



Pragmatic Failure in Cross-Cultural Communication

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Abstract

There is a phenomenon: a non-native speaker may confront miscommunication even with a good master of the target language, which is known as “pragmatic failure”. Unlike linguistic errors, native speakers often fail to recognize it as such and attribute it to boorishness, which may do more harm to communication. Though pragmatic failure is a primary cause of cross-cultural communication breakdown, it receives little attention, especially in traditional foreign language teaching. This thesis intends to examine Chinese English majors’ pragmatic failure in verbal communication, probes into the causes of pragmatic failures and puts forward strategies in avoiding pragmatic failure.

Key words: Pragmatic failure; Cross-cultural communication; English language teaching

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1. INTRODUCTION

It is commonly found that sometimes a non-native speaker with a good mastery of the linguistic system of the target

language cannot make himself understood or cannot correctly figure out what people from different cultures really mean. This inability to understand what is meant by what is said is referred to as “pragmatic failure” (Thomas, 1983).

“Pragmatic failure” was first put forward in 1983 by British linguist Jenny Thomas in *Cross-Cultural Pragmatic Failure*. She defined it as “the inability to understand what is meant by what is said.” (Thomas, 1983) She classes it into two areas: pragmalinguistic failure and sociopragmatic failure. In her opinion, pragmatic failure is likely to occur when speaker and hearer do not share a common linguistic or cultural background. It is often attributed to rudeness or hostility by native speakers and thus may do more harm to effective communication than linguistic errors. Therefore, more attention should be paid to pragmatic appropriateness rather than grammatical correctness in cross-cultural communication.

Scholars in China have engaged in the research in pragmatic failure and given useful suggestions to foreign language teaching. However most of the research is just introductions to pragmatic failure or superficial cause analysis of pragmatic failure in cross-cultural communication. There seem to be few linguists focusing the research on the systematic analysis of real speech acts or discussing them from a cultural-pragmatic perspective.

This thesis is intended to explore pragmatic failure in cross-cultural communication in the field of verbal communication, and attempts to conduct cause analysis of pragmatic failure and suggests some tentative strategies in avoiding such failures.

2. THEORY

2.1 Cross-Cultural Communication

Hu Wenzhong (1994) advised that the primary concern of cross-cultural study should be those of a cross-country,

cross-ethnic or cross-race nature. The differences between different regions, classes, social ranks, professions or genders are worth studying but not of primary concern. Hu Wenzhong (1999) brought forward the factors greatly influencing cross-cultural communication as follows: a nation's history, a nation's tradition, religious beliefs, values, social organizations, conventions, political system, and stage of modernization. These factors are also those that are most important in shaping a nation's culture.

Jenny Thomas (1983) emphasized that the term "cross-cultural" is used as a shorthand way of describing not just native-nonnative interactions, but any communication between two people who, in any particular domain, do not share a common linguistic or cultural background. This thesis primarily focuses on the communication between people from two countries.

Scholars believed that cross-cultural communication can mainly be divided into verbal communication and nonverbal communication. This thesis will mainly discuss pragmatic failures in cross-cultural verbal communication.

2.2 Pragmatics and Pragmatic Failure

2.2.1 Pragmatics

Morris (1938) first proposed the term "pragmatics" in his book *Foundations of the Theory of Signs*. However, it was not until the publication of *Journal of Pragmatics* in 1977 that pragmatics achieved its position as an independent discipline. After that, pragmatics began to develop very rapidly. Hu Zhuanglin et. al (1988) argued that "Pragmatics can be defined as the study of language in use and linguistic communication...Pragmatics takes care of the aspect of meaning that is not accounted for by semantics." George Yule (2000) defined pragmatics as "the study of the relationships between linguistics forms and the users of those forms."

2.2.2 Pragmatic Theory and Principles

Four important theories or principles in pragmatics are important. They are Speech Act Theory, Cooperative Principle, The Politeness Principle and Face Theory.

(1) Speech act theory

J. Austin (1962) first proposed Speech Act Theory. J. Searle (1969, 1975) furthered the Speech Act Theory and studied on indirect speech acts, in which one utterance performs one illocutionary act indirectly by performing another. That is to say, the speaker does not say what he wants to say directly; on the contrary he expresses his purpose with another speech act. According to them language does not merely describe states of affairs but it does things. Three acts of statements are described:

Locutionary act: an act of saying something.

Illocutionary act: an act performed in saying something.

Perlocutionary act: an act performed by or as a result of saying sth. (He, 1997, pp.85-86)

Take the utterance "It's a bit dark in this room" as an example. The locutionary act performed by the speaker is

his utterance of all the words 'It', 'dark', 'room', etc., thus expressing what the words literally mean. By making such an utterance, he has expressed his intention of speaking, i.e. making a complaint, or asking someone to turn on the light, depending on the context and this is illocutionary act. If the hearer gets the speaker's message and turns on the light for him, the speaker has brought about of desired effects on the hearer. Thus, the perlocutionary act is successfully performed. An illocutionary act has force. If hearers do not understand speakers' "illocutionary act", that is to say, do not see what the speakers mean to tell them, and reply them according to "locutionary act", pragmatic failure will be committed in this situation.

(2) The Cooperative Principle

In order to explain how the speaker can manage to convey more than what is said and how the hearer can arrive at the speaker's meaning, H.P. Grice (1978) believed that there must be a set of assumptions guiding the conduct of conversation. These rise from basic rational considerations and may be formulated as guidelines for the efficient and effective use of language in conversation to achieve cooperative goals. He identified these guidelines as the Cooperative Principle, which is expressed as follows: Make your contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged. Grice formulate four categories of maxims to specify the cooperative principle further:

Quantity

1) Make your contribution as informative as is required.

2) Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

Quality

Try to make your contribution one that is true.

1) Do not say what you believe to be false.

2) Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

Relation

Be relevant

Manner

Be perspicuous.

1) Avoid obscurity of expression.

2) Avoid ambiguity.

3) Be brief.

4) Be orderly.

(Grice, pp.45-46)

Grice suggested that all speakers, regardless of their cultural background, adhere to this principle in conversation so as to make a successful communication. However, the cooperative principle and its maxims will not be followed by everybody all the time. People do violate them in everyday conversation. The CP and its maxims are in accordance with the western values. Qian Guanlian (1997) points out that there are many daily

conversations in Chinese which do not follow the CP and its maxims. In cross-culture communication, interlocutors are prone to observe maxims according to their native culture. Therefore, pragmatic failures are produced due to the different observing of the CP.

(3) The Politeness principle

Geoffrey N. Leech (1983) proposed the Politeness Principle as a way of explaining how politeness works in conversational exchange in his book, *Principles of Pragmatics*. He believed that it can be seen as a necessary complement to the CP and rescues CP from serious trouble because the CP is unable to answer the question “why people are so indirect in conveying what they mean.” Compared with cooperative principle, the politeness principle has a bigger binding force (Liu, 1987). When the cooperative principle and politeness principles are in contradiction, people always adhere to the politeness principle in order to ensure a cooperative discourse. Leech offers the following maxims of politeness principle:

- 1) Tact maxim (in impositives and commissives)
 - a) Minimize cost to others
 - b) Maximize benefit to others.
- 2) Generosity maxim (in impositives and commissives)
 - a) Minimize benefit to self
 - b) Maximize cost to self
- 3) Approach maxim (in expressives and assertives)
 - a) Minimize dispraise of others
 - b) Maximize praise of others
- 4) Modesty maxim (in expressives and assertives)
 - a) Minimize praise of self
 - b) Maximize dispraise of self
- 5) Agreement maxim (in assertives)
 - a) Minimize disagreement between self and others
 - b) Maximize agreement between self and others
- 6) Sympathy maxim (in assertives)
 - a) Minimize antipathy between self and others
 - b) Maximize sympathy between self and others

(Leech, 1983, p.132)

Chinese scholar Gu Yueguo proposed some maxims of politeness in Chinese cultural settings. He observes that there are basically four notions underlying the Chinese conception of politeness: respectfulness, modesty, attitudinal warmth, and refinement. (Gu, 1990, p.239). Gu (1992) offers further revision of his maxims and demonstrates altogether five: the self-denigration maxim, the address term maxim, the refinement maxim, agreement maxim and the virtues-words-deeds maxim.

