The Impact of Knowledge of Multiword Units on Pragmatic Knowledge of Iranian EFL Learners

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Abstract—**This study investigated the impact of multiword knowledge of chunks on Iranian EFL learners' pragmatic perception of the illocutionary act of request. The research was triggered by the need for EFL learners to enhance their ability to use English effectively in different social interactions. Two research instruments: a Multiword Chunk Test and a Discourse Completion Test were employed to collect data for this systematic inquiry. Major findings derived from the study highlighted the fact that Iranian advanced EFL learners with higher repertoire of multiword lexical knowledge demonstrated higher pragmatic ability and outperformed in expressing the speech act of request. On the account of findings, it is inferred that knowledge of multiword lexical items is of paramount importance for interactions in different contexts in general and expressing the politeness strategies in particular. It can be argued that insufficient and limited knowledge of multiword units could be a major hindrance to effective learning and communication, resulting in pragmatic failures in many intercultural communication situations.**

Index Terms—**pragmatic competence, multi-word units, speech acts of request, politeness**

I. INTRODUCTION

Although a perception of linguistic competence has been dominant in linguistic theory for several decades, there has been an increased interest recently in the nature and key role of pragmatic competence and its significance has become increasingly apparent in language teaching. Recently, the study of pragmatic competence in an L2 has attained remarkable attention by SLA researchers. Researchers into pragmatic competence of adult foreign and second language learners demonstrate that grammatical linguistic knowledge does not merely lead to development of pragmatic competence (Bardovi-Harling and Dornyei, 1998). Linguistic meaning is quite distinct from pragmatic meaning in the way that the latter requires the listener not only to comprehend the linguistic information like knowledge of words and syntax but also the contextual information, such as role and status of the interlocutor, the physical setting and the communicative acts which would probably take place in the context (Rost, 2002).

According to the pioneers and internationally widely recognized specialists in the field, Keneth Rose and Gabriel Kasper (2001) pragmatic competence is attributed to the ability of interpretation of utterances within the context particularly when a speaker's utterance is not identical to his intended meaning and it is the ability to perform communicative action efficiently and interact successfully within various context with different interlocutors.

At the present time, it is widely acknowledged that to run a successful communication in any language, one requires to acquire sociocultural knowledge about that language community. In the light of conducted research into the pragmatic competence of adult foreign and second language (L2) learners it is indicated that grammatical development is not tied to a parallel level of pragmatic development (Bardovi-Harlig & Dornyei, 1998).

There are a variety of definitions on the term pragmatics around presented by different scholars. According to David Crystal (1985) "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 their use of language has on other participants in the act of communication" (P.240). Celce-Murcia, Dorney & Thurrell (1995) define pragmatic competence as the capability to put across the communicative intention by implementation and perception of speech acts and language functions. Furthermore, Thomas (1995) finds out that English language learners are required to infer pragmatics meaning in order to understand the intention of the speaker as well as to interpret his/her feelings and attitudes. In one model of pragmatic ability he emphasizes that pragmatic meaning is perceived through the comprehension and understanding of speech acts and conversational implicatures.

The concept of speech act theory as the basic underlying framework and cornerstone of pragmatics has gained importance in pragmatic research not only due to its impact in historical study of pragmatics, but also because of the social implications they carry (Ervin-Tripp, 1976). Pragmatic knowledge and ability as socially constructed phenomenon, contributes to the development of several sub-fields of pragmatics investigating various linguistic topics

from direct to indirect speech acts (Levinson, 1983; Searle, 1975) such as politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Leech, 1983).

Pragmatic competence as Bialystoke (1993) probes consists of a variety of abilities at work and how they are used to interpret language in context for different multi-purposes from greeting to requesting, informing or demanding and so on, based on the speaker 'stability to adopt and change language according to needs and expectation of the listener and the ability of the speaker to pursue accepted rules and maxims in conversations and narratives.

Concerning pragmatic aspect of formulaic language, many researchers have confirmed the links between formulaic language units and pragmatic competence. As Columas (1979) states that the formulaic language can be as the verbal cornerstone in particular conversational action whose meaning is conditioned by the behavioral patterns they are integrated with . Wood (2002) believes that formulaic language helps learners deal with the complexity of many social situations, and contributes to orderly structure as well as unambiguity in communication and provides a sense of group identity.

