Accuracy and speed in the interpretation of implied meanings in English: Turkish teacher trainees versus native speakers

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate how Turkish Teacher Trainees of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) interpret implied meanings, which is an integral but lesser-studied component of pragmatic competence. The conduct of the study began with the development of an online multiple-choice discourse completion test (MDCT) through two piloting phases. Next, the test was given to a group of 144 1st year teacher trainees and a group of 127 native speakers of English, who served as the comparison group to provide interpretation norms as the benchmark. The results revealed a significant difference between the native speakers and teacher trainees in favor of the former in terms of both accuracy and speed at the interpretation of implied meanings in English. In consideration of the fact that teacher training is critical for inevitably influencing how instructional practices are used in the future, the study identified an improvable aspect in the pragmatic skills of prospective EFL teachers, which could pave way for informed instructional solutions for both EFL teacher trainees and learners.

1. Introduction

Since "pragmatic competence (the ability to process and use language in context)" is an essential constituent of being communicatively competent, prospective teachers of English, who will be naturally expected to help their own students to have pragmatic competence, are worth examining in terms of the extent to which they themselves have it. To support this argument, we can narrow the focus on teacher trainees schooled in EFL contexts like in Turkey, where teaching practices tend to be grammar-oriented while even high grammatical competence would not guarantee pragmatic competence, and developing the latter is a bigger challenge because of the minimal chances of processing sufficient authentic input. This all gets more thought-provoking when we consider the fact that interlocutors might tend to evaluate pragmatic flaws more severely than grammatical ones.

The issue would acquire a further dimension when we narrow the focus on the research agenda within pragmatics, which has been claimed to give its descriptive focus on speech acts and to a lesser extent on

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the other main areas including implicatures though they could prove troublesome for learners to interpret even after constant and prolonged exposure to the target language.

1.1. Literature review

1.1.1. . Evolution of Pragmatic Competence in Overall Communicative Competence

A historical perspective shows us the development of competences that an efficient language user would need to have. Along the continuum could be linguistic competence (Chomsky, 1965) and communicative competence (Hymes, 1972; Canale & Swain, 1981; Canale, 1983), which was extended by Bachman and Palmer (1996) to pioneer in the conceptualization of detailed pragmatic knowledge as a requisite in overall language ability. The following years strengthened this position. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, which has been widely used in the design of language curricula, included pragmatic competence as one of the basic components of communicative language competencies (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 33).

In this context, pragmatic ability with regard to language education, thus language teachers, automatically becomes worth examining. The argument is supported with the exploration of some fundamental issues in specific reference to EFL environments like the one in Turkey, about which the pertinent literature reports grammar-oriented language teaching practices, materials and assessment (Özmen, 2012; Uztosun, 2013; Erkmen, 2014). The problem here is that even if such a learning context works in the best way possible, it is still open to question whether the learners can gain pragmatic competence concurrently with grammatical competence (Bardovi-Harlig, 1996; Jianda, 2006). With the reports added like Yu's (2006), who suggests that language learners may need to better understand pragmatic aspects of the target culture so that they can interpret appropriately what they hear and interact effectively with members of that culture, pragmatic competence as an instructional target for teachers becomes definitely worth considering. Nevertheless, the literature suggests an air of "neglect" about handling "pragmatics as a learning target" in especially EFL classrooms (Brubæk, 2012; Hu, 2014; Segueni, 2014). Under these circumstances, we cannot delegate the task to exposure to the input provided throughout an EFL program as there would naturally be a limited amount of authentic input and chance to observe and use the target language in natural contexts (Cenoz, 2007; Martinez-Flor & Soler, 2007; Taguchi, 2011; Alagözlü, 2013; Li, 2015). This is verified by findings like in Taguchi (2008), where 60 students in a college in Japan (EFL learners) and 57 students in a college in the US completed a computerized listening task that measured the participants' accuracy and speed of pragmatic comprehension with indirect refusals and opinions. The results revealed that the longitudinal gain of speed in pragmatic information processing was smaller than that of accurate understanding of pragmatic meaning in the EFL environment. Taguchi (2008) explains the findings from the perspective of cognitive theories of skill development, where the small gain in comprehension speed found among the EFL learners may be attributed to the fact that they lacked sufficient incidental exposure to the target language to develop performance speed.

