

# Pragmatic Knowledge Assessment in Listening Sections of IELTS Tests

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**Abstract**—Recently, a lot of attention has been paid to the use of pragmatic knowledge as a component of communicative competence in standardized tests. This research aims to assess the degree of pragmatic knowledge assessment in the first section of IELTS listening tests based on the component parts of pragmatic competence proposed by Bachman (1990) and developed by Jung (2002). In order to conduct this research, a set of IELTS tests administered between 1999 and 2009 was gleaned. Then, the first sections of the listening tests were chosen. After that, the component parts of pragmatic competence were meticulously identified and elicited. To delete the most frequently used constituents of pragmatic competence; a comparative analysis was carried out. After that, the pragmatic knowledge was meticulously scrutinized at five macro levels of the ability to perform speech acts, convey and interpret non-literal meaning, perform politeness and discourse functions as well as using cultural knowledge. Chi-Square tests were employed to assess the degree of difference across these five component parts. The findings suggest that the degree of difference was significant ( $p < 0.05$ ). The most frequent constituents were discourse markers and politeness functions, while the cultural knowledge aspect was totally ignored. Despite the fact that the test aims to assess language proficiency, the findings show a low priority to assess pragmatic knowledge. Additionally, they indicated an unequal assessment of the component parts of pragmatic competence.

**Index Terms**—pragmatic knowledge, communicative competence, speech acts, non-literal meaning, politeness functions, discourse functions

## I. INTRODUCTION

As numerous varied models of communicative competence suggest efficient and efficacious interaction in any given language requires more than purely linguistic knowledge. Indeed, pragmatics is the part and parcel of language ability in order for L2 learners to comprehend and be comprehended in their everyday communications with native speakers. Despite the fact that this significant domain of second language acquisition was over looked over the past two decades, pragmatic has been recognized as an acceptable focus of enquiry in today's mainstream SLA research. It is just recently that some noticeable advances have been made in the understanding of the pragmatic facets of language.

Leech (1983) asserts that if one intends to achieve pragmatic competence, s/he needs to achieve paralinguistic and socio-pragmatic competence. As Jung (2002) argues, in order to be pragmatically competent, one needs to have the ability to execute speech acts, convey and interpret non-literal meaning, carry out discourse and politeness functions in addition to making use of cultural knowledge. These five facets of pragmatic competence are closely interconnected. Indeed, they do not act individually but they interact with each other systematically so as to manage learner's linguistic knowledge. Some standard language proficiency tests (SLP) like IELTS have sought to evaluate and examine learners on these components of pragmatic competence. This study aims to assess the degree of pragmatic knowledge assessment in the listening section of IELTS as an international language proficiency test with regard to each component of pragmatic competence.

## II. REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

According to Leech (1983), learner's ability to make use of appropriate speech acts in a particular speech event in addition to opting for suitable linguistic forms to grasp a speech act is a principal component of pragmatic competence. In order to have the command of a successful speech act performance, learners must recognize the extra-linguistic facet that is cultural constraints acting in a NS's choice of a particular speech act suitable for the context. Furthermore, learners must know how to identify any speech act at the linguistic level and based on the L2 sociocultural norms. Cohen (1996a) defines it as sociocultural knowledge: a "speaker's ability to determine whether it is acceptable to perform the speech act at all in the given situation and, if so, to select one or more semantic formulas that would be appropriate in the realization of the given speech act" (p. 254).

Another constituent of pragmatic competence which enables learners to be pragmatically competent is the ability to interpret and convey non-literal meaning. Grice (1975) distinguishes between sentence meaning which applies to the

propositional sense of an utterance, and speaker meaning which makes an allusion to the indirectly transferred sense transcending the surface-level linguistic form of an utterance. In the words of Carrell (1984), “one aspect of pragmatic competence in an L2 is the ability to draw correct inferences” (p.1). Fraser (1983) puts an emphasis on the importance of the ability to construe figurative language as part of pragmatics in that such sentences are overt and purposeful violations of the conversational maxims. Furthermore, such specific kinds of conversational implications may be difficult for L2 learners to soak up. Therefore, interpreting and conveying non-literal meaning can be regarded as an integral part of L2 pragmatic competence.

