Perceptions of L1 and L2 Speakers on Task Difficulty of Pragmatic Tasks

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In L2 pragmatics, only a few studies have examined task complexity. Furthermore, the existing studies have predominantly focused on the cognitive dimension and have lacked consistent findings. González-Lloret and Ortega (2018) and Pallotti (2019) have thereby contended that socio-interactional features be incorporated into task design. Along this line, this study investigated perceptions of L1 and L2 speakers of English regarding the difficulty of four role-play tasks with differentiated degrees of (dis)preference and imposition. Participants included 33 L1 speakers and 63 Korean L2 speakers at intermediate-level (*n* = 32) and high-level (*n* = 31). Results showed that participants' perceived difficulty matched the design intentions exclusively affected by request size, responsibility for the problem, and persuasion across complex versions of the tasks. Moreover, the linguistic consequences of such factors entailed challenges among L2 speakers. There were also various factors that emerged for task difficulty other than the manipulated task design features, underscoring the importance of participants' explanatory comments in L2 pragmatics.

Key words: L2 pragmatics, task difficulty, socio-interaction variables, proficiency, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)

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1. INTRODUCTION

L2 pragmatics within the field of TBLT has researched topics such as pragmatic instruction (Alcon-Soler, 2018; Bardovi-Harlig, 2015; Bardovi-Harlig, Mossman, & Vellenga, 2015), task complexity (Gilabert & Barón, 2013, 2018; Gómez-Laich & Taguchi, 2018; Kim & Taguchi, 2015, 2016; Taguchi, 2007), task modality (Regan & Payant, 2018), L2 proficiency (Levkina, 2018; Taguchi, Kaufer, Gómez-Laich, & Zhao, 2016) and assessment (Ekiert, Lampropoulou, Révész, & Torgersen, 2018; Kuiken & Vedder, 2018; Youn, 2018, 2020). Among these areas, task complexity is one of the most widely researched topics in TBLT research, but it has received relatively less attention in L2 pragmatics (González-Lloret, 2020; Levkina, 2018). Furthermore, the few studies that have examined task complexity in L2 pragmatics have focused predominantly on a cognitive dimension of pragmatic task design and produced a lack of consistent findings (Gilabert & Barón, 2013, 2018; Gómez-Laich & Taguchi, 2018; Kim & Taguchi, 2015, 2016; Taguchi, 2007). Therefore, the purpose of the present study aimed at addressing this gap by exploring a socio-interactional dimension as new task design criteria that concerns "how people design and conduct their interactions in completing a task" (González-Lloret & Ortega, 2018, p. 192). The selection of this dimension was motivated by the view of interactional pragmatics that pragmatic meanings and actions are achieved through organized sequences of turns that participants construct together in conversation (Kasper, 2006, 2009). To expand the theoretical scope of task complexity literature and to propose the inclusion of socio-interactional variables as task design features in L2 pragmatics, the present study investigated whether and how task manipulations by socio-interactional features – (dis) preference and imposition – elicited task demands and explored what factors were related to the difficulty of L1 and L2 speakers in performing the designed pragmatic tasks based on their open-ended responses. In the following sections, I first review the literature on task difficulty and L2 pragmatics to summarize the current findings and fill the gap in this field. Then, I present the theoretical basis for investigating the socio-interactional features of pragmatic task design.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Task Difficulty and L2 Pragmatics

Many TBLT scholars argue that a more explicit definition of task complexity or task difficulty is needed because the terms used in the L2 literature are ambiguous and uncertain (Pallotti, 2019; Sasayama, 2016). Given this, Pallotti (2019) attempts to reconceptualize

these terms; task complexity should be used only for referring to a task's inherent, absolute, or structural properties that stay within a task itself such as a number of elements or planning, and task difficulty is a more appropriate term for when there is an interaction between tasks and individuals' cognition or characteristics. Pallotti (2019) also argues that the major sources of L2 task difficulty are distinct to learner-related difficulty which primarily results from the encounter of task features with an individual's aptitude, prior knowledge, or L2 proficiency, and feature-related difficulty that arises from task features themselves; some task features are more cognitively demanding for everyone, irrespective of individual characteristics. To avoid terminological confusion, the present study is in parallel with Pallotti's (2019) argument; task difficulty is defined as a given task's inherent demands that interact with a participant in a given context with a focus on feature-related difficulty.

With little attention to task difficulty in L2 pragmatics, only a few publications focus on the interrelationship between L2 pragmatic tasks and task difficulty (Gilabert & Barón, 2013, 2018; Gómez-Laich & Taguchi, 2018; Kim & Taguchi, 2015, 2016; Taguchi, 2007). More importantly, the limited number of these existing studies induced task demands primarily by manipulating +/- reasoning and/or +/- elements based on Robinson's (2001a, 2011) Cognition Hypothesis, hypothesizing that increasing task difficulty facilitates accuracy and complexity of production, interaction, noticing and uptake, as well as deeper processing and retention of learned knowledge. However, the overall findings of pragmatic task difficulty research were somewhat inconsistent. In other words, these findings did not lend support to Robinson's Cognition Hypothesis framework because manipulations of L2 pragmatic task difficulty were not significantly relevant to L2 learners' pragmatic performance.

For example, complex tasks manipulated along +/- elements produced a higher number of pragmatic moves (requests, suggestions), but task difficulty had no significant impact on the variety of pragmatic moves (request/suggestion-making expressions) (Gilabert & Barón, 2013). In addition, complex tasks operationalized by reasoning demands led to a greater amount of interaction as learning opportunities and retention of acquired knowledge (Gómez-Laich & Taguchi, 2018; Kim & Taguchi, 2015, 2016) whereas no significant effect of task difficulty was found concerning the quality of participants' performance and learning gains (Kim & Taguchi, 2015, 2016). These inconsistent findings suggest the difficulty of applying the existing Cognition Hypothesis framework to L2 pragmatic difficulty research and possibly the limitations of focusing mainly on cognitive factors in pragmatic task design (González-Lloret, 2020).

It has been recently discussed that a source of inconsistency could be attributed to having a primary focus on individual-based cognitive factors, and little concern about pragmatic characteristics and interactional phenomena for task design features (Gómez-Laich & Taguchi, 2018; González-Lloret, 2020; González-Lloret & Ortega, 2018; Wong & Waring, 2010; Youn, 2013, 2018). Given this concern, the field has begun to move toward an

interaction-based pragmatic perspective that concentrates on investigating how interlocutors design and conduct their interaction in organized sequences by employing a wide range of pragmatics and interactional resources (González-Lloret, 2020; González-Lloret & Ortega, 2018). González-Lloret and Ortega (2018), in particular, proposed to take into account socio-pragmatic interactional characteristics to increase and reduce the demands of tasks. Specifically, they introduce a framework that considers sequential organizations of interaction (Schegloff, 2007) and politeness principles (Lakoff, 1973) as independent variables that influence L2 pragmatic task difficulty. Informed by Conversation Analysis (CA), they argue that these components contribute to "how people interact with others to complete a task" (González-Lloret & Ortega, 2018, p. 192). Despite the necessity of socio-interactional characteristics in pragmatic task design, very few studies have been conducted to relate task difficulty to interactional task demands and to explore their impact on overall task difficulty and pragmatic performance (Pallotti, 2019).

Given this, the present study sought to explore how L1 and L2 speakers of differing proficiency levels perceived the difficulty of pragmatic tasks which were designed along the socio-interactional dimension based on their open-ended responses. In this study, the inclusion of a group of L1 speakers was to obtain more reliable evidence of task difficulty effects from a task design perspective. As pointed out in the previous studies (Lee, 2019; Pallotti, 2019), the effects of task difficulty could be affected by L2 speakers' variability in competence, so it would be hard to ascertain whether the effects of task difficulty would be attributed to the design features of tasks themselves or L2 speakers' characteristics. To overcome this problem, it was necessary to recruit L1 speakers who have a better command of their native language and show less variance in performance than L2 speakers. The following section explains the rationale behind the socio-interactional features used to establish the different levels of difficulty in tasks that involve pragmatic situations.

2.2. Socio-pragmatic Interactional Variables of Pragmatic Tasks

To provide a theoretical grounding for the pragmatic tasks used in this study, I discuss two types of socio-pragmatic interactional criteria that create task demands: preference organization and imposition.

2.2.1. Preference organization

Preference organization refers to turns organized for certain social actions such as requesting, inviting, or complimenting which involve preference and dispreference (Schegloff, 2007). For instance, a speaker issues a turn for requesting, and a recipient either accepts or rejects the request; in these sequential turns, a speaker's requesting is mainly

considered a dispreferred action since it imposes upon a recipient, and a recipient's acceptance and rejection are considered a preferred and dispreferred responses, respectively (Schegloff, 2007).

