

Do Pragmatic Awareness and Grammatical Awareness Relate to Motivation and Severity Rating, and Do They Relate to One Another?

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Abstract

Motivation is one of the factors that are believed to be related to the awareness of the second language (L2) features and the L2 pragmatic learning. This study aims to determine if the pragmatic and grammatical awareness relates to motivation and severity rating, and if the pragmatic and grammatical awareness are correlated to one another. The subjects were 81 first-year English-major Thai students at Naresuan University. These students learned English within a foreign language (EFL) context. Two sets of analyses were carried out; one for each type of awareness being investigated. The first set, with the dependent factor being grammatical awareness, used the following independent factors: five types of motivation (ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self, L2 learning experience, intended effort, L2 anxiety), the severity rating of the grammatical inappropriateness and the pragmatic awareness. The independent factors of the second set were similar to the first, except that the severity rating of the grammatical inappropriateness and the pragmatic awareness were changed into the severity rating of the pragmatic inappropriateness and the grammatical awareness, and the dependent factor was pragmatic awareness. The findings showed that the severity rating of the grammatical inappropriateness was the only factor that was significantly correlated to the grammatical awareness, and the severity rating of the pragmatic inappropriateness was the only factor that was significantly related to the pragmatic awareness. These findings suggest that L2 learners' perception of the seriousness of the grammatical and pragmatic mistakes has a greater bearing on grammatical and pragmatic awareness than motivation or the other awareness factors.

Keywords: grammatical, L2 Thai learners, motivation, pragmatic, severity rating

1. Introduction

Successful communication depends on many factors, such as interlocutor, speaking context and knowledge of the topic. Two important factors that have been intensively investigated are grammatical knowledge and pragmatic competence. According to Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei (1998), grammar is the accuracy of linguistic features including morphology and syntax while pragmatics is the appropriateness of speech in a specific situation, speakers and content. Whereas a good communication includes pragmatic competence and linguistic competence (grammatical awareness) (Levinson, 1983), many studies showed that grammatical awareness is not correlated to pragmatic awareness (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1991; Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998; Yamanaka, 2003) suggesting that high knowledge of grammar does not guarantee the knowledge of the appropriateness of the utterance in the context.

Researchers have spent their efforts exploring the relationship between factors, such as length of residence in the L2 speaking context (e.g., Ran, 2007; Xu, Case, & Wang, 2009), motivation (Tagashira, Yamato, & Isoda, 2011), and pragmatic and grammatical awareness. For example, in the study of Tagashira et al. (2011), the relationship between grammatical and pragmatic awareness, and motivational factors by L2 Japanese learners was explored. The grammatical and pragmatic awareness, together with severity ratings of their inappropriateness was examined using the questionnaire of Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei (1998). The motivation was explored with questionnaire by Hiromori (2006) which comprised of five aspects of motivation, including intrinsic motivation, identified regulation, introjected regulation, external regulation and amotivation on a five-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). The participants were divided into four groups according to their motivational profile: moderately motivated group, self-determined motivation group, amotivated group and externally regulated motivation group. Their descriptive findings showed that motivational profiles influenced the error identifications and severity ratings of errors. The ANOVA findings showed no difference in the scores of error identifications and severity ratings of grammatical and pragmatic errors. However, Tagashira et al. (2011) did not investigate whether the two types of awareness: pragmatic and grammatical are related to their severity ratings, nor did they investigate the significant relationship between motivational profiles, severity ratings of grammatical and pragmatic inappropriateness, other type of awareness and error identifications. Their descriptive findings of the relationship between motivational profiles, and error identifications and severity ratings of errors cannot be generalised to other samples in the same population. Hence, the question of whether the two types of awareness, pragmatic and grammatical, are correlated with the seriousness that the L2 learners attribute to the mistakes in these two aspects, other type of awareness and motivation still remains unanswered.