Learners seeking to achieve pragmatic competence need also to have the ability to execute politeness functions. According to Leech (1983) and Thomas (1995), indirectness enhances the amount of negotiability and optionality on the part of listener and thereby reduces the imposition upon the listener. Yet some of the cross-cultural researches into politeness have recommended that the application of this principle takes advantage of a systematic variation in languages and cultures. The researchers suggested that the ability to opt for the suitable linguistic directness with regard to the L2 norm is pivotal for pragmatic competence. Such cultural principles which pertain to politeness as shared by members of the L2 community attach great importance to the development of learner’s pragmatic competence.

The capability to execute discourse functions is one of the other facets of one’s pragmatic competence. In the words of Blum-Kulka (1997), “a full pragmatic account would need to consider the various linguistic and paralinguistic signals by which both participants encoded and interpret each other’s utterances” (p. 49). According to Celce-Murcia and Olshtain (2000), learners must be conscious of the discourse differences between their L1 and the L2 so as to attain pragmatic competence. If learners want to effectively impart their intentions in discourse, they need to produce two kinds of discourse management capability, one is the ability to recognize and create the right discourse markers in terms of their pragmatic functions, and the other is the capacity to construe and fill the discourse crack as L2 conversational conventions prescribe.

The fifth component of pragmatic competence deals with the capability to tap into cultural knowledge. Specific L2 culture-bound knowledge is viewed as a hindering factor that underpins various parts of pragmatic ability. In fact, culture is considered as the heart of L2 pragmatic competence. Jiang (2000) argues that metaphor efficiently captures the nature of language and culture as a whole: “communication is like transportation: language is the vehicle and culture is the traffic light” (p. 329). In other words, a precise competence of L2 cultural rules of behavior is needed to acquire L2 knowledge.

Recently, test-makers have made an attempt to incorporate some short pragmatic understanding queries into their listening sections of standardized exams such as IELTS, TOFEL and so forth to gauge the learners’ pragmatic knowledge. They have fathomed the significance and crucial role of pragmatic knowledge so as to extract genuine language abilities of learners. Therefore, they have sought to incorporate the above five components of pragmatic knowledge into their exams.

Some SLP’s like IELTS have made an attempt to examine learners on these components of pragmatic competence. This research aims to evaluate the extent of pragmatic knowledge assessed in the listening section of IELTS tests in terms of each component of pragmatic competence. The 1999-2011 tests have been analyzed and worked at in the research to ascertain the amount of pragmatic knowledge incorporated in these exams with regard to each component of pragmatic competence.

#### A. *Statement of the Problem*

Language teaching/ learning has gone through remarkable changes since Hymes’ (1972) introduction of communicative competence as the main index of a learner’s language command. Canale(1983) and Bachman’s (1990) taxonomies have made a lot of contributions to the development of novel perspectives on language skills and components. Second language evaluation by nature has gone through considerable modifications. The evaluation of communicative competence then has become the principal objective of most Standard Language Proficiency Test (SLP). Pragmatic knowledge is a significant component of communicative competence, whose importance has been deservedly identified by Second Language Acquisition (SLA) practitioners and researchers. Although, it turns out not to have found its right place in Standard Language Proficiency Test. Albeit receiving insubstantial attention given to it especially in recent SLP tests, the evaluation of pragmatic knowledge must be still more highlighted in such exams. This research is aimed at evaluating recent SLP tests more particularly the listening section in IELTS test in terms of pragmatic knowledge assessment. The outcomes obtained from this research may alert test-making teams to paying more attention to this less needed facet in Language Proficiency Assessment.