It is evident that multi-word units are ubiquitous and pervasive components in any language. It is believed that the language users who have achieved mastery of a vast quantity of such units can perform fluently in their communication. Playing a crucial role in language acquisition, vocabulary learning has a significant role especially for EFL learners to advance their English proficiency. In real communication, the primary purpose is the conveyance and understanding of messages and interlocutors need to make comprehensible utterances. Apparently, it is essential that learners reach the mastery of these key chunks like discourse markers and understand their functions to help maintain the flow of speech and conversation and interaction, and ensure that speakers and listeners understand each other (Nation and Webb, 2011).

Multiword chunks are critically significant in facilitating communicative competence and producing fluent speech. Widdowson (1989) views communicative competence consisting of two components: "grammatical competence" which can represent the knowledge and "pragmatic competence" which can refer to the ability of the learners. As a matter of fact the majority of native speakers' linguistic knowledge comes from "adaptable lexical chunks" rather than "analyzed grammatical rules" (Widdowson, 1989).

In another research, Ketko (2000) highlights that knowledge of multiword chunks and the way they are selected and manipulated in accordance to an appropriate context can depict a sign of communicative competence. As posited by Wood (2002) formulaic language units have great implication in classroom, particularly in language development and in facilitating fluent production.

According to McCarthy, M., O'Keeffe, A. and Walsh, S. (2010) some researchers claim that manipulation of multiword chunks assist learners to enhance their fluency. Another advantage attributed to the use of lexical chunks refers to the fact that they can be used for clarification of the intended meaning and generating other phrases with similar meanings.

Multi-word units seem to be important in learning a language and learning of word lists will be ineffective for achieving communicative competence, which should be noted as the final end of all language-learning and teaching encounters (Canale & Swain, 1980).

Paying due attention to the subtle role that mastery of multi-word chunks plays in communicative competence, teaching and learning them will gain immediate significance. Lewis (1997) for instance, argued that competence and proficiency in a language is a matter of acquiring fixed or semi-fixed prefabricated items.

Moudraia (2001) also contended that multi-word lexical units are kind of collocations which plays a role both in first language acquisition, and in learning any second or foreign language; this illuminates how seriously teaching and learning these multi-word expressions should be taken into consideration. It is, therefore, apparent that to gain competence either (linguistic or communicative), the learner will require to master semi-fixed and fixed expressions. Some of these co-occurrence patterns are so subtle that even advanced language users, including EFL teachers, may struggle with, and this leads to their inefficiency in handling communicative tasks.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

With the emergence of Communicative Language Teaching and the explicit recognition of the role of pragmatic competence in communicative ability more attention was paid to learners' engagement in the pragmatic, authentic and functional use of language for meaningful purposes (Brown, 2007).As an objection to Chomsky's (1965) linguistic competence Hymes (1972) proposed the concept of communicative competence. He as one of the pioneer proponents of communicative competence defined it as "what a speaker needs to know to communicate appropriately within a particular speech community" (Saville-Troike, 1996, p.362).There is no clear-cut and well-defined definition for pragmatics (Ellis, 2008). Evidently, concerning the pertinent literature, it is claimed that pragmatics is the study of language in daily communication, and the learner's full knowledge about the grammar of the target language does not guarantee his pragmatic competence (Bardovi-Harlig & Dörneyei, 1998; Kasper & Rose, 1999).

In Bachman's (1990) model of communicative competence language competence was divided discretely into two types, namely pragmatic competence and organization competence. Organization competence is composed of grammatical competence and textual competence, and pragmatic competence comprises into illocutionary competence and sociolinguist competence. The relationship between utterances and the functions that speakers intend to perform

through those utterances (illocutionary force) and the contextual features of language use that affect the appropriateness of utterances are the primary concern of Bachman's model.

