

## Motivation, amount of interaction, length of residence, and ESL learners' pragmatic competence

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### *Abstract*

This study examined how motivation for learning English, the amount of contact with English, and length of residence in the target language area affects Korean graduate students' English pragmatic skills. The study attempted to account for differential pragmatic development among 50 graduate-level Korean students in relation to individual factors mentioned above. The data were collected using three types of elicitation instruments: a written background questionnaire, a discourse completion test, and the mini-Attitude/Motivation Test Battery. Descriptive and inferential statistics (correlation coefficients, and multiple regressions) were used to analyze the data. The findings of the study revealed that (a) the level of motivation had a positive and moderate relationship with the ESL learners' L2 pragmatic competence; and (b) the amount of L2 contact and length of residence had only a weak and insignificant impact on the participants' pragmatic competence.

**Keywords:** motivation, amount of interaction, ESL, pragmatic competence, length of stay

### **Introduction**

In the past two decades, a substantial body of empirical research in interlanguage pragmatics has described how speech acts performed by non-native speakers differ from the target language norms. These studies have focused on either the production or comprehension of speech acts such as requests, refusals, apologies, and compliments. Compared to other studies of second-language acquisition (SLA), which have examined variation among individuals with respect to L2 language learning for quite some time, most ILP studies to date have been limited to finding how L2 learners perform a particular speech act, and there has been relatively little inquiry into how they acquire L2 pragmatics and which factors affect learners' acquisition of L2

pragmatics (Bardovi-Harlig, 1999; Kasper & Rose, 2002). Thus, ILP researchers have argued for additional inquiry into the variables that are known to potentially affect learners' pragmatic development.

Researchers have found that "high levels of proficiency do not guarantee concomitantly high levels of pragmatic competence" (Bardovi-Harlig, 1999, p. 686) and that other variables like length of stay in the target community, quality and quantity of input, and level of interaction should be taken into account when assessing L2 learners' performance. The role of length of residence in the target community, quality and amount of input and level of motivation on learners' pragmatic development are important issues to consider (Bardovi-Harlig

1999; Kasper & Rose, 2002). Furthermore, the inconsistency of research findings regarding the impact that individual differences such as length of residence and motivation might have on learners' pragmatic development requires more research (Churchill & Dufon 2006; Félix-Brasdefer 2004; Kasper & Rose 2002).

A second-language context supports the acquisition of pragmatic issues as learners encounter more opportunities to use the language, and are generally exposed to the L2 more intensively (Eslami-Rasekh, 2005; Segalowitz & Freed, 2004). However, the assumption that that living abroad provides an ideal context for language learning has been questioned by other researchers (Yager, 1998). The factors that each individual brings to the learning context are both crucial and complex. Learners differ in terms of how ready they are linguistically and cognitively to seize and benefit from the opportunities provided for language learning (Segalowitz & Freed, 2004; DeKeyser, 1991). This study, thus, considers how different variables, such as motivation, the amount of contact with English, and type of contact, affect Korean graduate students' English pragmatic skills. By examining the effects of these factors on L2 pragmatic competence, we hope to gain more knowledge about the dynamic interactions between learners' pragmatic development and individual variables, creating a better understanding of the potential influence of these variables in L2 pragmatic acquisition success.

In what follows we will first present the theoretical framework of the study. Following that the methodology of the study will be presented. The results of the study are presented next, and at the end the findings are discussed and conclusions provided.

### **Theoretical framework**

*The role of individual variables in the development of second language pragmatics* Researching individual differences (ID) in language learning has a long tradition in SLA. However, the role of ID in the acquisition of L2 pragmatics has rarely been addressed. Existing research in SLA has investigated how the social, psychological, cognitive, and personal dimensions of L2 learning impact how much and how quickly the individual will learn an L2 (Collentine & Freed, 2004).

The first dimension falls under the heading of social factors. The basic theory is that the language learners' emotional and social attachment to the target language culture has a positive effect on the amount of language learned. Cross-cultural adjustment and acculturation have been cited as particularly important in determining how much language will be learned. Additionally, attitudes (Schumann, 1986) and intended length of residence in the target language area are other crucial factors. A language learner who intends to remain in the target language area for a long time is more likely to develop extensive contact with the target language members, promoting L2 learning (Schumann, 1986). L language development differences is also attributed to psychological factors and includes variables such as language shock, culture shock, culture stress, integrative or instrumental motivation, and ego-permeability. The third group refers to cognitive factors and includes the learner's language aptitude, intelligence, and differing attention levels. Learners may differ in where they direct or orient their attention to the input they receive, as well as the output they produce, and these differences may play a crucial role in developmental outcomes in language learning (Skehan & Foster, 2001).

