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

**İngilizce Öğretmenliği Öğrencilerinin Konuşma Sezdirimlerini Anlama  
Becerileri**

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### **Abstract**

This study investigates the extent to which Turkish ELT student teachers comprehend conversational implicatures concerning Grice's theory of co-operative principle (1989). The act of communication speech acts can be either direct or indirect. In the case of indirect speech acts, an addressee has to comprehend the addresser's meaning, which means comprehending the implicature. Implicature is the meaning of the speaker's utterance that is not part of what the speaker says. The inference of the meaning in an utterance by participants mostly depends on the contextual clues in a particular situation. The listener has to differentiate between the literal (semantic) meaning and non-literal (pragmatic) meaning. Developing ELT students' pragmatic competence is significant for successful communication in the target language. Although there is much research into EFL pragmatic competence focusing on conversational implicatures, in the Northern Cypriot ELT context there is still a need to examine the

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issue. This study was designed to investigate the extent to which prospective teachers of English comprehend conversational implications.

**Keywords:** *Pragmatic Competence, Comprehension of implicatures, Turkish ELT students*

## **ÖZ**

Bu çalışma, Grice'in işbirlikçi kuramına göre (1989) Türk İngiliz dili öğretmen adaylarının İngilizcedeki konuşma sezdirimlerinin kavramalarını incelemektedir. İletişimde söz edimi eylemleri ya doğrudan ya da dolaylı olabilir. Dolaylı söz edimi durumlarında muhatap konuşmacının ne ima ettiğini anlamalıdır, bu da konuşma sezdirimlerini kavrama anlamına gelir. Konuşma sezdirimleri konuşmacının söylediklerinin bir parçası olmayan bir konuşma ifadesidir. Bir konuşmada katılımcıların anlamların çıkarımı büyük ölçüde bağlamsal ipuçlarına bağlıdır. Dinleyici edebi (anlamsal) anlamı ile edebi olmayan (edimbilimsel) anlamı birbirinden ayırması gerekir. İngiliz dili öğretmen adaylarının İngilizcedeki konuşma sezdirimlerinin başarılı iletişim için çok önemlidir. KKTC'de İngiliz dili öğretmen adaylarının İngilizcedeki konuşma sezdirimlerinin kavramalarını incelemeye yönelik çok sayıda araştırma olmasına rağmen bu alanda daha fazla araştırmaya gerek duyulmaktadır. Bu çalışma, İngiliz dili öğretmen adaylarının İngilizcedeki konuşma sezdirimlerinin kavramalarını araştırmak için tasarlanmıştır. Araştırma sonuçlarına göre Türk İngiliz dili öğretmen adaylarının İngilizcedeki konuşma sezdirimlerinin kavramaları ortalama olarak düşük düzeydedir.

**Anahtar sözcükler:** *Edimbilim Yetkinlik, Sezdirimlerin kavranması, Türk İngiliz Dili Öğretmen Adayları*

## **Introduction**

Developing language learners' pragmatic competence is significant for successful communication in the target language. Although there are many well-written articles on the importance of pragmatic competence in the target language, we still need to do more in order to eliminate the uncertainties in relation with the pragmatic competence in the target language. There is a close relationship between pragmatics and EFL/ESL in many researches Rintell (1981), Scarcella and Brunak (1981), Brown & Levinson (1987), Koike (1992, 1996), Saito & Beecken (1997), Félix-Brasdefer (2003, 2006), Huth (2006), Yavuz & Rızaoğlu, and Taghizade (2017).

One of the focal points of pragmatic competence is the implicatures in which learners of English need to gain capabilities for successful communication. Comprehending conversational implicatures concerning Grice's theory of co-operative principle (1989) is one of the issues that ELF/ESL scholars

are interested in as a research area. The act of communication speech acts can be either direct or indirect. In the case of indirect speech acts, an addressee has to figure out the addresser's meaning, which means comprehending the implicature. Implicature is the meaning of the speaker's utterance that is not part of what the speaker says.

Although there is much research into EFL pragmatic competence focusing on conversational implicatures, in the Northern Cypriot ELT context there is still a need to examine the issue. This study was designed to investigate the extent to which prospective teachers of English comprehend conversational implications. The study seeks to find answers to the following research questions:

1. Is there any difference in pragmatic comprehension regarding implicature types?
2. Is there any gender-based difference regarding comprehending implicatures?
3. Is there any grade-based difference regarding comprehending implicatures?
4. Are there any age-based differences regarding comprehending implicatures?

