

LEARNER CORPUS RESEARCH 2013

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Criteria features of pragmatic competence in a spoken corpus of Japanese learners of English to profile different levels of proficiency

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Outline of Presentation

1. The Aim of Study and Research Questions
 2. The NICT JLE Corpus
 3. The European Common Framework: The CEFR Level
 4. Past Studies on L2 Speech Acts
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1.1 The Aim of the Study

- To explore what kind of *criterial features* of pragmatic competence can be identified to profile different levels of proficiency in the NICT JLE Corpus
- *Criterial features* : linguistic features which specify what learners know and can do in English at each level of proficiency (Hawkins and Filipović, 2012)

1.2 Research Questions

- (1) What kind of language features in “request” of **speech acts** can be found as *criterial features* to specify different levels of proficiency in **the NICT JLE Corpus** , referring to the **Reference Level Descriptions** in the CEFR?
- (2) How are **the SST levels** in the NICT JLE Corpus correspondent with **the CEFR Level** , in terms of pragmatic competence?

2.1 The NICT JLE (Japanese Learner English) Corpus

- 15-minute oral interview transcripts – the SST (Standard Speaking Test)
- the Standard Speaking Test - OPI (Oral Proficiency Interview) of ACTFL(American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages)
- More than 1,200 Japanese Learners of English
- Graded into nine proficiency levels (holistically evaluated)

SST Level	Proficiency	Subjects	Types	Token
Level 1	Novice	3	217	1,440
Level 2		35	1,516	20,788
Level 3		222	6,025	211,625
Level 4	Intermediate	482	10,120	606,951
Level 5		236	8,290	365,330
Level 6		130	6,867	219,646
Level 7		77	5,455	139,534
Level 8	Advanced	56	4,981	112,185
Level 9		40	4,429	85,420

2.2 Five Stages of the Standard Speaking Test (SST)

Stage	Contents	Duration
Stage 1	Warm Up (Casual Conversation)	3-4 mins.
Stage 2	Single Picture Description	2-3 mins.
Stage 3	Role-play Between Interviewee and Interviewer	1-4 mins.
Stage 4	Making a Story Based on a Picture	2-3 mins.
Stage 5	Winding-down Conversation	1-2 mins.

2.3 Types of Tasks Given in Stage 3

Types of Roleplay Task (Stage 3: Five Types and Three Difficulties)		
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Shopping 2. Invitation 3. Train 4. Travel 5. Landlord 	Beginner	A general transaction: Purchasing an item - asking the information about the prices, quantity, number of the items and the method of payment
	Intermediate	
	Advanced	Negotiation: Asking for a refund or exchanging a purchased item
Interviewer: a shop assistant or a train staff Interviewee: a customer or a passenger		

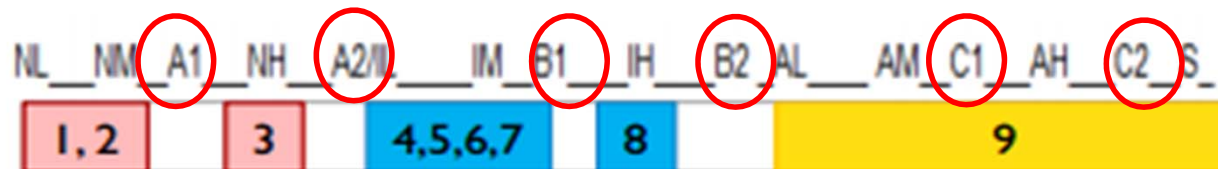
2.4 The Data Used in the Analysis

Required Skills in the Task	General Transaction (Purchasing a desired Item)					Negotiation (Asking for a refund or exchanging a purchased item)			
	L1	L2	L3	L4	L5	L6	L7	L8	L9
Shopping No. of Subjects	Beginner			Intermediate		Advanced			
	1/1	10/12	10/10	10/94	10/20	10/33	10/20	10/13	10/12
Subjects' Token	25	331	1002	1093	1439	1361	1758	1881	2337
Subjects' Turns	8	130	141	158	188	111	143	160	172
Interviewer's Token	101	913	841	1046	1054	872	1024	1162	1145
Interviewer's Turns	8	135	145	160	190	112	147	165	176
Train No. of Subjects	Beginner		Intermediate			Advanced			
	2/2	8/8	10/64	10/141	10/36	10/14	10/20	10/13	10/11
Subjects' Token	56	280	913	1056	1031	1673	1665	2156	1765
Subjects' Turns	20	90	115	136	135	120	114	123	127
Interviewer's Token	141	662	642	807	827	809	805	973	1020
Interviewer's Turns	20	94	114	136	134	121	120	128	132

3.1 The SST Levels vs. the CEFR Levels

The Common European Framework Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment (CEFR)

C2	Mastery	Proficient User
C1	Effective Operational Proficiency	
B2	Vantage	Independent User
B1	Threshold	
A2	Waystage	Basic User
A1	Breakthrough	



<http://www.tufs.ac.jp/ts/personal/tonolab/cefr-j/kaneko-izumi-ppt.pdf>

(Kaneko & Izumi, 2012, p.4)

3.2 Pragmatic Competences

Pragmatic competences

- are concerned with the functional use of linguistic resources (production of language functions, speech acts), drawing on scenarios or scripts of **interactional exchanges**.
- It also concerns the mastery of discourse, cohesion and coherence, the identification of text types and forms, irony, and parody.
- For this component even more than the linguistic component, it is hardly necessary to stress the major impact of interactions and cultural environments in which such abilities are constructed.

(Council of Europe, 2001)

3.3 Illustrative Skills of Transactions to Obtain Goods (drawing on the CEFR)

Transactions to obtain goods (Shopping)	
 B2 (Level 9)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negotiation • Asking for compensation • Asking for concession
B1 (Level 8)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall transaction including less routine situations • Making a complaint
A2 (Level 7) (Level 6) (Level 5) (Level 4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall transactions with simple and common situations • Asking things about goods • Asking the price • Asking information about quantities, numbers, and prices
A1 (Level 3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asking people for things • Handling numbers, quantities, cost and time

(Council of Europe, 2001, p.80)

4. The Past Studies on L2 Speech Act

Trosborg (1995), Salgado (2011), and Kaneko (2004)

- ❖ Speech Acts (Request, Apology, Complaint)
- ❖ DCT (Discourse Completion Task) or Learner Corpus
- ❖ Coding scheme for Speech Acts – grammar, lexis & pragmatics
- ❖ Learners at different proficiency levels vs. Native speakers
- ❖ Higher learners tend to perform like native speakers, and basic learners use less strategies.

