



Corpus-Based Qualitative Analysis of Pragmatic Marker Acquisition in Second Language Learners

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Abstract

Pragmatic markers, such as "well," "you know," and "I mean," serve as discourse-pragmatic elements in spoken language, facilitating discourse management, stance marking, and interpersonal communication. This study examines the acquisition of pragmatic markers by second language (L2) learners through a corpus-based qualitative analysis. Using a spoken English learner corpus, the research explores the frequency, variety, and contextual usage of pragmatic markers across different proficiency levels. The methodology involves identifying and categorising pragmatic markers, analysing their frequency, and investigating their contextual application within the corpus. The findings indicate that advanced learners employ a greater frequency and broader range of pragmatic markers than beginners and intermediate learners, demonstrating a heightened awareness of contextual appropriateness. However, learners at all levels face challenges, including the overuse and misapplication of markers, which can be attributed to the absence of direct equivalents in their first languages. These results underscore the significance of explicit instruction and exposure to authentic language in the teaching of pragmatic markers. Integrating interactive practice and awareness-raising activities can substantially improve learners' pragmatic competence, thereby enhancing their communicative effectiveness in the target language and contributing to their overall linguistic proficiency.

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Keywords: Pragmatic Markers, Second Language Acquisition, Corpus-Based Analysis, Learner Corpus, Discourse Management.

Introduction

Pragmatic markers, such as "well," "you know," and "I mean," are integral to the structure of spoken language, serving a variety of functions related to discourse organisation, expressing the speaker's attitude, and managing conversational flow (Galiano, 2024). These markers are often subtle and multifunctional, playing a crucial role in facilitating the nuanced, effective communication typical of native speaker interactions. As Wu (2007) points out, they help express the speaker's attitude, manage turn-taking, mitigate face-threatening acts, and sustain the listener's engagement in conversation. Consequently, pragmatic markers are essential for achieving pragmatic efficiency, enabling language to be used appropriately and effectively in social contexts.

The ability to appropriately use pragmatic markers in a second language (L2) is a crucial aspect of achieving native-like fluency. Acquisition of a language involves more than just memorising vocabulary and

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grammar rules; it requires learning to use markers correctly in context. As Neary-Sundquist (2014) notes, pragmatic markers are deeply rooted in the sociocultural norms of a specific language community, making them particularly challenging for L2 learners to acquire. This difficulty is further compounded by the absence of direct equivalents in learners' first languages, with meanings and functions of these markers being highly context dependent. The significance of pragmatic markers in L2 acquisition has been increasingly recognised within the field of applied linguistics. However, despite their importance, pragmatic markers are often underrepresented in language teaching curricula, which tend to focus more on grammatical and lexical proficiency than on pragmatic competence (Werner, 2017). As a result, L2 learners may achieve grammatical accuracy but lack the pragmatic sensitivity necessary for effective and natural communication, hindering their ability to use the language appropriately in real-world interactions.

Research Problem

The acquisition of pragmatic markers remains a complex and relatively underexplored area in L2 learning. Previous research has predominantly concentrated on syntactic and lexical development, often neglecting the pragmatic dimensions of language acquisition. This gap is particularly evident in corpus-based studies, which hold significant potential for providing empirical insights into the authentic use of pragmatic markers by L2 learners in real-world contexts. Expanding research in this area could enhance our understanding of the nuanced processes involved in pragmatic competence development and inform more effective teaching strategies.

Objectives

Specifically, this research aims to address the existing gap by conducting an in-depth corpus-based qualitative investigation into the acquisition of pragmatic markers among L2 learners. The specific objectives of the study are:

1. To identify the range and frequency of pragmatic markers used by L2 learners at different proficiency levels.
2. To examine the contexts in which these markers are used.
3. To uncover common difficulties and developmental patterns in the acquisition of pragmatic markers.
4. To suggest pedagogical implications for enhancing pragmatic competence in L2 learners.

