

Multimethod Approach to Research in Interlanguage Pragmatics

Saad Al-Gahtani, and Ghassan H Al Shatter

Abstract—Argument over the use of particular method in interlanguage pragmatics has increased recently. Researchers argued the advantages and disadvantages of each method either natural or elicited. Findings of different studies indicated that the use of one method may not provide enough data to answer all its questions. The current study investigated the validity of using multimethod approach in interlanguage pragmatics to understand the development of requests in Arabic as a second language (Arabic L2). To this end, the study adopted two methods belong to two types of data sources: the institutional discourse (natural data), and the role play (elicited data). Participants were 117 learners of Arabic L2 at the university level, representing four levels (beginners, low-intermediate, high-intermediate, and advanced). Results showed that using two or more methods in interlanguage pragmatics affect the size and nature of data.

Keywords—Arabic L2, Development of requests, Interlanguage Pragmatics, Multimethod approach.

I. INTRODUCTION

PRAGMATICS is concerned with the use of language in communication, in particular the relationship between language and the context in which it is used. As Mey [1] puts it, pragmatics “studies the use of language in human communication as determined by the conditions of society”. For Crystal [2], more specifically, pragmatics is “the study of language from the point of view of users, especially of the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction and the effects of their use of language has on other participants in the act of communication”. When considering pragmatics as a domain with second language studies, it is referred to as Interlanguage Pragmatics (ILP). The term Interlanguage (IL) was first coined by Reinecke [3]. Selinker [4] further adapted this term in the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA). IL has been defined as what L2 learners produce between their L1 and L2 [5]. Following the introduction of IL into SLA, IL has received a great amount of attention from SLA researchers. ILP refers to the examination of non-native speakers' production, and the acquisition, of linguistic patterns in L2 [6], [7], [8], and [9].

Over the past three decades, numerous studies have been carried out on ILP (see [9], for details). Within the research literature, particular attention has been given to how Non-native Speakers (NNSs) differ from Native Speakers (NSs) in terms of pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic behavior, and to what extent NSs of various languages deviate from each other, rather than how NNSs' linguistic repertoire develops over time [10], [9], and [11]. Therefore, ILP has been primarily deemed “a study of second language use rather than second language learning” [12]. Topics that have been covered in the literature on ILP include: perception of illocutionary force and politeness, production of linguistic action, influence of context variables, discourse sequencing and conversational management, pragmatic success and failure, and joint negotiation of illocutionary force [9].

Pragmatic development refers to how L2 learners' pragmatic competence develops over time. This development can be examined in two ways, either by conducting a longitudinal or cross-sectional study. Data collection methods in ILP have been considered a controversial issue in ILP research, with each data collection method having both its advantages and disadvantages [13]. The debate also discussed the validity of natural and elicited data including role play versus natural data. Although some studies investigated the validity of role play data as compared to natural speech in ILP [14], no study, to the knowledge of the researchers, has investigated the validity of multimethod approach (natural and role play) during the realization of request in Arabic. The current study therefore focuses on the argument raised about research techniques in ILP including the increasing call for the use of multimethod approach [8]. In light of this focus, the current study employed different data collection methods, i.e. institutional discourse (natural) and role-play scenarios (elicited). The main purpose of using these methods is to compare between the performance of requests made in natural and role-play data, in order to examine the influence of multimethod approaches on data extraction, diversity, and enhancement, and to investigate their validity as different data elicitation techniques.

II. DEVELOPMENT OF REQUESTS

A. Methodological Comparison

Boxer [15] argues that using natural data boosts the validity of the results. Natural data also provides the researcher with long and complex data [16] and is very rich in semantic features, diversity and length [17], and [18]. However, natural data has also been criticized as it lacks a systematic nature

S. Al-Gahtani, Assistant Professor of Applied Linguistics, is with Arabic Language Institute, King Saud University, Saudi Arabia (phone: +966 1 4672855, e-mail: algsaad@ksu.edu.sa).

G. Al Shatter, Associate Professor of Applied Linguistics, is with Arabic Language Institute, King Saud University, Saudi Arabia (phone: +966 1 4692920; e-mail: fgalsatter@yahoo.com).

(Beebe, 1992, cited in [17]), does not control social variables [19]; is problematic in relation to comparability [20]; and is time consuming [21].

Shying away from authentic data, ILP researchers tend to use elicited data [22]. Kasper and Rose [11] suggest that elicited data is the most appropriate choice for ILP studies due to the fact that they better enable the researcher to make a comparison between NSs and L2 learners at different proficiency levels.