(4) Face theory

Goffman (1967) first proposed the concept of ‘face’. Brown and Levinson defines ‘face’ as “public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself” and “something that is emotionally invested, and that can be lost, maintained, or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to in interaction” (Brown and Levinson, 1967, p.61). There are two kinds of ‘face. One is negative face,

the desire of the individual not to be imposed on. The other is positive face, which is the desire of individual to be appreciated and approved of.

There are always acts putting ‘face’ at risk in communication, namely Face Threatening Act (FTAs), which refers to acts that encroach on the hearer’s desire to be respected. Some of the FTAs offend the hearer’s negative face by imposing on him/her while others threaten the hearer’s positive face by indicating the speaker’s lack of concern for the hearer’s self-esteem. Politeness strategies lead to an effort of dealing with FTAs.

2.2.3 Pragmatic failure

Thomas (1983) first used the term “pragmatic failure” to refer to “the inability to understand what is meant by what is said” and regards it as “an important source of cross-cultural communication breakdown,” which is still widely adopted and quoted by most scholars today. The term “cross-cultural” not only describes native–non-native interactions, but any communication between two individuals who lack a common linguistic or cultural background. That is, even the people from the same country, speaking the same language can still encounter communication breakdown.

Thomas (1983) argued that there are two levels of speaker meaning:

- 1) Assign sense and reference to the speaker’s words (level 1 speaker meaning)
- 2) Assign force or value to the speaker’s words (level 2 speaker meaning)

Though both levels involve pragmatic inference, Thomas (1983) reserves it only for misunderstandings which arise from an inability to recognize the force of the speaker’s utterance when the speaker intended that this particular hearer should recognize it, that is, the second level of speaker meaning. Then, pragmatic failure occurs on any occasion when hearer perceives the force of speaker’s utterance as other than speaker intended she/he should perceive it. Therefore, pragmatic failure is more prone to occur between native and non-native speakers when the non-native speaker doesn’t express himself/herself in an appropriate way.

Besides defining pragmatic failure, Thomas further divided it into two types: pragmalinguistic failure and sociopragmatic failure. Leech (1983) classified general pragmatics into pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics, and said, “...we do need detail pragmatics into pragmalinguistic studies which are language-specific, and socio-pragmatics studies which are culture-specific.” Many scholars (e.g. Hu Wenzhong, He Ziran, etc.) adhere to this classification in their study of pragmatic failure. Also, the author will adopt this distinction in this thesis.

According to Thomas, pragmalinguistic failure “arises when the pragmatic force mapped by the speaker onto a give utterance is systematically different from the

force most frequently assigned to it by native speakers of the target language, or when speech act strategies are inappropriately transferred from L1 to L2" (Thomas, 1983, p.99). Thomas considers that pragmalinguistic transfer is one of the sources of pragmalinguistic failure. Pragmalinguistic transfer refers to "the inappropriate transfer of speech act strategies from one language to another, or the transferring from the source language to the target language of utterances which are semantically/syntactically equivalent, but which, because of 'interpretive bias', tend to convey a different pragmatic force in the target language" (Thomas, 1983, p.101). Compared with pragmalinguistic failure, sociopragmatic failure is a much more complicated matter for teachers of English to deal with and "it is a reflection of the student's system of values and beliefs, and should not be corrected, but only pointed out and discussed" (Thomas, 1983, p.108). Also, it is harder for the English learner to realize because this kind of failure is related to cultural factors. In different countries, the culture is varied. Since the culture in China is quite different from it in English-speaking countries, Chinese people and native speakers of English abide by the different social rules and principles. It is often found that, in cross-cultural communication, learners behave unconsciously according to their own culture. Thus, when the two cultures meet, the differences will cause sociopragmatic failure.

2.2.4 Studies on Pragmatic Failure Home and Abroad

Peter Dash (2004) discusses the possible causes of cross-cultural pragmatic failure from the perspective of the difference between pragmatics and semantics. He clearly defines what pragmatics is and also explains the potential ambiguities which occur in other definitions of cross-cultural pragmatic failure. Besides, he points out different understandings of pragmatic failure shed new light on foreign language teaching.

Field Richard W. (2007) discusses the relation between pragmatic failure and beliefs from the aspect of philosophy in his paper Pragmatic Failure and Belief Attribution. He thinks that any mandatory reason should not be given to terminate these speech acts which are guided by the current belief.

Spencer-Oate & Xing (2000) probed the face problem in the context of business between English and Chinese.

He Ziran (1997) proposed that pragmatic failure does not refer to the ordinary performance error in wording, but to the failure to achieve the expected effect in communication that results from inappropriate utterance, tactless manner, or the unidiomatic expressions.

Qian Guanlian (2005) made it more specific: pragmatic failure occurs when in communication the speaker uses grammatically correct sentences, but unconsciously violates the interpersonal or social norms, or takes little notice of the time, space or addressee. In contrast to Thomas' opinion that overly blames the inability of the

hearer; Chinese understanding emphasizes more on the inability of the speaker to produce proper utterances.

Researchers (Dai & Zhang, 2002; Lü & Lu, 2003) have studied pragmatic failure from the perspective of SLA. They attribute the cause of pragmatic failure to the negative transfer of the learner's linguistic knowledge of the native language, cultural conventions and thinking patterns.

Hong Gang (1991) probed into the relationship between linguistic and pragmatic competence by means of pragmatic failure. His research indicated that the number of pragmatic failures made by learners of high-level linguistic competence is nearly the same as that by learners of low-level linguistic competence, which further showed that high-level linguistic competence does not equal high-level pragmatic competence. Therefore, pragmatic knowledge has to be taught for pragmatic competence will hardly increase with the improvement of linguistic competence.

Dai Weidong and Zhang Hongling (2000, p.3) put forward that cultural transfer is a major cause of pragmatic failure from the aspect of second language acquisition.

Liu Shaozhong and Zhong Guoshi (2001) propose a new sort of classification. In their opinion, pragmatic failure can fall into five categories, namely pragmalinguistic relevance failure, sociopragmatic related relevance failure, pragmalinguistic relevance failure, pragmalinguistic cognitive relevance failure and pragmalinguistic cultural relevance failure.

Li Guizhi and Zhang Guo (2003) base their analysis of the causes of pragmatic failure on adaptation theory. They find that, in people's verbal communication, pragmatic failure occurs when the communicative language of both sides fail to comply with the communicative context (Li and Zhang, 2003, p.93).

Wang Wei (2012), based on the error analysis theory and the learners' corpus, enumerates the learners' cases of pragmatic failure, and then reflects on how to grasp the actual cultural connotation of vocabulary in the teaching process of Sino-English translation to avoid pragmatic failure.

Lu Jiawei (2013) thinks that pragmatic failure is due to the difference of cultural psychology in the process of communication.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Problem

It is believed that a good command of linguistic knowledge is able to guarantee the success of the cross-cultural communication. The research intends to testify this assumption and study pragmatic failure experienced by Chinese English majors in cross-cultural verbal communication, especially when they perform certain speech acts, as well as analyze its potential causes.