1.1.2. Pragmatic flaws and communication

In light of the abovementioned points, one could naturally harbor doubts about especially EFL learners' probable communication problems in encounters especially with native speakers. In line with Thomas (1983), Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei (1998) and Crandall and Basturkmen (2004), Economidou-Kogetsidis (2015, p. 1-2) appreciates the probable gravity of such problems by noting that a NS could attribute a grammatically competent and fluent non-native speaker's pragmatic failure to impoliteness. Accordingly, she states that when EFL learners move to the target language community, sophisticated pragmatic competence becomes essential since pragmatically inappropriate language can cause pragmatic failure by unintentionally violating social appropriateness.

1.1.3. Pragmatics and Implied Meanings

Taking account of all mentioned above, "implied meanings" within the framework of "implicature" were addressed as the focal point of this study. Besides the acknowledged significance of pragmatic competence in overall language ability, the principal reason for this choice is the fact that, among its five main areas including "implicature" (Levinson, 1983), the study of pragmatics has focused on speech acts (Aijmer, 2011; Eslami & Mirzaei, 2012; Roever, 2013; Bardovi-Harlig & Shin, 2014; Bella, 2014) and to a lesser extent on implicatures (Roever, 2006; Bardovi-Harlig & Shin, 2014). Besides that, in light of the aforementioned general neglect of instructional pragmatics, it would not be hard to predict that implied meanings have not been frequently made the focus of attention in Turkish EFL learning and teacher education settings either. These all would acquire an additional dimension when we consider the fact that implicature is an "unremarkable and ordinary" conversational strategy (Green, 1989, p. 92) used frequently and extensively in daily conversation (Pichastor, 1998; Matsuda, 1999; McTear, 2004). Moreover, it was made a major constituent of the first pragmatic competence test developed in the field of Applied Linguistics (Roever, 2005). In this respect, it is important to investigate how prospective language teachers interpret implicatures to see how aware and equipped they would be to assist learners in comprehending indirectness (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001) as an action of fair-play to give them a fighting-chance" (Yoshida, 2014).

Within this framework, before elaborating on how implied meanings were addressed in this study, it is considered worthwhile here to touch on the blanket term "implicature" and several related points.

1.1.4. Implicature (comprehension)

It was Grice (1975) who introduced the notion of "implicature" to denote cases in which what is meant is distinct from what is uttered (Davis, 2007). He also categorized the concept into "conventional" and "conversational" implicatures, the latter of which originates from his well-known Principle of Cooperation (1975, 1981) and Maxims (quality, quantity, relevance, manner). When an interlocutor deliberately disregards one or more of these maxims, that could well be to go beyond the extent of what s/he utters with the intention of expressing his/her aims indirectly but more effectively that way though.

The Cooperative Principle played a historically important role in pragmatics (Hadi, 2013). It has led to new developments in people's understanding of conversation, in the light of which Bouton (1988, 1994, 1999) was the first researcher to study implicatures in specific relation to language learning. In conformity with the scholars postulating that it is often difficult for L2 learners to notice how people in a given culture express meaning indirectly (Wolfson, 1989) as they show an inclination for taking utterances at face value (Kasper, 1997), Bouton discovered that the ability of NNSs to interpret implicatures is highly questionable and needs to be supported through instruction, which later kept being verified in studies like Kubota (1995), Lee (2002), Taguchi (2005), Roever (2005) and Rızaoğlu and Yavuz (2017).

Using his research findings as base, Bouton (1994) divided implicatures into two sets: idiosyncratic and formulaic. While the comprehension of the former relies mainly on a shared perception of the context, the latter is based on a formula of some sort, which would be structural, semantic, or pragmatic and crucial to a person's effective interpretation. The implicature labeled "Indirect Criticism" in this category can be considered a representative example. There is a semantic formula to it from which a person can receive clues as to the speaker's message. It is often used in response to a request for a value judgment like "How do you like my new shoes?" When that judgment might prove offensive to the person asking, the speaker often responds with a positive remark about some peripheral, unimportant feature of whatever s/he is asked to evaluate. For instance; a response like "They certainly look comfortable" might be indirect criticism if the shoes are expensive dress shoes, for which the most important characteristic would be their appearance (Bouton, 1994, p. 99).

Bouton's key finding on formulaic implicatures was that they might prove considerably difficult for NNSs and they are less susceptible to even prolonged exposure effects. Nevertheless, they were very much teachable, which provided the direct inspiration for the implied meanings to be included in this study. As it had been planned to be followed by an instructional dimension, the idea was first to investigate the comprehension of teachable implied meanings by Turkish EFL teacher trainees, who can also be viewed as advanced learners in an EFL context, and then to provide them an instruction program to help the interpretation of those implied meanings.

In this regard, the following section lists the implied meanings covered in the study and then briefly explains the rationale behind their inclusion.