Discourse Completion Task (DCT) has been identified as the most common data elicitation instrument in ILP research [23], and [8]. However, DCT has come under criticism as it does not provide real-life performance [24], or capture real-life language use [25]. What is more, written responses have been found to be shorter than spoken responses [17].

The use of role-plays, despite having its pitfalls, has been found to be an effective elicitation technique. Kasper and Dahl [8] deemed that role-plays are preferable to other elicitation techniques when collecting pragmatic data, whilst both Mackey and Gass [26] and Tran [19] have argued that role-plays are more representative of real-life performance. When compared to DCTs, role-plays have been found to be more comprehensive [27] whilst allowing the researcher to control social variables in a similar way to DCT [25], and [11]. In addition, Al-Gahtani and Roever [28] argue that role-plays yield interactive data and enable researchers to examine sequence organization. On the other hand, role-plays have been criticized because they do not reflect real life interaction [23], [29], and [25] and transcribing the necessary data tends to be time consuming [8].

III. METHODS

A. Participants

It should be noted that due to the absence of female Arabic L2 classes in Saudi Arabia Universities at the time of conducting the current study, participants were restricted to male learners only. The study included 117 male participants studying Arabic as a second language (Arabic L2) at the Arabic Language Institute (ALI), King Saud University (KSU) from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds (55 countries).

67 participants were randomly selected for the natural data, who were further divided into four groups: beginner (14), low-intermediate (14), high-intermediate (16), and advanced (23) learners. The criteria for dividing the learners into four groups were based on both their educational levels and their results of the placement test, administered by the ALI. This test was incorporated in order to ensure the validity of the division, as studies that have grouped learners based solely on their educational levels have found the subsequent diversity of participants has impacted on the findings. (e.g. see studies by Trosborg [30]; Rose [31]). The test composed of three parts: oral skill (25 grades), writing (25 grades), and general language skills (50 grades). Learners with scores ranging from 0-20 were assigned to level one and further considered beginner learners; those whose scores ranged from 21-40 were

assigned to level two and further considered low-intermediate learners; those whose scores ranged from 41-74 were assigned to level three and further considered high-intermediate learners; and those whose scores ranged from 75-100 were assigned to level four and further considered advanced learners. Since ALI does not accept students over 25 years of age, learners' ages ranged from 18 to 25 years.

50 participants were randomly selected for the role play data, who were further divided into five groups: beginner (10), low-intermediate (10), high-intermediate (10), advanced (10), and Arabic NS (10). The same criteria for dividing the learners based on their proficiency were used in this phase. Likewise, their ages ranged from 18 to 25 years old. In order to control any possible variables that might have an effect on learners' production of requests, participants selected in this phase were different from those in the natural data. However, they were at the same proficiency level, so their target language pragmatic knowledge is comparable to the participant population in the natural data.

B. Procedures

In order to gain authentic data, participants engaged in two institutional interactions (phase one and phase two), with a five month interval. In the beginning of the semester, one subject for each level was intentionally scheduled in a timeslot that did not suit the majority of students. In order to reschedule these subjects, participants had to individually ask the administrator in charge of the timetable to rearrange their timeslots to suit all students (phase one). At the end of the semester, two final exams for each level were intentionally scheduled to be administered on the one day. Again, participant had to individually request for one exam to be deferred or brought forward (phase two). The administrator was informed that his interactions with the learners were being recorded in order for the department to evaluate the progress of learners' language. Only after the second situation took place were the learners informed about the actual study, making the data collected for this phase fully authentic. At this stage, one of the researchers met all the participants, explained the aims and background of the study, and provided them with the plain language statement. They were informed that they would be free to withdraw from the study and that their data would be discarded if they chose to do so. All participants agreed to participate in the current study; therefore, all interactions were transcribed and translated into English by one of the researchers.

Role play participants, on the other hand, were informed of the study aim, background, and procedures in advance. They signed the consent form keeping in mind that participation is voluntary and that they can leave at any time. Two role-play cards were administered to participants one at a time, with a five month interval. For each situation, they were given five minutes to read carefully over the scenario in order to absorb the role they would subsequently play. Before the role-play commenced, the conductor asked the participant if the role-play scenario was clear, or if they had any further questions they wished to ask. In an attempt to ensure the clarity of the

scenario, the conductor also explained the scenario to the participant in his own words. All role-plays were audio taped. In all role-plays, one of the researchers played the role of conductor in order to eliminate potential variables. All role plays were transcribed and translated into English by one of the researcher.

