterance would be appropriate would be considered satisfactory. The following is a sample situation from the data from Participant 6, who was male, 24 and Chinese: *"Bir şirketin müdürüsünüz. Bir elemanla iş görüşmesi yapmanız için haftaya tekrar gelmesini rica ediyorsunuz."* [You are the director in a company. You are requesting an employee (applicant) to come again next week to have a job interview.] Other role relationships provided by the respondents include doctor-patient, student-student and business representative-business representative.

Scenario 2

The prompt was aimed at a situation in which a manager asks an employee to work overtime. The power of the speaker and the imposition were high while distance was ranked low. The utterance that was chosen for this study was "Yarın teftiş var. Bugün temizlik için mesaiye kalabilir misin?" [There is inspection tomorrow. Could you work overtime today for cleaning?] Table 6 summarizes the role relationships and the ranking of sociopragmatic factors in the situations created by the participants.

Table 6 Role relationships provided by the participants in Scenario 2

Speaker	Hearer	# (%)	Power	Distance	Imposition
Boss	Employee	8 (66.6)	High	Low	High
Secretary	Coworker	1 (8.3)	Neutral	Low	High
Security guard	Cleaner	1 (8.3)	Neutral	Low	High
Administrator	Teacher	1 (8.3)	High	Low	High
Principal	Student	1 (8.3)	High	High	High

For this speech act, 9 participants created situations in line with the situation the original utterance was used for. That is, they were situations with the speaker with higher power than the hearer, low distance between the speaker and the hearer and high imposition. While doing so, 8 of them used a boss and an employee scenario, while 1 participant used an administrator and a teacher as roles. However, the administrator-teacher situation would be unusual, as cleaning is not typically conducted by teachers at schools. Of the remaining three situations, two included neutral power relations. One participant preferred the roles of a secretary and a coworker and another those of a security guard and a cleaner. Again, it would be unusual for a secretary or a security guard to ask a coworker or a cleaner to work overtime. The last situation entails an interaction between a principal and a student. This situation was also unusual as students do not do cleaning and it is irrelevant, as the utterance conveyed working overtime clearly and did not apply to this scenario. Thus, the three responses that were not in line with the sociopragmatic factors of the situation the utterance was used for could not be considered satisfactory responses. The following is a sample situation provided by Participant 2, who was female, 20, and from Afghanistan: *"Bir fabrikada şef olarak çalışıyorsunuz. Bugün fabrikada bitmesi gereken temizlik var. Bunu bir çalışanınızdan mesaiye kalmasını istiyorsunuz."* [You work as a manager at a factory. There is cleaning left to be finished today at the factory. You are asking one of your staff to work overtime.]

Scenario 3

The utterance in this scenario was used for a situation in which an employee in a restaurant asks a first-time customer who reserved a table for a special night to move to another table. The sociopragmatic factors were ranked as low power on the part of the speaker and high distance, as the employee does not know the customer, as well as high imposition, as the employee is intruding on the customer's special night and asking him or her to move away from the table was specifically reserved for the night. The utterance used for this situation was "Efendim, çok özür dilerim. Burada teknik ekibin acilen çalışması gerekiyor. Sizi başka bir masaya alabilir miyiz?" [Sir/madam, I deeply apologize. The technical team needs to work here immediately. Could we move you to another table?] Table 7 summarizes the role relationships in the situations created by the participants for this utterance.

Table 7 Role relationships provided by the participants in Scenario 3

Speaker	Hearer	# (%)	Power	Distance	Imposition
Waiter	Customer	2 (16.6)	Low	High	Low
Waiter	Customer	4 (33.2)	Low	High	High
Teacher	Student	1 (8.3)	High	Low	Low
Worker	Worker	1 (8.3)	Neutral	Low	Low
Chair of a meeting	Participants	1 (8.3)	Neutral	Low	Low
Secretary	Customer	1 (8.3)	Low	High	Low
Customer representative	Customer	1 (8.3)	Low	High	Low
Construction worker	Customer	1 (8.3)	Low	High	High