5.1 Analysis: Coding Scheme

- **Past Studies**: Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper, 1989; Trosborg, 1995; Salgado, 2011
- **Appendix: Coding Scheme for Request Strategies**

1. Identifying a Head Act

(i) Alert , (ii) Head Act, (iii) Supportive Moves

(i) **Alert**: a term of address or attention getter

(ii) **Head Act**: the minimal unit which can realize request; the core of the request sequence.

Excuse me, could you give me a lift to town?

(iii) **Supportive Moves**: a unit external to the request, which modifies its impact by either aggravating or mitigating its force.

Could you clean up this mess? I'm having some friends over for dinner tonight.

5.1 Analysis: Coding Scheme

2. Classifying a Head Act

2.2 Requestive Perspectives:

(i) Speaker-oriented, (ii) Hear-oriented, (iii) Impersonal

2.3 Directness: (i) Direct, (ii) Conventionally Indirect , (iii) Indirect

Polite requests are usually realised with an indirect speech act.
(Nattinger and DeCarrico, 1992)

- *“Can you pass me the salt?”*

- (i) Having an illocutionary force as a request

- (ii) Being a locution as a simple question about the ability to pass the salt

=> 'Conventionally Indirect Speech Act'

- *“The kitchen seems to be in a bit of a mess.”*

- (i) its literal utterance does not convey any requests to the hearer.

- (ii) Illocutionary force as a speech act can be arrived at from the basis of non-linguistic extrinsic factors such as situational context and the immediate discourse co-text.

=> 'Non-conventionally Indirect Speech Act'

5.1 Analysis: Coding Scheme

3. Identifying a Modification Pattern

3.1 Internal Modification (Inside the Head Act)

3.1.1 Lexical Patterns

politeness marker “*please*”, downtoner “*maybe*”, upgrader “*really*”, interpersonal marker “*you know*”, subjectivizer “*kind of*”, tag question “*isn’t it?*”, consultive device “*Do you think....?*”

3.1.2 Syntactic Patterns

past tense, progressive aspect, interrogative, negation, declarative, modal

3.2 External Modification (Attached to the Head Act)

3.2.1 Supportive Moves

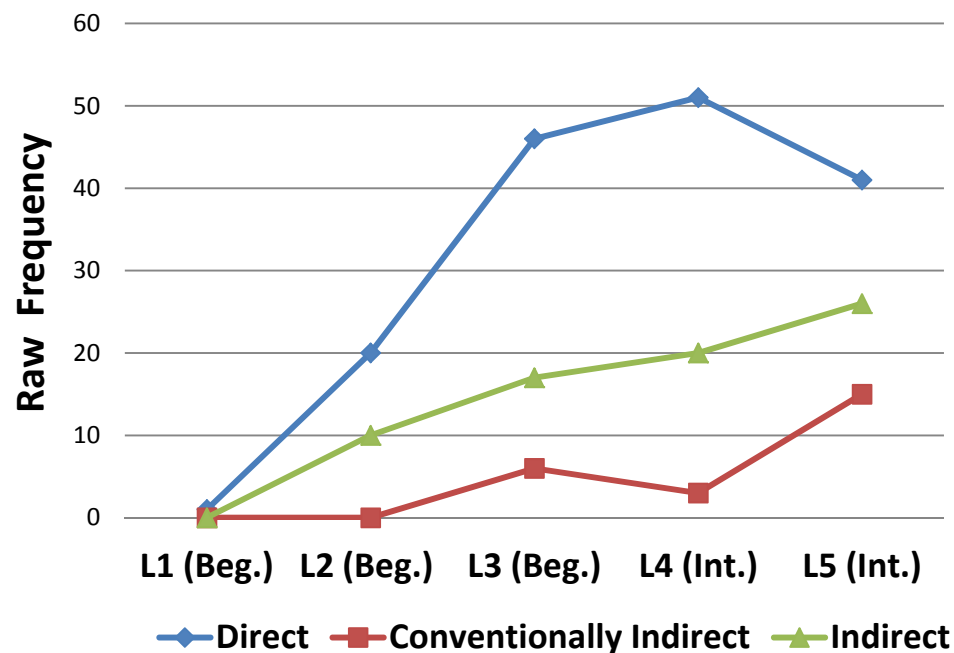
grounder, preparatory, threat, cost minimizer, disarmer, promise, confirm

6.1 Results: Three Directness Types of Strategies (Shopping)

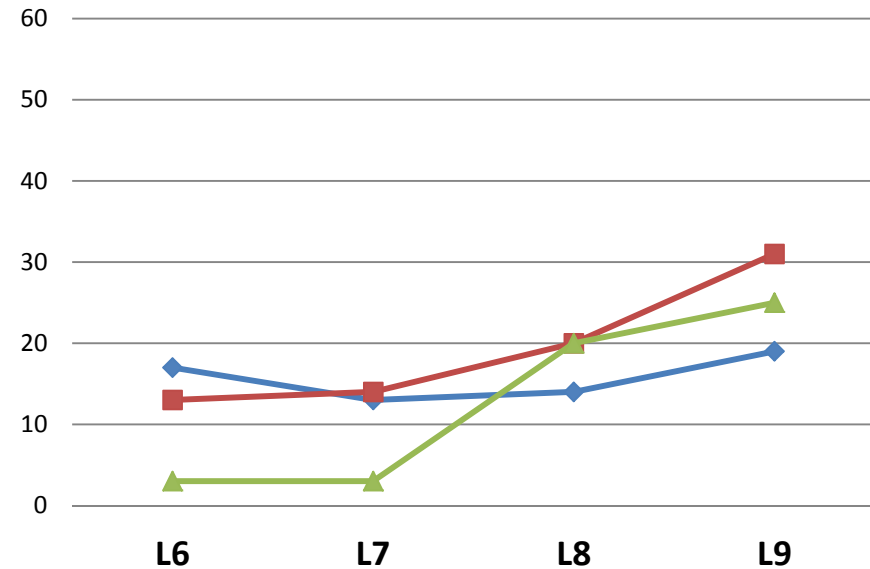
From Beginner to Lower Intermediate Levels: Direct ↑

