

## **AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE OF THE FRONT-OFFICE TRAINEES OF VALOMBOLA VOCATIONAL TRAINING CENTRE**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study aimed to analyze the front-office trainees' pragmatic competence at Valombola VTC. The trainees were tested on their ability to formulate and implement strategies for requests, their politeness principles in the speech acts of refusal and apologetic responses, and the factors that impact their pragmatic competence. Fifteen out of thirty (2022) front-office trainees enrolled in the Hospitality Department's program were chosen for the study using a systematic random sampling method. A Written Discourse Completion Task (WDCT) and a questionnaire were utilized as data collection devices. Qualitative and quantitative analyses were conducted on the data about the students' pragmatic abilities. According to the study's results, the trainees' pragmatic competence was a dismal 30% when it came to the verbal act of refusing. It can be concluded that the trainees at the front desk lacked the pragmatic competence necessary to effectively respond to requests, offer apologies, and employ a refusal approach. Taking into account the outcomes of the three speech acts of asking, apologizing, and refusing, their pragmatic competence was found to be fairly low. This is in line with their preference for using their vernacular language when interacting with others, as shown even in the questionnaire. Furthermore, the results show that trainees employ various aggressive apologetic methods and reaction styles when asked to apologize. Finally, the results show that pragmatic competence is affected by several underlying issues, such as a lack of education, a low level of everyday activities involving English, and the misunderstanding of pragmatic implicature. Finally, the TVET sector as a whole and front-desk trainees in particular were advised to take English for Specific Purposes with an emphasis on pragmatic skills.

**Keywords:** Pragmatic Competence, Pragmatic Reference, Pragmatic Inference, Speech Act of Politeness.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Pragmatics is the focus of this study since it is one of the overarching goals of higher education for all students to be able to communicate effectively and appropriately in a variety of contexts. Pragmatics is the study of how meaning is shaped by context (Hence, 2000 Taguchi, 2009). Hence "Pragmatic competence" is defined by Taguchi as "the capacity to use language effectively in a social setting," a claim that Searle (1969) supports. It has been presumed that front office trainees at vocational institutions, and specifically Valombola VTCs, struggle with pragmatic competence. This is because they

are seen to understand instructions only on a semantic level, rather than the pragmatic branch of language that is necessary for effective communication. Issues with social pragmatic communication disorder, pragmatic language impairment, and pragmatic failure were major concerns in the hospitality training division's assessment of students' communicative competence. Because of the aforementioned concerns about the alleged lack of pragmatic competence among TVET students at Valombola Vocational Training Centre and elsewhere, the current research aims to shed light on the potential reasons for these issues.

It is generally believed that the front desk trainees at Valombola VTC have weak inferring and referring skills, so this study set out to assess the extent to which this presumption is true. It has also been noted that there has been an issue with rudeness when interacting socially on campus and in class with both their front-office trainers and other trainees. These front-desk trainees frequently exhibited a lack of pragmatic competence in their day-to-day interactions, spoke informally or in less professional ways, and generally failed to impress. Pragmatic language use is already difficult for native speakers of a language, and it gets much more so for non-native speakers (Cohen, 2008).

It would indicate that pupils lack knowledge of various speech actions and politeness norms when it pertains to pragmatic competence (Cohen, 2008). The major issue in this study is pragmatic failure, which is seen to be a contributing factor to the prevalence of rudeness, arrogance, condescending, insincerity, and other undesirable behaviours among front desk employees in most hospitality organizations.

Research on English as a Second Language (ESL) in multicultural and multilingual Namibia is expected to supplement what is currently known. Therefore, it follows that this type of project is essential for shedding light on the issues related to English usage, particularly among hospitality industry front-office trainees undergoing vocational training.

The study could also give valuable information to those who build TVET curricula on the pros and cons of using English in professional settings for pedagogical purposes, specifically regarding the success or failure of trainer-trainee communication. It is also believed that the study will help break down barriers in communication on pragmatic competence and discourse analysis, which might lead to the establishment of a good atmosphere where the training department's instructors and students can work together to reach their objectives.