This study closely follows the study of Tagashira et al. (2011). Both aim to investigate two types of awareness, pragmatic and grammatical, in relation to motivation, but this study differs from that study in the following ways:

- 1) The motivation questionnaire of this study is from the study of Papi (2010) which is composed of five aspects of motivation (ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self, L2 learning experience, intended effort, L2 anxiety);
- 2) The severity rating of two types of pragmatic and grammatical inappropriateness and other type of awareness are also added as the independent factors;
- 3) The dependent factor is either pragmatic or grammatical awareness – the severity rating is not the dependent factor in this study; and
- 4) The significant relationships between motivational profiles and grammatical awareness, and between motivational profiles and pragmatic awareness are investigated.

Thus, the aims of this study are: 1) To examine the motivational profiles of L2 Thai learners; 2) To explore two types of awareness: grammatical and pragmatic of L2 Thai learners; and 3) To investigate the significant relationship between each type of awareness, and motivation, severity rating of errors, and the other type of awareness. It is hypothesised that ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self, L2 learning experience, intended effort, the other type of awareness, and the seriousness in the errors will be positively correlated to each type of awareness whereas L2 anxiety will be negatively correlated to each type of awareness.

2. Pragmatic Awareness and Motivation

Motivation has been found to play role in many aspects of English learning, such as L2 phonology (Kitikanan, 2016). The relationship between pragmatic awareness and motivation was investigated for the first time in the study of Takahashi (2001) showing that motivation was positively correlated to the willingness to adopt target norms for pragmatic action. Another evidence supporting positive relation between pragmatic competence and motivation is from Ahn (2007). The subjects in Ahn's study were 50 Korean students in the United States. The motivation questionnaire was the mini-attitude/motivation test battery developed by Gardner (1985) comprising five aspects: integrativeness, attitudes toward learning situation, motivation, instrumental orientation and language anxiety. The pragmatic competence questionnaire was a written DCT which was composed of four situations. For each situation, the subjects were asked to create a conversation of two people (one speaker was the respondent). The finding regarding motivation showed that the level of motivation was positively related to pragmatic competence. These findings suggest the positive influence of motivation towards L2 pragmatic awareness.

3. Grammatical Awareness and Motivation

The studies on the relationship between motivation and grammatical competence are rare as most studies on motivation and L2 English proficiency were carried out with the proficiency in overall rather than in grammar specifically (e.g., Al-Qahtani, 2013; Yamashiro & McLaughlin, 2001). However, there are studies showing that motivation is positively correlated to grammatical awareness (e.g., Hu, 2011; Lasagabaster, 2011). For example, in the study of Lasagabaster (2011), the relationship between motivation and English achievement by L2 learners from the Basque Country was examined. Their motivation questionnaire consisted of 13 questions and each response was based on a five-point Likert scale. The English grammar achievement was measured by the standardised Oxford Placement Test. The analysis of motivation was divided into three groups: interest and instrumental orientation, attitudes towards learning English in class, and the two previous variables and effort. The findings showed that the score of Grammar test was significantly positively related to all three groups of motivational factors suggesting that when students have higher motivation, their grammatical performance is better than those with lower motivation. Another instance is from Hu (2011) exploring the relationship between demotivational factors and their English proficiency of Taiwanese learners of English. The questionnaire was composed of 35 questions to measure 11 aspects of demotivation including learning difficulties, threats to self-worth, monotonous teaching, poor teacher-student relationship, punishment, general and language anxiety, lack of self-determination, poor classroom management, theory not put into practice, xenophobia, inadequate English skills at matriculation. These demotivating factors were rated based on a five-point scale. The English proficiency questionnaire was adopted from the GEPT (General English Proficiency Test) composing a grammar and reading comprehension test, and a listening comprehension test. Their findings showed that 'confused by English grammar' which was in learning difficulties had the highest correlation with grammar proficiency as compared to other demotivating items, and this item explained the most variance in grammar achievement. This suggests that the proficiency of English grammar should be better when L2 learners understand the rule of English grammar.

