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Pragmalinguistic Differences between Proficient and Less Proficient Malay Learners of English in Request

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Abstract

In the teaching and learning of a second language, more often than not emphasis is placed on grammatical accuracy and language fluency, while aspects of pragmatics take back seats. Ideally, the higher the proficiency, the higher the pragmalinguistic ability of selecting acceptable politeness strategies and language-specific means from a language's existing resources. This study sought out the pragmalinguistic differences between proficient and less proficient Malay learners of English in making requests. The objectives of this study were to find out: (1) the different pragmalinguistic strategies employed by the two groups of respondents in making requests, and (2) whether more proficient Malay learners of English apply higher amount of pragmalinguistic strategies compared to the less proficient learners. Data for this study was obtained through Discourse Completion Test (DCT) questionnaires and interviews of 10 Malay secondary school students in Malaysia. The results indicated significant differences in both the types and amount of pragmalinguistic strategies employed by the proficient and less proficient groups. Surprisingly, the more proficient group did not display the expected politeness in their requests.

INTRODUCTION

English competency in Malaysia has moved out from the sphere of being an asset to being a necessity. To master a language though, one has to learn all the aspects of a language, including the appropriateness of usage in context. Often, grammatically-competent learners may not know the proper language to use in performing speech acts.