The final set of individual variables is related to age, gender, anxiety, self-esteem, tolerance of ambiguity, language learning styles, and language learning strategies (Larsen-Freeman, 2001). Research suggests that no single variable can account for the rate and success of language acquisition. Nevertheless, the study of SLA within and across various contexts of learning would lead to a broadening of our perspective concerning the most important variables that affect and impede L2 acquisition.

#### *Length of residence*

Length of residence is construed as one of the ID variables that affect learners' different developmental stages of L2 pragmatics. Many studies have used length of stay in a target speech community as an indicator of L2 pragmatic acquisition (Han, 2005). Researchers argue that language learners living in a target speech community have many opportunities to interact in the L2, which leads to the learners' successful acquisition of pragmatic competence. Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1986) found a relationship between length of stay in the target speech community and the target-like perception of directness and politeness in an L2. Olshtain and Blum-Kulka's study (1985) also showed that the amount of external modification used by L2 learners approximated community pragmatic norms after five to seven years of stay in the target language environment, and that such convergence correlated positively with duration of stay. Takahashi and Beebe (1987) compared Japanese EFL and ESL learners' production of refusals and found that the ESL learners' refusals were more target-like. House (1996) found that learners who had stayed in English-speaking countries consistently performed better than their peers who had not, both before and after instruction. Röver (1996) found that German EFL students who had spent as little

as six weeks in English-speaking countries outperformed learners who did not in the use of pragmatic routines. Bouton (1999) investigated how length of residence affects non-native speakers' understanding of implicature in American English. Similarly, Churchill (2001) recorded a decrease in direct want statements in the English request realizations of his JFL learners over a month in the target language context. Overall, these studies suggest that longer residence in the target language community yield greater L2 pragmatic attainments.

Contrary to what these studies claim, however, some researchers argue that length of residence in the target country has not been identified as a good predictor of L2 attainment and is not sufficient in the achievement of increased proficiency in L2. Kondo (1997) examined Japanese EFL learners' apology performance before and after one year of home stay in the United States, and compared them with L1 speakers of Japanese and American English. In some respects, the students' apologies became more target-like, but in others they did not. In a more recent study, Rodriguez (2001) investigated the effect of a semester studying in a target-language community by examining students' request strategies. The findings of the study showed no advantage at all for the study-abroad students. Roever (2001) also observed that neither learners' comprehension of implicatures nor performance of speech acts in English benefited from the learners' time abroad. It is possible that, much like how children acquire L1 through continuous interaction with adults and peers, L2 learners may need to be involved in intensive interaction with native speakers and fully embrace the L2 culture in order to achieve native-like pragmatic skills in the L2 (Ninio & Snow, 1996).

Although the studies mentioned above provide evidence of the relation between pragmatic development and learners' length of residence in the target language community, one might wonder to what extent pragmatic ability is influenced by the intensity of learners' exposure to the target language, as opposed to the quantitative measure of length of residence in the target language community. Related to this, from their longitudinal study of learners' acquisition of temporality, Klein, Dietrich, and Noyau (1995) concluded that what matters is intensity, not length, of interaction. Similarly, Matsumura (2003) asserted that acquisition of pragmatic competence is not associated with the length of stay, because learners vary individually in the amount of interaction in an L2 as well as opportunities to interact in the target culture. Thus, intensity of interaction may account for more of the learning process than duration of stay in the L2 speech community.

Kasper and Rose (2002), have raised concerns as to whether pragmatic ability is influenced by the quality of nonnative speakers' exposure and social contacts or the quantitative measure of length of residence. These researchers consider intensity of interaction to be the important factor rather than the length of residence. For example, Bella's (2011) study on invitation refusals by L2 learners of Greek revealed that opportunities for interaction are much more critical than length of residence in the target community for the development of learners' pragmatic competence. Bella's (2012) study revealed similar results in relation to request modification strategies. These findings suggest that the impact of length of residence in the target community and intensity of interaction with native speakers on pragmatic development remains an open question which is worth exploring further.

As suggested by Félix-Brasdefer (2004), the results of studies dealing with the effects of length of residence on pragmatic ability should be viewed with caution due to the variation research findings present regarding both the pragmatic measure used (comprehension, production, etc.) and the time span proposed for pragmatic development to take place.

