Bridging the Gap between Linguistic and Pragmatic Assessment in Turkish Contexts

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study was to reach an understanding of the perceptions and self-evaluations of faculty members and students regarding pragmatic assessment in foreign language education. The participants were the academics and students in EFL departments at six state universities in Turkey. The data were collected through six open-ended questions in which the participants were asked to provide written answers. The main findings pointed at three themes for discussion: perceptions of pragmatic assessment and its contributions to foreign language education, the challenges as well as the scope and ways of pragmatic assessment. The participants generally appreciated the contributory nature of pragmatic assessment in their foreign language development. However, they also referred to some problems negatively influencing the

process of pragmatic assessment and hindering pragmatic development. Based on these findings, some practical and pedagogical suggestions are provided.

Keywords: pragmatics, pragmatic assessment, foreign language education, higher education

Introduction

Foreign language teaching has taken its unique place as a discipline experiencing subsequent shifts and adjustments based on the developments in the field of education. The constantly-changing and developing dynamics in this discipline have affected the priorities shaping the practices in language classrooms. A brief overview of the history of language teaching reveals that the focus of foreign language education was, for a long period, on the provision of the linguistic aspects of the target language. To put it differently, the basic purpose was to enable learners to master the target language with the center of attention on the grammatical aspects sometimes integrated with reading activities. As the focus of the agenda was on grammar education, assessment procedures naturally put emphasis on the assessment of the linguistic knowledge of learners.

Due to the new proposals and developments in foreign language education, however, some certain shifts have taken place noticeably impacting the process of foreign language teaching and learning. Some theories have accentuated the communicative side of languages besides their linguistic features. Searle's (1969) introduction of the Speech Act Theory, Canale and Swain's (1980) model of communicative competence, Leech's (1983) proposal for distinguishing pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics followed by Bachman's (1990) specific conception of pragmatic competence can be assumed to have paved the way for the escalation of interactive characteristics of language teaching. The increase in the awareness of the significant nature of communicative skills in language development has inevitably influenced the focus of foreign language education. Along with the aforementioned theories, the emphasis has shifted from linguistic to communicative aspects in foreign language teaching and learning. In other words, it can be stated that the development of interactional skills has taken priority over the

development of structural competence in target language. Therefore, new suggestions for providing learners with communicative knowledge and enlarging their pragmatic competence have been put forward in order to follow the most influential ways in foreign language education. In line with this, new regulations in curriculum and material design have been introduced in foreign language teaching programs. Though not taking place in all educational circles on a regular basis, foreign language education has been observed to place emphasis on developing learners' communicative, in other words, pragmatic skills.

Since there are two main processes in language education; i.e., teaching and assessment, some literature focusing on teaching and assessing pragmatic competence in foreign language education are presented in the Literature Review section.

Literature Review

An increasing number of studies have contributed to the development of pragmatics in general and teaching pragmatics in particular by examining different aspects in a diversity of contexts. Research on pragmatics has especially focused on the effects of different factors on pragmatic development of second/foreign language learners. Some studies investigated the impact of language proficiency on pragmatic development (Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998; Cohen & Olshtain, 1981; Ifantidou, 2011; Phakiti & Li, 2011; Taguchi, 2011b; Takahashi, 2005) while some others focused on the relationship between instruction and development of pragmatic competence (Alco´n Soler & Guzmán Pitarch, 2010; Bardovi-Harlig & Mahan-Taylor, 2010; Fordyce, 2014; Liddicoat & Crozet, 2001; Nguyen, Pham & Pham, 2012; Takimoto, 2009). There are also a group of studies working on the effects of second and foreign language learning environments on learners' progress in pragmatic competence (Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998; Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1986; Schauer, 2006). Relevant literature also presents studies taking into consideration the possible relation between pragmatic development and the amount of time spent in the target environment (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1986; Ren, 2013; Roever, 2012; Schauer, 2006; Taguchi, 2014).