1.1.5. Implied meanings covered in the present study

To start with, below is given the list of the implied meanings included in this study with their quantities in the data collection instrument and their sources:

Table 1. The Numbers of the Test Items in Each Group of Implied Meanings and their Sources

Implied Meaning	Number of Test Items	Source
Pope Questions	5	(Bouton, 1994)
Indirect Criticism	4	(Bouton, 1994; Kubota, 1995)
Indirect Advice	4	(Matsumura, 2001; 2007)
Topic Change	4	(Roever, 2005)
Disclosure	3	(Taguchi, 2005)
Irony	3	(Colston & O'Brien, 2000)
Indirect Refusals	3	(Taguchi, 2005)
Indirect Requests	2	(Rinnert & Kobayashi, 1999)
Fillers (on direct interpretation)	5	(Taguchi, 2005)

First, it should be mentioned that Pope Questions, Indirect Criticism, Irony, Topic Change and Disclosure had already been included in several other studies similar to this one (Bouton, 1994; Taguchi, 2005; Roever, 2005). Indirect requests, Indirect Advice and Indirect Refusals, which have not been bunched together with the abovementioned implied meanings in any data collection instrument before, were included in this study on the basis of a consideration like Verschueren's (2009, p. 9), who observes that Grice's (1975) account of implicatures and Searle's (1975) definition of indirect speech acts are very similar, or Birner's (2013, p. 195), who posits that indirect speech acts are a subtype of conversational implicature.

In this light, it would be worth emphasizing here that some of the implied meanings listed above are ones that have already been reported as formulaic in the related literature (Bouton, 1994, 1999; Taguchi, 2005, Roever, 2005). For the rest, which have not been overtly declared as formulaic (Disclosure, Indirect Advice and Indirect Requests), the researcher's supposition is that some of their reported variations can be deemed formulaic, thus worth being included and tested in terms of comprehensibility and teachability. The intention here was responding to Taguchi's (2005, p. 545) invitation to integrate different implied meaning types into study designs to help people better understand pragmatic comprehension and Bouton's (1994, p. 106) call that we should be alert to implicature types of which we are not fully aware with an eye to including them in instruction programs.

1.2. Purpose and Research Questions

In light of the considerations above, the aim of this study was formulated as "comparing how NSs of English and Turkish EFL teacher trainees interpret the implied meanings in English". In this regard, the following research questions guided the study:

1) Is there a significant difference in the comprehension accuracy of implied meanings in English between NSs of English and Turkish EFL teacher trainees?

2) Is there a significant difference in the comprehension speed of implied meanings in English between NSs of English and Turkish EFL teacher trainees?

2. Method

2.1. Pilot Studies

The first practical step was developing the data collection instrument. In light of studies specifically on implied meaning interpretation (Bouton, 1988, 1992, 1999; Taguchi, 2002, 2005; Roever, 2005; Rızaoğlu & Yavuz, 2017), with the help of a professional computer programmer and a NS colleague with 25 years' experience in FL teaching and teacher training, meticulous work was done to have the online MDCT of this study. With that in hand, the piloting was carried out with different comparison groups.

In the first attempt, the subgroups with varying proficiency levels were 69 first-year EFL teacher trainees, 13 Turkish citizens (who had been schooled in an English-speaking country), 23 intermediate-level EFL learners at Uludag University School of Foreign Languages and 12 NSs of English (seven of whom were later interviewed about each test item).

Despite some promising results, the NS debriefing sessions produced the compromise on the necessity of a second pilot study. Accordingly, four of the NSs, who were all ELT professionals that had contributed to the first one, were interviewed again on possible revisions. Moreover, a new American NS group of 14 academics took a revised version of the test, with five of them providing their direct feedback on wording and some alternative distractors.

Eventually, the new version of the test was developed considering the paralleling views on the revision alternatives. After these refinement stages, the test was administered to new groups of 43 EFL Teacher Trainees, 21 NSs of English, 14 intermediate-level EFL learners at the School of Foreign Languages and 11 high school students, who were getting a language intensive education to enroll for programs like ELT, English Literature and Translation/Interpreting Studies.

The Cronbach Alpha's Reliability Coefficient was calculated as ".777", which is acceptably high. To see if there were any significant differences between the groups, the Kruskal Wallis test was conducted, which showed significant differences among the groups: $\chi^2 = 54.589$, p<0.01. To see if there were significant differences between the pairs, Mann-Whitney comparisons were performed, which did demonstrate statistically significant differences between the NSs' performance and those of all the other groups. It was also seen that the performance differences between the particular pairs of groups could be attributable to the proficiency differences. This seems to be a strength of the test as it reflected the performance variability between participants from different proficiency levels.