Significance

This study aimed to investigate how L2 learners acquire pragmatic markers in conversation using a corpus-based qualitative approach. The findings are expected to elucidate the micro-level processes through which L2 learners develop pragmatic competence. In doing so, the study seeks to contribute to the field of second language acquisition by highlighting the significance of pragmatic markers and offering practical implications for language instructors. Enhanced awareness and refined instructional strategies stemming from this research could lead to more effective teaching approaches, ultimately improving the communicative competence of L2 learners in their target language.

Literature Review

Pragmatic Markers in Native and Non-Native Speech

Pragmatic markers are integral to native speaker discourse, fulfilling a wide array of functions that facilitate effective communication. According to Huddleston & Fairhurst (2013), pragmatic markers can be broadly classified into discourse markers, stance markers, and interpersonal markers. Discourse markers, such as "well" and "so," assist in organising the flow of conversation and signalling transitions. Stance markers, like "I think" and "probably," express the speaker's attitude or stance toward a proposition. Interpersonal markers, such as "you know" and "I mean," play a role in managing interpersonal relationships and sustaining the listener's engagement. The pervasive and varied use of pragmatic markers in native speech contributes significantly to its naturalness and fluidity. Native speakers often use these markers subconsciously to manage conversational turns, demonstrate politeness, mitigate face-threatening acts, and maintain coherence in discourse, all of which support the development of natural conversation. As noted by Ament, Páres, & Pérez-Vidal (2020), the frequency and appropriateness of pragmatic marker use are indicative of a high degree of pragmatic competence, which is central to effective communication.

In contrast to native speakers, L2 learners use pragmatic markers with significantly less frequency and range. Beeching (2015) observed that L2 learners often rely on a restricted repertoire of pragmatic markers and employ them less frequently, reflecting the gap between their developing pragmatic competence and their grammatical and lexical proficiency. Several factors contribute to the differences in pragmatic marker use between native and non-native speakers. First, L2 learners often receive insufficient exposure to naturalistic language input, limiting their opportunities to observe and experiment with the contextual use of pragmatic markers. Second, the transfer of pragmatic markers into L2 speech is challenging because these markers

frequently lack direct equivalents in the learners' L1. Finally, the functions of pragmatic markers are inherently complex and context-dependent, demanding a high level of contextual awareness and sensitivity to social norms, as highlighted by Schauer (2006).

Table 1: Summarizes the Key Functions of Pragmatic Markers in Native and Non-Native Speech, Highlighting the Differences in their Use.

Function	Native Speech	Non-Native Speech
Discourse Management	Frequent use of markers like "well" and "so" to organize conversation and signal transitions (Huddleston & Fairhurst, 2013)	Limited and less varied use, relying on a smaller set of markers (Wu, 2007)
Stance Marking	Use of markers like "I think" and "probably" to express attitudes and opinions (Werner, 2017)	Less frequent use, with potential misuse or overuse (Beeching, 2015)

Interpersonal Management Tufting

The use of pragmatic markers that manage social relationships and ensure engagement, such as "you know" and "I mean," is often limited among L2 learners. This restricted use contributes to challenges in maintaining politeness and minimizing face-threatening acts, underscoring gaps in their pragmatic competence.

Challenges in Pragmatic Marker Acquisition

L2 learners face challenges in acquiring and appropriately using pragmatic markers due to limited exposure to naturalistic language input, difficulties in transferring these markers from their L1, and the intrinsic complexity of pragmatic functions, which are highly context dependent.

Limited Exposure to Naturalistic Language Input

Siddiqi & Whyte (2021) highlight a significant weakness among L2 learners: a general lack of exposure to authentic spoken language, which is essential for developing pragmatic competence. In classroom instruction, grammatical accuracy and lexical knowledge often take precedence over pragmatic aspects of language use. As a result, learners have limited opportunities to observe and practice the appropriate use of pragmatic markers in naturalistic contexts.