#### *Amount of interaction*

Seliger's 1977 study of the role of interaction patterns of ESL students provides empirical support that target language use is essential in second-language acquisition. Seliger claimed that the more learners seek out opportunities to use the target language and interact intensively with native speakers, the more competent they become. Stern (1983) also believed that committed language learners "seek communicative contact with target language community members and become actively involved as participants in authentic language use" (p. 411). Pica (1996) and Ellis (1994) also offered evidence to validate the positive correlations between interaction in the target language and success in language learning. Learners acquire comprehensible input through target language interactions that provide input on how to successfully use the language, enact speech acts, and carry out redressive action (LoCastro, 2003). Marriot (1995) study examined the acquisition of sociolinguistic competence by Australian secondary students who participated in exchange programs in Japan. She observed how learners benefit more from "self- and other-correction" procedures in interactive situations in a Japanese homestay context. Cooperative interactants who surrounded the learners contributed significantly to the development of these learners' L2 pragmatic awareness.

Likewise, Edmondson and House (1991) suggested that exposure to proper pragmatic input in the target language does have a beneficial effect on the development of pragmatic competence. Kasper (1998) noted that “sustained contact with the target language and culture may be required to attain native pragmatic knowledge and skill” (p. 200). Resonating this, Wray (1999) proposed that interactions with native speakers helps language learners obtain the pragmatic rules of use in the target language. Additionally, in a study on Japanese ESL learners’ perception of appropriateness in advice situations, Matsumura (2003) found that the amount of exposure to the target language was a significant factor predicting learners’ pragmatic ability.

#### *Motivation*

Although there are a number of studies in SLA that suggest motivation is one of the variables that provide the primary impetus to initiate L2 learning, and the driving force to sustain the long-term learning process, there is a relative dearth of data that specifically focus on a possible link between motivation and L2 learners’ pragmatic competence. Additionally, depending on the domain of language to be examined, motivation has been found to have more or less effect. Au (1998) pointed out that a number of studies have revealed zero or even negative relationships between motivation and L2 proficiency (Clement, Gardner, & Smythe, 1980; Kasper & Schmidt, 1996). The importance of motivation in interlanguage pragmatics was raised as one of twelve basic questions by Kasper and Schmidt (1996). Niezgodna and Rover (2001) showed that environment may not be the only factor influencing the development of pragmatic competence and affective variables may also play an important role in learners’ L2 pragmatic acquisition. Schmidt (1993) observed that “those who are concerned with

establishing relationships with target language speakers are more likely to pay close attention to the pragmatic aspects of input and to struggle to understand than those who are not so motivated” (p. 36).

The first systematic studies to examine the effects of motivation on L2 pragmatics were by Takahashi, 2001 and 2005. Takahashi (2001) speculated that motivation could be one of the most influential individual variables influencing differences in learners’ noticing of target request forms. The study shows that highly motivated learners willingly adopt target standards for pragmatic action, whereas less-motivated learners are more likely to resist accepting target norms. Takahashi argued that learners’ personal values may influence how much effort they expend on understanding L2 pragmatics and sociolinguistic practices and how much of a positive affect they have toward a target-language community.

Evidence from research studies indicates that availability of input through interlocutors or models is a necessary condition for development of pragmatic competence. However, learner-internal factors may control the conversion of input to intake and consequently hinder or boost the development of pragmatic knowledge. Accordingly, the present study examines the role of motivation in interlanguage pragmatics.

Considering the importance of length of residence, amount of interaction and motivation in second language acquisition, it is worthwhile to examine whether these three variables play a role in the pragmatic competence of ESL learners. The study focuses on the performance of compliments and compliment responses by Korean ESL learners.

### *Compliments*

Compliments are one of the frequently used speech acts in everyday encounters, yet they are intricate and could be challenging for L2 learners. They are studied in different languages and compared across languages and cultures (e.g., Golato, 2005; Lorenzo-Dus, 2001; Maíz-Arévalo, 2012; Manes, 1983; Wolfson & Manes, 1981). One of the earliest studies is Wolfson and Manes (1981) empirical and descriptive work on compliments in American English. Wolfson and Manes (1981) argued that compliments in American English are highly patterned, with a very restricted set of syntax and lexicon. Wolfson and Manes (1981) also found that the most frequent topics of compliments fall into two major categories: those having to do with appearance/possessions, and those addressing ability/performance. Under the category of appearance/possessions, compliments tend to be on clothing and other personal features such as hairstyles and on possessions such as cars and household items.