As the present study was conducted in Turkish context, referring to the research carried out in Turkey related with pragmatics and

pragmatic competence would be appropriate in order to locate the study in the already-existing literature. The main area of investigation in Turkish context is speech acts (Aydın, 2013; Balcı, 2009; Deveci, 2010; Genç & Tekyıldız, 2009; Han & Burgucu-Tazegül, 2016). Another aspect of pragmatic competence investigated by Turkish scholars is Interlanguage Communicative Competence (Atay, 2015; Bektaş-Çetinkaya, 2012; Çetinavcı, 2012; Hişmanoğlu, 2011; Sarıçoban & Öz, 2014). Regarding studies in Turkish context, one can infer that there is a scarcity of research in terms of pragmatic assessment in this particular setting.

Assessing Pragmatic Competence

The number of studies carried out in the field so far on the assessment of pragmatic competence may appear limited compared to those on the issues related to the effects of different factors on pragmatic development and speech act productions. Taking the initiative in the field of pragmatic evaluation, Oller (1979) proposed pragmatic proficiency tests and called attention to two problematic aspects for designing them. One of the problems is about the time limitation. Test-takers are expected to produce language throughout the set period. Therefore, it could be difficult for learners to process the language within time limitation. The other challenge is related to the meaningfulness of the statements or conversations in pragmatic tests. It is important to present test-takers with meaningful language in order for them to produce appropriate usages. Considering this point, Oller (1979) suggested that tests should be natural to provide meaningful language for examinees. In the following years, Hudson, Detmer and Brown (1992, 1995) developed six prototype assessment instruments in order to analyze the influence of power differences between interlocutors, social distance and ranking imposition on pragmatic productions of learners. They designed different discourse tests with open-ended statements, written and oral versions and self-assessment: Written Discourse Completion Tasks (WDCT), Multiple-Choice Discourse Completion Tasks (MDCT), Oral Discourse Completion Tasks (ODCT), Discourse Role-play Talks (DRPT), Discourse Self-Assessment Tests (DSAT) and Role-play Self-Assessments (RPSA). These instruments require participants to reveal their performances based on

various situations. Supporting the rationale behind the proposals of these instruments, Brown (2001) commented that the variations offered through these tools are helpful in making more comprehensive examinations of language learner productions. Offering high levels of validity and reliability for pragmatic assessment, the instruments developed by Hudson et al. (1992, 1995) have been translated and adopted by researchers working in different foreign language contexts.

Some other researchers have also developed their own instruments for pragmatic assessment (Grabowski, 2009; Roever, 2005). Taking Hudson et al.'s (1992, 1995) designs as an example, Tada (2005), to assess speech act productions, worked on a small scale tool as a combination of a multiple-choice and an oral DCT. Adding the assessment of routine formulae and implicature, Roever (2005, 2006) aimed to provide an additional perspective to pragmatic assessment. Conducting a quantitative study in a Chinese EFL setting, Jianda (2006) re-designed the DCTs and added multiple choice items in order to evaluate the off-line pragmalinguistic productions of the participants. Noting that this type of DCT met the validity and reliability demands for the particular Chinese context in terms of assessing the participants' interlanguage pragmatic knowledge, the researcher concluded that though there are significant differences between the high-achievers and low-achievers considering their English proficiency, some similar differences are not observed in their pragmatic knowledge. Jianda (2006) suggested that pragmatic aspects of the target language should be taught to language learners for successful development of communicative competence. Criticizing the design of DCTs for not presenting real communicative situations, Walters (2007) did a qualitative research and employed conversation analysis informed tests (CAIT). Suggesting further investigation, the researcher regarded CAITs as efficient tools to obtain more reliable results as they enable examinees to analyze and work on the forms in the instrument.

In 2007, Fujiwara aimed to initiate a critical discussion of pragmatics tests grounded on a technical and ethical examination. Specifically focusing on pragmatic tests in terms of validity and reliability, the researcher explained that native speakers of the target language were regarded as powerful testers in preparing pragmatic tests and added that, from an ethical perspective, validity aspect was not

carefully considered these tests. The researcher concluded that these tests were negatively leading to a way in which "native-speakerism" (p. 24) is enforced in the assessment of pragmatic competence.