Advanced Group: Conventionally Indirect & Indirect ↑

Three Types of Strategies in "Shopping" of Beginner and Intermediate Groups



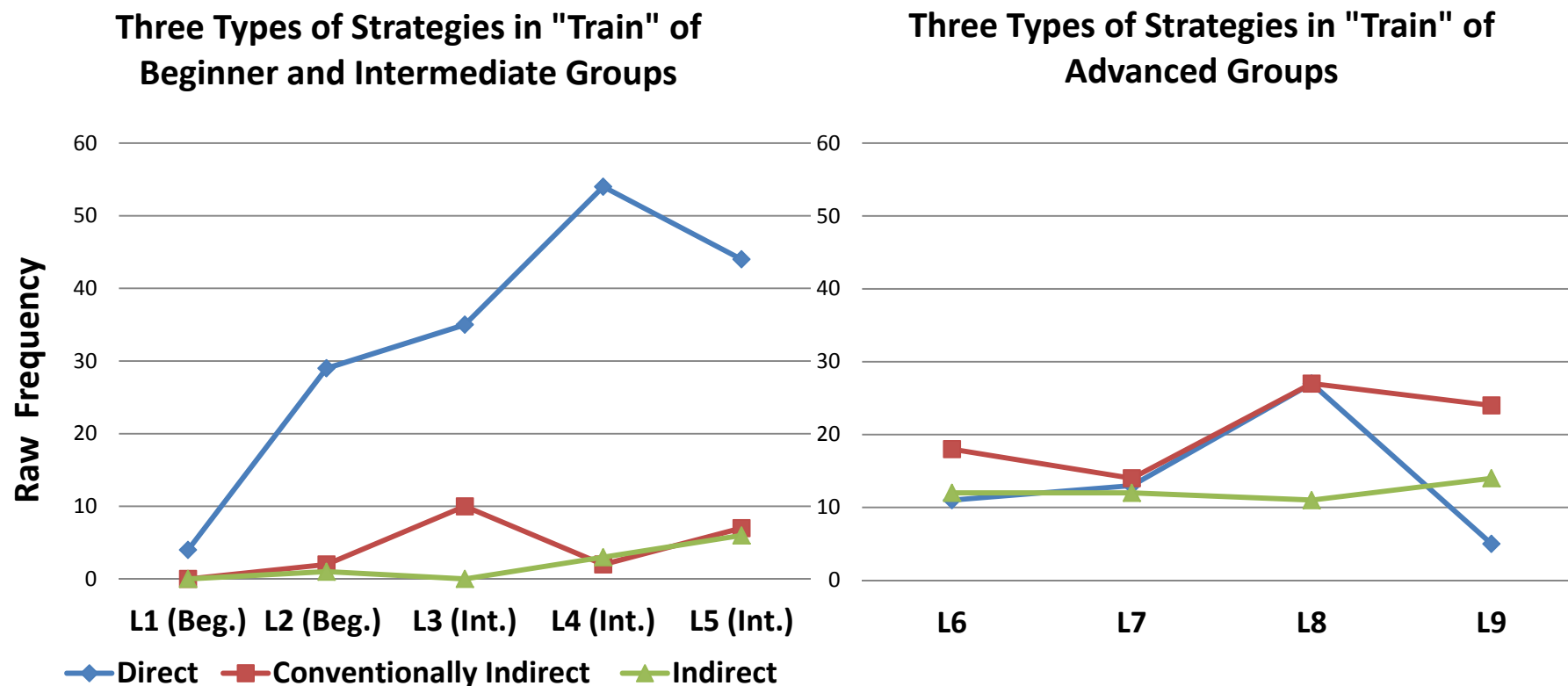
Three Types of Strategies in "Shopping" of Advanced Group



6.1 Results: Three Directness Types of Strategies (Train)

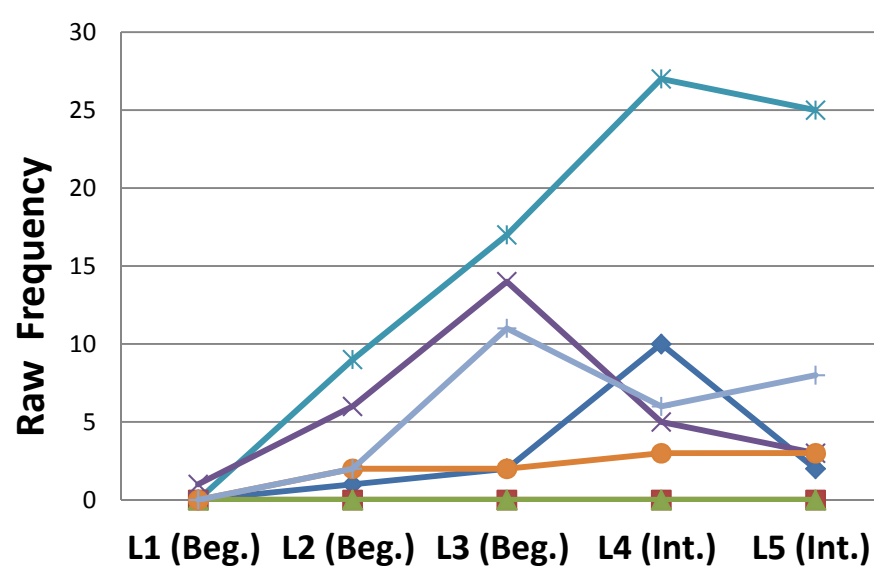
From Beginner to Lower Intermediate Levels: Direct ↑