The article intends to answer the following questions:

- 1) What is the current situation of English majors' pragmatic competence?
- 2) What is the relationship between English majors' pragmatic competence and linguistic competence?
- 3) What pragmatic failure are English majors prone to commit in cross-cultural communication?
- 4) What are the reasons for the pragmatic failure English majors produce?
- 5) What are the strategies to avoid pragmatic failure?

3.2 Subject

The subjects of this study are two groups of 115 students from School of Foreign Language in Inner Mongolia University for Nationalities. Group One included 60 juniors, who were preparing for TEM 8 (Test for English Majors Band Eight). Group Two included 58 freshmen, who had just enrolled into the university. Group One had a longer English learning experience, therefore the pragmatic competence of Group One was assumed to be higher than that of Group Two. The participants had studied English for at least six or eight years respectively, which ensure that subjects have mastered necessary linguistic knowledge to accomplish the task.

3.3 Instruments

The questionnaire consists of forty multiple choice questions, each followed with four choices and a brief situation description, concerning time, location and environment as well as the interlocutors' relationship (see Appendix I). Each question has one single most appropriate answer. Both pragmatic and sociopragmatic questions are included.

The questions are selected from the following sources with proper adjustment:

- 1) "English Pragmatic Competence Investigation" attached to "A Survey of Pragmatics" (He, 1986)
- 2) "The Customs and Language of Social Interaction in English" (Oatey, 1987)
- 3) "An Analysis of Common Mistakes of Chinese in English Usage" (Zhang, 1993)

The credibility proves secured to a certain degree due to the fact that the questions have been used by a number of researchers in pragmatic research. Besides, an American professor was invited to make small modifications to the questionnaire and checked the answers as a native speaker of English so as to render the test more reliability.

3.4 Procedure

The subjects did the questionnaire in the classroom in September 2019. The subjects were informed that the results would be used only for data collection of a pragmatic research project and have no influence on their final evaluation in final exam before the distribution of the questionnaire. No time limit was imposed and if any problem arises when doing questionnaire, they were free to consult dictionaries or ask the instructor, so that they

could fully understand each and every question and the pragmatic competence would not be compromised due to language obstacles. However, the only requirement is that it should be finished independently so as to give a relatively valid representation of their pragmatic competence.

3.5 Data Analysis and Discussion

After being processed with SPSS 11.5, the data shows there is a great lack of pragmatic competence among the two groups of English majors regardless of their linguistic competence. As Table 1 indicates, the mean of Group 1 (51.750) is rather low as well as that of Group 2 (49.375). Moreover, the means of Group 1 and Group 2 are very close, and this difference is not statistically significant ($P > 0.05$) according to the t-test for mean differences between the two groups ($t=1.754$, $df=114$, $P=0.082$) (see Table 3.2). The results show that these Chinese English majors still have a low pragmatic competence when dealing with real conversations despite the fact that they have learned English for a minimum of six years. It is also shown that those with higher linguistic competence do not necessarily have higher pragmatic competence. Therefore, it is safe to say that there is not necessarily positive correlation between linguistic competence and pragmatic competence among Chinese English majors.

Table 1
Descriptive statistics of groups' test scores

	Number	Mean	Std. deviation	Std. error mean
Group 1	60	51.750	6.7695	.8739
Group 2	56	49.375	7.8081	1.0434

Table 2
Independent samples t-test of groups' test scores

	Levene's test for equality of variances		T-test for equality of means		
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Equal variances assumed	1.353	.247	1.754	114	.082

Table 3
Independent samples t-test of groups' test scores (continued)

	Levene's test for equality of variances		T-test for equality of means		
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Equal variances not assumed			1.745	109.158	.084

According to Appendix II, the highest failure rate is up to 98.3% in Question 17 involving answering a phone call, which means only two of the 116 subjects have chosen the most appropriate answer. Besides, there are another seven questions (i.e. Questions 2, 6, 19, 22, 29,

37, and 38) whose failure rate is above 80% and which fall into the pragmatic range where Chinese English learners are very likely to experience pragmatic failure. They are mainly concerned with social distance and cultural differences. Nevertheless, the lowest failure rate is only 5.2% in Question 31, which means only six of the 116 subjects have committed the pragmatic failure. There are altogether four questions (i.e. Questions 30, 31, 35, and 40) with a low rate of failure below 10%. Three of them are related to expressing thanks or responding to others' thanks while one is connected with a polite refusal to others' invitation.

4. CAUSE ANALYSIS OF PRAGMATIC FAILURE

Thomas (1983) proposes that pragmalinguistic failure is basically a linguistic problem caused by mistaken beliefs about pragmatic force of utterance. Pragmatic failure occurs when the utterance conveys an undesired pragmatic force because of differences in the linguistic encoding between the speaker and the hearer. It is mainly due to two aspects: non-native speakers inappropriately apply speech act strategies in the target language; non-native speakers negatively transfer the structure and meaning

Pragmalinguistic failure involves the basically grammatical (pragmalinguistic) assessment of the pragmatic force of a linguistic token, while sociopragmatic failure stems from cross-culturally different perceptions of what constitutes appropriate linguistic behavior, concerning the size of imposition, cost/benefit, social distance, relative rights and obligations. (Thomas,1983). Therefore, the cultural differences between the speaker and the hearer are the main cause of sociopragmatic failure. In addition to that, lack of pragmatic knowledge and ignorance of social distance and occasions also play an important part in sociopragmatic failure. This thesis intends to discuss the causes indiscriminately on the basis of questionnaire data collected no matter whether it is pragmalinguistic failure or sociopragmatic failure. (see Appendix II).

4.1 Interlingual Negative Transfer

Interlingual transfer is the transfer across languages, that is, the influence of the native language on the target language. Pragmatic failure in question 2, 3, 8, 15, 16, 21, 26, 32 and 33 are all instances of interlingual negative transfer.

Interlingual negative transfer mainly includes two aspects: the inappropriate transfer of speech act strategies from one language to another, or the transferring from the native language to the target language of utterances which are semantically/syntactically equivalent, but which, because of different "interpretative bias", tend to convey a different pragmatic force in the target language.

(Thomas, 1983) When seeing a guest off, for example, Chinese speakers tend to say "Goodbye and please walk slowly." This may irritate an English guest for he might think he's considered old or weak enough to walk slowly. However, this is just a negative transfer of the Chinese polite expression "Goodbye and please walk slowly." which actually asks the guest to watch his steps. In fact, the English equivalent would be "Goodbye and take care". Another example (Question, p.15),

One morning, on his way to the library Doctor Smith comes across one of his students after greet each other.

Doctor Smith: Is your library open on Monday?

Student: _____

A: Of course.

B. Yes, of course.

C: Yes, it is.

D. Yes, everybody knows it.

Table 4
Choice distribution of question 15

	Question 15			
	A	B	C	D
Group 1 (%)	7.33	18.67	74.00	0.00
Group 2 (%)	15.29	18.86	64.05	1.80
Average	11.31	18.77	69.03	0.91

Note: the letter in bold face indicates the most appropriate utterance.

