Acquisition of Pragmatic Routines by Learners of L2 English: Investigating Common Errors and Sources of Pragmatic Fossilization

Zia Tajeddin
Allameh Tabataba'i University, Tehran, Iran
<zia_tajeddin@yahoo.com>

Minoo Alemi
Islamic Azad University, West Tehran Branch, Iran
<minooalemi2000@yahoo.com>

Roya Pashmforoosh
Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas, US
<r.pashmforoosh@gmail.com>

Abstract

Unlike linguistic fossilization, pragmatic fossilization has received scant attention in fossilization research. To bridge this gap, the present study adopted a typical-error method of fossilization research to identify the most frequent errors in pragmatic routines committed by Persian-speaking learners of L2 English and explore the sources of fossilization. In the first phase of the study, a pragmatic routines test was administered to 230 male and female participants to determine the typical errors and their persistence across different proficiency levels. In the second phase, retrospective interviews were conducted to explore the sources of the errors in pragmatic routines committed by 15 highly fossilized advanced learners. The findings revealed that the frequent errors in pragmatic routines were mainly due to sociopragmatic failure. It was found that first language transfer, lack of knowledge, and overgeneralizations were among the most frequent sources of pragmatic fossilization. This can be due to the non-authentic poor-input pedagogical setting in which EFL learners fail to acquire the appropriate pragmatic routines. This study has implications for pragmatic instruction and pragmatic fossilization studies.

Keywords: error, fossilization, pragmatic fossilization, pragmatic routines, L2 English

Introduction

Fossilization, first introduced by Selinker (1972), is now a key concept in the Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research. Fossilization involves an interaction between the three systems of native language, interlanguage, and target language and is the process

through which learners fail to progress toward the target-like performance due to the defective structures in their interlanguage utterances. One area where paucity of control over pragmalinguistic knowledge is obvious is that of pragmatic routines. Researchers follow a set of procedures to investigate fossilization along the learning process. Given its local and selective nature, according to Han (2013), fossilization may occur at any point in the course of language development. However, it seems that the effect of non-native speakers' proficiency levels on fossilizable L2 pragmatic routines has remained underexplored.

To document the nature and sources of pragmatic fossilization, such as L1 transfer and overgeneralization, previous studies have looked at the selection of participants, collection of data (in both natural and artificial settings), and interpretation of data (e.g., Han, 2004, 2009; Han & Odlin, 2006; Long, 2003; Selinker, 1972). Despite extensive research on fossilization, exploring pragmatic fossilization in general and the sources of fossilized pragmatic features among advanced English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in particular still remains necessary. The EFL learning context of Iran is particularly of interest to us as it is an input-poor context because learners are mainly exposed to English in language institutes and have little chance for communication outside the classroom to develop their pragmatic competence. To bridge this gap, the present study aimed to investigate the Iranian EFL learners' fossilization in L2 English pragmatic routines and the sources of common errors of pragmatic routines among advanced learners of English.

Literature review

Pragmatic routines

Pragmatic routines are the recurrent words or phrases employed for particular social purposes, including thanking, apologizing, requesting, greeting, insulting, complimenting, and offering (Davis, 2007). Coulmas (1981) describes pragmatic routines as those conventionalized pre-patterned expressions whose occurrence is highly context-dependent. Pragmatic routines are realized in specific social contexts which are shared by members of a particular speech community. Bardovi-Harlig (2012) maintains that some studies characterize pragmatic routines as a specific sequence of words representing functionally bound expressions as, for example, in *you know* (House, 2009; Pilcher, 2009) and *I mean* and *you see* (Romero Trillo, 2002).

House (1996) describes the importance of pragmatic routines in L2 learning. She argues that from a sociolinguistic viewpoint, 'it is important to learn routines at any learning stage because they embody the societal knowledge that members of a given speech community share … Routine formulae are thus essential in the verbal handling of everyday life' (pp. 226-227). For Kesckes (2010), conversational routines, as a broad category, include situational bound utterances (SBUs) in which context identifies the formulas used therein. Additionally, routine formulas, as Hall (2009) pointed out, are employed to perform speech acts (e.g., *Get outta here*), to serve as topic-opening, topic-maintaining, or topic-closing moves (e.g., *So what's up with you? What else? Well that's enough of that!*), to express social conventions in honorifics (e.g., *Your Highness, I am deeply honored*), or to convey affective content (e.g., *That's what I'm talking about*).

Pragmatic routines serve numerous functions in discourse ranging from semantic to socio-pragmatic acts. According to Kesckes (2003), routine formulas which have communicative functions represent particular sociocultural concepts. Thus, L2 learners may not acquire them easily in view of the association between form-meaning-function mappings.

Research on pragmatic routines

Focusing on recent empirical studies, Bardovi-Harlig (2012) had an overview of five main themes of research on pragmatic routines. The themes include the use of pragmatic routines, spread of pragmatic routines by multiple speakers, attitudes toward routine formulas in pragmatics, pragmatic routine formulas and second language acquisition, and formulas in pragmatics pedagogy. Pragmatic routines have been studied in relation with speech acts (Bardovi-Harlig, 2009; Manes & Wolfson, 1981; Ohashi, 2010), politeness (Terkourafi, 2002, 2005), and impoliteness (Culpeper, 2010). Bardovi-Harlig (2009) observed conversations in which routine formulas occurred in speech acts. The oral discourse completion tasks were designed in a study conducted by Bardovi-Harlig (2009) to elicit conversational routines used by native speakers and learners of English. The results revealed that the learners' underuse of pragmatic routines may be the result of various sources, including lack of familiarity with some expressions and overuse of familiar expressions.