Complimenting can be treated as a social strategy employed to start or maintain solidarity in mundane interactions between colleagues, neighbors, or close friends. Holmes (1988) essentially agreed with this view by treating compliments as “positively affective speech acts directed to the addressee that serve to increase or consolidate the solidarity between the speaker and addressee” (p. 486). According to Herbert (1989), compliments establish solidarity with the listener by praising some feature relevant to that listener, of which the listener approves. Compliments serve many other social functions as well. Under certain conditions, compliments replace speech acts such as apologies, thanking, and greetings. Compliments can also be used to soften the effects of criticism or other face-threatening

acts such as requests (Billmyer, 1990). As Wolfson (1983) suggested, compliments may even be used as sarcasm (e.g., “You play a good game of tennis — for a woman”) (pp. 86-93).

### *Compliment responses*

Compliments trigger a number of response options for the addressee (Holmes, 1995; Maíz-Arévalo, 2012; Pomerantz, 1978). One early study focusing specifically on compliment responses is Pomerantz’s (1978) descriptive analysis of compliment responses in American English. Based on her data, Pomerantz posited that agreement/acceptance and disagreement/rejection were the predominant compliment response type in American English.

Gracefully accepting compliments without seeming to praise oneself can result in a dilemma for the recipient of the compliment (Herbert, 1986). Manes (1983) also recognized the dilemma posed to receivers of compliments and offered a set of strategies which enable speakers to both accept but not necessarily agree with the compliment.

As Herbert (1990) pointed out, “thank you” is considered the most appropriate response to a compliment in the United States. While this response is appropriate in most situations, researchers have stated that “an unadorned ‘thanks’ may unintentionally limit or even end an interaction between status equals, and deflecting compliments may serve to extend the interaction between interlocutors, which may lead to interlanguage development” (Billmyer, Jakar, & Lee, 1989, p. 17). Wolfson (1989) agreed stating that a native speaker of English may strategically use compliments to open and to lengthen the conversation. Using a simple “thanks” then may

inadvertently result in the opposite outcome by limiting opportunities to extend the interaction. As a result, interaction opportunities for the nonnative speakers may be hindered (Wolfson, 1989). Being able to compliment others and to respond to compliments effectively will enhance interaction possibilities for the learners and therefore, should promote their pragmatic development.

### **Purpose of the study**

This study examined the Korean ESL learners' level of approximation to native speakers' use of giving compliments and responding to compliments, and the effect of the three research variables (motivation to learn English, the amount of interaction in English, and length of residence in the target-language area) on the pragmatic competence level attained. The following research questions were addressed:

- 1) How do differences in the Korean ESL learners' degree of motivation correlate with their achievement of pragmatic competence?
- 2) How does the amount of interaction in English contribute to the differences in the Korean ESL learners' pragmatic competence?
- 3) How do differences in the Korean ESL learners' length of residence contribute to the differences in the Korean ESL learners' pragmatic competence?

### **Methodology**

#### *Participants*

The participants of the study were 50 Korean graduate students majoring in different academic fields at Texas A&M University in the United States. The length of time the participants had spent in the United States ranged from two years to eight years. The participants were recruited from

various Korean communities (e.g., Korean students' association, Korean churches).

#### *Instrumentation*

The data for the present study were collected using three types of elicitation instruments: a written background questionnaire, a discourse completion test, and the mini-Attitude/Motivation Test Battery.

#### *Background Information Questionnaire*

The researchers used the background questionnaire to identify the amount of interaction in English the participants experienced in their daily encounters and their length of residence in the United States. The questionnaire elicited information on the total amount of time participants used English during a typical week, both inside and outside the classroom (e.g., the time spent speaking English, watching television or listening to the radio, reading books in English, and writing email), and the number of years spent in the United States.

#### *Discourse Completion Test*

Data for examining pragmatic competence of Korean ESL learners in the speech acts of compliment and compliment responses were collected via a written DCT. Social variables of power and distance were considered in designing the DCT situations and only complimenting scenarios assumed by the researchers to be experienced by the participants in their daily living in the L2 community were used for the study.

Social distance was kept constant in all situations (only acquaintances), since research has indicated that the great majority of compliments occur between interlocutors who are friends or acquaintances, rather than strangers (e.g., Manes, 1983; Wolfson, 1981, 1989).

**Table 1: DCT situations**

	Distance	Dominance/Power	Compliment Type
Situation 1	-	=	Ability
Situation 2	-	-	Performance
Situation 3	-	+	Appearance
Situation 4	-	=	Possession

*Notes:* “-“ indicates little distance or dominance; “ = “ indicates equal dominance; “ + ” indicates more dominance

### *The Mini-Attitude/Motivation Test Battery*

The mini-attitude/motivation test battery (mini-AMTB) was used to measure the participants' degree of motivation to learn English. Developed by Gardner (1985), the AMTB is the most frequently used assessment tool to measure students' attitudes and motivation to learn another language, and to assess various individual difference variables based on the socio-educational model. The mini-AMTB is made up of 11 items that fall into five dimensions of motivational constructs: integrativeness (items 1-3), attitudes toward learning (items 4 and 5), motivation (items 6-8), instrumental orientation (item 9), and language anxiety (items 10 and 11). The mini-AMTB uses a seven-point interval scale anchored at the end points, with the mid-point as neutral. The mini-AMTB has recently been used in many studies of L2 motivation (e.g., Baker & Macintyre, 2000), because it reduces administration time while measuring the basic constructs of the original AMTB.

