

# Cross-Linguistic Encounters: Assessing Pragmatic Competence in English in 1º Bachillerato Students

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**Cross-Linguistic Encounters: Assessing Pragmatic Competence in  
English in 1<sup>st</sup>-Bachillerato Students**

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Máster Universitario en Formación de Profesorado de Educación Secundaria  
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Especialidad en Inglés

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# Contents

<i>Abstract.....</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Resumen.....</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>1. Introduction .....</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>2. Theoretical background.....</i>	<i>4</i>
2.1. Speech act theory: Austin's and Searle's classification.....	4
2.2. L2 pragmatics teaching in the EFL curriculum .....	5
2.3. Research on EFL speech-act performance and opportunities for teaching.....	7
<i>3. Methodology .....</i>	<i>8</i>
3.1. Educational context: the Bilingual Programme, the English Department and participants involved .....	8
3.2. Textbook review: content on L2 speech-act learning .....	10
3.3. Discourse Completion Test.....	11
<i>4. Data analysis .....</i>	<i>14</i>
4.1. Coursebook review .....	14
4.1.1. An overview on pragmatic content .....	14
4.1.2. Examination on speech acts .....	15
4.2. Discourse Completion Test results .....	17
4.2.1. Quantitative analysis.....	18
4.2.2. Qualitative analysis .....	21
<i>5. Discussion of the results and reflections on L2 pragmatics pedagogy in Bachillerato .....</i>	<i>29</i>
<i>6. Conclusions .....</i>	<i>32</i>
<i>References.....</i>	<i>33</i>
<i>Appendix: DCT questionnaire.....</i>	<i>36</i>

## Abstract

The present dissertation shows an assessment of pragmatic competence in English in 1<sup>st</sup>-Bachillerato students from a bilingual high school in Madrid. More specifically, the study emerged from the oversight this particular skill undergoes in praxis, as secondary EFL teachers tend to be overly focused on grammatical-lexical aspects of language. The research was carried out by examining all pragmatics-related content from the assigned textbook, alongside a Discourse Completion Test meant to collect data on EFL learners' realisation of selected speech acts. Moreover, this paper attempted to check whether students were well equipped to face any type of pragmatic failure (either sociopragmatic or pragmalinguistic) when communicating with people whose L1 is not Spanish. Lastly, some pedagogical approaches were drawn on to show pragmatics teaching in English for Secondary and, especially, Bachillerato students.

**Keywords:** Bachillerato, EFL, pragmatics, pragmatic failure, speech acts.

## Resumen

El presente trabajo fin de máster muestra una evaluación de competencia pragmática en lengua inglesa a estudiantes de 1<sup>o</sup> de Bachillerato de un instituto bilingüe de Madrid. Para ser más exactos, el estudio partía de la poca atención que esta destreza experimenta en la práctica, ya que los docentes de inglés de secundaria tienden a centrarse en aspectos gramático-léxicos del lenguaje. Esta investigación se llevó a cabo por medio de un estudio de contenido pragmático en el libro de texto asignado, además de un *Discourse Completion Test* diseñado para recoger datos sobre la realización de actos de habla por parte de los alumnos de inglés. Además, esta disertación trató de comprobar si los estudiantes estaban bien preparados para afrontar cualquier tipo de error pragmático (ya fuese sociopragmático o pragmalingüístico) a la hora de comunicarse con gente cuya L1 no sea español. Por último, se mencionarán algunos enfoques pedagógicos en la enseñanza de la pragmática del inglés para estudiantes de Educación Secundaria y, especialmente, Bachillerato.

**Palabras clave:** Bachillerato, ILE, pragmática, error pragmático, actos de habla.

## 1. Introduction

Words encompass varied connotations depending on the context they are uttered in. For instance, saying “congratulations” at a best friend’s wedding does not resemble in meaning as when someone happens to fail a test. This is, to a short extent, what pragmatics envisage studying: how context shapes the meaning of language, either written or oral, and its role in interpersonal communication (Brown & Levinson., 1987; Yule, 1996; Huang, 2007; Ishihara & Cohen., 2010; Alba-Juez, 2015). Learners who take EFL enrolment currently at secondary and upper-secondary education are to be acquainted with this particular competence, as it becomes key for a full linguistic performance.

Learning pragmatics is a lifetime process humankind undergoes at different paces. However, when it comes to second language acquisition, what role does pragmatics play? Several scholars (Bardovi-Harlig, & Dörnyei, 1988; Bardovi-Harlig, 1996; González-Cruz, 2009; Ishihara and Cohen., 2010; Maíz-Arévalo, 2014; Alba-Juez, 2015; Chen, 2017, Konakahara, 2017) attempted to draw multi-oriented approaches to L2<sup>1</sup> pragmatics teaching – regarding such a linguistic field as the L2 skill which marks the genuine difference between a native and a non-native speaker. By the same token, they are to make students notice that learning a foreign language implies a vital need to understand the different social behaviours they will eventually face as L2 learners.

In the case of English, its labelling as a “lingua franca” (ELF) or “international language” (EIL) challenges the previous vital need to raise pragmatic awareness (Ishihara, 2012; Maíz-Arévalo, 2014). In other words, when two non-native speakers of English happen to be chatting in English, there is no pragmatic model to be adapted to. Given this lack of relevance, why do scholars insist on including pragmatics into the EFL curriculum? In fact, this very present internationalisation and multiculturalism brings about a need to awaken students’ social abilities regarding language and social behaviour (Thomas, 1983; Bardovi-Harlig, 1996; González-Cruz, 2009; Ishihara, 2010; Maíz-Arévalo, 2014; Alba-Juez, 2015, Konakahara, 2017). That is, language teaching should not solely target structural grammar- and vocabulary-items instruction, but also extend into students’ correct use of language in context, lest they may be misunderstood.

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<sup>1</sup> L1 and L2 will be used in this text in reference to first and second language respectively.

The Community of Madrid introduced its Bilingual Education Programme (*Programa de Enseñanza Bilingüe*) in 2004. This programme aimed to include Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) methodologies whereby pupils are fully immersed in artificial English-speaking environments; this new generation underwent a remarkable increase in L2 input, which accomplished perceptible improvements in such language learning (Nashaat & Llinares., 2018). Although some scholars seem to be at odds with the outcomes of this so-called bilingual programme, (Guitérrez & Pedrosa., 2010; Roncero-Mateos, 2018) surveys<sup>2</sup> show how this linguistic immersion becomes striking enough to succeed at Cambridge Assessment English tests, namely KET, PET, FCE, CAE<sup>3</sup>.

Due to this bilingual atmosphere that students from Madrid take advantage of, the main motivation for this research is whether fully-skilled bilingual students show enough pragmatic competence in their L2 (English in this case); in order to check such a competence, a Discourse Completion Test was designed to examine the speech-act choice amongst Spanish-speaking Bachillerato students in English. This pragmatic-competence assessment will be related to the presence of speech acts in these students' 1<sup>st</sup>-Bachillerato textbook.

Thus, the following research questions (RQ) will attempt to draw conclusions upon:

RQ1. What is Bachillerato students' pragmatic competence in English in relation to their choice of particular speech acts in L2?

RQ2. What pragmatic content is included in the EFL textbook and how is the students' pragmatic performance related to such learning material?

RQ3. Are there (if any) socio-pragmatic or pragmalinguistic transfers from their L1 (i.e. Spanish) into English?

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<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.comunidad.madrid/noticias/2018/06/13/alumnos-centros-bilingues-comunidad-obtienen-mejores-resultados> [last retrieved 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2020].

<sup>3</sup> KET: Key English Test; PET: Preliminary English Test; FCE: First Certificate in English; CAE: Certificate in Advanced English.

In order to meet the academic standards this dissertation aims to reach, this will be the next structure to be followed: to begin with, the theoretical framework will provide solid sociolinguistic and pedagogical grounding – going from classic speech act theories (Austin’s and Searle’s) to speech-act teaching in EFL; secondly, the methodology section is meant to present the variables, materials, and educational environment to be dealt with; thirdly, a thorough analysis of the data obtained will be accomplished so as to assess students’ pragmatic awareness; next, some reflective thoughts upon the prior analysis will be drawn; to summarise all this up, relevant conclusions will be figured out as to whether Madrid’s Bilingual Programme entails pragmatic-awareness raising from both educators and students through the learning of English.