The general consensus of CA studies with regard to preference organization (Al-Gahtani & Roever, 2012, 2014; Pekarek Doehler & Pochon-Berger, 2011, 2015; Pomerantz, 1984; Schegloff, 2007; Taleghani-Nikazm & Huth, 2010; Wong & Waring, 2010; Youn, 2013) demonstrates that preferred actions (offering) and responses (acceptance) are produced immediately and kept short since they are comfortable, supportive and reinforcing. In contrast, a speaker puts dispreferred actions (requesting) late in sequence through preliminary moves (an availability check, accounts, explanations) and, similarly, a recipient provides dispreferred responses (rejection) with any combination of reasons, mitigation, or more elaboration because dispreference is uncomfortable, unpleasant, or difficult. This indicates that dispreference may lead interlocutors to provide more reasons, explanations, or elaborations in comparison to preference which might require little interactional work (Al-Gahtani & Roever, 2012; Schegloff, 2007). Given this, to create varying degrees of interactional difficulty, the pragmatic tasks of the present study were operationalized by incorporating preference and dispreference in sequences of accomplishing a social action of requesting.

2.2.2. Degree of imposition

Social factors such as relative power (P) (vertical disparity between interlocutors in a hierarchical structure), social distance (D) (degree of familiarity between interlocutors) (Félix-Brasdefer, 2007), and degree of imposition (R) (cost to a recipient: time, money, effort) determine how face-threatening a social action is and how much politeness resources a speaker offers to mitigate face threats (Taguchi & Roever, 2017). To elaborate, PDR-high, which involves a higher level of imposition, higher power, and a more distant relationship, requires a greater degree of politeness to allow a recipient to save face than PDR-low in which the social action with a lower degree of imposition is addressed to a person in equal power and a small distance (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Little research accommodates the link between social features and sequential organization of interaction in applied linguistics (Wong & Waring, 2010). Among the few, two studies by Youn (2013, 2018) showed that participants mitigated the heavy weight of imposition (e.g., a recommendation letter request to a professor) via their use of more interactional devices such as pre-commitment checks, the establishment of shared understanding, and/or accounts than the lower degree of imposition (e.g., deciding a meeting time with peers). That is, a situation that involves a higher degree of imposition would be more interactionally challenging since it demands more interactional strategies on the part of a speaker who

requests to avoid hurting a recipient's feelings and minimize imposition or negative evaluation by the recipient when fulfilling a social action (Gonzalez-Lloret & Ortega, 2018). This suggests that there might be a clear impact of social demands on participants' interaction in a given context. Considering this, this study created distinct levels of task difficulty via the weight of imposition in requesting contexts.

With increasing attention to a socio-interactional perspective, this study attempts to explore difficulties and ease associated with pragmatic tasks designed based on L1 and L2 speakers' open-ended responses to provide insights into how task design interacts with participants' perceptions of task difficulty as a part of a larger study.[1] Therefore, it poses the following research questions:

1) What are the overall patterns of L1 and L2 speakers' perceived difficulty in L2 pragmatic tasks?
2) According to L1 speakers, what factors are related to the difficulty of L2 pragmatic tasks?
3) According to L2 speakers (high and intermediate), what factors are related to the difficulty of L2 pragmatic tasks?

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Participants

L1 speakers 33 L1 speakers of English voluntarily participated in the study. Participant ages ranged from 20 to 49 years (*M*=33.0, *SD*=7.644) and they were undergraduate and graduate students and university-level instructors who had taught English for an average of nine years (ranging from 1 to 24 years).

L2 speakers 63 Korean speakers voluntarily participated in the study. Participant ages ranged from 20 to 37 years in the high-level (*M*= 24.6, *SD*= 2.811) and the intermediate-level (*M*= 23.9, *SD*= 4.161). They consisted of undergraduate and graduate students who did not have previous experience living in English-speaking nations, and whose amount of previous English study ranged from 9 to 24 years with an average of 14.9 years (*SD*=3.830). The L2 speakers were divided into a high-level (*n*=31) and an intermediate-level (*n*=32) based on their self-reported scores on the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) and Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) obtained within the two years

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[1] The study investigated the effects of socio-interactional features on task difficulty. It confirmed the significant differences among the four tasks via cognitive measures. (Manuscript in preparation).

preceding the time of the experiment. The L2 speakers with a score of 800 to 990 were categorized as high-level (H-level) and those with a score of 600 to 795 as intermediate-level (IM-level) (Abe & Roever, 2019). As the two standardized English proficiency test scores were incompatible, the study mapped TOEFL scores onto TOEIC scores in consultation with College of Europe and Kaplan. The independent t-test results revealed a significant difference between the high-level and the intermediate-level, $t(63) = 15$, $p < .001$ (H-level: $M = 933.23$, $SD = 55.63$; IM-level: $M = 738.44$, $SD = 47.29$).

3.2. Tasks

3.2.1. Role-play tasks

The rationale behind the use of role-play tasks was their wide employment in L2 pragmatic research (Taguchi & Roever, 2017; Youn, 2018) and its characteristics of some degree of authenticity (Al-Gahtani & Roever, 2012; Youn, 2018). In this study, role-play tasks were delivered by an interlocutor, an L1 English speaker who has been an instructor at universities for over 20 years. Participants and the interlocutor performed the four tasks in a random sequence to prevent sequencing effects (Lee, 2019). For each task, a participant and the interlocutor were given different information about a situation and a role-play card to help them interact and negotiate naturally in the course of accomplishing a pragmatic action (Youn, 2013, 2018).

Given the definition of tasks as "the things that people do in their daily lives at work, at play and in between" (Long, 1985, p. 89), previous English for Specific Purposes (ESP) studies (Evans, 2013; Huh, 2006; Lambert, 2010; Long, 2015; Martin & Adrada-Rafael, 2017; Serafini & Torres, 2015) claim that this high degree of real-world relevance of tasks is particularly adequate for business environments. Accordingly, the four role-play tasks were designed to elicit a pragmatic action of requesting in business contexts. The request scenarios for each task according to task difficulty are as follows: the simple (*rescheduling of a meeting),* less simple *(requesting help with a team project)*, complex *(requesting salary increase),* and highly complex *(requesting an extension of the delivery due date of an order)* (Appendix A).

3.2.2. Operationalization of task difficulty

Operationally, the demands of four role-play tasks resulted from the varying degrees of imposition and the provision of (dis)preference while maintaining higher social power (P+) and higher social distance (D+) that might impact participants' interaction and task difficulty. Table 1 describes the varying degrees of the variables in the four role-play tasks.

TABLE 1
Operationalization of Socio-Interactional Features

		Simple	Less Simple	Complex	Highly Complex
Social variables	Distance Power Imposition	D+ P+ Low I	D+ P+ Moderate I	D+ P+ High I	D+ P+ Very high I
Interactional variables	Pre-sequences Core AP Post-sequences	Go-ahead Pre-R	Go-ahead Dis-R Pre-R	Blocking Dis-R Pre-R	Blocking Dis-R Dis-R

Note. Pre-R = preferred-response; Dis-R = dispreferred-response

The Degree of Imposition The choice of imposition for pragmatic task design features was motivated by the nature of requesting as a target social action for this study. Requesting is significantly relevant to the weight of imposition based on the definition which refers to the cost being put upon a recipient who performs a speaker's request (Taguchi & Roever, 2017). Thus, this study manipulated the imposition variable based on cost. To be specific, the description of each request situation operationalized the weight of imposition, ranging from a simple task with little cost on the part of a recipient to a highly complex task with a heavy cost. A survey was carried out to confirm the degrees of the imposition variable. Six L1 speakers were asked to rank the four situations in ascending order from the lowest to the highest imposition. The raters' agreement was 100%, confirming that the simple task had the lowest imposition, followed by the less simple, complex, and highly complex task with higher impositions.