One of the primary features of routines, as Coulmas (1981) points out, is their sociocultural aspects, representing culturally-specific worldviews, such as '*May God increase your bounty*,' or expressing and maintaining group identity. Davis (2007) investigated the attitudes of Korean ESL learners in Australia and Korean EFL learners in Seoul regarding the use of Australian-English pragmatic routines. The results showed that the Korean EFL learners were reluctant to use Australian formulas such as '*Cheers*' or '*Good on you*' when compared with their counterparts. This avoidance represents resistance to Australian-English pragmatic norms. Previous studies (e.g., Kecskes, 2003; Rehbein, 1987; Wray, 1999) also found that particular cultural aspects of pragmatic routines make L2 learners reluctant to acquire L2 formulas. In such contexts, L2 learners may employ their own L1 pragmatic norms that differ from the target-like utterances to maintain their cultural identity (Kecskes, 2003). Similarly, Farghal and Haggan (2006) found a strong native language influence in compliment responses by bilingual Kuwaiti learners of L2 English.

A number of studies have addressed the recognition and production of pragmatic routines by L2 learners (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig, 2009; Barron, 2003; House, 1996; Roever, 2005). Bardovi-Harlig and Bastos (2011) explored the effect of three learner variables of proficiency, length of residence, and intensity of interaction on the recognition and production of authentic pragmatic routines. They found that the recognition of authentic routines correlated with length of residence and that proficiency and intensity of interaction significantly affected the production of L2 pragmatic formulas. The influence of instruction on pragmatic routines has been examined in previous studies (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig & Vellenga, 2012; Boers & Lindstromberg, 2012; House, 1996), indicating the effect of instructional materials and noticing activities on the acquisition of pragmatic routines. The studies have generally shown more development in the

acquisition of pragmatic routines by those L2 learners who studied abroad or received an intensity of interaction (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig & Bastos, 2011; Barron, 2003). However, the failure of L2 learners to master the pragmatic routines, as suggested by Han (2004), 'despite continuous exposure to the TL [target language] input, adequate motivation to improve, and sufficient opportunity for practice' (p. 4) has remained unresolved in the SLA research. Therefore, from a pedagogical perspective, it remains to re-evaluate pragmatic routines with regard to interlanguage use and its potential for contributing to interlanguage pragmatic development.

Pragmatic fossilization

Persistent errors in interlanguage pragmatics is an inherent characteristic of learners' interlanguage. The systematic inappropriate use of certain pragmatic formulas leads to fossilization in language development (Romero Trillo, 2002; Selinker, 1972). During the learning process, the pragmatic distance between two languages, as Kasper and Blum-Kulka (1993) noted, may result in an information gap in the formulation of pragmatic routines. What leads to fossilization is, in fact, the combination of unmarked L1 expression and ambiguous (i.e., non-robust) L2 input. Regarding a cline of acceptability and appropriateness for pragmatic competence, as explained by Tsimpli and Sorace (2006), the discourse features of the target language are more vulnerable to fossilization than semantic features. That is to say, discourse features that involve language and pragmatic properties require a higher level of processing, whereas semantic features incorporate formal properties of the language alone.

Evidence for fossilization has been reported in a number of studies undertaken by Han (2003, 2004) and Han and Odlin (2006). According to Han (2004), the empirical studies done on fossilization adopted one of the methodological approaches of longitudinal research, typical error, advanced learners' errors, corrective feedback, and length of residence. Traditionally, earlier studies on fossilization used learners' naturally produced data over an extended period of time (e.g., Han, 2010; Lardiere, 2006). In a typical-error approach, the pervasive errors in the interlanguage of learners with the same L1 background are analyzed to investigate fossilization. Kellerman's (1989) study of Dutch-speaking learners of English adopted a typical-error approach with regard to the use of *would* in hypothetical conditional sentences. The fact is that even for advanced learners, as evidenced in the studies conducted by Wekker, Kellerman, and Hermans (1982) and Selinker and Lakshmanan (1992), the errors typically occurred despite learners' abundant exposure to L2 input. Early examples of corrective feedback include the study by Vigil and Oller (1976), who refer to the nature of feedback as a source of fossilization. In light of the model presented in Vigil and Oller (1976), Selinker and Lamendella (1979) studied the role of extrinsic feedback in interlanguage fossilization. Regarding the provision of corrective feedback on typical errors, Kellerman (1989) found that the pedagogic intervention had little effect on learners' use of linguistic structures. Despite explicit instruction and years of immersion, studies on length of residence (e.g., Thep-Ackrapong, 1990; Washburn, 1991) showed the pervasiveness of fossilized interlanguage errors at different proficiency levels.

Birdsong (2004) maintains that "fossilization has been understood in various ways, among them, as a process, as a cognitive mechanism, and as a result of learning" (p. 86).

As evidenced by Selinker and Han (2001), various learner behaviors are associated with fossilization, including backsliding, low proficiency, typical errors, and non-target like performance. In fact, when acquisition stops, a semi-developed linguistic structure may exhibit permanent resistance to native-like construction (Han & Odlin, 2006; Han & Selinker, 2005; Long, 2003; Selinker, 2011). Following previous studies (e.g., Romero Trillo, 2002; Takahashi, 1996; Trosborg, 1995), it seems that fossilization in the area of pragmatics has not been sufficiently explored. For example, Romero Trillo (2002) studied fossilization of discourse markers in native and non-native speakers of English and found that proficient adult learners failed to use pragmatic elements appropriately in communication. In another study conducted by Takahashi (1996), the learners' transferability perception of request strategies by Japanese learners of English was investigated. The study revealed that EFL learners still failed to perceive the differences in request strategies between the two languages. The errors the learners made were systematic, leading Takahashi (1996) to conclude that they had been transferred from the first language and became fossilized. Pragmatic transfer generally refers to the influence of learners' pragmatic knowledge of languages other than second language on their comprehension and/or production of their L2. Earlier studies focused on multiple forms of transfer and the conditions under which transfer takes place. Two types of pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic transfer were among the types of pragmatic transfer identified by researchers (e.g., Kasper, 1992). As far as pragmalinguistic transfer is concerned, Kasper (1992) accounts for illocutionary force and politeness value in L1, which might affect learners' perception and/or production in L2. Sociopragmatic transfer also includes external contextual factors such as participants' roles in a given sociolinguistic context. Different manifestations of pragmatic transfer have been identified so far, including interference or negative transfer and facilitative or positive transfer. In addition, as evidenced in earlier research, the influence of first language on second language might bring about different results of overuse (i.e., abuse) and underuse (i.e., avoidance) of functions and formulas. Most studies addressed the negative manifestation of pragmatic transfer. For instance, Kasper and Blum-Kulka (1993) have reported the frequency and use of Spanish routine formulas among Spanish learners of English who were often judged impolite due to their infrequent use of common formulas such as "Sorry" and "Please" during their stay in England. Takahashi (1996) also stated that it is difficult to identify the sources of pragmatic failure, which might be ascribed to L1 transfer, interlanguage overgeneralization, and/or transfer of training (i.e., instructional effect). Therefore, transferability of pragmatic routines needs to be studied further considering the different ways in which a language may influence the use of routine formulas.