L2 learners are strikingly different from that of L2 native speakers in their second language (L2) pragmatic system, in both production and comprehension (Kasper, 1997). It is manifested clearly in previous interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) research that despite of high proficiency competence, still advanced L2 learners suffer from their L2 pragmatic competence deficiencies (Kasper and Schmidt, 1996; Kasper and Rose, 1999). Interlanguage pragmatics as a controversial issue refers to the relationship between L2 proficiency and L1 transfer or the impact of learners' native language and culture on their performance and interpretation of L2 speech acts (Tsatagawa, 2013). The relationship between L2 proficiency and pragmatic transfer has been under investigation in some studies and the researchers such as Takahashi and Beebe (1987), and Blum-Kulka (1982) have unanimously hypothesized that L2 proficiency is positively correlated with pragmatic transfer. Takahashi (1996) assumed that learners with higher proficiency can adequately control over their L2 production to express their L1 native speakers' opinions at the pragmatic level.

In ILP studies, the majority of scholars have endeavored to make inquiries about cross-cultural distinctions in speech acts and how they are perceived and produced by English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners. Despite the fact that various speech acts (e.g., apologies, complaints, and compliments) have been under investigation in ILP research in the past three decades, according to Kasper (1997) and Hendriks (2008) requests remain as the core of the most frequently investigated speech acts. According to Brown and Levinson (1987) request, as the most important speech acts, is considered as a face- threatening act due to the fact that non-native speakers' inappropriate use of the request can make them sound rude and impolite.

As Bardovi-Halig (2008) articulates the concept of formulaic expressions as a feature of acquisition process can refer to components of speech act as well. The sociopragmatic usage of formulaic expressions and implication of instruction of such form-function expressions have several impacts on learners. Typically learners can overgeneralize, under generalize and or misuse them under limitation of their knowledge of proper use of context. Obviously, it can be inferred that lexis has gained its great importance and become excessively influential in language acquisition since learning lexical chunks can make it convenient to choose proper words according to the context. Based on Chomskyan theory since native speaker's utterances are limited, creation and usage of prefabricated items play an essential role in their language production.

The concept of lexical chunks has long been observed by linguists and language teachers. However, when it comes to the definition, the outcome is far from satisfactory, and it is due to various versions presented by different researchers from many perspectives. This diversification brings about various classifications of lexical chunks, some of which are made based on the functions of them. According to (Wray, 2002) more than 57 terms associated with lexis have been used in linguists' research among which the most frequently mentioned are collocation, lexical chunks, formulaic sequence, multiword units/strings, phraseology, prefabs, and units of meaning. Lewis (1993) calls them as lexical chunks and Moon (1997), addresses it multi-word items/ units; and formulaic sequences (Wray, 2000). The term used by the researcher in this paper is multi-word items due to its great publicity among researches.

Although all the mentioned scholars refer to this phenomenon differently, it is just Moon (1997, p. 43) who proposes a full definition. In the present study, a multi-word item is defined based on Moon's definition as a vocabulary item that is composed of a sequence of two or more words which can either semantically or syntactically form a meaningful and indivisible unit. In another definition presented by Nattinger and DeCarricco (1992, p. 37) multi-word items fall into two categories: collocations and lexical phrases. These prefabricated phrases are regarded as collocations "if they are chunked sets of lexical items with no particular pragmatic functions and they are considered as lexical phrases if they have such pragmatic function".

Newell (1990) describes a chunk as "a unit of memory organization, formed by bringing together a set of already formed chunks in memory and welding them together in a larger unit". According to him, chunking enables learners to build such structures repetitively and this psycholinguistic perspective of chunking leads to stratifying the memory which plays a prominent role in human cognition. Thus the lexical chunk in the actual speech act can generate particular semantic, pragmatic, cognitive and discursive structures, etc. in language.

Studies conducted by Ellis (2006) and Conklin and Schmitt (2008) signify that formulaic sequences, e.g. making requests, making apologies, responding to compliments, refusing, complaining, etc. are realized by conventionalized language, e.g. I'm (very) sorry to hear about _____, to express sympathy, or I'd be happy to _____ in response to a request (Nattinger and Decarrico, 1992). These formulaic sequences as ready-made chunks enable speakers to achieve the pertinent speech act in a quick, reliable manner.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Reviewing the previous literature reveals that although the relationship between formulaic language and fluency is well-constructed, the relationship between the use of multiword units and their effect on pragmatic ability is less dealt with. Concerning pragmatic aspect of formulaic language, many researchers have confirmed the links between formulaic language units and pragmatic competence. Functions of particular sets of formulas in communication have been under investigation in various studies. Bahns, J., Burmeiste, H. & Vogel, T. (1986) in a study of the use of formulas in child language acquisition have outlined 6 main pragmatic categories of formulas as: a) expressive, b)

directive, c) games or play, d) poly functions, e) question and f) pathic. In another study, Bygate (1988) concluded on the role of formulas in adult learner interaction. He also explored that a considerable range of syntactic and pragmatic uses of formulas in a wide range of conversational contexts for various pragmatic purposes.