Preference/Dispreference The selection of preference organization for the task design variable was due to requesting; it is considered a dispreferred action and relates to preferred and dispreferred responses. Creating different levels of task difficulty via preference organization is based on the assumption that participants create their discourse sequentially. That is, the discourse is built upon a core Adjacency Pair (AP) (paired utterances by different speakers, request-acceptance/refusal) with pre-sequences (turns that precede a core AP) and post-sequences (turns that follow a core AP) (Schegloff, 2007). An AP consists of First Pair Part (FPP) which projects a prospective action and Second Pair Part (SPP) conditioned by FPP such as offer-acceptance/decline (Schegloff, 2007). In a formal request sequence of each discourse, the provision of the interlocutor's preferred and dispreferred responses was utilized as follows: go-ahead as preferred (to encourage progress toward the request: *sure*) and blocking as dispreferred (to obstruct progress: *Currently, I'm very busy at work*) in pre-sequences, and acceptance (preferred) and rejection (dispreferred) as SPP in a core AP and post-sequences. Accordingly, a simple task condition that only consists of the interlocutor's preferred responses requires participants to invest less interactional effort. In contrast, a highly-complex task solely with the interlocutor's dispreference demands more interactional

resources for participants to successfully accomplish a social action of requesting. A pilot study was conducted to test the presumed difficulty levels driven by the combination of imposition and preference variables. Participants were nine L1 and L2 speakers of English and the overall results showed the different levels of task demands among the four designed tasks.

3.3. Questionnaire

The data collection instruments used in this study were questionnaires written in English and Korean for L1 and L2 participants, and participants also responded in their native language to clarify their intended meaning as much as possible. The questionnaires were developed following those in Paas, van Merrienboer, and Adam (1994), Robinson (2001b), and Sasayama (2016), and the initial questionnaires were piloted with nine L1 and nine L2 speakers. During this study, participants were asked to provide explanations of what made the task easy and/or difficult, followed by background questionnaires. Background questionnaires were given to the participants to collect demographic information, including nationality, gender, age, educational background, job, and most recent TOEFL/TOEIC scores (only L2 speakers) (Sasayama, 2015). After the study, participants also carried out a post-survey in which they ranked the four tasks in terms of their perceptions of task difficulty and provided detailed explanations for their sequence from the easiest to the most complex (Appendix B). Participants provided one or two sentence responses in the during-survey and generally gave more detailed explanations for their ranking of the four tasks in the post-survey. All participants, without exception, answered the open-ended questions.

3.4. Data Collection

The data were collected over nine weeks. The during-survey was introduced via Google form upon completing each role-play task on Zoom during the experiment. The post-survey was administered in MS word via email after the study. At the time of the data collection, each participant's comments were quickly gone through to see whether they clearly explained why the task was easy and/or difficult, and when in doubt, participants were asked to clarify the comments. After these processes, the comments became typically clear in this regard.

3.5. Data Analysis

Thematic data analysis was used for the research questions; the themes and coding categories emerged inductively from an examination of the data rather than being determined beforehand (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). All individual participants' open-ended responses were first looked through, and then, coded for ease and/or difficulty. Subsequently, emerging themes were identified and the related themes were categorized into subordinate categories. These subcategories, lastly, were combined to create superordinate categories (Sasayama, 2015). Participants' responses that belonged to each subordinate category were counted, then, the proportion of each category to the overall subordinate categories was calculated in each task (Tables 2, 3, and 4). It should be noted that the same person often provided comments explaining why a task was difficult in some ways but easy in others. Also, one person provided several comments that simultaneously belonged to multiple subordinate categories.

4. RESULTS

This section turns to report the findings of participants' open-ended responses for why they perceived a task to be easy or difficult to perform. Overall patterns of participants' perceptions of task difficulty and a coding scheme are first presented, followed by sources of ease and difficulty for each task in the three groups (L1, H, IM). Each task was numbered in the order of the simplest (Task 1) to the most complex (Task 4) tasks.

4.1. Overall Patterns and Coding Scheme

Regarding the overall patterns of participants' perceived difficulty in the four tasks, the L1 group contributed 6% of the total comments regarding the difficulty of Task 1 and it gradually increased to 97% in Task 4, with Task 2 at 52% and Task 3 at 74% (Table 2). Similar to the L1 group, the percentage of overall comments on the difficulty in the L2 groups also revealed that the four tasks lined up in the expected order of difficulty ranging from Task 1 (18%) to Task 4 (95%) in the H-level group (Table 3) and from Task 1 (25%) to Task 4 (94%) in the IM-level group (Table 4). Plus, the L2 groups showed higher percentages than the L1 group in terms of overall difficulty across the tasks. It was, however, observed that the H-level (95%) and IM-level (94%) groups had slightly lower percentages of overall difficulty than the L1 group (97%) in Task 4. In addition to the quantitative analysis, participants' open responses were analyzed qualitatively. The L1 and the L2 groups yielded similar patterns in sources of perceived difficulty and ease. Based on the comments, the following superordinate, subordinate categories and themes emerged; as a first category,

social situations that were concerned with the inherent difficulty of each task were identified to entail *context* (comment about contextual factors), *interaction* (comments related to the interlocutor), and *relationship* (comments about a hierarchy of power). *Code difficulty* that relates to language aspects was introduced as a second superordinate category. Lastly, *performance factors* discussed what possible factors affected participants' overall performance quality. These included *task-induced* (comments about task instruction), *(un)familiarity* (comments about prior experiences), *practice effect* (comments about (in)experience with tasks)*,* and *participant-generated factors* (comments related to an individual's characteristics). Table 5 presents a coding scheme with representative comments.

4.2. Open-ended Responses by L1 speakers

This section presents the findings for each of the four role-play tasks performed by L1 participants regarding each category. Sources of difficulty and ease are considered in turn for the tasks.

4.2.1. Task 1

Task 1 (simplest task) described a situation in which a staff (participant) asked a manager (interlocutor) to find his available days to reschedule a videoconference meeting with a client. Task 1 posed the lowest *social situational* demands which accounted for nearly 78% of all reasons (Table 2). Within this superordinate category, the *context* subordinate category was the primary reason for their ease, and it was specifically due to the size of the request (schedule change), for example:

(1) I just had to ask for a good time that worked for both parties to reschedule for the following week.

In this category, several participants also expressed that Task 1 was quite easy because they were not responsible for the problem, given that the cause of the rescheduling came from an outside source (i.e., the client's cancellation). A few comments displayed that a common and easy-to-understand scenario and a shared goal of both parties (i.e., to satisfy the client) made the task easy as well.

TABLE 2
Summary for Each Category for L1 Group

Super/Sub categories	Task1 Easy #	%	Task1 Difficult #	%	Task2 Easy #	%	Task2 Difficult #	%	Task3 Easy #	%	Task3 Difficult #	%	Task4 Easy #	%	Task4 Difficult #	%
Social situations																
Context	28	42.9	2	50.0	13	33.3	20	47.6	10	43.5	23	35.4	-	0.0	23	29.9
Interaction	17	27.0	-	0.0	17	43.6	15	35.7	6	26.1	24	36.9	-	0.0	30	39.0
Relationship	-	0.0	1	25.0	-	0.0	5	11.9	-	0.0	6	9.2	-	0.0	4	5.2
Code difficulty																
Language	-	0.0	-	0.0	1	2.6	-	0.0	-	0.0	2	3.1	-	0.0	4	5.2
Performance factors																
Task-induced	5	7.9	1	25.0	2	5.1	-	0.0	3	13.0	4	6.2	-	0.0	6	7.8
(Un)familiarity	3	14.3	-	0.0	3	7.7	-	0.0	2	8.7	3	4.6	-	0.0	6	7.8
Practice effect	4	6.3	-	0.0	3	7.7	2	4.8	2	8.7	2	3.1	1	50.0	4	5.2
PPT-generated	1	1.6	-	0.0	-	0.0	-	0.0	-	0.0	1	1.5	1	50.0	-	0.0
Total	58	100	4	100	39	100	42	100	23	100	65	100	2	100	77	100
	94%		6%		48%		52%		26%		74%		3%		97%	

Note: PPT = participant; # = number of comments on ease and difficulty; % = percentage of each category for ease and difficulty

TABLE 3
Summary for Each Category for High-level Group

Super/Sub categories	Task1 Easy #	%	Task1 Difficult #	%	Task2 Easy #	%	Task2 Difficult #	%	Task3 Easy #	%	Task3 Difficult #	%	Task4 Easy #	%	Task4 Difficult #	%
Social situations																
Context	25	41.7	2	15.4	14	32.6	15	39.5	11	64.7	13	18.3	1	20.0	24	27.3
Interaction	17	28.3	-	0.0	14	32.6	10	26.3	3	17.6	23	32.4	-	0.0	27	30.7
Relationship	1	1.7	1	7.7	-	0.0	4	10.5	-	0.0	4	5.6	-	0.0	6	6.8
Code difficulty																
Language	7	11.7	4	30.8	5	11.6	4	10.5	-	0.0	20	28.2	-	0.0	20	22.7
Performance factors																
Task-induced	6	10.0	-	0.0	5	11.6	1	2.6	1	5.9	-	0.0	3	60.0	4	4.5
(Un)familiarity	-	0.0	-	0.0	-	0.0	1	2.6	1	5.9	6	8.5	-	0.0	3	3.4
Practice effect	4	6.7	4	30.8	4	9.3	2	5.3	-	0.0	5	7.0	-	0.0	4	4.5
PPT-generated	-	0.0	2	15.4	1	2.3	1	2.6	1	5.9	-	0.0	1	20.0	-	0.0
Total	60	100	13	100	43	100	38	100	17	100	71	100	5	100	88	100
	82%		18%		53%		47%		19%		81%		5%		95%	