4. Methodology

4.1 Subjects

The subjects of this study was 81 first-year English-major students at Naresuan University. Out of the total number of subjects, 59 were female (72.84%). At the time this research was carried out, the students were in their first semester. As these students were English major students, the average ability of their English proficiency was higher than most students majoring in other subjects. Their English proficiency is considered to be

intermediate. Their ages were approximately 18-19 years old. They studied English in the EFL (English as a foreign language) context, i.e. using mainly English in the English classroom. Outside the classroom, in their daily lives, they were rarely exposed to English as the primary language within their community was Thai. Before entering university, they were well versed in the use of English as EFL.

4.2 Research tools

There were two research tools for this study: questionnaire for two types of awareness: pragmatic and grammatical, and the severity ratings of their errors, and questionnaire for language learning motivation. The details of each tool used are as follows.

4.2.1 Questionnaire for two types of awareness: pragmatic and grammatical, and the severity ratings of their errors

As mentioned earlier, the questionnaire to explore two types of awareness: pragmatic and grammatical, and their severity ratings was from Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei (1998). The questions were in English without Thai translation. It comprised of 20 situations. Two sets of eight situations were used to measure for each type of awareness. These 16 situations presented inappropriateness in each type of awareness. The four remaining situations were irrelevant, but were added to distract students from being aware of what tests are being performed upon them. However, instead of having only one question as in the study of Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei (1998), two questions were provided to avoid vagueness in the answer, following similar approach used in Tagashira et al. (2011). Figure 1 shows the example of the answer sheet.

18. Anna needs directions to the library. She asks another student.

A: Excuse me, could you tell me where is the library.

Was the last part...

(a) grammatically correct? Yes No

If your answer is no, how serious do you think it was?

Not bad at all ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ Very bad

(b) appropriate in the situation Yes No

If no, how serious do you think it was?

Not bad at all ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ Very bad

Figure 1: An example of the answer sheet in this study

4.2.2 Questionnaire for language learning motivation

The questionnaire for the language learning motivation was taken from Papi (2010) which was developed according to the L2 Motivational Self System (Dörnyei, 2005). It had 30 items, and it was provided in both Thai and English to minimise the language barrier for the learners. The L2 Motivational Self System comprises three variables: ideal L2 self (the hope to become professionally successful), ought-to L2 self (an effort in language learning to avoid negative outcome) and L2 learning experience (learning factors, such as teacher, curriculum, peer). The other two variables, which were intended effort and L2 anxiety, were added in Papi's study and this study to make the investigation of motivation aspect more insightful. As there were five aspects of motivation, each aspect was measured with six items. This questionnaire was based on six-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 6 = strongly agree). Ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self and intended effort were measured with statements whereas L2 learning experience and L2 anxiety were measured with questions.

4.3 Data collection

The data collection was divided into two parts. First, the L2 Thai learners were tested for the two types of awareness: grammatical and pragmatic. As the room was small compared to the number of L2 Thai learners, the subjects were divided into three groups with approximately 25-27 subjects per group. One group did the test in the room at a time. To ensure they tried their best on the test, they were given the incentive that this test would be marked and would contribute 2% towards their final grades. At the beginning of the test, the author explained to the students the differences between the grammatical and pragmatic correctness, and how to do the test. Further assistance was given with an example on the questionnaire. The test took about 25-30 minutes. After the test, the subjects voluntarily did the motivation questionnaire. The duration of this second stage was 10-15 minutes. This research project has received ethical approval from Naresuan University Institutional Review Board (COA number: 002/2018 and IRB number: 1056/60).