Advanced Group: Direct ↑↓, Conventionally Indirect ↑, Indirect →

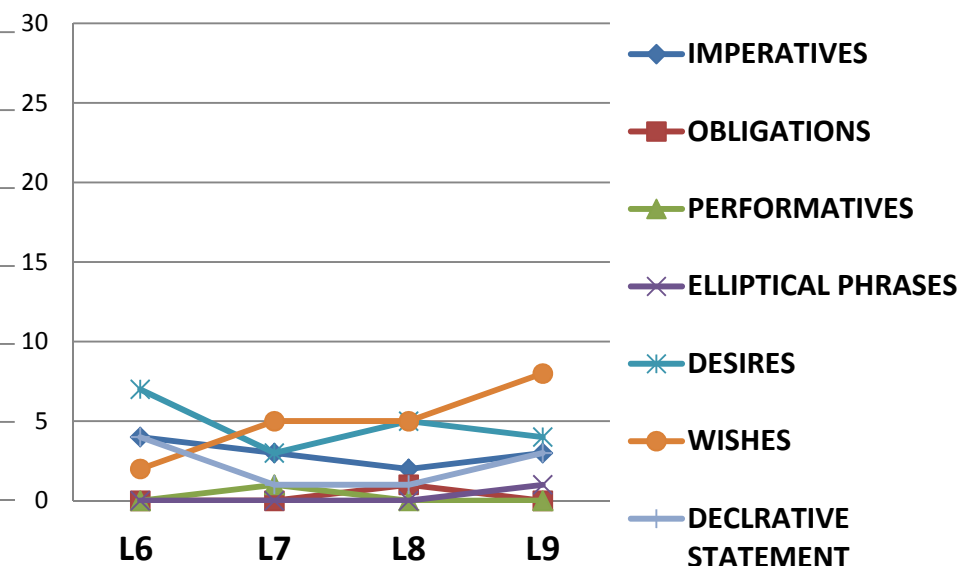


6.2 Results: Patterns of Direct Strategies (Shopping)

"Shopping" of Beginner and Intermediate Groups



"Shopping" of Advanced Group

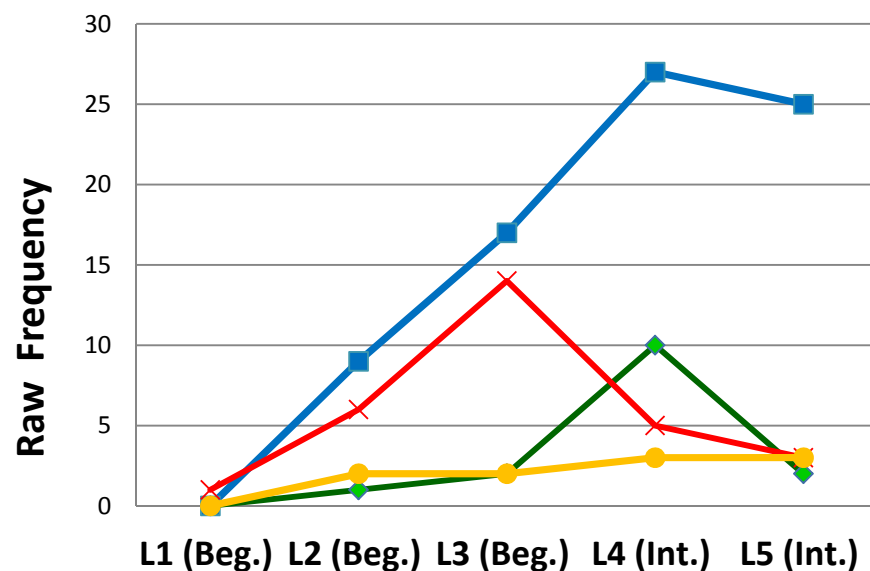


6.2.1 Results: Patterns of Direct Strategies (Shopping)

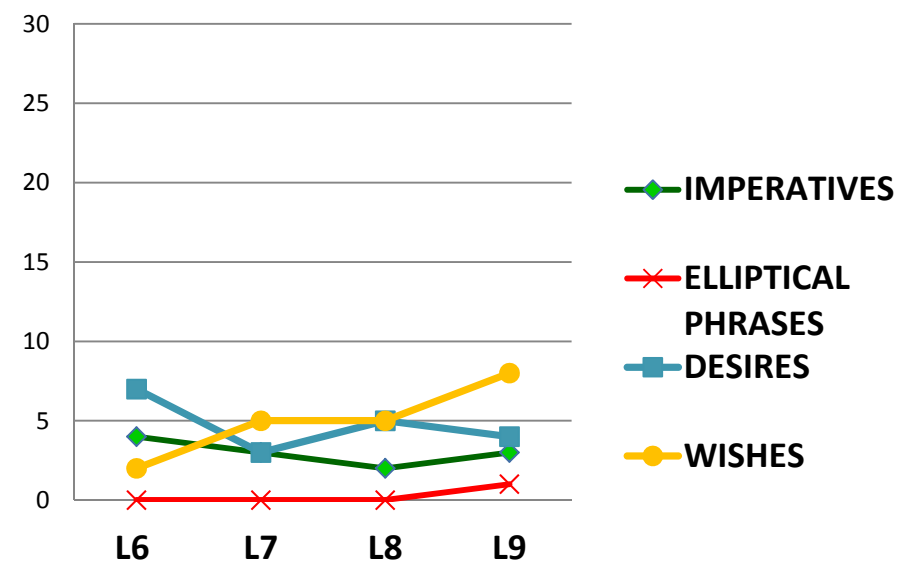
From Beginner to Lower Intermediate: Desires (“need”, “want”)↑

Advanced: Wishes (“would like”, “wish”) > Desires (“need”, “want”)