TABLE 4
Summary for Each Category for Intermediate-level Group

Super/Sub categories	Task1 Easy #	Task1 Easy %	Task1 Difficult #	Task1 Difficult %	Task2 Easy #	Task2 Easy %	Task2 Difficult #	Task2 Difficult %	Task3 Easy #	Task3 Easy %	Task3 Difficult #	Task3 Difficult %	Task4 Easy #	Task4 Easy %	Task4 Difficult #	Task4 Difficult %
Social situations																
Context	17	34.7	4	25.0	10	23.3	14	22.6	9	45.0	15	18.8	2	40.0	19	24.1
Interaction	12	24.5	-	0.0	15	34.9	19	30.6	4	20.0	21	26.3	-	0.0	30	38.0
Relationship	-	0.0	1	6.3	-	0.0	3	4.8	-	0.0	4	5.0	-	0.0	4	5.1
Code difficulty																
Language	11	22.4	7	43.8	4	9.3	19	30.6	1	5.0	26	32.5	2	40.0	21	26.6
Performance factors																
Task-induced	4	8.2	1	6.3	4	9.3	1	1.6	2	10.0	-	0.0	-	0.0	-	0.0
(Un)familiarity	-	0.0	1	6.3	1	2.3	1	1.6	-	0.0	10	12.5	-	0.0	-	0.0
Practice effect	3	6.1	1	6.3	6	14.0	4	6.5	3	15.0	4	5.0	1	20.0	5	6.3
PPT-generated	2	4.1	1	6.3	3	7.0	1	1.6	1	5.0	-	0.0	-	0.0	-	0.0
Total	49	100	16	100	43	100	62	100	20	100	80	100	5	100	79	100
	75%		25%		41%		59%		20%		80%		6%		94%	

TABLE 5

Superordinate/Subordinate Categories and Emerging Themes with Examples

Super-categories	Sub categories	Emerging themes	Example comments
Social Situations	Context	Entitlement for a request (E)	What made this task easy was the fact that I felt that I was in the right and had a good reason to be asking for the raise. Because of me, profits had been increasing in the company, and it was a reasonable thing to ask of him for a higher raise. (Task 3)
		PPT responsibility (E/D)	That was tough. Even though I didn't create the problem, it was my responsibility, and I was at fault for not fulfilling the contract. (Task 4)
		Request size (E/D)	Asking for more money is always difficult no matter the situation, whether it is dealing with a salary increase or lending money to a friend. (Task 3)
		Shared goal (E) Personal gain (D)	With T1, we were on a 'team' so to speak, selling to a client, so we both can gain from working together. (Task1)
		Scenario complexity (E/D)	상황이 복잡하지 않고 이해관계도 내 상황을 설명하기 쉬웠던 것 같다. [I think it was easy to explain my situation because the situation was not complicated and the stakes were low.] (Task 2)
		Balancing utterances (D)	What made this most difficult was trying to balance admitting fault with the logistical error while simultaneously protecting the equity and reputation of our own company as a manufacturer. (Task 4)
	Interaction	Persuasion (E/D)	There was no hesitation on the manager's part to offer up his availability and he was willing to reschedule, there was no friction felt on my end. (Task 1)
		Time constraints (D)	Since the director only had a few minutes to speak, not having the time to be able to go into detail on how we could rectify this situation and come to a mutual solution was problematic. (Task 4)
		Balancing utterances (D)	T4 drove up my anxiety because I had to work with the client on a solution that could still potentially fulfill his order while being apologetic yet confident in front of him that my solution will work. (Task 4)
	Relationship	Relationship (D)	T3 was more difficult than T2 because I was talking to the director of the company, who is someone in a higher position of power. (Task 3)
Code Difficulty	Language	Linguistic aspects (D)	약속 재조정이라는 reschedule 이라는 단어가 생각이 안 나서 둘러 말하느라 긴장을 좀 했다. [I couldn't think of the word *reschedule*, so I was a bit nervous about finding out what I could say.] (Task 1)
Performance Factors	Task-induced	Prompt cards (E/D)	T4 was the hardest because there were 6 steps to the role-play card. (Task 4)

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	Factor (E/D)	Quote
(Un)familiarity	Provision of examples (E)	롤 플레이 카드에서 활용가능한 다른 단어들이 주어졌으며, 즉각적인 연봉인상 대신 제시 가능한 다른 상황이나 해결책들이 제시되어 있어 대화상황에 참고할 수 있었다. [The role-play card presented words or solutions that could be used for the given situation, so I could refer to them while performing the task.] (Task 3)
	Prior experiences (E/D)	I have to schedule things in a professional way very often and communicate those things with people who I also only have a professional relationship with so due to that prior experience it was easy. (Task1)
Practice effect	Practice effect (E/D)	T4 was more difficult than T3 due to it being the first task I performed. (Task4)
	Affective factors (E/D)	Due to nerves, I found it difficult to remember the role play facts that I had just read. (Task 3)
Participant-generated	Strategy (E)	T3 만큼이나 어려운 단어들 많았지만 제가 말할 수 있는 다른 단어로 대체해서 미리 한 말을 생각해 둔 것이 여태 했던 테스크 중에서 그나마 수월하게 느껴졌던 이유 같습니다. [There were as many difficult words as T3. However, this task felt relatively easy compared to the tasks I had done so far because I thought of what to say in advance by replacing difficult words with words that I knew.] (Task 4)
	Intention to perform well (D)	좀더 풍부한 어휘를 사용하여 문장을 만드는 것이 쉽지 않았다. [It was not easy to make sentences using a richer vocabulary.] (Task 1)

Note: E = easy; D = difficulty; One factor can affect ease and difficulty simultaneously (e.g., E/D).

The next subordinate category, *interaction*, revealed that Task 1 felt easy because of the interlocutor's immediate and preferred response to the participants' request which did not force the participants to persuade the interlocutor:

(2) There was no hesitation on the manager's part to offer up his availability
    and he was willing to reschedule, there was no friction felt on my end.

Among *performance factors,* participants felt relatively comfortable performing the task due to: (a) a concise role-play card that had fewer steps to follow and less information to remember, (b) familiarity with the previous tasks, and (c) prior experiences of similar situations. As shown above, L1 participants perceived Task 1 as easy due to the small request size and persuasion not being required to perform the given request.

4.2.2. Task 2

Task 2 described a situation in which a staff (participant) had to ask a project manager (interlocutor) for help with a team project. Participants found the task hard mainly due to *context* (47.6%). Specifically, the majority of the comments illustrated that the task was personally difficult as participants had to ask the interlocutor for a favor because of their own failure to fulfilling responsibility toward the assigned project:

(3) I found T2 slightly more difficult than T1 because the situation was related
    to my own workload. Therefore, the project manager might have thought
    that I was incompetent or hadn't planned my time effectively.

Another difficult part was related to *interaction* (35.7%). In response to the interlocutor's rejection to help or advise with the project, which was instructed to be presented in the core AP (Table 1), participants had to think of other ways to persuade him to provide assistance to complete the report on time:

(4) The difficult part of the task was that the manager wasn't able to readily
    help. I had to do a little bit of problem-solving to get him to find someone
    else to help me to finish the project that I as a staff worker was supposed to
    complete.

Relative to *interaction*, a time constraint that stemmed from the interlocutor's rejection (i.e., being busy with the meeting) added pressure on participants in the course of solving the problem. To add a further observation, participants seemed to be challenged by asking

for a favor from someone in a higher position (11.9%).

Conversely, the main source that made Task 2 relatively easier was *interaction* (43.6%); the interlocutor provided an offer (i.e., to get another employee to help) as the preferred response in the post-sequences (Table 1) in response to the participant's second request and the interlocutor's quick and positive solution no longer demanded persuasion. For example,

> (5) The manager offered to have another employee help out – that's what made it easy.

