

Longitudinal Pragmatic and Grammatical Development in English among Chinese Students

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Abstract

This study investigates pragmatic development among Chinese EFL learners, with reference to accuracy improvement in grammar. Sixty college students in mainland China were pre- and post-tested on their pragmatic and grammatical comprehension and production over one academic year. Their test results were compared with those of 14 native English speakers. Quantitative results show that these Chinese EFL learners developed significantly in both pragmatics and grammar over time. Qualitative analysis reveals that they differed from the native speakers in terms of contents and address forms in realizing certain speech acts.

Keywords: pragmatics, grammar, development, EFL, Chinese learners

Introduction

The debate over the role of second language (L2) proficiency and the length of residence (LOR) in the development of pragmatic competence cuts across several bodies of research. Within this research, second language (SL) refers to research in which the language under investigation is the dominant language in the host culture whereas foreign language (FL) refers to research done on language that is not the dominant language and mostly learned at school. When the FL environment and the SL environment are compared, initial findings demonstrate that learners make greater gains in pragmatic comprehension, particularly in the production and perception of speech acts, in the SL environment when second language (L2) proficiency is considered (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998; Barron, 2002; Hoffman-Hicks, 1992; Li, 2000; Matsumura, 2001, 2003; Olshain & Blum-Kulka, 1985; Schauer, 2006; Takahashi & Beebe, 1987). More recent research draws on the experiences of study-abroad students and confirms the advantages of the SL environment, particularly when the intensity and range of experiences of the learners are considered (Kinginger & Belz, 2005; Kinginger & Blatter, 2008; Kinginger & Farrell, 2004).

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There is much less research which explores the influence of LOR and L2 proficiency on pragmatic competence within the FL environment, but available evidence suggests an interesting overlap between the two bodies of research. Consistent with research comparing the SL and FL environment (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998; Barron, 2002; Hoffman-Hicks, 1992; Li, 2000; Matsumura, 2001, 2003; Olshtain & Blum-Kulka, 1985; Schauer, 2006; Takahashi & Beebe, 1987), LOR and L2 proficiency play a key role in promoting pragmatic competence (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998; Niezgodna & Röver, 2001; Schauer, 2006). Specific findings suggest that exposure to the target language does improve pragmatic competence. Niezgodna and Röver (2001), for instance, attributed students' pragmatic growth to participation in a communicatively-based teacher education program.

Despite findings which suggest the potential the SL environment holds for pragmatic competence, most research has been limited with cross-sectional research (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998; Kinginger & Farrell, 2004; Schauer, 2006; Taguchi, 2008; Takahashi & Beebe, 1987). Longitudinal research with a pre- and post-test design has been limited (e.g., Bouton, 1992, 1994; Taguchi, 2007), and those studies have been in a restricted number of settings. More longitudinal research on the connections between L2 proficiency and LOR within the FL environment is needed to make firm conclusions about the development of pragmatic competence. To address that gap the research, this study investigates the longitudinal pragmatic development among Chinese EFL learners in mainland China over one academic year. Quantitative and qualitative data is used to explore the connections between pragmatic development and improvement of accuracy in grammar. Sixty college students in China were pre- and post-tested; their tests were analyzed and compared with those of a group of 14 native speakers of American English. Two research questions guided this study: (1) Do Chinese EFL learners develop pragmatic and grammatical proficiency over time? (2) What are the differences, if there are any, in speech acts realization between Chinese EFL learners and American native speakers? Findings contribute to the existing body of developmental literature in L2 pragmatics in general, and particularly in foreign language contexts.

Pragmatic Development in Second Language Learning

The role of the learning environment in pragmatic development is considered central over much of pragmatic research in both cross sectional and longitudinal research. Cross sectional research is often focused on measuring pragmatic comprehension. Pragmatic comprehension is the ability to recognize intention within an utterance (Thomas, 1995). There are two levels of pragmatic competence. The first is the utterance meaning level, which is the ability to understand a word's defined meaning. The second is the force of the utterance, which is best described as the speaker's underlying intention. Studies of pragmatic competence (e.g., Bouton, 1992, 1994; Carrell, 1981, 1982; Cook & Liddicoat, 2002; Kasper, 1984; Koike, 1996; Röver, 2005; Taguchi, 2002, 2003, 2005, 2007, 2008; Takahashi & Roitblat, 1994) have largely confirmed that comprehension is influenced by L2 proficiency and by the degree of specificity embedded within an utterance. While several studies have been set in the FL environment (e.g., Belz & Kinginger, 2002, 2003; Ohta, 2001a, 2001b; Taguchi, 2007;), longitudinal studies of pragmatic comprehension have not been forthcoming. What few there are, however, suggest that the FL environment can be a place that improve pragmatic proficiency.