As is indicated in Table 4, A, B, and C are all appropriate expressions to Chinese speakers, so 11.31% and 18.77 % of the subjects chose A and B respectively (see Table 4). However they are not the right responses, because in English "of course" often has the implication that what the speaker has asked about is self-evident (Thomas, 1983), which makes the responses A and B sound as rude and insulting as D, implying "What a stupid question!" One more example (Question 4),

Wang had something to tell the manager, Mr. Smith, so he went to his place, entering the room and said, " _____ "

A. You're not busy, I hope.

B. Got a minute?

C. Can I have a word with you, Mr. Smith?

D. I'm terribly sorry to trouble you, Mr. Smith.

Table 5
Choice distribution of question 4

	Question 4			
	A	B	C	D
Group 1 (%)	4.00	14.33	24.33	57.33
Group 2 (%)	0.00	22.43	43.84	33.73
Average	2.00	18.38	34.09	45.53

As is shown in Table 4, 45.53% of the subjects chose the wrong answer D due to the negative transfer of Chinese speech act strategies that Chinese tend to make some small talks before bringing about the intended topic. In contrast, English people prefer C for they would like to express their intentions at the very beginning especially on a formal occasion.

4.2 Intralingual Negative Transfer

Intralingual negative transfer is the transfer within the language, referring to a situation that learners make false inferences based on the pre-acquired rules of the target language, which mainly results from faulty or partial learning of the target language and is independent of the native language. Pragmatic failures reflected in Question 9 and 11 are all examples of intralingual negative transfer. Pragmatic failure mainly comes from two forms of intralingual negative transfer: overgeneralization and oversimplification.

Pragmatic overgeneralization is particularly likely to occur where a narrow range of structures in the mother tongue has a wider range of possible “translations” in the target language. (Thomas, 1983) For example, there are a large number of possible ways of expressing obligation in English (must, have to, should, out to, etc.). “To be to” is one of them, but it can’t be used in all contexts despite its pragmatic restriction. In fact, “to be to” is mostly limited to very unequal power relationships, such as commands from officers to soldiers, demands from top managers to lower employees, directives from parents to small children, therefore its overgeneralization will make the hearer uncomfortable or even irritated and further fail the communication.

Oversimplification assigns a narrow range of pragmatic force to a linguistic token or structure that actually has a wider range. Take the word “no” for example. Non-native speakers simply attach it to the pragmatic force of negating or refusing. However, it can be used to express one’s surprise or excitement in “No! I can’t believe my eyes.” Another example (Question 9),

- Wang: What do you think of the movie?
 Smith: I can’t praise this film too highly.
 By this, Mr. Smith means
- the film is just so-so.
 - this film is not good.
 - this film is so good that it deserves praise.
 - this film is OK, but doesn’t deserve praise.

Table 6
Choice distribution of question 9

	Question 9			
	A	B	C	D
Group 1 (%)	26.00	7.33	57.67	9.00
Group 2 (%)	49.00	6.36	43.85	0.79
Average	37.50	6.815	50.76	4.89

As is indicated in Table 6, 50.76% of the subjects thought that “not” here was used as a negation and chose the wrong answers. In fact, the structure of “not...too+ adjective/adverb” emphasizes an affirmation so that C is the only appropriate answer.

4.3 Ignorance of Social Distance and Occasions

Social distance is mainly caused by the intimacy of the

speaker and the hearer, or the difference between their social statuses or identities. If the two are of intimate relationship or equal social status, the communication is likely to be casual, informal and less restricted by social conventions; otherwise, the communication tends to be tactful, formal and strictly restricted by social conventions.

Social occasions can also influence the pattern of communication. On some informal occasions, the social distance can be greatly reduced whereas the social distance can be enlarged in very formal occasions. Questions 4, 14, 18, 24, 25, 29, 36, 37, 38 and 39 are concerned with social distance and occasions, most of which have the failure rate above 60%. This indicates the subjects’ low sensitivity to social distance and occasions. For example (Question 38),

If you want to borrow a book from your friend, you will say, “_____”

- Excuse me. I was wondering if you could lend me you textbook.
- Can you lend me your textbook?
- Could you possibly lend me you textbook?
- Perhaps you’ll lend me your textbook, won’t you?

Table 7
Choice distribution of question 38

	Question 38			
	A	B	C	D
Group 1 (%)	65.17	21.50	8.21	5.12
Group 2 (%)	52.07	15.79	22.11	10.03
Average	58.62	18.65	15.16	7.58

As is shown in Table 7, 81.36% of the subjects chose the formal expressions of the three inappropriate choices A, C and D. They all have ignored the fact that the social distance is rather close between friends. There’s no need being formal for the formality may just drive friends away. Therefore, the most informal utterance B should be chosen as the most appropriate one.

4.4 Lack of Pragmatic Knowledge

Pragmatic knowledge refers to those pragmatic theories that describe and direct the appropriate use of language. A good command of those pragmatic theories can’t totally avoid pragmatic failure for it is not unusual that two or more pragmatic theories conflict with each other. Then, some pragmatic rules have to give way to other ones for the sake of communication. Question 5, 8, 20, 23, 25, 26, 34 and 35 all require the application of pragmatic knowledge to make a most appropriate utterance. For example (Question 20),

Your friend’s mother, Mrs. Smith, asked if you would like something to eat.

- What would you say to refuse politely?
- “No, thank you. You are so kind.”
 - “Oh, no. Mrs. Smith.”
 - “No, thanks. I’ve just had lunch.”

D. "I'm full and have no room for any more."

Table 8
Choice distribution of question 20

	Question 20			
	A	B	C	D
Group 1 (%)	54.00	0.00	29.33	16.67
Group 2 (%)	26.69	0.00	44.74	28.57
Average	40.35	0.00	37.035	22.62

As politeness principle should be followed, no student chose B which is an abrupt and impolite refusal. According to Table 8, 40.35% of the subjects chose A attempting to emphasize the hearer's gratitude to this invitation while 22.62% of them chose D which seems to provide a good excuse. However, A lacks an excuse which makes the response insincere while B is short of thanks to Mrs. Smith's good intention. Though the excuse may be invented and thus violate the Quality Maxim of Cooperative Principle, it conforms to the Sympathy Maxim of Politeness Principle to make Mrs. Smith feel good. Therefore, C is the most appropriate response integrating thanks with an excuse.

4.5 Cultural Differences

4.5.1 Assessments of Relative Power or Social Distance

Owing to cultural differences, non-native speakers may judge relative power or social distance differently from native speakers (Thomas, 1983). For example, Chinese students behave more deferentially than American students in an American classroom because teachers have higher status in Chinese culture than they do in American culture. This kind of behavior is rather out of expectation to American teachers and they will consider Chinese students as silent, obedient and lack of originality. Non-native speakers may sometimes appear to be behaving in a pragmatically inappropriate manner because they perceive themselves to be at a disadvantage. Questions 6 and 19 both demand a non-native speaker to make an appropriate judgment of the social distance in the target language which is culturally different from his/her first language. For example (Question 6),

Miss Brown has been late for school quite recently. After class, her teacher Professor Smith talks to her.

Prof. Smith: Er, Miss Brown. I'm sorry to have to mention this, but could you possibly try to be a little earlier in the morning? This is the third time you've been late this week.

Miss Brown: _____

A. Oh, I'm awfully sorry, Professor Smith, but I really will try to be on time.

B. Oh, dear! I'm sorry, Professor Smith.

C. Ok, I'm sure to come earlier next time.

D. Please excuse me this time. I won't be late next time.

Table 9
Choice distribution of question 6

	Question 6			
	A	B	C	D
Group 1 (%)	69.00	7.67	7.33	16.00
Group 2 (%)	62.81	8.61	5.26	23.32
Average	65.90	8.14	6.30	19.66

As is indicated in Table 9, 65.90% of the subjects chose A, the same as what they would say to a teacher in Chinese. Considering the nearly equal status of students and teachers in an English context, A is too humble a response to the teacher's criticism. An apology with a promise for future punctuality will agree with their relative power. However, only 19.66% made the most appropriate choice of D.