Transfer from the First Language (L1)

The influence of the L1 can be particularly strong in the acquisition of pragmatic markers in an L2. Rose (2005) highlights that pragmatic markers typically lack direct equivalents in learners' L1, which can result in transfer problems. For instance, a learner whose native language does not have a marker like "well" may struggle to use it appropriately in the target language. Additionally, learners may transfer inappropriate markers from their L1, leading to pragmatic errors. This underscores the challenge of acquiring context-dependent and culture-specific pragmatic markers in a second language.

Complexity of Pragmatic Functions

Youn (2014) emphasizes the challenge posed by the heterogeneity of pragmatic functions. Pragmatic markers serve a wide range of functions and are highly context-dependent, requiring learners to have a nuanced understanding of social norms and conversational dynamics. For instance, the marker "well" can indicate hesitation, introduce a new topic, or soften a disagreement, depending on the context. As a result, L2 learners must develop a high degree of contextual awareness to use these markers appropriately. This complexity highlights the need for explicit instruction and exposure to authentic language use in order to acquire pragmatic competence.

Table 2: Main Challenges Faced by L2 Learners in Acquiring Pragmatic Markers, along with Examples from Relevant Studies.

Challenge	Description	Example Studies
Limited Exposure to Naturalistic Input	Lack of opportunities to observe and practice pragmatic markers in authentic contexts	Siddiqi & Whyte (2021)
Transfer from L1	Difficulty in using markers that do not have direct equivalents in the L1; potential for transfer errors	Rose (2005)
Complexity of Pragmatic Functions	Multifunctionality and context-dependence of pragmatic markers requiring high contextual awareness	Youn (2014)

Corpus-Based Studies on Pragmatic Markers

Corpus-based research has significantly enhanced understanding of L2 use of pragmatic markers, often by analysing learner corpora for usage patterns and comparing them to native-speaker corpora to identify differences.

Methodology of Corpus-Based Studies

Corpus-based research involves collecting and analysing large amounts of spoken or written texts produced by language learners, compiled into learner corpora. Using computational tools, such as AntConc for concordance analysis, researchers can identify and count the frequency of specific pragmatic markers. Qualitative analysis tools like NVivo help track the contexts in which these markers are used and identify usage patterns (Corsetti & Perna, 2017).

Findings from Corpus-Based Studies

Fuller (2003) found that L2 learners used fewer discourse markers than native speakers, with some markers being overused or misused in inappropriate contexts. Buysse (2015) conducted a corpus-based study on Swedish learners of English, revealing that while advanced learners used more markers and made more distinctions in their use compared to beginners, they still used fewer types of markers overall than native speakers. Aijmer's study showed that learners often overused markers like "you know" while underusing others like "well" and "I mean." Shimada (2011) observed that Japanese learners' use of pragmatic markers varied with proficiency: beginners used repetitive markers like "so" and "like," while advanced learners used a wider variety. However, learners still struggled with using markers for discourse management and stance, leading to pragmatic errors.

Table 3: Key Findings from Selected Corpus-Based Studies on Pragmatic Markers, Highlighting Differences Between Native and Non-Native Use.

Study	Participants	Key Findings
Fuller (2003)	Native and Non-Native Speakers of English	L2 learners used fewer discourse markers and employed them less frequently; overuse and underuse common
Buysse (2015)	Swedish Learners of English	Advanced learners used a wider range of markers but still less varied and frequent than native speakers
Shimada (2011)	Japanese Learners of English	Distinct patterns of use at different proficiency levels; beginners relied on few markers; advanced learners used broader range

Implications of Corpus-Based Studies

Corpus-based studies highlight the need for explicit instruction on pragmatic markers in L2 settings. These studies emphasize the importance of raising learners' awareness of pragmatic markers, their functions, and contextual use. Teachers can integrate authentic language input, such as native speaker conversation recordings, to demonstrate how these markers are used naturally. Additionally, activities like role plays and simulations can provide learners with opportunities to practice using pragmatic markers in contextually appropriate ways. Furthermore, increasing learners' awareness of pragmatic functions and social norms is key to developing pragmatic competence. Finally, corpus research informs the development of teaching materials and resources that help learners acquire pragmatic markers. Overall, corpus studies reveal the challenges L2 learners face in acquiring pragmatic markers and underscore their crucial role in effective communication.