Research conducted within the FL environment done by Ohta (2001a, 2001b) found that the American learners of Japanese in the U.S. developed their ability to use expressions of alignment in Japanese over one academic year. By analyzing learners' private speech and their interactions with peers and teachers, Ohta showed that, over time, learners' sensitivity to pragmatic information grew significantly. Although varied in pace, the learners progressed in a similar developmental sequence and expanded their use of acknowledgement expressions. Some learners outpaced the others in being more able to use *ne*-marked expressions of alignment, a significant marker in the Japanese language showing a good listenership. Ohta's research is one of the first to demonstrate that FL learners are not at a disadvantage in their ability to gain pragmatic proficiency in a domestic classroom. Her findings show that by being engaged in more meaningful classroom activities and explicit instruction, FL learners can improve L2 pragmatic competence.

Belz and Kinginger (2002, 2003) examined address forms in French and German as foreign languages in the U.S. Both studies demonstrated FL learners improved notably their addressing competence and grew more capable of using the second-person pronouns in the TL after participating in a tele-collaborative partnership project. Both research projects illustrated that FL learners could go beyond the walls of a formal classroom and get necessary help from more capable native peers to improve their L2 pragmatic proficiency.

Similarly, Taguchi (2007) studied pragmatic comprehension among 92 Japanese EFL learners enrolled in a Japanese language class over a period of seven weeks in Japan. Twenty native speakers of English were used as a control group. Participants completed a pre- and post-test measure of their ability to comprehend indirect opinions and indirect refusals. Findings demonstrated a significant correlation between growth in overall L2 proficiency and accuracy. After seven weeks, the Japanese EFL learners could comprehend indirect speech acts more accurately, and their comprehension speed accelerated. Measures were also taken of general language proficiency, as measured by the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and the speed of lexical and pragmatic comprehension. While there was a significant relationship between proficiency and accuracy as well as lexical speed and comprehension, general L2 proficiency did not have a relationship to comprehension speed, and lexical access speed did not have a relationship to accuracy.

Taken together, research into pragmatic development within the SL setting suggests that learners can develop pragmatic proficiency over time in the foreign language setting, but the limited number of studies do not allow for generalizations across different settings. Moreover, the research above is restricted to Japan and the US and it is not clear how the pragmatic and general L2 proficiency connect.

Pragmatic and grammatical development

Early research demonstrated that pragmatic and grammatical awareness is associated with one's learning environment (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998; Schauer, 2006). Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei (1998) explored the connections between pragmatic and grammatical awareness. EFL learners in Hungary and Italy and ESL learners in the U.S. watched a video of 20 scenarios, which included either grammatical errors or pragmatic violations. The participants were asked to find mistakes of both types and judge the severity of each mistake in a questionnaire. The authors found that the EFL learners displayed more sensitivity to grammatical errors, while the ESL learners were more sensitive to pragmatic violations. They also found that the ESL learners in the U.S. with a shorter LOR rated pragmatic violations less severe than their ESL peers with a longer LOR. The authors further noticed that with increased overall L2 proficiency, the ESL learners became more tolerant of grammatical errors but less tolerant of pragmatic violations, while the EFL learners showed the opposite: They weighted grammatical mistakes as more severe than pragmatic inappropriateness.

Schauer (2006) duplicated many of the findings in Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei's (1998) study. Employing the same instrument, Schauer (2006) compared test results of German EFL learners in Germany and German ESL learners in Great Britain and followed the ESL group for one academic year. The learners watched a series of video scenarios in which the interlocutors' speech acts, which contained either apologies, refusals, requests, and suggestions, contained either grammatical or pragmatic errors. Consistent with Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei's (1998), Schauer found that the learning environment played a key role in pragmatic development and grammatical awareness. ESL learners were more responsive to pragmatic violations while the EFL learners recognized more grammatical errors than ESL learners. She further found that the ESL learners' pragmatic awareness increased significantly over one-year stay in the host culture and approximated to that of the native English speakers. However, this research did not indicate whether the German EFL learners developed their awareness in pragmatics over time.