### *Data collection procedures*

A pilot study was conducted prior to the main study to determine the practical feasibility of the inquiry and to ensure clarity of the questionnaire and the discourse completion test. In the main study, participants first signed a consent form confirming their willingness to participate. The researchers provided the participants with detailed instructions about the tasks in their L1. The instruments were administered individually and each participant was asked to complete the

written open DCT first and then the background information and motivation questionnaire.

### **Data analyses**

A statistical analysis of the data was carried out using version 14.0 of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. Tests for normality of variables, multicollinearity among variables, and interrater reliability were taken to prevent against validity issues and to improve the reliability of the quantitative analyses. Descriptive statistics were used and the means for level of pragmatic competence, amount of interaction in English, length of residence in the target environment and motivation were converted to standardized scores (z scores) for each participant. The standardized data were then analyzed by performing a Pearson product-moment correlation and multiple regression ( $\alpha = .05$ ).

Pearson's  $r$  correlation coefficients were carried out to examine if there is a statistically significant correlation among three independent variables (motivation for learning English, the amount of interaction in English, and length of residence in the L2 community) and Korean ESL learners' L2 pragmatic competence.

Following bivariate (correlational) relationship analysis, multiple regression analysis was performed to determine the joint effects of all independent variables on the dependent variable. A multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine if the findings in correlation



coefficient analysis are upheld by the multiple regression analysis.

### Results

This study aimed to account for the different levels of pragmatic development among fifty graduate-level Korean ESL learners and whether the learners' pragmatic ability was influenced by motivation levels for learning English, the amount of interaction

in English, and length of their residence in the target-language community.

First, univariate descriptive statistics were conducted to obtain mean, standard deviation, skewness and kurtosis of the raw data for each observed variable. Table 2 displays a summary of univariate descriptive statistics for the three observed variables.

**Table 2: Descriptive statistics of research variables**

	N	Mean	Std.	Skewness		Kurtosis	
				Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
DCT	50	1.85	.50	.129	.337	-.622	.662
Amount of Interaction	50	32.04	23.09	.632	.337	-.924	.662
Motivation	50	4.67	.74	-.252	.337	.011	.662
Length of Residence	50	3.94	1.57	.597	.337	-.231	.662
Valid (listwise)	N 50						

The mean level in the DCT representing the L2 pragmatic competence of the Korean ESL learners when performing complimenting behavior indicated that the Korean ESL subjects attained a relatively high level of English pragmatic competence. A mean of 1.85 suggests that the Korean ESL learners' DCT rating is close to the "acceptable" category, which means that their dialogues contained small errors with respect to pragmatic norms. The total amount of time the participants spent interacting in English each week had a mean of 32.04. The seven-point scale to determine subjects' level of motivation for learning English had a mean of 4.67, which implies that the participants had a favorable attitude toward learning English.

Measures of skewness and kurtosis were examined to ensure that the data of individual variables represented a normal distribution. As seen in Table 2, the skewness and kurtosis values of the three variables all lie between  $\pm 1.0$ , which means that all three variables fall within the "excellent" range as acceptable variables for further analyses (George and Mallery, 2001).

The Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to examine the degree of consistency in the two independent raters who scored the participants' DCT scores. There was a correlation coefficient of .61 using Eisenstein and Bodman's (1993) nativeness rating scale for assessing the participants' pragmatic competence.

Meanwhile, multicollinearity was found to pose no threat to the reliability of the subsequent regression analyses.

#### *DCT rating results*

Results of the DCT rating showed that 71 (35.5 percent) of the dialogues achieved a rating of 1 (native-like). A large number, 92 (46 percent), obtained a rating of 2 (acceptable) and contained small errors that did not affect understanding or appropriateness. Thirty-one dialogues (15.5 percent) received a rating of 3 (problematic) which meant that they contained errors that might cause misunderstandings. There were 6 dialogues (3 percent) that were rated as 4 (not acceptable) meaning that they were difficult to comprehend and/or there were instances of a violation of a social norm.

