

**EFFECTS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE
PROFICIENCY ON PRAGMATIC PRODUCTION
AND COMPREHENSION OF APOLOGY
AMONGST JORDANIAN EFL LEARNERS**

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by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iii
LIST OF TABLES	viii
LIST OF FIGURES	xi
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	xiii
LIST OF APPENDICES.....	xv
ABSTRAK.....	xvi
ABSTRACT	xviii
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Overview of the Study	1
1.2 Background to the Study.....	3
1.2.1 Pragmatic Competence.....	3
1.2.2 The Status of English Language in Jordan	7
1.2.3 Problems Faced by Jordanian EFL Learners	11
1.3 Statement of the Problem.....	14
1.4 Research Objectives	18
1.5 Research Questions	18
1.6 Significance of the Study	19
1.7 Limitations of the Study	21
1.8 Definition of Key Terms.....	22
1.9 Conclusion	24
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW.....	25
2.1 Introduction.....	25

2.2	Pragmatic Competence	25
2.3	Interlanguage Pragmatics (ILP)	34
2.3.1	ILP Research Design	37
2.3.1(a)	Longitudinal Research Design.....	38
2.3.1(b)	Cross-sectional Research Design.....	41
2.4	Related Theories.....	44
2.4.1	Cognitive Approaches	44
2.4.1(a)	Two-dimensional Model of Language Proficiency Development.....	46
2.4.2	Speech Act Theory	50
2.5	Related Studies.....	55
2.5.1	The Effect of Language Proficiency on Pragmatic Competence.....	55
2.5.2	Definition and Classification of Apology Strategies	64
2.5.3	ILP Studies on the Speech Act of Apology	68
2.5.4	Studies on Speech Act of Apology in Jordan	74
2.6	Conceptual Framework.....	83
2.7	Conclusion	89
CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY		90
3.1	Introduction.....	90
3.2	Research Design of the Study	90
3.3	Population and Sampling	97
3.3.1	EFL Learner Groups.....	100
3.3.2	Native Speakers of English.....	101
3.4	Ethical Issues.....	102
3.5	Methods of Data Collection	103
3.5.1	Discourse Completion Tasks (DCTs)	104
3.5.1(a)	Advantages and Disadvantages of DCT	106

3.5.1(b)	The Adapted WDCT	108
3.5.1(c)	Description of Situations	109
3.5.2	Focus Group Interviews	112
3.6	Pilot Study.....	119
3.6.1	Pilot Study of WDCT Questionnaire	120
3.6.2	Developing MDCT Questionnaire	121
3.6.3	Pilot Study of Focus Group Interview.....	123
3.7	Procedures of Data Collection	123
3.8	Data Analysis	125
3.8.1	Quantitative Data Analysis	129
3.8.2	Qualitative Data Analysis.....	132
3.9	Answering Research Questions.....	134
3.10	Data Screening	135
3.10.1	Checking for Errors.....	135
3.10.2	Missing Values.....	135
3.11	Validity and Reliability of the Study.....	136
3.12	Trustworthiness of Qualitative Data.....	137
3.13	Conclusion	139
CHAPTER 4 RESULTS.....		140
4.1	Introduction.....	140
4.2	Jordanian BEFLLs' Production of Apology Strategies.....	141
4.2.1	Explicit Strategy Used by BEFLL	141
4.2.2	Less Explicit Strategy Used by BEFLL	146
4.2.3	Non-apology Strategy Used by BEFLL	149
4.3	Jordanian IEFLLs' Production of Apology Strategy	150
4.3.1	Explicit Strategy Used by IEFLL	151
4.3.2	Less Explicit Strategy Used by IEFLL	155

4.3.3	Non-apology Strategy Used by IEFLL	159
4.4	Jordanian AEFLLs' Production of Apology Strategies.....	160
4.4.1	Explicit Strategy Used by AEFLL.....	161
4.4.2	Less Explicit Strategy Used by AEFLL.....	163
4.4.3	Non-apology Strategy Used by AEFLL.....	167
4.5	The Correlation between Jordanian EFL Learners' Levels of Proficiency and Pragmatic Production of Explicit Strategy	177
4.5.1	The Correlation between Jordanian EFL Learners' Levels of Proficiency and Pragmatic Production of Less Explicit Strategy.....	181
4.5.2	The Correlation between Jordanian EFL Learners' Levels of Proficiency and Pragmatic Production of Non-Apology Strategy.....	186
4.6	The Correlation between Jordanian EFL Learners' Levels of Proficiency and Pragmatic Comprehension of Explicit, less Explicit, and Non-Apology Strategy	188
4.7	Pragmatic Development of Jordanian EFL learners' Production of the Speech Act of Apology.....	190
4.7.1	Overall Use of Sub-Strategies of Explicit Strategy by NSE, BEFLL, IEFLL, and AEFLL.....	190
4.7.2	Overall Use of Sub-Strategies of Less Explicit Strategy by NSE, BEFLL, IEFLL, and AEFLL.....	194
4.7.3	Overall Use of Sub-strategies of Non-apology Strategy by NSE, BEFLL, IEFLL, and AEFLL.....	199
4.8	Jordanian EFL Learners' Explanation of their Selection of Apology Strategies.....	204
4.8.1	Theme 1: Similar Belief of the Purpose of the Speech Act of Apology	204
4.8.2	Theme 2: Difference in English Learning Activities Outside Classroom	205
4.8.3	Theme 3: Difference in Choice of Apology Strategies	208
4.8.4	Theme 4: Difference in Preference of Questionnaire	211
4.9	Summary of Research Findings	214
4.9.1	Jordanian EFL Learners' Expression of Apology.....	214

4.9.2	The Correlation between Jordanian EFL Learners' Level of Proficiency and Pragmatic Production of Apology Strategies	215
4.9.3	The Correlation between Jordanian EFL Learners at Beginner, Intermediate, and Advanced Levels of Proficiency and Pragmatic Comprehension	215
4.9.4	Pragmatic Development of Speech Act of Apology	216
4.9.5	Jordanian EFL Learners' Explanation for their Selection of Apology Strategies.....	217
4.10	Conclusion	218
CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS		219
5.1	Introduction.....	219
5.2	Discussion of Research Findings	219
5.2.1	Discussion of Research Question One	220
5.2.2	Discussion of Research Question Two.....	223
5.2.3	Discussion of Research Question Three.....	226
5.2.4	Discussion of Research Question Four	228
5.2.5	Discussion of Research Question Five.....	230
5.3	Contributions of the Study	232
5.4	Pedagogical Implications.....	235
5.5	Recommendations for Future Research.....	239
5.6	Conclusion	240
REFERENCES		241
APPENDICES		
LIST OF PUBLICATIONS		