## 2. Theoretical background

### 2.1. Speech act theory: Austin’s and Searle’s classification

In order to frame the socio-linguistic study of L2 speech-act choice alongside its pedagogical implications, it is vital to make reference to the Speech Act theory. The actions implied by utterances are typically known in pragmatics as *speech acts* (Yule, 1996). It was the English philosopher John L. Austin who first coined this term over the late 1930s. According to Austin’s Speech Act Theory (1962), three types of acts take place when something is uttered: the *locutionary act*, which refers to the sentence itself; the *illocutionary force*, which can be defined as the actual meaning of the words performed; and the *perlocutionary act*, which regards the effect of the previous two (Yule, 1996). These phenomena can solely take place through two different types of acts: *performative* and *constative*. The former constatives encompass statements and assertions: e.g. The Greek language is older than Latin; performative acts involve “utterances that are used to do things or perform acts” (Huang, 2007: 95): e.g. I promise I’ll learn to cook proper curry.

Nonetheless, this theory brings about some limitations which reside in the lack of a broader and more detailed classification. Seven years after Austin’s essay *How to do things with words* (1962) was published, his American peer, John Searle, provided further development to what Austin classified as speech acts. Searle divided speech acts into five types (adapted from Yule, 1996: 54-55; Huang, 2007: 106-108):

- (a) **Representatives:** referring to those utterances whereby the speaker conveys their own beliefs. E.g. Aeroplanes are safer than cars.
- (b) **Directives:** speech acts in which the speaker shows clearly their want to get something from the hearer. These include orders, requests or commands. E.g. Would you clean up the bathroom, please?
- (c) **Commisives:** through these speech acts, the speaker commits themselves to do something. Commisives are commonly expressed as pledges, offers, promises, etc. E.g. I'll never drink alcohol again.
- (d) **Expressives:** the speaker shares with the hearer their current psychological state. Typically expressed through apologies, congratulations or blames. E.g. I'm living my oats!
- (e) **Declaratives:** speech acts expected to change the world by uttering powerful phrases. As opposed to the previous types, declaratives (or declarations) entail noteworthy effects, as they are performed by legally empowered persons (e.g. lawyers, prime ministers, etc.). E.g. (A judge at the end of a trial) I hereby absolve you of all charges.

This dissertation will target five speech acts for students to perform through a discourse completion test, namely: **apologies, complaints, refusals, requests** and **thanks**. The reason for such a selection is driven by the linguistic competence in English these Bachillerato participants were to have (i.e. a B2 level of English); so far, students performing in upper-intermediate level are to be familiarised with all these five speech acts learnt time and again in their English lessons – as they also happen to be highly frequent in daily discourse.

## 2.2. L2 pragmatics teaching in the EFL curriculum

The pedagogy of pragmatics in the L2 classroom has been broadly discussed over the past decades (Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1988; Estébanez, 1992; Bardovi-Harlig, 1996; Fernández-Amaya, 2008; Chen, 2017; Ishihara & Cohen, 2010; Ishihara, 2012). Prior



papers agree on pragmatics as marking the difference between being native and non-native speakers.

EFL teaching involves plentiful skills to be regarded, as described in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR): production, interaction, mediation and reception (2019: 30). Within the same document it is clearly schematised that, in order to perform communicative language competence, L2 learners must accomplish three different dimensions: linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic (2019: 30). As explained in this very companion, the call for plurilingualism “exploits pre-existing sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences which in turn develops them further” (2019: 29). Furthermore, the CEFR remarks on the relevance pragmatic competence (PC henceforth) means, as it comprises the “actual language use in the (co-)construction of text. Pragmatic competence is thus primarily concerned with the user/learner’s knowledge of the principles of language [...]” (CEFR, 2019: 138). L2 teachers are expected to awaken students’ pragmatic awareness so as to complete their genuine overall language proficiency. On the other hand, it is to be considered that the CEFR aims to describe and, to an extent, advise foreign language teachers to instruct according to general common European standards. In so doing, pragmatic-awareness raising is to be adjusted to the teacher’s means, so that students can get acquainted with such a phenomenon.

Including pragmatics teaching in the EFL curriculum should, thus, be one of the main tasks of the teachers. Handful scholars and correspondent studies (Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, Z., 1988; Bardovi-Harlig, 1996; González-Cruz, 2009; Ishihara & Cohen, 2010; Ishihara, 2012; Chen, 2017) pinpoint the importance given to grammar- and vocabulary-learning as opposed to pragmatic competence. As reported by Ishihara “there is a genuine need for research-based pragmatics instruction that more accurately reflects how language is actually used in context” (2014: 201). On the one hand, proficient students may happen to perform good grammar skills, but conversely lack pragmatic competence in a given context (Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1988: 3). What is more, their focus on structure rather than on communication – as the CEFR suggests – supposes a noteworthy ignorance to pragmatics. Consequently, such a type of student will resume in transferring L1 pragmatics to their target L2 (Ishihara, 2012: 31). On the other hand, to what extent is

pragmatics teaching feasible in the EFL classroom? González-Cruz asserts that as long as the teacher unconsciously exposes their students to target pragmatic norms, such teaching can be effective enough (2009: 45). Be that as it may, teaching pragmatics is somewhat limited, as teachers cannot fully drill pupils with the whole range of speech acts, and politeness strategies. However, teachers' fundamental task (with regard to pragmatics teaching) is to "make students more aware that pragmatic functions exist in language, specifically in discourse, in order that they may be more aware of these functions as learners" (Bardovi-Harlig, 1996: 12).

### **2.3. Research on EFL speech-act performance and opportunities for teaching**

Several studies (Garrido-Rodríguez, 2006; Ishihara, 2010; Zhao & Throssell, 2011) have been carried out so as to assess the role of speech-act teaching in foreign languages. The key aim to teach pragmatics is by and large to raise intercultural awareness. In so doing, students become acquainted with manifold ways to convey meaning by uttering different speech acts. According to Zhao and Throssell, "misunderstanding between two interlocutors who do not share the same culture can easily occur due to the disparity of the performative speech acts, especially concerning different cultures" (2011: 91). The scholars illustrate this likely cross-cultural failure with greetings: for instance, Chinese greetings tend to be translated as "have you eaten?" (as opposed to Western languages' "hello") (ibid, 2011: 90). According to Grass and Neu (quoted in Zhao and Throssell, 2011: 90), these sort of greetings are bound to pragmatic failure, as the Western addressee might interpret they are being invited to eat.

Scholars like Fernández-Amaya (2007) argue that English language teaching should implicate pragmatic awareness raising, with special regard to Thomas' cross-cultural-pragmatic approach (1983). Students can learn to use language properly – other than focusing on grammatical and lexical acquisition – so they become aware of the sociolinguistic environment they can get to deal with (Fernández-Amaya, 2007: 19). Other scholars pinpoint the position of L2 pragmatics as a "third place" between the speaker's L1 culture and their L2's (Pohl, 2004). That is, it is a sort of "mezzanine" that makes the L2 learner leap up to a properly competent language learning.

According to Ishihara and Cohen (2010: 57), there are up to eight most commonly researched speech acts that can be checked on the CARLA Speech Act website<sup>4</sup> (apologies, complaints/responses, greetings, invitations, refusals, requests and thanks). However, this research will solely tackle five of them: namely, apologies, complaints, refusals, requests, and thanks (see **section 4**).

### 3. Methodology

The methodology to be followed throughout this paper is oriented to assess Bachillerato students' pragmatic competence, as well as the pragmatic content in their English textbook. All data gathered will be viewed both from a quantitative perspective, where marks and tendencies will be commented on; and from a qualitative approach, whereby textual description will be primarily handled and related to the theory seen in **section 2**.

Therefore, this section will be structured as follows: to start with, the educational context will be introduced (school, bilingual context, target participants); secondly, data gathering will be presented in another two parts, namely textbook review on speech-act teaching, and discourse completion test (DCT) analysis.

#### 3.1. Educational context: the Bilingual Programme, the English Department and participants involved

The school selected for this assessment was based in the multicultural city of Madrid (Spain) and belongs to the Community of Madrid's Bilingual Programme as of 2010. That educational offer included CLIL methodologies whereby students were constantly exposed and required to produce academic content by using the English language in subjects such as Social Sciences, Arts, or Biology. This programme is subdivided into two types: Bilingual Section (BS) and Bilingual Programme (BP): the access to BS can only be given to those students previously enrolled in bilingual schools or whose level of English reaches either A2 or B1 proficiency. BS students can take all their courses in

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<sup>4</sup> The Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition of the University of Minnesota provides a corpus of the most commonly used speech acts: <https://carla.umn.edu/speechacts/descriptions.html> [last seen 24th March 2020].