The analysis of factors that contribute to success in achieving L2 pragmatics were performed using DCT scores as the criterion measure of learners' pragmatic skills.

Correlation coefficient analysis was performed to investigate the relationship among the four variables of interest.

#### *Research Question One*

The first research question examined to what extent learners' pragmatic competence is related to their degree of motivation. To examine this relationship, a Pearson product-moment correlation analysis with alpha set at .05 was performed. The analysis indicated a significant and strong relationship between DCT scores and the level of motivation ( $r = -.305, p = .031$ ).

Next, we examined which subcomponents of motivation are correlated with pragmatic competence. Descriptive statistics (table 3) show that the measures of skewness and kurtosis of the five motivation subscales were within acceptable levels and consistent with a relatively normal distribution. Thus we followed with the correlation analysis.

**Table 3: Descriptive statistics of the motivation subscales**

	N	Mean	Std.	Skewness		Kurtosis	
				Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Integrativeness	50	4.64	.96	-.477	.337	.154	.662
Attitude	50	4.81	1.01	-.316	.337	.390	.662
Motivation	50	4.52	1.04	-.081	.337	-.639	.662
Instrumental	50	6.04	1.15	-.980	.337	.081	.662
Anxiety	50	4.11	1.27	-.218	.337	-.512	.662
Valid N (listwise)	50						

As shown in table 4, motivation subscale showed the highest correlation ( $r = -.287, p = .043$ ) with participants' DCT scores, followed by language anxiety with the second highest correlation ( $r = -.245, p = .086$ ). Both constructs show moderate, statistically significant correlations. The positive relationship between anxiety and pragmatic competence was rather unexpected because previous studies in

general have found a negative relationship between anxiety and L2 achievement (Gardner, Day, & MacIntyre, 1992). However, some researchers have found experimental evidence that anxiety could be beneficial in language learning (Brown, Robson, & Rosenkjar, 2001).

**Table 4: Correlations between pragmatic competence and motivation subscales**

Variables	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
Pragmatic Competence & Integrativeness	-.169	.241
Pragmatic Competence & Attitude toward learning situation	-.151	.294
Pragmatic Competence & Motivation	-.287	.043
Pragmatic Competence & Instrumental orientation	-.156	.280
Pragmatic Competence & Language anxiety	-.245	.086

The other subscales on motivation survey (integrative and instrumental orientation, attitude toward learning situation) and the pragmatic competence did not reveal any statistically significant relationships.

#### *Research Question Two*

The second research question examined whether learners' pragmatic ability is related to amount of interaction in the target language. A Pearson product-moment correlation matrix was used to examine the relationship between the amount of interaction in English and the students' level of L2 pragmatic ability.

Contrary to what was expected, the correlation coefficient for amount of interaction was not statistically significant ( $r = -.194, p = .177$ ). Research has shown that the type of interaction, rather than the amount of interaction, is instrumental in developing pragmatic ability (Parr, 1988; Freed, 1990; Ward & Rana-Deuba, 2000). Thus, a Pearson product-moment correlation matrix between separate types of interaction in the target language and the learners' pragmatic competence was performed.

Descriptive statistics in Table 5 show mean, standard deviation, skewness and kurtosis of the raw data for the four types of interaction.

**Table 5: Descriptive statistics of the amount of interaction variable**

	N	Mean	Std.	Skewness		Kurtosis	
				Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Speaking	50	6.68	7.18	2.025	.337	4.702	.662
Reading	50	14.97	15.35	.958	.337	-.378	.662
Listening	50	6.99	5.47	.629	.337	-.374	.662
Writing	50	3.39	4.55	4.361	.337	24.038	.662
Valid (listwise)	N 50						

A review of the summary statistics showed an abnormal distribution for two of the subcomponents of amount of interaction variable (speaking and writing). Thus, a data transformation on the variables (speaking and writing) which did not show normal distribution was executed.

Table 6 presents the correlation between the participants' DCT performance and the three interaction subfactors.

**Table 6: Correlations between pragmatic competence and amount of interaction subscales**

Variables	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
Pragmatic Competence & Sqrt (Speaking)	.070	.628
Pragmatic Competence & Reading	-.315	.026
Pragmatic Competence & Listening	.046	.752

The correlation coefficients between the different types of interaction and the pragmatic competence were small and a salient relationship was identified only between time spent reading books and the DCT scores ( $r = -.315$ ,  $p = .026$ ).

### *Research Question Three*

The third research question examined to what extent achievement of L2 pragmatic competence is related to the length of residence in the second language community. The correlation analysis showed that the relationship between the two variables was in the desired direction; that is, longer length of residence was more likely to lead to better outcomes in L2 pragmatics. However, the correlation coefficient ( $r = -.141$ ,  $p = .329$ ) was not significant.