Although research on multiword units has recently seen a growth of interest, there has been little/no work done on their impact on pragmatic knowledge. Indeed, no published research seems to be available with respect to the impact of knowledge of chunks on pragmatic ability of EFL learners. In fact the findings of a few studies on contrastive analysis of collocations between English and Persian seem to be available and it seems that collocations have received greater attention among some Iranian scholars. Nevertheless, to date, to the best of our knowledge, no study has pointed to the possible impact of knowledge of multiword chunks on pragmatic ability among Iranian EFL learners with regard to the perception of politeness. This study adds to this body of research by covering this gap. Reviewing the literature did provide a few insights into the relationship between learning multiword items and raising pragmatic ability. Apparently, it seems that very few studies have been done on the effect of knowledge of multi-word units on the learners' pragmatic ability particularly within Asian context .Consequently, the present study is an attempt to understand whether, a mastery of a large quantity of such units might lead to accuracies in the production of the target language regarding the pragmatic competence for high-proficient EFL learners and find out if this knowledge could differentiate among EFL learners' pragmatic abilities. Furthermore, to determine the extent to which Iranian EFL learners' knowledge of pragmatics in general and politeness in particular is affected by their knowledge of chunks. Therefore, in the light of multiword chunk knowledge, this study investigates the impact of mastery of multiword items on Iranian EFL learners in relation to their pragmatic ability.

Although majority of Iranian adult EFL learners relatively have the knowledge of English grammar and vocabulary, they somewhat struggle with the use of suitable word combinations in a relevant context. From the previous studies it can be concluded that nonnative speakers may fail to propose their intention in an appropriate manner due to the lack of familiarity with the norms and conventions of the second language and consequently their requests might sound rather impolite. So, there is a need for a more careful investigation of EFL learners' judgments of native speakers' speech act production to find the areas of difficulty and avoid future communication breakdowns.

Since English in Iran is mostly taught and learned at schools, universities and institutes, and due to less exposure to real authentic language, the researcher aims to scrutinize how the multiword units can speed up the development and growth of pragmatic ability of the EFL learners. The major objective of the current study is to find out the impact of EFL learners' knowledge of multiword chunks on their pragmatic ability, and to examine the extent to which this knowledge can boost their pragmatic performance in real situation when it comes to interaction in an EFL context. In the light of their multiword lexical knowledge, this study will aim at investigating Iranian EFL learners' interlanguage pragmatic competence of request.

This speech-act based study is tied up to the field of interlanguage pragmatics (ITP) and due to the fact that the lack of sociopragmatic knowledge may make different learners behave differently, hence, this study is assumed to be significant in the following ways: to find ways to promote and improve pragmatic ability of Iranian EFL learners especially to opt the appropriate politeness strategies in speech act performance using their lexical knowledge of chunks. In theories of language acquisition, pragmatics has mostly been deemphasized and unrecognized as a significant knowledge component in language learning especially in EFL learning context, therefore, the findings can be immensely useful as it can highlight the importance of learning multiword items in equipping EFL learners to use appropriate communicative patterns and pertinent utterances for being considered as a successful interactant. This study may also provide some guidelines for EFL learning and teaching for specific and explicit classroom instruction within the current teaching setting in Iranian EFL context. Advanced Iranian adult learners might also get benefited with respect to the fact that "even advanced learners of English exhibit noticeable gaps in L2 pragmatics", (Kasper, 1997) by providing the opportunities for explicit and systematic teaching of formulaic forms to compensate for their pragmatic incompetence. The results of the current study may shed light to the point that acquiring the knowledge of chunks may accelerate and foster the rate of pragmatic growth in EFL learners. Moreover, the activities and materials used in Iranian EFL context seem to be inadequate in respect to pragmatic input. On the evidence of poor performance of EFL learners even in advance levels with high proficiency in real situation interaction, the necessity for realization and inclusion of learning multiword items to facilitate fluency might seem important. The use of knowledge of chunked items might impact the development of language fluency and lead to automatic speech production and consequently may enhance and reinforce the pragmatic development and functions focusing on specific speech acts. This study is, therefore, intended to answer the following research question:

RQ: Does knowledge of lexical chunks have any significant impact on pragmatic ability of Iranian EFL learners?

