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## **Production of Conversational Implicatures by Students of the ELT Department**

### **İngilizce Öğretmenliği Öğrencilerinin Konuşma Sezdirimlerini Kullanma Becerileri**

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#### **Abstract**

This study was planned to investigate prospective English language teachers' competence in implicature production. The participants were 88 trainee teachers who were studying English language teaching in the first, second and third years in a university in Cyprus. They were given an Implicature Production Instruments with twelve situations, and they were asked to respond according to the situations in an implicit way. The results showed that female participants used more implicatures than the male participants, older participants used more implicatures and that the third year participants used more implicatures as compared to the other years. The second-year group was not homogenous regarding implicature production. The outcomes indicated that although pragmatic competence concerning implicature production may develop naturally. English language learners and trainee teachers need to be supported regarding pragmatic competence in the same way as they are supported in other competency areas.

**Keywords:** *implicatures, English language teachers, expressions, gender difference, age, year of study*

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## Öz

Bu çalışmada İngilizce Öğretmenliği bölümüne devam eden öğrencilerinin İngilizce dilinde sezdirileri üretme becerileri araştırılmıştır. Çalışmaya, bölüme birinci, ikinci ve üçüncü sınıfta devam eden 88 öğrenci katılmıştır. Çalışmaya katılım gönüllülük esasına dayanmaktadı. Katılımcılara 12 durum içeren sezdiri üretme ölçeği verilmiştir. Bu durumlar, şikayet bildirme, istek bildirme, kızgınlık bildirme, eleştirme gibi konular içermektedir. Katılımcılara bu ifadeleri direk olarak değil, sezdiri yolu ile nasıl ifade edebilecekleri soruldu. Veriler toplandıktan sonra her bir katılımcıdan alınan ölçek notlandı ve her bir katılımcı için toplan ölçek puanı çıkarılmıştır. Veri SPSS programı aracılığı ile yaş, cinsiyet ve bölüme devam ettiği yıl gibi faktörler açısından incelendi. Bulgular katılımcıların sezdiri anlama becerilerinin genel olarak orta düzeyde olduğunu gösterdi. Kadınlar sezdirileri genel olarak daha iyi ifade ederken, erkekler daha çok direk ifadeler kullandılar. Bu sonuç sezdiri üretme becerisi ile ilgili bir gösterge olabileceği gibi, cinsiyete dayalı tercihlerin de bir sonucu olabilir. Yaş grupları karşılaştırıldığında, yaşı büyük olanların küçük olanlara göre daha başarılı olduğu görüldü. Yaş grupları ile ilgili sonuç dil öğrenmek için harcanan sürenin önem arz ettiğini göstermektedir. Bölüme devam eden birinci, ikinci ve üçüncü sınıflar karşılaştırıldığında ise, ikinci sınıfların bir ve üçüncü sınıflara göre daha a sezdiri kullandığı görüldü. Bunun en temel sebebi bu grupta sezdirileri çok kullananlar ile çok az kullananlar arasındaki büyük farktı. Sezdiri üretme becerisi, dilin sadece sözlük anlamı ile değil ikincil anlamları ile veya kültürel anlamları ile kullanılabileceğine ilişkin farkındalık sonucu gelişir. Bu çalışmadan çıkan sonuçlar İngilizce öğrencilerine ve öğretmen adaylarına bu ve buna benzer konularla ilgili farkındalık kazanmalarını sağlamak üzere yardımcı olunması gerektiğini göstermektedir.

**Anahtar sözcükler:** *sezdiri üretim, ifade, İngilizce öğretmenleri, cinsiyet farkları, yaş, eğitim yılı*

## Introduction

This study was planned to investigate prospective English teachers' pragmatic competence in implicature production. The concept of competence has been a topic of interest for researchers in the SLA research field. Linguistic competence is one of the competency areas that is normally addressed in all language classes, pragmatic competence is sometimes purposefully addressed, but when it is addressed, the lessons do not consistently aim at improving pragmatic competence. One apparent reason for this is that pragmatic competence is not tested in language exams. Despite this, pragmatic competence is an essential part of overall language proficiency. Previous research in pragmatics mostly focused on speech acts and conversational expressions only some research focused on comprehension and production of implicatures. The present study is designed to address the gap of research in implicature production.

