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# Acquisition Of Pragmatic Competence And The Implication Of Critical Period Hypothesis

**Thesis Submitted in Fulfilment of  
Requirements for the Degree of MS Applied  
Linguistics**

**RASHIDA MANZOOR (090684017)  
University of Management and  
Technology UMT  
9/19/2012**





**University of Management and Technology UMT  
C II Johar Town Lahore Pakistan**

**The Acquisition Of Pragmatic Competence And The Implication  
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**Thesis Submitted in Fulfilment of Requirements for the Degree of  
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**Submitted to,**

**Pro. Nazir Ahmad Malik**

**By**

**Rashida Manzoor (090684017)**

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## **Dedication**

They say they never come back, they never see whatever we do. But she comes in my dreams so many times and watches her daughter doing so many things. I am sure, her soul will be proud to see my work. I dedicate this thesis to my late mother. May her soul rest in peace.

Amen

## **Declaration**

It is declared that this thesis has been written under the supervision of Pro. Nazir Ahmad Malik. The materials and the data are original, whereas the methodology is adopted, and it is referred properly. A special care also has been given to the references. All references are correct to my best knowledge, therefore in case of any similarity, it will only be a coincidence.

## **Acknowledgement**

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Erica Schramma, (USA).

My brothers Asdullah Manzoor and Naseeb Hanmad.

My cousin and friend Ayesha, and Hafsa, (Norway).

In the end I would not say thanks to my beloved daughter and husband. I could only sing this song for you in my imaginations,

### **"You Raise Me Up"**

When I am down and, oh my soul, so weary;  
When troubles come and my heart burdened be;  
Then, I am still and wait here in the silence,  
Until you come and sit awhile with me.

You raise me up, so I can stand on mountains;  
You raise me up, to walk on stormy seas;  
I am strong, when I am on your shoulders;  
You raise me up... To more than I can be.

You raise me up, so I can stand on mountains;  
You raise me up, to walk on stormy seas;  
I am strong, when I am on your shoulders;  
You raise me up... To more than I can be.

There is no life - no life without its hunger;  
Each restless heart beats so imperfectly;  
But when you come and I am filled with wonder,  
Sometimes, I think I glimpse eternity.

You raise me up, so I can stand on mountains;  
You raise me up, to walk on stormy seas;  
I am strong, when I am on your shoulders;  
You raise me up... To more than I can be.

You raise me up, so I can stand on mountains;  
You raise me up, to walk on stormy seas;  
I am strong, when I am on your shoulders;  
You raise me up... To more than I can be.

You raise me up... To more than I can be  
(Brendan Graham.)

## **Abstract**

Today many second language acquisition researchers agree that the acquisition of pragmatic competence in foreign language is a challenge for learners. The difficulty is not always with the syntactic realisation, or the phonological system or lexicon etc. for these learners, but the actual problem arises when they struggle for the learning of target language pragmatics. The inappropriate use of L2 pragmatics, especially the request strategies leave the impression that these L2 speakers are rude, slow or impolite (Scollon and Scollon, 1983). However, the present study investigates the role that age plays in the acquisition of pragmatic competence. A total number of 30 participants took part in this study. They were divided into 3 groups, group A, British Native Speakers of English, Group B Post-Critical Period Hypotheses and Group C Pre-Critical Period Hypotheses. These participants were given 3 different situations (Higher to lower, Equal to equal, and Lower to higher) to produce responses in the form of requests. It is found that the British native speakers of English are inclined to use more indirect request strategies in the all situations. The Post-critical period hypothesis participants produced more direct responses. The Pre-critical period hypothesis participants were also found to be indirect, similar to the group A, the British Native speakers of English. It was found that age factor plays a crucial role in the learning of pragmatics competence, and there is an inter-cultural difference in the use of request strategies.

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<b>List of Abbreviations</b>		
i.	Age of onset	(AO)
ii.	Critical Period Hypothesis	(CPH)
iii.	Discourse Completion Test	(DCT)
iv.	First Language	(L1)
v.	Second Language	(L2)
vi.	Non-native speakers	(NS)
vii.	Native speakers	(NS)
viii.	Inter Language Pragmatics	(ILP)

## Chapter 1

### Introduction to the Pragmatic Competence

The chapter 1 introduces the present study. It has been divided into 6 parts. The first part, (1.1) is about the introduction of the pragmatic studies. The second part, (1.2) is an over view of the whole thesis and shows the arrangement of the chapter. The third part, (1.3) is all about the background and definition of the pragmatics and pragmatic competence. It also differentiates the inter-language pragmatics and cross-cultural pragmatics. The part fourth, (1.4) describes the request strategies and the classification of the different request strategies. The part five, (1.5) explains the role of pragmatic competence in communication. The part six presents the introduction of the present study.