The results revealed a lot of variability in this situation. Six participants created situations with waiter and customer roles. Two of these situations do not convey high imposition and overall only five of the situations include high imposition requests. Four of these involve an interaction between a waiter and a customer and one of them between a construction worker and a customer. The setting is a restaurant. The reason for low imposition scenarios (i.e., ones having no indication of special circumstances making the situation more difficult) could be that the utterance did not refer to a special night or special reservation of the table. If the utterance included a disarmer (e.g., "I know that you are celebrating a special day . . ."), more participants might have created situations with high imposition requests. However, the mean of the number of strategies and the most commonly used strategies based on the mean of strategies did not include a disarmer in the earlier data. Thus, situations that did not reveal high imposition but were relevant were considered to be acceptable for this utterance, which amounts to nine responses. The following is a sample situation from the data provided by Participant 7, who was female, 25, and Kazakh (Russian): "*Bir lokantada garson olarak çalışıyorsunuz. Müşteriye teknik ekibin acilen çalışması gerektiğini söylüyorsunuz ve onları başka masaya alacağınızı söylüyorsunuz.*" [You work as a waiter in a restaurant. You tell your customer that the technical team needs to work immediately and tell them you will move them to another table.] Other role relationships used included worker-worker, chair of a meeting-participants, teacher-student, customer representative-customer and secretary-customer. The first two had neutral power relationship and the last two conveyed low power, high distance, but low imposition. One of the situations, teacher-student, was not an appropriate situation for the utterance given. The utterance could not be directed to a student by a teacher as the utterance ("Sir/Madam, I deeply apologize . . .") would be a strong request and would not reflect a typical utterance by a teacher addressed to a student.

Scenario 4

The request speech act in this scenario came from the situation in which a college student asks a professor to extend the deadline for a project. The ratings of sociopragmatic factors revealed a speaker with low power, low distance between the speaker and the hearer and high imposition as the deadline for submitting grades by the professor is approaching. The utterance was: "Biliyorum proje teslimi için son gün geldi ama ben yetiştiremedim. Bana iki gün daha müsaade edebilir misiniz?" [I know that today is the deadline for project submission, but I could not finish it. Could you excuse me two more days?] Table 8 outlines the role relationships that emerged in participants' responses.

Table 8 Role relationships provided by the participants in Scenario 4

Speaker	Hearer	# (%)	Power	Distance	Imposition
Student	Professor	6 (50)	Low	Low	High
Employee (architect, engineer, researcher)	Boss	5 (41.6)	Low	Low	High
Boss	Boss	1 (8.3)	Neutral	Low	High

Eleven participants provided situations that were in line with the situation the utterance was used for in terms of the sociopragmatic design, that is, the speaker with low power, low distance between the speaker and hearer, and high ranking of imposition. These situations were considered satisfactory responses. Of these 11 situations, six revealed a student-professor scenario while five revealed employee-boss scenario. Only one participant preferred a neutral power relationship between two bosses. Here is a sample situation from data provided by Participant 8, who was female, 23, and Ukrainian: "*Siz bir öğrencisiniz. Mezun olmak için bir proje hazırlamalısınız. Teslim günü geldiği zaman proje hazır değildi. Bu sebeple öğretmene iki gün daha müsaadeyi soruyorsunuz.*" [You are a student. You must prepare a project to graduate. The project is not ready on submission day. For this reason, you are asking your teacher for two more days.]

Discussion

Discourse completion tasks have been used commonly for more than three decades now and have been used as useful tools to collect data in pragmatics research. This study is an attempt to modify the traditional DCT to switch its focus by reversing it to allow more direct access to participants' or test-takers' sociopragmatic competence. This would be achieved through seeing how they would interpret utterances offered to them and create situations

in which they think the utterances would be appropriate. A traditional DCT asks respondents to write (or even say or act out) a speech act for a given situation. With this characteristic, we may gain insight into the pragmalinguistic repertoire of the respondent, or illocutionary competence, and make inferences about his or her sociopragmatic interpretation of a situation, or sociolinguistic competence. An R-DCT reverses the situation and allows the researcher or tester to better understand how the respondent interprets the utterance and the sociopragmatic aspects or forces it carries. Utterance interpretation or inference constitutes an important part of discussion in pragmatics (see, e.g., Wilson & Sperber, 2004). It is also part of the intercultural competence models. For example, Deardorff (2006, p. 254) puts interpretation under necessary skills in her model. Correctly interpreting utterances and communicative intentions of speakers are important aspects of successful communication. In this respect, the R-DCT gives a better picture of the sociolinguistic awareness of the participants rather than the illocutionary items they have at their disposal. Compared to DCTs, R-DCTs will potentially make it easier to assess the sociolinguistic competence component of intercultural communicative competence or pragmatic competence. In this respect, what is novel in the R-DCT is the way it reverses the DCT to change the focus of the measure. In assessing intercultural competence or pragmatic competence, several measures can and need to be employed; thus, instead of an attempt to replace any existing tool such as DCTs, it is an attempt to complement the existing tools by focusing on a specific component of users' competence.