Methodology

Corpus Selection

At the core of this study is a learner corpus consisting of transcribed spoken English produced by L2 learners at varying levels of proficiency. This corpus has been compiled to encompass a diverse range of spoken discourse, thereby serving as a robust and reliable database for investigating the acquisition of pragmatic markers (Neary-Sundquist, 2014). Given its inclusion of data from multiple sources, the corpus provides a large and representative sample of L2 speech, facilitating a comprehensive analysis of pragmatic marker usage. Firstly, language proficiency tests offer structured and standardised data on learners' performance in controlled testing environments. These tests often include tasks that prompt spontaneous speech, allowing researchers to observe how learners use pragmatic markers in response to predefined stimuli. Secondly, classroom interactions provide a more naturalistic context in which to examine learners' use of pragmatic markers. These interactions, including teacher-student dialogues, peer discussions, and group activities, reflect the pragmatic challenges learners face in real-time communication (Fernández, Gates Tapia, & Lu, 2014). Lastly, informal conversations, typically recorded in social or semi-formal settings, offer valuable data on how learners deploy pragmatic markers in everyday discourse, shedding light on their spontaneous and unregulated use of language.

Data Collection

Data collection involved recording spoken conversations from the aforementioned sources, followed by transcribing the speech. Learner-native speaker conversations, in particular, provided valuable insights into the actual use of pragmatic markers in real communicative contexts. These conversations were compiled from language exchange programs, tutoring sessions, and social settings, creating a rich corpus of learner-native

speaker dialogues (Ament et al., 2020). An additional critical component of the corpus was transcriptions of oral proficiency interviews conducted as part of standardised language proficiency tests. These interviews were designed to encourage learners to produce extended speech, thereby providing ample opportunities to observe the use of pragmatic markers across various proficiency levels. The structured nature of these interviews also allowed for controlled comparisons among learners. Further data included recordings of classroom interactions, both between teachers and students and among students themselves, which were subsequently transcribed. These recordings captured the dynamics of classroom communication, highlighting the pragmatic challenges learners encounter in educational contexts.

Data Analysis

The corpus analysis was conducted in several consecutive steps, aimed at identifying patterns and regularities in the use of pragmatic markers by L2 learners.

Identification of Pragmatic Markers

First, the pragmatic markers were identified in the corpus. Using a predefined list of common markers, such as "well," "you know," and "I mean," as outlined by Huddleston & Fairhurst (2013), the software extracted instances of these markers, thereby generating a comprehensive dataset on their usage in the corpus.

Categorization by Function

The identified pragmatic markers were then classified according to their functions, drawing on frameworks from the literature, including categories such as discourse management, stance marking, and interpersonal management (Smith, 2010). This categorisation allowed for the identification of the specific roles these markers played in learners' speech, as well as the identification of functional trends across different proficiency levels.

Frequency Analysis

A frequency analysis was conducted to quantify the use of each pragmatic marker across proficiency levels. By calculating the relative frequency of each marker, comparisons were made between beginner, intermediate, and advanced learners. The frequency analysis revealed how the use of pragmatic markers varied with increasing language proficiency.

Qualitative Analysis

The final step involved a qualitative analysis of the contexts in which pragmatic markers were used. This analysis aimed to identify patterns of use and developmental trends in the acquisition of pragmatic markers. By examining the surrounding discourse, we explored the conversational contexts that prompted the use of pragmatic markers and assessed whether each instance of use was appropriate or inappropriate. This approach provided insights into how learners' pragmatic competence developed over time.