#### 1.1 Introduction

The study of language has been encapsulated into syntax, semantics and pragmatics. The study of Pragmatics is a subfield of linguistics. Few decades before many researchers used to regard pragmatics as a fuzzy area. It was also thought that the study of pragmatics was not worthy of classifying as an independent and major field of language studies (Thomason, 1973). But in recent years, the study of pragmatics has been given a significant attention as an independent branch of enquiry in linguistics studies. The growing literature on the communication strategies and large number of empirical studies on speech act behaviour shows that the significance of pragmatics has been realised both in socio and applied linguistics by most of the researchers. To acquire pragmatic competence in second language (L2) appears as a challenge for learners. Today, several studies, for instance Rintell, (1981); Blum-Kulka, (1982, 1983); El-Shazly, (1993); Alammari, (2000); Novick, (2000); Bajoudah, (2002), have found that even after attaining high level of language competence and command over target language, the second language learners remain unsuccessful to communicate in target language successfully. The lack of pragmatic competence leave the impression that these L2 speakers are rather, slow, impolite. Therefore, it is very important for L2 learners to acquire pragmatic competence along with grammatical knowledge and text organization in target language. The lack of pragmatic competence makes it difficult for the learners to actively take part in

L2 settings. On many occasions it becomes the reason of a breakdown in communication between two persons or communities, if required strategies are not used in common conducts such as, requesting for help, asking for leave, and ordering for something. Scholars have tried to find out the solution of acquiring pragmatic competence in second language. In this context the present study presents a solution to the acquisition of pragmatic competence and shows how age factor plays a role the acquisition of pragmatic competence. The role of Critical Period Hypothesis in language acquisition has been found few decades before (Singleton, 1995). To my knowledge, there is no study dealing with the question of acquisition of pragmatic competence that might be subjected to such a critical period. The aim of the present study is to investigate the linkage between the acquisition of pragmatic competence and critical period hypothesis for language acquisition, and how age factor plays a role in acquisition of pragmatic competence. This would be an addition in the existing literature of pragmatic studies.

## **1.2 An overview of the thesis**

The present thesis has been divided into five chapters, whereas each chapter consists of section and sub-sections. A special attention has been given to create a logical co-relation among all chapters. These chapters are arranged as following:

**Chapter 1** is about the introduction to the present studies. It also defines pragmatics and the connection between inter- language and cross-linguistic pragmatics. The request strategies and their classification have also been described in detail and finally the importance of acquiring pragmatics competence is briefly highlighted.

**Chapter 2** presents brief literature review of the previous studies of inter-cultural pragmatics. Researchers in recent times have found inter-language and cross-language differences in requests strategies. The second part of this chapter defines and discusses the role of critical period in the acquisition of L1 and L2. It also considers and raises the issue of leaning of pragmatic competence and how it is subjected to critical period hypothesis.

**Chapter 3** explains the methodology. How the hypothesis leads to the research questions that will be addressed in this thesis. It also describes the method used to test the research questions, how the data is analysed, and presents the results of the

**Chapter 4** discusses the use of request strategies by all three groups. It also describes and encodes the results. And finally, it considers whether there is a critical period for the acquisition of pragmatic competence.

**Chapter 5** summarizes the findings of the present study, presents discussion of the results. It also gives answers to the questions which were raised in the chapter 3. Additionally, a note based on author's own is also given in this chapter. Towards the end it considers some of its limitations, and raises some further research questions about the relationship between critical period hypothesis and pragmatic competence.

### **1.3 Background of the pragmatic studies**

#### **1.3.1 Definition**

Pierce, (1905), used the term pragmatics in his philosophical works. Pragmatics is considered relatively as a young linguistic discipline compared to Phonetics and Syntax, which established itself as an independent area of linguistic research only about 40 years ago, (Schauer 2009). The studies of pragmatics has its roots in language philosophy and later it developed as a result of the ideas concerning with the functions and use of language by many philosophers, for instance, Wittgenstein (1953: in Bach, 2004) Austin, (1962), Searle, (1969, 1975, 1976) and Grice, (1968, 1975). An account of different definition of pragmatics, cited in Schauer, (2009) is given. Perhaps the most quoted definition of pragmatics is proposed by Morris, (1938) who defined pragmatics as 'the study of the relation of signs to interpreters' (p. 6).

Pragmatics is the study of language from the point of view of users, especially of the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction and the effects their use of language has on other participants in the act of communication. (Crystal,1985, p. 240

Linguistic pragmatics (from Greek pragma, activity/deed) is the study of communication principles to which people adhere when they interact rationally and efficiently in social contexts. Speakers/writers follow these principles to imply additional meaning to a sentence, and hearer/readers follow these principles to infer the possible meaning of an utterance out of all available options in a given context. Pragmatics describes the linguistic forms, action patterns and strategies that are used to imply and interpret, which enable interlocutors to comprehend the intended, but not uttered meaning. (Bublitz, 2001, p. 27)