"Shopping" of Beginner and Intermediate Groups



"Shopping" of Advanced Group

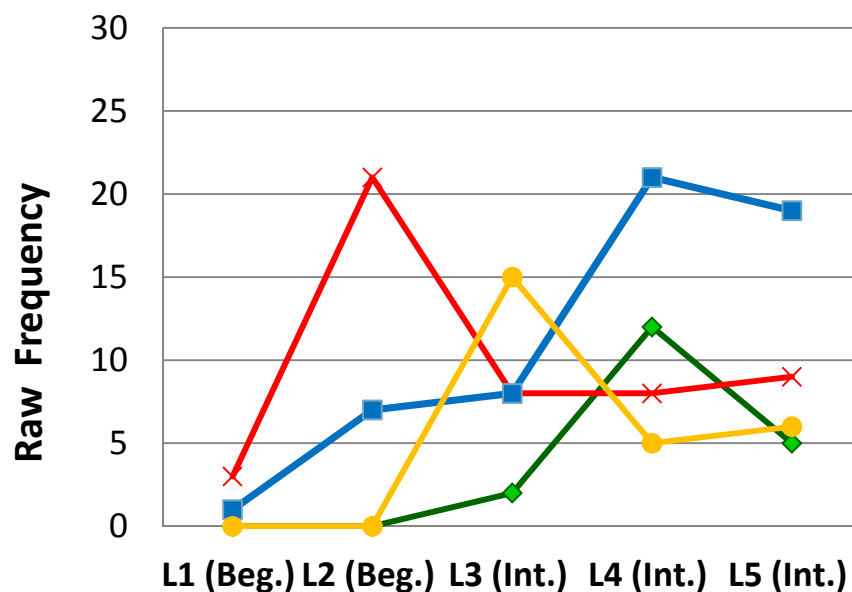


6.2.2 Results: Patterns of Direct Strategies (Train)

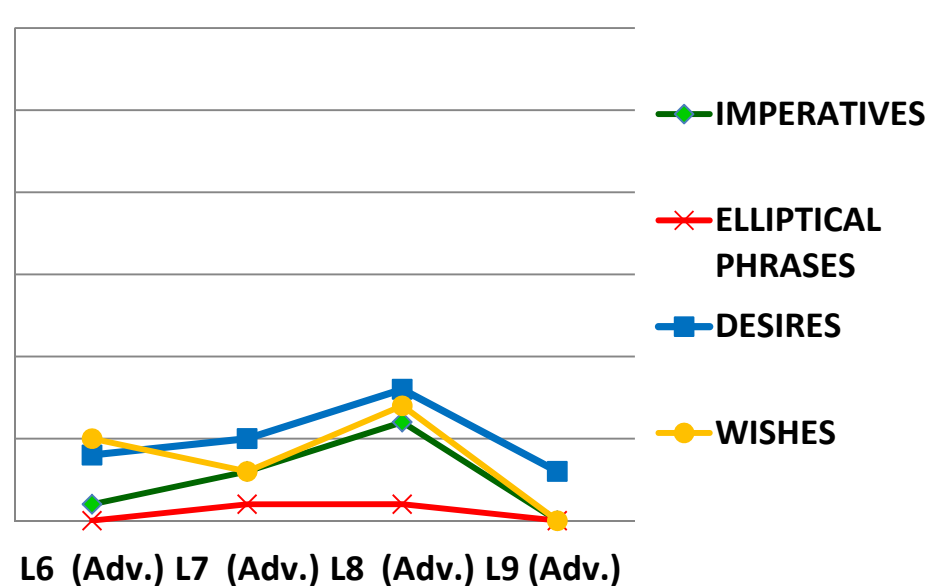
Beginner and Intermediate: Elliptical phrases (“Jacket.”) ↓, Desires ↑

Advanced: Desires = Wishes = Imperatives

"Train" of Beginner and Intermediate Groups



"Train" of Advanced Group



6.3 Results: Lexical Pattern of Direct Strategies

Lexical Downgrader as Internal Modification: Politeness marker “please” in Direct Request Strategies: Shopping & Train

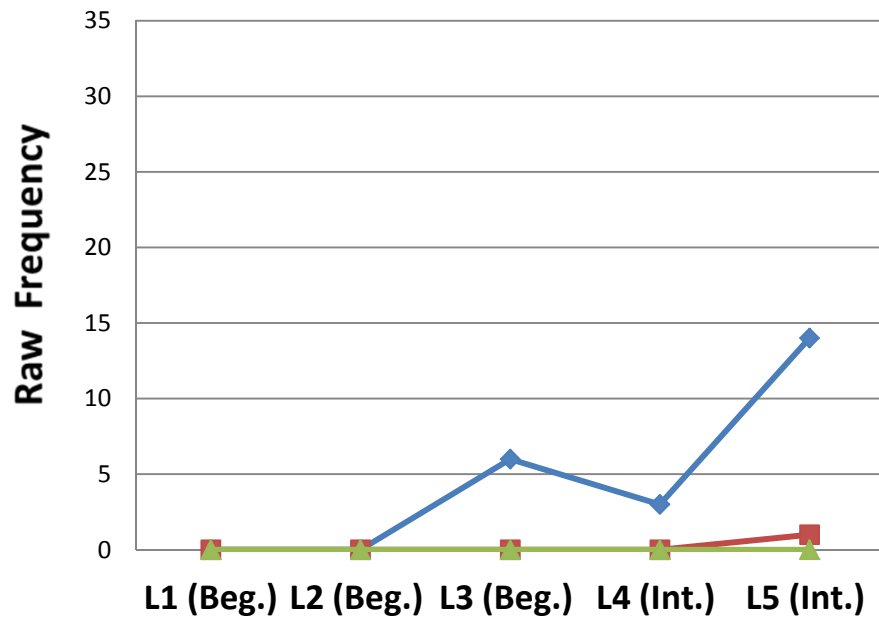
- Almost all occurrences of “Imperative” are modified with “please” from Level 3 to Level 9.
- 10%-70% of “Elliptical Phrases” are modified with “please”, which are observed only in Beginner and Intermediate groups.
- “Please” is the item which is acquired from the lower level of proficiency.