Like Roever's (2005) experience following Hudson et al. (1995), the piloting process took nearly a year for a well-designed test essential to obtaining meaningful results. From the administration of the initial pilot test till that of its final version, though none had been asked to, some NS participants e-mailed their comments about their experience. The change between the beginning and end of the process was quite dramatic, which justifies the work during the piloting period. Below are given some comments to illustrate the point. While the first one is from the beginning, the second is from the midst and the other is from the end of the process:

1. "It was still possible in most cases to see what the intent was but it just sounded weird if that makes any sense. Anyways, best of luck!"

2. "The test was very well written, and one can see a lot of thought went into it."

3. "Thought this to be very interesting. Went quickly. The discussions seemed pretty clear cut to me."

The lengthy process of developing the data collection instrument and all its items with the favored response options are documented extensively in Çetinavcı and Öztürk (2017).

2.2. Main Study

2.2.1. Research site and participants

The main study was conducted in the ELT Department of Uludag University in Bursa, Turkey, where the teacher trainees are students who passed the two-phased university admission exam, which in its second phase measures solely the English language proficiency level of the test-takers.

The bigger group of participants comprised 144 (40 males and 104 females aged between 18 and 21) 1st year EFL teacher trainees studying the 2013-2014 academic year. They all had received an average of 8 years of English education at elementary and high school, which should mean that the participants were relatively advanced learners of English.

The other group consisted of 127 NSs of English. 79 were American, 32 were British, 10 were Canadian and 6 were Australian. 63 were male and 64 were female. Their average age was 37.6.

The basis for the NSs participation was of voluntariness and mostly with snowball sampling. They can be considered in two groups. The first group comprised the researcher's personal contacts available for face-to-face communication. The second consisted of people reached through their e-mail addresses acquired with the help of the personal contacts or found in some mailing lists on the Internet. They were all asked to participate online from different cities, countries and even continents wherever and whenever they felt free to. Eventually, out of nearly 200 people requested to assist, 127 agreed to participate. They were of varying nationalities, ages and occupations, among whom are a 19-year-old female American cashier at a fast-food restaurant, a British welfare officer in her forties, a 78-year-old male American software engineer of Israeli origin, a 32-year-old female Canadian elementary education teacher, a 48-year-old male Australian avionics technician etc.

2.2.2. Procedure

At the beginning of the semester, 144 first-year students took the online test simultaneously in a big computer lab in five groups in five consecutive days of the same week. Apart from the sequential instructions automatically provided after log-in, all the trainees were given a printed set of identical instructions containing a personal password and some brief directives on what to do before, during and after the test.

The statistical analyses of the teacher trainees' performance were made after their test data were amassed. However; as NS participation in the study continued in an irregular manner until quite late in the procedure, the comparisons became possible only when the accumulated NS data was eventually decided to be put into analysis.

2.3. Instrument(s)

Describe the instrumentation when relevant. You should both describe the instruments you used in the study and explain their purposes. If you used existing instruments developed by others, you should report their reliability and validity. Additional information about the instruments may also be reported when available. For example, you may describe the number and type of items used, the length of time required to complete the instrument, and how test norms are reported. Check for copyright information and for permission to use the instrument or to include it in your study.

If you developed a data collection instrument (e.g., a questionnaire or an achievement test), explain how you constructed it and the type of items you used. When appropriate, you should also discuss how you assessed the instrument's reliability and validity and whether you piloted it first before using it.

The JLLS Editorial Board and/or the Reviewers have the rights and privileges to ask you to send the data or instruments to them.

3. Results

3.1. Comprehension Accuracy Differences between Turkish EFL Teacher Trainees and NSs of English

3.1.1. Results in terms of the whole test

Once the data were transferred into SPSS, *Tests of Normality* were carried out to check if the participants' scores were normally distributed. Since the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test showed that they were not ($p < 0.01$ for both groups), the nonparametric *Mann-Whitney U test* was applied to compare the performances of the teacher trainees and NSs. In the table below, the answer is provided to whether the difference between them is statistically significant or not:

Table 2. Mann-Whitney U Results of the Overall Test Totals

Group	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	U	p
Teacher Trainees	144	76.77	11055.50	615.500	**.000**
NSs of English	127	203.15	25800.50		

As table 2 reveals, a significant difference was found between the test totals of the trainees and NSs ($p < 0.01$). This suggests that, in terms of the test as a whole, the latter are significantly more accurate at interpreting the implied meanings included in the study.