4.4 Data analysis

For the motivation part, the internal consistency for items in each type of motivation was checked with Cronbach's alpha in *R* (R Core Team, 2016) with *Rcmdr* package (Fox & Bouchet-Valat, 2017). The results showed that the scores of internal consistency of each type of motivation was the highest in the ideal L2 self (0.84), followed by English anxiety (0.83), English language experience (0.76), intended effort (0.74) and ought-to L2 self (0.64). According to Dörnyei (2002), the threshold of the internal consistency for L2 research should be higher than 0.70. All types except items for ought-to L2 self were scored above the

threshold. However, the internal consistency for the ought-to L2 self was at the acceptable level (Sternad & Bobek, 2014); hence, all items were kept. Then the ratings of each item for each type of motivation were combined and divided by the number of items (six).

For the pragmatic and grammatical awareness, eight items for each type of awareness were coded in the way that when the L2 learners answered 'no', it meant that their answer was correct, so they got '1' for answering the question correctly. Then if they answered 'yes', they got '0' because their answer was wrong. All correct scores of the eight items for each type of awareness were combined – the higher the total score, the more they answered the questions correctly. For the ratings of the grammatical and pragmatic awareness, the rating was combined and divided by eight (for each type of ratings); hence, the higher the rating, the more the subject was serious about that mistake. The descriptive statistics, i.e. mean, minimum, maximum and standard deviation (SD) were used to present motivation, pragmatic and grammatical awareness and their ratings.

To investigate the relationship between each type of pragmatic and grammatical, and motivation, other type of awareness and the severity ratings of each type of their errors, two linear regression models were run in *R* (R Core Team, 2016) using *Rcmdr* package (Fox & Bouchet-Valat, 2017). The first model had grammatical awareness as dependent variable, and the independent variables were five types of motivation, the severity rating of the grammatical inappropriateness and the pragmatic awareness. The second model had pragmatic awareness as dependent variable whereas the independent variables were similar to the first model except that the severity rating of the grammatical inappropriateness and the pragmatic awareness were changed into the severity rating of the pragmatic inappropriateness and the grammatical awareness. All variables in the two models were interval.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Motivational profiles

As English learning motivation in this study was divided into five categories: ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self, English learning experience, intended effort and English anxiety, the results for the English learning motivation are as follows. From these five types of motivation, scoring out of six, the average score of intended effort was the highest ($M = 5.14$, $SD = 0.54$), followed by ideal L2 self ($M = 5.10$, $SD = 0.78$), English learning experience ($M = 4.83$, $SD = 0.61$), ought-to L2 self ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 0.88$) and English anxiety ($M = 3.66$, $SD = 0.94$). When comparing the minimum score of each motivation, it was found that the lowest score of motivations was English anxiety ($Min = 1.00$), followed by ought-to L2 self ($Min = 1.50$), English learning experience ($Min = 2.83$), ideal L2 self ($Min = 3.00$) and intended effort ($Min =$

3.50). For the comparison of the maximum score of each motivation, ideal L2 self, English learning experience and intended effort had the highest maximum scores of 6, followed by ought-to L2 self ($Max = 5.83$) and English anxiety ($Max = 5.50$).