#### B. *Research Question*

This study attempts to find an answer to the following questions:

1. Do listening sections of IELTS tests assess pragmatic knowledge?
2. Are components of pragmatic knowledge assessed equally in listening sections of IELTS tests?

#### C. *Research Null Hypotheses*

Based on the research questions above the hypotheses are made:

H1: The listening sections of IELTS tests do not assess pragmatic knowledge.

H2: Components of pragmatic knowledge are not equally assessed in listening sections of IELTS tests.

### III. METHODOLOGY

Several IELTS tests were collected, and the listening sections of these tests were chosen and analyzed. As this study attempted to take pragmatic competence into consideration, the researcher took an interest in analyzing the first parts of the listening sections in some IELTS tests in terms of the components of pragmatic knowledge.

To that end, a corpus comprised of a set of IELTS listening tests administered between 1999 and 2011 was collected. All these tests were actual past papers of IELTS tests published by Cambridge University Press which are reliable enough as the sources of data. Following the collection of some IELTS tests (1999 to 2011), the first parts of the listening sections, adding up to thirty two short conversations, were derived from the tests. The first section of each IELTS listening test contains a short conversation on a familiar everyday topic between two people. Then in order to analyze this application in addition to the underlying function throughout each test, I did my utmost to elicit each component of pragmatic knowledge put forward by Jung (2002).

In order to make more clarification for the readers, the researcher identified the pragmatic components within the whole available tests.

### IV. RESULTS

The results of these analyses are reported in the following sections.

#### A. Diachronic Results for Speech Acts

In this part of the study, an analysis was developed to the nature of pragmatic categories involvement over time.

Accordingly, there was an overall significant difference ( $p < 0.05$ ) in the use of various representative categories over time.

TABLE 4.1:  
DIFFERENCE IN THE USE OF REPRESENTATIVE CATEGORIES OVER TIME

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	36.190	49	.913	.000
Likelihood Ratio	42.419	49	.735	
Fisher's Exact Test	.000			
Linear-by-Linear Association	.451	1	.502	
N of Valid Cases	218			

In relation to representative categories, it was found that the highest frequencies belonged to 1999 (16.5%), 2011 (15.6%) and 2000 (14.7%). Meanwhile, in 2005 the lowest number of these categories was employed (6.4%).

Besides, in relation to disagreeing, 2011 had the highest (8.8%) and 2005, 2007 and 2009 the lowest frequencies (0%). Concerning describing, 2002, 2005 and 2009 (14.3% each) had the highest and 2000 (6.2%) the lowest record. As to informing, 2005 (14.3%) was the most and 2002 (3.6%) the least frequent years. With respect to predicting, 2000 (12.5%) was the highest and 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2009 the lowest frequent years (0%). As to reporting, 2007 (13.6%) and 2005 (0%) were the most and least frequent years. In terms of criticizing, 1999 (8.3%) had the highest and 2002, 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2009 the lowest records. With respect to confirming, 2005 (21.4%) and 2011 (5.9%) were the highest and lowest rates.

In relation to the next, speech act category, that is directives, the difference in the employment of various directives did not prove significant.

TABLE 4.2  
DIFFERENCE IN THE USE OF DIRECTIVE CATEGORIES OVER TIME

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	23.122	56	1.000	1.000
Likelihood Ratio	26.159	56	1.000	
Fisher's Exact Test	24.251			
Linear-by-Linear Association	.158	1	.691	
N of Valid Cases	266			

Yet, certain tendencies in the involvement of different subcategories were observed over time. In relation to asking, 2009 (14.7%) and 2005 (7.5%) were the highest and lowest frequent years. Meanwhile, for ordering 2009 (8.8%) and 1999 (0%) were the highest and lowest frequencies. As to requesting, 2011 (10.5%), 2000 (10%) and 2007 (10%) were the most and 2007 (3.3%) the least frequent years. As to suggesting, 2000 (10%) had the highest and 2006 (2.6%) the lowest records. Concerning demanding, 2005 (2.5%) and 2007 (10%) had the lowest and the highest rates. In relation to

dismissing, 2011 (2.6%) and 2006 (7.9%) were the lowest and highest frequent years. In terms of warning, 2006 (5.3%) and 2005 (5%) were the highest and 1999, 2000, 2007, 2009 and 2011 the lowest (0%). Finally, with respect to advising, 1999 (13.6%) had the highest record as against 2006 (2.6%) with the lowest record.