While both studies (Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998; Schauer, 2006) found that ESL learners showed more pragmatic awareness and EFL learners had more grammatical sensitivity and claimed that one's learning environment was more decisive in L2 pragmatics, Niezgodna and Röver (2001) argued that EFL context did not prevent learners from developing pragmatic sensitivity. Borrowing Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei's (1998) instrument, Niezgodna and Röver found that the Czech EFL learners (college students) in the Czech Republic

outscored the ESL peers in the U.S., who were taking second language classes. The EFL group identified more mistakes of both types and judged both types of mistakes as more severe than the ESL group. Within group comparison showed that less advanced learners of either group recognized more pragmatic than grammatical errors, while learners reversed the tendency. These findings led Niezgoda and Röver to speculate that overall L2 proficiency might be more crucial in L2 pragmatics than the learning environment.

More recently, Xu and her colleagues (2009) examined the influence of both LOR and overall L2 proficiency on L2 pragmatic competence with a reference to L2 grammatical competence in the U.S. One hundred and twenty-six international students with two academic levels of English proficiency from 17 countries were tested on their pragmatic and grammatical competence using the same instrument as in Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei's (1998) study. Results revealed that both LOR and overall L2 proficiency influenced L2 pragmatics significantly with overall L2 proficiency demonstrating a stronger influence. Findings also showed that there was a strong and positive correlation between pragmatic and grammatical competence for advanced participants and all participants as a group.

The research above suggests that the connections among grammatical proficiency, LOR and the FL versus the SL environment represent an important combination of variables in the study of pragmatic comprehension. Work by Schauer, 2006, Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998 and Niezgoda and Röver (2001) demonstrates that the FL environment, when supplemented with classroom instruction, provides a venue which can promote pragmatic development. Grammatical development also plays a role throughout in predicting pragmatic comprehension. The conclusiveness of these of these findings, however, is limited. There are too few studies across a limited number of settings and there are still fewer that are longitudinal. This study fills the gap in previous research by offering a longitudinal examination of pragmatic development of EFL learners in mainland China.

Research Method

Participants

The participants were 60 second-year college students from a major university in China; they were EFL learners who studied software technology (50 males, 10 females, age range: 19-22). To gain admission into a university in China, students had to pass rigorous national entrance examinations, and English was one of the tested subjects. While many of the EFL participants had been abroad, none had been to an English-speaking environment. One had been to Japan for a week on a tour; another had visited friends and relatives in Russia. Five had some knowledge of Japanese, and one, some French. Before college, they had studied English as a school subject for six to 14 years, depending on the English education arrangement in their hometown. The average in English as a FL instruction for these students was 8.25 years.

College students in China must pass a certain level of the College English Test to meet graduation requirements. The College English Test (CET) is a test battery which was launched in the late 1980s to measure college students' overall English proficiency and to promote the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language. The CET was developed by Chinese English language testing professionals. The CET consists of two written tests of Band 4 (CET-4) and Band 6 (CET-6), and one Spoken English Test (CET-9). As non-English majors, students need to pass the CET-6 to get a bachelor's degree, which requires a score of at least 60 out of 100 on the test.

At the participants' university, the students were required to take English lessons for two academic years and pass their CET-6 certificates before graduation. When the study began, all participants were in their second year of English instruction and had their CET-4 certificates in hand; by the time the study ended, all of them had passed the CET-6, a significant improvement in their English proficiency over one academic year. A group of 14 native English speakers from a research institute in the U.S. also participated (5 males, 9 females, age mean: 24-45). They were graduate students in the College of Education; three were pursuing their doctoral degrees, and the others were enrolled in various master's programs.

Instrument

The descriptive data were elicited with an expanded questionnaire based upon Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei's (1998) study, which consisted of 20 written scenarios with discourse completion tasks (see below). Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei (1998) created 20 video dialogues which could take place in an educational setting. Of the 20 scenarios, eight had pragmatic violations with no grammatical mistakes; eight had grammatical mistakes without pragmatic problems; four had no mistakes of any kind (controls). The eight pragmatic scenarios presented various kinds of pragmatically inappropriate responses, including the lack the extent to the offense in an apology, and the lack of mitigators in a suggestion. The eight grammatically incorrect but pragmatically correct scenarios contained mistakes, such as a zero object, a double use of the past tense, inversion in an embedded question, and *-ing* with a modal. Pragmatic competence in realizing four speech acts was examined: requests, apologies, suggestions, and refusals. Students watched each scenario and then gave their responses on a handout. Below is an example of the handout with a pragmatic problem:

1. The teacher asks Peter to help with the plans for the class trip.

T: OK, so we'll go by bus. Who lives near the bus station? Peter, could you check the bus times for us on the way home tonight?