5.2 Two type of awareness: grammatical and pragmatic

The results of the two types of grammatical and pragmatic awareness will be presented together with their severity ratings. The descriptive statistics showed that out of eight, the average scores of the error identification of pragmatic awareness ($M = 4.05$, $SD = 1.69$) was higher than that of the grammatical awareness ($M = 3.24$, $SD = 1.10$). This result is contrary to the findings in the study of Tagashira et al. (2011), where Japanese learners had higher scores of the error identification of grammatical awareness than the pragmatic one (grammatical = 4.31, pragmatic = 3.77). This suggests that while Thai learners are better at English pragmatics than grammar, Japanese learners are more competent in grammar than pragmatics. Having low scores on error identification for both types of awareness (less than 55%) might be due to the English barrier in the task as they were in English without Thai translation. The subjects might not understand English in the text in the sufficient degree to judge the grammatical and pragmatic errors. It implies that the interlanguage of both groups of L2 learners is still in the learning stage. While the minimum scores of the average scores of the error identification of the two types of awareness: pragmatic and grammatical were similar ($Min = 0$ for both), the maximum scores of the average scores of the error identification was higher in the pragmatic awareness ($Max = 8$) than the grammatical one ($Max = 7$). Comparing the severity ratings for the pragmatic and grammatical inappropriateness, out of six, the average score of the rating was higher in the pragmatic awareness ($M = 1.69$, $SD = 0.94$) than the grammatical one ($M = 1.10$, $SD = 0.64$). Similar to the results of the average scores of the error identification of pragmatic and grammatical awareness, the results of the severity ratings of the two types of inappropriateness of Thai learners were contrary to the findings of the study of Tagashira et al. (2011) as Japanese learners had higher severity ratings for grammatical inappropriateness than the pragmatic one (grammatical = 1.97, pragmatic = 1.90). This suggests that whereas Thai learners are concerned about the appropriateness of the utterances than grammaticality, Japanese learners are the opposite. However, the mean scores of the severity ratings for the pragmatic and grammatical inappropriateness by both Thai and Japanese learners were low. This might suggest that L2 learners with EFL background might not take pragmatic and grammatical inappropriateness as serious mistakes. Although the minimum scores of the rating for both types of awareness were similar ($Min = 0$ for both), the maximum score of the rating for the pragmatic awareness ($Max = 4$) was higher than the one for the grammatical awareness ($Max = 3.5$).

5.3 The relationship between each type of awareness: pragmatic and grammatical, and motivation, other type of awareness and severity rating of their inappropriateness

Regarding the relationship between motivation, pragmatic awareness and severity rating of grammatical inappropriateness, and grammatical awareness, results from the linear regression model showed that the grammatical awareness was not significantly correlated with any types of motivation, nor the pragmatic awareness ($p > 0.05$ for all contrasts). These results might suggest that the grammatical awareness is not promoted by motivation, nor the pragmatic awareness. The finding that grammatical awareness was not significantly related to motivation is contrastive to the findings of Hu (2011) and Lasagabaster (2011) as they found positive correlation between motivation and grammatical awareness. This result might be attributable to the difference of research tools used by them and this study. For example, it might be due to different questionnaires for the motivational investigation and different tests for the grammatical awareness. As the subjects in this study had to be aware of the appropriateness of the final utterance in each context in two aspects, this might lessen the awareness in grammar. It is possible that if similar test is used, the results might be different. The finding that no correlation between the grammatical awareness and the pragmatic awareness supports many previous studies (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1991; Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998; Yamanaka, 2003). However, the statistical model showed the significant positive relationship between the grammatical awareness and severity rating of the grammatical awareness ($b = 1.99, SE = 0.18, t = 10.91, p < 0.01$). The grammatical awareness is high when the L2 Thai learners consider the grammatical mistake as a serious mistake. This suggests that grammatical awareness might be promoted by the seriousness in grammatical mistake. Figure 2 illustrates positive relationship between the grammatical awareness and the severity rating of grammatical inappropriateness.

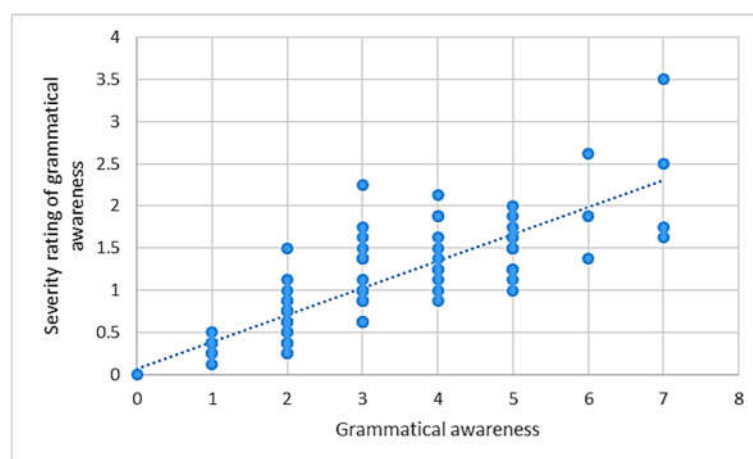


Figure 2: The positive relationship between severity rating of grammatical inappropriateness and grammatical awareness