In relation to the next major commissives category, the overall differences over the years was found significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) in the employment of different subcategories.

TABLE 4.3  
DIFFERENCE IN THE USE OF COMMISSIVE CATEGORIES OVER TIME

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	29.080	49	.989	.000
Likelihood Ratio	28.354	49	.992	
Fisher's Exact Test	.000			
Linear-by-Linear Association	.077	1	.781	
N of Valid Cases	246			

As to a close analysis of the commissives subcategories, in agreeing 2006 with 16.7% and 2002 with 3.8% were the highest and lowest records. As to inviting, 2002 (11.5%) and 1999 (4.2%) had the highest and lowest positions. Concerning committing, 2011 with 8.3% had the highest rate while 1999, 2000, 2002, 2005, 2006 and 2007 had no records (0%) in this case. As to refusing, 2000 and 2006 (10% each) were the most and 2009 (2.8%) the least frequent years. Concerning accepting, 2002 (19.2%) and 2006 (6.7%) had the highest and lowest records. In terms of offering, 1999 had the highest (12.5%) and 2009 (5.6%) the lowest rates. In relation to promising, 2009 (11.1%) was the highest year while 2011 (2.8%) was the lowest year.

As to expressive category, an overall significant difference was not found among the subcategory frequencies ( $p > 0.05$ ). Meanwhile, certain tendencies were found among the years.

TABLE 4.4  
DIFFERENCE IN THE USE OF EXPRESSIVE CATEGORIES OVER TIME

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	15.607	35	.998	.975
Likelihood Ratio	19.548	35	.984	
Fisher's Exact Test	18.52			
Linear-by-Linear Association	.024	1	.877	
N of Valid Cases	146			

As to apologizing, 2000 (21.4%) had the highest while 2011 (4.2%) the lowest rates. Concerning congratulating, 2005 and 2011 (6.2% each) were the highest and 2000, 2002 and 2006 (0%) the lowest records. In relation to deploring, 1999 had no occurrences while 2009 (11.5%) and 2007 (11.1%) had the highest frequencies. In terms of thanking, 1999 had 2006 (25% each) had the highest records while 2007 with 5.6% was the least frequent year. Finally, concerning complimenting, 2002 (12.5%) was the most and 2009 (3.8%) the least frequent years.

#### B. Synchronic Results for Speech Acts Categories

In this part of the study, the involvement of four speech act categories were compared in each particular year.

The frequencies and the extent of difference based on the chi-square tests in each particular year were reported as follows:

In 1999, the frequency differences in representatives, commissives and expressive proved significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) while not significant for directives ( $p > 0.05$ ).

TABLE 4.5:  
DIFFERENCE IN THE USE OF PRAGMATIC CATEGORIES IN 1999

1999	Representatives categories	Directives categories	Commissives categories	Expressives categories
Chi-Square	48.444	1.545	26.167	10.875
Df	7	5	6	4
Asymp. Sig.	.000	.908	.000	.028

In 2000, only the differences in representatives and commissives were significant ( $p < 0.05$ ). Yet, the other directives and expressives differences were not statistically significant ( $p > 0.05$ ).