3.1.2. Results in terms of the item subsets

For the item subsets, the same statistical analysis procedures as those for the overall scores were followed. As the scores for the item subsets were not normally distributed (p= .000 for both groups), the nonparametric *Mann-Whitney U test* was applied to compare the performances of the teacher trainees and NSs in terms of each item subset. In the table below, the output is displayed:

Table 3. Mann-Whitney U Test Results for the Item Subset Scores

Subset	Group	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	U	p
Irony	Teacher Trainees	96.23	13857.00	3417.000	**.000**
	NSs of English	181.09	22999.00		
Indirect Advice	Teacher Trainees	109.66	15791.50	5351.500	**.000**
	NSs of English	165.86	21064.50		
Pope Questions	Teacher Trainees	105.11	15136.00	4696.000	**.000**
	NSs of English	171.02	21720.00		
Indirect Refusal	Teacher Trainees	127.08	18299.50	7859.500	**.001**
	NSs of English	146.11	18556.50		
Disclosure	Teacher Trainees	116.50	16775.50	6335.500	**.000**
	NSs of English	158.11	20080.50		
Topic Change	Teacher Trainees	102.91	14818.50	4378.500	**.000**
	NSs of English	173.52	22037.50		
Indirect Request	Teacher Trainees	111.23	16016.50	5576.500	**.000**
	NSs of English	164.09	20839.50		
Indirect Criticism	Teacher Trainees	78.86	11355.50	915.500	**.000**
	NSs of English	200.79	25500.50		

As shown in Table 3, a significant difference was found between all the item subset scores of the teacher trainees and NSs ($p < 0.01$ for each item subset except "Indirect Refusals", where "p" is 0.01).

To sum up, no matter looked at on the whole or type by type, the findings suggest that there is an apparent statistically significant difference between the accuracy degrees of the teacher trainees and NSs at interpreting the implied meanings covered in this study.

3.2. Comprehension Speed Differences between Turkish EFL Teacher Trainees and NSs of English

Same as before, Tests of Normality were initially carried out to check if the scores were normally distributed. The response times were not normally distributed for the NSs ($p = .000$) while their distribution proved to be normal for the teacher trainees ($p = .200$). As the former situation would call for the Mann-Whitney U test while the latter would require the t-test, both of them were conducted to see whether their results would support each other's. In the following tables, basic descriptive statistics information and the results of the t-test, which matched with those of the Mann-Whitney U test too, are displayed:

Table 4. Basic Descriptive Statistics on the Response Times

Group	N	Mean (in seconds spent)	% of the "Time Allowed"*	Std. Dev.
Teacher Trainees	144	1064	63.3	192.331
NSs of English	127	769.48	45.8	230.567

* "28 X 60=1680 seconds" for 28 items as 60 seconds were prescribed for each item

As can be seen in the table above, the teacher trainees used 63.3% of the maximum time allowed while the NSs used 45.8% of it. What follows is to see whether this difference is statistically significant or not.

Table 5. Independent-samples T-test Results of the Response Times

Group	N	Mean	S	Sd	t	p
Teacher Trainees	144	1064.00	192.331	269	-11.461	**.000**
NSs of English	127	769.48	230.567			

As is seen, the t-test found a significant difference between the response times (p < 0.01). This suggests that, in terms of the test as a whole, NSs of English are not only more accurate at interpreting the implied meanings but also significantly quicker to respond to them.

4. Discussion

This study found NSs of English to be remarkably more accurate than teacher candidates at interpreting implied meanings. A statistically significant difference in favor of the former was detected between all the item subset scores including "indirect requests (requestive hints) (Weizman, 1993)", "disclosures" and "indirect advice" as well, which were made by this study the subject of investigation for the first time in a MDCT.

These results should all be conforming to Wolfson (1989) and Kasper (1997), who posit that L2 learners often tend to take utterances at face value in lieu of deducing what is meant from what is said, and Bouton (1988, 1992), who found that NNSs tend to interpret implicatures differently from the way NSs do. We see with a closer look that, despite their years of language study that had brought them to an academic setting of ELT training, the participants of this study were not only "different" from but also significantly inferior to NSs' accuracy level. This could be understandable when we consider Bouton's (1994, p. 99) another finding which reveals that NNSs perform noticeably worse on implied meanings (particularly on the types like included in this study) even after having been immersed in an ESL environment for an extended period.

When it comes to the comparison of the response times, it was found that the teacher trainees used 63.3% of the time allowed while the NSs used 45.8% of it, which was another significant difference between the two. While processing speed in interaction does matter in authentic communication, these findings suggest that NSs are not only more accurate at comprehending but also significantly quicker at responding to implied meanings, which is understandable within the presupposition that interpreting such language use would take a relatively long time, even longer for language learners as it is based on the recognition of the mismatch between what is given by the language form itself and what is really intended with it (Verschueren, 1999).