LIST OF TABLES

		Page
Table 2.1	Jordanian studies on speech act of apology	76
Table 3.1	Description of EFL learners.	101
Table 3.2	Description of NSS	102
Table 3.3	Distribution of the contextual factors across the ten situations.....	109
Table 3.4	Examples of explicit sub-strategies in Bataineh and Bataineh (2008)	126
Table 3.5	Explanation and examples of less explicit sub-strategies in Bataineh and Bataineh (2008)	127
Table 3.6	Explanation and examples of non-apology sub-strategies in Bataineh and Bataineh (2008)	128
Table 3.7	Strength of relationship.....	131
Table 3.8	Percentage of variance explained, r^2	131
Table 3.9	Answering research questions of the study	134
Table 4.1	The overall frequencies and percentages of the sub-strategies of explicit strategy by BEFLL	141
Table 4.2	The overall frequencies and percentages of the sub-strategies of less explicit strategy by BEFLL	146
Table 4.3	The overall frequencies and percentages of the sub-strategies of non-apology strategy by BEFLL	149
Table 4.4	The overall frequencies and percentages of the sub-strategies of explicit strategy by IEFLL	151
Table 4.5	The overall frequencies and percentages of the sub-strategies of less explicit strategy by IEFLL	156
Table 4.6	The overall frequencies and percentages of the sub-strategies of non-apology strategy by IEFLL	159
Table 4.7	The overall frequencies and percentages of the sub-strategies of explicit strategy by AEFLL.....	161
Table 4.8	The overall frequencies and percentages of the sub-strategies of less explicit strategy by AEFLL.....	163

Table 4.9	The overall frequencies and percentages of the sub-strategies of non-apology strategy by AEFLL.....	167
Table 4.10	Descriptive statistics of explicit apology strategy production for three groups.....	169
Table 4.11	Differences among the mean scores of BEFLL, IEFLL, and AEFLLs' Production of Explicit Apology Strategy (N= 300).....	170
Table 4.12	Post-hoc Scheffe's tests of explicit apology strategy production for three groups.....	170
Table 4.13	Descriptive statistics of less explicit apology strategy production for three groups.....	172
Table 4.14	Differences among the mean scores of BEFLL, IEFLL, and AEFLLs' production of less explicit apology strategy (N= 300).....	172
Table 4.15	Post-hoc Scheffe's test of less explicit apology strategy production for three groups.....	173
Table 4.16	Descriptive statistics of non-apology strategy production for three groups.....	174
Table 4.17	Differences among the mean scores of BEFLL, IEFLL, and AEFLLs' production of non-apology strategy (N= 300).....	175
Table 4.18	Post-hoc Scheffe's tests of Non-apology strategy production for three groups.....	176
Table 4.19	Correlation between sub-strategies of explicit apology and EFL learners' language proficiency levels.....	177
Table 4.20	The squared correlation (r^2) of language proficiency and the production of sub-strategies of explicit strategy.....	179
Table 4.21	The squared correlation (r^2) of language proficiency and the production of sub-strategies of explicit strategy.....	181
Table 4.22	Correlation between sub-strategies of less explicit apology and EFL learners' language proficiency levels.....	182
Table 4.23	The squared correlation (r^2) of language proficiency and the production of sub-strategies of less explicit strategy.....	184
Table 4.24	The squared correlation (r^2) of language proficiency and the production of sub-strategies of less explicit strategy.....	185
Table 4.25	Correlation between sub-strategies of non-apology strategy and EFL learners' language proficiency levels.....	186

Table 4.26	The squared correlation (r^2) of language proficiency and the production of sub-strategies of non-apology strategy	188
Table 4.27	Correlation between EFL learners' scores in MDCT questionnaire and EFL learners' language proficiency levels.....	188
Table 4.28	The overall use of sub-strategies of explicit strategy by BEFLL, IEFLL, AEFLL, and NSE.....	191
Table 4.29	Descriptive statistics of explicit apology strategy production for four groups	192
Table 4.30	Differences among the mean scores of BEFLL, IEFLL, AEFLL and NSEs' production of explicit apology strategy (N= 400).....	192
Table 4.31	Post-hoc Scheffe's tests of explicit apology strategy production for four groups	193
Table 4.32	Overall use of sub-strategies of less explicit strategy for BEFLL, IEFLL, AEFLL, and NSE.....	195
Table 4.33	Descriptive statistics of less explicit apology strategy production for four groups	196
Table 4.34	Differences among the mean scores of BEFLL, IEFLL, AEFLL, and NSEs' production of less explicit apology strategy (N = 400).....	197
Table 4.35	Post-hoc Scheffe's tests of less explicit apology strategy production for four groups	198
Table 4.36	Overall use of sub-strategies of non-apology strategy for BEFLL, IEFLL, AEFLL, and NSE.....	200
Table 4.37	Descriptive statistics of non-apology apology strategy production for four groups	201
Table 4.38	Differences among the mean scores of BEFLL, IEFLL, AEFLL, and NSEs' production of non-apology strategy (N= 400).....	201
Table 4.39	Post-hoc Scheffe's tests of non-apology strategy production for four groups.....	202

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1.1	Jordan MoE (2013) 11
Figure 2.1	Chronological evolution of communicative competence (adopted from Celce-Murcia, 2008, p. 43).....28
Figure 2.2	Components of communicative language ability model (Bachman, 1990, p. 87).....30
Figure 2.3	Language competence classification adapted from (Bachman and Palmer 1996, 2010).....31
Figure 2.4	Strands of research in ILP35
Figure 2.5	Conceptual framework88
Figure 3.1	Explanatory sequential design (Creswell, 2014)93
Figure 3.2	Research design of the study95
Figure 3.3	Focus group interview design..... 118
Figure 3.4	Procedures of data collection 125
Figure 4.1	Bar chart for BEFLL, IEFLL, and AEFLLs' mean scores of explicit strategy production and 95% confidence intervals across EFL learner groups..... 171
Figure 4.2	Bar chart for BEFLL, IEFLL, and AEFLLs' mean scores of less explicit strategy production and 95% confidence intervals across the three groups..... 173
Figure 4.3	Bar chart for BEFLL, IEFLL, and AEFLLs' mean scores of non-apology strategy production and 95% confidence intervals across the three groups..... 176
Figure 4.4	Bar chart for BEFLL, IEFLL, AEFLL, and NSEs' mean scores of explicit strategy production and 95% confidence intervals across EFL learner groups and NSE group..... 194
Figure 4.5	Bar chart for BEFLL, IEFLL, AEFLL, and NSEs' mean scores of less explicit strategy production and 95% confidence intervals across the three groups of Jordanian EFL learners and NSE group..... 199

Figure 4.6	Bar chart for BEFLL, IEFLL, AEFLL, and NSEs' mean scores of non-apology strategy production and 95% confidence intervals across the three groups of Jordanian EFL learners and NSE group.....	203
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AEFLL	Advanced Level of English as a Foreign Language Learners
BEFLL	Beginner Level of English as a Foreign Language Learners
DCT	Discourse Completion Task
EFL	English as Foreign Language
ESL	English as Second Language
FL	Foreign Language
GSCE	General Secondary Certificate Examination
IEC	Islamic Educational College
IEFLL	Intermediate Level of English as a Foreign Language Learners
IFID	Illocutionary Force Indicating Device
ILP	Interlanguage Pragmatics
L1	First Language
L2	Second Language
MDCT	Multiple-Choice Discourse Completion Task
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoHESR	Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NNSs	Non-native Speakers
NSs	Native Speakers
NSE	Native Speakers of English
One-way ANOVA	One-way Analysis of Variance
R_s	Spearman Correlation coefficients
SLA	Second Language Acquisition

SPSS 24	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences 24.0
TL	Target Language
TOEFL	Test of English as a Foreign Language
WDCT	Written Discourse Completion Task
η^2	Effect size formula