TABLE 4.6:  
DIFFERENCE IN THE USE OF PRAGMATIC CATEGORIES IN 2000

2000	Representatives categories	Directives categories	Commissives categories	Expressives categories
Chi-Square	43.000	2.267	32.533	8.857
Df	7	6	6	4
Asymp. Sig.	.000	.894	.000	.065

In 2002, the difference in the use representatives, commissives and expressive proved significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) while not significant in directives ( $p > 0.05$ ).

TABLE 4.7:  
DIFFERENCE IN THE USE OF PRAGMATIC CATEGORIES IN 2002

2002	Representatives categories	Directives categories	Commissives categories	Expressives categories
Chi-Square	31.500	3.235	30.538	9.625
Df	6	7	6	4
Asymp. Sig.	.000	.862	.000	.047

In 2005, the difference in the involvement of representatives and directives categories was not statistically significant ( $p > 0.05$ ) as against the two commissives and expressive categories with significant differences ( $p < 0.05$ ).

TABLE 4.8:  
DIFFERENCE IN THE USE OF PRAGMATIC CATEGORIES IN 2005

2005	Representatives categories	Directives categories	Commissives categories	Expressives categories
Chi-Square	4.857	2.400	28.385	14.000
Df	3	7	6	5
Asymp. Sig.	.183	.934	.000	.016

In 2006, all the differences but the difference in the employment of directives category proved significant ( $p < 0.05$ ).

TABLE 4.9:  
DIFFERENCE IN THE USE OF PRAGMATIC CATEGORIES IN 2006

2006	Representatives categories	Directives categories	Commissives categories	Expressives categories
Chi-Square	19.500	3.316	33.467	10.875
Df	5	7	6	4
Asymp. Sig.	.002	.854	.000	.028

In 2007, similarly, the mere difference in the directives was not significant ( $p > 0.05$ ) while the other usage differences proved significant ( $p < 0.05$ ).

TABLE 4.10:  
DIFFERENCE IN THE USE OF PRAGMATIC CATEGORIES IN 2007

2007	Representatives categories	Directives categories	Commissives categories	Expressives categories
Chi-Square	12.545	1.333	41.947	15.333
Df	4	6	6	5
Asymp. Sig.	.014	.970	.000	.009

In 2009, in line with some of the earlier patterns, the mere directives differences was not significant ( $p > 0.05$ ).

TABLE 4.11:  
DIFFERENCE IN THE USE OF PRAGMATIC CATEGORIES IN 2009

2009	Representatives categories	Directives categories	Commissives categories	Expressives categories
Chi-Square	15.929	4.824	48.000	22.000
Df	4	6	7	5
Asymp. Sig.	.003	.567	.000	.001

Finally, in 2011, all the representatives, commissives and expressive usage differences were significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) while the only directives category did not suggest a significant usage difference ( $p > 0.05$ ).

TABLE 4.12:  
DIFFERENCE IN THE USE OF PRAGMATIC CATEGORIES IN 2011

2011	Representatives categories	Directives categories	Commissives categories	Expressives categories
Chi-Square	45.529	4.211	47.556	20.500
Df	7	6	7	5
Asymp. Sig.	.000	.648	.000	.001

### C. Pragmatic Competence Aspects

There are five aspects for pragmatic competence. They are listed below.

#### 1. Speech Act Aspect

In an assessment of various pragmatic competence aspects, the involvement of speech act categories was analyzed over the years. Based on the results of a chi-square test there was not an overall significant difference ( $p > 0.05$ ) in employing various speech categories over the years. Meanwhile, certain tendencies were found worth mentioning.