4.5.2 Free Topics and Taboos

Topics might cause pragmatic failure. What is regarded as free topics varies greatly in different culture. For example, Chinese people are inclined to ask such questions as "How old are you?" "Are you married?" "Where are you going?" "Where do you live?" "What's your salary?" in a conversation even with a stranger. Those are very normal topics to greet people or begin a conversation in China, which are intended to show one's concerns or create a friendly atmosphere and whose answers are not so important. However, those inquiries will make English people feel disturbed and annoyed for they are particularly sensitive to topics about one's age, weight, income, politics, religion, social status, etc. Questions 10, 12 and 22 all test the understanding of free topics in English. For example (Question 10),

Immediately after an introduction, what can a Chinese most appropriately talk about with a native speaker of English?

A, Marital status. B. Religion.

C. Occupation. D. Age

Table 10
Choice distribution of question 10

	Question 10			
	A	B	C	D
Group 1 (%)	34.05	13.17	48.83	3.95
Group 2 (%)	27.29	12.25	44.94	15.52
Average	30.67	12.71	46.89	9.74

As is indicated in Table 10, 30.67% of the subjects chose A and 9.74% of them chose B and D respectively. "Occupation" is a relative free. Only topic 46.89% chose the appropriate topic of C. "Occupation" is a relative free topic in a conversation between strangers or new acquaintances. The best topic will be weather most of the time. Age should never be talked about with a female native speaker of English. The topic of religion is also a non-free topic, to be exact, a taboo.

Just as the perception of free and non-free topics, taboos vary cross-culturally. Taboos arise from the source religion as well as racial- or gender-discriminated vocabulary. Moreover, words concerning illness and death are taboos in both English and Chinese. There are taboos concerned with addressing form. Parents' names were regarded as taboos by Chinese people in the past. Even today Chinese people still find it uncomfortable to speak of their parents' names though it is not so strictly restricted, whereas American people feel free to speak of their parents' names or even call their parents by their first names to show a kind of relationship. Chinese and English people also differ in the use of kinship terms in addressing people. English people usually use the terms for real relatives while Chinese people tend to abuse them (Liu and Zeng, 2004). Chinese people make use of different kinship terms, sometimes together with their surnames, to address people according to their age even though they are not real kin. "Aunt" or "uncle" is used to call people of the parents' age; "grandma" or "grandpa" is applied to address people of the grandparents' age. Chinese people like to address others with their occupations ((Liu and Zeng, 2004), such as "Teacher Wang", "Carpenter Zhang", "Driver Liu" while few English people use this kind of addressing form.

4.5.3 Pragmatic Principles

Because of the differences between western and eastern cultures, some of the pragmatic theories and principles cannot be applied to Chinese English learners. For instance, politeness has different thinking patterns and forms of expressions in English and Chinese, so Chinese English learners will unconsciously apply Chinese politeness principle to English instead of Leech's Politeness Principles. The results of Questions 8, 26, 30, 31, 40 can all manifest different understanding of politeness between Chinese and Western cultures. For example, when praise, Chinese people always deny the praise and debase themselves to show their modesty, which will be considered impolite and imprudent by western people for denying their remarks in such a direct way. In western culture, people would like to accept others' praise with a "thank you" who gives priority to the maxims of approbation and agreement while Chinese people attach greater importance to modesty carried out by means of abasing oneself to honor others. One more example (Question 26),

You have been to visit a Westerner and at the end of the afternoon he is saying "goodbye" at the door. What might you say to him?

- You say, "_____"
- A. Thank you for a lovely afternoon.
 - B. I'm sorry to have taken up so much of your time.
 - C. Stay where you are.
 - D. Goodbye. / See you

Table 11

Choice distribution of question 26

	Question 26			
	A	B	C	D
Group 1 (%)	75.19	6.51	0.00	18.30
Group 2 (%)	53.67	9.43	0.00	36.90
Average	64.43	7.97	0.00	27.60

As is indicated in Table 11, 7.97% of the subjects chose B, showing the guilt for the time wasted on the speaker himself, which is typical of Chinese politeness while 27.60% of the subjects chose D as a normal response to "goodbye". However, B is not suitable for western culture and D is not polite enough for a guest. Therefore, A is the most appropriate answer, showing gratitude to the host's warm hospitality.

4.5.4 Values, Religion and Thinking Patterns

Values, religion and thinking patterns also have an influence on the use of language. The western culture values individualism and equality while the eastern culture places weight on collectivism and hierarchy. The religion of Christianity exerts great influence on western culture while the religion of Buddhism as well as Confucianism has a great impact on Chinese culture. Chinese people tend to think in a holistic, synthetic and inductive way while westerners are prone to a logical, analytical and deductive way of thinking. Without a general understanding of these aspects, pragmatic failure can also arise in cross-cultural communication.

5. STRATEGIES IN AVOIDING CROSS-CULTURAL PRAGMATIC FAILURE

5.1 Cultivating Learners' Pragmatic Competence

To make a successful communication, importance should be attached to pragmatic competence except linguistic competence. Verbal communication cannot begin without linguistic competence. Therefore, Linguistic competence is the basic condition for successful communication while pragmatic competence is of higher requirement. Without pragmatic competence, one cannot express himself properly and cannot understand the real intention of the speaker; thus, the communication cannot be carried out successfully. Lack of pragmatic competence will inevitably cause pragmatic failure and hinder successful communication. Thereby, pragmatic competence should be cultivated alongside with linguistic competence.

How to cultivate learners' pragmatic competence? As a type of knowledge that learners possess, develop, acquire, use or lose, competence is not teachable. (Kasper, 2001). However, foreign language teachers can offer learning opportunities to benefit the development of pragmatic competence. There are a number of activities useful for pragmatic development.

5.1.1 Authentic Input of Target Language

Learners can be given a variety of observation assignments in or outside classrooms to acquire sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic information from various sources of authentic oral or written communication. A sociopragmatic task could be to observe under what conditions native speakers make compliments-when, on what kinds of topics, and to whom. A pragmalinguistic task concentrates on the strategies and linguistic means to perform a communicative act. Such observations may be open or guided. It is up to learners to detect the important features in open observations while learners are given a list of specific factors to observe in guided ones. Outside classroom observations will be reported to class, compared to those of other learners in small groups, and if necessary, commented and interpreted by the teacher. Such observations on pragmatic features help learners understand interrelation between linguistic forms, pragmatic functions, social contexts and cultural background.

5.1.2 Improvement of pragmatic inferential ability

As the inner mechanism in the cognitive process of human beings, pragmatic inferences play an indispensable role in communication. "Inferential model" comes from Grice's Conversational Implicature (1978), and then is developed into "ostensive-inferential model" by Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1986). Relevance Theory stresses "dynamic context" in human communication and cognition. By means of inferences and contemplation, the hearer must find access to correct contextual assumptions so as to achieve the relevant contextual effects of an utterance.

For example,

A: Has John come to school?

B: He's ill.

As is seen from the above example, only by recognizing B's implicature can A understand B's real intention. That is, A makes an inference from B's utterance to access the contextual assumption that "John can't come to school because of his illness." Then B's implicature is realized that "John hasn't come to school." This shows pragmatic inferential ability plays an important role in foreign language learning. Teachers should carry out inferential trainings so as to improve learners' cognitive ability to find relevance and make inferences. Since relevance is decided by the contextual effects and inference has and the processing effort needed to achieve that inference (Sperber & Wilson, 1986), it is important to choose an inference that has largest contextual effects and need least processing effort.