As suggested in earlier research by Selinker (1972) and Han (2004), fossilization occurs in learners' interlanguage performance because of five processes. The central processes are (1) language transfer, (2) transfer of training, (3) strategies of second language learning, (4) strategies of second language communication, and (5) overgeneralization of target linguistic material. Evidently, more research is needed to explore the possibility that other components of pragmatics can be the target of fossilization. Evidence from pragmatic research (e.g., Nattinger & DeCarrico, 1992; Roever, 2005; Weinert, 1995; Wray & Perkins, 2000) has shown that pragmatic routines which reflect

the norms of speech communities are the target of learning for language learners. Since pragmatic routines may vary in form, function, and frequency from one language to another, they are likely to become fossilizable structures. In addition, advanced EFL learners may have good knowledge of a range of pragmatic routines but still commit the typical errors in these formulas. Therefore, it appears that pragmatic routines hold great relevance for fossilization. Despite this need for research on pragmatic fossilization, pragmatic fossilization in general and fossilization of pragmatic routines in particular have not been explored among EFL learners in Iran.

Against this backdrop, the present study set out to investigate the common errors in pragmatic routines among Iranian Persian-speaking learners of L2 English across proficiency levels. Additionally, the present study aimed to explore the sources of fossilization of pragmatic routines among advanced learners of L2 English. Sources of fossilization are important since they are among the seven significant aspects of fossilization specified by Selinker and Lamendella (1978): (1) the nature of fossilization, (2) its source, (3) its objects, (4) the manner of fossilization, (5) the point at which it begins, (6) its persistence, and (7) candidates for fossilization. To address the two purposes of the study, the following questions were formulated:

1. What are the frequent errors in English pragmatic routines committed by pre-intermediate, intermediate, and advanced Persian-speaking L2 learners of English?
2. What are the sources of fossilization of English pragmatic routines among advanced Persian-speaking L2 learners of English?

Method

Participants

The participants were 230 male and female Persian-speaking learners of L2 English enrolled in EFL classes in four English language institutes, all of which offered a six-level communicative course, using the textbook series *Top Notch*. Participation in the study was voluntary and consisted of 42 (18.3%) pre-intermediate, 99 (43.0%) intermediate, and 89 (38.7%) advanced learners. *Top Notch 2* was used at the pre-intermediate level as the textbook. *Top Notch 3* and *Summit 1* were used at the intermediate-level. For the advanced learners, *Summit 2* functioned as the textbook. Table 1 depicts the relevant characteristics of the learners.

Table 1. EFL learners' profile summary

	No. of Learners	Percentage (%)	Cumulative Percentage (%)
Pre-intermediate (*Top Notch 2*)	42	18.3	18.3
Intermediate (*Top Notch 3* and *Summit 1*)	99	43.0	61.3
Advanced (*Summit 2*)	89	38.7	100
Total	230	100	

Instruments
Pragmatic routines test

The typical error as an established approach to fossilization research was used in the current research. To this end, a validated teacher-made test of English pragmatic routines with the Cronbach alpha reliability index of .86 was developed to determine the typical errors committed by pre-intermediate, intermediate, and advanced EFL learners. The test consisted of 38 multiple-choice items which measured the knowledge of English pragmatic routines. The list of expressions was constructed from the conversational formulas used in a variety of pragmatic studies such as Kecskes (2007) and Roever (2005). Each item of the test consisted of a short conversation and three choices, as illustrated in (1). The learners were asked to choose one correct response out of the three choices. The two incorrect choices were either taken from word-by-word translation from Persian to English or were pragmalinguistically and/or sociopragmatically incorrect in the particular context of the conversation. Two experts' judgments evidenced the soundness of the right choice and the inappropriacy of the wrong choices.

(1) A: What a fantastic coat! Was it expensive?
    B: ——————————

        a. It was not worthy of you.
        b. It was nothing at all.
        c. It cost an absolute fortune!

The test items included various correct choices ranging from more commonly used pragmatic routines such as '*Thanks*,' '*Yes, of course*,' and '*Terrible*' to increasingly less commonly used routines such as '*I forgot all about it*,' '*I'm to blame*,' and '*Much obliged*.' It was assumed that some of the items would be more difficult than others, not necessarily because of the target routines but due to the relation between the right answer and the distractors. For example, in some items both the target routines and the distractors were correct routines when considered in isolation, but the distractors were not the correct choices in that specific context. Besides the use of linguistically appropriate but contextually inappropriate L2 pragmatic routines as distractors, some other distractors were developed out of non-target L1-driven expressions for the Persian-speaking learners of English, such as the following:

(1) Sharmandam
    'I'm really ashamed'

(2) Pak faramoosh kardam
    'I cleanly forgot'

(3) Hamash harfe
    'That's only words'

(4) Ghabele shoma ro nadareh
    'It was not worthy of you'

(5) Ta'arof nakonid
    'Aren't you complimenting?'

(6) Lotf mikonid
    'That's you favor'

(7) Mehmane man bash
    'Be my guest'

(8) Hamash taghsire mane
    'It's all my blame'

These are some of the most common formulaic expressions used in Persian conversations. For instance, '*It was not worthy of you*' is commonly used in Persian in response to compliments. In terms of its function, as Sharifian (2008) noted, it is used to scale down the compliment while raising the status of the complimenter.