With an aim to evaluate the effectiveness of self-assessment-based instruction on the development of complaint, suggestion and request productions of 30 university students, Pakzadian and Tajeddin (2014) worked with two groups of participants. Both groups were presented a conversation based on particular speech acts and then the students were required to complete a WDCT. One group conducted self-evaluation and the performances of the other group were assessed by their teachers. The results revealed that the self-evaluation group performed better than the other group in the WDCTs in general. However, there were not statistically significant differences between the overall scores of the two groups. There was also an observable inter-rate reliability with the teacher ratings in the control group.

Tajeddin and Alemi (2014) regarded the issue of pragmatic assessment from a different angle and investigated the criteria of native English raters in assessing EFL learners' pragmatic abilities. 51 raters were asked to assess six different apology cases and describe how they carried out the rating process. The results revealed that the degrees of severity differed from rater to rater and the researcher concluded that the myth of native speaker is not a distinctive factor. With an aim to evaluate the degree of pragmatic knowledge involved general tests, Allami and Aghajari (2014) examined the first part of IELTS listening tests conducted for a ten-year period (between 1999 and 2009). The researchers found that the most commonly involved aspects were discourse markers and politeness functions. However, items to assess test-takers' cultural knowledge were not included in the tests. The researchers concluded that all aspects of pragmatic knowledge were not assessed equally and there was a low priority in the assessment of these aspects compared to other language areas.

In the light of the above-mentioned studies, it can be inferred that pragmatic assessment is an area that has received attention but needs further investigation. The consideration of foreign language assessment exposes that the focus of assessment is, on a large scale, on the evaluation of grammatical knowledge and competence of foreign language learners. The development of pragmatic skills is not

adequately assessed in the process of foreign language education. Setting out from this perception, the present study, based on a qualitative research design, aims to contribute to the existing literature pertaining to pragmatic assessment in foreign language education. The basic purpose is to portray the perceptions, attitudes and self-evaluations of faculty members and EFL learners at tertiary level in Turkey towards pragmatic assessment, its benefits in the development of foreign language knowledge and competencies and the challenges in the assessment process.

Research Design

This study was conducted with a particular aim to present an in-depth picture of how academics and EFL students consider the assessment of pragmatic competence in foreign language education. Their perceptions of the challenges hindering appropriate and effective pragmatic assessment and its possible contributions to learners' general language development are included within the scope of the study.

The participants of this study were 554 EFL students and 50 faculty members from six state universities in Turkey. The EFL students were from all grades and they had experiences of learning the target language ranging from five to twelve years. The faculty members had professional experiences ranging from less than five to more than twenty years. Besides, some had Bachelor's, some Masters and some had Ph.D. degrees.

As the aim was to obtain an in-depth understanding of the perceptions and self-evaluations of the participants pertaining to pragmatic assessment in foreign language education, six open-ended questions were formed by the researcher in the light of relevant literature. The questions directed to the faculty and student participants focused on such similar issues as their perceptions of the benefits of pragmatic assessment, the challenges experienced in assessment process and the ways to assess pragmatic competence. Those questions for the faculty members were written in English and all of them provided answers in English. For student participants, the questions were written in their native languages so that they could feel more relaxed when reflecting their perceptions.

Written questions were provided in order to offer the participants the flexibility and time to provide answers reflecting their thoughts. The participants were asked to write their answers for these questions. The written answers were evaluated by the researcher and two raters to ensure interrater reliability. In the analysis process, content analysis was adopted as it enables the researcher to attain more detailed appreciation of participant conceptions. Frequent statements were identified basic codes and they were combined into relevant categories and broader themes.

Results

The analysis of the data rendered many participant quotations mirroring the conceptions of participants concerning issues related to pragmatic assessment in foreign language education. The analysis resulted in three areas of discussion: attitudes towards pragmatic assessment and its contributions to foreign language education, the challenges experienced in the assessment process besides the scope and the ways to assess pragmatic competence. These issues are to be presented with some quotations from the faculty members and from the student participants.

The analysis of the data revealed the positive attitudes of both academics and EFL students towards pragmatic assessment in foreign language education. While they were reflecting their perceptions, the participants also referred to the contributory nature of assessing pragmatic competence. The table below presents the codes and categories formed based on participant quotations in terms of their attitudes towards assessing pragmatics and its contributions in foreign language education.