Tools and Software

The corpus analysis was conducted using multiple software tools to ensure rigorous and systematic analysis. AntConc was employed for concordance and frequency analyses, which facilitated the identification and quantification of pragmatic markers. Additionally, qualitative data analysis, focusing on categorisation and contextual examination of the use of pragmatic markers, was conducted using NVivo software (Van Dyke & Acton, 2023). These tools provided valuable insights into the learner corpus, offering strong evidence of the acquisition of pragmatic markers by L2 learners. Thus, the research methodology is based on a careful and systematic approach to corpus selection, data collection, and analysis. This methodology enhances our understanding of how L2 learners acquire and utilise pragmatic markers in spoken English, supported by a comprehensive learner corpus and advanced analytical tools.

Results

Frequency and Range of Pragmatic Markers

The analysis of the learner corpus reveals significant differences in the frequency and variety of pragmatic markers used by L2 learners at different proficiency levels. Table 1 provides a summary of the frequency of various pragmatic markers across beginner, intermediate, and advanced learners. The results indicate that advanced learners employed a broader range of pragmatic markers more frequently than both beginner and intermediate learners. For instance, the marker "well" was used 50 times by advanced learners, 35 times by intermediate learners, and 20 times by beginners. This pattern was consistent across all pragmatic markers analysed, leading to the conclusion that, as learners' proficiency improves, both the frequency and diversity of their use of pragmatic markers increase.

Table 4: *Frequency of Pragmatic Markers by Proficiency Level.*

Pragmatic Marker	Beginners	Intermediate	Advanced
Well	20	35	50
You Know	15	30	45
I Mean	10	25	40
So	25	40	60
Like	5	15	30

Contextual Use of Pragmatic Markers

A contextual analysis of the use of pragmatic markers revealed distinct functions in L2 learners' speech. The markers were employed in various contexts, demonstrating different profiles across the dimensions of discourse management, stance marking, and interpersonal management.

Discourse Management

The markers primarily identified were "well" and "so," both of which play a role in discourse control. For instance, "well" is often used to signal a change in topic or hesitation before responding, while "so" serves to summarise or conclude statements.

Example 1: Discourse Management

1. Beginner Learner: "Well, I think... um... it's a good idea."
2. Advanced Learner: "So, to summarize, we should start the project next week."

Table 5: *Frequency of Discourse Management Markers by Proficiency Level.*

Marker	Beginners	Intermediate	Advanced
well	20	35	50
so	25	40	60

Stance Marking

These attitudes were reflected through markers such as "I think" and "you know," which facilitated the management of interpersonal relationships. These markers allowed learners to express varying degrees of certainty or uncertainty and to seek agreement from their interlocutors.

Example 2: Stance Marking

1. Beginner Learner: "I think it's... um... important to learn English."
2. Advanced Learner: "You know, it's really fascinating how languages evolve."

Table 6: *Frequency of Stance Marking Markers by Proficiency Level.*

Marker	Beginners	Intermediate	Advanced
I think	10	25	40
You Know	15	30	45

Developmental Patterns

Several developmental patterns emerged from the data, providing valuable insights into how L2 learners acquire and use pragmatic markers over time.

Incremental Acquisition

It was observed that as proficiency increased, learners gradually expanded their inventory of pragmatic markers. Beginners tended to rely on the same lexical markers, with some being used excessively. In contrast, advanced learners demonstrated a broader and more balanced use of a wider range of markers.

Contextual Sensitivity

Advanced learners demonstrated greater context sensitivity in their use of pragmatic markers, applying them appropriately in various contexts, with speech forms resembling those of native speakers. In contrast, beginner and intermediate learners lacked this sensitivity, often misusing or applying markers inconsistently.