Pragmatic judgment interviews

Out of the 89 advanced EFL learners, 15 who scored less than half in the pragmatic routines test were characterized as fossilized learners and asked to participate in one-on-one retrospective interviews. The interviews (i.e., the second phase of the study) took place a week after the test. The purpose of the pragmatic judgment interview was to gain further understanding of persistent errors that were committed by fossilized advanced EFL participants in the study. To investigate the sources of the errors, only questions that were incorrectly answered were included in the interviews. The participants were asked to explain their reasons for selecting the (incorrect) choices and not the other alternatives. They were also asked to state the degree of their familiarity with the correct answer.

Data collection and analysis

To investigate their knowledge of L2 pragmatic routines, the participants were given 20 minutes for the test. The goal was to encourage learners to respond quickly, as approximately 30 seconds was allotted for each item on a recognition test. To check learners' familiarity with the L2 pragmatic routines, one week later the second phase was conducted to ask the fossilized advanced EFL learners who had received the lowest scores on the test to reconsider the questions they answered incorrectly and explain why they preferred one choice to the others.

The learners were interviewed individually in Persian for about 15 minutes each and did not receive any interventions. The comments from the learners were focused on the questions that they had answered incorrectly. All the interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim for further analysis.

The responses to the test of pragmatic routines were analyzed and the common errors were identified. The number of errors that occurred across proficiency levels was counted, and the descriptive statistics, including mean values and standard deviations, were calculated. The advanced EFL learners' interviews were recorded and categorized by two teacher-raters to investigate the sources of fossilization. To probe the sources of fossilization of English pragmatic routines, an inductive and data-driven method proposed in grounded theory was used to analyze the qualitative data emerging from the learners' interview protocols. The errors were identified and the comments were

coded. The elicited data were categorized and, based on Creswell (2012), the extracted categories were checked against the data until 'saturation' was achieved.

Results and discussion

Frequent errors in English pragmatic routines

The first research question was aimed to probe the frequent errors in English pragmatic routines committed by pre-intermediate, intermediate, and advanced Persian-speaking learners of English. To investigate the question, the results of the test of pragmatic routines were analyzed and the common errors were identified. Table 2 shows the most common errors for each proficiency level. It reports on the five most frequent errors across proficiency levels, with the corresponding mean values ranging from (0=incorrect answer) to (1=correct answer). As can be seen, the common errors for pre-intermediate learners were '*Much appreciated*' (item 38, M = .14), '*It's all my blame*' (item 29, M = .19), '*Let me see*' (item 7, M = .23), '*No trouble at all*' (item 35, M = .28), and '*I mean*' (item 36, M = .28). For advanced learners, the most frequent errors included '*Much appreciated*' (item 38, M = .15), '*It's all my blame*' (item 29, M = .35), '*What a pain*' (item 31, M = .39), '*Let me see*' (item 7, M = .39), and '*What's wrong?*' (item 14, M = .42).

A comparison of the common errors committed by pre-intermediate and intermediate learners for the five most difficult items of the test shows that the frequent errors were '*Much appreciated*' (instead of '*Much obliged*'), '*It's all my blame*' (instead of '*I'm to blame*'), and '*Let me see*' (instead of '*I'd no idea*'), respectively. Similarly, the frequent errors for intermediate and advanced EFL learners were found in item 38 ('*Much appreciated*') and item 29 ('*It's all my blame*'). As displayed in Table 2, '*What a pain*' instead of '*Poor you*' (item 31, M=.39) was among the most frequent types of error committed by the advanced EFL learners. It appears that the most frequent types of errors across proficiency levels were mainly the result of sociopragmatic rather than pragmalinguistic failure. As to the interplay of functional adequacy and situational appropriateness, it was found that the learners selected the incorrect options regardless of the context in which the pragmatic routine occurred (e.g., '*What's going on here?*' instead of '*What's wrong?*' in a conversation between a police officer and a participant of a traffic accident).

Table 3 presents the mean scores of the responses to all items for each level. The results show that the mean scores, out of 38, ranged from a low of 19 for pre-intermediate to a high of 20 for intermediate learners. As is shown, the highest mean score was for the advanced learners with the value of 24.61.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the common errors in English pragmatic routines

Pre-intermediate				Intermediate				Advanced			
Item No.	M	Frequency (n = 42)	%	Item No.	M	Frequency (n = 99)	%	Item No.	M	Frequency (n = 89)	%
Item 38 (*Much appreciated*)	.14	36	85.7	**Item 38** (*Much appreciated*)	.19	80	80.8	**Item 38** (*Much appreciated*)	.15	75	84.3
Item 29 (*It's all my blame*)	.19	34	81.0	**Item 29** (*It's all my blame*)	.20	79	79.8	**Item 29** (*It's all my blame*)	.35	57	64.0
Item 7 (*Let me see*)	.23	32	76.2	**Item 7** (*Let me see*)	.30	69	69.7	**Item 31** (*What a pain*)	.39	54	60.7
Item 35 (*No trouble at all*)	.28	30	71.4	**Item 24** (*That's nice*)	.32	67	67.7	**Item 7** (*Let me see*)	.39	53	59.6
Item 36 (*I mean*)	.33	28	66.7	**Item 12** (*I cleanly forgot*)	.33	66	66.7	**Item 14** (*What's wrong?*)	.42	51	57.3

Table 3. Total Descriptive statistics of errors in English pragmatic routines

Proficiency	N	Min	Max	M	SD
Pre-intermediate	42	10.00	31.00	18.59	5.16
Intermediate	99	12.00	34.00	20.83	5.23
Advanced	89	13.00	35.00	24.61	5.08

The above findings reveal the common errors that the participants made in the recognition of pragmatic routines. It was found that the most common errors made by the participants included, inter alia, non-target-like utterances in an expression of apology (e.g., '*I'm really ashamed*' instead of '*I'm absolutely sorry*'), a statement of responsibility (e.g., '*It's all my blame*' instead of '*I'm to blame*'), and a promise of forbearance (e.g., '*No trouble at all*' instead of '*These things happen*'). Based on the findings, it can be argued that pragmatic routines are often challenging for L2 learners since they do not lend themselves to context-free pre-patterned expressions (Kecskes, 2007, 2014; Wray & Namba, 2003). The findings indicate that the challenging distractors for EFL learners are those expressions which are related to sociopragmatic rather than pragmalinguistic features of pragmatic routines.