## **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

### ***Pragmatics and the Concept of Communication***

While communicating effectively necessitates grasping the intended meaning, pragmatics delves into how context plays a role in doing just that. Getting a handle on effective communication requires deciphering not only what others say, but also their intended meaning (Yule, 2006). Yule argues that the capacity to comprehend a speaker's meaning beyond the words they have spoken is just as crucial to effective communication as the ability to understand what they have spoken. Being fluent in a language is only one aspect of learning that language, as Hymes (1972) points out. Even though a sentence is

grammatically correct, it may have no place in another setting. Misunderstandings or even emotional distress can arise from inappropriate language use or when words are misused in general. Therefore, being competent in both language and pragmatics is necessary for fluency. "Pragmatics" refers to the study of speaker meaning (Yule, 2006). It is clear from Yule's definition of pragmatics that understanding meaning is not enough to ensure effective communication. It is important to grasp the speaker's intended meaning as well. Everyone needs to be able to deduce what the speaker means for there to be an agreement. So, it's best to stay away from pragmatic failure, which is defined as misinterpreting someone's words (Thomas, 1983).

### ***Pragmatic implicature***

Not only do people express themselves verbally in regular conversation, but their deliberate word choices also reveal their intentions. This means that the majority of the time when conversing, people will employ indirect speech acts. According to Rose and Casper (2001), Paul Herbert Grice first proposed the idea of implicatures in 1975. According to Grice, "what is meant" in a discussion is typically more substantial than "what is stated," and this supplementary meaning is both implied and foreseeable. The verb "to suggest" is the root of the noun "implicature" (Rose & Casper, 2001). "Implicate" means "to imply by expressing something else," and "implicature" is the noun form of the verb "implicate" (Grice, 1975).

Implicit reasoning is a component of pragmatics, a branch of language study (Davis, 2016). In pragmatics, an indirect or implicit speech act is what a speaker means by their utterance that is not part of what is openly expressed; this is called conversational implicature. In contrast to explicature, which conveys an assumption directly, the expression is often referred to as implicature (Grice, 1975 as cited in Davis, 2016). "Implicature" can indicate two things: either the meaning or object of someone expressing one thing while implying another. The four conversational maxims proposed by Grice (1975)—the maxims of quantity, quality, relation, and manner—are applied to conversational implicatures.

### ***Pragmatic reference and inference***

A pragmatic inference strategy is necessary for comprehending a full utterance when the speaker's message transcends the logical or literal interpretation of the sentences utilized. The concept of scalar implicature, a kind of pragmatic inference, is relevant here (Yule, 1997). Inference, as defined by Yule (1997), is when the listener makes use of background knowledge to conclude the speaker's intended meaning. Words, in Yule's view, do not denote anything other than personal preference. Saying something like "It is on the shelf" is one example. This would imply a book rather than a specific individual (Yule, 1997). It is important to understand that when one person expresses their thoughts concerning something or someone, the listener deduces those intentions. On occasion, it's not enough for the process to function between a single speaker and listener; it must also function in terms of social interactions amongst the entire community that shares a shared language and culture. "Where is the green salad sitting?" is an example of a question that one server might ask another in a restaurant. "He is seated by the door," the second person says... Words do not denote anything in this

context; what they do refer to are individuals. Another scenario is a student at NUST asking another, "Could you let me borrow your Sifiso Nyati?" "Sure, please look on the very first front shelf," the second trainee interjects. The fact that we may use names of things (salad) to refer to individuals and names of persons (Sifiso Nyati) to refer to novels is demonstrated by these examples.

### ***Pragmatics Rescues Semantic Failures***

According to Horn (2006), pragmatics is the study of contextual meanings beyond semantic literal meanings. Researchers like Levinson (1983) offer pragmatics definitions that are relevant to pragmatic stylistics, but few of these scholars highlight the need to understand the semantic meanings behind pragmatic competence and pragmatics. Here is an example from Cutting (2002) that illustrates this:

Envision yourself calling your go-to eatery and asking, "Hi, do you happen to have any tables available this Saturday?"

"Yes, we do," the restaurant manager says before hanging up the phone.