## **2. Theoretical Background**

Linguistic competence introduced by Chomsky (1965) focuses mainly on grammatical knowledge, and there is a general belief that the speaker who has linguistic competence speaks in a perfect way. Linguist later introduced pragmatic/communicative competence which started a new page in the TL theory and methodology. The first scholar who used the term communicative competence was Hyme (1972, 1974). He claimed that teaching a foreign language is more than teaching grammar and lexical systems. He highlighted the sociolinguistics aspects of linguistics competence by giving importance to the ability to use grammatical competence in different communicative situations. Regarding the importance of communicative competence in language development Hymes argues that:

The importance of concern with the child is partly that it offers a favourable vantage point for discovering the adult system, and that it poses neatly one way in which the ethnography of communication is a distinctive enterprise, i.e., an enterprise concerned with the abilities the child must acquire beyond those of producing and interpreting grammatical sentences, in order to be a competent

member of its community, not only what may possibly be said, but also what should and should not be said (Hymes, 1972, p. 26).

Cultural interference in second language acquisition is another crucial issue introduced by Hymes in which he claims that different cultures have different speech patterns. Hymes argues that:

Even the ethnographies that we have, though almost never focused on speaking, show us that communities differ significantly in ways of speaking, in patterns of repertoire and switching, in the roles and meanings of speech. They indicate differences with regard to beliefs, values, reference groups, norms and the like, as these enter into the ongoing system of language use and its acquisition by children (Hymes, 1972, p. 33).

Later, Grice (1957) focused on the differences in meanings between lines. He claimed that there is a difference between what the speaker says and intends to communicate. Hymes (1972, 1974) and Grice's (1957) studies later inspired ESL/EFL scholar to conduct more research on linguistic and communicative competence to develop language learners' pragmatic competence. Since then many research has been conducted by many ESL/EFL specialist to enhance and improve pragmatics competence of language learners (Thomas, 1983; Kasper, 1989; Bardovi-Harlig, 1996; Bardovi-Harlig, 1996; Kasper and Rose, 2001; Bardovi-Harlig and Griffin, 2005; Ishihara & Cohen 2010; Rızaoğlu and Yavuz, 2017; and Taghizade, 2017).

Recently, many other types of research on conversational implicature have been conducted by many different scholars all over the globe. Taguchi (2007) conducted a study on native speakers Japanese learners of English to find out how capable students are in implied meaning in dialogues. The results of the study proved that "development of pragmatic knowledge and processing capacity of using the knowledge may not coincide perfectly in L2 development" (Taguchi, 2007: 313). Parmata et al. (2017) investigated the most problematic implicatures and the factors influencing the students' competence to comprehension implicature in Indonesia EFL context. The study findings depicted that indirect criticism implicatures were the most problematic implicatures. The second part of the findings supported Bouton's and Roever's arguments. Rızaoğlu & Yavuz conducted a study on Turkish EFL students' comprehension and production of implicatures. The findings of the study showed that students had a moderately high ability in implicature comprehension and production.

### 3. Method

This study adopts a descriptive research design and applies a quantitative data analysis method to analyse and interpret the collected data. The quantitative data analysis method is used to "establish the relationship between variables and look for and sometimes explain the causes of such a relationship" (Fraenkel, Norman, & Hyun, 2012: 11).

#### 3.1. Participants

Eighty-five first, second and third year Turkish ELT student teachers (52 female, 33 male) majoring at the ELT department, Faculty of education, Cyprus International University participated in this study.

#### 3.2. Instrument

In order to collect the data, we used a shortened version of a questionnaire developed by Bouton (1988- 1994). Before the adoption of the questionnaire, we got permission from Rızaoğlu (2017) who adapted it to the Turkish setting. Bouton's original test has high-reliability coefficient (i.e., 28 items, 0.74) (Bouton, 1994), the shortened version because of the limitations of the study has a lower reliability coefficient (KR-20 = 0.48).

#### 3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

The instrument was distributed to students in different classes, and they allocated almost 20 minutes to complete the questionnaire. The collected data were analysed by SPSS 24.

### 4. Findings of the Study

#### 4.1 Implicature comprehension regarding implicature type

The first research question of the study was to find out to what extent can the ELT student teachers comprehend implicatures in the target language regarding implicature types. In order to understand the differences in pragmatic comprehension regarding implicature types, we calculated the data according to the four maxims of conversations. As shown in table 1. the overall success rate is 38.17 which is the low, moderate level of achievement.