The sources of fossilization of English pragmatic routines

To answer the second research question, the error taxonomy was developed based on the interview protocols. The aim was to show why the advanced EFL learners in the study committed the persistent errors in pragmatic routines. The findings from Table 4 show that there were six sources for fossilization of pragmatic routines among the participants.

Table 4. Sources of fossilization of English pragmatic routines

Categories	Frequency (N = 149)	Percentage (%)
Non-target like use of L1-driven expressions	39	26.2%
Inadequate knowledge of and exposure to target expressions	31	20.8%
Overgeneralization of target-like expressions	25	16.8%
Context-specific variables	23	15.4%
Grammatical errors	17	11.4%
Other performance variables	14	9.4%

As evident from Table 4, language transfer (*f*=39, percentage=26.2%), inadequate knowledge (*f*=31, percentage=20.8%), and overgeneralization of target-like utterances (*f*=25, percentage=16.8%) were among the most frequent sources of pragmatic fossilization. What follows presents the extracted categories along with relevant examples taken from the learners' retrospective interviews. Based on the findings, the sources of fossilization fall into six main categories. It should be noted that no changes

were made to the excerpts taken from the learners' answers. The learners were given pseudonyms to guarantee their anonymity.

(1) Non-target like use of L1-driven expressions

This source of pragmatic fossilization, as most learners mentioned, refers to the influence of first language (L1) pragmatic transfer on the EFL learners' recognition of target-like expressions. It was found that the pragmatic expressions such as '*It was not worthy of you*,' as illustrated in Example (2), occurred as a result of L1 transfer.

(2) A: What a fantastic coat! Was it expensive?
    B: ——————————

a. It was not worthy of you.
b. It was nothing at all.
c. It cost an absolute fortune!

One of the learners (L7), for example, commented that:

I chose 'It was not worthy of you' because I think in all modesty it is better to say that a thing is worthless even though it's a high-priced item. I think this is a common practice. But perhaps it sounds too Farsi.

Similarly, L12 stated that:

We normally use 'lotf darin' [That's your favor] and 'ghabeli nadareh' [It was not worthy of you] in Farsi. You know. We use them to socialize with others and to be more kind and hospitable.

(2) Inadequate knowledge of and exposure to target expressions

This source of fossilization points to the learners' lack of familiarity with target-like communicative expressions. The comments from the advanced respondents revealed their limited knowledge of the correct pragmatic routines in some cases. As in Example (3), most of the learners did not choose the correct answer.

(3) A: —————. It's very kind of you to let me borrow your notes.
    B: Glad to be of help.

a. Much obliged.
b. Much appreciated.
c. Much thanks.

For instance, L3 said that:

I am not generally familiar with the expression of 'Much obliged' in a spoken conversation. I selected 'Much appreciated' from the other choices since I've heard it the most.

(3) Overgeneralization of target-like utterances

Overgeneralization was another source of fossilization. It refers to the overextended use of existing L2 knowledge to new target expressions and indicates the learners' ignorance of rule restrictions. This resulted in an infelicitous statement of responsibility,

for instance, when the participants overgeneralized the use of the conventional formula '*It's all my blame.*' As in Example (4), the learners cross-associated '*It's all may blame*' with its Persian equivalent, '*Hamash taghsire mane.*'

(4) A: I forgot to fill up the tank before we left.
  B: Oh! Do you mean to say we've run out of petrol?
  A: I'm afraid we have and —————.

a. I get a blame
b. I'm to blame
c. It's all my blame

Echoing the same idea, L10, for instance, noted that:

I think the correct answer is 'It's all my blame.' It reflects its alternative in English which is 'It's all my fault.'

(4) Context-specific variables

The learners' lack of familiarity with the contextual factors, such as the degree of formality and the length of utterance for situation-bound expressions, was also a source of fossilization. As shown in Example (5), one of the conversations in the test of pragmatic routines was between a police officer and a driver involved in a traffic accident. Accordingly, the police officer needed to address the driver as depicted in the following short dialog:

(5) A: —————? How fast were you going?
  B: Driver: I don't know. Maybe 40.

a. What's up?
b. What's going on here?
c. What's wrong?

It appears that other alternatives that may occur in a conversation between two close friends such as '*What's up?*' and '*What's wrong?*' were not appropriate in this context.

Likewise, L2 commented that:

I selected 'What's wrong' regardless of the given context and the participants involved in this conversation.

(5) Grammatical errors

This source of fossilization in pragmatic routines occurred because of learners' inattention to the grammatically correct form of a pragmatic routine. As reflected in Example (6), the participants answered this item incorrectly and selected '*Let a try*' instead of '*Let me give it a try*':

(6) A: Look. Here's a quiz on events of the twentieth century.
  B: Oh, ——————-. I'm good at history.
  A: All right. First question: …

a. Let a try
b. Let me give try
c. Let me give it a try

L8, highlighting the simplicity of speech routines, expressed his ideas in the following words:

The lengthy expressions may not be that much useful in spoken language. I prefer to use 'Let me a try' in this short talk.

(6) Other performance variables

This prevailing source of fossilization refers to test takers' performance variables, including test anxiety and fatigue. Referring to this source of errors, one of the learners (L9) stated that:

I was not prepared for a sudden exam.

Furthermore, L15 added that:

I was so stressful and I couldn't focus my attention on the questions.

The aim of this study was not to simply count instances of particular responses but rather to explore the sources that appeared to underlie them. The findings of this study indicate that some language learning strategies (e.g., transfer, overgeneralization, and simplification) identified in L2 linguistic development also hold relevance for L2 pragmatics. This also appears to be in harmony with Selinker's (1972) contention, suggesting that fossilization in learners' interlanguage performance occurs as a result of five processes. The central processes are: (1) language transfer, (2) transfer of training, (3) strategies of second language learning, (4) strategies of second language communication, and (5) overgeneralization of target linguistic material.