## **Literature review**

The significance of pragmatic competence within communicative competence is emphasised in this section. Also, an overview of empirical studies on pragmatic competence is discussed.

## **Theoretical background**

Communicative competence has been an essential concept in language learning and teaching. There have been various attempts at identifying and defining the sub-components of communicative competence. Chomsky differentiated between competence and performance, paying particular attention to competence which refers to grammatical or linguistic competence. Linguistic competence involves knowledge of language rather than the ability to use language. Halliday and Hymes are two big names who reacted to Chomsky's notion of competence. Halliday replaced it with his functional perspective focusing on textual, interpersonal and ideational meta-functions. Hymes tried to expand the concept of competence by adding socio-linguistic competence to the grammatical competence. Sociolinguistic competence involves factors such as setting, participants, and ends. Canale and Swain (1980) presented a comprehensive framework establishing a clear statement of the content and boundaries of communicative competence. One of the components they have identified is sociolinguistic competence. Sociolinguistic competence involves the knowledge of "the extent to which utterances are produced and understood appropriately in different sociolinguistic contexts depending on contextual factors such as the status of participants, purposes of the interaction, and norms or conventions of interaction" (Canale, 1983, p. 7). Bachman (1990) set out to develop her version of communicative language ability. This model was different from the earlier models in that it allocated pragmatic competence an independent and significant position as one of the two essential parts of communicative ability. This emphasis on pragmatic competence signalled the growing concern for developing pragmatic skills. In another model by Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei and Thurrell (1995) discourse competence dimension of Communicative Competence was centralised. In this model, pragmatic competence, though represented under another name, actional competence, was continued to be recognised as one of the basics of Communicative Competence. Another model of Communicative Competence, devised by the Council of Europe (2001: 9) involved pragmatic competence as one of the main domains.

Austin is another vital name who worked on pragmatic competence. Austin (1962) proposed a fundamental notion of speech acts (example acts: promising, ordering, greeting, warning, inviting, and congratulating). He asked: *What do we do with language?*, and answered: We perform speech acts. By speech acts he refers to the everyday activity of informing, instructing, ordering, threatening, complaining, describing. In other words, language is an activity that we do in various situations and circumstances. Every speech act that we perform has three components, which he calls *locution*, *illocution*, and *perlocution*. Locution is the propositional statement, illocution is the intended meaning, and Perlocution is the expected response. The act of saying something is a locutionary act. It is no more than a string of words containing phonological (sounds), syntactic (grammar), and semantic (word meaning) elements put together in a systemically acceptable sequence. In performing a locutionary act, one often performs such an act as asking or answering a question, giving some information, an assurance or a warning (Austin, 1962, pp. 98–99).

The perlocutionary act is the effect or the consequence of an utterance in a given situation. Following the convention of Austin (1962) who had introduced the notion of speech acts, Grice developed his general theory of communication – the Co-operative Principle (CP). He emphasised the need for cooperation in discourse. The CP is grounded on one basic principle: make your contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged. (Grice, 1975: 307). It also had four maxims: quality, quantity, relevance, and manner.

He explains the maxims as follows:

1. The maxim of Quality: try to make your contribution one that is true, specifically:
  - a. Do not say what you believe to be false
  - b. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence
2. The maxim of Quantity
  - a. Make your contribution as informative as is required for the current purposes of the exchange
  - b. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.
3. The maxim of Relevance

Make your contribution relevant
4. The maxim of manner: Be perspicuous, and specifically:
  - a. Avoid obscurity
  - b. Avoid ambiguity

- c. Be brief
- d. Be orderly

These maxims show in what way language users comprehend and produce implicatures. The quality maxim is mainly about honesty, the quantity maxim is about being clear and efficient, the maxim of relevance is about the relevance of the contribution and the maxim of manner is about the manner in which the speaker makes the contribution in conversation.