The second most common reason was *context* (33.3%) in which most of the comments displayed that the request did not feel like it reflected poorly on them as an employee due to an unexpected circumstance (i.e., a co-worker taking a sick leave) that was outside of their control:

> (6) T2 was easy because I just needed to ask for help with the project and the circumstances were not my fault considering my team member got sick and was out.

Among the context-related comments, a few participants also proposed that a common aim between the two parties helped relieve their pressure, namely, the manager is in charge of the project the staff worked on, so submitting the report on time was the interest of both parties. Furthermore, Task 2 was made easy by prior experiences, practice with the task, clear prompt cards, and casual vocabulary that can be used in any industry or social situation. In short, responsibility for the problem, required persuasion, and the relationship between the staff and project manager contributed to the perceived difficulty of Task 2.

4.2.3. Task 3

The situation was about negotiating money at a workplace. A team leader (participant) who was not satisfied with the recently proposed salary increase decided to ask a director (interlocutor) for a raise. With Task 3, *interaction* (36.9%) primarily determined the L1 participants' difficulty. Many participants noted that the hardest part of the task was to persuade the interlocutor who declined their requests a few times (in the core AP and post-sequences in Table 1):

> (7) The director was very quick to shut down my request and I struggled to think about what I would say to continue the conversation.

Moreover, a few participants thought that the time restriction (i.e., the director is busy dealing with customer complaints), which was provided as the block response in the pre-sequences, put them at disadvantage because it not only made them rush to express their issue but also gave them an impression that the interlocutor had little concern for the request.

The subsequent factor for difficulty was *context* (35.4%) showing a similar proportion to *interaction.* The biggest challenge regarding this category had to do with the nature of the request – asking for money. Here is a sample comment:

(8) Asking for more money is always difficult no matter the situation, whether it is dealing with a salary increase or lending money to a friend.

It was also noted that a few participants felt slightly difficult balancing their utterances:

(9) Attempting to come across as loyal to the company while also being so determined on receiving an increase in salary is not an easy balance strike.

Plus, two participants stated that it felt like the motive for the request was primarily personal gain, which indicates that more persuasion and justification were demanded when requesting. Participants were also faced with challenges in other categories: (a) professional hierarchy, (b) volume of information, (c) a lack of experience with the context, and (d) business language required.

For ease, it was suggested that the entitlement elicited from the character's impressive job performance and the approachable attitudes of the interlocutor who was open to discussion and supportive of the request helped the discussion to proceed. Collectively, the difficulty of Task 3 was mainly accounted for by needing to successfully persuade the interlocutor with viable reasons and the request of asking for money.

4.2.4. Task 4

In this situation (highly-complex task), a sales manager (participant) who oversaw a project of supplying men's moisturizer containers to a cosmetics company found an unexpected mistake that made the delivery schedule impossible. Therefore, he had to meet a purchasing director (interlocutor) of the cosmetics company in person to ask for an extension of the delivery due date. In Task 4, participants associated their perceived difficulty most closely with persuasion in *interaction* (39.0%) because the interlocutor did not accept anything less than what was promised in the contract although participants attempted to negotiate with alternatives (e.g., discount, outsourcing) several times as shown in the post-sequences in Table 1:

(10) The situation asks for certain things to be done, for example, providing a discount, but the conversation partner kept denying all suggestions that were being made. I believe this can make the task much more difficult because two parties have two different goals in mind and cannot meet a solution.

Under the same category, a few participants suggested that Task 4 was significantly more stressful because they realized early on that the interlocutor had little time due to an emergency meeting, and this possibly limited their capacity to resolve the problem. Additionally, a few participants found difficulty in balancing their utterances while negotiating with the interlocutor who issued multiple refusals in the post-sequences (Table 1). An example is shown below:

(11) T4 drove up my anxiety because I had to work with the client on a solution that could still potentially fulfill his order while being apologetic yet confident in front of him that my solution will work.

Following *interaction*, *context* (29.9%) was the second most frequent category for the high level of difficulty. Most of the comments to this end were related to participant responsibility for the problem and its negative consequences. In detail, participants stated that the character allowed such a big and potentially costly mistake to occur (i.e., the production of wrong-size containers) and this could lead to a negative effect on his company (i.e., to lose the client forever and/or to lose millions of dollars in sales):

(12) T4 was a potentially career-defining screw-up moment. I failed in my job as a manager overseeing my team. I made a giant mistake, angered a reliable and large sales partner at company B, and potentially lost millions of dollars in sales. I might be getting fired.

Furthermore, one participant expressed concern about balancing his attitudes considering the significant mistake:

(13) What made this most difficult was trying to balance admitting fault with the logistical error while simultaneously protecting the equity and reputation of our own company as a manufacturer.

As discussed above, exploring feasible offers and the criticalness of the mistake was listed as perceived difficulties by L1 participants in Task 4.

4.3. Open-ended Responses by L2 speakers

This section provides L2 participants' explanatory comments by proficiency groups. Sources of difficulty and ease are considered for each task with a focus on a comparison between the high (H) and intermediate (IM)-level groups.

4.3.1. Task 1

As for easiness, both groups showed very similar response patterns that *context* and *interaction* predominantly made the task easy (Tables 3 and 4). Relative to *context*, most of the comments were about the simple request and not being responsible for the given problem:

(1) A 회사가 불가피한 상황으로 새로운 일정을 요구하는 상황이기에 매니저가 일정이 가능하기만 하면 A 회사도 매니저의 일정을 따를 확률이 크다고 생각하기에 이 상황을 전달하기 편했고, 나의 입장은 비디오 미팅 스케줄이 파기된 것에 대한 책임은 없다고 느꼈기에 스트레스도 적었다. [It was easy to communicate the situation because I felt that Company A was asking for a new schedule due to unavoidable circumstances, so as long as the manager was available, Company A would most likely follow the manager's schedule. My position was less stressful as I felt I was not responsible for the destruction of the video meeting schedule.]

In addition, the common scenario that was easy to encounter in daily life was introduced by a few participants in both groups. Further, the interlocutor's openness to rescheduling and simple vocabulary (e.g., days, client) made the task easy to handle. Other comments included the themes for easiness as follows: (a) the short task length and the small amount of information to consider, (b) their familiarity with the task, (c) the relationship (i.e., working in the same company) (only H), and (d) the strategy use such as preparation of a concise summary and more focus on task completion rather than performance quality (only IM).

Regarding difficulty, the most frequent comments offered by both groups had to do with *language*; however, the difference observed was that the H-level group was oriented to the use of formal words and speech nuances whereas the IM-level group reported its difficulty with the task due to their lack of general English proficiency, especially with vocabulary. Here are the example comments:

(2) 원어민이 아니기 때문에 내 의사를 회사 상황에 적절한 뉘앙스로 전달하는 것이 어려웠다. (H) [Not being a native speaker, it was

difficult to communicate my intention with a nuance appropriate to the professional situation.]

(3) 약속 재조정이라는 reschedule 이라는 단어가 생각이 안나서 돌려 말하느라 긴장을 좀 했다. (IM) [I couldn't think of the word *reschedule*, so I had to strain to say it back, so I was nervous.]

Other noticeable differences were detected in *context* and *relationship*; relative to *context*, the need to explain the background behind the request in English (i.e., the reason for rescheduling a meeting) was reported as a further difficulty in the IM-level group:

(4) 약속을 그냥 미루는게 아니라 담당자가 참석할 수 없고, 취소한 사람과 나의 관계에 대해 설명하는 것이 어려웠습니다. [T1 was difficult because it was not just a matter of postponing the appointment, it was also a matter of explaining why the person could not make it and my relationship with the person who canceled it.]

Moreover, one comment from the IM-level group pointed out his difficulty with opening a conversation in a formal relationship:

(5) 공적인 관계에서의 영어를 어디까지 공적으로 인사말을 나눠야 하는지 고민이 되었습니다. [I was worried about how many opening sequences I should make in a formal relationship.]

In short, the ease of Task 1 was mainly attributed to the simple request, no participant responsibility, the interlocutor's immediate positive affirmation, and easy vocabulary for both groups. Nevertheless, a specific concern about the formality of language was mentioned by the H-level participants. Plus, the IM-level participants reported difficulties with the description of the given situation and structuring the opening while stressing their lack of general language ability.