It was found that specific pragmatic features are likely candidates for fossilization, namely those causing non-target like use of L1-driven expressions. A comparison of the common errors (e.g., 'It wasn't worthy of you,' '*Aren't you complimenting*,' and '*I'm really ashamed*') committed by pre-intermediate, intermediate, and advanced learners in English pragmatic routines indicates that L1 transfer is closely tied with pragmatic fossilization. In line with previous research (e.g., Han & Selinker, 1999; Selinker & Lakshmanan, 1992; Yu, 2011), this suggests that L1 transfer is a 'privileged contributor' to fossilized structures. According to Han (2004), it can then be argued that language transfer not only stabilizes but also fossilizes an interlanguage structure. It appears that advanced EFL learners' recurrent errors arose from L1 typological transfer. One reason might be that this influence was not attended to in the language learning process.

Moreover, the qualitative analysis of the data indicates that advanced learners in the study committed the pragmatic errors mainly because of the inadequacy of exposure to target-like expressions (e.g., '*Much obliged*' and '*Good heavens!*'). Yet, under this source of pragmatic fossilization, it was found that most advanced EFL learners reported their lack of exposure to English pragmatic routines. This finding seems to be supported by earlier studies (Dörnyei, Durow, & Zahran, 2004; Bardovi-Harlig & Bastos, 2011) which found that recognizing routines had a significant effect on the intensity of interaction.

Similarly, Roever (2005) found that even short-term exposure to the host environment resulted in a greater knowledge of routines.

Furthermore, the findings of the interviews indicate that overgeneralization of target-like utterances is an evident source of fossilizable pragmatic routines. This source of fossilization, consistent with the related literature (Bardovi-Harlig, 2009; Ellis, 2003; Pawley & Syder, 1983; Selinker, 1972), was frequently mentioned by the participants in the study. The learners maintained that they selected the pragmatic routine, for example '*It's all my blame,*' incorrectly as it reflects its alternative formula in English which is '*It's all my fault.*'

Meanwhile, this study showed that the context-specific source of fossilization reflects the interface between pragmalinguistic knowledge (i.e., the linguistic knowledge of expressions) and sociopragmatic (i.e., the knowledge of social contexts) whereby a learner may know an expression but be unaware of the context in which the expression can be used. This source of fossilization in L2 pragmatics substantiates the point made by Edmonson and House (1991), who suggest that EFL learners cannot necessarily handle conversational routines 'because they do not have ready access to and therefore do not make use of, standardized routines for meeting the social imposition' (p. 284).

As to the fifth source of pragmatic fossilization, errors in grammar, it was also found that learners preferred simple to elaborated expressions. This finding is in line with a number of previous studies (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig, 2009; Han, 2003). The errors in grammar were the result of grammatical inaccuracies and simplification of target-like utterances. As Farghal and Haggan (2006) found, grammatical inaccuracy and pragmatic inappropriateness were the major sources of errors in compliment responses in the case of bilingual Arab college students. In addition, it can be argued that when language learners pay attention to communicative fluency at the expense of grammatical accuracy, some inappropriate pragmatic routines are likely to be fossilized. Therefore, the speech may become grammatically inappropriate due to simplification, resulting in fossilized structures. Selinker (1993), for example, suggests that learners sometimes simplify the target-like utterances which could lead to fossilized expressions. The French immersion learners, for instance, may quite consciously use one form of the verb as a general strategy.

The final source of fossilization hinges upon the effect of performance variables such as learners' fatigue and test-taking anxiety. Emphasizing the same fossilization source, Han (2003), for example, suggests that the internal and external causal factors (i.e., environmental, cognitive, neurobiological, and socio-affective) may result in fossilization. These sources of errors are also reflected in Selinker's (1972) assertion that errors in learners' interlanguage performance occur when their attention is focused on a new and difficult subject or when they are in a state of anxiety or in a state of other extreme excitement.

Conclusion

Pragmatic fossilization, as suggested by Han (2013), is an interlanguage unique phenomenon in which acquisition fossilizes a semi-developed pragmatic formula. With

specific focus on the under-researched area of pragmatic fossilization, this study provided evidence on EFL learners' common errors in pragmatic routines across proficiency levels and the sources of this fossilization among advanced learners. It appears that sociopragmatic errors persist in learners' L2 pragmatic routines across proficiency levels. As to the recurrent pragmatic errors that language learners committed, the results show that pragmatic fossilization is the result of various manifestations of failure in L2 pragmatic acquisition. It can be concluded that, among the six sources of fossilization, first language transfer, lack of knowledge, and overgeneralization of native-like expressions are the most frequent ones among the fossilized advanced EFL learners.

As to the pedagogical implications of the study, it can be concluded that the quantity and diversity of pragmatic routines used in the context of teaching are the neglected aspects of language teaching curriculum. This can be due to the low-input pedagogical setting in which EFL learners fail to acquire the appropriate conversational routines. Thus, it can be contended that an input-rich learning situation results in L2 pragmatic acquisition and relatively less persistent errors. Pragmatic competence can then effectively be acquired by providing adequate input, increasing opportunity for communication practice, and enhancing explicit instruction in the use of pragmatic routines. A further implication for ELT stakeholders, namely syllabus designers, materials developers, teacher trainers, and teachers, is to contribute to the success of the teaching and learning process of pragmatic formulas by emphasizing the importance of sociopragmatic knowledge in L2 pragmatic acquisition.