One important advantage of R-DCTs is that they could help diminish the need for comparing learner data with native speaker data. Assessing competences with native speaker criteria has been criticized in the field of intercultural competence (Byram, 1997). Although the utterances used as prompts in the R-DCT created for this study came from data collected from native speakers of Turkish, statistical comparison with native speakers would not be necessary. A better way of utilizing utterances for R-DCTs would be getting them from spoken corpora. However, the corpora should be clear about the role relationships in the situation in which the speech sample is used. The corpus used should be either a corpus of speech acts or a spoken corpus in which pragmatic elements such as speech act type, information about interlocutors, roles, settings, activity type and so on are tagged. Spoken corpora without these features will be difficult for speech act retrieval, especially the large ones. It is because searching the corpora for speech acts is challenging. For example, there may be many instances of apologies that do not include any of these words: *sorry, afraid, apologize, forgive me.* By the same token, *these boxes are really heavy* may be a request speech act. These challenges make

general spoken corpora difficult resources for speech act retrieval (see Ruhi, Schmidt, Wörner, & Eryılmaz, 2011, for a discussion of these issues and ways of enhancing retrieval of speech acts from a spoken corpus). If the sample speech acts are retrieved from a corpus of speech acts or a corpus with pragmatic tagging, a natural and appropriate utterance, regardless of whether it comes from a native speaker or not, could be used as a prompt in an R-DCT. Thus, successful interchanges from a corpus, be they among native speakers or not, could be used as prompts in R-DCTs. This will also free the testers from their intuitions about what utterances could be appropriate in a situation. If the sample from the corpus of real communication does not demonstrate any misunderstandings or breaks in communication, then the utterance could be considered an example of a successful utterance for a given situation.

In addition, in a traditional DCT, second language learners' or speakers' failure to provide an utterance that is similar to a native speaker's may be due to several factors. It may be, for instance, because (a) the participant did not understand the text in the DCT prompt, (b) he or she did not understand the situation described in the prompt, (c) he or she used conventions in his or her first language and they did not transfer well, or (d) they understood everything but did not have the pragmalinguistic forms in their repertoire. There may even be more factors. Such complexity makes traditional DCTs weak candidates for assessing intercultural competence because it is not clear to what nonnative speakers' failure to provide native speaker utterances should be attributed. There is also the question whether it is even desirable to compare their utterance to native speakers' utterances, as discussed by Byram (1997). In this regard, R-DCTs help minimize such complexities and allow us to make better judgments about respondents' intercultural or pragmatic competence. We could tell whether a respondent is likely to be engaged in misinterpretations or misunderstandings based on how he or she interprets the utterances given.

Although this study is an attempt to propose a prototype of a novel tool as developed from an existing tool, it has limitations. One of them is that the only person involved in analyzing the situations created by the participants was the researcher. Analysis and ratings by additional persons may have been beneficial. It is especially true when we are focusing on appropriacy rather than accuracy. Since appropriacy is a fluid phenomenon that can be context specific and individually variable, deciding whether the situations written about by the participants would be appropriate situations for the utterances given would benefit from the contributions of multiple raters.

Another question would arise about the assessment tool for the proposed measure. For this study, those participants who were able to create relevant situations with sociopragmatic characteristics similar to situations in

which the utterances given to them were used were considered to have performed satisfactorily. Those that created situations that carried sociopragmatic factors different from the original situations had problems. This is confirmed by the data, which revealed that situations that carried the sociopragmatic characteristics of the original situations would be those in which the utterance given would be appropriate. Those that differed from the original situation in terms of sociopragmatic factors turned out to be the ones in which the utterance would not be appropriate. For example, in Scenario 3, one participant provided a teacher as the speaker and a student as the hearer, creating sociopragmatic factors different from the intended design. The utterance in this situation would not be appropriate. In contrast, even if respondents created situations with roles different from the original situations, the utterance could potentially be appropriate as long as the sociopragmatic factors did not contradict the original situations. For example, in Scenario 4, the utterance came from a student-professor situation, and yet employee-boss designations in the data carried the same sociopragmatic pattern and thus created situations in which the utterance could be used. This shows that an approach to assessment using sociopragmatic factors could be useful in assessing intercultural or pragmatic competence. However, limiting the assessment to sociopragmatic factors has to be further researched, possibly by comparing it to naturally occurring data. One way of seeing whether correct designation of factors in creating situations leads to appropriate situations for utterances given is through a comparison to natural utterances and situations. If similar utterances in similar real life situations with the same sociopragmatic context are appropriate, then better judgments can be made about the assessment method employed in this study. However, assessing appropriacy will always be challenging as an utterance that could work perfectly in some contexts may become inappropriate if the contextual features change a little. It is because appropriacy and conversations are dynamic, fluid, context-specific, and personally evaluated at the time of speech by the interactants. This study proposes the use of sociopragmatic factors in the assessment rubric with the acknowledgement that it needs to be further investigated through a comparison to naturally-occurring speech.