You inquired about the availability of tables, and their literal response was "yes"—which is also accurate—from a semantic perspective. But if we apply pragmatics, we can assume that you were hoping to book a table for that specific Saturday. Given this background, it's easy to see how pragmatics arose from the need for a solution to the problem of semantics' inability to transmit the speaker's intended meaning within the given context. Thinking about how semantics relates to pragmatics analysis, Cutting (2008) argues that pragmatics became its academic discipline mainly due to semantics' inadequacy in explaining meaning. The study of pragmatics, as seen in the previous example, allows us to focus on the construction of meaning within context rather than on the literal meaning of words and sentences. Considerations such as irony, metaphors, and intended meanings are part of pragmatics, which examines the gap between the literal and socially intended meanings of words (Cutting, 2008). For instance, when a boss asks, "What time do you call this?" while an employee is running late for work. Based on the context and the boss's vocal intonation, it seems like he or she is more interested in the rationale behind an employee's tardiness to work than in the exact time. That pragmatics saves semantics from its shortcomings is stressed for this very reason.

### ***Speech Acts in Pragmatics***

In pragmatics, speech acts play a crucial role in determining whether or not there are hidden meanings behind a speaker's words and phrases. According to Yule (1996), the study of speech actions involves observing how both speakers and listeners utilize language. The phrase "speech act" is used by Yule (1996, p. 47) to describe the activities that are carried out through speech. When a manager commands, "Follow COVID-19 protocols!" he is effectively endorsing the regulations and policies of the COVID-19 pandemic. The manager is executing an action here by way of speech. Words have the power to alter a person's demeanour. Language, as Yule explains further, is rife with implicit meanings as well. When someone says anything, it's not always clear what they mean. Sometimes, there's more to their words than meets the eye.

### ***Speech Act Distinction***

The difference between the locution, illocution, and perlocution of a speech act is an important one, says Smit (2012). In addition, Searle (1969) considered the idea that every speech act comprises three distinct phases: locution, illocution, and affective processing by the listener (perlocution). Locutionary is the process of describing what a speaker says by just reciting a sentence from a language. For example, the pronoun "my watch" is used as a noun in the sentence "my watch is broken," which is a predicative expression. The speaker's intended action when they utter a sentence is called an illocutionary act. Words like "state," "promise," "apologize," "threaten," "predict," "order," and "request" fall within this category. An illocutionary act is an act of ordering, according to Searle, when a mother says to her child, "Take your feet off the table" (1969). Additionally, the impact of a speaker's words on an audience is known as a perlocutionary act. The listener may be inspired, embarrassed, intimidated, bored, or persuaded by these effects. The perlocutionary conduct is likely to be annoying if, for instance, a husband says to his wife ten times in five minutes, "Hurry up, sweetheart, we're going to be late for the party" (Parker, 1986).

Mey (1994) states that it is possible to engage in three speech acts—the locutionary act, the illocutionary act, and the perlocutionary act—at the same time. Keep in mind that the act of elocution is related to the pronouncing of a phrase that establishes its reference and sense. The literal meaning of words lies at the heart of the literal deed. This area is particularly vulnerable to the COVID-19 pandemic. The literal interpretation serves as a timely reminder of the high prevalence of COVID-19 in the region. What an illocutionary act is all about, according to Mey (1994), is the speaker's intended meaning. By way of illustration, the previous statement was meant to convey the idea that the hearer should take precautions against the spread of the COVID-19 virus, such as covering their face when they are in public places.

### ***Politeness in Pragmatics***

According to O'Keefe et al. (2011), politeness is a combination of verbal and nonverbal actions that show consideration for other people's feelings regarding appropriate behaviour. According to Gleason and Ratner (1998, p. 286), encouraging civility in speech acts is being considerate of other people's sentiments and engaging in behaviours related to positive face (the want to be approved of) and negative face (the wish to be free from the imposition, unimpeded, or left alone). An effort to minimize the potential for conflict and confrontation inherent in all human interchange is the goal of civility, according to Lakoff (1990, p. 34). Politeness, according to Yule (2010, p. 135), is being mindful of and considerate of another person's face. When people act in a way that they think is polite in a particular situation, they are trying to demonstrate shared values with others, which leads to positive emotions, according to O'Keefe et al. Politeness helps people build and maintain relationships, and it operates through evaluative moments that involve assessing someone's behaviour and interpersonal attitudes (Yule, 2010).