However, this study is not without limitations which may decrease the generalisability of the findings. The data were collected through the adoption of a typical-error approach. To lend support to the findings of this study future longitudinal research should be done with more representative groups of participants in diverse contexts. Another limitation is the multiple-choice nature of the test that was used to determine learners' familiarity with pragmatic routines. Moreover, the exploration of production of pragmatic routines by EFL learners has not been addressed in the current investigation. As to the persistent errors across proficiency levels, the examination of the relation of recognition and production in pragmatic routines is also a crucial step in the development of L2 pragmatic competence which requires further research. The recurrent errors in authentic conversational interactions that may cause misunderstanding among EFL learners must be further investigated. Future longitudinal research is also needed to shed light on the interplay between native language, interlanguage, and target language. It is ultimately suggested that teachers' perceptions of sources of fossilization be explored in future research while attempting to minimize the possible perceptual mismatches between teachers and learners.

About the Authors

Zia Tajeddin is Professor of Applied Linguistics at Allameh Tabataba'i University, Iran, where he teaches doctoral courses in Discourse Analysis, Interlanguage Pragmatics, and Second Language Teacher Education. He is Chair of Iranian Interlanguage Pragmatics SIG, is editor of *Issues in Language Teaching*, and sits on the editorial/review boards of

journals such as *RELC Journal* and *TESL-EJ*. His research interests center on interlanguage pragmatic instruction and assessment, classroom discourse analysis, teacher identity and cognition, and EIL/ELF. He has presented papers at international conferences and published papers in many journals, including *The Language Learning Journal*, *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, *RELC Journal*, *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, *The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher*, *TESL-EJ*, and *TESL Canada Journal*.

Minoo Alemi is Assistant Professor of Applied Linguistics at Islamic Azad University, West Tehran Branch, and a post-doctoral associate at Sharif University of Technology (SUT), Iran. She is the founder of Robot-Assisted Language Learning (RALL) and the co-founder of Social Robotics in Iran. She is on the editorial/review boards of many journals, including *British Journal of Educational Technology*, *BRAIN*, *LIBRI*, and *Scientia Iranica*. Her areas of interest include discourse analysis, interlanguage pragmatics, materials development, and robot-assisted language education. She has presented papers at many international conferences and published papers in journals such as *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, *The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher*, *TESL Canada Journal*, and *International Journal of Social Robotics*.

Roya Pashmforoosh is a Ph.D. candidate in Applied Linguistics at Kharazmi University, Iran, and a visiting researcher at Texas A&M University, US. Her areas of interest include interlanguage pragmatics, English as an international language (EIL), and speaking assessment. She has presented papers on pragmatics and EIL at international conferences and published papers in journals such as *Language Testing*.

References

Bardovi-Harlig, K. (2008). Recognition and production of formulas in L2 pragmatics. In Z. H. Han (Ed.), *Understanding second language process* (pp. 205-222). Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.

Bardovi-Harlig, K. (2009). Conventional expressions as a pragmalinguistic resource: Recognition and production of conventional expressions in L2 pragmatics. Language Learning, 59(4), 755-795.

Bardovi-Harlig, K. (2012). Formulas, routines, and conversational expressions in pragmatics research. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, 32*, 206-227.

Bardovi-Harlig, K., & Bastos, M. T. (2011). Proficiency, length of stay, and intensity of interaction and the acquisition of conventional expressions in L2 pragmatics. *Intercultural Pragmatics, 8*(3), 347-384.

Bardovi-Harlig, K., & Vellenga, H. E. (2012). The effect of instruction on conventional expressions in L2 pragmatics. *System, 40*(1), 1-13.

Barron, A. (2003). *Acquisition in interlanguage pragmatics: Learning how to do things with words in a study abroad context*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Birdsong, D. (2004). Second language acquisition and ultimate attainment. In A. Davies & C. Elder (Eds.), *The handbook of applied linguistics* (pp. 82-105). London: Blackwell.

Boers, F., & Lindstromberg, S. (2012). Experimental and intervention studies on formulaic sequences in a second language. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, 32*, 83-110.

Coulmas, F. (1981). *Conversational routine: Explorations in standardized communication situations and pre-patterned speech*. The Hague: Mouton de Gruyter.

Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (4th ed.). New York: Pearson Education.

Culpeper, J. (2010). Conventional impoliteness formula. *Journal of Pragmatics, 42*, 3232-3245.

Davis, J. (2007). Resistance to L2 pragmatics in the Australian ESL context. *Language Learning, 57*(4), 611-649.

Edmonson, W., & House, J. (1991). Do learners talk too much? The waffle phenomenon in interlanguage pragmatics. In R. Phillipson, E. Kellerman, L. Selinker, M. Sharwood Smith, & M. Swain (Eds.), *Foreign/second language pedagogy research: A commemorative volume for Clause Faerch* (pp. 273-287). Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Farghal, M., & Haggan, M. (2006). Compliment behaviour in bilingual Kuwaiti college students. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism, 9*(1), 94-118.

Hall, T. (2009). The fossilization-formula interface. *Columbia University Working Papers in TESOL & Applied Linguistics, 9*(2), 62-64.

Han, Z. H. (2003). Fossilization: From simplicity to complexity. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism, 6*(2), 95-128.

Han, Z. H. (2004). *Fossilization in adult second language acquisition*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Han, Z. H. (2009). Interlanguage and fossilization: Towards an analytic model. In V. Cook & L. Wei (Eds.), *Contemporary applied linguistics* (Vol. 1, pp. 137-162). London: Continuum.

Han, Z. H. (2010). Grammatical morpheme inadequacy as a function of linguistic relativity: A longitudinal study. In Z. H. Han &T. Cardierno (Eds.), *Linguistic relativity in SLA: Thinking for speaking* (pp. 154-182). Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Han, Z. H. (2013). Forty years later: Updating the fossilization hypothesis. *Language Teaching, 46*(2), 133-171.

Han, Z. H., & Odlin, T. (2006). *Studies of fossilization in second language acquisition*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Han, Z. H., & Selinker, L. (2005). Fossilization in L2 learners. In E. Hinkel (Ed.), *Handbook of research in second language teaching and research* (pp. 455-483). Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Elbaum.

House, J. (1996). Developing pragmatic fluency in English as a foreign language: Routines and metapragmatic awareness. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition, 18*(2), 225-252.

House, J. (2009). Subjectivity in English as lingua franca discourse: The case of you know. *Intercultural Pragmatics, 6*(2), 171-193.