### **The previous empirical research**

Research in pragmatic competence focuses on speech acts, conversational expressions and few studies have been conducted in implicature production. Some research findings point to the importance of conversational expressions. Bardovi-Harlig (2009) reported findings of conventional expressions production task which involved 32 scenarios. The study aimed to investigate the reasons behind the low use of conventional expressions and the relationship between recognition and production of these expressions. The scenarios involved various speech acts such as expressions of gratitude, requests and acceptances of offers. Low production is associated with lack of socio-pragmatic knowledge. Pragmatic comprehension was a prerequisite to pragmatic production, but it was not sufficient on its own. "At least four areas of pragmatic knowledge bear on production: identifying a speech act context, pragmatic strategies, content, and form" (Bardovi-Harlig, 2009). These knowledge areas indicate that awareness of context, knowledge of pragmatic strategies, content and form determine the performance of the language users.

Similarly, Al-Fatlawi (2018) conducted a study to investigate the awareness of written sarcasm in British English and the effect of various factors on the recognition of sarcasm. They found that there was not any significant difference between males and females regarding sarcasm ratings. There was not a correlation between age and sarcasm ratings. Pearson (2006), in an experimental study, investigated the development of pragmatic competence and strategy use by novice learners of the second language (L2) Spanish. They reported that as L2 grammatical competence improved, participants used less low-level directive strategies and used more verb forms with morphological complexity. Grammatical competence was essential for pragmatic competence and that L1 pragmatic system influenced how L2 was processed, interpreted and produced.

There has also been an interest in the relationship between proficiency and implicature production. DeBoer (2015) conducted a study on the comprehension and production of

conventional expressions and investigated the effects of language proficiency and intensity of interaction. The results showed a significant effect for L2 proficiency on the recognition and production of conventional expressions. The intensity of interaction was a significant factor in production. Some researchers narrowed their research topic down to issues such as the production of sarcasm, strategy use. Similarly, Şentürk (2017) investigated young adult EFL learners' speech act preferences for advice, request, apology, and the relationship between language proficiency and pragmatic competence. L2 proficiency was not a predictor of participants' preferences for the speech acts of advice and apology. Most participants preferred to use imperatives. Regarding requests, all participants used direct and indirect speech acts, and regarding the apology, they mostly used indirect speech acts. Both preparatory school and freshman students used similar structures which suggest that L2 proficiency is not a sign of pragmatic competence. However, higher proficiency enables learners to use more structures. Also, Da Silva (2012) conducted an experimental study to investigate the learners' awareness of pragmatic knowledge and the relationship between proficiency and pragmatic knowledge. The results showed that the participants' initial awareness of pragmatics ranged from 3.00 to 17.00 out of 20 mean score which shows that the participants had a wide range of differences regarding awareness of pragmatics. A significant positive correlation between language proficiency and pragmatic ability was also found. Such correlation indicates that when the proficiency level increased, the pragmatic level increased as well. The treatment results showed that pragmatic competence can be improved through instruction, the experimental group participants improved their pragmatic knowledge significantly as compared to the control group participants.

There has been some research interest in implicatures too. Taghizadeh (2017) conducted research to evaluate the extent to which pragmatic competence can be measured with DCTs. The results showed that Iranian ELT students who learned English in Iran and who did not stay in an English-speaking country lack pragmatic knowledge. Students who were taught the literal meanings of vocabularies were not aware of the hidden meanings the words trigger, therefore were not able to identify them. Rizaoglu and Yavuz (2007) conducted a study on the comprehension and production of implicatures. The findings on the implicature production showed that the participants mostly used the maxim of quality for the purposes of creating sarcasm and politeness. The results showed that the participants' comprehended speech acts that they could produce. Taguchi (2005) compared less and high proficient ESL learners not

only concerning their level of implicature comprehension. Correlation analysis revealed a significant, but not a strong relationship between comprehension accuracy and production appropriateness and no significant relationship between pragmatic comprehension and production speed.