C. Data Analysis

The majority of ILP studies have adapted the traditional analytical approach, i.e. the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP) coding scheme, to analyze their data, which was based on data elicited through DCTs. The fact that most of these studies have employed DCTs explains the reason that they have adapted the CCSARP coding scheme. However, this analytical method has been criticized by a number of researchers [25], [32], [33], and [30]. In their recent study on requests by Arabic learners of English, Al-Gahtani and Roever [34] developed a classification scheme for head acts that is proficiency-based, rather than politeness or directness oriented. They argue that identification of head acts is fairly unproblematic for a scheme like CCSARP, which was designed for DCT data. However, such identification is far more complex for interactional data, where the request head act may be preceded by supportive moves which all have some degree of requestive illocutionary force. Therefore, the authors utilized the “next-turn proof procedure” [35] commonly used to identify head acts in Conversation Analysis (CA). Based on this procedure, head acts refer to the utterances treated by the hearer as requests. Even after the identification of head acts, however, another problem arises in relation to how they are coded within the CCSARP framework. As Biesenbach-Lucas [36] has pointed out, this framework has not been consistent in assigning head acts to the same directness level. For example, want statements are classified as direct requests in the CCSARP coding scheme, while they have been classified as indirect requests in other studies (e.g. [37], and [30]). Moving away from this problematic coding scheme, Al-Gahtani and Roever [34] coded head acts according to their formal properties instead of their directness levels. Consequently, they identified four categories: imperatives and want statements, modals, if-clauses, and complex requests.

Based on the discussion above, we have adapted Al-Gahtani and Roever’s [34] classification of head acts. As they looked at requests in English and not Arabic, however, some important amendments to the approach been made. Firstly, six categories for head act strategies were identified in the current study: want statement, performative, possibility, modal, if clause and other. It should be noted though, that the “other” category is composed of other request strategies that occurred infrequently in the data. For instance, a few participants produced requests that were grammatically incomplete. These requests lacked the use of verbs, such as, “*anaa SabaaH*” (I’m morning). This was due to their insufficient proficiency. In addition, requests that expressed opinions were detected in the data “*araa 'ana fii al-SabaaH 'afDa'*” (I think that it’s better in the morning) however they were rarely employed in the

corpus. After request strategies were identified and further classified, the focus was turned into the use of modification strategies, of which a further five strategies were identified: none, please, tag, formulae and title.

IV. RESULTS

A. Natural Data

1) Head Acts

Table I details the head act strategies employed among groups. It clearly indicates that the “want statement” strategy was most commonly utilized across all groups. However, whilst the beginner, low-intermediate and high-intermediate groups utilized this strategy with frequencies of 75%, 92.8% and 75% respectively, the advanced group employed this strategy with a frequency of only 43.4%. Whilst it was still the most commonly used strategy, the advanced group also relied on producing a range of head act strategies. Also of note, it was found that the low-intermediate group used the “want statement” strategy most frequently, favouring this strategy even more than the beginner group. Given the fact that the “want statement” strategy dominated the corpus, the other head act strategies were infrequently employed, particularly by the first three groups.

TABLE I
HEAD ACTS AMONG GROUPS (NATURAL DATA)

Strategy	Beginner	Low-inter	High-inter	Advanced	Total
Want statement	21 (75)	26 (92.8)	24 (75)	20 (43.4)	91 (67.9)
Possibility	-	-	-	5 (10.8)	5 (3.7)
Performative	3 (10.7)	2 (7.1)	4 (12.5)	11 (23.9)	20 (14.9)
Modal	-	-	2 (6.2)	7 (15.2)	9 (6.7)
If clause	1 (3.5)	-	-	1 (2.1)	2 (1.4)
Other	3 (10.7)	-	2 (6.2)	2 (4.3)	7 (5.2)
Total	28	28	32	46	134

N= raw score; () = percentage.

Overall, the results of the head act strategies among groups reveal that the learners’ proficiency level did not have a striking influence on their production of requests, as the “want statement” requests dominated the learners’ production of requests regardless of their proficiency level. Despite this overall trend, however, some cross-sectional developmental patterns were detected. Most notably, the advanced group employed the “want statement” strategy with a lower frequency than the other groups, whilst also making more use of the “performative”, “modals” and “possibility” strategies.

2) Modification to Head Acts

Table II illustrates the use of modification strategies among groups in the natural data. The occurrence of head acts lacking modification strategies was widespread across all groups. Surprisingly, however, a correlation between the use of head acts lacking modification strategies and the learners’ proficiency level was observed. As the data reveals, with the increase of proficiency levels participants had a tendency to

produce more head acts lacking any modification strategies. As a result, the beginner group was the only group which utilized all modification strategies, with the “please” strategy being solely employed by the beginner group. The beginner group also utilized the “formulae” strategy.