### ***Politeness and Cultures (Semantics Vs Pragmatic Competence)***

Many studies have adapted the concept of politeness to multiple languages (Saeed, 2009). Saeed goes on to say that cross-cultural diversity is a major factor to think about

when assessing the usefulness of the politeness concept for analyzing indirect speech acts. According to Yule (2010, pp. 134–136), other people don't always appreciate when you use indirect communication. Take this hypothetical conversation between a tourist who appears bewildered as he lugs around his bags and a random passer-by as an example.

**Visitor:** Excuse me. Do you know where the Ambassador Hotel is?

**Passer-by:** Oh sure, I know where it is. (And walks away)

Here, the tourist makes a request using an indirect speech act—an interrogative structure—but the bystander responds as though it were a direct speech act (Yule, 2010). Cultures have different views on what words and phrases are most appropriate for expressing politeness, according to Yule. Someone whose culture values indirectness and avoiding direct imposition would find it rude if someone from a culture that values directness as a means of solidarity used direct speech acts (such as "Give me that chair!"). Since it is not immediately apparent if the speaker wants the chair or is only inquiring about it, a misunderstanding of an utterance like (Are you using this chair?).

### *Pragmatic failure*

The way people talk varies greatly among cultures and communities. These linguistic variations indicate distinct cultural ideals or, at the very least, distinct value systems, and they are well-considered and structured. When people, particularly those speaking a different language, have difficulty using the language appropriately, it can lead to a breakdown in communication known as pragmatic failure (Thomas, 1983). Ziran (1988) sees it as the failure to attain the desired communicative consequences in communication, while Thomas thinks it's the failure to comprehend an utterance. Problems with communication can be worsened by pragmatic failure rather than by grammatical failure. Pragmatic failure in cross-cultural contexts can lead to a major "communication collapse" (Thomas 1983, p. 97). The belief goes like this: when the listener doesn't get the speaker's meaning, that's a pragmatic failure.

The importance of being able to decipher the underlying meanings of spoken language was highlighted in this section. The reason is, that if one isn't careful, their words or speech could be misunderstood and made to sound unpleasant. Additionally, the chapter notes that one can gain a better grasp of the utterances by learning about speech acts and pragmatics. To avoid cross-cultural pragmatic failures, it is important to keep in mind certain expressions when communicating with people from different cultural backgrounds. Additionally, some linguistic components and expressions necessitate socio-pragmatic competence to be understood better. For instance, not all of Namibia's vernacular languages use the same humorous or idiomatic terms as English.

Hence, it is crucial to take into account pragmatic knowledge or competency and respect for cultural integrity when communicating. Idiomatic expressions are obstacles that could make it harder for someone to understand the true meaning of what someone is saying. Front desk trainees are one group who could benefit from socializing speech acts in a workshop setting to bring attention to the identified obstacles. In addition, it was noted that to grasp the intended meanings, one must carefully examine statements and make pragmatics a central point of conversation. Users can easily decipher the meaning of utterances by familiarizing themselves with the conventions and idiomatic expressions

of both their native and target languages. This could lead to an expansion of their linguistic knowledge, which in turn could allow them to perform speech acts, which are fundamental to the field of pragmatics.

## **FINDINGS**

### ***Formulation and Realisation of Request and Refusal Strategies***

The formulation and realisation of request strategies was the first target objective of the current enquiry and as such, the research sought to investigate whether the front-office trainees possessed the requisite pragmatic knowledge as evidenced through their formulations of requests and refusals. The Written Discourse Completion Tests proved effective in collecting data to respond to the objective. The front-office trainees were presented with a variety of requests that they potentially were likely to encounter occasionally in their engagement with either their trainers or their fellow trainees. The entire nine requests presented to the trainees required their formulation and production of requests in response to trainers' and other fellow trainees' requests.