### **Methodology**

An implicature production instrument (IPI) was used to collect data from 86 young adults aged between 18 and 30 who are prospective English language teachers. The instrument was in the format of a written discourse completion task (WDCT). IPI was devised by Rızaoğlu and Yavuz (2007). It involves hypothetical situations-contexts and is followed by a dialogue where the first speaker's utterance is provided. The test takers were required to state how they would respond in the given situation in an indirect way supposing it is necessary to be indirect. If they did not feel the need to be indirect, they could give direct responses. Jergigan's (2007: 78) rating scale (Cronbach's alpha: 0.81) was adopted to categorise the implicatures, and two researchers categorised them. The responses were also categorised on the basis of conversational maxims (Gricean, 1975). The rating scale involved 5 scores from 0 to 4. 0: no response provided, 1: response in unacceptable pragmatically given the context, 2: response is generally unacceptable pragmatically in this context, though perhaps not in all contexts, 3: response is generally appropriate given the context, but contains one or more noticeable pragmatic flaws that affect the intended meaning, 4: near perfect close to native responses in context, syntax and lexicon.

### **Research questions**

1. What is the range of participant achievement regarding the type of implicatures?
2. Is there any statistically significant difference between male and female participants regarding producing implicatures?
3. Is there any statistically significant difference between age groups regarding producing implicatures?
4. Is there any statistically significant difference between the participants in terms of the years that they spent in the English language teaching department regarding producing implicatures?

## Findings and discussion

*What is the range of participant achievement regarding the type of implicatures?*

Table 1 Responses to situations according to the maxims

	Speech Act	Quantity	Quality	Relation	Manner	Explicit	L1Inf.	Missing
1	Response to bad news	11.8	13	8.3	12.9	32.9	18.8	2.3
2	Indirect criticism	40	14	0	8.3	15.6	1.2	10.9
3	Mentioning oneself	10.6	4.8	27	3.6	45.3	4.7	4
4	Expressing disturbance	1.2	27.1	0	2.4	57.6	5.9	5.8
5	Expressing annoyance	1.2	49.3	1.2	4.7	3.6	3.5	36.5
6	Expressing complaint	3.6	37.6	0	14.1	30.6	3.5	10.6
7	Indirect criticism	21.1	47.1	2.4	5.9	12.9	7.1	3.5
8	Indirect request	2.4	16.5	0	2.4	72.9	1.2	4.6
9	Indirect request	6	15.3	0	7.1	52.9	1.2	17.5
10	Expressing annoyance	4.7	44.6	3.6	7.1	18.8	7.1	14.1
11	Indirect criticism	14.1	18.9	0	2.4	50.6	0	14
12	Indirect criticism	1.2	42.4	0	7.1	38.8	0	10.5



The table above shows the type of speech acts for each situation and how the participants responded to these speech acts based on Gricean conversational maxims. The table above shows that the participants provided explicit responses to most of the situations. This outcome indicates that they did not have much awareness about implicatures. When the responses provided for the four maxims were compared, it became clear that the participants were much better at producing implicatures within the maxim of quality. When the participants used the maxim of quality, 3,5% used Irony, 8,2% used sarcasm and 2,4% used rhetorical questions.

*Is there any statistically significant difference between male and female participants regarding producing implicatures?*

Table 2 Gender difference

Gender	N	Mean	SD	SEM	df	t	Sig
Female	52	<b>24.27</b>	<b>5.21</b>	.72	83	1.42	<b>0.08</b>
Male	33	19.79	21.79	3.79			

As shown in the table above there was not any statistically significant difference between female and male participants. The mean score of the female participants was much higher than the male participants with a standard deviation of 5.21. This outcome shows that female participants were much better at producing implicatures than male participants ( $P= 0, 08$ ). The standard deviation of male participants is 21.79 indicating that there were weak and successful participants in the group. The responses in the female group were much more homogenous. The female participants ( $m= 0.40$ ) used the quantity maxim significantly ( $P= 0.00$ ) more compared to male participants ( $m= 0.16$ ). On the contrary, Al-fatlawi (2018) reported that there was not any statistically significant difference between the participants regarding sarcasm ratings, which relates to the quality maxim. Similarly, there was not any statistically significant difference between the two groups regarding the quality maxim.