English with some exceptions<sup>5</sup>; on the other hand, BP students can enjoy access to this programme certificate-free, although their academic offer in English is remarkably reduced (5 hours a week of English language lessons in addition to another course). Regarding the two Bachillerato years, there is no BP or BS as such – since this stage is oriented towards university examinations to be made in Spanish – yet there is an upper-intermediate English offer (CEFR B2) alongside an Advanced English programme.

The English Department counts with 14 teachers entitled to instruct English in both the BP and BS programmes. The Department's *programación*, or syllabus, includes the didactic and communicative competences; guidelines, contents and assessment to be followed by all the teachers in order to accomplish the students' learning aims for each grade. As for pragmatic competence, section 3.1 from the school's English syllabus. states:

El componente Pragmático-discursivo contempla tres dimensiones: la sociolingüística (vinculada con la adecuada producción y recepción de mensajes en diferentes contextos sociales); la pragmática (que incluye las microfunciones comunicativas y los esquemas de interacción); y la discursiva (que incluye las macrofunciones textuales y las cuestiones relacionadas con los géneros discursivos). (Programación de Inglés, 2019: 10)

Hence the pragmatic dimension of language is contemplated by teachers themselves in this very academic *programación*. According to the syllabus, students are to get acquainted with different types of texts (written and/or oral) where pragmatics, discourse and the sociolinguistic environment play a key role, so that their language-learning progression can be fulfilled.

As to the participants for this research, they all were all 1<sup>st</sup>-Bachillerato students. The reason for such a grade-choice falls upon their expected maturity and linguistic consolidation towards B2 level (i.e. upper intermediate). In other words, Bachillerato students' age ranged from 16 to 18 years old, and their belonging to this upper studies group determined a fairly solid background knowledge. This previously mentioned

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<sup>5</sup> Spanish Language and Literature, Mathematics, Religion are not offered in English (Consejería de Educación e Investigación, 2016).

background knowledge refers to the experience social beings have on the world around them – key to master pragmatic skills, at least, in an L1.

Some relevant data will be considered in order to respond to the previously stated research questions: to begin with, they were all 1<sup>st</sup>-Bachillerato students from the same high school and enrolled in an upper-intermediate English course; there was a total amount of 19 participants from the same group, since this school divided EFL Bachillerato into two groups: upper-intermediate (B2) and Advanced English (C1-C2) (*Programa de Inglés Avanzado*); all of them started learning English from nursery and enrolled in EFL at their primary and secondary education, too.

### 3.2. Textbook review: content on L2 speech-act learning

Culture-related teaching content has become highly popular over the last few years with the advent of English as an International Language (EIL) (Yang, 2018). New foreign language teachers consider including cultural content in their lessons, with an aim to raise cross-cultural awareness. Such content comprises a myriad of topics from music to hand gestures, but also pragmatics-based topics – for instance, speech-act usage in different cultures (Ishihara and Cohen, 2010).

In the present study, research question number 2<sup>6</sup> draws special attention to the implementation of pragmatic content within the EFL curriculum. Hence, for this case study, the participants' textbook was looked through and examined to overview whether pragmatic content was included as part of their learning of English. In order to do so, the fact that students' textbook-following was a usual routine was regarded as vital for their pragmatics-learning progress. In other words, according to the *Programación*, the textbook assigned for 1<sup>st</sup> Bachillerato (upper-intermediate English) is *Gateway B2* (Departamento de Inglés, 2019: 169), which means pupils will be highly exposed to its contents.

This part of the analysis was to examine whether students are taught and illustrated with interlanguage speech-act usage; in other words, the different ways a speech act can be

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<sup>6</sup> RQ2. What pragmatic content is included in the EFL textbook and how is the students' pragmatic performance related to such a learning material?

uttered (in this case) in English – being different to a learner’s L1 different. Such speech acts were classified according to Searle’s taxonomy and the CARLA corpus. This corpus belongs to the so-called Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition from the University of Minnesota. It provides a broad range of speech acts in different modern languages, namely, Hebrew, Japanese, Persian, Hindi, British/American English and Spanish amongst others.

### 3.3. Discourse Completion Test

In order to assess pragmatic competence in Bachillerato students, this paper meant to use Discourse Completion Tests (DCT) as one of the manifold pragmatic-ability assessment methods available (e.g. multiple-choice questions, performance-based pragmatic assessment tasks, role plays, etc.)<sup>7</sup>. DCTs are “production tests that present a hypothetical communicative situation, called a prompt, and invite test-takers to respond to it” (Taguchi, 2019: 313). Students were given a test made up of ten open-ended questions for them to answer via *Google Forms* voluntarily and anonymously (see **appendix** for the whole set of questions). These questions (or prompts) were based on Ishihara and Cohen (2010) pragmatics-teaching approaches, whereby L2 learners are triggered to produce specific speech acts accordingly. Since this test was designed for 1<sup>st</sup>-Bachillerato students, some of the questions were suggested by the author (Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4, Q5, Q6 and Q10) whilst Q7, Q8 and Q9 were adapted from Ishihara and Cohen (2010: 242-243). Besides, all of the questions were adapted to a B2 level of English (which was the one these students were aimed at meeting by the end of the course).

The DCT itself attempted to assess students’ use of the five target speech acts listed in **section 2.1** (i.e. apologies, complaints, compliments, refusals, requests and thanks). In order to do so, each of the questions in the form expected the use of (at least) one of each of the aforementioned speech acts:

Speech acts	Question from DCT
Apologies	Q4, Q9
Complaints	Q2, Q3, Q8

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Taguchi (2019: 308-316).

<b>Refusals</b>	Q7
<b>Requests</b>	Q1, Q4
<b>Thanks</b>	Q6, Q5, Q10

Table 1. Target speech acts and corresponding questions from DCT

The reason why some questions may bring about more than one speech act is due to the multiple ways speakers can react at the given prompts. This is underpinned by the interculturality between participants' L1 and English, which could lead to either sociopragmatic<sup>8</sup> or pragmalinguistic<sup>9</sup> failures.

In order to quantify the speech acts in **table 1**, a rubric was designed by the author. In much the same way, the rubric also provided assessment for the relation between each speech act and the prior textbook content. Participants were to deal with a total amount of 10 prompts for them to respond in English. Nevertheless, it was their use of language-in-context what was being assessed. Hence, the next rubric was followed to score students' responses to their prompts with regard to their speech-act choice in English – meant to be more or less accurate depending on aspects such as rank of imposition, (in)formality, distance between the interlocutors, and so on:

Speech acts	Examples <sup>10</sup>	Score
<b>Apologies</b>	• Use of “sorry” / “I apologise”	1.5
	• Off-record apology (i.e. hinted)	0.5
<b>Complaints</b>	• Use of mitigation strategies (e.g. honorifics, modal verbs)	1.25
	• Bald-on-record complaint (i.e. direct complaint)	0.75
<b>Refusals</b>	• Direct refuse (e.g. “I refuse”; “no”)	0.5
	• Indirect refuse (e.g. use of hedges, disclaimers, apologies...) <sup>11</sup>	1.5
<b>Requests</b>	• Use of mitigation devices (e.g. honorifics, modal verbs)	0.75

<sup>8</sup> According to Leech, *sociopragmatic* failure refers to the incorrect use of linguistic formula and expressions in particular contexts where the rank of imposition is key (quoted in Thomas, 1983: 99). E.g. When a student addresses their headmaster as “pal”.

<sup>9</sup> *Pragmalinguistic* failure occurs when a speaker's utterance's illocutionary force is not properly decoded by hearer – remarkably common in speakers who undergo pragmatic transfers from their L1 into their L2 (Thomas, 1983: 99).

<sup>10</sup> Some of the examples will be labelled by Brown & Levinson's politeness theory terms (1987) with meaning alongside.

<sup>11</sup> Based on Ishihara & Cohen (2010: 60-61).

	• Use of “please”	0.75
	• Direct request (i.e. being impolite)	0.5
<b>Thanks</b>	• Showing on-record gratitude (e.g. “thank you for...”)	1.5
	• Off-record thank (e.g. “you didn’t have to”)	0.5

*Table 2. Rubric for speech act assessment*

As can be observed, there are three types of score (0.5, 0.75 and 1.5), so that the participants could obtain up to 2 points per speech act. Given that some prompts triggered more than one speech act, the points obtained from each question were to be reflected with a general mean. That is, speech acts like “apologies” were to be performed in Q4 and Q9, from which students’ scores in both questions were summed up and divided into two (i.e. the number of questions which triggered this speech act). Consequently, a single mark is obtained.