The results showed that a lot of people (trainees) utilized rudeness signals and were very frank while refusing to do things. Additionally, the straight denial method of negation of proposition strategy got the second highest proportion. Also, the ability strategy had a lower response rate, which is important to note (Could you). This was critical because it highlighted a scenario where the trainers' and trainees' pragmatic communication engagements could be badly affected. In addition, the results showed that some of the participants possessed the moral fibre necessary for effective cross-cultural dialogue. The strategies relied on the speaker, which greatly increased the likelihood of discomfort and misunderstanding for the listener or recipient of the request. 'You must' and 'I need you to' were frequently used in the trainees' requests. In pragmatics-based communication, using these terms when requesting training from instructors conveys an undesirable quality. There needs to be pragmatic pedagogical intervention because it sounds like the trainees were demanding that the trainer do anything instead of just asking. Because of these gaps in cross-cultural communication, participants' requests were misunderstood as being unpleasant or nasty, and front-desk trainees require immediate training in pragmatic competence, perhaps in a program similar to English for Specific Purpose. According to Yazdanfar and Bonyati (2016, p. 8), people should not be considered rude just because they choose to utilize direct tactics in their language use. Examining cultural scripts' discretion was thus central to the study of directness and indirectness. Thomas (1983) and Blum-Kulka (1991) state that impolite or nasty requests might lead to a failure in communication, pragmatics, or even socio-pragmatics.

### ***Trainees' Responses on the Speech Acts of Refusals***

According to Yuan (2012), when someone says "no" to a request or invitation, whether directly or indirectly, it is seen as a speech act of denial. Additionally, according to Yuan, the requestor may view them as acts of face-threatening behaviour since the response goes against what the speakers had hoped for. Smit (2012) adds weight to this claim by noting that "face-threatening activities" are speech acts that endanger one's good or poor reputation. According to Chen (1996), as referenced in Tanck (2002), there are three possible speech acts when someone refuses: 1) an expression of regret, "I'm

sorry”, followed by 2) a direct refusal, “I cannot come to your birthday party, followed by 3) an excuse, “I will be on business in the US”. Tanck suggests these three components based on a study done by Beebe, Takahashi and Uliss-Weltz (1990), observing that in case of an invitation, the formulaic sequence would comprise of 1) an expression of regret, followed by 2) an excuse, and ending with 3) an offer of an alternative. The current study also made use of the same components to analyse the front-office trainees’ refusal responses. The speech act of refusal data collection section of the WDCT consisted of nine situations.

In evaluating their pragmatic competence, the trainees were expected to refuse the requests made, and in doing this, considering politeness and apologetic approaches where necessary was important. The following are some of the nine situations which were presented:

Table 1. Speech Act Situations for Refusal

Speech Acts of Refusals: Situations (see Appendix B)	
Refusal A	Refuse your trainer’s request to mark fellow trainees’ papers for him.
Refusal B	Refuse a fellow trainee’s appeal to do a class assignment for her.
Refusal C	Refuse your trainer’s request to submit your tasks three days before the given deadline.
Refusal D	Refuse your classmate’s request to lend her your summary books.
Refusal E	Refuse your trainers’ request to present the computer lab rules to fellow trainees.
Refusal F	Refuse your trainer’s instruction to remain behind to redo tasks he claims we inadequately attended to.
Refusal G	Refuse your fellow trainee’s appeal to show her how to upload some activities on the Moodle E-learning platform.

**Revelation of the Speech Acts of Apologies**

Murphy (2015) states that the act of apologising can take one of two basic forms or a combination of both; one is that a speaker may use an explicit ‘illocutionary force indicating device’ and the other is that the speaker may refer to one of the factors which precipitated the need for an apology and the speaker’s responsibility for the offence. Human beings are prone to making mistakes, they may do wrong to one another – intentionally or accidentally, whatever the case may be – and an apology has to be made at some point to maintain peace. According to Murphy performative verbs such as *sorry*, *excuse*, *apologise*, *forgive*, *regret* and *pardon* are used to carry out the speech act of apologising. Apologies are face-threatening acts (Brown & Levinson, 1987, as cited in Yuan, 2012), as there is a need for the speaker to admit having done wrong when performing an apology and this undermines his/her face. Should the speaker fail to apologise, it becomes a threat to the hearer’s face (Wouk, 2006, as cited in Yuan, 2012). In this regard, Bataineh and Bataineh (2006) as cited in Yuan (2012) observe that when one offers an apology, one demonstrates the willingness to humiliate oneself, which

makes an apology a face-saving act for the hearer but a face-threatening act for the speaker. In analysing the speech act of apology, Brown and Attardo (2000) propose the five components of an apology and these are a) an expression of apology, through which the wrongdoer repeats the feeling of regret; b) an explanation of the situation, in which the wrongdoer tries to reconstruct the incident to see whether he/she deserves forgiveness; c) an acknowledgement of responsibility, in which the wrongdoer states his/her responsibility for what has happened as a part of the apology; d) an offer of repair, through which the wrongdoer tries to offer a way to compensate for the harm; and e) a promise of non-recurrence, in which the wrongdoer promises not to repeat the offence. Divorced from these five components of an apology, Yuan (2012) suggests the employment of three R's: Regret, Responsibility and Remedy.