4.3.2. Task 2

Concerning a pattern for causes of task difficulty, both groups suggested *interaction* as their difficulty. Furthermore, the difference between the two groups was that the H-level group attributed its difficulty more to *context* whereas the IM-level group had its difficulty mainly with *language.* However, when looking closely at each subordinate category, both groups provided largely similar themes about perceived difficulty. First, in *context*, the two

groups were generally concerned about how to word their requests in a more polite way, given that they asked for help due to their inability to complete the project. For example:

(6) 자신의 일을 다른 이에게 부탁하는 것이었기 때문에, 말을 하는 데에 있어서 더 조심하고 정중하게 했어야 했는데, 이를 영어로 표현하는 것이 어렵게 느껴졌던 것 같습니다. [As I was asking someone else to do my job, I think I should have been more careful and polite, and I found it difficult to express that in English.]

The task was also challenging as it required more linguistic elaboration with the complex situation involving a sick co-worker, an upcoming workshop, and a tight deadline.

In terms of *interaction,* many participants commented on how to persuade the interlocutor to offer help after he had initially refused their requests, for instance:

(7) Task 안에 상사가 거절한다는 내용이 없었는데 상사가 자신이 바쁘다고 거절해서 당황했다. 때문에 새로운 대안을 만들어야 하는 것이 어려웠다. [I was at a loss because the manager rejected the request and the task prompt did not involve anything relevant to it. It was also difficult to create a new alternative in response to his refusal.]

Along the line, a few participants expressed that they felt rushed in request realization, knowing that the interlocutor was busy with the meeting:

(8) T2 를 진행할 때 매니저가 시간이 없다는 점을 언급했던 점이 마음을 더 급하게 만들어서 더 어려웠던 것 같습니다. [It was more difficult because the manager mentioned that he did not have time and which made me feel more rushed in T2.]

The two proficiency groups illustrated differences in *language* similar to Task 1; retrieving business terms and speaking in a more professional manner made the task difficult for the H-level group. Here is a sample comment:

(9) 비즈니스 상황이란 걸 감안해서 말투에 대해서 신경써야 한다는 부분이 좀 어렵게 느껴지게 했던 것 같습니다. [I think the fact that it is a business situation and you have to be careful about your tone of voice makes it a little more difficult.]

By comparison, the IM-level group stated more general language problems for its

difficulty such as coming up with words (e.g., sick leave), composing sentences, understanding the interlocutor, and knowing where to pause their speech. One of the example comments is as follows:

> (10) 해야하는 말이 많은데 말을 어디서 끊어야 하는지, 어디까지 말해야 하는지 알수가 없어서 계속 줄줄 말하다 보니 약간 의사 소통의 어려움은 있었던 것 같다. [I had a lot to say, but I didn't know where to stop or how far to go, so I kept going on and on, so I think there was a little bit of communication difficulty.]

Both groups showed their concerns about power status, and one participant in the IM-level group reported difficulty with formulating a conversation opening, as seen below:

> (11) 본론을 꺼내기 전에 인사말과 본론으로 자연스럽게 넘어갈 수 있는 다른 말을 좀 더 하고 싶었는데 공적인 관계라는 설정으로 얼마나 친근하게 말을 해야할지 몰라 인사만 하고 바로 본론을 말해 대화를 부자연스럽게 이어나가는 것 같은 어려움이 있었다. [I wanted to say a few more words to say hello and other things that would naturally lead to the main point, but I did not know how to be friendly in a formal relationship, so I just said hello and went straight to the main point, which made the conversation unnatural.]

At the same time, Task 2 was thought of as being easier due to the following themes: (a) the interlocutor's offer to help, (b) the absence of full responsibility for the problem, (c) the easily explained situation, and (d) the mutual interests for both parties. To sum up, L2 participants regardless of proficiency cited difficulty in making their requests sound polite, generating possible ideas, and describing the situation with more details. The differences in difficulty between the two groups emerged in terms of language aspects; the IM-level group reported limited language proficiency and launching a conversation as their difficulties, contrasting the H-level group which pointed to the register of language in a professional context as their main difficulty.

4.3.3. Task 3

In Task 3, *interaction* and *language* became the sources of task difficulty regardless of the proficiency levels although *language* was more of a problem for the IM-level group as seen in Tables 3 and 4. When inspecting each category, a large number of comments about *interaction* in both groups suggested that it was hard to come up with persuasive points in

favor of a pay raise in response to the interlocutor's refusals:

(12) 영어로 반대 의견에 맞닥뜨렸을 때 설득을 해야 한다는 점이 가장 어려웠습니다. 한국어로 해도 긴장될 상황인데 영어로 하려니 더 어떻게 말해야 할 지 모르겠고, 그래서 태스크에서 지시한 대로 연봉인상을 원한다는 주장을 제대로 말하지 못했습니다. [The most challenging part was having to persuade the other party in English when faced with opposing opinions. I was nervous enough in Korean, but in English, I did not know what to say, so I did not make the case that I wanted a salary raise as the task instructed.]

Along with this, similar to the L1 group, a few participants indicated that the time constraint made the task difficult because it forced them to quickly think about how to proceed with the dialogue.

Almost 30% of the comments in both groups attributed their difficulty to *language*, specifically, dealing with figures and percentages, and business-related words (e.g., third quarter, sales, performance, salary increase). Here is a sample comment:

(13) 매출인상이나 숫자를 대화에 넣어서 진행해야 하다보니 그 표현을 어떻게 해야 하는지 신경쓰다가 다른 문장들을 구사하는 데에도 어려움을 겪었던 것 같습니다. [Because I had to bring *sales increases* and numbers into the conversation, I was worried about how to phrase them, and then I had a hard time making other sentences.]

In this category, the difference was also acknowledged similar to the previous tasks; the H-level group seemed to have difficulty with the choice of formal linguistic expressions when they had to make a request again after the other party refused their first request:

(14) 완곡한 거절을 하였을 때, 다시 영어로 부탁하는 관용어구를 떠올리는 것도 어려워서, 한국어로 생각나는 표현을 영어로 번역하여 말을 했다. (H) [When he refused, it was difficult to come up with an idiomatic phrase to ask him again in English, so I translated what I could think of in Korean into English.]

In contrast, a limited English ability in terms of words, composing sentences, and use of correct grammar were considered challenges in the IM-level group. Here is a sample comment:

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(15) 단어들을 영어로 몰라서 단어를 풀어서 말하려고 어떻게 말해
    야할 지 생각하느라 어려웠다. 접속어를 써서 문장을 연결하
    려 할 때 어떤 접속어를 써야할 지 고민했다. 문장을 말할 때
    문장의 끝으로 갈수록 전치사를 어떤 것을 써야할지 헷갈려서
    항상 문장의 끝을 흘려서 말한 것 같다. [I did not know the words
    in English, so I had a hard time figuring out other ways to say them.
    When I tried to use conjunctions to connect sentences, I did not know
    which conjunction to use. When speaking, I was confused about which
    preposition to use towards the end of the sentence, so I always seemed
    to stumble over the end of the sentence.]

Regarding *context*, both groups found it challenging because of the nature of the request and word choices appropriate to the request:

(16) 연봉 인상이라는 다소 민감한 주제를 상사에게 직접 제안해야
    하는 상황이라 약간의 불편함을 느꼈고, 영어로 저의 의견을
    최대한 예의있게 전달하려고 하니 더욱 어려웠습니다. [I felt a
    bit uncomfortable because I had to propose the rather sensitive topic of a
    salary increase directly to my boss, and it was even more challenging
    because I was trying to convey my opinion in English as politely as
    possible.]

In the same vein, both groups suggested that requesting was difficult because it was based on personal interest that promoted more justifications. Furthermore, the scenario including sufficient information about the character's performance (e.g., sales increase, the launch of a new campaign) posed linguistic challenges to the IM-level group as they had to elaborate on such information to convince the interlocutor.

A few participants in both groups saw Task 3 to be difficult due to the hierarchy in the professional setting which forced them to deliver the speech as politely as possible in terms of vocabulary, expressions, or terms of address. Here is one of their comments:

(17) T2 는 직원과 관리자의 입장이었던 반면 T3 은 팀장과 이사의
    관계였기 때문에 호칭이나 대화법을 결정하는 것이 더 어려웠
    습니다. [T2 was between an employee and a manager, while T3 was
    between a team leader and a director, so it was more difficult to decide
    how to address or talk to them.]

On the other hand, some aspects reduced the difficulty of this task. The primary reason in

both groups was that the situation involved the character's success rather than his fault, so his success made it easier for participants to make more requests even though the first request was rejected. Furthermore, the interlocutor's willingness to compromise with the alternatives as the preferred response in the post-sequences made Task 3 relatively less difficult. Taken together, in terms of difficulty, proposing grounds for their requests, using figures and business terms, and choice of polite words were considered the major concerns for L2 participants. As for the differences, while the H-level group specifically named the use of formulaic expressions for requests as a challenge, the IM-level group addressed its limited language ability and difficulty giving descriptions of the context for the request.