### *Regression analysis*

The third phase of our analysis consisted of multivariate statistical analyses. When examined individually, the regression model of the effect of motivation on pragmatic competence was significant and about 10 percent of the variation in the dependent variable ( $R^2 = .093$ ) was accounted for by motivation variable. However, the model including either amount of interaction or length of residence as the independent variable failed to demonstrate the powerful relationship between these variables and the dependent variable.

Multiple regression modeling was then used to analyze the overall contribution of each independent variable with the influence of other independent variables controlled for,

evaluating the contribution of total independent variables to the total explained variation in the dependent variable. The aim was to examine two questions: Was it possible that students' L2 pragmatic achievement was best predicted as a combination of all three predictor variables of motivation, amount of interaction, and length of residence? Or did a single predictor variable yield greater predictability? To answer these questions, a series of multiple regressions were performed by first entering two predictor variables (amount of interaction and length of residence) after controlling for the strongest predictor identified based on the correlation analyses (motivation).

Inspection of the squared multiple correlations ( $R^2$ ) suggests that overall, 7.5 percent of the variance related to participants' L2 pragmatic competence was explained by two variables (amount of interaction and length of residence). Based on Cohen (1988), this effect size is considered to be small and not significant ( $F(2, 47) = 1.899$ ,  $p = 0.161$ ).

Next, in order to explore the presence of possible relationships between predictors and outcomes, all three independent variables (motivation, amount of interaction, and length of residence) were added to the model, and changes in the values and direction of parameter estimates as well as changes in the significance and the size of the  $R^2$  were recorded. When motivation predictor was added to the model, the value of  $R^2$  did change substantially (from  $R^2 = .075$  to  $R^2 = .154$ ). Inspection of the squared

multiple correlations ( $R^2$ ) suggests that moderate and statistically significant relationships were found among these predictors,  $F(3, 46) = 2,802, p = 0.050$ . The three independent variables explained about 16 percent of the variance.

To explain the degree to which the independent variables (motivation, amount of interaction, and length of residence) affect the L2 pragmatic achievement of the learners, the weight of their respective standardized regression coefficient, or beta ( $\beta$ ), was calculated for each predictor variable. The predictor variable of motivation yielded a beta of  $-.286$  and a  $t$  value of  $-2.083$  resulting in a significant relationship ( $p = .043$ ) while the predictor variable of the amount of interaction and length of residence yielded a beta of  $-.197/-.206$  and a  $t$  of  $-1.395/-1.477$  resulting in a non-significant relationship ( $p = .170/.147$ ), respectively.

Findings from multivariate regression analysis are consistent with those obtained through examination of simple correlations, and suggest that among all predictors considered in the present study motivation was the main predictor of the criterion variable (pragmatic competence).

### Discussion and conclusions

This study was undertaken in an attempt to account for Korean ESL learners' pragmatic competence, as functions of their motivation levels for learning English, amount of interaction in English, and length of residence in the target-language community. Pearson's  $r$  correlation coefficients were calculated to assess which variable was the better predictor of participants' pragmatic competence. The correlation between pragmatic competence and motivation was moderately significant; contrary to what was expected, however, the correlation

coefficient for the amount of interaction and length of residence was relatively low.

The results support other research findings that indicate motivation as an important factor in second-language pragmatic acquisition (e.g., Cook, 2001; Niezgoda & Rover, 2001; Schmidt, 1993; Takahashi, 2001, 2005). With respect to this finding, data was further examined to check the extent to which the subcomponents of motivation were related to the participants' L2 pragmatic competence. The results show that learners' pragmatic competence is associated with some motivational factors but not with all motivation subscales. In particular, the learners' motivational intensity was found to be closely related to their pragmatic competence. The one exception to this finding was a positive relationship between language anxiety and the participants' pragmatic performance. This finding is incongruent with other research in which language anxiety has been shown to correlate negatively with language achievement (Gardner & Macintyre, 1993; Horwitz, 2001). Our results are not unexpected given that some studies indicate what would typically be labeled as detrimental anxiety could be sometimes facilitative for language learning (Brown, Robson, & Rosenkjar, 2001).