P: #No, I can't tonight. Sorry.

Is the last part appropriate/correct? Yes No

If there is a problem, how bad do you think it is?

Not bad at all _: _: _: _: _: Very bad

And, how would you revise it?

The following is a scenario with a grammatical mistake:

2. Peter and George are classmates. George invites Peter to his house, but Peter cannot come.

G: Peter, would you like to come over to my house tonight?

P: *I'm sorry, I just can't. I'm very tired. I couldn't sleep on last night.

Is the last part appropriate/correct? Yes No

If there is a problem, how bad do you think it is?

Not bad at all _: _: _: _: _: Very bad

And, how would you revise it?

The instrument was used in a slightly different way within this study. Because it was not possible to obtain the original video, the participants were asked to complete the handout without the benefit of having watched the scenarios on video. While this represents a departure from the original work by Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei (1998), it is not unprecedented. Xu et al (2009), for instance, used Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei's (1998) instrument without showing the videos to a group of foreign-born university graduate students for the same purposes. Moreover, each item within the handout provided a description of the video scenario as well as the accompanying dialogue that was sufficient to relate the linguistic intent of the dialogue, notwithstanding the gestural information which would have been communicated through video.

Within this study, the participants were given the written handout, and, consistent with Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei's (1998) original methodology, were told that the task before them was not a test but a way for the researchers to learn what they think. Participants first indicated whether or not each response was in each scenario by checking *yes* or *no*. If they chose *no*, the participants rated the severity of the mistake on a 6-point

scale from “not bad at all” to “very bad.” Finally, if they indicated that the scenario contained an error, they were asked to write a revised response in the blank. If they did not see an error and chose *yes*, the participants could proceed to the next scenario.

Analytical Procedure

Quantitatively, pragmatic and grammatical development was calculated in terms of judgment and amendment to problematic utterances and of sensitivity towards problems. The participants earned a score of “1” for a correct judgment with an acceptable response/a reasonable explanation. The participants obtained a score of “0” for an incorrect judgment or, a correct judgment but with no acceptable response/rationale. All *yes* answers (including *no* responses without acceptable response/rationales) were converted to 0 on the scale which indicated *not bad at all* in analyzing the ratings ranged from 0 to 6. All but one of the scenarios were analyzed.¹ Pragmatic and grammatical items were analyzed separately.

Qualitatively, the DCTs were coded based on the framework of Bardovi-Harlig and Griffin(2005). New patterns were also generated according to the present data. The Cronbach α internal consistency coefficients of severity rating scale for pragmatic and grammatical items for the present study were .79 and .74; for Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei’s (1998) study, they were .72 and .77; for Niezgodna and Röver’s (2001) study, they were .73 and .79, indicating that the instrument was highly reliable.

Results

Significant analyses of variance were produced for pragmatics: $F(2, 131) = 17.38, p < .001, \chi^2 = .16^2$ and grammar as well: $F(2, 131) = 35.77, p < .001, \chi^2 = .36$. The Tukey’s test for Honestly Significant Differences.

Error Judgment

The percentage means of all participants on pragmatic and grammatical error judgment were computed. Table 1 summarizes the descriptive data of one-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs). Differences (*HSD*) revealed that with respect to pragmatics, the differences existed between two pair-wise comparisons of means: between the EFL learners across tests ($p < .001$) and between the EFL learners and the native speakers on the pre-test ($p = .05$). No statistical difference was found between the mean scores of the EFL learners and the native speakers on the post-test. Regarding grammar, the Tukey’s *HSD* tests uncovered significant variations among all pairs of means, with the mean score of the native speakers the highest, of the EFL on the post-test in the middle, and of the pre-test the lowest. These findings suggest that 1) the Chinese EFL learners made remarkably progress in both pragmatics and grammar, and 2) the Chinese EFL learners differed from the native speakers in grammar across tests.