TABLE II
MODIFICATION STRATEGIES AMONG GROUPS (NATURAL DATA)

	Beginner	Low-inter	High-inter	Advanced	Total
None	24 (85.7)	25 (89.2)	31 (96.8)	44 (95.6)	124 (92.5)
Please	1 (3.5)	-	-	-	1 (.7)
Tag	1 (3.5)	2 (7.1)	1 (3.1)	-	4 (2.9)
Formulae	1 (3.5)	1 (3.5)	-	1 (2.1)	3 (2.2)
Title	1 (3.5)	-	-	1 (2.1)	2 (1.4)
Total	28	28	32	46	134

N= raw score; ()= percentage

To sum up, despite the disproportionate use of head acts lacking modification strategies, the learners' proficiency level was seen to have no noticeable influence on the use of these strategies. All learner groups displayed a tendency to produce requests lacking modification strategies. Nonetheless, some variations among groups, particularly in the beginner group, were seen. The beginner group tended to modify their requests more than the other groups and further used all modification strategies.

3) Performance over the Five-Month Period

In regards to the influence of learners' proficiency level on their production of head act strategies in both phases, likewise it was found that the five-month period did not have a strong impact on learners' production of head act strategies, as illustrated in Table III and Table IV. Ultimately, it has been established that the use of head act strategies by all learner groups did not greatly differ over the five-month period. Therefore, it can be potentially argued that a period of five months is not long enough for L2 learners to display any noticeable developmental patterns. Consequently, these results raise some important questions; why did the participants rely most heavily on the “want statement” strategy? Furthermore, can this trend be ascribed to the acquisition of Arabic, the setting of the study, or the data collection method employed in this study?

TABLE III
HEAD ACT STRATEGIES AMONG LEARNER GROUPS IN PHASE 1 (NATURAL DATA)

Strategy	Beginner	Low-inter	High-inter	Advanced	Total
Want statement	10 (71.4)	14 (100)	14 (87.5)	9 (39.1)	47 (70.1)
Possibility	-	-	-	2 (8.6)	2 (2.9)
Performative	1 (7.1)	-	2 (12.5)	6 (26)	9 (13.4)
Modal	-	-	-	6 (26)	6 (8.9)
If clause	-	-	-	-	-
Other	3 (21.4)	-	-	-	3 (4.4)
Total	14	14	16	23	67

N= raw score; ()= percentage

TABLE IV
HEAD ACT STRATEGIES AMONG LEARNER GROUPS IN PHASE 2 (NATURAL DATA)

Strategy	Beginner	Low-inter	High-inter	Advanced	Total
Want statement	11 (78.5)	12 (85.7)	10 (62.5)	11 (47.8)	44 (65.6)
Possibility	-	-	-	3 (13)	3 (4.4)
Performative	2 (14.2)	2 (14.2)	2 (12.5)	5 (21.7)	11 (16.4)
Modal	-	-	2 (12.5)	1 (4.3)	3 (4.4)
If clause	1 (7.1)	-	-	1 (4.3)	2 (2.9)
Other	-	-	2 (12.5)	2 (8.6)	4 (5.9)
Total	14	14	16	23	67

N= raw score; ()= percentage

Table V and Table VI detail the modification strategies used across all groups in phase 1 and 2. Likewise, it was found that the modification strategies produced across all groups were not greatly affected by the five-month period. As stated above, most participants had a tendency to produce head acts with no modification strategies.

TABLE V
MODIFICATION STRATEGIES AMONG LEARNER GROUPS IN PHASE 1 (NATURAL DATA)

	Beginner	Low-inter	High-inter	Advanced	Total
None	12 (85.7)	13 (92.8)	15 (93.7)	22 (95.6)	62 (92.5)
Please	1 (7.1)	-	-	-	1 (1.4)
Tag	-	1 (7.1)	1 (6.2)	-	2 (2.9)
Formulae	1 (7.1)	-	-	-	1 (1.4)
Title	-	-	-	1 (4.3)	1 (1.4)
Total	14	14	16	23	67

N= raw score; ()= percentage

TABLE VI
MODIFICATION STRATEGIES AMONG LEARNER GROUPS IN PHASE 2
(NATURAL DATA)

	Beginner	Low-inter	High-inter	Advanced	Total
None	12 (85.7)	12 (85.7)	16 (100)	22 (95.6)	62 (92.5)
Please	-	-	-	-	-
Tag	1 (7.1)	1 (7.1)	-	-	2 (2.9)
Formulae	-	1 (7.1)	-	1 (4.3)	2 (2.9)
Title	1 (7.1)	-	-	-	1 (1.4)
Total	14	14	16	23	67