4.3.4. Task 4

Task 4 showed different patterns for sources of difficulty between the two groups; *interaction* and *context* were used as a justification for the difficulty of the H-level group, but *interaction* and *language* more commonly appeared in the IM-level group. To elaborate on *interaction* as the most contributing factor, both groups had difficulty looking for workable solutions to negotiate with the interlocutor who was quite firm about meeting the delivery due date:

> (18) 고객사가 말할 때마다 거절해서 새로운 조건을 그때마다 생각
> 해내기가 매우 어려웠음. [It was very difficult to come up with new
> solutions whenever the interlocutor refused the proposed one.]

In the same vein, a handful of participants also suggested that the time restriction created anxiety because it forced them to be logically efficient in the following explanation and negotiation.

Regarding *context*, a large number of the comments in both groups attributed high task difficulty to the significant mistake of not being able to fulfill the promised orders and negative consequences of business relationships and job employment:

> (19) 일이 잘 해결되지 못할 경우 상대 회사에도 손실을 입히고 내
> 가 다니는 회사에서 해고될 수도 있는 중대한 사안에 관한 대
> 화였기 때문에 난이도가 있었다. [It was challenging because it was
> a conversation about something so important that if it did not work out,
> it could cost the other company money and get me fired from my job.]

In addition, several participants in both groups had difficulty narrating the specific background of the emergency: why the problem happened (i.e., production of 50 ml instead

of 100 ml ordered) and why it was difficult to solve it (i.e., two weeks for reproduction). Noticeably, the participant in the IM-level group seemed to have given up on explaining such aspects, as seen below:

(20) T4 상황을 원어민에게 설명하고 싶었는데 (용기 크기가 잘못 제작되었고, 재제작에 최소 2주 소요된다 등) 영어로 설명할 자신이 없어서 구체적인 내용 설명은 포기하고 제작을 기한 내에 못하게 되었다, 1주일 더 연장해주실 수 있느냐만 물었던 것 같다. (IM) [I wanted to explain the situation (the container was made in the wrong size and it took at least two weeks for remanufacturing, etc.), but I was not confident explaining the details in English, so I gave up. Instead, I just said that I could not make it within the deadline and only asked if it could be extended for another week.]

The language-related factor did influence the difficulty of both proficiency groups especially in terms of vocabulary (e.g., delivery date, supply, extension). More importantly, both groups found it difficult to negotiate and explain while coming across as apologetic given the significant mistake they were responsible for:

(21) 내 쪽의 잘못이기 때문에 사과를 해야 하는데 적절한 표현이 적재적소에 생각나지 않는다고 느꼈습니다. (계속해서 sorry 만 반복사용). (IM) [I felt like I needed to apologize because it was my fault, but I could not think of the right words at the right time (I kept using sorry over and over again).]

Similar to Tasks 2 and 3, the IM-level group exhibited a range of linguistic difficulties in pronunciation (e.g., ml), understanding the interlocutor (listening), structures, and grammar knowledge. Here is a sample comment:

(22) 회사와 회사의 대화이었기에 I를 써야 할지, We를 써야할지 몰라 계속 헷갈렸던 것 같다. 그리고, 대화상대방과의 대화초반에 우리의 상황을 길게 말해야하는 때 계속 문장과 문장을 이어나가야 하는데, 그 문장들을 적절하게 이어줄 수 있는 올바른 접속어를 계속 고민한 부분이 어려웠다. [I think I kept getting confused about whether to use *I* or *We* because it was a conversation between the companies. Also, at the start, when we had to explain our situation at length, it was difficult to keep thinking about the right conjunctions to connect the sentences.]

Lastly, both groups found Task 4 more demanding because they had to talk to a client, which required them to command language more formally. Collectively, the major difficulties of both proficiency groups were the proposal of substantive solutions, the significance of the mistake, the description of the complex situation, and the use of polite linguistic expressions. Similar to the previous tasks, the IM-level group further identified more linguistically varied difficulties.

5. DISCUSSION

This study aimed at relating the manipulation task difficulty to socio-interactional features and exploring the perceived difficulty of L1 and L2 speakers on the designed pragmatic tasks based on their open-ended responses. With regard to the overall patterns, the L1 and L2 participants' difficulty matched the design intentions, informed by the finding that the percentages of overall comments on difficulty increased as the predicted order of task difficulty across the four tasks. This is an indication that socio-interactional characteristics have the potential to create varying degrees of pragmatic task difficulty. This study, therefore, highlights the claim that pragmatic characteristics and interactional phenomena should be incorporated into the design of tasks, proposed by González-Lloret and Ortega (2018). Additionally, the L2 groups generally showed higher percentages of overall difficulty than the L1 group throughout the tasks, suggesting that they had more difficulty performing the designed tasks than their counter group.

Regarding the sources of perceived difficulty, in the L1 group, *context* and *interaction* were referred to almost exclusively as reasons for its difficulty in Task 4 whereas Task 1 was perceived as easy due to these categories. For middle tasks 2 and 3, these were mentioned by some for ease and by others for difficulty with proportionally greater emphasis on the difficulty for Task 3 (Table 2). Both proficiency groups yielded similar patterns to the L1 group, however, they prevalently associated *language* with their difficulty on all four tasks (Tables 3 and 4). As for *performance factors*, the L1 and L2 participants listed extended turn-taking, a large amount of information in task prompts, unfamiliarity with a situation, inexperience with a task, and individual characteristics (e.g., affective factors) as their difficulty, but the comments were provided significantly less often than to the other two superordinate categories.

In addition to the quantitative account of task difficulty, participants' open responses were scrutinized qualitatively with regard to the causes of task difficulty. A more in-depth exploration of comments on *social situations* that accounted for the largest proportion among the three superordinate categories in the four tasks is as follows: in Task 1 perceived as the easiest, the three groups largely reported the small request (i.e., schedule change), the

absence of responsibility (i.e., the client is the cause of the problem), the commonplace scenario, the interlocutor's immediate positive affirmation and the shared goal of satisfying the client (only L1) as contributing factors to their easiness. However, it was noted that the IM-level group cited initiating a conversation with someone in a higher position and having to explain a context in English as reasons for its difficulty.

With Task 2, all groups attributed their perceived difficulty primarily to the responsibility for the problem (i.e., the failure to complete the assigned project on time) and necessary persuasion (i.e., thinking of alternate means of help). Additionally, the time pressure and the interlocutor's higher position (only L1) were also mentioned as challenges. At the same time, what distinguished the L1 group from the L2 groups was that the L1 group was more concerned about negative evaluation by the interlocutor because their requests showed an inability to complete the assigned project. By comparison, the two proficiency groups named linguistic difficulties with politely wording their requests and describing the given context. Moreover, the IM-level group presented a conversation opening (i.e., greeting, small talk) in a professional hierarchy as an additional difficulty.

As for Task 3, the required persuasion by coming up with substantive reasons and the request (i.e., asking for money) were considered participants' major concerns. Other common features of difficulty that emerged across the three groups were the time constraint, personal gain, and power status. Regarding differences in comments, the L1 group paid extra caution to balancing their utterances (i.e., to make their arguments sound determined but careful), taking into account the sensitivity of the subject matter requested. On the contrary, the L2 groups were challenged by how to politely convey their utterances in terms of words, phrases, or terms of address, given the nature of the request and the professional hierarchy. The IM-level group informed additional linguistic difficulty related to narrating the details of the given context for requesting.

Turning to Task 4, the perceived difficulty of the three groups was mainly affected by the persuasion (i.e., exploring feasible offers), the responsibility for the problem (i.e., the failure of meeting the contractual obligations), and negative consequences of the problem (e.g., losing a client, job employment). Their difficulty was also relevant to the time restriction and the other person's higher social power (i.e., supplier-buyer). However, the three groups displayed slightly distinct aspects. On one hand, the L1 group linked its difficulty with how to strike a balance between being apologetic for the significant mistake and simultaneously being confident in their solutions, and between admitting fault and protecting the reputation of the company. On the other hand, the L2 groups had difficulty using expressions of apology in the negotiation process, orienting to the significant mistake in the context. Moreover, they found it difficult to command formal language given the relationship and to explain the highly-complex situation in English.