Table 1
Error Judgment (percentages)

	EFL ($n=60$)		NES ($n = 14$)		
	pre-test Mean/ <i>SD</i>	post-test Mean/ <i>SD</i>	Mean/ <i>SD</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Effect Size</i>
Pragmatic	.56/.27	.79/.17	.71/.11	<.001	.16
Grammatical	.30/.27	.50/.28	.94/.09	<.001	.36

Note. Judgement: 0 = no mistakes; 1 = a mistake with an acceptable correction/ rationale

Severity Ratings

ANOVAs were performed on the mean scores of all participants to compare their sensitivity towards pragmatic and grammatical problems. Table 2 shows the results of these analyses.

Table 2
Severity Ratings

	EFL		Mean/ <i>SD</i>	NES	
	pre-test Mean/ <i>SD</i>	post-test Mean/ <i>SD</i>		<i>p</i>	<i>Effect Size</i>
Pragmatic	4.16/1.68	4.61/.93	3.61/1.08	.02	.53
Grammatical	2.97/1.59	3.40/1.23	2.86/1.53	.19	n.s.

Note. Ratings: 1 = not bad at all; 6 = very bad

As can be seen, the analysis was significant for pragmatic ratings: $F(2,131) = 3.84, p = .02, \chi^2 = .53$. The Tukey *HSD* test revealed a significant difference between the mean scores of the EFL learners on the post-test and of the native speakers ($p = .03$). However, no statistical difference was found among any pairs of means with respect to grammatical ratings. These analyses indicate that 1) the Chinese EFL learners took pragmatic violations more seriously than the native speakers on the post-test, and 2) all participants in this study shared a similar attitude towards grammatical errors.

Pragmatic and Grammatical Comprehension and Production

Further inspection of Table 1 also reveals that the EFL learners in China identified more pragmatic problems and fewer grammatical mistakes on both tests while the native speakers showed the opposite tendency. Paired-sample *t*-tests confirmed the significant differences between pragmatic and grammatical judgment on the pre-test: $t = 6.35, df = 59, p < .001, d = .82$,³ and on the post-test: $t = 8.39, df = 59, p < .001, d = 1.08$. The native speakers exhibited high scores in grammar with a lower pragmatic score: $t = 7.23, df = 13, p < .001, d = 1.93$. These results show that among the Chinese EFL learners, their L2 pragmatic ability developed ahead of their L2 grammatical knowledge. On the other hand, the native speaker's pragmatic ability lagged behind their grammatical knowledge.

In terms of pragmatic and grammatical attitudes (Table 2), paired-sample *t*-tests revealed significant differences between the rating means of the EFL learners on pre-test: $t = 4.12, df = 59, p < .001, d = .53$ and post-test: $t = 6.90, df = 59, p < .001, d = .89$. The same pattern is also observed in the native speakers: $t = 2.17, df = 13, p = .05, d = .58$. This outcome indicates that all participants in this study treated pragmatic violations more severe than grammatical mistakes.

Discourse Completion Tasks

Pragmatic development among the Chinese EFL learners was further examined by analyzing their written production on the DCTs and comparing with the native production. As mentioned earlier, the coding schema was based on Bardovi-Harlig and Griffin's (2005) study with new schema developed for the present data. The examinations were reported in three sub-sections by speech act.

Refusals

An explanation is normally expected to accompany a refusal such as in the *Class Trip* scenario. Table 3 shows that fewer than fifty percent of the participants realized the speech act successfully across tests and groups.

Nonetheless, it was encouraging to see that the EFL learners did as well as the native speakers on the post-test in being able to offer more explanations, alternatives, and acceptable rationales (42% vs. 43%). It was also interesting to find similar rationales in both the native and the EFL learners' data. For instance, one native speaker wrote, "this needs more elaboration," and an EFL learner said, "I think Peter needs to tell the teacher more why he could not."

A closer look at the data, however, revealed that the EFL production differed from those of the native speakers in the contents of explanation. Whereas the native speakers preferred to explain it as external excuses, most of the EFL learners chose to be excused by personal reasons (e.g., *a broken car* vs. *I'm busy*). Moreover, in non-accepted responses, the EFL learners either revised the original "sorry" into "I'm sorry" or the more intensified form "I'm very sorry" to downgrade their refusals. The native speakers, on the other hand, just re-ordered the formula by switching "sorry" up to the front.