5.1.3 Communicative Practice

Communicative practice can improve learners' pragmatic competence. There are mainly three ways to carry out communicative practice in the classroom and they share the feature of being learner-centered.

The first one is small group discussion. This requires learners to take roles as speakers and hearer alternatively during a discourse and center their utterances on a particular topic.

The second one is task-based interaction. Different kinds of tasks can make learners participate in different social events and perform different communicative acts. Specific pragmatic abilities are promoted by different tasks. For example, referential communication tasks can enlarge learners' vocabulary and enhance strategic competence while interpersonal communication tasks involve learners in social relationships and performing various communicative acts (Kasper, 1997). Such activities as role-play, imitation, and drama can offer practice for interpersonal interactions in cross-cultural communication.

The third one is extracurricular activities. They are the effective source of communicative practice. Having English parties, celebrating English holidays, setting up "English corner" can create a language atmosphere and bring fun to learners as well as providing them opportunity to express their thoughts, display and exercise their linguistic and pragmatic competence.

5.2 Raising cultural awareness and understanding cultural differences

As is mentioned in 4.5, ignorance of cultural differences is one of the main causes for pragmatic failure. Therefore, as the first step to improve the understanding of cultural differences, raising cultural awareness is a necessity to cultivate pragmatic competence.

With the development of cultural awareness step by step, the knowledge of the target culture is enlarged meanwhile there is an obvious change of attitudes: people's willingness to accept and respect cultural differences is gradually increased. Therefore, a right attitude is the key to the improvement of cultural awareness. Every culture is equal: no culture is superior or inferior to another culture. The respect of each other's culture will help with successful communication while any disrespect or prejudice to others' culture will create great barriers in cross-cultural communication and undoubtedly result in pragmatic failure and miscommunication.

Teachers should attach great importance to cultural input and output to help learners understand cultural differences between the English and Chinese languages. This can be carried out in the following ways.

1) Teachers can introduce the cultural information involved in teaching materials and point out its cultural significance or conventions of use, especially the communicative acts of great cultural differences in language use, such as addressing, greeting, apologizing, inviting, etc. When organizing classroom activities, teachers can create a particular cultural environment, and ask learners to do role-play to raise learners' awareness of the appropriate use of language in a given social background.

2) Teachers can provide various sources of oral or written data for learners to observe the peculiar characteristics of the western culture, such as native speakers as classroom guests, videos of authentic interaction, TV/radio programs, movies, and other fictional or non-fictional written or audiovisual sources.

3) Schools can offer the courses concerning western culture. Delivering lectures on culture, organizing extracurricular activities are among the ways to stimulate the learners' enthusiasm for the English culture and help with cultural understanding.

CONCLUSIONS

Pragmatic competence and linguistic proficiency are both important to ensure the successful communication. Due to the imbalanced development of pragmatic competence and linguistic competence, pragmatic failure often arises in the communication of Chinese English learners. Therefore, it is important to conduct a study to find out the pragmatic failures Chinese English learners made. The study was conducted among English majors in Inner Mongolia University for nationalities. The findings are as follows:

1) English majors have a high rate of pragmatic failure even after at least six or eight years of English study, which means their pragmatic competence needs to be greatly improved in English teaching.

2) High linguistic competence does not necessarily lead to equally high pragmatic competence, i.e. pragmatic competence does not develop in proportion with linguistic competence.

3) Pragmatic failure experienced by English majors is of high frequency on verbal communication concerning social distance or cultural differences.

Potential causes of pragmatic failures have been analyzed: interlingual negative transfer, intralingual transfer, lack of pragmatic knowledge, ignorance of social distance and cultural differences, etc.

Practical strategies have been proposed to improve learners' pragmatic competence, that is, teachers should integrate cultural and pragmatic knowledge with language teaching.

The results of the current study may have some implication on college English teaching, learning as well as cross-cultural communication. This study presents a clear picture of the present pragmatic competence of English majors and also demonstrates one's pragmatic competence can't be improved automatically with the development of linguistic competence; thus teachers and learners have to place as much weight on pragmatic competence as well as linguistic competence. The analyses of the possible causes of pragmatic failure imply the importance of pragmatic-and cultural-awareness as well as authentic input of pragmatic and cultural knowledge in

or outside a classroom. Besides, communicative practice has to be carried out to put the acquired knowledge into use. Only with the improvement of pragmatic competence can pragmatic failure be avoided in cross-cultural communication.

Limitations remain in this study. The subjects of the study are limited to the English majors in Inner Mongolia University for Nationalities, who cannot represent all the English learners in China. Moreover, the study only includes a questionnaire of forty multiple choice questions, which may undermine the reliability of the study. The future research will improve the study to work on the authentic output of a more representative group of subjects and try to find out more subtle causes for pragmatic failure.

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APPENDIX I

Questionnaire for English Pragmatic Competence

Directions: For each problem in this part, you are presented with one situation with four utterances below. Read the description of each situation with the utterances and decide which the most appropriate utterance is in that situation. Mark your choice by writing the corresponding letter on the Answer Sheet.

1. Amy is talking to her friend, Lucy.

Amy: I wonder if you'd mind posting this letter for me on your way home, Lucy?

Lucy: _____

- A. You're welcome.
- B. I don't care.
- C. I don't mind.
- D. Yeah, sure.

2. Miss Li works in an international business office. One day she worked very late. Her boss said to her, "Thanks a lot. That's a great help." Miss Li replies: _____

- A. "It's my pleasure."
- B. "Never mind. It's my duty."
- C. "You are welcome."
- D. "Oh, it's nothing."

3. George is in the way.

Susan: May I get through here?

George: _____

- A. Yes, please.
- B. Yes, you can.
- C. Yes. (opening a passageway).
- D. (opening a passage way without demur).

4. Song had something to tell the manager, Mr. Smith, so he went to his place, entering the room and said, _____

- A. "You're not busy, I hope."
- B. "Got a minute?"
- C. "Can I have a word with you, Mr. Smith?"
- D. "I'm terribly sorry to trouble you, Mr. Smith."

5. If someone gives you directions in English so quickly that you don't understand, you might respond:_____

- A. "Excuse me, I'm still learning the language, could you repeat that a little more slowly?"
- B. "Thank you. I appreciate your help."
- C. "Could you repeat that?"
- D. "Try to repeat the directions to the person."

6. Miss Brown has been late for school quite recently. After class, her teacher Professor Smith talks to her.

Professor Smith: Er-Miss Brown. I'm sorry to have to mention to this, but could you possibly try to be a little earlier in the morning? This is the third time you've been late this week.

Miss Brown: _____

- A. Oh, I'm awfully sorry, Professor Smith, but I really will try to be on time.
- B. Oh, dear! I'm sorry, Professor Smith.
- C. OK, I'm sure to come earlier next time.
- D. Please excuse me this time. I won't be late next time.

7. Mrs. Smith has been spending the afternoon with an acquaintance, Mrs. Brown She has just got up to go. The hostess addresses her guest as follows:

- A. "Are you leaving yet?"
- B. "Are you leaving already?"
- C. "Aren't you leaving yet?"
- D. "Aren't you leaving already?"

8. George is talking to his school-mate, David.

George: How did you do on the exam, David?

David: I barely passed. I made a hopeless mess of it. I don't know why I did so badly.

George: _____

- A. Just try to forget about it.
- B. Don't worry. You'll do better next time.
- C. It doesn't matter.
- D. Cheer up.

9. Zhou: What do you think of the film?

Smith: I can't praise this film too highly.

By this Mr. Smith means _____

- A. this film is just so-so.
- B. this film is not good.
- C. this film is so good that it deserves praise.
- D. this film is OK, but doesn't deserve praise.