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix A	The TOEFL Junior Standard overall score levels, total scores, overall performance descriptors, and CEFR profiles
Appendix B	Letter sent to the Ministry of Education and Islamic Educational College Schools in Jordan
Appendix C	Permission letter from Jordanian Ministry of Education for Data Collection
Appendix D	Consent Form
Appendix E	Semi-structured Interview
Appendix F	The script of the Focus Group Discussion for group 1 (BEFLL)
Appendix G	The script of the Focus Group Discussion for group 2 (IEFLL)
Appendix H	The script of the Focus Group Discussion for group 3 (AEFLL)
Appendix I	Written Discourse Completion Task (pilot study)
Appendix J	Written Discourse Completion Task
Appendix K	Rating Scale by Eisenstein and Bodman (1993)
Appendix L	Multiple-choice Discourse Completion Task
Appendix M	Samples of the students' answers to WDCT
Appendix N	Samples of the students' answers to MDCT

**KESAN KEMAHIRAN BAHASA INGGERIS TERHADAP PENGHASILAN
DAN PEMAHAMAN PRAGMATIK PERMOHONAN MAAF DALAM
KALANGAN PELAJAR BAHASA INGGERIS SEBAGAI BAHASA ASING
JORDAN**

ABSTRAK

Para penyelidik dalam bidang perkembangan pragmatik silang bahasa (ILP) telah menunjukkan minat yang mendalam dalam mengkaji faktor yang mempengaruhi kompetensi pragmatik. [Kemahiran bahasa adalah salah satu faktor bebas yang dominan dalam bidang perkembangan pragmatik silang bahasa (Taguchi, 2011; Xiao, 2015). Bagi tujuan mengkaji sama ada terdapat hubungan di antara kemahiran bahasa dan kompetensi pragmatik, satu kajian kaedah pelbagai telah dijalankan ke atas 300 pelajar Bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa asing (EFL) Jordan dari sekolah Kolej Pendidikan Islam (IEC) di Jordan dan 100 penutur asal Bahasa Inggeris (NSE). Berdasarkan skor pelajar EFL Jordan dalam ujian *TOEFL Junior*, 300 pelajar Jordan tersebut telah dibahagikan pada tiga kumpulan: (1) pelajar EFL tahap permulaan (BEFLL), (2) pelajar EFL tahap pertengahan (IEFLL), dan (3) pelajar EFL tahap maju (AEFLL) dengan 100 pelajar dalam setiap kumpulan. Kerangka konseptual kajian diambil dari Model Dua-dimensi Perkembangan Kemahiran Bahasa (Bialystok, 1993), Teori Lakuan Bahasa (Searle, 1969), dan Model Kebolehan Komunikasi Bahasa (Bachman & Palmer, 1996, 2010). Data kuantitatif dan kualitatif dipungut untuk menjawab lima persoalan kajian. Data kuantitatif telah dipungut menggunakan *Written Discourse Completion Task* (WDCT) dan *Multiple-Choice Discourse Completion Task* (MDCT) manakala data qualitative telah dipungut menggunakan temubual separa berstruktur. Data yang dipungut melalui WDCT dan MDCT telah dianalisis

menggunakan taksonomi strategi permohonan maaf yang dibangun oleh Bataineh dan Bataineh (2008) dan ujian statistik. Data qualitative telah dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa pelajar EFL Jordan pada setiap tahap kemahiran bahasa Inggeris telah menggunakan pelbagai strategi permohonan maaf yang menunjukkan perbezaan yang signifikan dalam kalangan mereka. Hasil kajian turut menunjukkan apabila kemahiran bahasa pelajar EFL meningkat, penghasilan lakuan permohonan maaf mereka juga menjadi lebih asli. Tambahan lagi, kajian menunjukkan kemahiran bahasa mempunyai korelasi signifikan dengan penghasilan dan pemahaman lakuan permohonan maaf oleh pelajar EFL Jordan. Hasil kajian tersebut mencerminkan bahawa kemahiran bahasa Inggeris mempunyai peranan penting dalam penghasilan dan pemahaman strategi permohonan maaf dalam kalangan pelajar EFL Jordan. Kajian telah mengenalpasti keperluan untuk menyediakan bahan yang dapat mengukuhkan kompetensi pragmatik pelajar dan pendidik di sekolah di Jordan. Perkara tersebut dapat dilaksanakan dengan menyediakan bahan pembelajaran yang bersifat asli dan mengambil guru bahasa Inggeris yang merupakan penutur asal di sekolah. Disyorkan juga agar pelajar didedahkan pada aktiviti pembelajaran ekstra di dalam dan luar bilik darjah untuk memantapkan pembangunan kompetensi pragmatik pelajar EFL Jordan.

**EFFECTS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY ON PRAGMATIC
PRODUCTION AND COMPREHENSION OF APOLOGY AMONGST
JORDANIAN EFL LEARNERS**

ABSTRACT

Researchers in the field of interlanguage pragmatic (ILP) development have shown a keen interest in investigating the factors that affect pragmatic competence. Language proficiency is one of the dominant independent factors in the field of ILP development (Taguchi, 2011; Xiao, 2015). In order to examine whether a relationship exists between language proficiency and pragmatic competence with regard to pragmatic production and comprehension, a mixed-method study was conducted on 300 Jordanian English as a foreign language (EFL) learners of Islamic Educational College (IEC) schools in Jordan and 100 native speakers of English (NSE). Based on Jordanian EFL learners' scores in TOEFL Junior test, the 300 Jordanian learners were divided into three sub-groups: (1) beginner EFL learners (BEFLL), (2) intermediate EFL learners (IEFLL), and (3) advanced EFL learners (AEFLL), with 100 participants in each group. The conceptual framework of the study is based on Two-dimensional Model of Language Proficiency Development (Bialystok, 1993), Speech Act Theory (Searle, 1969), and Communicative Language Ability Model (Bachman & Palmer, 1996, 2010). Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected to answer the five research questions. While the quantitative data were collected using Written Discourse Completion Task (WDCT) and Multiple-Choice Discourse Completion Task (MDCT), the qualitative data were collected using semi-structured interviews. Data collected using WDCT and MDCT were analysed using Bataineh and Bataineh's (2008) taxonomy of apology strategies and statistical tests which include descriptive

statistics. The qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis. The results of this study revealed that Jordanian EFL learners used various types of apology strategies across the three levels of English language proficiency with significant differences among the learner groups. The results also showed that when EFL learners' language proficiency increased their production of the speech act of apology became more native-like. Moreover, the study showed that language proficiency was significantly correlated with Jordanian EFL learners' production and comprehension of the speech act of apology. These results reflect that English language proficiency plays a significant role in the production and comprehension of apology strategies among Jordanian EFL learners. The study addresses the necessity of including materials which serve to strengthen learners and teachers' pragmatic competence in schools in Jordan. This can be achieved through including authentic materials and NSE teachers in schools. It is also recommended that students be exposed to extra learning activities inside and outside classrooms to further develop the Jordanian EFL learners' pragmatic competence.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview of the Study

As a widely-spoken language in the world, English is considered as one of the most spoken languages (Simons & Fennig, 2017). It is the dominant global language as far as the globalisation of political and academic discourse is concerned (Bangboe, 2001). Crystal (2008, p. 3) estimated that “over a third of the world’s population” use English either as their first language (hereafter L1), second language (hereafter L2) or foreign language (hereafter FL). The acronym EFL refers to English as a foreign language. Scrivener (2005) defined EFL as “English for learners who come from a country where English is not spoken as a mother tongue” (p. 426). In other words, it is not the official or main language.