Table 3
Summary of Accepted Production in Refusing

Scenario	Production	EFL (n = 60)		NES (n = 14)
		pre-test (N)	post-test (N)	
Class Trip				
	Explanation/alternative	4/2	10/4	3/0
	No production but with rationale	5	11	3
	Total accepted	11/18%	25/42%	6/43%

Requests

There were four requesting scenarios. The problem planted in the *Snack Bar* scenario was offering too elaborate of a response for a service encounter. An alerter was appreciated in the *Direction* scenario. Together with the *Busy Teacher* and *Questionnaire* scenarios, all four situations called for a change in form. As Table 4 shows, the EFL learners improved progressively over time in three situations (i.e., *Snack Bar*, *Busy Teacher*, & *Questionnaire*), and they had little difficulty correcting the problem in *Direction* on both tests as did the native speakers. On the *Snack Bar* scenario, they developed their competence in placing an order over a counter by either changing the form into a request or reducing the formality. The same was true with the *Busy Teacher* and *Questionnaire* scenarios. Most learners became more competent when talking to their teachers over time. Most of them could convert the original statement into a question, and seven of them changed it into a suggestion like the native speakers did on the *Busy Teacher* scenario. The same progress was also observed on the *Questionnaire* scenario, which involved the highest imposition. The EFL learners improved their ability to ask for help from their teacher over time (48% vs. 82%). They made changes in form and employed a variety of auxiliary verbs to meet their goals (i.e., can, will, could, & would), and they outperformed the native speakers on the post-test (82% vs. 43%).

Nevertheless, when compared to the native data on *Snack Bar* scenario, most EFL learners were unable to place an order. The conventional *please* formula remained a preference across tests, and the native formula *I'd like to* did not occur in the EFL data. With respect to *Busy Teacher* scenario, some EFL learners changed the response into an acceptance (e.g., *OK, I'll come back later*).

Apology

The apology scenarios were matched for interlocutors (teacher & friend). As Table 5 displays, most EFL learners made progress across tests on both situations. Furthermore, on the post-test with the *Late* scenario, they outscored the native speakers by 14 percent (93% vs. 79%), becoming more capable of making promises of forbearance when making an apology.

While apologetic, fewer EFL learners than native speaker participants could supplement their apologies with explanation. Additionally, unlike their NS peers, no EFL learners made changes in form or requested a new

date on the *Not Ready* scenario. The main strategy employed by the EFL learners across scenarios was the conventional expression, *I'm sorry* with the intensifier *very*, as they did on the *Class Trip* scenario mentioned earlier.

Table 4
Summary of Accepted Production in Requesting

Scenario	Production	EFL (<i>n</i> = 60)		NES (<i>n</i> = 14) (N)
		pre-test (N)	post-test (N)	
Snack Bar				
	Change in form (<i>can/will/could/may/I would like/please/I'll have/imperative</i>)	22	45	9
	Total accepted	22 (37%)	45 (75%)	9 (64%)
Direction				
	Alerter	13	13	2
	Change in form (<i>could/can/will/please</i>)	38	39	10
	Please	0	5	2
	No production but with rationale	0	2	0
	Total accepted	51(85%)	59 (98%)	14 (100%)
Busy Teacher				
	Change of form (<i>suggestion/question</i>)	26 0/26	34 7/27	12 2/10
	“OK, I’ll come back (later).”	7	12	0
	Total accepted	33 (55%)	46 (77%)	12 (86%)
Questionnaire				
	Change in form (<i>can/will/could/would</i>)	28 19/8/1/0	48 25/21/1/1	5 1/0/2/2
	Explanation	1	1	0
	No production but with rationale	0	0	1
	Total accepted	29 (48%)	49 (82%)	6(43%)

Table 5
Summary of accepted production in apologizing

Scenario	Production	EFL (<i>n</i> = 60)		NES (<i>n</i> = 14) (N)
		pre-test (N)	post-test (N)	
Not Ready	Apology with explanation	0	3	5
	Apology only	45	49	0
	Change in form/request new date	0	0	6
	No production but with rationale	0	0	3
	Total accepted	45 (75%)	52 (87%)	14 (100%)
Late	Apology/with explanation	44/1	45/5	0/10
	Promise of forbearance	0	6	1
	Total accepted	45 (75%)	56 (93%)	11(79%)

To recap, the Chinese EFL learners developed their pragmatic competence in terms of comprehension and production significantly over time. They developed a near native-like competence in the four speech act realization examined across tests, even though they differed from the native speakers in the means and contents of realizing certain speech acts.