IV. METHODOLOGY

A. Participants

The participants of this study were 107 male and female EFL students studying English at Navid English Institute in Shiraz, Iran. All participants, 74 female and 33 male EFL learners, were Iranian EFL Persian speakers, learning English as a foreign language. The participants received no information of being experimented on purpose, so the reliability of the experiment can be mostly guaranteed. As a widely accepted research method in social science, "purposive

sampling" technique (Dornyie, 2007) was used and some intact clusters were purposively selected. The researcher ensured participants that their personal information would be kept confidential. Choosing adult advance learners in C1(Advance High) and C2(Superior) levels which are considered as high proficient levels according to Common European Framework (CEFR) as participants of this study had several reasons. Rose and Kasper (2001) state that grammatically advanced learners do not necessarily display concurrent pragmatic competence.

B. Instruments

The main instruments were two tests, a Multiword Chunk Test (MCT) and a Discourse Completion Test (DCT).

B1. Discourse Completion Test (DCT)

Discourse Completion Test (DCT) and role-play are widely employed in cross-cultural pragmatics, and in interlanguage pragmatics study in particular. DCT and role play yield results which are not significantly distinct (Rintell & Mitchell, 1989; Sasaki,1998), therefore, in this study, DCT was used since it provides a large amount of data in a short time and consumes less time and energy (Schauer, 2009). This study investigated the politeness strategies used by Iranian EFL learners through speech acts of request. Hence, to assess the learners' pragmatic competence a DCT was used. It consisted of 16 request scenarios which was developed by Schauer (2009) and was used by Khorshidi (2013) in his research. In each situation the respondents were provided with description of the context and the social status between the interlocutors. The respondents were allowed to choose their responses which could facilitate elicitation of the data. The Speech Act Measure Rating Criteria prepared by Cohen, Paige, Shively, Emert, & Hoff (2005) was used to evaluate the participants' responses in the DCTs. Their scoring method range from number 1(very inappropriate) to number 5(very appropriate).Two native like English language teachers helped the researcher by providing comments on the researcher's rating .The inter-coder reliability of the ratings was also assessed to ensure valid findings. Since the DCTs were scored based on the Speech Act Measure Rating Criteria prepared by Cohen *et al.* (2005), their scoring method ranged from number 1 to number 5, therefore, Cronbach Alpha was used to determine its reliability. The minimum and maximum scores as well as the mean and standard deviation were applied to assess the reliability of the present DCT. The reported reliability for the DCT by the use of Cronboch Alpha procedure was (.930).

B2. Multiword chunk test (MCT)

To evaluate the participants' knowledge of chunks, a multiple-choice chunk test was designed and administered. It contained 40 items which aimed at measuring different components like phrasal verbs, collocations, and idiomatic expressions which are frequently used. The testees were required to choose the answer that best completes the sentence in 30 minutes. The respondents were asked not to use dictionaries either. In order to categorize the participants as high, mid, and low proficient (1/2) standard deviation (SD) was added to and subtracted from the mean of the distribution. The participants whose scores were above (+1/2 SD) and below (-1/2SD) were considered as high and low groups respectively. The participants whose scores were between +1/2 SD and -1/2 SD were considered as mid group. To have three homogeneous groups 35.5% of the total of the participants or 38 participants were put into group one (high), 28.0% of them or 30 were assigned into group two (mid), and 36.4% of them or 39 participants were categorized as group low. In order to calculate the reliability of the MCT the responses to each multiple choice question were converted into numbers. Each correct answer was coded one and each incorrect response was coded as zero. Concerning this dichotomous numerical coding, the procedure used for calculating the reliability of the MCT was Guttman procedure. Therefore, the reported reliability of the present MCT, by the use of Guttman split-half reliability (L4) is (.846).