N= raw score; ()= percentage

So far we have looked at the speech act of request naturally performed in an institutional setting. On the whole, the findings show that the “want statement” strategy dominated the corpus with no noticeable variations across all groups. However, the advanced group deviated from the other groups, with the learners in the advanced group showing the ability to utilize a varied number of head act strategies apart from the “want statement” strategy. When investigating the use of modification strategies, it was found that besides using a direct strategy which normally requires a modification device, the participants also opted for using bare head acts with predominantly no modification strategies used. Moreover, the five-month period did not substantially have an effect on the use of head act strategies and the use of modification strategies. However, some unexpected results were noticed. The advanced learners tended to increase their use of the “want statement” strategy, whilst decreasing their use of the “modals” strategy. Since there were no baselines in Arabic, we cannot determine whether or not this trend signals a developmental or regressive pattern. Also of importance to the broader findings of this study will be evaluating whether or not the data collection method played a role in yielding these puzzling results. Therefore, the following section of the study will replicate the institutional setting in elicited data, namely, role play scenarios including Arabic NS data.

B. Role-Play Data

1) Head Acts

Table VII illustrates the head act strategies used across all groups. As pointed out above, a group of Arabic NSs have been included in the role play data in order to provide a benchmark in Arabic from which to compare learners’ results. Table VII reveals that despite the considerable use of the “want statement” strategy across all groups, learners’ proficiency level did affect their use of head act strategies.

TABLE VII
HEAD ACT STRATEGIES AMONG GROUPS (ROLE PLAYS)

Strategy	Beginner	Low-inter	High-inter	Advanced	NS	Total
Want statement	12 (60)	7 (35)	6 (30)	8 (40)	10 (50)	43
Possibility	2 (10)	4 (20)	8 (40)	2 (10)	1 (5)	17
Performative	6 (30)	7 (35)	2 (10)	2 (10)	2 (10)	19
Modal	-	2 (10)	3 (15)	3 (15)	-	8
If clause	-	-	-	3 (15)	5 (25)	8
Other	-	-	1 (5)	2 (10)	2 (10)	5
Total	20	20	20	20	20	100

N= raw score; ()= percentage

The “want statement” strategy was found to be favoured by all groups, including Arabic NSs. There were, nonetheless, other strategies, namely “possibility”, “performative” and “if clause”, that were also used very commonly by particular groups. The data also show that the learners’ proficiency level had an impact on their use of head act strategies. Although the “want statement” strategy was favoured across all groups, up to the high-intermediate group its use decreased with the increase of the proficiency level. In contrast, from the high-intermediate group to the Arabic NS group, its use increased with the increase of the proficiency level. The “U” shape of the use of the “want statement” strategy reflects the reliance upon the “want statement” strategy within the low-level learners, due to their limited linguistic repertoire. Due to the expansion of their linguistic repertoire and the limited immersion in L2 society, intermediate learners have a tendency to use and rely on head act strategies other than the “want statement” strategy. By contrast, high-level learners have both a broader linguistic repertoire as well as an increased social immersion enabling them to be more familiar with how NSs perform requests in Arabic. This thereby explains the reason that the advanced learners tended to rely on the use of the “want statement” strategy despite being pragmalinguistically capable of producing more complicated head act strategies. When investigating the use of the “possibility” strategy, another U-shaped developmental pattern was detected. Due to the difficulty of producing “possibility” requests, its use increased with the increase of the proficiency level. However, upon reaching an advanced level, learners began to minimize the use of this strategy, possibly realizing that this kind of requests is uncommon among Arabic NSs. In terms of the use of the “performative” strategy, it was found that its use declined with the increase of the proficiency level. Perhaps, this is due to the realization that “performative” requests are not preferred by Arabic NSs. When it comes to the use of the “modal” strategy, the results reveal that it was infrequently employed in the corpus. Interestingly however, a similarity between the beginner group and the Arabic NS group has been noticed in terms of the use of this strategy. Both groups never produced “modal”

requests, but the reason behind the avoidance of using this strategy most likely varies between these two groups. The beginner learners had a limited linguistic repertoire and thereby could not produce such complicated and challenging requests. To the contrary, Arabic NSs were definitely capable of producing such complicated requests, but they did not do so due to the fact that they were influenced by their culture and language norms. The low-intermediate, high-intermediate and advanced groups showed an ability to employ the “modal” strategy; yet, its use among these groups was very limited, probably a sign of their realization of its un-preference in Arabic. As was the case with the “modal” strategy, the “if clause” strategy was infrequently utilized in the corpus. This strategy was produced by only the advanced and Arabic NS groups whilst the other groups avoided using this strategy. The “other” strategy was rarely employed and no developmental patterns were found in terms of its use among groups. Overall, learners’ proficiency affected their use of the head act strategies. It also becomes apparent that the use of the head act strategies among groups has a clear indication of sociopragmatic development among groups.