As English is the most frequently chosen FL to be taught for communicative purposes, it plays a significant role in intercultural communication (Lihui & Jianbin, 2010). To communicate successfully in a language, it is necessary for individuals to be familiar with linguistic and sociolinguistic aspects of that language. This familiarity helps English as a foreign language (hereafter EFL) learners’ ability to use language properly and in the right context. Such a user will be defined as communicatively competent (Hymes, 1972). Communicative competence, which is considered an essential factor in achieving effective communicative goals (Hymes, 1972; Canale & Swain, 1980; Bachman, 1990), is closely dependent on knowledge in both areas of grammar and pragmatics (Levinson, 1983; Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998). However, communication breakdown can take place when Non-Native Speakers (hereafter NNSs) lack either grammatical or pragmatic knowledge. It has been argued

that miscommunication in terms of pragmatic failure can be more serious than grammatical mistakes. While native speakers (hereafter NSs) often forgive NNSs' grammatical errors, they rarely disregard pragmatic failure. In the case of pragmatic failure, NNSs are often considered rude or impolite. Regarding this, Cohen (1996) argued that the "control of the vocabulary and grammar of the language without achieving a comparable control over the pragmatic or functional uses of the language" can lead NNSs to experience miscommunication (p. 253).

Scholars in the field of interlanguage pragmatics (hereafter ILP) development have shown a keen interest in investigating the factors that affect pragmatic competence. One of the factors that has been investigated is language proficiency (Schauer, 2006, 2009; Bardovi-Harlig & Bastos, 2011; Xiao, 2015). According to Bialystok (1993), knowing a form does not guarantee the proper application of that form in situations when the circumstances change. She believed that FL/L2 learners' production and comprehension of speech acts should be related to two dimensions of language proficiency: analysed representation and control of processing (Koike, 1996; Hassall, 1997, 2003, 2006).

ILP studies on the influence of language proficiency on pragmatic competence have reported interesting findings, some of which showed that language proficiency has a positive effect on pragmatic competence (e.g., İstifçi, 2009; Al-Gahtani & Roever, 2011; Qorina, 2012; Rastegar & Yasami, 2014). Other studies, on the other hand, revealed that language proficiency has no effect on pragmatic competence (e.g., Sorour, 2015; Tabatabaei & Farnia 2015; Khorshidi, Mobini & Nasiri, 2016; Moheballi & Salehi, 2016). Moreover, research on the pragmatic development of Jordanian EFL learners has not properly addressed the effect of language proficiency on EFL learners' pragmatic competence (e.g., Bataineh & Bataineh, 2008; Al-Momani, 2009; Huwari

& Al-Shboul, 2015). Accordingly, the main purposes of this study are to examine the ILP development of expressing apology among Jordanian EFL learners at three different language proficiency levels, and this study was conducted to find out whether there is any relationship between language proficiency and pragmatic competence in terms of pragmatic production and comprehension of the speech act of apology. The following section briefly introduces the background to the study and Jordanian EFL learning context.

1.2 Background to the Study

This section begins with a brief explanation of the concept of pragmatic competence. This is followed by a description of the current status of the English Language in the Jordanian context. The third sub-section presents an overview of the major problems encountered by Jordanian EFL learners. These problems are presented based on what has been reported by researchers in the Arab EFL contexts.

1.2.1 Pragmatic Competence

Before introducing the concept of pragmatic competence, there is a need to discuss communicative competence. This term was first introduced in 1972 by Hymes who conceived it as a reaction to Chomsky's (1965) notion of linguistic competence. The notion of linguistic competence emphasises grammar and syntax, and "omits almost everything of socio-cultural significance" (Hymes, 1972, p. 62). Hymes postulated that learners' knowledge of how to construct grammatically correct sentences is insufficient to communicate effectively. Ever since then, the language users' ability to use language appropriately in communication has been included in all theoretical models of communicative competence (Canale & Swain, 1980; Canale, 1983; Bachman, 1990; Bachman & Palmer, 1996, 2010). Pragmatic competence is one

of the major components in a number of models of communicative competence. Although several scholars have defined pragmatic competence from different perspectives, Rose's (1999) definition of pragmatic competence is one of the extensively accepted definitions by researchers in the field of ILP (Tello Rueda, 2006). Rose (1999) defines it as the ability to use available linguistic resources in a contextually appropriate fashion. Thus, to be competent, NNSs should not only display a high level of accuracy in their choice of vocabulary and grammatical structures, but they should also understand the contextual appropriateness of their utterances. Unlike grammatical mistakes that are often expected from NNSs, NSs consider mistakes related to pragmatic failure as breaches of politeness (Thomas, 1983).

According to Bachman and Palmer (1996), pragmatic knowledge helps learners "to create or interpret discourse by relating utterances or sentences and texts to their meaning, to the intentions of language users, and to relevant characteristics of the language use setting" (p. 69). In agreement with Leech's view (1983), Bachman and Palmer (1996) believed that pragmatic competence encompasses two distinct components of competence: pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic competence. The former concerns the appropriateness of form, while the latter focuses on socially appropriate language use (Leech, 1983; Kasper, 1997). To be pragmatically competent, NNSs need to have access to a variety of linguistic resources, as well as social and cultural knowledge to apply those forms appropriately in various contexts. Roever (2011) points out that both components are "tightly connected" (p. 2).

The production and comprehension of speech acts and their appropriateness in a given situation are two important aspects of pragmatic competence. The speech act is considered as a basic device of human interaction (Searle, 1975). Some examples of speech acts are apologies, greetings, requests, complaints, invitations, compliments,

and refusals. The speech act of apology is the focus of the current study because apologising is considered as one of the most frequently used acts, either in public or private interactions (Grainger & Harris, 2007). Furthermore, Ogiermann (2009) contended that apology is an essential function of language due to its “vital social function of restoring and maintaining harmony” (p. 45), and smoothing out resentment (Intachakra, 2004). Additionally, as Norrick (1978) has argued that apologising and forgiving have more social importance than congratulating and thanking (Norrick, 1978 as cited in Ogiermann, 2009, p. 45).

Kasper and Schmidt’s definition of ILP illustrates the interdisciplinarity or “hybrid” nature (Kasper & Blum-Kulka, 1993, p. 3) of ILP as belonging both to pragmatics and second language acquisition (hereafter SLA). ILP is the study of “the development and use of strategies for linguistic action by non-native speakers” (Kasper & Schmidt, 1996, p. 150). However, ILP has been criticised for focusing on the comparison of the differences between NNSs’ production of speech acts and those of NSs, while few studies have dealt with the development issues of ILP (e.g. Kasper, 1992; Bardovi-Harlig, 1996; Kasper & Schmidt, 1996; Kasper & Rose, 2002). According to Bardovi-Harlig (1999), ILP is “fundamentally not acquisitional” (p. 679). This shortage of studies in ILP development has led Bardovi-Harlig (1999) to come up with an argument that SLA pragmatics research must be concerned with “How does L2 pragmatic competence develop?” (p.186).