**Table 1: Implicature comprehension regarding implicature type**

Implicature type	Explanation	Success Rate (%)
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Quantity	Understated negative criticism, Be sufficiently informative	29.97
Relevance	Be relevant, Irony/Sarcasm	66.55
Quality	Conventional expression	25.98
Manner	Be orderly	30.2

Additional analysis of the implicature regarding sub-categories depicted that the highest level of success was in Relevance implicatures with a rate of 67% (Table 1). The next percentage is 30% which belongs to the Quantity and Manner implicature. The Quality implicature showed a 26% success rate which is relatively low.

**Table 2: Correct response rates per item**

Items	Implicature Type	Success Rate (%)
5	Relevance	62.8
8	Relevance	<b>82.6</b>
13	Relevance	51.8
14	Relevance	69.0
1	Quantity-understated negative criticism	16.3
3	Quantity-understated negative criticism	14.0
6	Quantity-be sufficiently informative	26.7
11	Quantity-understated negative criticism	20.0
12	Quantity-be sufficiently informative	52.9
2	Quality-irony/sarcasm	43.5
4	Quality-set conventional expression	29.1
9	Quality-set conventional expression	36.6
10	Quality-irony/sarcasm	<b>10.7</b>
7	Manner-be orderly	30.2

Table two shows the success rates per item in which the highest rate belongs to item eight in the category of Relevance. The lowest item is item 10 which belongs to the Quality.

#### **4.2. A comparison of implicature comprehension regarding gender**

The second research question of the study was to find out if there is any difference between female and male. Table three depicts statistical data about gender-based differences regarding comprehending implicatures.

**Table 3: Gender-based differences regarding comprehending implicatures**

Gender	N	Mean	SD	Sig.
Female	52	20.85	8.35	0.55
Male	33	22.79	9.02	

As shown in table 3, there are no statistically significant differences between group means regarding gender. However, a comparison of the mean of the two groups revealed that male subjects have a slightly higher mean (M=22.79, SD=9.46) than that of female subjects (M=20.85, SD=8.35).

#### **4.3. A comparison of implicature comprehension regarding age**

The third research question of the study was to find out if there is any difference between different age groups in comprehending implicatures. Table four shows the statistical data about gender-based differences regarding comprehending implicatures.

**Table 4: Aged-based differences regarding comprehending implicatures**

Age	N	Mean	SD	Sig.
18-20	47	20.68	8.27	0.38
21-23	29	22.48	9.46	

As shown in table 5, there are no statistically significant differences between different ages among participants. However, a comparison of the mean of the two groups revealed that 21-2 group have a slightly higher mean (M=22.48, SD=9.48) than that of 18-20 age group (M=20.85, SD=8.35).

#### **4.4. A comparison of implicature comprehension regarding year of students**

The third research question of the study was to find out if there is any difference between different levels in comprehending implicatures. Table five shows the statistical data about level-based differences regarding comprehending implicatures.

**Table 5: Level-based differences regarding comprehending implicatures**

Comprehension Score	N	Mean	SD	P	Post Hoc Test
Year 1	37	20.97	6.76	0.01	Y1 vs Y3= 0.13
Year 2	31	19.35	8.33		
Year 3	18	26.44	10.72		
Total	86	21.53	8.59		

As shown in table 5, there were statistically significant differences between group means in favour of third graders as determined by one-way ANOVA regarding the grade level of subjects. The mean score of third-year students revealed that they were more successful in comprehending implicatures.

### **Discussion and conclusion**

The results of this study revealed that subjects' implicature comprehension competence is moderately low. However, the achievement rate regarding different implicature types was high or low. The findings overlap with the outcomes of previous researches conducted in different countries (Taghizade, 2017; Alagözlü & Büyüköztürk, 2009; Bialystok, 2003; Garcia, 2004). However, the results are not in line with other studies that depicted moderately high success rates (Rızaoğlu, 2017; Ergüven, 2001; Lee, 2002). The findings of the study depicted differences on the implicature types in which students were more successful in some specific types. Students were more successful in Relevance Implicatures and less successful in Quality Implicature. The results of this study were a replication of related previous studies (Bouton, 1992; Taguchi, 2005; Rızaoğlu & Yavuz, 2017; and Parmata et al., 2017). Lack of knowledge of the cultural values of the target language is the main reason for the related results. This study was an attempt to highlight the problems encountered by the Turkish Cypriot student teachers in understanding English implicature and find out some solutions to those problems. Further studies can be conducted on Turkish students at different levels and contexts in order to create more solutions for ambiguities and problems students encounter. Experimental studies can be applied to Turkish students to examine the effectiveness of teaching implicatures to Turkish students.

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