2) Modification to Head Acts

Table VIII displays the modification strategies used across all groups. Some deviations were found in terms of the use of modification strategies among groups. To sum up, the ability to apply modification strategies to head acts was evident in all groups. The results also clearly show that the “title” strategy was the most frequently employed across all groups. However, some regressive rather than developmental patterns were noticed. For example, excluding the advanced group, the use of modification strategies decreased with the increase of learners’ proficiency level. Furthermore, the “formulae” strategy was not used by the high-intermediate group, whereas the beginner and low-intermediate showed an ability to employ this strategy which was most favoured by Arabic NSs. Thus, seemingly the beginner and low-intermediate groups, along with the advanced group, approximated Arabic NSs to a greater extent than the high-intermediate group. Furthermore, all learner groups fell short of replicating Arabic NSs with respect to the use of the “tag” strategy, as this strategy was not employed by Arabic NSs at all. Consequently, it can be argued that using a tag question as a modification device does not represent Arabic norms.

TABLE VIII
MODIFICATION STRATEGIES AMONG GROUPS (ROLE PLAYS)

	Beginner	Low-inter	High-inter	Advanced	NS	Total
None	8 (29.6)	10 (34.4)	12 (57.1)	9 (27.2)	6 (20.0)	45 (32.1)
Please	4 (14.8)	4 (13.7)	1 (4.7)	2 (6.0)	3 (10.0)	14 (10)
Tag	5 (18.5)	5 (17.2)	2 (9.5)	4 (12.1)	-	16 (11.4)
Formulae	3 (11.1)	4 (13.7)	-	6 (18.1)	12 (40.0)	25 (17.8)
Title	7 (25.9)	6 (20.6)	6 (28.5)	12 (36.3)	9 (30.0)	40 (28.5)
Total	27	29	21	33	30	140

N= raw score; ()= percentage

3) Performance over the Five-Month Period

Table IX and Table X show the head act strategies used across all groups in the two phases. In relation to the effect of the five-month period on learners’ proficiency level, some variations in the use of head act strategies over the five-month period were noticed. On the whole, the findings reveal that the five-month period had an impact on the learners’ use of head act strategies. The results also support the findings of U-shaped developmental patterns. The use of the “want statement” strategy decreased within the beginner and low-intermediate groups over the five-month period. Upon reaching the high-intermediate group, a noticeable shift was observed; its use rose over the five-month period and remained being employed with a high frequency within the advanced group in both phases. Likewise, the use of the “possibility” strategy appeared in the beginner group in phase 2. Then, its use increased within the groups and over the five-month period. Till reaching the high-intermediate group in phase 2, an opposite way occurred. Its use tended to drop till it disappeared in the advanced group in phase 2. Accordingly, these findings clearly reveal that the high-intermediate group evidenced the beginning point from which sociopragmatic developments began through producing more “want statement” and less “possibility” requests after the beginner and low-intermediate learners tended to do the opposite.

TABLE IX
HEAD ACT STRATEGIES AMONG LEARNER GROUPS IN PHASE 1 (ROLE-PLAYS)

Strategy	Beginner	Low-inter	High-inter	Advanced	Total
Want statement	7 (70)	5 (50)	2 (20)	4 (40)	18 (45)
Possibility	-	2 (20)	6 (60)	2 (20)	10 (25)
Performative	3 (30)	3 (30)	-	1 (10)	7 (17.5)
Modal	-	-	2 (20)	2 (20)	4 (10)
If clause	-	-	-	1 (10)	1 (2.5)
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total	10	10	10	10	40

N= raw score; ()= percentage

TABLE X
HEAD ACT STRATEGIES AMONG LEARNER GROUPS IN PHASE 2 (ROLE-PLAYS)

Strategy	Beginner	Low-inter	High-inter	Advanced	NS
Want statement	5 (50)	2 (20)	4 (40)	4 (40)	15(37.5)
Possibility	2 (20)	2 (20)	2 (20)	-	6 (15)
Performative	3 (30)	4 (40)	2 (20)	1 (10)	10 (25)
Modal	-	2 (20)	1 (10)	1 (10)	4 (10)
If clause	-	-	-	2 (20)	2 (5)
Other	-	-	1 (10)	2 (20)	3 (7.5)
Total	10	10	10	10	40

N= raw score; ()= percentage

In regards to the use of modification strategies across groups, striking variations between phase 1 and 2 were observed, as Table XI and Table XII reveal. Overall, it was found that the five-month period had a strong impact on the use of modification strategies, with the use of modification strategies considerably increasing in phase 2. The five-month period also had an effect on the use of these strategies among groups. In phase 2, almost all groups were able to use greatly more modification strategies. In particular, the beginner, low-intermediate and high-intermediate groups displayed considerable development in mitigating the illocutionary force of their requests in phase 2.