C. Data Analysis Procedure

The process of data analysis was to collect information that lies behind the raw quantitative data obtained from MCT and DCT tests .The obtained data from the tests mentioned were converted into numbers by the process of coding and then to analyze data statistically, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 20 was used. On the account of yielded reliability values the internal consistency of the two instruments were confirmed. To find the relationship between proficiency level of multiword items and of the participants' pragmatic ability on DCT, descriptive statistics and One Way ANOVA were employed.

V. Results

As it was explained in the previous section, all 107 participants took part in the Multiword Chunk Test. On the account of the results, the respondents were divided into three groups of high, mid, and low based on the mean score and standard deviation. The scores higher than (Mean+1/2SD) were considered as high scores and the scores between +1/2 SD and -1/2 SD of the mean were identified as mid and the scores lower than (Mean-1/2SD) as low ones respectively. Table I depicts the mean and the number of participants within each group based on their scores on the MCT.

TABLE I
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF MULTIWORD CHUNK TEST SCORE OF PARTICIPANTS

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
High	38	28.00	37.00	32.1053	2.61792
Mid	30	21.00	27.00	23.1000	1.91815
Low	39	7.00	21.00	16.1538	3.45298
Valid N (listwise)	107				

In order to answer the research question, one way ANOVA was run through the SPSS program. The scores obtained from the administration of MCT were then compared with the scores the participants received in the DCT questionnaire to detect if there was a difference between the performances in different levels of pragmatics and their knowledge of multiword chunks. Table Π. exhibits a multiple comparison among the three groups as follows:

TABLE Π
ANOVA FOR MULTIWORD UNIT KNOWLEDGE AND PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE SCORES

(I) Level	(J) Level	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
High	Mid	.73191[*]	.15193	.000
Mid	Low	.76442[*]	.15107	.000
High	Low	1.49633[*]	.14180	.000

* The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

On the basis of their performances and the average rating for DCT, the participants in the high group outperformed the participants in the other two mid and low groups. Comparing the higher L2 group with the mid group, the mean difference was reported (0.73191), while that of the higher and lower L2 group was calculated (1.49633). The mean difference of mid learners comparing with the lower groups was reported (0.76442).The Pearson Correlation was applied to find any significant relationship between knowledge of multiword chunks and pragmatic competence. The results of the correlation revealed that there was significant positive relationship between the variables. Evidently the knowledge of chunks had an impact on the pragmatic ability of the participants. Conversely, in lower group L2 production, these lack of external and internal modification and multiword expressions interfered with appropriateness, and consequently led to lower mean appropriateness ratings. As it is evident from Table 3.multiword chunk knowledge had a significant impact on pragmatic ability and the correlation between multiword chunked knowledge of high proficient learners and their pragmatic competence was   significant (p=.000) in each group. In other words the participants with higher knowledge of multiword chunks were more pragmatically competent .Therefore, based on the findings there was a significant correlation between knowledge of multiword items and pragmatic ability of the participants in high group. So, it was inferred that, in mid and low levels, the learners' mastery of multiword units was not as high as their counterparts in high group to help them use the language properly at pragmatic level.

VI. Discussion

The research question focused on EFL learners' knowledge of multiword chunks and their pragmatic competence with respect to their perception of politeness strategies in expressing speech act of request in an EFL context. The statistical analysis applied to examine the data was one-way analyses of variance (ANOVA).The External and Internal Request Modification developed by House and Kasper (1987) was also used to analyze the data of the learners' pragmatic competence. On the basis of the results in Table Π it is inferred that mid and low participants' knowledge of chunks is not high enough to help them express their pragmatic abilities similar to that of high group. Since all the participants in the present study were at C1 (Advance High) and C2 (Superior) levels, they had learned English for at least 6 to 10 years, they were all identified as advanced learners. Nevertheless, proficiency was not a distinctive feature to differentiate their performance in expressing politeness strategies. The findings of the current research must be in line with the model proposed by Bachman(1990) based on which language learners need to acquire both organizational competence and pragmatic competence to achieve language competence .Pragmatic competence is an indispensable component of overall language proficiency. According to (Kasper, 1997) L2 learners are strikingly different from that of L2 native speakers in their second language (L2) pragmatic system, in both production and comprehension. It is manifested clearly in previous ILP research that despite of high proficiency competence, still advanced L2 learners suffer from their L2 pragmatic competence deficiencies (Kasper and Schmidt, 1996; Kasper and Rose, 1999).