Most of the studies that have investigated the pragmatic development of learners can be categorised into two types: cross-sectional and longitudinal designs (for details refer to Section 2.4). Cross-sectional design is the process of comparing data which is collected from two or more distinct learner groups who are different according to their proficiency in the target language (hereafter TL) or the length of

time spent in the L2 environment (Bardovi-Harlig, 1999; Rose, 2000, 2009; Kasper & Rose, 2002; Matsumura, 2003; Göy, Zeyrek & Otcu, 2012; Mahmoodi, 2013). On the other hand, a longitudinal design refers to observing the progress of a particular group of learners through a certain period of time (Schmidt, 1983; Ohta, 2001; Barron, 2003; Chen, 2006; Schauer, 2006, 2009; Woodfield, 2012). The findings of studies of ILP development, both cross-sectional and longitudinal studies, have revealed that factors such as language proficiency and length of stay in a target environment can contribute to explaining the variation observed among learners in the outcome of development and thus enhance the understanding of the underlying mechanisms of that development.

Some studies have shown that language proficiency is a dominant independent variable in the field of ILP development (Taguchi, 2011; Xiao, 2015). A plethora of research has examined the effect of language proficiency through examination of L2 pragmatic transfer (Koike, 1996; Wannaruk, 2008), pragmatic production (Pinto, 2005; Shardakova, 2005; Taguchi, 2006; Dalmau & Gotor, 2007; Félix-Brasdefer, 2007; Al-Gahtani & Roever, 2011; Allami, & Naeimi, 2011), and pragmatic comprehension (Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998; Niezgodna & Röver, 2001; Cook & Liddicoat, 2002; Garcia, 2004; Schauer, 2006; Taguchi, 2008, 2011; Xu, Case, & Wang, 2009; Bella, 2012; Sorour, 2015). Among studies that have focused on ILP development, very few studies have revealed the positive influence of language proficiency on pragmatic competence (e.g., İstifçi, 2009; Al-Gahtani & Roever, 2011; Qorina, 2012; Rastegar & Yasami, 2014). On the other hand, other studies have revealed that there is almost no effect of language proficiency on pragmatic competence (Sorour, 2015; Tabatabaei & Farnia, 2015; Khorshidi et al., 2016; Mohebbali & Salehi, 2016). These inconclusive findings on the effect of proficiency

levels on pragmatic competence clearly necessitate further inquiries into the investigation of the effects of proficiency level on pragmatic competence.

Some studies have reported that the learning environment is another factor that can affect pragmatic development along with language proficiency (Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998; Niezgodna & Röver 2001; Schauer, 2006, 2009; Xu et al., 2009; Taguchi, 2011). Some scholars assume that the L2 environment/context is considered more advantageous than FL environment. Despite this premise, some studies have shown that the study-abroad environment is not always advantageous for L2 development (Taguchi, 2008). Although previous studies have indicated some important findings in ILP development, their narrow scope raises serious questions about the generalizability of their results to other FL contexts. Hence, it is necessary to extend the scope of ILP research to encompass the study of more languages and cultures. Moreover, reviewing previous studies shows that there is a need to enhance research on other EFL learning groups. Therefore, this current study focused on Jordanian EFL learners and examined the effect of English language proficiency on the development of their production and comprehension of apology. The following section provides a brief review of the status of the English language in Jordan.

1.2.2 The Status of English Language in Jordan

This section is devoted to providing an overview of the status of the English language in Jordan. This section starts with a brief overview of the significance of English as a global language. This is followed by the status of the English language in Jordan, which is the context of the current study.

The desire for knowledge as one of the outstanding characteristics of the human mind is becoming increasingly dependent upon proficiency in English language

(Bangboe, 2001; Neeley, 2012). In fact, the English language is ranked among the top five widely spoken languages. Crystal (2008, p. 3) estimated that “over a third of the world’s population” use English either as their L1, L2 or FL. Most people use English for communication during social interaction, trade or participation in international academic conferences (Mckay, 2002). For example, Van Weijen (2012) reported that 80% of the articles that are published in all the journals indexed in Scopus are in the English language.

In Jordan, the use of English as a global language has been growing dramatically over the past decades. The Jordanian government considers acquiring the English language as essential to promote the country’s technology, education, economy and to maintain its relationships with the rest of the world. Hamdan and Hatab (2009), Drbseh (2013), Dweik and Awajan, (2013), Batiha, Noor and Mustaffa (2016), and Batiha, Mustaffa and Noor (2018) stated that using English Language in several Jordanian sectors such as airports, tourism, foreign affairs, and higher scientific studies is more important than using Arabic language. As a result of its importance, English has been declared as a mandatory subject in the school curriculum in Jordan, and students who graduate from public secondary schools have at least been instructed in English for eight years (Drbseh, 2013; Tahaineh, 2010, 2014). For instance, in Jordan, learners commonly study English, French, German, and Italian as their FLs in the education system, English language is considered as the main FL taught in the Jordanian education system (Bani-Khaled, 2013). Therefore, English language learners in Jordan are expected to be fluent linguistically and pragmatically. However, Bani-Khaled (2013) and Al-Zoubi and Abu-Eid (2014) stated that using English for communication purposes is still rather a problematic and challenging issue for Jordanian EFL learners.

As a result of the British occupation from 1916-1946, the English language is the first FL taught in the Jordanian education system. After independence in 1946, the Jordanian government considered English as a FL in the education system and made it a compulsory subject for students at the age of eleven. This was changed after the 1990s when the Ministry of Education (hereafter MoE) decided to include English in the curriculum from the first year of school where English is taught at the age of six. The inclusion of English in the early stages of the education system has given the English language a prestigious position in the Jordanian education system.

English education in Jordan mainly involves Kindergarten, Basic, Secondary, and Higher education level (see Figure 1.1). In Jordan, teaching English in the Kindergarten is based on the term entertainment education for children as young as four to five years. Its content is designed to educate and entertain. In other words, the main focus is on the types of content that serve to entertain while containing an educational value for the purpose of creating a favourable attitude among children toward the English language. Pre-school Education is mainly sponsored by private schools or non-governmental organisation (hereafter NGO) funded schools (Williams, 2014). The next level is Basic Education, which is compulsory. Students at this level are required to learn English as a compulsory subject from grade 1 (age 6) to grade 10 (age 16).

According to the MoE (2013), in the secondary school which is not compulsory to attend in Jordan, students continue learning English for another two years, whether as students of academic secondary level or as a trainee in the applied vocational training program. English is a mandatory subject in the General Secondary Certificate Examination (hereafter GSCE) in Jordan. The GSCE determines whether students can be admitted to universities and community colleges. The final level of the education

system in Jordan is Higher Education, which is the responsibility of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (hereafter MoHESR). English includes two programs, one of which is for English majors, and the other is for undergraduates majoring in other subjects, known as non-English majors. Failure in English course/subject in the final exam of each level in the Jordanian education system means that the student is not entitled to join the next level. Despite all the attempts of MoE and MoHESR in Jordan to encourage the use of English language in schools and universities, and to increase learners' exposure to English language, English for communicative purposes is still rather problematic and challenging (Bani-Khaled, 2013; Al-Zoubi & Abu-Eid, 2014). The next section highlights the most common problems that learners of English in Jordan encounter.