This obviously poorer performance of the teacher trainees in interpretation speed would be explicable with a more specific look too when we take Taguchi (2008) as an example, where a group of ESL learners in the USA outperformed an EFL group in speed of pragmatic comprehension. Given the fact that this is mainly attributable to the abundant incidental processing practice available in the ESL environment (Taguchi, 2011a, p. 913), one can predict quite precisely that NSs would be significantly quicker to respond to implied meanings even in a case where the NNS are advanced learners on the brink of EFL teaching as a profession, which makes the findings possible to be generalized to the preceding stages of the EFL learning environment in Turkey.

At this point it would be worth mentioning that, in our day characterized by globalized communication in multiculturalism, using NS norms as a benchmark for pragmatic behavior may not be so crucial in an FL situation (Wyner & Cohen, 2015, p. 547). Nevertheless, in the strenuous attempt to develop a valid MDCT to measure pragmatic comprehension, this study had the compelling need for

norms to count as the "favored options of interpretation", and no other appropriate way to have them could be conceived than taking the ones on which the NS participants reached a satisfactory compromise in the piloting stages, plus the main study. Apart from that, as Wyner and Cohen (2015, p. 547) put it with a comprehensive look, NS norms as a benchmark can be valuable for learners to have familiarity with what these norms are, regardless of whether they attempt to adhere to them. What is more, such norms would help learners to figure out not only what went wrong in experienced pragmatic failures but also ways in which they could be avoided in future interactions. In this regard and reconsidering the results from its participant group of advanced learners, who are even authorized to study ELT as a profession, this study can be claimed to demonstrate that Turkish learners of EFL would have considerable benefits from instruction on implied meanings as an essential constituent of pragmatics (Levinson, 1983), the competence of which is reported to be crucial for general communicative competence (Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Council of Europe, 2001).

In the grand scheme of things, this proven need for enhancement of pragmatic competence would be predictable from the general air of "neglect" about handling "pragmatics as a learning target" (Brubæk, 2012; Hu, 2014; Segueni, 2014). With a closer look specifically at FL contexts, where learners' opportunities to come into contact with the target language are circumscribed (Kasper, 2001; Cenoz, 2007; Martinez-Flor & Soler, 2007; Taguchi, 2008, 2011; Alagözlü, 2013; Li, 2015) and many textbooks offer classroom learners little opportunity or questionable information for learning L2 pragmatics (Thomas, 1983; Myers-Scotton & Bernstein, 1988; Bardovi-Harlig et al, 1991; Bardovi-Harlig, 2001; Wong, 2002; Vellenga, 2004; Ishihara, 2010; Alagözlü, 2013; Economidou-Kogetsidis; 2015; Li, 2015), the need for instruction to heighten learners' pragmatic awareness (Kasper, 1997, 2001a; Bardovi-Harlig, 2001) would be stressed even more strongly.

When we reconsider the results of this study as specific to FL teacher trainees this time, the fact that the participants revealed signs of weakness in implied meaning interpretation is in line with earlier research reporting about the potentially weak pragmatic competence of NNS teacher candidates (McNeill, 1993; Milambiling, 1999; Pasternak & Bailey, 2004; Alagözlü & Büyüköztürk, 2009; Bektas-Cetinkaya, 2012), which would be a likely consequence of teacher education programs predisposed to neglect pragmatic aspects of language and effective techniques for teaching pragmatics (Bardovi-Harlig, 1992; Karatepe, 2001; Biesenback-Lucas, 2003; Vásquez & Sharpless, 2009; Eslami, 2011; Alagözlü, 2013; Wyner & Cohen, 2015) despite the fact that teacher training is critical as it inevitably influences the ways in which instructional methods and materials are utilized. We know that incorporating pragmatics in FL teacher training has even been reported to be imperative (Ishihara, 2010; Wyner & Cohen, 2015), particularly when motivation is lacking to pay attention to the subtleties associated with that construct. In case of teachers' intentional or unintentional neglect of it, students may view it as a silent acknowledgement that pragmatics is either unimportant or does not exist at all (Wyner & Cohen, 2015, p. 542). In this light, the findings of this study suggest a vicious cycle as it is prospective EFL teachers who are supposed to help future EFL learners have pragmatic competence besides the other areas of language ability.