TABLE XI
MODIFICATION STRATEGIES AMONG LEARNER GROUPS IN PHASE 1 (ROLE-PLAYS)

	Beginner	Low-inter	High-inter	Advanced	Total
None	7 (70)	6 (60)	9 (90)	5 (31.2)	27
Please	-	1 (10)	1 (10)	1 (6.2)	3
Tag	3 (30)	1 (10)	-	2 (12.5)	6
Formulae	-	1 (10)	-	4 (25)	5
Title	-	1 (10)	-	4 (25)	5
Total	10	10	10	16	46

N= raw score; ()= percentage

TABLE XII
MODIFICATION STRATEGIES AMONG LEARNER GROUPS IN PHASE 2 (ROLE-PLAYS)

	Beginner	Low-inter	High-inter	Advanced	Total
None	1 (5.8)	4 (21.0)	3 (27.2)	4 (23.5)	12
Please	4 (23.5)	3 (15.7)	-	1 (5.8)	8
Tag	2 (11.7)	4 (21.0)	2 (18.1)	2 (11.7)	10
Formulae	3 (17.6)	3 (15.7)	-	2 (11.7)	8
Title	7 (41.1)	5 (26.3)	6 (54.5)	8 (47.0)	26
Total	17	19	11	17	64

N= raw score; ()= percentage

V. COMPARISON BETWEEN NATURAL AND ROLE-PLAY DATA

When considering the use of head act strategies among groups in natural and role-play data, the results reveal the data-collection method affected learners' production of head act strategies. In natural data, the use of head act strategies across groups did not substantially vary. The beginner, low-

intermediate and high-intermediate groups relied almost exclusively on the "want statement" strategy. Although the "want statement" strategy was most favoured by the advanced group, the learners in this group displayed a tendency to produce a variety of head act strategies. On the other hand, learners' proficiency had an effect on their use of head act strategies in the role-play data. In other words, some U-shaped developmental patterns were observed. Upon reaching the high-intermediate group, the use of the "want statement" strategy declined and the use of the "possibility" strategy increased. This undoubtedly shows learners' pragmalinguistic development; yet, high-intermediate and advanced learners' competence of sociopragmatics had begun to develop and thereby realized that the decrease of using the "want statement" strategy and the increase of the "possibility" strategy were not developmental but rather regressive patterns. Thus, they tended to do the converse way; they increased the use of the "want statement" strategy and decreased the use of the "possibility" strategy.

In regards to the use of modification strategies in natural and role-play data, it was found that the data-collection method affected the use of modification strategies. The majority of requests in natural data lacked the use of modification strategies. To the contrary, the majority of requests in role-play data were produced in combination with modification strategies. When it comes to the use of modification strategies among groups, the results reveal that the use of modification strategies differed between natural and role-play data. In natural data, there were no considerable deviations among groups. In contrast, learners' proficiency did affect their use of modification strategies.

When examining the influence of the five-month period on the production of head act strategies in natural and role-play data, no notable differences were found. Nonetheless, the use of head act strategies among groups over the five-month period varied between the two data-collection methods. The performance of learners among groups did not differ over the five-month period in natural data whilst it differed in role-play data. In role-play data, the five-month period demonstrates low-level learners' pragmalinguistic development and high-level learners' sociopragmatic development. Likewise, the use of modification strategies, in general, and among groups, in particular, over the five-month period varied between natural and role-play data.

Overall, even though both data-collection methods show that the "want statement" strategy was most preferred across all groups, learners' performance in natural data differed from that found in role-play data. It is also more likely to detect pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic developmental or regressive patterns in role-play data. The most plausible explanation of the difference between looking at requests in natural and role-play data is that in natural data, learners do not focus on the language they use so much as how to convey the message in a clear and easy way whilst in role-play data, the learners are more likely to take the language they use into account, as they are probably aware that it is the focus of the investigation.