10. Immediately after an introduction, what can a Chinese most appropriately talk about with a native speaker of English?

- A. Marital status.
- B. Religion.
- C. Occupation.
- D. Age.

11. George and David are former classmates.

George: "I've got a job."

David: "You haven't!"

By this David means _____

- A. "Really?"
- B. "You're joking."
- C. "Impossible."
- D. "No, you haven't got a job."

12. Wang Fei is studying in America, one day she asks her classmate Linda a question.

Wang Fei: Do you mind if I ask you how much you weigh?

Linda: _____

- A. Yes, I do.
- B. Ha, ha. Gee, Americans don't really like to be asked such a question.
- C. I'm about 50kg.
- D. No, I wouldn't mind it at all.

13. Two friends are discussing an English course.

A: Were you satisfied with that course you took?

B: I didn't think much of it.

By this B means _____

- A. "I was dissatisfied."
- B. "I was satisfied."
- C. "I hadn't actually begun to think about it."
- D. "I don't know."

14. When introduced to an elder professor or a friend's parents, what would you say?

- A. "How are you?"
- B. "Hello" and bow.
- C. "Hello, it's nice to meet you", and then shake hands.
- D. "Hi! Glad to know you."

15. One morning, on his way to the library Doctor Smith comes across one of his students, and they greet each other.

Doctor Smith: Is your library open on Friday?

Student: _____

- A. Of course.
- B. Yes, of course.
- C. Yes. It is.
- D. Yes, everybody knows it.

16. One day, a Chinese student invited his foreign teacher to have dinner. When all is ready, the student warm-heartedly said, _____

- A. "Help yourself!"
- B. "Eat more!"
- C. "Please!"
- D. "Eat slowly!"

17. One the telephone.

George: Hello, I'd like to speak to Wu Yifan, please.

Wu Yifan: _____

- A. I'm Wu Yifan.
- B. This is me.
- C. This is Wu Yifan speaking.
- D. It's me here.

18. Mr. Green's secretary, Pat Kent, went to the airport to meet Mr. Barnes for her boss.

Miss Kent: _____

- A. "Excuse me, would you be Mr. Barnes?"
- B. "Are you Mr. Barnes?"
- C. "You are Mr. Barnes, aren't you?"
- D. "Excuse me, are you Mr. Barnes?"

19. Wu Yifan had a question to ask his foreign teacher. He went to Professor Black's place. After he got the answer, he got up to leave. He said, _____

- A. "Well, that's clear-thank you very much."
- B. "Well, I've got to go now."

- C. "Thank you for your time/help."
- D. "I'm afraid I must go now."

20. Your friend's mother, Mrs. Smith, asked if you would like something to eat. What would you say to refuse politely?

- A. "No, thank you. You are so kind."
- B. "Oh, no. Mrs. Smith."
- C. "No, thanks. I've just had lunch."
- D. "I'm full and have no room for any more."

21. Wu Yifan meets his English teacher, John Smith, outside the classroom.

- Wu Yifan says, _____
- A. "Hello-Mr. John."
 - B. "Morning, Mr. Smith."
 - C. "Hi, teacher Smith."
 - D. "Good morning, teacher."

22. Suppose you meet your classmate, John Smith, on the street shortly after dinnertime.

- You greet him by _____
- A. "Hi, John, where are you going?"
 - B. "Hi, have you eaten?"
 - C. "How are things?"
 - D. "Taking a walk, John?"

23. Suppose you are waiting for a bus with a foreigner you don't know. It is a cold snowy day, but you like the weather very much because the trees covered with snow are really beautiful.

- The foreigner said, "What a terrible weather."
Which of the following should you choose as a response?
- A. "Yes, it is."
 - B. "I don't think so. It is really wonderful."
 - C. "I think so."
 - D. "I agree with you."

24. If your English teacher uses a Latin word you don't know, you might _____

- A. say nothing and pretend that you have understood.
- B. say, "Please repeat."
- C. say, "I am sorry. What did you say just now?"
- D. say, "I'm sorry, I didn't understand what you said. Could you please repeat the last word?"

25. Suppose a foreigner has invited you out to dinner at a restaurant. At the end of the meal, when you are saying goodbye to each other, the foreigner thanks you for coming. What would you say in reply?

- A. "You're welcome."
- B. "Well, thank you. It was very kind of you to invite me."
- C. "It's my pleasure."
- D. "Give no verbal response-just smile."

26. You have been to visit a westerner and at the end of the afternoon he is saying "goodbye" at the door. What might you say to him?

- You say: _____
- A. "Thank you for a lovely afternoon."
 - B. "I'm sorry to have taken up so much of your time."
 - C. "Stay where you are."
 - D. "Goodbye./Say you."

27. At a party or social occasions, how would you indicate that it was time for you to leave someone's home?

- A. I would say, "It's getting late and I'd better be going."
- B. I would say, "I must be off now. Sorry to have troubled you so long. Thanks for everything."

- C. I would say, "I have wasted a lot of your time. I have to leave now."
D. I would make up an excuse (e.g. I have to get up early tomorrow, etc.)

28. When you visit your English friend, George, in his house, he wants to treat you to some coffee.

George: Would you like some coffee?

You: _____

- A. No, please don't go to any trouble.
B. That would be great.
C. Thank you.
D. You are too polite.

29. When introducing yourself to someone you don't know at a party, what would you say?

- A. "Hi, I'm..."
B. "May I introduce myself to you and at the same time I make you acquaintance?"
C. "Hi, I'd like to meet you."
D. "Hi, I'm... Do you know many people here?"

30. When someone compliments you on the watch you are wearing, you would _____

- A. give it to him.
B. say, "Oh, this cheap thing? It is not worth much."
C. say, "Thanks" and smile.
D. say, "Would you like to have it?"

31. Linda is a foreign student in China. She meets Mr. Li.

Linda: I was told that you won the first prize in the speech contest. Congratulations.

Mr. Li: _____

- A. Just lucky.
B. Thank you.
C. I can't say I did well this morning.
D. I could have done better if I was not so nervous.

32. After Dr. Brown has given his three-hour lecture. Student says, _____

- A. "You have made a wonderful lecture, Dr. Brown."
B. "Your lecture was such an attractive one that I'd like to listen to you another 3 hours."
C. "I must say I really appreciate your talk this morning."
D. "Dr. Brown, I have never heard a lecture so wonderful as you did this morning."

33. One day, when an American lady accidentally bumped into Wu Yifan.

Lady: I'm terribly sorry.

Wu Yifan: _____

- A. That's all right.
B. Never mind.
C. it doesn't matter.
D. Don't worry.

34. At a bus stop

Man: Excuse me, do you know which bus to catch for London Road, please?

Woman: sorry, I've no idea.

Man: _____

He then went up to another person.

- A. It doesn't matter.
B. Oh.
C. Never mind.
D. Thank you anyway.

35. You've just been asked out to dinner but you don't want to go with the person who invited you. You might say,

- A. "I don't think so. I already have plans."
B. "No, I really don't enjoy being with you."

- C. "I'm dieting so I mustn't go out to eat."
 D. "Thanks a lot but I'm busy tonight."

36. Mr. Brown met his teacher, Mrs. Smith, outside library.

- Mr. Brown: Good morning, Mrs. Smith. How are you?
 Mrs. Smith: Very well thank you, Mr. Brown, and how are you?
 A. Oh, can't complain.
 B. I'm very well, too, thank you.
 C. Same old thing.
 D. OK.