Kasper, G. (1992). Pragmatic transfer. *Second Language Research, 8*(3), 203-231.

Kasper, G., & Blum-Kulka, S. (1993). *Interlanguage pragmatics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kellerman, E. (1989). The imperfect conditional: Fossilization, cross-linguistic influence and natural tendencies in a foreign language setting. In K. Hyltenstam & L. Obler (Eds.), *Bilingualism across life span* (pp. 87-115). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kecskes, I. (2003). *Situation-bound utterances in L1 and L2*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Kecskes, I. (2007). Formulaic language in English lingua franca. In I. Kesckes & L. R. Horn (Eds.), *Explorations in pragmatics: Linguistic, cognitive, and intercultural aspects* (pp. 191-218). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Kecskes, I. (2010). Situation-bound utterances as pragmatics acts. *Journal of Pragmatics, 42*(11), 2889-2897.

Kecskes, I. (2014). *Intercultural pragmatics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Long, M. H. (2003). Stabilization and fossilization in interlanguage development. In C. Doughty & M. H. Long (Eds.), *Handbook of second language acquisition* (pp. 487-535). Oxford: Blackwell.

Manes, J., & Wolfson, N. (1981). The compliment formula. In F. Coulmas (Ed.), *Conversational routine: Explorations in standardized communication situations and pre-patterned speech* (pp. 115-132). The Hague: Mouton de Gruyter.

Nattinger, J. R., & DeCarrico, J. S. (1992). *Lexical phrases and language teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ohashi, J. (2010). Balancing obligations: Bowing and linguistic features in thanking in Japanese. *Journal of Politeness Research: Language, Behavior, Culture, 6*(2), 183-214.

Pilcher, H. (2009). The functional and social reality of discourse variants in a northern English dialect: I don't know and I don't think compared. *Intercultural Pragmatics, 6*(4), 561-596.

Rehbein, J. (1987). Multiple formulae: Aspects of Turkish migrant workers' German in intercultural communication. In K. Knapp, W. Enninger, & A. Knapp-Pothoff (Eds.), *Analyzing intercultural communication* (pp. 215-248). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Romero Trillo, J. (2002). The pragmatic fossilization of discourse markers in non-native speakers of English. *Journal of Pragmatics, 34*(6), 769-784.

Roever, C. (2005). *Testing ESL pragmatics: Development and validation of a web-based assessment battery*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang.

Selinker, L. (1972). Interlanguage. *International Review of Applied Linguistics, 10*(1), 219-231.

Selinker, L. (1993). Fossilization as simplification? In M. L. Tickoo (Ed.), *Simplification: Theory and application* (pp. 14-28). Singapore: Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization.

Selinker, L. (2011). *Some unresolved issue in an ELT new media age: Towards building an interlanguage semantics*. Paper presented at the Seminar in Advanced SLA, Teacher College, Columbia University.

Selinker, L., & Han, Z. H. (2001). Fossilization: Moving the concept into empirical longitudinal study. In C. Elder, A. Brown, E. Grove, K. Hill, N. Iwashita, T. Lumley, T. McNamara, & K. O'Loughlin (Eds.), *Studies in language testing: Experimenting with uncertainty* (pp. 276-291). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Selinker, L., & Lakshmanan, U. (1992). Language transfer and fossilization: The multiple effects principle. In S. Gass & L. Selinker (Eds.), *Language transfer in language learning* (pp. 197-216). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Selinker, L., & Lamendella, J. (1978). Two perspectives on fossilization in interlanguage learning. *Interlanguage Studies Bulletin, 3*(2), 143-191.

Sharifian, F. (2008). Cultural schemas in L1 and L2 compliment responses: A study of Persian-speaking learners of English. *Journal of Politeness Research: Language, Behavior, Culture, 4*(1), 55-80.

Takahashi, S. (1996). Pragmatic transferability. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition, 18*(2), 189-223.

Terkourafi, M. (2002). Politeness and formulaicity: Evidence from Cypriot Greek. *Journal of Greek Linguistics, 3*(1), 179-201.

Terkourafi, M. (2005). Pragmatic correlates of frequency of use: The case for a notion of "minimal context." In S. Marmaridou, K. Nikiforidou, & E. Antonopoulou (Eds.), *Reviewing linguistic thought: Converging trends for the 21st century* (pp. 209-233). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Thep-Ackrapong, T. (1990). *Fossilization: A case study of practical and theoretical parameters*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Illinois State University.

Trosborg, A. (1995). *Interlanguage pragmatics: Requests, complaints, and apologies*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Tsimpli, I., & Sorace, A. (2006). Differentiating interfaces: L2 performance in syntax-semantics and syntax-discourse phenomena. In D. Bamman, T. Magnitskaia, & C. Zaller (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 30th annual Boston University conference on language development* (pp. 653-664). Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Press.

Vigil, N., & Oller, J. (1976). Rule fossilization: A tentative model. *Language Learning, 26*(2), 281-295.

Washburn, G. (1991). *Fossilization in second language acquisition: A Vygotskian perspective*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Pennsylvania.

Weinert, R. (1995). The role of formulaic language in second language acquisition: A review. *Applied Linguistics, 16*(2), 180-205.

Wekker, H., Kellerman, E., & Hermans, R. (1982). Trying to see the 'would' for the trees. *Interlanguage Studies Bulletin, 6*, 22-55.

Wray, A. (1999). Formulaic language in learners and native speakers. *Language Teaching, 32*(1), 213-231.

Wray, A., & Namba, K. (2003). Use of formulaic language by a Japanese-English bilingual child: A practical approach to data analysis. *Japan Journal of Multilingualism and Multiculturalism, 9*(1), 24-51.

Wray, A., & Perkins, M. R. (2000). The functions of formulaic language: An integrated model. *Language and Communication, 20*(1), 1-28.

Yu, M. C. (2011). Learning how to read situations and know what is the right thing to say or do in an L2: A study of socio-cultural competence and language transfer. *Journal of Pragmatics, 43*(4), 1127-1147.