VI. DISCUSSION

In this study, natural data was collected by means of institutional discourse, recording the interactions between a native Arabic administrator and students (L2 learners). The key finding to have come out of this data is that learners, regardless of their proficiency level, relied most heavily on “want statement” requests and rarely made use of modification strategies. As Boxer [15] has argued, the most crucial benefit of using natural data is that learners’ performance is natural. Whilst some researchers have argued that natural data does not yield comparable data, consistent with the studies of Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford [38], [39], [40], and [23] and Kasper and Rose [11], the use of institutional discourse enabled comparable data to be collected in this study. As well as yielding results that reflect learners’ natural behaviour, the use of natural data enabled us to compare between groups of different proficiency. Another benefit of this approach was that it allowed social variables, such as gender and educational level, to be controlled.

On the other hand, the use of natural data brought with it some disadvantages. No significant developmental patterns in the use of head act strategies, modification strategies or even over the five-month period were observed in the natural data. These findings therefore indicate that L2 learners in real-life situations do not focus on the language they use, so much as how to convey the message in a clear and easy way. As far as ILP is concerned, this represents a shortcoming of collecting natural data, because ILP research concentrates on how pragmatic performance differs or develops with the increase of proficiency level. A similar result was also found in Rue and Zhang’s [41] study. They found that Chinese and Korean NSs displayed a tendency to employ most “mood derivable” requests (i.e. imperative requests) in natural data and “query preparatory” requests (i.e. modal requests) in role-play scenarios. Therefore, they concluded that:

“The combination shows the extent of naturalness in the two different settings. In role-plays, participants were more conscious of their responses due to the relatively formal and ‘watched’ setting, and consequently their responses were ‘polished’ with more indirect strategies than the data from the real life settings where more direct speech acts occurred.”

A similar scenario occurred in the current study, with learners tending to use more direct request strategies in the real-life setting, i.e. natural data. For this reason, rather than relying solely on natural data, it was most important for the current study to use a combination of data collection methods, including natural data with role-play scenarios.

As was the case with natural data, the current study reveals that data collected by role-play scenarios carries with it both advantages and disadvantages. The primary advantage of using role-play scenarios is that it revealed some important issues that had not been found in the natural data. Namely, the role-play scenarios revealed how learners’ pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic competence developed across groups, with the discovery of U-shaped developmental patterns in the use of head act strategies. It should be stressed here that this

finding does not indicate that the role-play scenarios yielded inaccurate data; both in natural and role-play data, “want statement” requests were most commonly used, indicating a similarity between the results despite the collection methods. Another key finding from the role-play data was that learners’ performance showed signs of development over the five-month period. When compared to the natural data, it was found that the production of modification strategies became more pronounced in the role-play data.

However, like other instruments in ILP research, role-play scenarios are not without flaws. The most prominent disadvantage of data collected by role-play scenarios is that it is not authentic [23], and [25]. Indeed, the results of this investigation reveal that some of participants’ pragmatic behaviour, which was found in the role-play data, did not appear in the natural data. An example of this is the frequent production of “possibility”, “performative” and “modal” requests.

It seems there is an inherent dilemma in comparing the usefulness of role-play scenarios and natural data. On the one hand, natural data can offer us examples of how participants behave in real life, whilst role-play scenarios can provide us with an insight into how L2 learners’ pragmatic competence develops. This dilemma, however, can be resolved rather simply. We would argue that if the focus of research is on how pragmatic features are employed or how NSs and NNSs perform speech acts in real life, using natural data is clearly a more effective method. However, if pragmatic development is at the heart of the research, role-play scenarios outweigh natural data because the researcher is more likely to detect developmental patterns. This is reflected in the numerous number of request development studies that have employed role-play scenarios as the main instrument (e.g. [28]; [42]; and [30]).

Although some researchers argue for one method or another, the number of researchers calling for the use of multimethod approach in ILP is increasing (e.g. [8], and [9]). Even those arguing for one approach over others usually talk about specific speech act situation. For example, Franch and Lorenzo [43], argued for the use of natural data in cross-cultural speech act realization. They found that data obtained from email messages (EM), “has much more to offer to speech act realization research than elicited (DCT) data”. They argue that DCT “may be used in interlanguage pragmatics or in, for example, assessing language learner’s knowledge of request routines”. As a result of this variation, researchers found that “no single method will thoroughly assess the behavior in question” [44], however, two or more would. For instance, one method may be used to collect the primary source of data, and the other to help with the interpretation of that data, or both methods be the primary source of data, yielding complementary information on the research questions at hand [8]. For ILP research, however, the combination of role-play scenarios and natural data is most useful solution, as the two methods “supplement each other to provide a rich picture of language use from different perspectives” [41]. The current study findings support this conclusion. It is possible to say

then that the multimethod approach (authentic and elicited) used in the current study allowed for additional data extraction, variation and enhanced the researchers ability to notice developmental ILP issues such as Arabic L2 learners' development of request over certain period of time.

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