Our study indicates that the relationship between amount of interaction and pragmatics competence was weak and non-significant. The findings of the present study are inconsistent with the findings of some previous studies, which found a statistically significant relationship between interaction and students' pragmatic abilities (Bacon, 2002; Hashimoto, 1993; Lapkin, Hart, & Swain, 1995). Our findings, however, agree with some other studies indicating that informal contact does not necessarily result in pragmatic development (e.g., Bouton,

1994; Masumura, 2003). The fact that increased opportunities to interact in the L2 did not necessarily result in L2 pragmatic achievement is an important issue for future research. Possible explanations might be that the amount of interaction itself was insufficient and thus failed to contribute to increases of learners' pragmatic knowledge. Lapkin, Hart, and Swain (1995) suggested that many factors affect how informal contact relates to acquisition, including the type and quality of informal contact, and individual differences, such as students' second-language level, language experience, learning style, attitude toward the host culture, awareness of cultural differences in language use, and willingness to accommodate to pragmatic norms in a L2 and motivation. Related to this suggestion, Siegal (1994) and LoCastro (1998) focused on learners' pragmatic development in relation to their subjectivity and agency. McKay and Wong (1996) argued that we should study L2 learners' subjectivity when we examine their L2 use and development. As DuFon (1999) asserted, little is known about how individual learners take advantage of opportunities to interact, and what factors influence their willingness and ability to do so.

Additionally, Schmidt (1993) argued:

*Simple exposure to appropriate input is unlikely to be sufficient for acquisition of L2 pragmatic knowledge because the specific linguistic realizations are sometimes opaque to learners and the relevant contextual factors to be noticed may be defined differently or may not be salient enough for the learner (p.36).*

Also, Kasper (1998) proposed that while authentic L2 input is essential for pragmatic learning, it does not secure successful pragmatic development.

Another major finding of the study was the lack of correlation between the learners' pragmatic competence with their length of residence in L2 community. This is contrary to the findings of studies which revealed the positive effects of length of residence on pragmatic competence (Churchill, 2001; House, 1996; Kuriseak, 2006). While these studies claim that a lengthy residence in the target-language area would tend to promote second-language learning, many questions remain about the validity of that assumption. Regarding this, the result in the present study supports findings from other studies that show length of residence may have a negligible effect on the eventual attainment of pragmatic skills in English (Bouton, 1994; Kondo, 1997; Roever, 2001; Rodriguez, 2001).

One might expect that students living for an extended time in the target-language community take advantage of the many opportunities to interact in the L2 and, in turn, would have shown greater achievement in the target language. However, additional variables that influence language learning success have been incorporated need to be taken into consideration. For example, it is possible that people with greater interest in long-term stay (e.g., U.S. permanent residents and naturalized citizens) would display a greater willingness to relinquish aspects of their native culture and acculturation into the host country. International students, on the other hand, might be more committed to maintaining their cultural heritage, and therefore show lower acculturation to life in the United States. Clearly, there is a need for further investigation into the relationship between pragmatic competence and the experiences that students have during their stay in the target community, which are greatly affected by the myriad of factors that are experienced differently by each learner.

Additionally, as noted by Ward and Rana-Deuba (2000), we do not know whether it is the quality or quantity of informal interaction that is of primary importance in language learning. Thus, it may not be the amount but rather the type of interaction that most affects the level of participants' pragmatic ability. Our results demonstrate that the time subjects reported reading books, magazines, or English-language newspapers was a significant predictor of the criterion measure. These results agree with Freed's (1990) study that show interactive contact with native speakers did not predict changes for students at the high intermediate and advanced levels. Freed concluded that perhaps the amount of interaction in L2 has less influence on advanced students' L2 pragmatic achievement. There is a need for future studies to explore the possibility that different types of activities interact in different ways with the process of language learning at different stages in the acquisition process. Learners vary in terms of how linguistically and cognitively ready they are to seize opportunities and to benefit from them once they do. This study documents examples of these complex interactions. It remains for future studies to identify additional variables that influence learners' pragmatic acquisition. Such interactions may help explain the enormous individual variation one sees in learning outcomes and underscore the importance of studying such variables together rather than in isolation.

The study has limitations due to the data collection methods (Eslami & Mirzaei, in press). We used self-reported data to measure the amount and type of contact and pragmatic performance of the learners. Future studies should also use qualitative information such as daily diary, interviews, and collect more detailed information about type and context of interactions. Furthermore, we only focused on the speech

act of complimenting and compliment response. Additional research is needed to further examine the effect of motivation, interaction, and length of residence using different pragmatic measures, in other speech acts, and with different groups of learners.

In conclusion, our findings show that simple exposure to language is unlikely to be sufficient for acquisition of L2 pragmatic knowledge because the specific linguistic realizations are sometimes not salient enough for the learner. For L2 pragmatics to develop, input should be noticed and some explicit techniques such as input enhancement and form focused instruction that would make the learners attend to the targeted linguistic features are necessary.

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