



Relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Pragmatic Awareness

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Received: 10-02-2014

Accepted: 23-03-2014

Published: 01-07-2014

doi:10.7575/aiac.ijalel.v.3n.4p.143

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijalel.v.3n.4p.143>

Abstract

Language learners' awareness of target language pragmatic features is influenced by individual difference variables, the least explored one being emotional intelligence. To investigate the relationship between emotional intelligence and pragmatic awareness, the current study was conducted over 120 Iranian senior undergraduates of English as a Foreign Language at a university in Iran. Pragmatic awareness was measured through a 12-scenario contextualized pragmatic judgment task. Emotional intelligence was also measured through the EQ-i. The results of the Pearson correlation revealed a strong positive relationship between emotional intelligence and pragmatic awareness. The pedagogical implications of the findings suggested incorporation of emotion-driven authentic materials in English language classes to invoke emotional intelligence in language learners.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Noticing Hypothesis, Pragmatic Awareness

1. Introduction

The role of language learners' awareness of target language sociolinguistic and sociocultural features (pragmatic awareness) in foreign language acquisition has been frequently emphasized (Schmidt, 1990, 1993, 2001; Leow, 1997, 2000; Takahashi, 2001, 2005). In fact, according to the noticing hypothesis, conscious noticing or awareness is a necessary and sufficient condition for input to be converted into intake for learning (Schmidt, 1993). However, language learners' level of awareness of target language pragmatic features is influenced by a variety of individual difference variables (Simard & Wong, 2001; Takahashi, 2001, 2005) among which exploring the effect of emotional intelligence on the noticing of pragmatic features has been advised by the scholars in the field of interlanguage pragmatics (MacIntyre, 2002; Takahashi, 2005).

The concept of Emotional Intelligence (EQ) was initially introduced by Salovey and Mayer (1990) to represent the ability of people to deal with their emotions (Wong & Law, 2002). They defined emotional intelligence as "the subset of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor ones' own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions" (p. 189). This concept was then popularized by Goleman (1995) who proposed that emotional intelligence involves abilities that can be categorized as self-awareness, managing emotions, motivating oneself, empathy, and handling relationships (Wong & Law, 2002).

He further argued that Intelligent Quotient (IQ) contributes to only about 20 percent of the factors that determine various dimensions of life success, leaving about 80 percent to other factors.

Therefore, intelligence quotient cannot be the sole predictor of success in foreign language acquisition rather there are many variables including emotional factors which are influential. Among such emotional factors which might constrain or enhance foreign language acquisition, emotional intelligence is a salient one (Ellis, 1994). The reason is that for becoming a proficient language user, mastering the grammatical rules of the target language (linguistic competence) does not suffice (Chang, 2009) rather language learners must acquire the sociolinguistic and sociocultural rules of the target language (pragmatic competence) including “when to speak, and what to talk about with whom, where and in what manner” (Wolfson, 1989). Understanding these culture specific expressions requires directing language learners’ attention to the pragmatic features of the target language (Kasper & Rose, 2002) which is more attributed to the emotional aspect of intelligence.

To rationalize the claim that emotional intelligence is a major influential factor in determining awareness of target language pragmatic features, the present study seeks to investigate the relationship between language learners’ level of emotional intelligence and their level of awareness of sociolinguistic and sociocultural aspects of the target language referred to as pragmatic awareness. More specifically, the research question is:

Is there any relationship between emotional intelligence and pragmatic awareness?

Accordingly the null hypothesis is:

There is no significant correlation between emotional intelligence and pragmatic awareness.

2. Literature Review

A review of recent literature in the field of linguistics shows a growing interest in research over the relationship between emotional intelligence and various aspects of language learning including speaking fluency (e.g. Bora, 2012), vocabulary knowledge (e.g. Jamali Nesari et al., 2011; Asadollahfam et al., 2012), writing performance (e.g. Abdolrezapour, 2013), and general language proficiency (e.g. Shakib & Barani, 2011; Zarezadeh, 2013). There are also studies which have explored the influence of a variety of individual difference variables including motivation (e.g. Takahashi, 2005), language proficiency (e.g. Matsumura, 2003; Takahashi, 2005), learning environment (e.g. Matsumura, 2001; Schauer, 2006), target language exposure (e.g. Matsumura, 2003), and length of residence in target language country (e.g. Bella, 2012) on the development of pragmatic awareness. However, there is a dearth of research on assessing the relationship between emotional intelligence and pragmatic awareness.

2.1 Studies on Emotional Intelligence

In one study, Bora (2012) explored the relationship between the level of emotional intelligence and the perception of language learners toward speaking classes. Participants consisted of 21 learners of English as a Foreign Language at a university in Turkey. Two likert scale questionnaires, one to assess language learners’ emotional intelligence and the other to assess their views toward activities in speaking classes, were used to collect the data. The findings indicated that emotional intelligence plays an active role for language learners to be active participants of speaking classes.