All of these scores were considered depending on the accuracy of the speech act(s) itself; in other words, if the speech act was realised politely (e.g. through the use of indirect strategies, hedges, etc.) and met the standards of English varieties’ pragmatics, the higher the score became. If otherwise, participants performed any sort of pragmatic transfer from their L1 or opted for impolite strategies, lower scores were given.

Scores will be calculated, firstly, individually according to the rubric in **table 2** and labelled by speech-act category. That is, scores per question will not be displayed to show general trends, but only the mean obtained by participant in given speech acts (e.g. P1 might score 1.5 in apologies – when apologies are triggered in both Q4 and Q9). Secondly, after these individual marks are gathered, the study will work on overall means, again, per speech act, in addition to the standard deviation to observe the distance from the mean.

Regarding the limitations of this data-gathering method, it must be stated that several pragmatics (Maíz-Arévalo, 2012; Taguchi, 2019) render DCTs reduced. More specifically, both DCTs and role plays frame test-takers in artificial environments, where speakers do not get to use real spontaneous speech. Such a type of speech, however, happened to be hard to collect for this dissertation since the ongoing circumstances (i.e.



COVID-19 pandemic) hampered any sort of contact with students. On the other hand, one of the advantages of this type of tests is its quick and easy collection.

## 4. Data analysis

This section is aimed at analysing the data obtained from the textbook the 1<sup>st</sup>-Bachillerato students were assigned by the English Department, and the DCT carried out through *Google Forms*. Therefore, the analysis will target two essential points: 4.1 coursebook review and speech-act teaching; and 4.2 an examination with regard to the aforementioned DCT's results (in relation with the speech acts in **subsection 4.1**).

### 4.1. Coursebook review

#### 4.1.1. An overview on pragmatic content

*Gateway* English-language series belong to the well-known worldwide publishing house *Macmillan Education*. According to the official website itself, these *Gateway* series offer “a comprehensive and easy to implement approach to life skills training, enabling teenagers to thrive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century world”<sup>12</sup>. Moreover, these books are designed for preparing students to achieve successful marks on international examinations (e.g. FCE, IELTS, TOEFL).

Considering content on pragmatics, *Gateway B2* introduces L2 speech acts through different topics regarding, more specifically, formal and informal registers. To begin with, Unit 1 includes sections on “informal emails” (to be more precise, “taking notes in informal interviews and “reply to a request in an email”) in addition to “expressing preferences” as part of the speaking block; Unit 2 also opts for dealing with rather informal usage of language (which tends to be the English speakers would face in, for example, social life); conversely, Unit 3, Unit 7 and Unit 9 handle formal or more academic English, offering content on argumentation such as “expressing and justifying opinions”, “Discussions 1 (presenting arguments)”, and “Discussions 2”.

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<sup>12</sup> From MacMillan English website: <https://www.macmillanenglish.com> [last visited 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2020].

## 4.1.2. Examination on speech acts

The analysis to be followed will regard the speech act taxonomy seen by Searle (cf. **subsection 2.1**) and that of the Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition's webpage. In order to check this, this paper will display the pedagogical impact L2 speech-act teaching is to cause in Bachillerato students' English. Therefore, samples from actual *Gateway B2* content regarding speech acts will be tackled, being such linguistic resources classified in: **greetings/farewells**, **thanks**, **apologies** and **complaints**. The choice for these speech acts is down to their appearance in the textbook and the DCT as well. In the case of "greetings/farewells," although lacking in the DCT, they will be studied from a register-choice point of view – in other words, whether 1<sup>st</sup>-Bachillerato students are taught to go formal or informal in English.

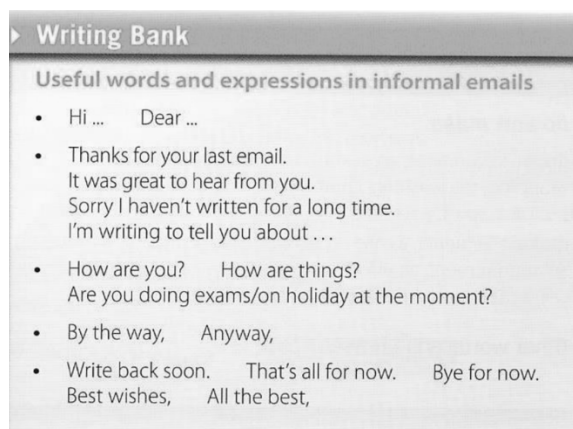


Figure 1. Writing bank box: informal emails (Spencer, 2016: 15)

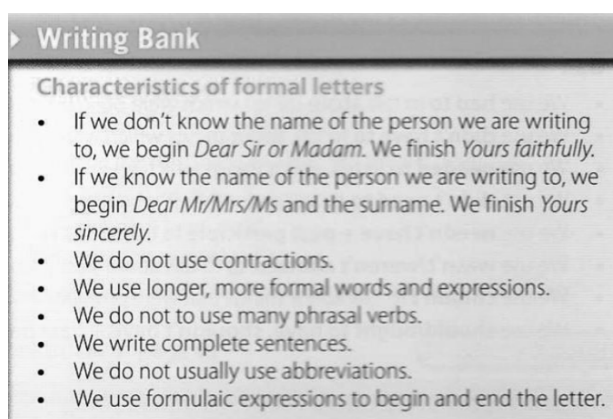


Figure 2. Writing bank box: formal letter (Spencer, 2016: 67)

To start with, **figure 1** illustrates examples from informal language students might frame, in this case, within "informal emails". Being emailing a potential conversation between

(at least) two interlocutors, EFL learners are to reproduce as many speech acts as the context itself demands. For instance, greetings (as in *Hi...*; *Dear...*), where honorifics such as Miss/Sir are omitted, show a clear social proximity between the participants involved (as in bullet points 1 and 2 in **figure 2**). Likewise, it can be observed how farewells are present in **figure 1** as in “write back soon”, “that’s all for now”, “all the best”, etc. Hence, B2 learners are indeed taught how to utter varied ways of saying “goodbye” in an informal context – which is yet to be differed from that of a formal one (see **figure 2**) in phrases like “yours faithfully” or “yours sincerely”.

Also, the textbook adds some thanks which are rare in Peninsular Spanish, as the addressee is being thanked for an alleged prior email (“thanks for your last email”). This phenomenon can be highly experienced when interacting with native speakers of English at friendly relationships. For instance, after having met up, British English speakers are prone to thanking their addressee for spending time with them.

As regards to apologies, **figure 1** displays a typical apology introduced as follows: “Sorry I haven’t written for a long time”. This choice for *sorry* is not rare for EFL learners to come across with, but considerably relevant from a cultural point of view as it is, again, common practice amongst native speakers of English to apologise (Deutschmann, 2003). It could be said, that both Peninsular Spanish and English-speaking cultures are prone to apologising, yet the way a British English speaker would apologise does differ from a Peninsular Spanish speaker in terms of frequency.

**Figure 3** shows a “speaking bank box” on how to express and justify opinions. According to Seale’s taxonomy, these phrases would be labelled as expressives, since the speaker is sharing their beliefs on some regard (e.g. “I think/believe/feel”; “To my mind...”). Pointing out to the target L2 speech acts for this research, EFL learners would be being exposed to complaints in this box on “expressing and justifying opinions”. That is, showing disagreement, as in “I (agree/)*disagree* that...” or “to my mind...”, is being taught through these phrases indeed. Being the case, learners dispose of handful ways of realising such speech acts; nevertheless, there is a classification to be made, as it can be observed how the textbook does not show when to utter such phrases. For instance, the use of “If you ask me,” and “I disagree” differ in impact on hearer. That is, the difference

between the two lies on the context they can be used (e.g. discussion, advising) and the addressee the speaker is using these phrases for (e.g. a friend; a stranger).