Furthermore, the findings of this study is in harmony with a study conducted by Jie, C. (2005) in that learners' proficiency had little effect on their performance to choose appropriate politeness strategies in social and contextual situations. According to his findings proficiency level was not the factor which could influence the participants' performance so effectively. Furthermore, there were not any significant differences in their overall use of politeness strategies containing levels of directness, internal modification and external modification. The findings of the present study also confirmed the obtained results from Arghamiri and Sadighi (2013) that proficiency level was not observed to be the determinant of the students' degree of pragmatic competence since there was no significant relationship between the students' proficiency level at different groups and their performance on the speech act of refusal.

Using the two instruments, the Multiword Chunk test (MCT) and Discourse Completion Test (DCT), the study also examined whether learners with high, mid and low level of multiword knowledge differed in their speech act production, and whether their choices of linguistic and lexical expressions differentiated the three groups' performances. The findings of the current study indicated that Iranian advanced EFL learners with higher knowledge and mastery of multiword items were able to properly use politeness strategies in expressing speech act of request in appropriate situations. It was revealed through these data that the participants also had a better grasp of the knowledge of how to use English appropriately. There was a significant difference in scores between the high, mid and low L2 groups with respect to appropriateness.

In terms of appropriateness ratings, it is indicated that knowledge of multiword chunks seems to affect the quality of speech act use. The results of the study then lend support to the previous literature that, as proficiency rises, the ability to produce appropriate speech acts improves (e.g., Roever 2005; Rose 2000;). What was found further in this study was that quality of speech acts elucidated in the higher L2 group, could be traced back to a combination of reasons. Implementation of more lexical chunks most likely could contribute to overall appropriateness of linguistic expressions, and more comprehensibility of the expressions.

To measure appropriateness in this study a holistic viewpoint was taken into account by the rater which was reflected in the rating descriptors based on Likert rating scale used for evaluating the responses .The pragmatic aspect including the degree of directness and politeness of expressions was perceived by the rater. To draw an analogy between average scores of higher group in the DCT questionnaires and their choices of multiword expressions subsumed in their responses, it was demonstrated that the responses were more pragmatic controlled by the use of more lexical bundles, like ready–made chunks, idiomatic expressions, and collocations. Therefore, implementation of multiword items could discriminate among the three L2 groups, particularly for expressing their requests politely. Therefore, it could be inferred that proficiency was not the component which determined the students' degree of pragmatic competence. Apparently, the participants' knowledge of chunked items could impact their language pragmatic awareness in a way that their mastery of multiword items could assist them to perform better with respect to the pragmatic features of politeness strategies.

On the basis of their pragmatic abilities and their performance according to the average rating for DCT, the participants in the high group outperformed the participants in the two mid and low groups. The mean difference was (0.73191) comparing the higher L2 group with the mid group, while that of the higher and lower L2 group were (1.49633).The mean difference of mid learners in comparison with the lower group was (0.76442). In lower L2 production, this lack of external and internal modification seriously interfered with appropriateness, and consequently led to lower mean appropriateness ratings.

These observations also corresponded to the analyses of lexical expressions. Frequency of used lexical items and basic formulaic sequences expressing speech act of request was more in responses of group of high in comparison with the other two groups. In high group, the frequency of the different types of request expressions, classified according to the House and Kasper framework (1987), were generally more than the other two L2 groups, suggesting that although participants in both mid and low groups were similar in the types of linguistic forms and request expressions used in some ways, even when they used same types of direct expressions, the higher L2 group received greater appropriateness ratings than the other mid and lower L2 groups due to the number of lexical sequences, idiomatic expressions they had used. Moreover, there were significant differences in their overall use of multiword strings with regard to politeness strategies including levels of directness, internal modification and external modification among three groups.