Asadollahfam et al. (2012) also investigated the relationship between emotional intelligence and language learners’ vocabulary knowledge. Participants included 50 learners of English as a Foreign Language at a university in Iran. Data were collected through Nation’s (2001) Word Level Test to assess language learners’ vocabulary size and Bar-On’s (1997) Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire to assess their emotional intelligence score. The results showed that language learners with high levels of emotional intelligence possessed a high level of vocabulary knowledge.

Most recently, Abdolrezapour (2013) explored the effect of emotional intelligence on language learners’ writing performance. Two groups of learners of English as a Foreign Language at a language institute in Iran, one as experimental group and the other as control group, participated in the study. The short form of the TEIQue was used to assess language learners’ emotional intelligence. To assess writing ability, language learners were asked to write on a topic once prior to intervention and once following intervention. Some pieces of short stories with high emotional content were also used as materials for intervention. The results of the study showed that introducing emotional intelligence strategy had a considerable positive effect on language learners’ writing performance.

2.2 Studies on Pragmatic Awareness

In one study, Takahashi (2005) investigated the relationship between language learners’ pragmalinguistic awareness and two individual difference variables including motivation and language proficiency. Participants in the study were 80 Japanese college learners of English as a Foreign Language. Data for the study were collected through a motivation questionnaire, a language proficiency test, and an awareness retrospection questionnaire. The study found that pragmalinguistic awareness was associated with language learners’ motivation but not with their language proficiency.

Schauer (2006) also explored the effect of learning environment on the development of pragmatic awareness. Two participant groups consisting of 16 German learners of English enrolled at a university in England and 17 German learners of English at a higher education institution in Germany participated in the study. Data for the study were elicited using the combined video-and-questionnaire instrument developed by Bardovi-Harlig and Dornyei (1998). The study revealed that learning environment plays a substantial role in priming language learners’ pragmatic awareness.

Most recently, Bella (2012) investigated the effect of length of residence in the target community on pragmatic

awareness. Two groups of participants with differing lengths of residence in Greece, one group with 1.6 years mean length of residence and the other with 3 years mean length of residence participated in the study. The instrument for data collection was the contextualized pragmatic and grammatical judgment test developed by Bardovi-Harlig and Dornyei (1998). The results revealed that increase in length of residence does not result in increase in pragmatic awareness.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

Participants in the study consisted of 120 Iranian language learners studying English as a Foreign Language at Shiraz University in Iran. They were all at the last year of their undergraduate studies. Thus, they were considered to possess a good command of English proficiency. Among the participants, 72 were females and 48 were males. Their ages ranged from 22 to 27 with a mean age of 24.5 years old.

3.2 Instrument

In general two instruments were used to collect the data for the current study: a pragmatic awareness test and an emotional intelligence questionnaire.

3.2.1 Pragmatic Awareness Test

To assess language learners' awareness of target language pragmatic features, 12 items including eight grammatical but pragmatically inappropriate scenarios eliciting four speech acts of requests, apologies, suggestions, and refusals as well as four grammatical and pragmatically appropriate sentences were adopted from the contextualized pragmatic judgment task developed by Bardovi-Harlig and Dornyei (1998) which was presented in a video format.

The video task was based on the written elicitation task. Each selected scene was recorded on the video twice. The first time, listeners were instructed to "just watch the scene". On the second pass the language learners were instructed to "watch and mark your answer sheet", and a screen with an exclamation mark appeared just before the sentence that the language learners were to judge. The sentence to be judged was the last sentence in the scenario. Each scenario was introduced by a short narration that set the scene.

In the written format an exclamation mark indicated the sentence to be judged. Learners were first asked to judge whether the targeted utterance was appropriate by marking the box labeled "yes" or "no". Then they were asked to rate the gravity of the problem on a six-part scale from "not bad at all" to "very bad" by placing an "X" along the scale. The four grammatical and pragmatically appropriate sentences were merely used as distractors and were excluded from data analysis. An example item is as follows:

It's Anna's day to give her talk in class, but she is not ready.

- Teacher: Thank you, Peter, that was very interesting. Anna, it's your turn to give your talk.
- !Anna: I can't do it today but I will do it next week.

Was the last part appropriate? Yes No

If there was a problem, how bad do you think it was?

Not bad at all ---,---,---,---,---,---,--- very bad

3.2.2 Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire

To measure language learners' emotional intelligence, the EQ-i developed by Bar-On (1997) was adopted. The EQ-i is a self-report measure of emotionally and socially intelligent behavior that provides an estimate of emotional-social intelligence. The EQ-i contains 133 items in the form of short sentences and employs a 5-point response scale with a textual response format ranging from "very seldom or not true of me" (1) to "very often true of me or true of me" (5).