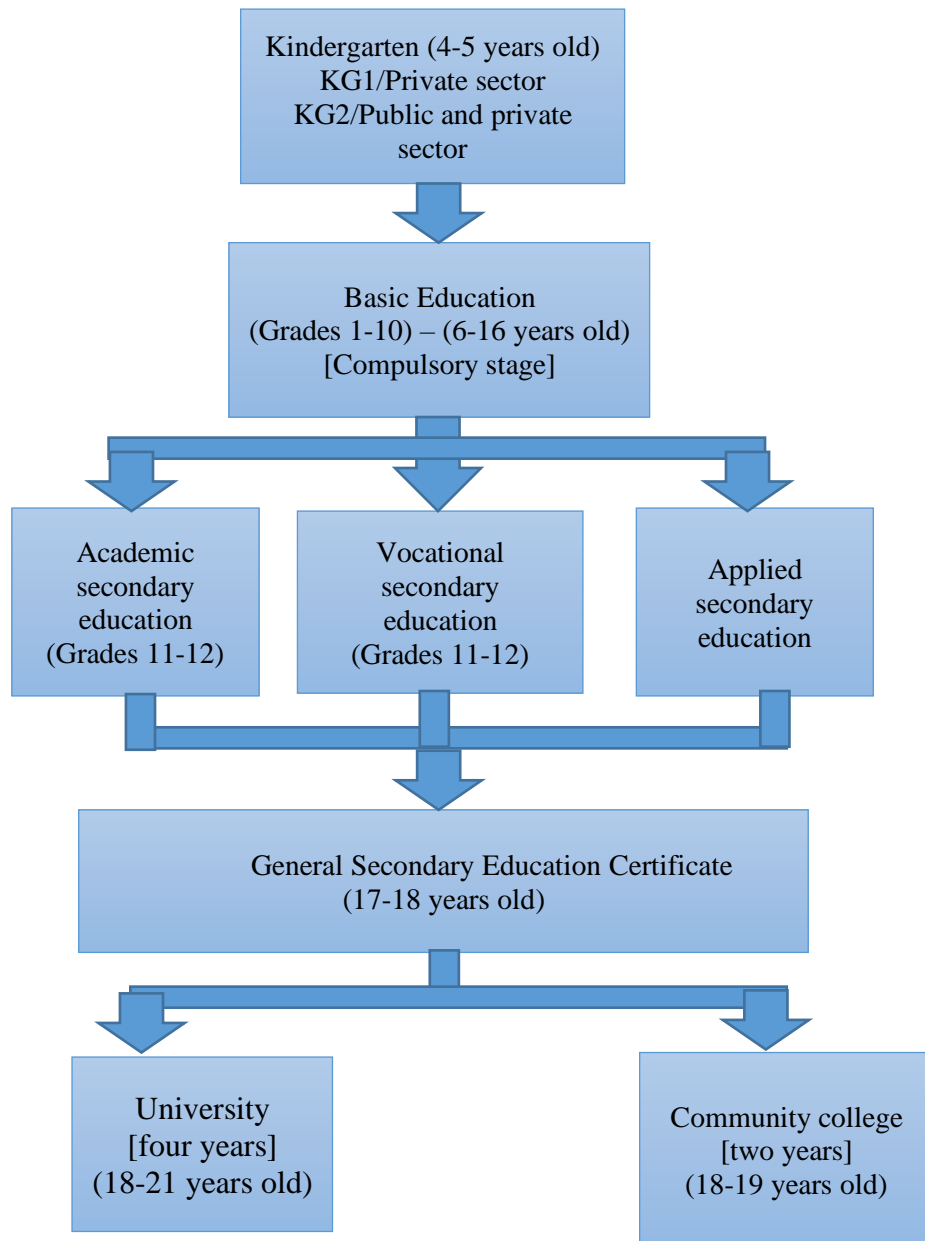


Figure 1.1 Jordan MoE (2013)

1.2.3 Problems Faced by Jordanian EFL Learners

Generally speaking, the Jordanian education system of teaching English is commonly criticised for its inefficiency in preparing its graduates to perform and communicate in English in real-life situations. Although Jordanian, in general, have the ability to construct grammatically correct sentences, they may fail to perform

appropriately during social interactions according to the norms of the TL (Rababah, 2002; Al-Zoubi & Abu-Eid, 2014; Bataineh, 2014; Bataineh & Hussein, 2015). These studies have shown that English for communication among Jordanian EFL learners is far from satisfactory.

Jordanian EFL learner's poor performance in English is commonly due to the obstacles that teachers and students encounter in the process of teaching, learning, and acquisition of English as a FL. One of the important barriers is related to the considerable differences in the alphabetic characters, syntax, and phonetic systems in Arabic and English languages (Rababah, 2002; Hameed & Aslam, 2015). The mistakes committed by NNSs due to these difficulties are referred to as transfer. For example, phonetic or phonological errors are mainly due to language transfer. As a result of the negative transfer, EFL learners may experience confusion while communicating with NSs. Generally speaking, most Arab students are confused with the English /p/ and /b/ due to the fact that the Arabic language has only one bilabial letter. So, if an Arab EFL learner says, "*Last night, you barked next to my car.*" instead of saying "*Last night, you parked next to my car.*" NSs will be offended.

Despite the call for changing the old traditional methods of language instruction (Zughoul, 2003), EFL teachers in Jordan are still following the old system of education in the Jordanian classrooms. In other words, they focus on grammatical competence much more than other types of competence, such as speaking. Consequently, Jordanian EFL students learn English with the sole purpose of excelling in examinations which are usually based on measuring the students' ability to read a text in English, memorise a large number of words, and listen to recorded conversation. This reflects that speaking for communicative purposes is excluded in most tests for Jordanian EFL learners in Jordan (Rababah, 2002).

Moreover, heavy reliance on the Arabic language by EFL teachers in the instructional process has further complicated these problems. In other words, in the process of teaching English, Jordanian EFL teachers revert to Arabic to discuss complex syntactic rules or to explain new vocabulary if students do not understand the meaning of difficult words. Experience has shown that this method is not always effective as it slows down the EFL acquisition process and minimises the opportunities for the students to be exposed to the English language (Rababah, 2002). Using English for explaining what cannot be understood by students is a better alternative to maximise the students' exposure to the English language in the Jordanian classroom.

Another difficulty that Jordanian language learners commonly face in learning English is lack of exposure to the TL. This has been reported by Rababah (2002), who stated that there is little chance for Jordanian EFL students to learn English through natural interaction with NSs of the TL. In Jordan, the interaction between students and native speakers of English (hereafter NSE) is possible mainly through tourist interactions. For example, the Bedouins, who are without formal education and who live out in the open, are still able to communicate in English because of the frequent presence of tourists who speak English, as well as other languages. Another difficulty is that the only way to learn and practice English is through formal education, inside the classrooms, where the English teachers are Jordanian NSs of the Arabic language.

Overall, English is the major FL in the Jordanian education system. Jordanian EFL learners learn English from kindergarten to Higher education. Despite the fact that they are exposed to the necessary skills to create grammatically correct sentences during their journey of learning English, there is still a chance of not being able to communicate with NSs in real life. This challenge has been observed by many

Jordanian researchers such as Al-Momani (2009), Al-Shboul, Maros, Yasin and Subakir (2012), and Bataineh (2014).