37. Mr. Smith has arrived for a meeting which, unfortunately, has been cancelled.

Mrs. Brown: I'm terribly sorry about not letting you know sooner, Mr. Smith, but unfortunately it was cancelled at the last minute and there simply wasn't enough time to inform everyone.

- Mr. Smith:
 A. Oh, don't let it worry you, Mrs. Brown. I quite understand.
 B. Oh, that's OK, Mrs. Brown. I understand.
 C. Oh, it doesn't matter, Mrs. Brown.
 D. Oh, don't worry about it, Mrs. Brown.

38. If you want to borrow a book from your friend, you will say, _____

- A. "Excuse me. I was wondering if you could lend me your textbook."
 B. "Can you lend me your textbook?"
 C. "Could you possibly lend me your textbook?"
 D. "Perhaps you'll lend me your textbook, won't you?"

39. You have finished dinner at a restaurant. You say, _____

- A. "Waiter, bill please."
 B. "Excuse me, how much is the dinner, please?"
 C. "Would you mind bringing me the bill?"
 D. "Could you possibly show me the bill?"

40. A Chinese student gives a birthday present to her America friend.

Lindy: (opening the present) Wow, it's net. Thank you.
 Xiao Lin: _____

- A. Really? Do you like it?
 B. Don't mention it. It is only a small gift.
 C. I'm glad you like it.
 D. Not at all.

Note: The above questions are selected form the following sources.

- 1) "English Pragmatic Competence Investigation" attached to "A Survey of Pragmatics" (He, 1986)
- 2) "The Customs and Language of Social Interaction in English" (Oatey, 1987)
- 3) "An Analysis of Common Mistakes of Chinese in English Usage" (Zhang, 1993)

APPENDIX II

Questionnaire Data (%)

	Question 1				Question 2				Question 3			
	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D
G1	12.83	7.17	32.73	47.27	62.17	35.67	2.17	0.00	44.5	3.33	52.17	0.00
G2	12.00	11.21	15.57	61.21	52.29	35.21	6.64	5.86	44.14	17.57	35.21	4.07
Avg.	13.13	8.42	24.50	53.95	56.40	36.71	4.11	2.79	44.23	10.08	44.17	1.52

		Question 4				Question 5				Question 6			
		A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D
G1		4.00	14.33	24.33	57.33	78.83	7.83	11.47	1.87	69.00	7.67	7.33	16.00
G2		0.00	22.43	43.84	33.73	72.03	1.29	20.93	5.86	62.81	8.61	5.26	23.32
Avg.		2.00	18.38	34.09	45.53	75.50	4.67	15.88	3.95	65.90	8.14	6.30	49.66
		Question 7				Question 8				Question 9			
		A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D
G1		12.83	32.17	41.17	13.83	7.83	63.83	5.50	22.83	26.00	7.33	57.67	9.00
G2		22.71	25.50	41.57	10.21	10.21	68.36	2.29	19.14	49.00	6.36	43.85	0.79
Avg.		17.60	28.95	40.88	12.57	8.98	66.03	3.95	21.05	37.50	6.82	50.76	4.89
		Question 10				Question 11				Question 12			
		A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D
G1		34.05	13.17	48.83	3.95	72.17	21.79	6.87	0.00	11.17	72.17	6.17	10.50
G2		27.29	12.25	44.94	15.52	52.29	24.50	12.00	11.23	12.00	70.14	2.29	15.57
Avg.		30.67	12.71	46.89	9.74	62.57	22.78	8.98	5.68	11.57	71.19	4.81	13.43
		Question 13				Question 14				Question 15			
		A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D
G1		35.5	21.17	26.17	17.17	15.50	34.50	44.5	5.50	7.33	18.67	74.00	0.00
G2		36.21	26.29	33.43	4.07	8.43	16.57	56.64	18.36	15.29	18.86	64.05	1.80
Avg.		35.84	23.64	29.67	10.84	12.57	26.36	51.36	10.71	11.31	18.77	69.03	0.91
		Question 16				Question 17				Question 18			
		A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D
G1		88.83	1.67	9.50	0.00	0.00	2.17	90.97	6.87	36.17	8.83	9.33	46.17
G2		86.21	5.36	8.43	0.00	4.07	3.07	87.00	5.86	42.36	5.86	9.43	42.36
Avg.		87.57	3.45	8.98	0.00	2.22	2.09	89.16	6.53	36.16	7.40	9.12	44.33
		Question 19				Question 20				Question 21			
		A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D
G1		10.50	0.00	85.97	3.53	54.00	0.00	29.33	16.67	16.17	65.50	6.17	12.17
G2		14.79	0.00	79.86	5.36	26.69	0.00	44.74	28.57	20.93	50.50	7.64	20.93
Avg.		12.57	0.00	83.12	4.31	40.35	0.00	37.04	22.62	18.47	58.26	7.40	15.88
		Question 22				Question 23				Question 24			
		A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D
G1		35.50	12.83	17.17	34.50	26.17	48.83	13.83	11.17	1.87	0.00	5.97	92.17
G2		20.17	29.86	4.07	45.93	11.21	67.36	15.57	5.86	3.07	7.64	7.64	81.64
Avg.		27.09	22.05	10.84	40.02	18.47	58.26	14.16	9.12	2.09	3.95	7.40	86.57
		Question 25				Question 26				Question 27			
		A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D
G1		1.17	78.83	16.17	3.83	75.19	6.51	0.00	18.30	33.83	47.83	3.83	14.50
G2		4.86	52.29	31.64	11.21	53.67	9.43	0.00	36.90	27.29	49.50	15.57	7.64
Avg.		2.95	66.02	23.64	7.40	64.43	7.97	0.00	27.60	30.67	48.64	9.98	10.71
		Question 28				Question 29				Question 30			
		A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D
G1		2.85	62.17	32.83	2.17	20.50	57.16	21.17	2.17	2.17	1.17	94.50	2.17
G2		0.00	57.64	39.04	3.32	11.21	53.07	28.07	7.64	0.00	6.92	88.00	5.11
Avg.		1.22	59.98	35.71	3.09	16.02	54.67	24.50	4.81	1.36	3.82	91.88	2.95
		Question 31				Question 32				Question 33			
		A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D
G1		1.17	98.83	0.00	0.00	23.53	18.13	24.80	33.53	58.53	21.47	18.13	1.83
G2		4.86	91.57	1.59	1.99	23.01	18.06	16.57	42.36	53.77	28.37	14.09	3.77
Avg.		3.25	95.03	0.66	1.06	23.08	18.30	20.89	37.73	56.23	24.80	16.18	2.79
		Question 34				Question 35				Question 36			
		A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D
G1		7.83	3.83	11.87	76.47	4.80	1.97	0.00	93.23	6.87	73.13	9.80	10.20
G2		5.56	0.00	6.84	87.60	5.16	3.77	3.37	87.70	1.59	89.49	3.37	5.56
Avg.		6.70	1.92	9.28	82.10	4.97	2.79	1.52	90.72	4.21	81.13	6.70	7.96
		Question 37				Question 38				Question 39			
		A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D
G1		11.47	18.53	66.87	3.13	65.17	21.50	8.21	5.12	51.87	11.47	26.47	10.20
G2		20.93	12.70	57.21	9.16	52.07	15.79	22.11	10.03	55.56	10.51	10.91	23.01
Avg.		16.18	15.72	62.27	5.83	58.62	18.65	15.16	7.58	53.65	11.01	18.77	16.58
		Question 40											
		A	B	C	D								
G1		0.00	4.50	95.50	0.00								
G2		1.59	7.34	87.70	3.37								
Avg.		0.76	6.13	91.48	1.63								