

Requests by Vietnamese Learners of EFL: An Investigation of the Relationship between Proficiency, Grammar, and Pragmatic Development

This study examines requests made by Vietnamese learners of EFL. The purpose of the study is to find out whether learners at different proficiency levels differ in their choice of request strategies, and in their use of syntactic mitigators to make their requests less imposing and more polite.

The data were collected by means of the discourse completion tasks (DCTs-open format), and the open role plays. There were 20 scenarios in the DCT, and 2 role plays. The participants, who took part in the study, included 1 Australian and 3 Vietnamese groups. The Australian group consisted of 84 undergraduate students in the Faculty of Arts, the University of Melbourne. The 3 Vietnamese groups, with 330 Vietnamese learners of EFL, were of different proficiency levels: 110 first-year students, 118 second-year students, and 102 third-year students, who were studying English as their major at the University of Hue, Vietnam. These students had to do a language proficiency test before actually completing the DCTs. The purpose of the test was to confirm whether the different levels the learners were in would ensure the difference in their proficiency. All the participants in these 4 groups filled out the DCTs. Then, only 10 pairs from each group were invited to perform the role plays. The Vietnamese students who did the role plays were chosen from each group based on their test results. This was to guarantee that they actually differed in their proficiency levels.

The data were analyzed with the focus on the choice of request strategies and syntactic mitigators. They were compared across the proficiency levels and the variations of the given scenarios.

Because of the limitation of time and scope, only the choice of request strategies will be presented.