Table 1: Theme for the Attitudes towards Pragmatic Assessment and its Contributions

Theme 1: The Attitudes towards Pragmatic Assessment and its Contributions					
Category 1: Assessing pragmatic competence	Integral part of language assessment	Faculty (N)	Faculty (F)	Students (N)	Students (F)
		23	63.8	240	52.7
	Raising awareness	13	36.2	215	47.2
Category 2: Contributions of pragmatic assessment	Identifying problematic areas	10	32.2	212	33.1
	Raising L2 proficiency	9	29	184	28.7
	Increasing self-confidence and motivation	7	22.6	198	30.8
	Developing self-assessment	5	16.1	47	7.3

As can be seen from Table 1, a majority of the participants from both parties pointed out that teaching and assessing pragmatics should be an essential part of language education if the aim is to train learners who are competent in effective communication. They also added that pragmatic teaching and assessment should be integrated and assessment should be one of the most important phases in teaching and learning foreign languages. Since student participants wrote just sentence-long comments or short phrases as to the necessity to integrate pragmatic assessment into language education, remarks from the faculty members can be much more enlightening. Reflecting the general view of the participants, the following quotation proposed by a faculty member can be considered as an explanation for the significance of integrating pragmatic assessment in the educational process:

> *In my opinion, the necessity of teaching and assessing pragmatic competence is related to the aim of teaching the target language. Specific purposes of teaching and learning a language can specify the content and the type of assessment. If pragmatic competence is a part of our teaching targets, it must be assessed. And, I believe that it must be a part of general assessment.*

Another faculty member also called attention to the same issue from a different perspective. He discussed the unity of teaching and assessing pragmatic competence and maintained that they should not

be separate but integrated components in foreign language education. He explained that assessing learners' linguistic knowledge alone is not an efficient way of understanding their general language development. In order to make his point clear, he put his ideas into the following words:

> *Just like its teaching, pragmatic assessment should not be separate on its own. Pragmatic development should be regarded as a part of whole language development. Since it is not possible to claim that linguistic competence is enough for successful communication in the target language, then, it is also not possible to maintain that an assessment which is based only on linguistic competence is enough to assess the learners' communicative competence effectively.*

As it can be seen in Table 1, a different point of discussion is related to the contributions of pragmatic assessment in learners' foreign language development. Before mentioning specific benefits of pragmatic assessment, it would be better to offer a specific comment from a faculty member concerning the overall advantage of integrating pragmatic assessment into general language assessment. The participant expressed that pragmatic assessment can be functional in foreign language education by revealing the central needs for modification in the design of courses as well as course materials. She also added that the changes can raise both teachers' and students' awareness of the importance of pragmatic competence and they can start to take it more seriously to do their best to develop pragmatic competence. The below-presented comment reflects the faculty member's personal evaluations of the integration of pragmatic assessment in foreign language education:

> *The assessment which includes pragmatic knowledge will, first of all, shows its effects on the foreign language teaching and learning system. The content of language courses will include pragmatic knowledge, new language teaching materials will be designed and the emphasis placed by teachers and learners on this type of knowledge will increase consequently. Most importantly the learning of pragmatic knowledge will be taken seriously and learners' L2 proficiency will increase since this type of knowledge*

is certainly required for effective communication in the target language.

The analysis of the contributions of pragmatic assessment to learners' foreign language development revealed that the faculty members and students shared similar perspectives. Most of the faculty members and students mentioned such benefits as awareness raising, increase in L2 proficiency, development of communicative skills, maintenance of more enjoyable and productive learning processes and identification of problematic areas. Besides, students also referred to such advantages as using language beyond grammatical rules, increasing awareness towards appropriate language usages besides developing self-confidence and the ability to self-assess the learning process. A student participant offered a detailed comment about the benefits of pragmatic assessment covering different perspectives:

> *Pragmatic assessment helps us to be aware of the significance of pragmatic knowledge and skills in appropriate communication. When we are properly assessed, we can identify our strengths and weaknesses and work on necessary aspects. The more we are aware of different aspects, the more motivated and willing we become to learn more. This also enables us to monitor and control our learning process; so, we can become more autonomous.*

Though faculty members and student participants appreciated the contributory nature of pragmatic assessment in foreign language education, they also frequently referred to the problems in the process of assessing pragmatic competence in foreign language education. Table 2 displays the challenges in pragmatic assessment from the points of view of both parties.