Findings signified that the L2 group differences in appropriateness ratings could not be attributed merely to the linguistic forms used to realize speech acts. Rather, the differences resulted from the number of lexical sequences that accompanied the responses. According to different scenarios of the DCT in the present study , the participants had different responses .For instance, in Scenario1 the utterance "**Could** you **please** open the window?" was labeled as a preparatory question and considered proper in terms of its directness level. However, it was rated as two in comparison with "**Excuse me**, **would** you **please do me a favor** and open the window? **It is getting kind of stuffy in here.**", which was rated as five by the rater. In another example, in Scenario 2 the utterance "**would you please** tell me where the Trent Building is?" which was evaluated as an appropriate utterance in terms of politeness was rated three in comparison with "**Excuse me, Sir**. I'm **looking for** the Trent Building. **I really appreciate** it **if** you could **point me to the right direction**?" which was ranked five.

In scenario 4, for example the responses of tree participants from three different groups are compared in terms of appropriateness. The first response is written by a participant from low-proficient group: "**Would** you **please bring in** some articles?" The second response is used by a participant from mid-proficient group to the same scenario. "**Would** you **do me a favor** and **bring** me some articles **in**? It's **really** urgent."The third response is stated by one of the participants from the high-proficient group to the same scenario. "**Dear** professor! I know this is **a last minute request**, but **I'm afraid I couldn't do anything on the paper. Would** you **mind giving me a hand** to **bring in** some articles? So I'll be able to **hand in** my essay **on its due date**?"

So, with mentioned justifications ,as it is indicated through investigation of different responses, apparently more formulaic sequences or idiomatic expressions are subsumed in the responses of the participants of the group with higher mastery of knowledge of multiword items. In other words, the more mastery of these prefabricated language forms they

had, the more clearly and appropriately they could express their polite requests and it is in consistency with Blum-Kulka's (1987) findings that the pragmatic clarity of the message is an indispensable part of politeness. Furthermore, she defines politeness as an attempt to achieve an interactional balance between two needs: "The need for pragmatic clarity and the need to avoid coerciveness." Therefore, it can be inferred that for the sake of more clarity and lucidity, the participants in high group manipulated more of these ready –made chunks and idiomatic expressions.

In consequence, data from this study revealed that EFL learners might need an over-focused on multiword units to include this knowledge as a kind of ability in their English language acquisition process. The data also highlighted that due to a lack of mastery in multiword items, they failed to express and carry out the requests properly. Accordingly, based on the collected data it could be surmised that, the knowledge of chunks had an impact on the performances of the learners. It is worth mentioning that acquiring lexical chunk competence seems to be essential for language learners, to help them develop and boost further pragmatic ability since their mastery promotes and facilitates language use in different contexts and can help learners optimize the learning outcomes in an EFL context.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

The current study is connected with the field of interlanguage pragmatics (ITP), with a speech-act approach focusing on the perception of request by Iranian EFL learners. This aims at investigating any relation between the non-native speakers' lexical chunk knowledge and their pragmalinguistic knowledge .The purpose of the present study is to investigate Iranian EFL learners' manipulation of multiword chunk knowledge in the way they perceive given speech acts, with a view to shedding light on their pragmatic knowledge. Particularly related for the present study, this research focused on request performed by Iranian EFL learners. They were required to select the most appropriate request in the given speech act situations.

In so doing, 107 EFL participants at Navid English Institute in Shiraz took part in two sets of test .An MCT was administered to assess the participants' knowledge of multiword items and then based on their performances on the test, they were divided into three groups of high proficient, mid proficient and low proficient .In pursuance of that, a DCT was given to evaluate their pragmatic competence. The yielded quantitative data were converted into numbers to be used in SPSS program for further statistical analysis. To analyze the data, the descriptive statistic of one way ANOVA was used to find the effect of knowledge of multiword items on pragmatic competence. The significant differences between the performance of the three groups of high, mid, and low on Discourse Completion Test (DCT) revealed that pragmatic failure can occur in interaction between the interlocutors in the given situations due to lack of mastery of lexical knowledge of chunks. In other words, the participants in the high group outperformed in comparison with their counterparts where pragmatic comprehension was needed to express appropriate polite requests. To sum up, the researcher came to the following conclusion that participants with higher mastery over knowledge of chunks performed better on the DCT by analogy with the mid and low participants and this difference was significant. Moreover, EFL learners might need an over-focused on multiword units to include this knowledge as a kind of ability in their English language acquisition process to achieve optimal use of language.

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