Discussion

This study longitudinally examined pragmatic development of EFL learners in mainland China, regarding the grammatical improvement and found that the Chinese EFL learners made calculable improvement over time in L2 pragmatics in terms of error judgment and correction. The longitudinal findings contribute to the larger body of research into the question of how L2 competence and LOR contribute to the development of pragmatic competence within the FL environment (e.g., Belz & Kinginger, 2002; Ohta, 2001a, 2001b, 2003; Taguchi, 2007, 2008). The first finding suggests that both the native speakers and EFL speakers in this study viewed pragmatic violations as more serious than grammatical mistakes. Additionally, this study found that the Chinese EFL learners differed from the native speakers in their pragmatic production in terms of contents, address forms and grammar. Consistent with prior research (e.g., Belz & Kinginger, 2002; Ohta, 2001a, 2001b, 2003; Taguchi, 2007, 2008), this study finds that EFL learners are able to make measurable gains over time in L2 pragmatics in terms of error judgment and correction. Like FL learners in Ohta's (2001a, 2001b) study who developed pragmatic sensitivity and grew pragmatically competent in Japanese within the foreign language classroom, the Chinese EFL learners in the present study improved their competence in recognizing pragmatic incongruity in a domestic environment as well.

Second, like the learners in Belz and Kinginger's (2002, 2003) research who became more competent in the use of address forms in French and German with scaffolding from competent native peers, these Chinese EFL learners also developed pragmatic proficiency through multiple exposures to the TL input and putting it into practice in their local context. More importantly, findings suggest that pragmatic development takes place as their overall L2 proficiency progresses, which further implies that one's learning environment is not as influential in developing L2 pragmatic competence as it is used to be (e.g., Carroll, 1967). As reported in Taguchi's (2008, 2011) and Xu et al.'s (2009) studies, with increased proficiency, learners of English developed their pragmatic competence in both interpretation and production over time regardless of their place of residence. Likewise, FL learners in Rodriguez's (2001) research matched their SL counterparts in pragmatics.

Third, this study shows that EFL learners developed pragmatic competence and grammatical ability over time. This finding suggests that an increased overall L2 proficiency brings about improved pragmatic and grammatical competence. Recall that all participants in this study completed their CET-6 certificates by the end

of the study. This improvement resulted in their development of pragmatics and grammar which is consistent with previous findings (e.g., Niezgodna & Röver, 2001; Salsbury & Bardovi-Harlig, 2000; Schauer, 2006; Xu et al., 2009). Such results demonstrate that a concomitant increase in both pragmatics and grammar among L2 learners takes place over time.

Clearly more research in the FL environment is needed to form definitive conclusions about the connections across overall L2 proficiency and grammatical proficiency before definitive conclusions can be drawn. As such, it is necessary to address the limitations of the present study. Participants in this study may have had more exposure to the target language than their counterparts in other areas of the —developed in China; the results might have been different if participants from other underdeveloped areas and participants from other institutions had been included. Secondly, the number of participants in each is group (60 Chinese students and 14 American students) is not equivalent. More evenly matched numbers would have been ideal, but, given the constraints on conducting international research, it was not possible to recruit more American students. Finally, the present instrument did not use a video during data collection. As mentioned above, this is not unprecedented but it is a departure from the original methodology developed by Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei (1998).

In conclusion, these findings make a needed contribution to the body of research exploring the influence of L2 proficiency and the FL learning environment on pragmatic competence (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998; Niezgodna & Röver, 2001; Schauer, 2006; Xu et al., 2009). While more research is needed within the FL environment to make definitive conclusions, these findings—supported by the longitudinal design—are an important step towards suggesting that overall L2 proficiency, pragmatic and grammatical competence improve as the level of overall L2 proficiency increases in the FL setting.

Notes

¹ The last scenario was not considered as saliently problematic according to the U.S. ESL teachers in Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei's (1998) study.

² According to Green, Salkind, and Akey (1997), effect sizes of .01, .06, and .14 are considered as small, medium, and large respectively.

³ According to Cohen (1988), effect sizes of .2, .5, and .8 are small, medium, and large, respectively.

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