Following *social situations*, language aspects influenced the difficulty of both proficiency

groups to a large extent (Tables 3 and 4) although it was less of a problem for the H-level group than for the IM-level group. Inspecting the comments, the work-related words (e.g., performance, figures) primarily made the tasks difficult in both groups. Plus, the differences between the two groups were observed; the H-level group was more mindful of the choice of polite linguistic expressions and mitigating utterances appropriate to the interactional elements (e.g., preference/dispreference) and contextual variables (e.g., imposition, relationships, settings) (Roever & Al-Gahtani, 2015). Although some of the participants in the IM-level group also oriented to such linguistic aspects, they showed more generalized comments that their difficulty originated from a lack of English abilities such as composing sentences, understanding the interlocutor, knowing where to pause, pronunciation, and grammar points.

To summarize, this study demonstrated that L1 and L2 participants' difficulty with the designed pragmatic tasks was significantly affected by request size, responsibility for a problem, and required persuasion, and these factors were highly related to the design features. In light of the open-ended responses, such factors were difficult because participants were encouraged to justify their position, disagree, and propose or negotiate by providing reasons, solutions/alternatives, or elaboration while interacting with the interlocutor. It is known that these pragmatic moves are presupposed by L2 speakers' knowledge of linguistic forms (Miller, Mitchell, & Pessoa, 2014), however, L2 participants in this study did not seem to have sufficient linguistic resources at their disposal to support these moves in extended discourses although they showed some degree of sensitivity to interactional and contextual information embedded in the tasks. Adding to that, participants felt pressured by time constraints (i.e., the interlocutor was busy) in terms of imposing an extra burden on the interlocutor. They also worried about having to be efficient in explanation/negotiation and their requests being forgotten. Lastly, the IM-level group exhibited a visible phenomenon that they had an issue with opening a conversation in a hierarchical relationship (Tasks 1 and 2), which was also found in the previous CA studies (e.g., Al-Gahtani & Roever, 2012; Youn, 2018, 2020). They further reported the difficulty of logically explaining the situations behind the request possibly due to their limited language ability.

The present study provides implications for pragmatic task difficulty research and second language teaching. The findings demonstrate that contextual and interactional features were of primary interest for both the L1 and L2 participants in performing the designed pragmatic tasks. Accordingly, this provides empirical evidence that González-Lloret and Ortega's (2018) task difficulty model is a useful framework for operationalizing task features and designing tasks. Secondly, the various factors found in addition to the manipulated designed features illustrate that the relationship between pragmatic task design and task difficulty is more complicated than assumed. Other factors, sometimes unexpected features, might affect task difficulty levels, thereby, this, in turn, underscores the importance of exploring

participants' open comments in task difficulty research (Sasayama, 2015). Bearing this in mind, future research should investigate participants' explanatory comments to advance our understanding of how task design interacts with participants' perceptions of task difficulty. In regards to pedagogical implications, this study shows L2 participants' learning needs by identifying factors that made the tasks difficult. These factors can serve as instructional objects or content for the development of interactional abilities in a classroom environment. For instance, given the participants' needs observed in this study, it would be desirable to instruct linguistic knowledge for pragmatic moves (i.e., justification, disagreement, requesting, proposal, apology), mitigation, and opening conversations through role-play tasks that promote learners to practice extended interaction.

The present study acknowledges limitations that should be addressed in future research. First, this study only utilized participants' open-ended responses that are primarily based on individuals' perceptions to explore task difficulty. More objective methods such as participants' task performances will enrich our understanding of task difficulty, especially regarding how participants' perceived difficulties are instantiated by their task performance. Furthermore, this study included only high and intermediate proficiency levels of L2 speakers to investigate sources of participants' difficulty with completing the designed pragmatic tasks. It will be more convincing if future studies use more specific and various levels to examine whether the findings found here transfer to other levels.

6. CONCLUSION

In L2 pragmatics, it is crucial to expand the theoretical scope of the literature by addressing new task design characteristics, given the difficulty of applying the Cognition Hypothesis framework to L2 pragmatic task difficulty research and possibly the limitations of focusing primarily on cognitive features in pragmatic task design. Following these concerns, the present study investigated whether and how socio-pragmatic interactional characteristics posed task demands based on L1 and L2 speakers' open-ended responses. The results showed that participants' overall perceptions of task difficulty were in parallel with the intended level of task demands. Moreover, the social and interaction factors – request size, responsibility, and persuasion – significantly influenced task difficulties for both L1 and L2 speakers. In particular, the linguistic consequences of these factors presented further difficulties for L2 speakers. Finally, this study demonstrated the importance of exploring participants' open-ended responses by investigating other factors that may have affected participants' perceived difficulties as they performed the designed pragmatic tasks.

Applicable level: Tertiary

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APPENDIX A
Role-Play Tasks

Simple Task (Task 1)

Participants' situation: You are a staff member assigned to Project A. You and your project manager are scheduled to have a videoconference tomorrow with the client representative. However, your client just informed you that he couldn't attend the meeting due to urgent matters at his office, and asked you to reschedule the meeting for the following week. So, you have to ask your manager to check his availability for the following week. The relationship between you and your manager is strictly professional, and you have only interacted with each other in the office. Now, go into his office.

Interlocutor's situation: You are a manager. One of the staff members on Project A, which you are responsible for, is visiting you. Your relationship with the staff member is strictly professional, and you have only interacted with each other in the office.

Less Simple Task (Task 2)

Participants' situation: You are a staff member in the sales department. Unfortunately, your schedule today is very demanding. You have to have your project report finalized by the end of today, and a colleague on the project has taken a sick day, so you have to do all the work by yourself. You also have to attend a workshop that takes a significant amount of time. You do your best to finish the report on time, but you know it is impossible. You think you can complete the report on time if someone can help you check the report's annual sales figures. So, you decide to ask your project manager for help. Your relationship with the manager is strictly professional, and you have only interacted with each other during the project meetings. Now, go into his office.

Interlocutor's situation: You are a project manager. One of your staff members who is working on the project you are responsible for is visiting you. Your relationship with the staff member is strictly professional, and you have only interacted with each other during the project meetings.

Complex Task (Task 3)

Participants' situation: You are a marketing team leader for a fashion company, and you have been recently offered a 3% salary increase. However, you are not satisfied with the increase because, over the past 4 years, you have successfully led your marketing team to improve performance. Specifically, a new social media campaign your team launched increased sales by 10 % by the third quarter of this year compared to the previous year, and that figure is expected to reach 15 % by the end of the year. So, you think a 5% increase is appropriate based on your achievements and experience, and you want to meet the Director of Marketing to discuss it. Your relationship with the director is strictly professional, and you have only interacted with each other in the office. Now, go into his office.

Interlocutor's situation: You are the Director of Marketing for a fashion company. A marketing team leader is vising you. Your relationship with the team leader is strictly professional, and you have only interacted with each other in the office.

Highly Complex Task (Task 4)

Participants' situation: You are a sales manager of a cosmetic container manufacturer (Company A). You are currently in charge of a project requiring your company to supply 100ml men's moisturizer

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containers in bulk to B Cosmetics. The project is one of the most important ones that your company is currently working on. However, with less than 7 days left until the delivery date, you found out this morning that 50ml containers were produced instead of 100ml containers due to an error in order processing caused by your sales department. Thinking it impossible to meet the delivery time of less than a week (it will take at least two weeks to re-manufacture the order), you urgently visit B Cosmetics to meet the Purchasing Director in person and ask for an extension on the delivery date. You and the director have had no interactions other than a few meetings related only to this project. Now, go into his office.

Interlocutor's situation: You are the Purchasing Director for B Cosmetics. A sales manager for a cosmetic container manufacturer (Company A) is visiting you. You have talked to the sales manager only a few times before and your relationship with the sales manager is strictly professional.

APPENDIX B
Post-Survey

1. You performed four role-playing tasks. Recall the following situations (A, B, C, D), and rank them in ascending order from easiest to most difficult.

- Task A: The team leader asks the director for a salary increase.
- Task B: The staff member asks the manager for help with a project report.
- Task C: The staff member asks the manager to find his availability to reschedule a meeting.
- Task D: The sales manager asks the purchasing director for an extension on the delivery date.

<div align="center">

1   2   3   4

very easy   (   )   –   (   )   –   (   )   –   (   )   very difficult

</div>

2. Please describe in detail the reason(s) that you consider the second-order task to be more difficult than the first-order task.

3. Please describe in detail the reason(s) that you consider the third-order task to be more difficult than the second-order task.

4. Please describe in detail the reason(s) that you consider the fourth-order task to be more difficult than the third-order task.