Table 2: Theme for the Challenges in Pragmatic Assessment

Theme 2: The Challenges in Pragmatic Assessment					
		Faculty (N)	Faculty (F)	Students (N)	Students (F)
Category 1: External challenges	Education system	24	52.2	354	56.6
	Examination style	22	47.8	271	43.3
Category 2: Student-related challenges	Students' proficiency levels	7	63.6	182	80.2
	Students' lack of awareness	4	36.6	45	19.8
Category 3: Faculty-related challenges	Instructors' awareness	11	64.7	37	51.4
	Instructors' capabilities for assessment	6	36.3	35	48.6

As displayed in Table 2, the challenges experienced in the process of pragmatic assessment are among the topics of discussion attracting attention in the comments of most participants. There are three main groups of challenges identified through participant comments. External factors consisting of the existing education system and examination style generally assessing students' linguistic knowledge formed the first group of challenges. The second category may be said to be related to students and to include their low proficiency and low levels of pragmatic awareness. Instructors' awareness of the importance of pragmatic assessment and their capabilities to conduct pragmatic evaluations may be regarded as the last group of challenges.

Introducing a comprehensive statement from a faculty member can be helpful to depict the perspectives pertaining to the causes of problems in pragmatic assessment. The participant proposed a meticulous comment referring to the challenges in assessing pragmatic competence including teachers and students along with the existing system as the agents influencing the process. He also focused on the inappropriate balance between teaching linguistic aspects of the target language and then assessing students' linguistic knowledge suggesting some radical changes in the existing situation:

> *The challenges in assessing students' pragmatic competence include such factors as education system, general assessment system, perceptions of FL teaching and learning and teachers' and students' preparedness. For the assessment of pragmatic*

competence, the common education system seems to be the basic challenge. It seems to be very common that language teaching in many courses do not go beyond the teaching of linguistic components... In general standardized tests, the basic criterion is linguistic competence in the target language. Therefore, many students and teachers tend to think linguistic competence as the ultimate goal of foreign language courses, and pragmatic competence as secondary or complementary. Unless an education system which also puts emphasis on pragmatic competence is established, the problems seem to be far from solution.

Considering both instructors and students as responsible for the challenges in pragmatic assessment besides the education system, a student participant explained that though the existing system may seem to be the single cause of the negative consequences, in reality, it is the teachers and students who form the basis of this system. He suggested, therefore, that unless the members who are expected to direct the process of foreign language education change their attitudes and styles, then, the system will not possibly change:

It is always easy to blame others for the negative results and it is also valid in the case of foreign language education. However, we, students, and our instructors need to accept that we are the main parts in this process. It is obvious that in this system, pragmatic competence is not valued so much and it seems this is not a big problem for us. Because if we want to improve our pragmatic competence, we need to force ourselves beyond our existing language proficiency. Besides, some instructors seem like they do not want to focus on pragmatics because it may be challenging for them. But, it is not helpful just to criticize, we need to shoulder the responsibility to change the things we are criticizing.

As expressed by the participants in this study, an additional issue in the discussion of pragmatic assessment is its scope; i.e., whether to assess pragmatic competence as a separate unit or to integrate it into general language assessment. The ways to assess pragmatic competence were also proposed by the participants. Table 3 shows the preferences of the participants in terms of the scope and ways of assessing pragmatic competence.