Finally, the prototypic R-DCT employed for this study brought a challenge during the assessment of responses. Initially, data was gathered from more than 12 participants. However, the R-DCT did not require participants to explicitly identify roles (see the appendix). Therefore, some responses did not make any indication about the roles of the speakers and hearers in the situations they created. Since the assessment proposed in this paper relies on sociopragmatic factors of power, distance and imposition, some responses could not be used. Although this problem created a limitation for this study, it

also led to the second version of the prototype, as could be seen from the sample item given above. An R-DCT created with items that ask respondents to explicitly identify roles will address this limitation. However, this version still needs to be tested by employing it to gather another set of data.

Conclusion

This paper has described a new measure, which I have proposed to name reverse discourse completion task, for assessing intercultural (communicative) competence as well as pragmatic competence. Since testing intercultural competence is a complex endeavor, the proposed measure is an attempt to address one aspect of this multidimensional competence rather than an answer to the problem. The new measure was tested with 12 participants in a study-abroad setting and the results indicate that the task could be used to assess the sociolinguistic competence component of intercultural competence. The study has also shown that sociopragmatic factors could be used in assessment. However, more elaboration on the proposed assessment method is needed. Further testing and use of this measure with a larger number of participants will improve the measure itself and the assessment procedures. It would be especially beneficial to compare data gathered using R-DCTs with naturally-occurring ones in order to see whether situations the R-DCT predicts as appropriate for utterances given will in fact be appropriate in real life. Nevertheless, the R-DCT can be implemented in addition to the available measures to address sociolinguistic competence.

Acknowledgments

References

Bachman, L. F. (1990). *Fundamental considerations in language teaching.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Blum-Kulka, S. (1982). Learning to say what you mean in a second language: A study of the speech act performance of learners of Hebrew as a second language. *Applied Linguistics, 3*, 29-59.

Blum-Kulka, S., House, J., & Kasper, G. (1989). *Cross-cultural pragmatics: Requests and apologies.* Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Blum-Kulka, S., & Olshtain, E. (1984). Requests and apologies: A cross-cultural study of speech act realization patterns (CCSARP). *Applied Linguistics, 5*, 196-213.

Bou Franch, P., & Lorenzo-Dus, N. (2008). Natural versus elicited data in cross-cultural speech act realization: The case of requests in Peninsular Spanish and British English. *Spanish in Context, 5*(2), 246-277.

Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language use.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Byram, M. (1997). *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence.* Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Canale, M. (1983). From communicative competence to communicative language pedagogy. In J. C. Richards & R. W. Schmidt (Eds.), *Language and communication* (pp. 2-27)*.* London: Longman.

Canale, M., & Swain, M. (1980). Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing. *Applied Linguistics, 1*, 1-47.

Cohen, A. D. (2004). Assessing speech acts in a second language. In D. Boxer & A. D. Cohen (Eds.), *Studying speaking to inform second language learning* (pp. 302-327). Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Cohen, A. D., & Olshtain, E. (1981). Developing a measure of socio-cultural competence: The case of apology. *Language Learning, 31*(1), 113-134.

Cohen, A. D., Paige, M. R., Shively, R. L., Emery, H. A., & Hoff, J. G. (2005). *Maximizing study abroad through language and culture strategies: Research on students, study abroad program professionals, and language instructors* (Final report to the International Research and Studies Program, Office of International Education, DOE). Minneapolis, MN: Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition, University of Minnesota. Retrieved from http://www.carla.umn.edu/maxsa/documents/MAXSAResearchReport.pdf

Cohen, A. D., & Shively, R. L. (2002). Measuring speech acts with multiple rejoinder DCT's. *Language Testing Update, 32*, 39-42.

Deardorff, D. K. (2004). *The identification and assessment of intercultural competence as a student outcome of internationalization at institutions of*

higher education in the United States (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). North Carolina State University, Raleigh, USA.

Deardorff, D. K. (2006). Identification and assessment of intercultural competence as a student outcome of internationalization. *Journal of Studies in International Education, 10*, 241-266.

Deardorff, D. K. (2009). Implementing intercultural competence assessment. In D. K. Deardorff (Ed.), *The SAGE handbook of intercultural competence* (pp. 477-491). Los Angeles: Sage.