The current study adopted the three R's approach to analyse the apologies provided by front-office trainees under study. The WDCTs used for this study comprised nine situational analyses designed to examine the front-office trainees' pragmatic competence in making apologies and apologetic refusals. However, the most notable finding of this study demonstrates that the targeted participants lacked an apologetic approach, evidenced by their failure to communicate competently. Their linguistic behaviours demonstrate pragmatic impairment. It was also observed that bluntness and negation of proposition – as part of direct refusal strategies – accounted for the larger percentage of responses when compared to apologetic responses as demonstrated in the situations detailed above and below.

### ***Application of Politeness in Speech Act of Refusal and Apologetic Responses***

The participants were presented with a Discourse Completion Test. The study presented the front-office trainees with sensitive and tricky situations that they may or might not have experienced in their daily engagements with their both trainers and fellow trainees in a pedagogical environment. As a way to check the pragmatics knowledge and awareness of the participants, the Discourse Completion Test included situations that required them to formulate refusals to suggestions or requests by participants of equal power or lesser power to them (fellow trainees) and there were 5 situations. Meanwhile, 4 of the situations required refusal strategy responses and were directly linked to the refusal of their trainers' requests.

Table 2. Students' Refusal Speech Act

Polite expression of refusal used	Situation Number (S#) - frequency of utilization (Often / Rarely)								
	S#1	S#2	S#3	S#4	S#5	S#6	S#7	S#8	S#9
<i>No, please...</i>	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely
<i>Couldn't...</i>	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely
<i>Wouldn't...</i>	Often	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely	Often	Rarely	Rarely
<i>No, I am sorry</i>	Often	Often	Rarely	Often	Often	Often	Often	Rarely	Rarely
<i>Excuse me...</i>	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely	Often	Rarely	Rarely
<i>Thank you for...</i>	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely
<i>I am afraid...</i>	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely	Often	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely

This study attempted to assess the frequency of the usage of the polite refusal strategy in responding to certain given situations. The analysis of responses for all nine refusal situations was made and it was established that most trainees lacked the polite refusal strategies approaches as evidenced in the table above. According to Jucker (2008, p. 120), politeness has become a cover term for both norms of behaviour and linguistic choices made concerning the need to preserve one's face in general, that is, one's public self-image. The data reveals that the respondents did not use different types of politeness strategies but rather used bluntness more often. It was observed that expressions such as 'please no..', 'please not', 'excuse me', 'pardon' and 'sorry' were not frequently used in most refusal responses.

It was further learnt that the trainees did not use clauses that are also used as softeners or a perlocutionary effect of an utterance on the addressee, exemplified by expressions such as 'if you don't mind', 'if you wouldn't', etc. As demonstrated in the above table, the usage of 'please' as in the example 'Please not this time of exams...' was rarely used. In the first situation (Situation A) for example, 'would' in combination with 'please' was supposed to be used often for a polite approach like in the example: *No please, I would rather not give you some notes this time of examinations.* However, it was found that the polite expression 'would not' was rarely used. This was indicative of the fact that politeness is rarely used in vocational education in general, and by front-office trainees in particular. According to Jucker (2008) the politeness indicator 'please' or *no please* is not only used at the beginning, it is also used in the middle or at the end of the phrases or the sentences.

Ishihara and Cohen (2007) gave the following clues on how one would say sorry to someone exemplified by the following expressions: • Sorry, I didn't mean to... • I am sorry but... • I apologize for... • I hope you will forgive me but... • I seem to have made a mistake. I'm sorry... • I am sorry for misunderstanding... • I hope you will understand..." (p. 62).

Similarly, to say 'no' or refuse requests, the following expressions are recommended with no meta-pragmatic explanation provided. 'I would rather not... If you don't mind, I'll say 'no' to that. I don't want... if you don't mind. I'm sorry, but I've said 'no' and I'm not going to change my mind. I'd prefer to.../ I'd rather... Why don't we... instead?' (Ishihara and Cohen, 2007, p.103).