Table 3: Theme for the Scope and Ways of Pragmatic Assessment

Theme 3: The Scope and Ways of Pragmatic Assessment					
		Faculty (N)	Faculty (F)	Students (N)	Students (F)
Category 1: The scope of assessment	Integrating pragmatic assessment into general language assessment	17	56.7	226	67.7
	Assessing pragmatic competence as a separate unit	13	43.3	108	32.3
Category 2: The ways of assessment	Authentic communicative tasks	19	42.2	197	38
	Role plays	13	28.9	167	32.2
	Portfolios	4	8.9	32	9.6
	Observation	2	4.4	43	8.3
	Presentations	2	4.4	36	6.9
	Checklists	2	4.4	43	8.3

The preferences of the faculty members and student participants revealed that including pragmatic assessment into general assessment process outweighed its independent assessment. However, there are not specific participant quotations representing this perspective. Instead, the participants generally expressed their opinion in simple phrases like "both pragmatic assessment and linguistic assessment" or "pragmatic assessment alone". One of the faculty members pointed out what to pay attention in the process of pragmatic assessment and expressed his concerns about the objectivity of the process. Stating that it is not easy to assess pragmatic competence, he proposed the below comment:

> *The assessment should consider such questions as 'Do the students reflect their intentions and understand their interlocutors' intentions? Do they use non-verbal signals effectively?, Do they select appropriate words?'. However, it is not easy to assess pragmatic competence through tests or activities. In this sense, it is almost impossible to mention an objective process.*

The data obtained from the participants were not limited to those mentioned so far. Most of the participants remarked authentic communicative tasks, role-plays and presentations as useful ways to improve pragmatic competence of learners. They also conceived classroom observations and portfolios as beneficial since they provide

teachers with the chance to evaluate learners' pragmatic development over a period.

The above comments and suggestions portray a picture of the perceptions and self-evaluations of faculty members and EFL students of pragmatic assessment in foreign language education in Turkey. It can be inferred from the findings that the general considerations center on the potential benefits concomitant of pragmatic assessment. However, there are also some challenges in the process negatively influencing assessment and, therefore, the development of pragmatic competence of foreign language learners.

Discussion

This study was conducted with the basic purpose of understanding the perceptions and self-evaluations of faculty members and students in Turkish EFL context regarding pragmatic assessment in foreign language education. The written comments proposed by the participants exposed that they have encouraging considerations about the value and the positive contributions of pragmatic assessment. However, they also referred to some issues that need to be handled for the betterment of teaching and assessing pragmatic competence. The discussion is based on the points that were included in the remarks of the participants.

The first discussion is about the contributions of pragmatic assessment in the development of learners' language proficiency in general and pragmatic competence in particular. Both the faculty members and the student participants maintained that pragmatic assessment helps them identify the problematic areas in their foreign language development. It raises learners' awareness and provides them with the chance to specify their areas of strengths and weaknesses and to work on those areas needing further attention. Pragmatic assessment was also accepted as beneficial in the development of students' self-confidence and motivation in continuing their foreign language learning as also reported in Ishıhara's (2009) study. The participants seemed to have appreciated the advantages of pragmatic assessment. However, their evaluations of pragmatic assessment were not limited only to its contributions in foreign language education. They were also aware of

the challenges in the process of pragmatic assessment based on their language learning and teaching experiences.

As expressed by the faculty members and the student participants, one of the biggest challenges in pragmatic development is the existing education system in Turkey which still puts more emphasis on teaching linguistic aspects of target language than on teaching pragmatic ones. In such a system, it becomes inevitable to focus on the evaluation of linguistic knowledge in the assessment process. However, this blocks the development of learners' pragmatic skills as they cannot effectively get the essential feedback for further development. The way of the existing system forces the members of the education process to follow traditional ways of teaching and assessment. The end product is the type of foreign language education in which the teacher provides learners with the linguistic side of the target language neglecting its communicative or pragmatic characteristics. The education system naturally influences the way classes are conducted and students are assessed, the tools used for evaluation, the attitudes of foreign language teachers and learners towards language learning and the preferences of teachers to lead their classes with an understanding that teaching pragmatic features of the target language is more difficult than teaching its linguistic aspects.