Looking at the abovementioned points from a practical perspective in terms of "pragmatic flaws and communication", we would come to see preservice EFL teachers, thus their prospective students, at risk of having future breakdowns in cross-cultural communication especially with NSs of English. As Thomas (1983, p. 97) puts it, differently from grammar errors likely to show a language-user as "not so proficient" at worst, pragmatic failures could reflect badly on him/her as a person. In a similar vein, Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei's (1998) study into metapragmatic awareness suggests that native speakers may tend to evaluate pragmatic errors more severely compared to grammatical ones, and the non-native speaker with the pragmatic error may be seen as rude (Crandall and Basturkmen, 2004, p. 38). If we specifically focus on implied meaning misinterpretation as a distinct type of pragmatic flaws, preservice

EFL teachers, thus their prospective students, could be deemed as lacking in handling of implicature, which is a conversational strategy far from being used by only clever and accomplished writers and conversationalists (Green, 1996, p. 66). This lack would take on more meaning in view of such reports suggesting that strict adherence to directness does not necessarily represent 'ideal' communication and part of the communicative competence expected of a speaker situated in a culture is the ability to know when to be alert for implicature and how to process implicature-based utterances (Lakoff, 2009, p. 104). Likewise, McTear (2004) states firmly that a significant facet of conversational competence is meanings that are expressed in a roundabout fashion as people do employ indirect language for purposes like sarcasm, politeness, softening requests etc. In much the same vein, Pichastor (1998) posits that everyday conversations see commonplace use of implicit communication strategies, which is a case that should result in sufficient inclusion of such strategies in textbook materials so that learners could take advantage of their value. In a parallel manner, Bardovi-Harlig (2001, p. 30) declares that providing learners with authentic input for support in handling indirect speech acts and implicature should be viewed as an action of "fair play: giving the learners a fighting-chance" (Yoshida, 2014, p. 262). This support can be considered to rise even more in importance when we recognize the fact that the natural inclination of L2 learners is for literal interpretation, taking utterances at face value rather than thinking that there may be a hidden meaning in what is said (Kasper, 1997).

To avoid communication problems that could stem from pragmatic flaws like ones mentioned above, Kramsch (1998) emphasizes the need to incorporate the cultural dimension into language teaching and use, which could well cover the pragmatic functions and notions expressed through language. As a response to such calls in a context where communicative language teaching model and the notional-functional approach now cover pragmatics as an important objective of instruction (Taguchi, 2013), this study identified an improvable aspect in preservice EFL teachers' pragmatic skills, i.e. handling implicatures, which is also a major constituent of the first pragmatic competence test developed in the field of Applied Linguistics (Roever, 2005). This could be hoped to inspire specific instructional moves for the betterment of the pragmatic competence of any EFL/ESL teacher trainee or learner in need of that, which takes on a new meaning when we remember the reports on the fact that the language teaching practices, materials and assessment in contexts like Turkey tend to be grammar-oriented (Özmen, 2012; Uztosun, 2013; Erkmen, 2014). According to Alagözlü (2013, p. 8), that would partly explain why Turkish students lag far behind in FL learning compared to many other world countries.

5. Conclusions

To sum up before the concluding remarks, the first practical step of this study was developing a MDCT as the data collection instrument. As the following step, the test was administered to relatively big groups of EFL teacher trainees and NSs to have comparable sets of data. The results showed that the native speakers were significantly faster and more accurate in implied meaning comprehension than the teacher trainees.

To briefly mention the significance of the study in light of the procedure outlined above, we could begin with the fact that it developed a MDCT that is usable both in a computerized and pen-and-paper format and measures "accuracy" together with "speed", which accords with the perspective put by Taguchi (2005, 2007, 2008, 2011) stating that not many studies had addressed fluency or processing speed in language learners' pragmatic performance. Besides that, special care was taken in the test to include some particular subsections of items in response to the calls in the literature for integration of different implied meaning types to add to our understanding of pragmatic comprehension in a target language. What is more, the focus of the test overall, thus the study itself, was on "implicature (implied

meanings)" so that the study could keep out of the reported weight of "speech acts" in pragmatics research and provide a new perspective upon another important but lesser-studied component of pragmatics.

Another major point adding to the significance of the study would be that it was conducted in a foreign language context, where a learner's opportunities to come into contact with the target language are not plenty and instruction is noted to be especially necessary in developing pragmatic awareness. What is more, the focus was specifically on non-native English-speaking teacher trainees, who have been reported to be in a disadvantageous position when compared to native speaker teachers in many areas including pragmatics. Given the fact that teacher training is critical as it inevitably influences how instructional practices are used in the future, it is important that the present study looked into problems in a major area of pragmatics for prospective EFL teachers, who will be supposed to help their own students to have pragmatic competence as well. Another point that would enhance the significance of the study is that it was conducted with participants with a relatively less studied L1 background (Turkish language), which was a response to the call in the literature that the range of L1 and target languages needs to be extended (Rose, 2005, p. 389) so that researchers and language educators are better supported to evaluate to what extent findings from studies of a particular L1 or target language could be transferable to other language combinations.