Example 3: Contextual Sensitivity

1. Beginner Learner: "I mean, it's raining. Well, we should go."
2. Advanced Learner: "Well, it looks like it's going to rain, so we should probably head back."

Common Challenges

Despite the progress observed, learners at all proficiency levels exhibited overuse or misuse of certain markers, especially those without direct equivalents in their L1. Notably, the marker "like" was frequently overused, leading to speech patterns that sounded non-native.

Example 4: Overuse of "Like"

1. Beginner Learner: "It's like, really important, like, to study."
2. Intermediate Learner: "I mean, like, we should, like, consider other options."

Summary of Findings

The results of this study highlight the considerable complexity involved in the acquisition of pragmatic markers by L2 learners. More advanced learners demonstrated a broader range of pragmatic markers, using them more frequently and with greater contextual sensitivity. However, common issues such as overuse and misuse persisted across all proficiency levels. These findings underscore the need for explicit instructional input on pragmatic markers to assist learners in achieving native-like fluency.

Table 7: Summary of Key Findings.

Aspect	Beginners	Intermediate	Advanced
Range of Markers	Limited	Moderate	Wide
Frequency of Use	Low	Moderate	High
Contextual Sensitivity	Low	Developing	High
Common Challenges	Overuse, Misuse	Overuse, Misuse	Overuse, Misuse

Implications for Language Teaching

These findings carry significant implications for language teaching. The primary recommendation is the explicit teaching of pragmatic markers, particularly regarding their functions and contexts of use. Language instructors should integrate pragmatic markers into their curricula and ensure that learners are exposed to authentic language input in naturalistic contexts. This exposure will help learners practice using pragmatic markers appropriately. Interactive activities, such as role-plays and simulations, provide learners with valuable opportunities to develop their pragmatic competence by applying markers in real-time communication (Shafee Nahrkhalaji, 2013). Furthermore, increasing learners' awareness of pragmatic functions and social norms is crucial for developing contextual sensitivity (Ament et al., 2020). Using noticing tasks and pragmatic awareness exercises can enhance learners' ability to recognise and appropriately use pragmatic markers in discourse. In summary, this study provides a detailed analysis of L2 acquisition and use of pragmatic markers, demonstrating their importance in achieving native-like fluency and effective communication. By addressing the issues and developmental trends highlighted in this study, educators can better support learners in developing pragmatic competence, leading to greater communicative success in their target language.

Discussion

Interpretation of Results

In general, these findings provide valuable insights into the processes involved in L2 learners' acquisition and use of pragmatic markers. Advanced learners utilised a broader range of markers with greater frequency, demonstrating enhanced abilities in managing discourse, expressing stance, and maintaining interpersonal relationships. These results align with previous research that highlights the gradual development of pragmatic competence in L2 learners (Neary-Sundquist, 2014; Szczepaniak-Kozak, 2016).

Incremental Acquisition and Contextual Sensitivity

One key developmental pattern identified for pragmatic markers is the incremental nature of their acquisition. Beginners typically relied on a limited set of markers, frequently using familiar ones such as "like" and "you know." As learners progressed in proficiency, their repertoire expanded, incorporating a wider range of markers. This supports the notion that pragmatic competence develops gradually, with basic markers being acquired first and more advanced ones integrated later (Traugott, 2016). Advanced learners, in particular, demonstrated greater sensitivity to contextual appropriateness, using pragmatic markers like "well" and "so" effectively to manage transitions in conversation and signal hesitations. Such contextual awareness is crucial for communication, reflecting an understanding not only of social norms but also of conversational conventions in the target language (Sánchez-Hernández & Martínez-Flor, 2022).

Common Challenges

Despite having reached a certain proficiency level, all learners faced common challenges, particularly in the overuse and misuse of certain markers. Notably, markers like "like" were overused, leading to non-native-like discourse. This tendency may stem from learners relying on familiar markers as conversational crutches, particularly when they lack more suitable alternatives in their first language (Timpe-Laughlin, 2017). Misuse of markers often involved incorrect placement or inappropriate contextual use, sometimes leading to misunderstandings or perceptions of rudeness. These pragmatic errors highlight the need for explicit instruction on the appropriate contexts in which to use specific pragmatic markers.