TABLE 4.13  
DIFFERENCE IN THE USE OF SPEECH ACT CATEGORIES OVER TIME

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	13.685	21	.883
Likelihood Ratio	13.464	21	.892
Linear-by-Linear Association	2.393	1	.122
N of Valid Cases	440		

In 1999, representatives (36.7%) and commissives (24.5%) were the most frequent categories followed by directives (22.4%) and expressive (16.3%). In 2000, representatives (30.2%) were the highest record followed by directives and commissives (28.3% each) and expressives (13.2%). In 2002, the directives (32.7%) were the highest frequent category with representatives (26.9%), commissives (25%) and expressive (15.4%) in the next levels. In 2005, directives (41.7%) had the highest frequency followed by commissives (27.1%), expressive (16.7%) and representatives (14.6%). In 2006, the frequency order was as directives (37.5%), commissives (26.8%), representatives (21.4%) and expressive (14.3%). In 2007, commissives had the highest rate (35.2%) followed by directives (27.8%), representatives (20.4%) and expressives (16.7%). In 2009 the frequency order was commissives (29%), directives (27.4%), representatives (22.6%) and expressive (21%). Finally, in 2011 directives (28.8%) were followed by commissives (27.3%), representatives (25.8%) and expressive (18.2%).

#### 2. Discourse Function Aspect

This part of the study dealt with the number of questions attending to certain discourse markers fulfilling discourse functions.

Based on the results of a chi-square test there was a significant difference concerning the year in the discourse function frequencies ( $p < 0.05$ ).

In a more detailed account, in 2009 (16.9%), 2007 (16.1%), 2006 and 2011 (15.3% each) the highest number of questions dealt with discourse functions. Meanwhile, in 2002 (5.9%) and 2005 (7.6%) the lowest rates were recorded.

#### 3. Non-Literal Meaning Aspect

This section was concerned with the inclusion of non-literal meaning in the questions. Although not significant ( $p > 0.05$ ), the difference over the years is clearly depicted in the following graph.

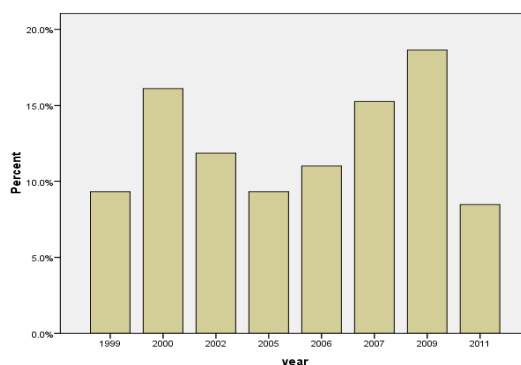


Figure 4.1: Non-literal Meaning Frequencies over Time

Accordingly, in 2009 (18.6%) and 2000 (16.1%) the highest number of questions entailed non-literal meaning while in 2011 (8.5%), 1999 and 2005 (9.3%) the least number of questions dealt with this aspect.

#### 4. Politeness Function Aspect

Concerning the issue of politeness, the questions were analyzed with respect to the inclusion of direct and indirect functions. Based on the results of the non-parametric parallel to independent samples T-test, i.e. Mann-Whitney U test, the differences over the years were statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ).

On the whole, 60 percent of the questions entailed direct functions as against 40 percent of indirect politeness functions. More particularly, the questions in 2000 highly dealt with direct functions (70%) as opposed to 1999 and 2007 (53.3%). On the other side, the highest rate of indirect politeness functions were included in 1999 and 2007 (46.7% each) as against to 2000 (30%) with the lowest frequency.

#### D. An Overall Comparative Account of Pragmatic Competence Aspects

In this part of the study, an overall account of the pragmatic aspects inclusion is provided.

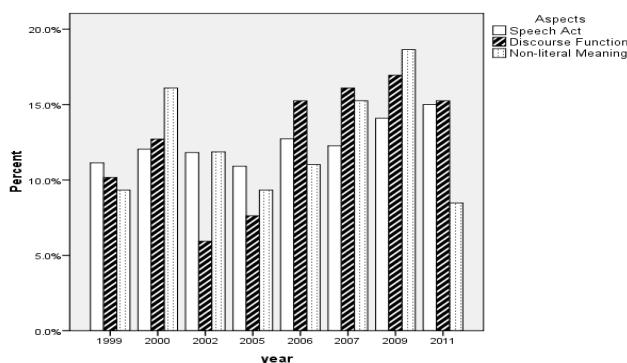


Figure 4.2: Pragmatic Aspects Frequencies over Time

To account for the extent of difference over the years across the pragmatic aspects, an analysis of variance was conducted.