6.4 Results: Patterns of Conventionally Indirect Strategies: Shopping

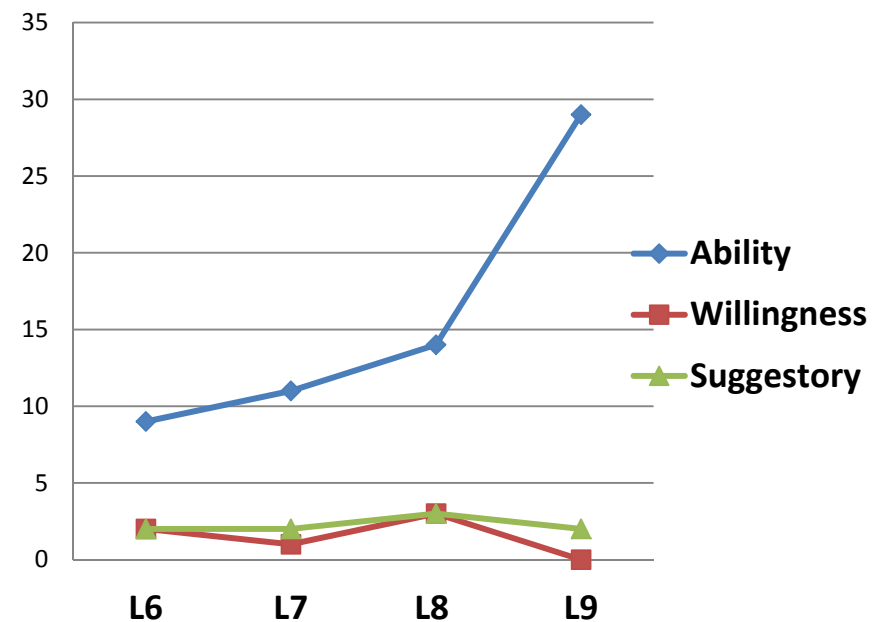
From Beginner to Advanced: Ability ↑

Advanced: Willingness & Suggestory →

"Shopping" of Beginner and Intermediate Groups



"Shopping" of Advanced Group

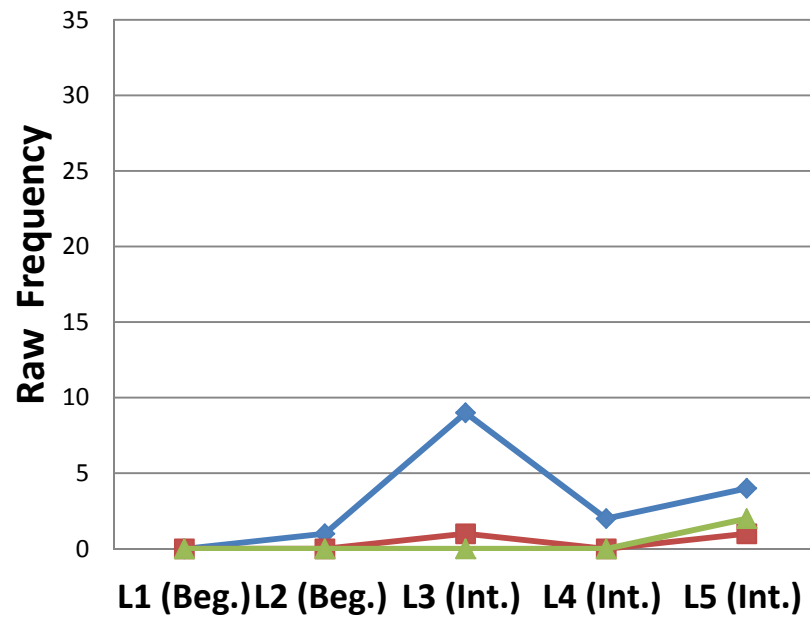


6.4 Results: Patterns of Conventionally Indirect Strategies: Train

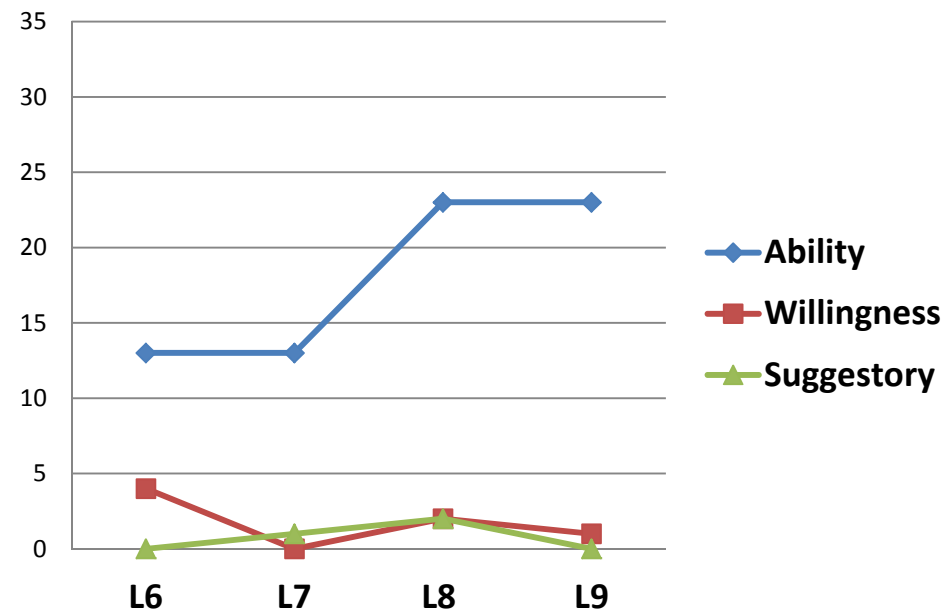