Deardorff, D. K. (2011). Assessing intercultural competence. *New Directions for Institutional Research, 149*, 65-79.

Fantini, A. (2009). Assessing intercultural competence: Issues and tools. In D. K. Deardorff (Ed.), *The SAGE handbook of intercultural competence* (pp. 456-476). Los Angeles: Sage.

Golato, A. (2003). Studying compliment responses: A comparison of DCTs and recordings of naturally occurring talk. *Applied Linguistics, 24*(1), 90-121.

Hinkel, E. (1997). Appropriateness of advice: DCT and multiple choice data. *Applied Linguistics, 18*(1), 1-26.

Hudson, T., Detmer, E., & Brown, J. D. (1995). *Developing prototypic measures of cross-cultural pragmatics.* Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press.

Johnston, B., Kasper, G., & Ross, S. (1998). Effect of rejoinders in production questionnaires. *Applied Linguistics, 19*(2), 157-182.

Kanik, M. (2011). The effect of content instruction in L2 on L1 pragmatics. *Research in Language, 9*(2), 93-110.

Leech, G. (1983). *Principles of pragmatics.* London: Longman.

Roever, C. (2006). Validation of a web-based test of ESL pragmalinguistics. *Language Testing, 23*, 229-256.

Rose, K. R. (1992). Speech acts and questionnaires: The effect of hearer response. *Journal of Pragmatics, 17*(1), 49-62.

Rose, K. R. (1994). On the validity of discourse completion tests on non-western contexts. *Applied Linguistics, 15*(1), 1-14.

Rose, K. R., & Ono, R. (1995). Eliciting speech act data in Japanese: The effect of questionnaire type. *Language Learning, 45*(2), 191-223.

Ruhi, Ş., Schmidt, T., Wörner, K., & Eryılmaz, K. (2011, September). *Annotating for precision and recall in speech act variation: The case of directives in the spoken Turkish corpus.* Poster presented at the biennial conference of the German Society for Computational Linguistics and Language Technology, Hamburg, Germany. Retrieved from http://std.metu.edu.tr/wp/wp-content/uploads/2009/05/hamburg_poster_abstract.pdf

Sasaki, M. (1998). Investigating EFL students' production of speech acts: A comparison of production questionnaires and role plays. *Journal of Pragmatics, 30*, 457-484.

United Nations World Tourism Organization. (2013). *UNWTO tourism highlights 2013 edition.* Retrieved from http://dtxtq4w60xqpw.cloudfront.net/sites/all/files/pdf/unwto_highlights13_en_hr.pdf

Van Ek, J. A. (1986). *Objectives for foreign language learning. Vol. 1: Scope.* Strasbourg: Council of Europe. Retrieved from http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/SourcePublications/Scope_VanEk_EN.doc

Varghese, M., & Billmyer, K. (1996). Investigating the structure of discourse completion tests. *Working Papers in Educational Linguistics*, *12*(1), 39-58.

Wilson, D., & Sperber, D. (2004). Relevance theory. In G. L. Ward & L. R. Horn (Eds.), *The handbook of pragmatics* (pp. 607-632). Oxford: Blackwell.

Yuan, Y. (2001). An inquiry into empirical pragmatics data-gathering methods: Written DCTs, oral DCTs, field notes, and natural conversations. *Journal of Pragmatics, 33*(2), 271-292.

Zuskin, R. D. (1993). Assessing L2 sociolinguistic competence: In search of support from pragmatic theories. *Pragmatics and Language Learning, 4*, 166-182.

APPENDIX

Items in the reverse discourse completion task

1. *"Biliyorum başka bir şehirden geldiniz ama sizinle ilgili kararımı netleştirebilmem için haftaya tekrar sizinle görüşmek istiyorum."* [I know that you came from another city but to clarify my decision about you I need to see you again next week].

   Durum: [situation] _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

2. *"Yarın teftiş var. Bugün temizlik için mesaiye kalabilir misin?"* [There is inspection tomorrow. Could you work overtime today for cleaning?]

   Durum: [situation] _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

3. *"Efendim, çok özür dilerim. Burada teknik ekibin acilen çalışması gerekiyor. Sizi başka bir masaya alabilir miyiz?"* ? [Sir/madam, I deeply apologize. The technical team needs to work here immediately. Could we move you to another table?]

   Durum: [situation] _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

4. *"Biliyorum proje teslimi için son gün geldi ama ben yetiştiremedim. Bana iki gün daha müsaade edebilir misiniz?"* [I know that today is the deadline for project submission, but I could not finish it. Could you excuse me two more days?]

   Durum: [situation] _____
   _____
   _____
   _____