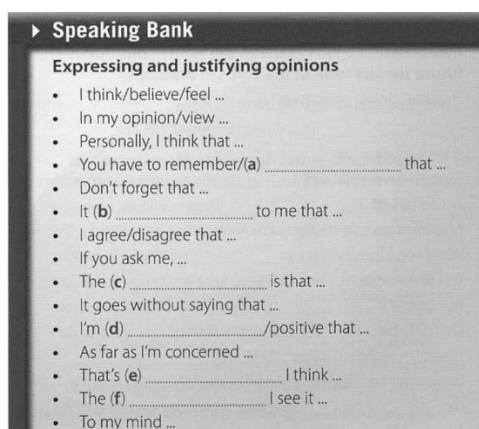


Figure 3. Speaking bank box: expressing and justifying opinions (Spencer, 2016: 40)

To conclude this section, most of the speech acts to be tackled for this research (namely, apologies, complaints, refusals, requests and thanks) are not quite instructed through the *Gateway-B2* textbook. For instance, apologies are certainly included (as seen in **figure 1**), and so are thanks – which could be labelled as expressives according to Searle’s taxonomy – and complaints (see **figure 3**). In general terms, opening phrases as the ones aforementioned throughout this section encompass most of the L2 speech acts this study envisages assessing. Therefore, 1<sup>st</sup>-Bachillerato EFL students’ pragmatic competence with regard to L2 speech-act learning is reinforced at this B2 level. As for the target speech acts missing in this textbook section, requests and refusals are clearly left out. Nonetheless, further explanations regarding the use of all these speech acts in context is not provided either, which leaves this task to the course instructor.

#### 4.2. Discourse Completion Test results

The Discourse Completion Test (DCT) was made up of 10 questions for participants to respond according to their own experience. The analysis to take part in this section will consist of checking the highest scores – which mean a good pragmatic proficiency – as opposed to the lowest ones. Furthermore, samples from the participants’ responses themselves will be illustrated, so that particular pragmatic strategies can be assessed. Hence both qualitative and quantitative data will be considered for such an examination.

## 4.2.1. Quantitative analysis

This subsection is devoted to offering a quantitative perspective of the DCT designed for the realisation of five speech acts: **apologies, complaints, refusals, requests** and **thanks**. As can be observed in **table 2**, students were to be scored depending on the pragmatic strategy realised in each of the ten questions. The table below reflects all quantitative results obtained from the DCT in each of the participants:

Participant	<i>Requests</i>	<i>Complaint</i>	<i>Refusal</i>	<i>Apologies</i>	<i>Thanks</i>
<b>P1</b>	1.12	1.08	2	1.5	1.5
<b>P2</b>	1.12	1.33	1.5	1.75	1.5
<b>P3</b>	1.5	1.33	2	1.75	1.5
<b>P4</b>	1.5	1.5	1.5	0.5	1.66
<b>P5</b>	1.5	1.33	1.5	1.75	1.66
<b>P6</b>	1.5	1.33	0.5	1.75	1.5
<b>P7</b>	1.5	1.75	0.5	1.75	1.66
<b>P8</b>	1.12	1.16	0.5	1.75	1.5
<b>P9</b>	1.12	1.25	0.5	1.5	1.5
<b>P10</b>	1.12	1.66	1.5	1.5	1.5
<b>P11</b>	0.75	1.5	1.5	1.75	1.66
<b>P12</b>	1.5	0.91	0.5	1.75	1.5
<b>P13</b>	1	1.16	2	1.75	1.66
<b>P14</b>	1.5	1.33	1.5	1.5	1.5
<b>P15</b>	1.12	1.33	1.5	1.75	1.66
<b>P16</b>	0.75	1.5	1.5	1.75	1.5
<b>P17</b>	0.62	1.16	1.5	0.5	1.66
<b>P18</b>	1.5	1.33	1.5	0.5	1.5
<b>P19</b>	1.5	1.33	0.5	1.75	1.5

Table 3. Quantitative results obtained in DCT

It must be regarded that participants could obtain up to 2 points per speech-act category; as explained in **subsection 3.3**, these scores were measured by means of a rubric meant to consider usual ways of realising particular speech acts. That said, the procedure to be

followed in this subsection consists on explaining how each speech act was assessed by displaying salient samples from actual responses.

**Table 4** illustrates the mean and the standard deviation obtained after calculating the results obtained in table 3:

Formula	<i>Requests</i>	<i>Complaints</i>	<i>Refusals</i>	<i>Apologies</i>	<i>Thanks</i>
<b>Mean</b>	1.24	1.33	1.26	1.5	1.55
<b>Standard deviation</b>	0.27	0.19	0.54	0.44	0.07

Table 4. Mean and standard deviation from DCT results

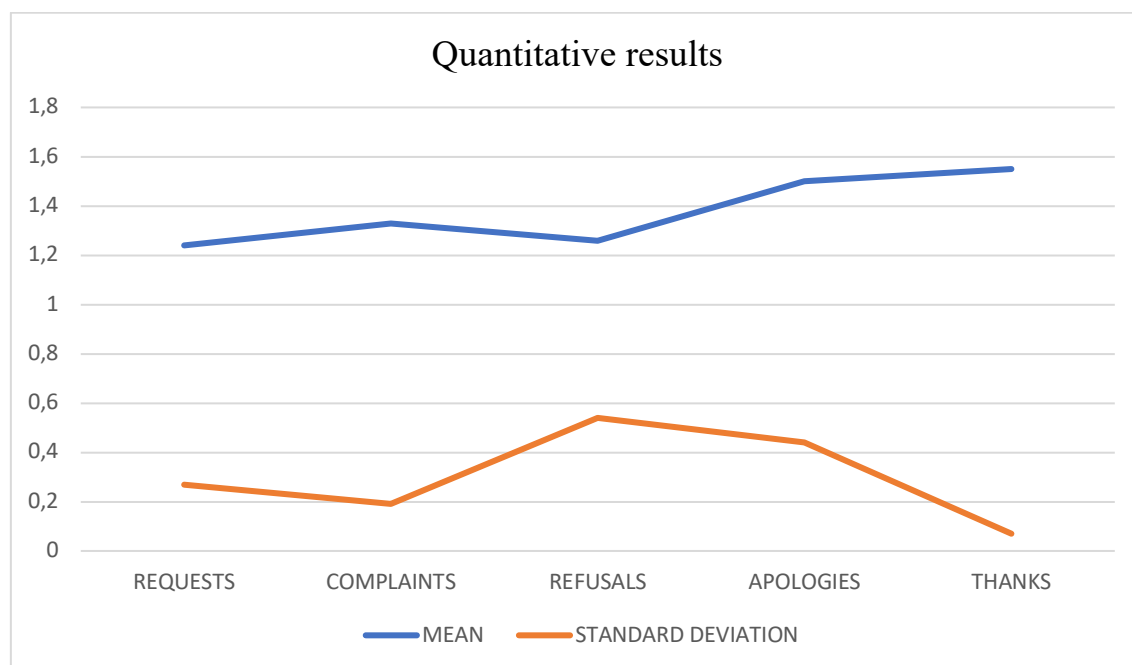


Figure 4. Illustrative graph for mean and standard deviation

The numbers above show what the overall mean is on each of the target speech acts. It must be born in mind that students could obtained up to 2 points per speech act, meaning the highest score equals a good pragmatic competence. Generally speaking, this particular 1<sup>st</sup>-Bachillerato group did well on what the DCT prompts attempted to elicit (i.e. the target speech acts).

As can be observed, the best pragmatic performance was found in **thanks** (1.55), happening it to be, likewise, a highly frequent speech act amongst speakers of English

(Deutschmann, 2003). Furthermore, thanks illustrates the lowest standard deviation out of the 5 speech acts (0.07), meaning the chance for error was very infrequent. Again, the reason for such a good performance was likely to be due to the significant amount of times thanks are realised in English in addition to students' acquaintance with such an L2 speech act throughout their academic life.

By the same token, **apologies** come second on the top of best realised speech acts (1.5) with a fairly high standard deviation (0.44). Only questions number 4 and 9 were to call for this speech act. The reason for such a successful performance might be due to the frequent exposure to apologies by speakers of English (Deutschman, 2003); moreover, it can be understood that formality tends to be prioritised in course-content along with negative-politeness strategies – in other words, linguistic formulae uttered to be as respectful to hearer (Brown & Levinson, 1987). For example, the coursebook included apologies as in “*sorry* I haven’t written for a long time” (see **figure 1**). Nevertheless, there is no mention to apologies throughout the textbook other than this last mentioned one.