This section provided a logical presentation of the study's results in light of the acknowledged research objectives from Chapter 1. The third goal, which involved assessing the use of politeness principles in request-refusal methods through speech acts, was associated with the most important findings. The participants were shown nine distinct scenarios and asked to demonstrate how to respond to each one in everyday life. They then assessed the responses based on the scenarios they had seen. The ability of the respondents to express and carry out refusals was examined and evaluated in the second objective. To prepare the participants for interactions with their trainers and other trainees, we simulated real-life scenarios. They had to come up with reasons not to comply with requests and then actually do it. It was crucial to provide a glimpse into the study's analysis of refusal situations and appropriate solutions when examining the provided refusal scenarios. The two most common direct techniques for refusing were being blunt (20.50 per cent) and denying the notion (19.20%), whereas the most common indirect strategies were being plain forthright, giving a reason, or explaining something.

In addition to lacking politeness approach tactics, respondents exhibited a lack of regret or apologetic attitude in reacting to many presented situations. The following column chart illustrates clearly how respondents demonstrated the use of direct refusal strategy e.g.... 'no' and negation of proposition on high rate.

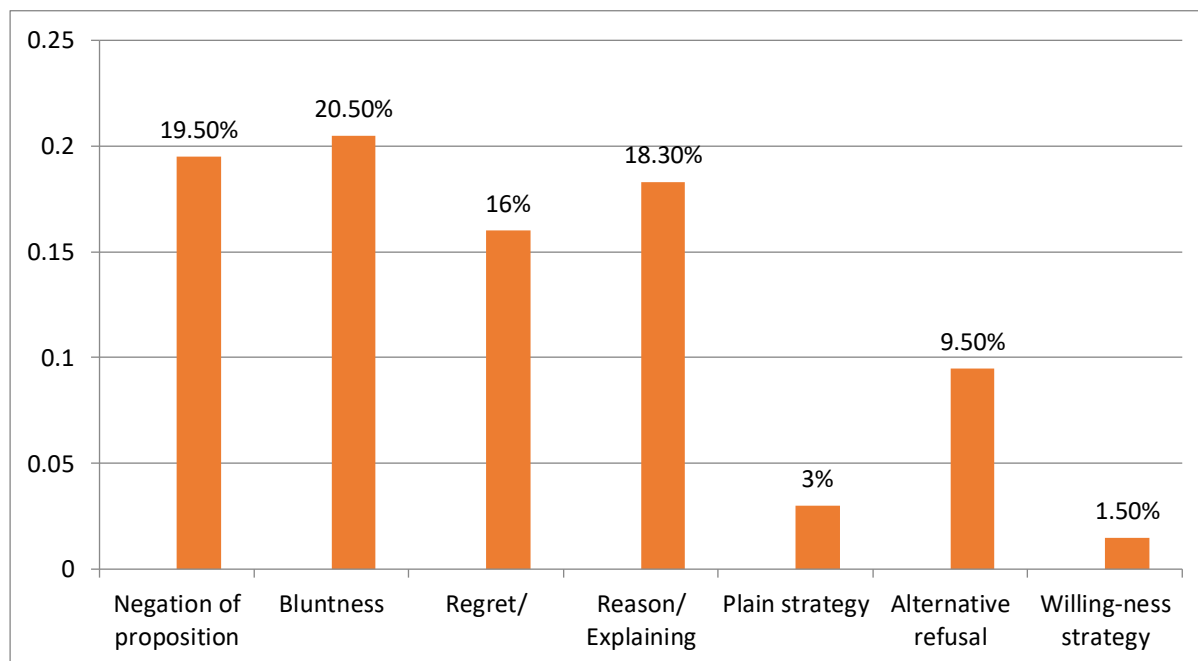


Figure 1. Total percentages of Refusal: Finding analysis of Situation A-I

## DISCUSSIONS

Because some parts of Trosborg's (1995) taxonomy of request realisation were irrelevant to the present study, its full format was not used. As a result, none of the five main kinds of request strategies—conventionally indirect (speaker-based), direct, internally modified, and externally modified—were employed. Firstly, it could be said that the participants' responses conformed to most of the broad request-type techniques, despite their vast and different display. The indirect conventional method, which is focused on the listeners, was the most effective in implementing the request tactics.