Beginner and Intermediate: Ability →

Advanced: Ability ↑, Willingness & Suggestory →

"Train" of Beginner and Intermediate Groups



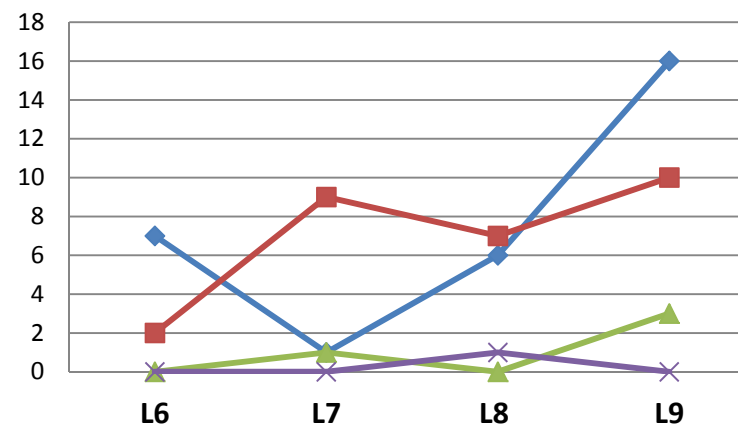
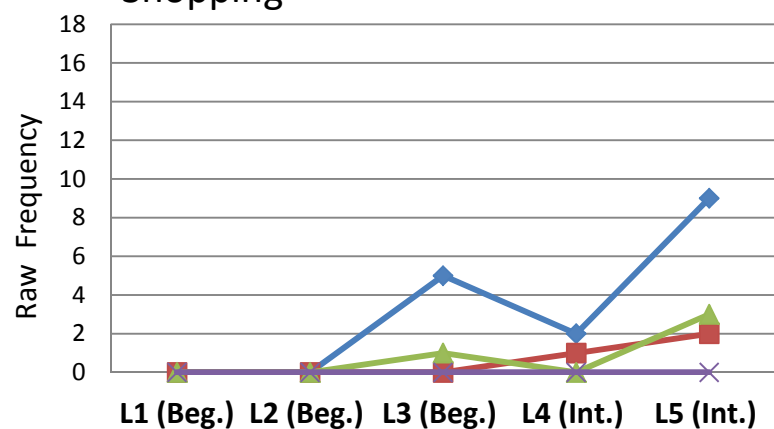
"Train" of Advanced Group



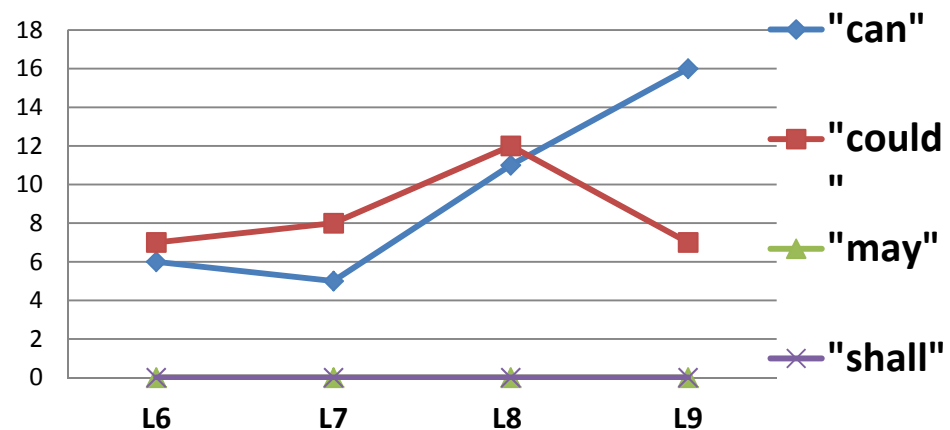
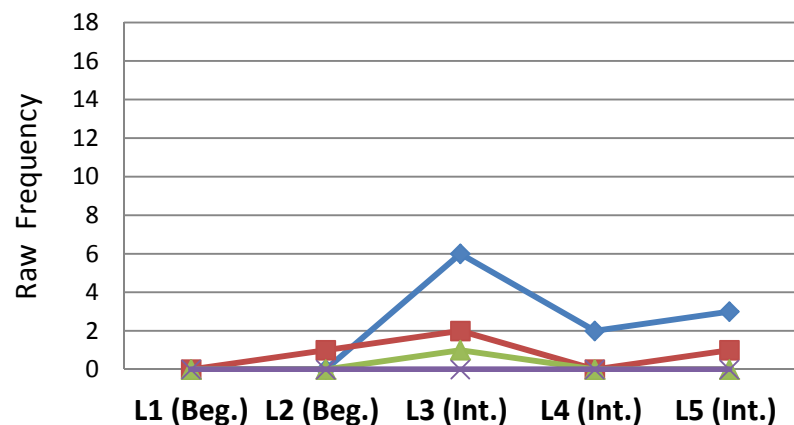
6.4.1 Results: Types of Modals in Ability

Beginner & Intermediate: "can" > "could"; Advanced: "can" = "could" ↑

"Shopping"