There was a statistically significant difference at the  $p < 0.05$  level in the inclusion of various aspects over the years [ $F(7, 668) = 5.28, p = 0.000$ ]. Post-hoc comparisons using the Tamhane's T2 test indicated that the inclusion of pragmatic aspects in 2011 was significantly different from 1999, 2000, 2002, 2005 and 2007. Apparently, in 2011 while the use of speech act and discourse function aspects were relatively the highest, attending to non-literal meaning was the least, hence this difference.

## V. DISCUSSIONS

This section provides a specific discussion for each research question and makes attempt to link each finding to the existing literature.

The findings of this study show that pragmatic competence is assessed in IELTS listening module test but according to the detailed findings, it can be concluded that the components of pragmatic knowledge are not assessed equally in IELTS tests in different years. In a cross sectional study Jalilifar (2009) investigated pragmatic competency in the form of the request strategies used by Iranian learners of English as a Foreign Language and Australian native speakers of English. The sample involved 96 BA and MA Persian students and 10 native speakers of English. A Discourse Completion Test (DCT) was used to generate data related to the pragmatic (request strategies) used by each group. Selection of request situations in DCT was based on two social factors of relative power and social distance. Although results revealed pragmatic development, particularly in the movement from direct to conventionally indirect strategies on the part of EFL learners, learners with higher proficiency displayed overuse of indirect type of requesting; whereas the native group was characterized by the more balanced use of this strategy. The lower proficiency learners, on the other hand, overused the most direct strategy type. In terms of the influence of the social variables, the findings of this research revealed that as far as social power is concerned EFL learners display closer performance to native speakers. But considering social distance, it seems that Iranian EFL learners have not acquired sufficient sociopragmatic knowledge to display proper social behavior.

Unfortunately, as mentioned in Aryadoust (2011), there are very little literature related to listening module in IELTS and TOEFL tests, and as far as the researcher of this study is concerned there are no studies related to pragmatic competence in listening parts of these two tests.

Because of the paucity of published research on the IELTS Listening Module, and the findings of studies, mentioned in chapter two, which are not generally about the nature of the listening questions, many outstanding questions preclude the investigation about the nature of items in IELTS listening module. Therefore the researcher made an attempt to investigate about the pragmatic competence of IELTS listening items. The findings of this study showed that pragmatic

competence is assessed in IELTS listening module test but it is found that the components of pragmatic knowledge are not assessed equally in IELTS listening items in different years.

## VI. CONCLUSIONS

This paper investigated the involvement of pragmatic competency and the equally distribution of pragmatic subcategories in IELTS listening items from 1999-2011. The existing literature involves different studies. Some researchers have investigated the effect of different language skills and knowledge on listening comprehension, some other researchers have considered the validity or reliability of IELTS different modules including listening module. Some studies are for and some others are against the relationship between listening and other modules or different language competencies and theories.

The difference between this study and other studies is that, in the process of our research the focus is on the essence and nature of the items of listening module in IELTS. The items are considered only with regard to their representativeness of pragmatic competency not any other trait or relation. Based on the identification of the IELTS listening items in recent years, contained in this study as the instrument, there appears that in some years at least one pragmatic category was ignored. This failure in involving all pragmatic categories in some tests might be intentional or unintentional. Listening skill has been regarded as a source for improving pragmatic competence, and the absence of one or more pragmatic categories in a reputable test like IELTS is not expected. Therefore the researcher believes that concentrating IELTS module studies on special aspects of different competences can help improve the test. Based on the findings, it seems that there is a need to help IELTS test modules especially listening module with construction, in order to compensate any possible lack of scholarly attention to this module.

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