Another possible challenge that needs to attract attention is the inadequacy of the instruments to assess pragmatic competence. In foreign language education, assessment tools have mostly been designed to evaluate linguistic aspects of the target language. The number of the instruments to assess learners' pragmatic development is still not so high. Besides, considering the scope of pragmatic assessment and the dynamics playing roles in pragmatic usages, designing tools for effective and appropriate pragmatic assessment is not so easy as developing linguistic assessment tools. The comments of Brown (2001), Jianda (2006) and Aufa (2013) support the notion that designing pragmatic assessment tools is a complex process. The issues of validity, reliability, authenticity and diversity, in general, cause the difficulties faced in the process of developing appropriate tools. The consideration of EFL contexts further increases the concerns for diversity and authenticity. As foreign language learners do not have ample opportunities to use the target language in authentic and diverse

contexts, it is important to offer them appropriate settings in which they can use the target language for different purposes. Pomerants and Bell (2007) suggest the integration of authentic communicative tasks and role-plays as influential ways to assess learners' pragmatic performances as they provide learners with an atmosphere, though not totally authentic, in which they are expected to produce target usages.

To formulate reliable pragmatic assessment tools requires that the instruments should be prepared by native and non-native professional expert users of the target language. Conducting a technical and ethical evaluation of pragmatic tests, Fujiwara (2007) pointed at the heavy reliance on native speakers in the process of preparing pragmatic tests. This was considered as a drawback of pragmatic tests by the researcher since there are many non-native teachers and learners of target language. Therefore, it can be suggested that, in order to take the issues of cross-cultural or intercultural pragmatics, pragmatic assessment instruments should be prepared, organized and practiced by a group of native and non-native professionals who are competent in field specific knowledge and who possess the necessary qualifications to conduct pragmatic assessment. Otherwise, the process and product will most probably turn out to be total failures.

Two additional points can be helpful in the discussion of pragmatic assessment: not imposing the idea of native-speakerism and assessing pragmatic development over a period. As to the issue of native-speakerism, foreign language learners should not be forced to speak like natives of the target language. The case of imposing native speakerism in teaching and assessing pragmatics is also criticized by Fujiwara (2007). Therefore, in the process of evaluating learners' pragmatic development, instead of centering on native speakerism language teachers or instructors should take such factors as linguistic diversity and multiculturalism in order to conduct a more fair assessment. Kasper and Rose (2002) suggest that learners' should not be imposed the native speaker norms and, in parallel with this idea Ishihara (2009) advises instructors hold an attitude in which learners are not judged strictly for their non-native productions but they are evaluated on the basis of their appropriate productions.

Another point to focus on as a pedagogical implication is assessing pragmatic competence over some process. Evaluating

learners' pragmatic performances over a period can be more beneficial than evaluating it through single products. Learners' pragmatic progress should be assessed not on a product-basis but on a process-basis. Besides, a process-based evaluation accompanied with efficient and comprehensible feedback can be much more supportive for teachers and learners to identify the points needing peculiar attention compared to a product-based assessment in which pragmatic knowledge and competence of learners are assessed and graded through single performances. For this purpose, as maintained by Ishihara (2009) learners can be offered different contexts and tools in the process of being pragmatically assessed. Sharing a similar point of view, Cohen (2008) favors gathering "data from more than one measure" (p. 222) as the best way for pragmatic assessment because of the changing dynamics affecting the process of pragmatic production. Therefore, as referred by some of the faculty members and student participants, observation and portfolios can take their places among the instrumental ways to assess learners' pragmatic development.

To sum up the discussion, it can be stated that there is growing interest and awareness as regards the importance of pragmatic assessment in foreign language education in the field. However, necessary alterations should be done both in educational policies and in real classroom applications. First of all, teachers should be informed about their responsibilities as the leading agents in educational process. World-wide seminars or conferences can be organized in which teachers can share their experiences and ideas about teaching and assessment of pragmatic competence. If teachers become more conscious of what they are expected to do, their determination to shoulder the responsibility as leaders in foreign language classrooms will increase and their students will benefit from this process.

Conclusion

This study aimed to reveal the faculty members' and learners' understanding of pragmatic assessment in EFL departments in Turkey. The content analysis of the data obtained from participants' written comments showed that pragmatic assessment contributes to the development of learners' general language competence and communicative capabilities. However, despite the growing realization of

the importance of pragmatic assessment, it is obvious, based on participant statements, that there are certain problematic issues that need close and careful consideration in order to create healthier environments in which successful pragmatic education and assessment can be attained. Unless these challenges are overcome, the vicious circle posing problems in teaching and assessing pragmatic competence will continue to prevail.

Acknowledgements

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