The individual's responses render a total EQ score and scores on the following 5 composite scales that comprise 15 subscale scores: Intrapersonal (comprising Self-Regard, Emotional Self-Awareness, Assertiveness, Independence, and Self-Actualization); Interpersonal (comprising Empathy, Social Responsibility, and Interpersonal Relationship); Stress Management (comprising Stress Tolerance and Impulse Control); Adaptability (comprising Reality-Testing, Flexibility, and Problem-Solving); and General Mood (comprising Optimism and Happiness).

3.3 Procedure

During the first semester of the academic year 2013/2014, 120 copies of the pragmatic awareness test were administered to the language learners participating in the study. Language learners were instructed to watch the video and judge the appropriateness of the sentence for each scenario. Upon completion of the pragmatic awareness test, 120 copies of the emotional intelligence questionnaire were distributed among participants to be completed. The test and the questionnaire slips were then collected for the data analysis.

3.4 Data Analysis

To measure language learners' level of pragmatic awareness, all "yes" responses to the question: "Is the target sentence appropriate?" were converted to 0 on the scale, thus obtaining error salience scales ranging from 0 to 6; as a result all participants had score on all of the items. The mean score for language learners' ratings on the scale was then computed. A mean score of 0 indicated the lowest level of pragmatic awareness whereas a mean score of 6 indicated the highest level of pragmatic awareness.

To analyze the data derived from the EQ-i, raw scores were tabulated and converted into standard scores based on a mean of 100 and standard deviation of 15. This resembled Intelligence Quotient (IQ) scores. Average (scores ranging from 90 to 110 according to Resing & Block, 2002) to above average (scores ranging from 111 to 120 according to Resing & Block, 2002) emotional intelligence scores on the EQ-i would suggest that the respondent would be effective in emotional and social functioning. The higher the scores, the more positive the prediction for effective functioning in meeting daily demands and challenges (Bar-On, 2006).

The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient, which is designed for interval level (continuous) variables, was then used to assess the relationship between pragmatic awareness and emotional intelligence. Pearson correlation coefficient (r) can only take on values -1 to $+1$. The sign out the front indicates whether there is a positive correlation (as one variable increases, so too does the other) or a negative correlation (as one variable increases, the other variable decreases). The size of the absolute value (ignoring the sign) provides an indication of the strength of the relationship (Pallant, 2013).

A perfect correlation of $+1$ or -1 indicates that the value of one variable can be determined exactly by knowing the value on the other variable. A scatterplot of this relationship would show a straight line. On the other hand, a correlation of 0 indicates no relationship between the two variables. Knowing the value on one of the variables provides no assistance in predicting the value on the second variable. A scatterplot would show a circle of points, with no pattern evident (Pallant, 2013).

Table 1 presents the guidelines proposed by Cohen (1988) to determine the strength of the relationship. The guidelines apply whether or not there is a negative sign out the front of the r value. Also, to measure the proportion of variability in one variable that can be determined from the relationship with the other variable, the squared correlation (r^2), called the coefficient of determination, can be used (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2013). All the analysis was performed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software, version 20.

Table 1. Determining the Strength of the Relationship

Strength	r Value
Small	0.10 to 0.29
Medium	0.30 to 0.49
Large	0.50 to 1.00

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 Findings

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics for language learners' level of target language pragmatic awareness as well as their level of emotional intelligence. The descriptive statistics presented in the table consists of the mean score, the standard deviation, and the number of respondents. The mean score and the standard deviation for language learners' pragmatic awareness are respectively 3.05 and 1.80 which indicate an average level of awareness of target language pragmatic features. The mean score and the standard deviation for language learners' emotional intelligence are respectively 99.21 and 12.69 which again indicate an average level of emotional intelligence.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Pragmatic Awareness	3.05	1.80	120
Emotional Intelligence	99.21	12.69	120

Table 3 presents the result of Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. According to this table, a Pearson correlation (r) of 0.78 was obtained which, according to the guidelines set by Cohen (1988), indicates a large positive relationship between language learners' level of pragmatic awareness and their level of emotional intelligence. In other words, as emotional intelligence increases, pragmatic awareness increases accordingly, that is, language learners who are more emotionally intelligent are more aware of target language pragmatic features.

Table 3. Correlation

	Pragmatic Awareness	Emotional Intelligence
Pragmatic Awareness	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.78
	N	120
Emotional Intelligence	Pearson Correlation	0.78
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.00
	N	120

To measure the proportion of variability in the level of pragmatic awareness that can be determined from the relationship with the level of emotional intelligence, the coefficient of determination was computed. The coefficient of determination, obtained through computing the squared correlation (r^2), is $r^2 = (0.78)^2 = 0.60$ which shows that 60 percent of variability in pragmatic awareness can be determined from the relationship with emotional intelligence. The pattern of the relationship has been depicted in the scatterplot in Figure 1.