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Communicative competence, which is made up of grammatical competence and pragmatic competence, is essential for effective communication (Leech, 1983). However, communication breakdown can take place when NNSs lack either grammatical or pragmatic knowledge. In language and communication, the term speech act is used to refer to performative function of an utterance. This area of investigation is the focus of the current study. Scholars in the field of ILP development have shown a keen interest in investigating the factors that affect pragmatic competence. One of the first scholars who considered research into the acquisition of pragmatic competence in L2 as a feature of ILP landscape is Kasper (1992) who argued that “the majority of interlanguage pragmatics studies focus on use, without much attempt to say or even imply anything about development” (p. 204). After that, in their influential publication, Kasper and Schmidt (1996) highlighted the significance of ILP as an important area of research in L2 acquisition research.

Generally speaking, there is a noticeable increase in the number of studies that have focused on the acquisitional aspect of ILP. However, Taguchi (2011) concluded that previous studies in ILP development studies, for the most part, have focused more on L2 learners’ pragmatic production (e.g., Félix -Brasdefer, 2004, 2007; Pinto, 2005; Shardakova, 2005; Bataineh & Bataineh, 2006; Dalmau & Gotor, 2007; Al-Gahtani & Roever, 2011; Allami & Naeimi, 2011) than comprehension (e.g., Koike, 1996; Cook & Liddicoat, 2002; Garcia, 2004; Taguchi, 2008, 2011). Most of these studies have focused on exploring how the NNSs perform speech acts such as requests and

compliments. One of the speech acts that have received researchers' attention is apology. Salehi (2014) pointed out that individuals use apology in daily life routine much more than other speech acts. Ogiermann (2009) explained that the reason behind this frequent use is the important role of apology in restoring and maintaining harmony among people. While performing an apology efficiently is not really easy, it is even more difficult for NNSs. Bataineh and Bataineh (2008), Al-Shboul et al., (2012), and Bataineh (2013) stated that Similar to most of EFL learners, Jordanian EFL learners in particular face challenges in expressing the speech act of apology in English language.

Although most of ILP studies have investigated factors affecting pragmatic competence, the primary focus has been the effect of the learning environment (Schuar 2006, 2009; Sorour, 2015). In other words, it has been noted that there is a lack of studies that examine how language proficiency can influence pragmatic competence (e.g., Taguchi, 2011; Xiao, 2015). Additionally, the findings of previous ILP studies are inconclusive. While some researchers (e.g., İstifçi, 2009; Al-Gahtani & Roever, 2011; Qorina, 2012; Rastegar & Yasami, 2014) have reported that language proficiency has a positive effect on pragmatic competence development, some other studies have not reported a significant effect of language proficiency (e.g., Sorour, 2015; Tabatabaei & Farnia, 2015; Khorshidi et al., 2016; Moheballi & Salehi, 2016). Based on the findings reported by these studies, learners with high level of proficiency does not guarantee native-like pragmatic production and comprehension of speech acts. Accordingly, more studies are required to determine the relationship between language proficiency and pragmatic competence development.

Research on ILP has also focused on learners from a variety of linguistic backgrounds, such as Catalan (Sabaté Dalmau, 2006), English (American English: Félix-Brasdefer, 2007, Irish English: Barron, 2003), German (Schauer, 2004, 2006,

2009), and Japanese (Matsumura, 2003), and Saudi Arab dialect (Al-Gahtani & Roever, 2011). However, this limitation raises serious questions about the generalizability of their findings to other FL contexts. Consequently, there is a need for more research to focus on FL learners. Taking this into account, the current study focused on Jordanian EFL learners' comprehension and production of apology.

A number of Jordanian researchers (e.g., Al-Adaileh, 2007; Bataineh & Bataineh, 2008; Al-Momani, 2009; Al-Shboul et al., 2012) argued that research in ILP that focused on Jordanians is still minimal. Moreover, Jordanian researchers, for the most part, have examined the production of speech acts by NSs of Jordanian Arabic and NSs of English language on the one hand, and Jordanian EFL learners with English NSs on the other hand (e.g., Bataineh, 2004, 2013; Bataineh & Bataineh, 2006; Al-Adaileh, 2007; Al-Shboul et al., 2012; Banikalef & Maros, 2013; Banikalef, Maros, Aladdi & Al-Natour, 2015). These studies have shown significant cross-cultural differences in speech act performance between NSs of English and NSs of Jordanian Arabic and Jordanian NNSs of English. Thus, the ability to comprehend speech acts has not been fully explored in previous studies in Jordan (Al-Momani, 2009; Huwari & Al-Shboul 2015; Al-Khaza'leh, 2018). Accordingly, the current study seeks to fill this gap by focusing on the development of pragmatic competence among Jordanian EFL learners.

Additionally, it is important to note that in previous Jordanian studies, researchers focus on examining Jordanian EFL learners in universities rather than learners in schools. Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (2005) justified this preference by stating that many of the controlled research methods "favour" higher proficiency level. It is also important to note that in previous Jordanian studies, researchers preferred to apply elicitation techniques using Jordanian EFL learners at intermediate-level or

advanced level of language proficiency. These cross-sectional studies cannot show enough developmental stages. Thus, to provide a more comprehensive view of developmental stages, ILP studies should ideally include “beginners through advanced learners” (Bardovi-Harlig, 2002, p. 186). Al-Issa (2003) has recommended that future research in the Jordanian ILP field should “encompass more levels of proficiency” (p. 596). Therefore, there is a need for Jordanian studies that provide an insight into the effect of language proficiency levels on Jordanian EFL learners’ pragmatic competence at the school level.

To be pragmatically competent, Jordanian EFL learners need to acquire a good understanding of linguistic, and sociolinguistic aspects of English language. Accordingly, to get a complete picture of Jordanian EFL learners’ pragmatic competence development, this study focused on sociolinguistic and functional knowledge, especially with regard to the relationship between language proficiency and Jordanian EFL learners’ pragmatic production and comprehension of the speech act of apology.

Taking into account the discussion in this section, there is a need for studies that examine how English language proficiency of learners affects both comprehension and production of the speech act of apology. The present study is a cross-sectional study that examines the relationship between levels of language proficiency of Jordanian EFL learners (beginner, intermediate, and advanced) and pragmatic competence in terms of production and comprehension of the speech act of apology.

1.4 Research Objectives

The current study addresses the following five research objectives:

1. To identify strategies Jordanian EFL learners at three different levels of English language proficiency use to apologise.
2. To examine the effect of English language proficiency of Jordanian EFL learners at three different levels of proficiency on pragmatic production of the speech act of apology.
3. To examine the effect of English language proficiency of Jordanian EFL learners at three different levels on pragmatic comprehension of the speech act of apology.
4. To study the influence of English language proficiency on the pragmatic development of Jordanian EFL learners' production of the speech act of apology.
5. To investigate the way Jordanian EFL learners account for their production and comprehension of the speech act of apology.

1.5 Research Questions

The current study was carried out to answer the following research questions:

1. What strategies do Jordanian EFL learners at different levels of English language proficiency use in expressing apology?
2. What is the effect of Jordanian EFL learners' level of English language proficiency on their production of the speech act of apology?
3. What is the effect of Jordanian EFL learners' level of English language proficiency on their comprehension of the speech act of apology?
4. To what extent is there pragmatic development in Jordanian EFL learners' production of the speech act of apology?
5. How do Jordanian EFL learners explain their production and comprehension of the speech act of apology?