Also worth noting is that, in contrast to the direct method, the indirect conventional strategy managed to gather a disproportionately high number of answers. This is contrary to the assertion by Iragui (1996, p. 58) who points out that, "the native speakers' use of alerts and intensifiers confirms most studies on interactional pragmatics that have reported that many trainees used impoliteness markers and used direct refusal strategies (bluntness) at high rate". Additionally, the straight denial method of negation of proposition strategy got the second highest proportion. Furthermore, it must be mentioned that a substantial amount of answers were also documented regarding the ability technique (Could you). This was critical because it highlighted a scenario where the trainers' and trainees' pragmatic communication engagements could be badly affected.

Some participants' use of direct imperative and performative methods suggests a potentially complicated communication scenario within TVET and the Hospitality training division at Valombola VTC. Participants' lack of pragmatic knowledge, particularly regarding the use of language in diverse settings, is implied by their use of these tactics. The use of imperatives and direct performatives as requests revealed a lack of understanding of pragma-linguistics and socio-pragmatics, which is especially problematic in pragmatics. Because of these gaps in cross-cultural communication, participants' requests were misunderstood as being unpleasant or nasty, and front-desk trainees require immediate training in pragmatic competence, perhaps in a program similar to English for Specific Purpose. According to Yazdanfar and Bonyati (2016, p. 8), people should not be considered rude just because they choose to utilize direct tactics in their language use. Examining cultural scripts' discretion was thus central to the study of directness and indirectness. Thomas (1983) and Blum-Kulka (1991) state that impolite or nasty requests might lead to a failure in communication, pragmatics, or even socio-pragmatics.

The results also showed that participants used the least tactics for internal and external modification, which could mean that the trainees had trouble coming up with good requests by not using the right language tools. According to the findings, non-native English speakers can be better prepared for cross-cultural communication processes by paying close attention to their immediate surroundings. Important ideas on internal syntactic and lexical downgraders were also the subject of the research. If you want to come up with request tactics that non-native English speakers can accept and use, you need to make sure you internalize these abilities and awareness. There is a difference between this study and the one by Blum-Kulka (1991) in terms of the setting; for example, the majority of the present study's participants reported never having interacted with native English speakers.

"Can you" and "Could you" are indicators of participants' limited pragma-linguistic expertise, according to the study. What the participants have experienced in the classroom about grammatical instruction may be directly related to this. Requests categorized as indirect conventional strategy and external modification showed this pattern (supportive reasons). One sign of a problem with request formulation diversity was the employment of the same approach and language formulations (House & Kasper, 1987; Trosborg, 1995). Research has also shown that people whose first language is not English do not often change their requests because of their lack of competence in the language.

Findings analysis shows that many responses were in line with direct techniques. The two most important direct rejection techniques were being blunt and negating the proposition. The most common indirect strategies were being simply direct, explaining or providing a reason, apologizing, or offering an alternative. Disagreement, statements of principle, and avoidance had little bearing on the results of this investigation. The research shows that direct rejection techniques were more common among the front-office trainees who participated, which is surprising given the number of alternatives to indirect strategies.

Research also shows that when participants felt psychological pressure, they were more likely to use a direct, frank approach with their trainers. This runs counter to the previous finding since, in these cases, the participants lacked an essential understanding

of socio-pragmatic issues and variables. Refusing a recommendation or request from a superior in a conversation may not have deviated from the anticipated realization of socio-pragmatic elements such as the power dynamic, the context, and the distance between the two parties involved. This goes against the grain of other research that has found that bilingualism should lead to a heightened understanding of pragmatics.

## CONCLUSIONS

The pragmatic competence of the front desk trainees was examined in this study by looking at how well they could formulate and implement strategies for handling requests. The test also looked at how well they used etiquette rules while saying no or apologizing. In addition, the study has looked at what makes a difference to trainees' pragmatic competence when working across cultures. Researchers used two WDCTs in the study: one to measure participants' ability to formulate and complete requests, and another to measure participants' ability to formulate and complete plans for refusing or apologizing. Extra information was gathered through the use of a questionnaire as well.

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