Table 3 Gender difference based on the situations

	Female			Male			P
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	
Situation 3 Speech act: Mentioning	52	2.85	3.94	32	<b>4.47</b>	7.14	<b>0.02</b>

oneself							
Situation 6 Speech act: expressing complaints	52	2.29	2.92	32	<b>4.16</b>	7.27	<b>0.00</b>
Situation 9 Speech act: Indirect request	52	2.17	4.42	32	<b>4.22</b>	6.88	<b>0.00</b>

While female participants scored higher in the overall use of implicatures, there were some situations that male students had a better grasp and performed better at producing implicatures. As seen in the table above, the difference between male and female participants in the production of implicatures for the 3rd, 6th, and 9th situations was statistically significant ( $P = 0.02, 0.00$  and  $0.00$  respectively). Similarly, Yavuz and Rizaoglu (2007) reported that most participants used quantity maxim (38.9%) in situation 3, quality maxim (56.7%) for situation 6, and they produced explicit responses (40%) in situation 9. However, they did not report any statistically significant difference between the two gender groups for these situations.

*Is there any statistically significant difference between age groups regarding producing implicatures?*

Table 4 Comparison of age groups

Age	N	Mean	SD	SEM	df	t	P
18-20	47	<b>23.28</b>	4.25	0.62	74	-1.31	<b>0.04</b>
21-23	29	<b>24.83</b>	6.03	1.12			

As shown in the table above, there was a statistically significant difference ( $P = 0.04$ ) between the 18-20 and the 21-23 age groups for the benefit of the 21-23 age group. The older learners were more successful in producing implicatures. Assuming that older learners had more experience as English language learners, the outcome may indicate that years of experience as language learners and trainee teachers contribute to the improvement of pragmatic

competence. Contradictory to the outcome in the present study, Al-fatlawi (2018) did not find any significant difference between age groups regarding sarcasm ratings.

As shown in the following table, when the two age groups were compared for their performance in each situation, statistically significant differences for the 10<sup>th</sup> and the 12<sup>th</sup> situations were found (P= 0.02 and 0.02 respectively). Yavuz and Rizaoglu (2007) reported a moderate production rate of implicatures for these situations. They reported that 42.2% of the participants used quality maxim for the situation 10 and 33.3% used quantity maxim in the situation 12.

Table 5 Comparison of age groups based on the situations

	Age range 18 - 20			Age range 21 - 23			P
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	
Situation 10 Speech act: expressing annoyance	47	<b>3.98</b>	6.35	29	2.62	3.78	<b>0.02</b>
Situation 12 Speech act: indirect criticism	47	2.34	2.98	29	<b>3.79</b>	6.79	<b>0.02</b>

In the present study, while the younger participants performed better in situation 10 older participants were better in situation 12. The outcome indicates that there would be a slow and steady improvement in pragmatic production as learners grow older.

*Is there any statistically significant difference between the participants regarding the years that they spent in the English language teaching department regarding producing implicatures?*

Table 6 Comparison regarding the year of study

Production Score	N	Mean	SD	P	Post Hoc Test
Year 1	37	<b>21.68</b>	4.37	<b>0.08</b>	Y1 vs Y2: 0.82
Year 2	31	<b>19.68</b>	<b>22.46</b>		Y1 vs Y3: 0.18

Year 3	18	<b>28.79</b>	<b>3.71</b>	Y2 vs Y3: 0.76
Total	86	22.44	14.16	

The participants were compared based on the year of study in the ELT department. Although there was not any statistically significant difference, the mean scores revealed interesting outcomes. Year 3 participants scored much higher as compared to the other two years, and their scores were consistent. Year 1 students were the second most successful group of participants and Year 2 were the least successful among the three groups. However, the standard deviation of Year 2 groups indicates that their scores were not consistent, there were both successful and weak participants. Similarly, when Al-fatlawi (2018) compared participants, any statistical significance was not found. This outcome indicates that pragmatic competence for the production of implicatures improves slowly.