On the grounds of the limitations of this study and the experiences that accumulated throughout its conduct, some recommendations can be made for further research.

First of all, considering the fact that this study (like many other previous inspiring studies) measured pragmatic comprehension with a reading instrument while people mostly "see and hear" in real-life communication, the data collection procedures in similar future studies could be designed as based on a sufficient number of readymade video extracts or fictionalized dramas to the purpose. Provided that this is achieved with proper validation work in a manner where audiovisual items would not impede but aid the watchers or listeners, the measurement of pragmatic interpretation could include such clues as tone of voice, setting, gestures and facial expressions, which all can express so much meaning together with or independently of the words there (Yamanaka, 2003, p. 129). In this regard, the ideal to be pursued within this framework would most probably be extracting discourse samples with the target implied meanings via corpora/concordance work and producing scenes out of them with proper use of tone of voice, facial expressions and gestures not open to ambiguity (Gruba, 2000). The fuller the extent to which this is achieved, the more likely it would be to use the products in both data collection and instruction procedures, which would give the researchers the chance to base their studies on authentic materials as much as possible.

In the context of discussing the content and scope of studies which are similar to this one, another recommendation for further research could me made about the identification and integration of even more implied meaning types into the designs so that we can add to our understanding of pragmatic comprehension/interpretation and learn which ones of them could be troublesome to EFL/ESL learners and why, which is an attempt made by the present study with the integration of some relatively under-investigated implicatures like "indirect pieces of advice" and "indirect requests". What is more, the range of L1s and target languages in studies on pragmatic interpretation and instruction could be expanded so that investigators and language educators can better assess whether and to what extent findings from studies of a particular L1 or target language may be valid in terms of other language combinations. Besides all these, incorporating the abovementioned features and more for the best validation work possible, further research could be conducted also on how competent language learners are in terms of "producing" implied meanings. This would provide a new perspective in studies of this one's kind beyond the focus merely on comprehension/interpretation.

Taking account of the fact the present study was conducted only with the first-year EFL teacher candidates at a national university in Turkey, who would be viewed also as relatively advanced EFL learners, similar studies could be carried out with learners of different proficiency levels and/or characteristics both in EFL and ESL environments so that the findings can be enhanced in generalizability beyond the subjects of the present study. This would pave the way for understanding who lag behind to what extent at implicature comprehension and what kind of instruction could do to help them. In that regard, the present study is also the fundamental component of a research project where the effects of a filmic materials-based instructional kit, which had been devised by the researcher to help the comprehension and/or production of implied meanings, were tested and some promising results were obtained.

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İma yollu ifadelerin doğru ve hızlı yorumlanmasında Türk İngilizce öğretmeni adaylarıyla anadili İngilizce olan kişilerin karşılaştırılması

Öz

Bu araştırmanın amacı, iletişimsel yeterliliğin bileşenlerinden biri olan Edimbilim becerilerinin "ima yollu ifadeler" boyutunun yorumlanmasında Türkiye'deki İngilizce öğretmeni adaylarının ne derece yetkin olduklarını ortaya çıkarmaktır. Bu çerçevede ilk olarak bir "çoktan seçmeli söylem tamamlama testi" geliştirilmiştir. Bu test 127 kişilik bir "anadili İngilizce olanlar grubuna" ve 144 kişilik bir "1. sınıf İngilizce öğretmeni adayları" grubuna verilmiştir. Elde edilen nicel verilere göre, İngilizcedeki ima yollu ifadelerin yorumlanmasında gerek doğruluk gerekse de hız anlamında, anadili İngilizce olanlarla öğretmen adayları arasında ilk grup lehine anlamlı bir fark çıkmıştır. Öğretmen eğitimi sürecinin gelecekteki öğretme pratikleri ve öğrenme deneyimleri üzerindeki kritik etkisi düşünüldüğünde, İngilizce öğretmeni adaylarının edimbilimsel becerilerinde geliştirilmeye muhtaç ve açık bir alanın saptanmış olması bu çalışmanın amaçları ve ilgili literatür bağlamında önem arz etmektedir.

Anahtar sözcükler: edimbilim; edimbilimsel anlama/anlamlandırma; ima yollu (sezdirili) ifadeler; öğretmen eğitimi

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