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study is significant from several perspectives. First, this study is significant in that it examines the effect of three levels of English language proficiency on pragmatic competence in order to provide a more comprehensive view of different pragmatic developmental stages. Although previous researchers preferred to select their participants from universities because many of the controlled research methods “favour” higher proficiency level (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 2005), in the present research the respondents were school students. Additionally, Jordanian researchers prefer to divide their participants into two groups, either intermediate or advanced level, without investigating learners at a beginner level (Al-Issa, 2003). Bardovi-Harlig (2001), Kasper and Schmidt (1996) and Kasper and Rose (1999) have pointed out that cross-sectional studies that apply elicitation techniques using NNSs at intermediate-level or advanced level of language proficiency have not shown developmental stages. In fact, to provide a more comprehensive view of developmental stages, ILP studies should ideally include “beginners through advanced learners” (Bardovi-Harlig, 2002, p. 186). Thus, in this study learners at three levels of English language proficiency were selected so that the findings can enhance understating of the effect of language proficiency on Jordanian EFL learners’ pragmatic competence in terms of production and comprehension of the speech act of apology. As results, the findings of the current study are intended to contribute to the field of ILP development, especially in EFL contexts.

Secondly, the findings of the current research can provide information about the apology strategies employed by Jordanian EFL learners (NSs of Jordanian Arabic language) and NSs of the English language. This can help FL learners either for Arabic or English language to be aware of the particular communication strategies that NSs

of the TL use to apologise. In other words, the results may help FL learners of the Arabic language to be aware of the way that Jordanian Arabic language uses Arabic communication strategies. Furthermore, the findings of the current study can help Jordanian EFL learners and other EFL learners to be familiar with communication strategies that NSE use.

Thirdly, the results of this study will add to the existing Arab ILP development literature by involving more Arab EFL learner groups. This serves to investigate whether or not Jordanian EFL learners share the same speech behaviour with other Arab EFL learner groups. Accordingly, this understanding and analysis of communication strategies can enable comparisons between these two languages or with other languages, and between Jordanian EFL learners and EFL learners from other nationalities.

Fourthly, the results of this research can be beneficial for different stakeholders in their English language learning process. Namely, Jordanian English-major students will be aware of the language skills that they need to improve since they may have careers related to the English language. Moreover, if they are planning to be EFL teachers, it is essential for them to improve their English language skills. This can help Jordanian non-English major students to understand barriers they face while using English communication strategies and try to overcome them in order to avoid using improper apology strategies that might cause confusion and misunderstanding in communicating with NSs of English. This is important because, after graduation, these students will be more marketable in the career market if they possess an excellent command of English communication strategies. On the other hand, Jordanian students who are planning to pursue their education out of Jordan can similarly benefit from the

results of this research because this study can contribute to enhancing their communication skills.

Fifthly, English language teachers in Jordan can also benefit from the findings of this study because they can become aware of the common strengths and weaknesses in their EFL learners' production and comprehension of apology strategies. This can help them, in turn, to improve learners' communication skills. Since L1 interference is a very common cause of errors in communication with NSs of English, these findings can help Jordanian EFL teachers to introduce the possible areas of difficulty or the common mistakes Jordanian EFL learners make in their use of speech acts of apology when the English language is used. By explaining and pointing out the proper apology strategies, they can provide better information and more instructional lessons for their learners.

Finally, in this chapter, it has been highlighted that there is lack of studies that investigate the relationship between the speech act of apology in English by Jordanian EFL learners and three different levels of proficiency (beginner, intermediate, and advanced) production and comprehension of the speech act of apology. So, this could be the first study to examine the Jordanian EFL learners' production and comprehension at three different levels of proficiency. Accordingly, the researcher hopes that this study will contribute to ILP development literature in general, and Arab ILP development literature in specific, and bridge the gap mentioned earlier.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

Similar to various studies, there are some limitations of this study. The first one is related to the target population. The sample of the study consists of students in selected private schools in Amman, Jordan. The participants have been chosen from

three branches of Islamic Educational College (hereafter IEC) schools, which are located in Jubeiha, and Jabal Amman, Amman, Jordan. Future studies may address a more varied population of various educational levels. In addition, as L2 proficiency was the only factor examined in the present study, other individual factors which may play a role in the development of L2 learners' pragmatic competence such as gender, motivation, social distance, and social power were not investigated.

This study focuses on Jordanian EFL learners at school level who, as members of a subculture, have their own style of producing and comprehending language, including the speech act of apology. As the speech act of apology examined in this study is limited to the academic context, the generalisations and conclusions may not be applied to other contexts or settings.

This study focuses on EFL learners from Jordan. Since Arab EFL learners do not share the same characteristics in their speech behaviours, the results of the study may not be generalised to all Arab EFL learners.

Regardless of the limitations mentioned above, this particular study can lead to valuable information regarding the effect of language proficiency level on pragmatic production and comprehension of the speech act of apology in Jordanian EFL contexts.

1.8 Definition of Key Terms

This section presents the definition of the most important key terms used in this study.

Communicative competence: “the knowledge of not only if something is formally possible in a language, but also the knowledge of whether it is feasible, appropriate or done in a particular speech community” (Hymes, 1972, p. 284).

Pragmatic competence: The ability to use available linguistic resources in a contextually appropriate fashion (Rose, 1999, p. 171).

Pragmalinguistic competence: The linguistic aspect of pragmatics which refers to “the particular resources which a given language provides for conveying particular illocutions” (Leech, 1983, p. 11).

Sociopragmatic competence: “The ability to adjust speech strategies appropriately according to different social variables, such as the degree of imposition, social dominance and distance between participants of conversation, and participants’ rights and obligations in communication” (Harlow, 1990, p. 328).

Interlanguage: Interlanguage is second language learners’ developing target language knowledge (Selinker, 1972).

Interlanguage pragmatics: The study of “the development and use of strategies for linguistic action by non-native speakers” (Kasper & Schmidt, 1996, p. 150)

Proficiency level: “A description of a language learner’s level of performance in a target language, often described in terms of beginner level, intermediate level or advanced level.”. (Richards & Schmidt, 2013, p. 464).

Discourse Completion Task (DCT): A questionnaire containing a set of very briefly described situations designed to elicit a particular speech act (Varghese & Billmyer, 1996, p. 40). Each situation in the DCT is designed in such a way that a specific communicative act (compliment, apology, invitation, thanking, request, refusal, etc.) can be elicited.

English as a second language: “Situations in which English is being taught and learnt in countries, context and cultures where English is the predominant

language of communication”, such as the United Kingdom of Great Britain, the United States of America and Canada. (Nunan & Carter, 2001, p. 2).

English as a foreign language: “Contexts where English is neither widely used for communication nor used as the medium of instruction”, such as in Jordan, Egypt, and Lebanon (Nunan & Carter, 2001, p. 2).

Speech act: A communicative action that is realised by means of spoken or written language and drawing on the social and cultural context, which reflects the intended meaning of the speaker or the speaker’s desired effect (Searle, 1979).

Apology speech act: A “compensatory action to an offence in the doing of which S [the speaker] was casually involved and which is costly to H [the hearer]” (Bergman & Kasper, 1993, p. 82).

1.9 Conclusion

Chapter One has described the background to the study and introduced important concepts which are communicative competence, pragmatic competence, ILP, and speech act. It has also presented the statement of the problem, the research objectives, research questions, significant of the study and its limitations. Finally, definitions of key terms are presented.