Next speech act to be dealt with would be **complaints**, whose mean in this 19-participant survey was 1.33 with a considerably low standard deviation (0.19). EFL Bachillerato learners were assigned Q2, Q3 and Q8 for this speech act to come out. Just like thanks, the amount of times this speech act was to take place was significantly higher, but as opposed to thanks, this very speech act has a more threatening impact on the addressee. That is to say, students had to mind their words, lest being excessively impolite.

As for the second to last speech act on the scores obtained falls **refusals**, with a mean of 1.26 and a standard deviation of 0.54 – placing refusals on top of the most varied quantitative results in this dissertation. Only one question was meant to bring about this speech act: Q7. This particular question attempted to make students decline an invitation from a friend – a context they would be more acquainted with due to their age. Nevertheless, the standard deviation reflects on the multiple ways such an invitation can be rejected like, as manifold factors (to be explained in **subsection 4.2.2**) come into place.

To conclude this section, the very last speech act to get quantitative results from is **requests** with a total mean of 1.24 and a standard deviation of 0.27. This time, Q1 and

Q4 were to trigger requests from participants. The reason for such a moderately low score can be – just like complaints – their being significantly threatening. The scores to be obtained for this speech act were outstandingly more varied than the rest of the speech acts (see **table 2**): if using mitigation devices (0.75), if adding “please” (0.75) and if acting impolitely (0.5). Therefore, omitting a “please” like P9 as in: *Hi, I would like to eat something, could you take me the menu?*, would solely count 0.75 due to the use of modal verbs which minimise the threat. As regards to the standard deviation, again this 0.27 score could be caused by the three-aspect rate the assessment rubric proposed; besides, there were two questions with unlike contexts (being Q1 a more formal one and Q4 a rather “family” framework) which happened to score differently.

#### 4.2.2. Qualitative analysis

This section of the paper will tackle all data obtained in DCT, whose results will be discussed by taking into account the results obtained in **table 3**. The procedure will consist of a general analysis of all of the speech acts proposed.

##### 4.2.2.1. Refusals

To start with, **refusals** will be exemplified through some responses obtained in question 7: “You’re invited to a friend’s party, but you don’t want to attend because it’s not your ‘cup of tea’. How do you decline the invitation?”. From a quantitative point of view, responses to this prompt could score: 0.5 if direct refuse (e.g. “I refuse”; “no”) and/or 1.5 if indirect refuse. The next example is taken from P4 in their answer to question 7:

P4. *Thank you for your invitation, i wish i could go but it is imposible for me, sorry. I promise you that the Next party i Will come.*

In this case, P4 scored 1.5 for the use of indirect refuse (see **table 2** for rubric). The student wanted to express their unavailability for the given party as prompted above by implying through the illocutionary force the expected decline (“i wish i could go but it is imposible for me, sorry). Something which happened to be somewhat challenging in this particular question was the politeness scale between the (fictional) addressee and the learner. To be more specific, students could respond with either direct or indirect refusals



(or both of them) depending on the proximity and impact they related such a situation from their own experience (e.g. friends, alike parties, feelings towards them, etc.).

Conversely, P6 obtained 0.5 points for being blatant with their response: “I appreciate your invitation, but I’m going to be honest with you, I don’t like that kind of parties. I’m sorry. We could hang out another day if you want”. That is, P6 wanted to express their sincerity without leading to misunderstandings by uttering a clear response; such an answer, besides, could have been formulated so as to avoid the inviter to put the offer back out.

#### 4.2.2.2. Apologies

Taking **apologies** for the next illustration, it must be regarded that both Q4 and Q9 were to hint the realisation of this speech act. The criterion to be followed for such an evaluation was based on the use of direct (1.5 points) and indirect apologies (0.5). The reason why direct apologies scored higher was down to their clarity and politeness implied at the same time. The next examples were extracted from Q4: “You’ve kicked your brother José, so your parents don’t let you go out. You want to ask for permission anyway:”

*P3: Mum, dad. I am very sorry about what I did, I promise you that I will not do it never more. But please, leave me go out today, I meet with my friends and it is so important to me to see them.*

*P19: I’m so sorry, I promise it won’t happen again. Can I go out please?*

For these answers, both students scored 2, as they opted for the unequivocal “to be sorry” alongside an offer of repair (Ishihara & Cohen, 2010: 64). That is, they both started addressing their parents by apologising first hand (P3: *Mum, dad, I am very sorry about what I did*; P19: *I’m so sorry*). In so doing, they both acknowledged out of the prompt itself that an action was wrong (i.e. kicking their brother), so an apology was needed regardless the language they were dealing with. Besides, apologies of this type are typically aroused by a particular interest: being let go out (in this case). Apologisers thus followed their “sorry” by an offer of repair through which they commit themselves not to

repeat such an action. Independently from the elaboration of either response, both participants went for taking the verb “to promise” for their non-recurrence assurance.

As regards Q9, the situation to be handled for an apology to come through went this way: “You really enjoyed the meal that your friend cooked for you on Saturday night. It wasn’t until the end of the next week that you remembered you hadn’t thanked him properly for the evening. You came to her place to apologise for that oversight.” Although a thanking speech act could be targeted here, the point was for the participant to apologise after being rude.

Some English-speaking cultures, like the British itself, regard apologising as their daily routine (Deutschmann, 2003). It is a strategy which has been by and large humourised on TV shows and films, as it portrays a living stereotype. Therefore, situations like Q9’s would be, in this kind of contexts, rendered significantly rude since the guest has been (although invited over) invading the hosts’ space.

After this prior sociolinguistic contextualisation, the results from this DCT project a general use of “sorry” by a total amount of 8 participants. Given that the prompt itself includes the verb “apologise”, this would have been the expected locutionary act; be that as it may, EFL learners went for pinpointing their fault of having forgotten to thank the host:

P4: *Yesterday I remembered how your meal was, and I dind’t thank you for that, so thank you very much for the meal and i wish to enjoy this things with you for a long time.*

P9: *Oh my god... i’m a mess!! I forget to say you something important.. your meal was incredible!! You should go to Masterchef.*

P10: *Harry, I forgot to say thank you for the incredible meal that you prepared last week. The next time I’ll be the chef!*

Notwithstanding, participants were consciously aware about a past oversight, and so was reflected on their use of English by means of these verbs. The fact that it has been a friend who has invited them over, which means: (1) the not-thanking act adopts a more damaging effect because of their relationship, and (2) such a relationship can be easily repaired by this last mentioned locutionary act (i.e. hinting the apology) cannot be dismissed.

#### 4.2.2.3. Thanks

When it came to **thanking**, participants had three prompts (Q5, Q6, Q10) where such a speech act was implicit in; thanking in English is highly common especially amongst British English speakers. The rubric shows that participants could obtained up to 1.5 points when showing on-record gratitude (i.e. saying “thanks”) and 0.5 if being indirect (i.e. hinting).

Q5 prompted a typical thanking speech act after a compliment as follows: “You are meeting up with your friends to hang around and one of them gets astounded by your outfit: Friend: ‘your shirt is delightful!’. How do you react?.” This question is deemed, in pragmatic terms, as a compliment, which happened to be usually thanked by the complimentee (Boyle, 2010; Maíz-Arévalo, 2012). It is to be noted that some contexts might lead to misunderstandings, which cause a lack of thank-type speech act to come out. Nonetheless, the vast majority of the participants (17/19) cracked the prompt accordingly with a 1.5 score; failing the remaining 2 test-takers to obtain 0 as they interpreted the given compliment as rude.

Q6 was expressed as: “You’ve been staying in Canada over a whole term and lived with a host family. It’s the very last day of your exchange; you’re at the airport with your host family and you want to express your gratitude for such an experience,” as to how the next two responses are to be analysed:

P1: *Thanks for everything you did for me, it was a pleasure to be in your family.*

P5: *You have been caring for me everyday, I love you and you will be always in my heart.*

P1 was given 1.5 points due to their absolute gratitude in uttering “thanks for everything you did for me”. According to the CARLA, this type of thanks could be labelled as an expression of delight or affection, since there is genuine gratitude for, in this case, being hosted.

On the other hand, P5 preferred to show their gratitude by being indirect – as can be appreciated by their lack of gratitude phrases (e.g. thanks, I’m grateful for...). Instead, this student wanted to imply their being charmed by such a hostage by using verbs like “to care for” and “to love”. These verbs hint a positive meaning towards the addressee (i.e. the host family), which result in an accurate pragmatic competence.