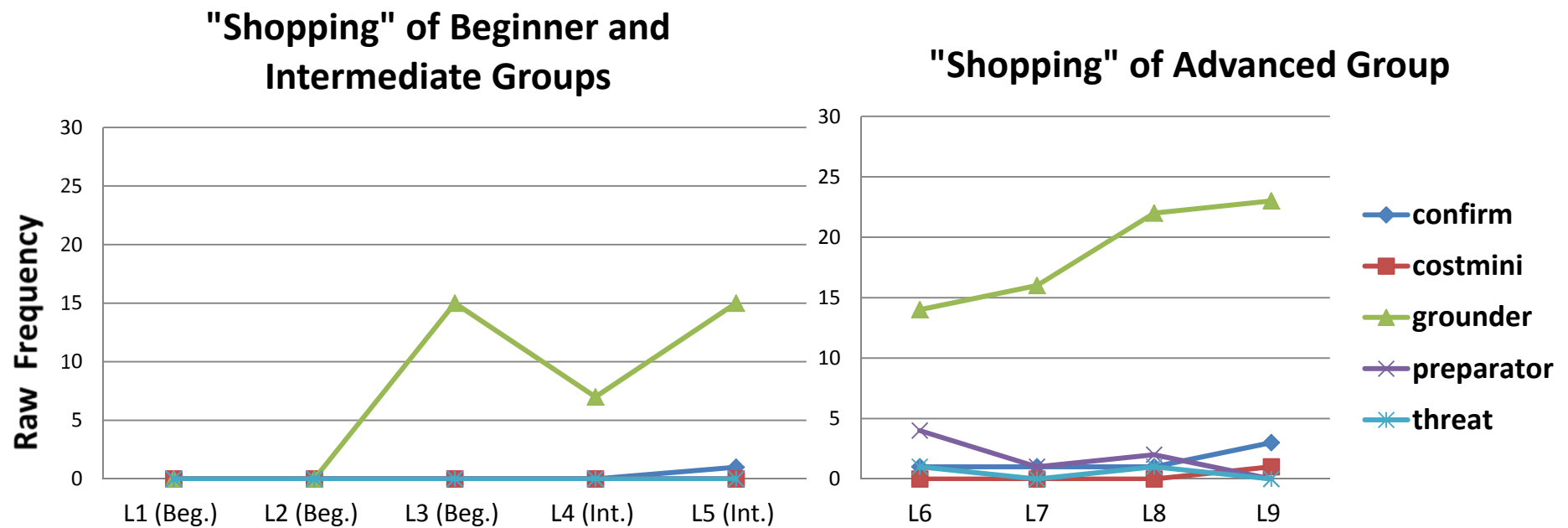


"Train"



6.5 Results: External Modification: Shopping

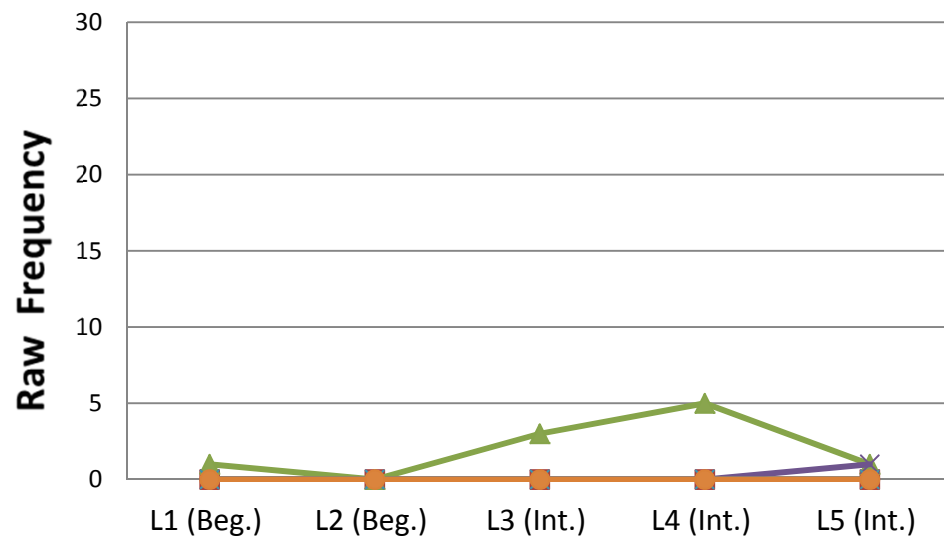
From Beginner to Advanced: Supportive Move “Grounder” ↑



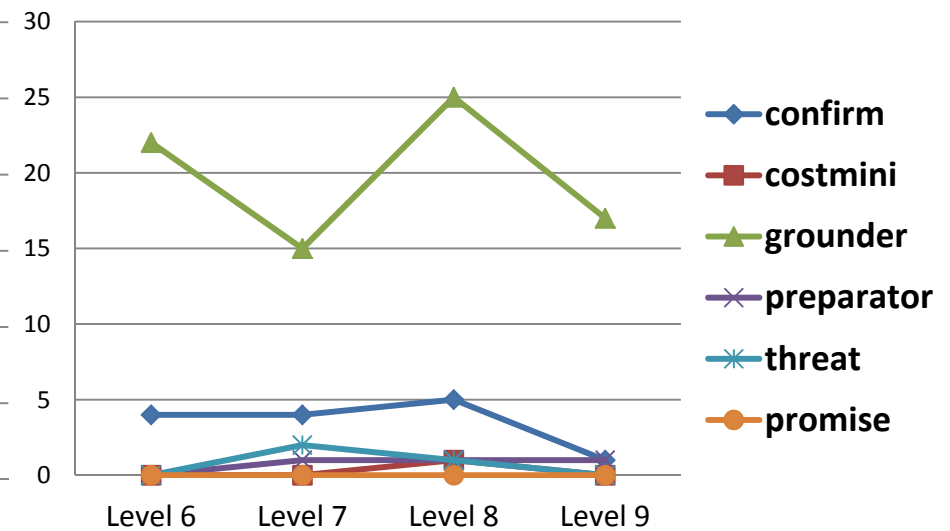
6.5 Results: External Modification: Train

Beginner & Intermediate: Supportive Move “Grounder” →
Advanced > Beginner & Intermediate

"Train" of Beginner and Intermediate Groups



"Train" of Advanced Group



7. Summary of Findings

- **RQ1: *Criterial features of “requestive” speech act are identified in the NICT JLE Corpus.***
 - Lower Learners = Direct Request Strategies; “please”
 - Higher Learners = Conventionally Indirect (can = could) and Indirect Request Strategies; “Grounder” Supportive Moves
- **RQ2: *The proficiency level of the NICT JLE Corpus may not be correspondent with the CEFR level.***
 - The language features of pragmatic use and their frequency may be somewhat influenced by the nature and difficulties of task (Beginner & Intermediate vs. Advanced).
 - There may be gaps between what the CEFR level describes learners of each proficiency can do and what the role-play tasks in the SST require the subjects to deal with.

8. Conclusion

1. Lower learners being more direct and higher learners being more conventionally indirect and indirect
=>Do lower learners make a request without redressing face-threatening effects? Are higher learners more polite?

⇒ **Developmental patterns?**

⇒ **Or The Task Influence?**

Beginner and Intermediate groups:

=> Required to express their wills to purchase a desired item

- Advanced group:

=> Required to explain a situation in order to persuade the shop assistant or the rain staff

2. Pragmatic competences in relation to the lexical and syntactic language features should be more analysed in terms of different levels of proficiency and tasks.
 - Improvement with annotation scheme – UAM Corpus Tool?

References

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