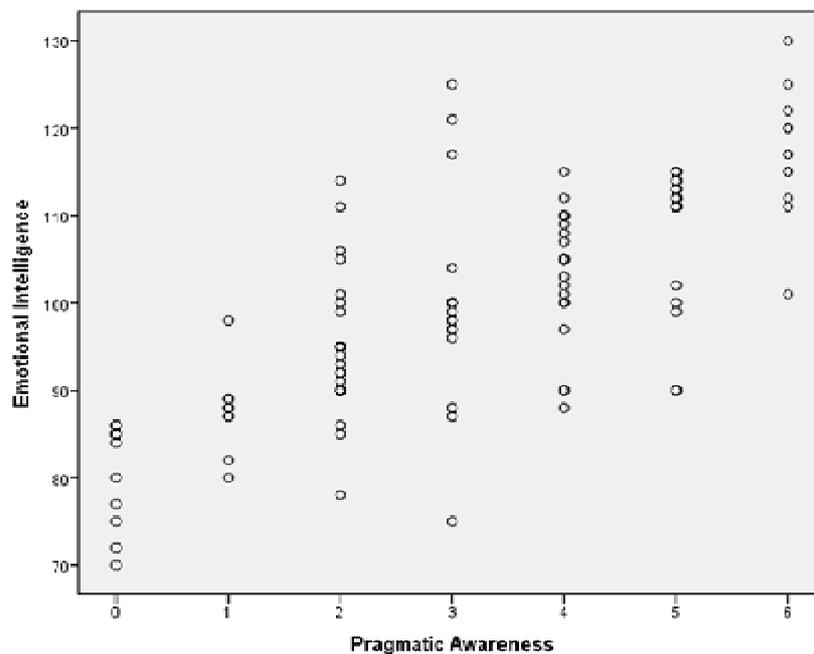


Figure 1. Scatterplot

4.2 Discussion

The study found that there is a strong positive relationship between being emotionally intelligent and being aware of target language pragmatic features, that is, as the level of emotional intelligence increases, the level of awareness of target language pragmatic features increases. In the current study, language learners who were more emotionally intelligent rated a higher awareness of target language pragmatic features than language learners who were less emotionally intelligent.

These findings reject the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant correlation between emotional intelligence and pragmatic awareness. The findings obtained in this study are consistent with the findings obtained in the studies by Bora (2012), Asadollahfam et al. (2012), and Abdolrezapour (2013) who found a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and various aspects of target language proficiency. The findings are also in line with the findings obtained in the studies by Takahashi (2005), Schauer (2006), and Bella (2012) who confirmed the influential role of individual difference variables on the development of target language pragmatic awareness.

The results of the study can be explained by the fact that language is a social institution which both is shaping and shaped by society at large or in particular the cultural niches (Armour-Thomas & Gopaul-McNicol, 1998). Emotions often carry with them impulses to act in a particular way appropriate to the emotion (Parkinson, 1995). These impulses to act might be highly appropriate or inappropriate for smooth social functioning, including target language interactions (MacIntyre, 2002).

The results of the study can be accordingly explained through the Bar-On Model of Emotional-Social Intelligence (ESI) which provided the theoretical basis for EQ-i used in the current study. According to this model, emotional-social intelligence is a cross-section of interrelated emotional and social competencies, skills, and facilitators that determine how effectively individuals understand and express themselves, understand others and relate with them, and cope with daily demands (Bar-On, 2006).

Consistent with this model, applied in the current study, which conceptualizes to be emotionally and socially intelligent as to effectively understand and express oneself, to understand and relate well with others, and to successfully cope with daily demands, challenges, and pressures, language learners with high level of emotional intelligence are those who can immediately and appropriately perceive their emotions and their interlocutor's emotion and are able to regulate their emotions to have pragmatically sound interactions appropriate to their interlocutors' social conventions.

5. Conclusion

The study found that there is a strong positive relationship between emotional intelligence and pragmatic awareness, that is, as level of emotional intelligence increases, level of pragmatic awareness increases accordingly. In this study,

language learners who possessed a higher level of emotional intelligence were more aware of the appropriate conventions of the target language features than language learners who possessed a lower level of emotional intelligence.

The significant role of emotional intelligence in determining the level of awareness of target language pragmatic features, as proved in the current study, suggests that language learners' emotional intelligence should be invoked through incorporation of emotion-driven authentic native English stories and videos (Shakib & Barani, 2011; Bora, 2012; Abdolrezapour, 2012; Zarezadeh, 2013). This not only can be served as a language practice but also can provide exposure to authentic emotional aspect of the target language.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Ali Rafieyan whose sincere cooperation contributed marvelously to the accomplishment of this research study.

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