Lastly, Q10’s prompt framed participants within a more challenging scenario, as they might not have faced it yet due to their age: “You’ve been called from a job offer you previously applied for, but the person on the phone brings bad news along: you are not in! What do you respond to end the call?” A thanking speech act would be rather expected for this sort of situations, since job-appliers have as yet being informed – in other words, they have been provided something which is to be thanked.

Although 13 participants included “thanks”/ “thank you” in their answers, there is a remaining amount of 6 test-takers who reacted differently. For instance:

P5: *Why did you call me? If it’s only for that, it’s not necessary. Don’t waste my time!*

P11: *Oh... I really wanted that job. It’s ok, I don’t mind. Anyway, if in the future you need someone for the job, call me.*

P15: *Oh, what a pity.. it would have been perfect if I have been chosen because of my way of work.*

As can be noticed, these Bachillerato students remarked the fact of not being in and, as in the case of P5, end up acting significantly rude. This would be considered, in terms of Thomas (1983) a sociopragmatic failure; that is, the speaker has not responding in their L2 (i.e. English) according to social requirements – being respectful to the addressee to keep face up, and grateful for being, at least, informed.

#### 4.2.2.4. Complaints

The next speech act to be discussed will be **complaints**. Question number 2, 3 and 8 were framed in varied contexts where students were to show their disagreement with the following situations:

Q2: It's results day, and you've found out your Mathematics teacher has committed a mistake at calculating your final grade, and you want to tell her about it.

Q3: Your friend Fernando has done something you didn't like to one of his friends, and you want to make him know. How do you express your feelings?

Q8: You and your date have been waiting for over 45 minutes for your meal to be served at a fancy restaurant. Besides, you have tickets for a show that starts in less than an hour. You feel the need to complain to the waiter about the excessive delay.<sup>13</sup>

As can be observed, the social scale varies in each of the questions: Q2 was designed to face complaining to a superior (a teacher); Q3, however, was meant to position both interlocutors at a same close social distance, since they are friends; and last but not least, Q8 addressed a peculiar, yet common at-the-restaurant situation, where the employee (the waiter) is still deemed inferior upon the so-called “the-customer-is-always-right” assumption. Thus all 1<sup>st</sup>-Bachillerato learners were to complaint by considering these factors mentioned above, which could have triggered pragmatic failure if improperly formulated responses were given.

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<sup>13</sup> Adapted from Ishihara and Cohen (2010: 242-243).

To begin with, Q2 displayed one of the two situations – given participants’ age – they were more familiarised with, as it was contextualised at school. For exemplification sake, two responses will be analysed:

P1: *Good morning, may we talk about my exam?*

P9: *Excuse me, I think that there is a mistake in my mark.*

From a quantitative point of view, P1 obtained 1.25 points for their being polite, whereas P9 went straight to the point for the alleged teacher to know about their discontent. As observed in **figure 2**, students disposed of formal phrases which, although labelled within formal-email context, are to be related with this teacher-pupil distance. In the case of P9, they opted for opening the speech act with an apology (*excuse me*), so as not to impinge on hearer as awkwardly as a direct complaint would (Brown and Levinson, 1987). Both responses went off record, which means the illocutionary force was to be decoded by the addressee since explicitness was opted out by the students. To put it differently, these 1<sup>st</sup>-Bachillerato learners wanted to indirectly demonstrate, through their L2 skills, their being in disagreement with the Mathematics mark.

Moving on to Q3, students were to handle a troublesome situation with a friend, whose last action towards another peer has resulted in participants to express their complaints towards him. Surprisingly, most of the students displayed a quite formal addressing towards the *complainee* (Konakahra, 2017). That is, most of them opted for using off-record strategies where the hearer is not found pressured to take action. For instance, P13 responded: *I think it is not the right way to treat your friend like you did, in my opinion you should apologise him*. Up to 10 participants opted for uttering the verb “to think” as an opinion marker for this response. In doing so, the hearer gets the point of the whole conversation – i.e. his friend’s discontent – without being the speaker extremely rude.

Lastly in complaints, there was Q8, which called for a more imposing context with a service not done and an employee to whom the complaint is addressed. Just like in Q2, most of the participants (13/19) opened the complaint with an “excuse-me”- like phrase.

In much the same way, the imposition was thus minimised, lest the waiter's face got considerably threatened.

To illustrate this aforementioned phenomenon, P12's response will be displayed: *excuse me sir, we have been waiting for our meal for over 45 minutes, do you know how long will it be?* In this case, P12 performed a noteworthy polite complaint, where honorifics are used ("sir"), the matter is transmitted ("we have been waiting for our meal for over 45 minutes") and the hurry is thus implied ("do you know how long will it be?"). Conversely, some participants preferred to show such a hurry explicitly by opting out of this politeness by P12. For example, P5's response (*I don't want to judge you, but I this excessive delay is unforgivable*) ended up performing a clear hedge by means of the disclaimer "but". In doing so, the student is transmitting through the L2 their disappointment on the fictional service.

#### 4.2.2.5. Requests

**Requests** were to score up to 0.75 if including mitigation devices; 0.75 if adding "please"; and 0.5 if opting for direct requests. Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (in Ishihara & Cohen, 2010: 66) expose three main strategies for request-realisation: (1) **direct strategies** (as in imperatives); (2) **conventionally indirect strategies** (e.g. what if we get this mess sorted?); and (3) **non-conventionally indirect strategies** (i.e. when implying something beyond the locutionary act).

1<sup>st</sup>-Bachillerato students had two questions to utter requests in, namely Q1 and Q4 (see **subsection 4.2.2.2** for Q4):

Q1: You're at a restaurant in Cork (Ireland) and you're desperate for some food.  
The waiter asks: Good evening, how can I help you?

Again, the rank of imposition varied remarkably since, just like the previously examined complaints, the addressees differ in being (a) a waiter in Q1 and (b) the participants' parents themselves. Therefore, context was to play a key role in despite the urgency of either of the prompts (i.e. being starving and wanting to go out respectively). In order to

point up this difference, two examples from the a same participant will be contrasted as follows:

Q1: P16: *Hello. I would like the cart please.*

Q4: P16: *Pleasee. I didn't want to kick him. It was a mistake. Please let me out.*

As may be noticed, the use of “please” stands out in both requests by P16, who even repeated it in Q4. This repetition, besides the vowel-doubling in Q4’s first “please” exemplifies the urgency and, to a remarkable extent, relationship between the interlocutors. Q1 is addressed to a waiter, which is by and large a stranger and therefore someone whose personal space is to be respected; yet Q4 is framed within a familiar environment, where frontiers are fairly crossable. Another aspect to be discussed is the use of modal verbs in response to Q1 (“would”) which also lead to a more polite and thus less threatening act towards the listener.

Something that genuinely prominent in requests for Q4 is the directness of most students (16/19) in terms of implying their want to be “let out”. It cannot be dismissed that the participants for this research were still 16-17-year olds, whose behaviour in this sort of situation can be significantly relatable.

## 5. Discussion of the results and reflections on L2 pragmatics pedagogy in Bachillerato

Prior **sections 4.1** and **4.2** have carried out a descriptive analysis on the textbook’s pragmatic content, and both quantitative and qualitative data from the DCT designed by the author. This section is devoted to bringing up a pedagogical reflection from both the didactic material examined and the results obtained in **section 4.2**.

This dissertation was driven by the assessment of pragmatic competence in 1<sup>st</sup>-Bachillerato bilingual programme students. In order to carry out such an assessment, three research questions were formulated: RQ1: What is Bachillerato students’ pragmatic competence in English in relation to their choice of particular speech acts in L2?; RQ2: What pragmatic content is included in the EFL textbook and how is the students’



pragmatic performance related to such a learning material?; RQ3: Are there (if any) sociopragmatic or pragmalinguistic transfers from their L1 (i.e. Spanish) into English? After prior analysis and reflection on the results, this discussion section will be meant to respond to each of the three questions from a pedagogical point of view.

Firstly, **RQ1** could be demonstrated from both quantitative and qualitative results: firstly, the results collected for the realisation of the proposed speech acts projected a favourable proficiency in pragmatic terms – ranging from 1.24 to 1.55 the mean in L2 speech-act performance. Namely, the students seem to have, either from their L2 pragmatics learning or by their L1 pragmatic competence, developed general good skills in this particular field. Secondly, the qualitative analysis has demonstrated that some students still need to get equipped with effective pragmatic knowledge in English, lest they fall in pragmatic failure (to be furtherly explained in RQ3).