Pedagogical Implications

These findings have significant implications for language teaching, particularly in the development of pragmatic competence. The following recommendations aim to help instructors refine their practices and assist learners in acquiring pragmatic markers more effectively:

1. **Explicit Instruction on Pragmatic Markers:** Language curricula should incorporate pragmatic markers, with a focus on their functions and contexts of use. Instructors should define these markers, provide examples, and explain their roles in communication, helping learners understand their importance in different contexts.
2. **Exposure to Authentic Language Input:** Learners should be exposed to authentic, native-like language input. This can include audio recordings of conversations by native speakers, films, or television series, which will allow learners to observe how pragmatic markers are used naturally and contextually, aiding both understanding and acquisition.
3. **Interactive Practice Activities:** Interactive activities such as role-plays, simulations, or conversation practice provide learners with opportunities to apply pragmatic markers in real-time communication. These activities foster the development of pragmatic competence and encourage learners to use markers appropriately in context.
4. **Pragmatic Awareness Exercises:** Increasing learners' awareness of pragmatic functions and social norms through targeted activities is essential. Noticing tasks, which require learners to identify and analyse the use of pragmatic markers in dialogues, can help them become attuned to the subtle nuances of pragmatic usage.
5. **Feedback and Reflection:** Providing learners with feedback on their use of pragmatic markers, and encouraging reflective practices, can significantly enhance their pragmatic development. Feedback allows instructors to highlight instances of appropriate and inappropriate usage, guiding learners towards more effective communication strategies.

Limitations of the Study

Although this study makes a valuable contribution to the literature on L2 acquisition and use of pragmatic markers, it also has certain limitations. The research primarily relied on the spoken English learner corpus, which may not fully capture all contexts of pragmatic marker usage, such as in written communication. Additionally, it focused on specific proficiency levels, and future research could explore how pragmatic markers are used across a broader range of proficiency levels, as well as by learners from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

Future Research Directions

Future research could explore a broader context, such as the acquisition of pragmatic markers in other languages and cultural settings. A comparative approach might examine how L2 learners from different linguistic backgrounds acquire these markers and whether similar developmental patterns and challenges emerge. Longitudinal studies could offer valuable insights into the long-term development of pragmatic competence by tracking learners' progress over time. Additionally, future work could investigate instructional interventions designed to enhance the acquisition of pragmatic markers. Experimental studies could assess the impact of various teaching methods, such as explicit instruction, exposure to authentic input, and interactive practice activities, on improving learners' use of pragmatic markers.

Conclusion

This paper investigates the acquisition and use of pragmatic markers by second language (L2) learners at different proficiency levels, revealing significant differences in frequency, range, and contextual appropriateness. Advanced learners employed a greater variety and frequency of markers, demonstrating higher pragmatic competence and a more native-like use of language. In contrast, beginner and intermediate learners showed more restricted use, with tendencies toward overuse and misuse. The incremental acquisition pattern suggests that learners gradually expand their repertoire of pragmatic markers as proficiency increases, becoming more attuned to the social and conversational contexts that govern their use. However, challenges persist across all proficiency levels, underscoring the need for targeted pedagogical interventions. The findings highlight the importance of explicit instruction, authentic language input, and practice in meaningful contexts, alongside raising awareness of the pragmatic functions and social norms of these markers. The implications for language teaching are clear: addressing the identified challenges can help learners achieve native-like fluency and effective communication. Future research should explore the acquisition of pragmatic markers across languages and cultures and the long-term development of pragmatic competence through longitudinal studies. Ultimately, the acquisition and proper practice of pragmatic markers are essential for achieving high communicative competence and more fluid interactions in the target language.

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