As shown in the following table, in Situation 10 younger participants scored significantly higher ( $P= 0,00$ ) whereas in situation 12 older participants scored significantly higher ( $P= 0,00$ ).

Table 7 Comparison of the year of study based on the situations

	Year 1			Year 2			Year 3			P	Post Hoc Test
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	M	SD		
St1-Speech act:response to bad news	37	<b>2.24</b>	1.06	30	<b>1.40</b>	0.85	18	<b>2.44</b>	1.24	<b>0.01</b>	Y1 vs Y2: <b>0.00</b> Y2 vs Y3: <b>0.00</b>
St2-Speech act:indirect criticism	37	<b>1.95</b>	0.52	30	<b>5.30</b>	7.63	18	2.67	0.48	<b>0.01</b>	Y1 vs Y2: <b>0.01</b>

As shown in the table above, in situation 1 there was a statistically significant difference between Year 1 and Year 2 for the benefit of year 1 participants ( $P= 0,00$ ); and between year 2 and Year 3 students for the benefit of year 3 students ( $P= 0,00$ ). Concerning situation 2, there was a statistically significant difference between year 1 and year 2 participants for the benefit of year 2 participants ( $P= 0,01$ ). On the other hand, Yavuz and Rızaoğlu (2007)

reported a moderate rate of production the same situations and they stated that the participants mostly used quality (44.4% and 44.4% respectively).

In conclusion, as shown in the table below, the participants' familiarity with the situations were investigated to understand their production performance better. The outcomes showed that the students sometimes came across similar situations, so they sometimes used implicatures in English. However, they often or very often (55.8%) followed English broadcasts. Most participants (53.7%) used implicatures often or very often in Turkish. This percentage in Yavuz and Rızaoğlu's (2007) study was much higher (81.1%).

Table 8 Student familiarity with the situations

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Total
Did you come across the situations before?	9.0 (24.4)	15.4	<b>53.8</b>	20.5 (21.8)	1.3	100.0
How often do you use implicatures in English?	1.2 (12.3)	11.1	<b>63.0</b>	18.5 (24.7)	6.2	100.0
How often do you use implicatures in Turkish?	3.7 (13.5)	9.8	32.9	29.3 <b>(53.7)</b>	24.4	100.0
How often do you follow English broadcasts and publications?	2.3 (12.8)	10.5	31.4	38.4 <b>(55.8)</b>	17.4	100.0

The outcomes presented in this paper shows that pragmatic competence can naturally improve as learners gain experience in the target language. However, the learners could struggle in this process.

### **Conclusion**

In this study, the participants were required to perform speech acts in an implicit way under specific situations. The data were analysed to understand how much the participants were able to use implicatures. Regarding the type of implicatures, they mostly tended to use quality maxim.

The analysis based on the gender showed that female participants were successful in most situations, whereas there is a limited number of situations in which male participants produced implicatures successfully. Statistical analysis showed that female participants scored higher. In the implicit expression of the speech acts of mentioning oneself, expressing complaints, and indirect request male participants scored higher.

The analysis of the participants' age range showed that older participants scored significantly higher. The analysis of the specific situations showed that younger participants scored significantly higher in the implicit expression of the speech acts of expressing annoyance and indirect criticism.

Regarding the year of study, statistical analysis showed that Year 3 was the most successful group, and Year 2 was the least successful group in producing implications. Concerning the speech act of response to bad news, a statistically significant difference between Year 1 and Year 2 was found in favour of Year 1 and between Year 2 and Year 3 in favour of Year 3. The only situation in which Year 2 performed better than Year 1 participants was the speech act of indirect criticism. Despite that, standard deviation showed that scores of Year 1 participants were more consistent than Year 2 participants.

Although pragmatic comprehension may naturally develop, the findings indicate that male participants, younger participants and weak students in a class of mixed pragmatic competence could struggle in the learning process. Both learners of English and trainee teachers need to be supported in pragmatic competence because implicatures are not easily observable thus not easily learnable. Further research is needed in training learners in implicature production.

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