As regards **RQ2**, the choice of this textbook seems to be an isolated case which cannot draw significant results in prior English pragmatics knowledge, but would certainly do so within in-course learning. These B2-English learners were to be expected to use this textbook all year round (i.e. from September until June) as the *programación* stated (see **section 3.2**). However, is this enough for raising pragmatic competence? As could be observed, the most relevant content on this topic was reduced to 3 “bank boxes”, including L2 speech acts like greetings/farewells, thanks, apologies and complaints. Hence, the way to meet the objectives listed in the *programación* on English pragmatic learning (see **section 3.1**) are to be complemented by additional material (e.g. anecdotes regarding pragmatic failure, TV shows in English, role plays, etc.).

**RQ3** addressed the so-called intercultural-pragmatics terms by Thomas (1983) on pragmatic failure. In order to draw conclusions on sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic failure – typically triggered by pragmatic transfers from speaker’s L1 – the qualitative results will be considered: generally speaking, these 1<sup>st</sup>-Bachillerato students happened to mostly perform sociopragmatic failure, as the illocutionary force was not usually properly decoded in some of the prompts (see **subsections 4.2.2.4** and **4.2.2.5**). As for RQ3’s reference to L1 transfer, it could be observed how requests presented some

transfers from Spanish in the lacking “please” by some participants (P2, P8, P9, P11, P12, P14, P15, P19 in question 1), which would be rendered rude in English-speaking contexts.

According to Estébanez, “la meta última de un modelo pedagógico consiste en hacer del aprendizaje de la Lengua Inglesa un elemento que contribuya a la educación de la persona” (1992: 178). When it comes to pragmatics, raising such a competence within L2 learners can cause a great impact on their communication skills; to be more specific, learning politeness strategies applied to the target language (English in this case) is to make students’ embrace a more effective communication. For instance, Q2 illustrated how politeness is key if wanting to obtain good results when, in this case, asking for a double check. Most of the students knew how to handle talking to a teacher about a frequent issue (as it is calculating a mark mistakably) and yet keep the threat minimised.

EFL instructors should also take into account their students’ age for pragmatics learning, as if their learners have not got to face situations like Q8 – being in a hurry at a restaurant – not only their L2, but definitely their L1 can bring about some kind of pragmatic failure. In that particular case, students would either end up acting rude or, like P14 who responded the following: *I don’t know how I would handle that situation. I’m not good at complaining in public, it makes me shy*. Teachers are to bear in mind their pupils are singularly diverse (in terms of personality, race, origin, learning, etc.), and thus pragmatics teaching should embrace such diversity. In other words, students cannot be forced to stomach embarrassing situations as P14’s states. Instead, teachers are to raise that pragmatic awareness, so that EFL students themselves can get to know their pragmatic use of language is vital for effective communication – e.g. L2 learners can develop proper politeness strategies (positive and negative) by teachers making them aware of intercultural perceptions of such.

To touch upon L2 politeness, it could be noticed in P5’s response to Q10 how rude a misuse of language can make speakers sound impolite, and, thus, lose face towards the hearer. This particular last question on being rejected from a job through the phone makes teachers reflect on their “professionalising” role for students; that is, teachers are to make their learners know how to handle these sort of scenarios – they might surely get to face shortly. In so doing, pragmatics becomes a genuinely effective tool to avoid these

sociopragmatic failures. EFL teachers can get to illustrate students what interviews are like and what sort of language is best to make usage of. In much the same way, pupils (especially these 16-year-olds) can become both linguistically and “self-esteeming” skilled to handle these highly common situations.

## 6. Conclusions

To conclude, cross-cultural pragmatics teaching could genuinely boost EFL students’ learning, as they get to wonder what words in specific (intercultural) context might mean. It does not mean grammar and vocabulary teaching should be left aside, but rather reinforced through these supralinguistic aspects (i.e. pragmatics and discourse). By these means, communication can become more effective at the same time intercultural linguistic concern is raised.

To begin with, the English coursebook itself did not present a broad range of pragmatic content, at least, with regard to L2 speech-act learning (solely greetings/farewells, thanks, apologies and complaints were found). If considering the coursebook as the only teaching support, that would lead to an incomplete acquisition of the L2 (English), as context needs to be exemplified in more detail. This is the reason why scholars like Ishihara (2012) propose anecdote-based approaches. Consequently, EFL students would learn how common it is to fall into pragmatic failure (either sociopragmatic or pragmalinguistic) regardless the alleged L2 proficiency. Moreover, such an approach would engage students with their English-language learning in addition to their getting to know their teacher better. L2 learning is also about life experience. Pragmatics teaching can bring grammar, culture and context together, and thus make the EFL class remarkably enriching.

As for the overall results obtained in the DCT, it could be concluded that 1<sup>st</sup>-Bachillerato students have generally performed accordingly to the prompts. Learning either L1 or L2 pragmatics is definitely a lifetime process, and being 16- or 17-year-olds has impacted on their linguistic situation-handling in the vast majority of the questions given – that is, their experience with language and society is broader than that of an infant. Notwithstanding, there is a long path ahead for L2 teachers concerning pragmatics instruction. These results were as yet found to hold sociopragmatic failure due to a likely lack of speech act

contextualisation in English. EFL teachers are to frame students in scenarios where authentic language (with special remark on pragmatics) is demanded. In order to do so, teaching should not be solely supported by the coursebook aforementioned; instead, assorted learning devices, such as TV shows, or even L2 *YouTube* channels, can boost students' pragmatic awareness to be projected on their English.

Although the data gathered seemed to have support this research, some limitations are to be pointed out: in the first place, the data-collection method. Although some scholars (Maíz-Arévalo, 2012; Taguchi, 2019) happen to be at odds as to whether DCT is an accurate assessment tool, the events occurring from March to May 2020 turned DCT as the most suitable option. Nonetheless, the fact that students took the test at home with translation tools at reach got projected on the language proficiency used. This is the reason why some responses acquired a native-like grammar and vocabulary-choice. As for the pragmatic dimension to be assessed, 1<sup>st</sup>-Bachillerato students did not get to use spontaneous pragmatic knowledge as in in-class intervention.

In a few words, 1<sup>st</sup>-Bachillerato is a remarkably suitable grade for students to become familiarised with advanced pragmatics in English: their performance was satisfactory and their politeness strategies in L2 were generally well managed. L2 speech-act learning is key to improve pupils' pragmatic competence, and thus embrace genuine proficiency in such a language.

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## Appendix: DCT questionnaire

Dear students,

I'd highly appreciate if you could please complete the following "Discourse Completion Test" as part of my master's dissertation (a.k.a. Trabajo Fin de Máster).

This is how it works:

1. Mind that the whole test is anonymous, which means no names will be considered.
2. Respond appropriately to questions from 1-10 in English; it's vital that you're sincere enough.
3. Save all your responses in, and send them off to me.

Should you have any inquiry, don't hesitate to email either me or your teacher.

Thanks a million!

Best wishes,

Daniel  
Trainee English Teacher - UAM

Q1. You're at a restaurant in Cork (Ireland) and you're desperate for some food. The waiter asks: Good evening, how can I help you?:

Q2. It's results day, and you've found out your Mathematics teacher has committed a mistake at calculating your final grade, and you want to tell her about it:

Q3. Your friend Fernando has done something you didn't like to one of his friends, and you want to make him know. How do you express your feelings?

Q4. You've kicked your brother José, so your parents don't let you go out. You want to ask for permission to them anyway:

Q5. You are meeting up with your friends to hang around and one of them gets astounded by your outfit: Friend: "your shirt is delightful!". How do you react?:

Q6. You've been staying in Canada over a whole term and lived with a host family. It's the very last day of your exchange; you're at the airport with the host family and you want to express your gratitude for such an experience:

Q7. You're invited to a friend's party, but you don't want to attend because it's not your "cup of tea". How do you decline the invitation?<sup>14</sup>:

Q8. You and your date have been waiting for over 45 minutes for your meal to be served at a fancy restaurant. Besides, you have tickets for a show that starts in less than an hour. You feel the need to complain to the waiter about the excessive delay:

Q.9. You really enjoyed the meal that your friend cooked for you on Saturday night. It wasn't until the end of the next week that you remembered you hadn't thanked him properly for the evening. You came to her place to apologise for that oversight:

Q.10. You've been called from a job offer you previously applied for, but the person on the phone brings bad news along: you are not in! What do you respond to end the call?

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<sup>14</sup> Q7, Q8 and Q9 are adapted from Ishihara & Cohen, 2010: 242-243.