For the relationship between motivation, grammatical awareness and severity rating of pragmatic inappropriateness, and pragmatic awareness, results from the linear regression model showed that similarly to the results of the grammatical awareness, the pragmatic awareness did not significantly correlate to any types of motivation, nor the grammatical awareness ($p > 0.05$ for all contrasts). The finding that pragmatic awareness did not significantly correlate to motivation is contrastive to the study of Takahashi (2001) and Ahn (2007) as these two studies found positive correlation between pragmatic awareness and motivation. This might be due to different questionnaire to investigate motivation. It might be that the questionnaire based on L2 Motivational Self System is not appropriate to find out the motivation that is related to pragmatic awareness. The other reason might be due to the group of L2 learners. It is possible that for L2 Thai learners, motivation does not play a role in the judgement of pragmatics at all as pragmatic awareness might require L2 ability. The subjects need to understand the context first to be able to decide whether the utterance is appropriate to the situation. In agreement with many studies (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1991; Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998; Yamanaka, 2003), no relationship between pragmatic awareness and grammatical awareness was found. Nevertheless, pragmatic awareness was found to be significantly positively correlated to the severity rating of the pragmatic inappropriateness ($b = 1.56$, $SE = 0.12$, $t = 12.79$, $p < 0.01$). These results suggest that when the L2 Thai learners take the pragmatic awareness as a serious mistake, then the pragmatic awareness increases. Figure 3 shows that the severity of the pragmatic awareness is positively related to the pragmatic awareness.

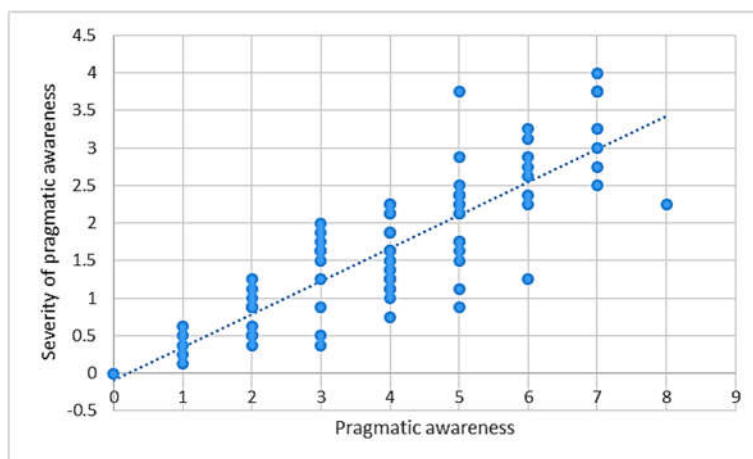


Figure 3: The positive relationship between severity rating of pragmatic inappropriateness and pragmatic awareness

6. Conclusion

In summary, the findings of this study showed that both types of awareness were not correlated to motivation. This might suggest that the degree of competence in grammar and

pragmatics is not driven by motivation in L2 learning. While many studies suggest that motivation plays a role in the L2 learning (e.g., Csizér & Lukács, 2010; Kitikanan, 2016), the results of this study tell us that motivation might not be essential in some aspects of the L2 development, at least not in pragmatic and grammatical aspects. One explanation to this phenomenon might be due to the linguistic background of the L2 learners in this study. As there were L2 Thai learners in EFL context, to completely master in L2 might not be their ultimate aim. They might learn L2 as it was a compulsory module in school. In the English as a Second Language (ESL) context, the L2 learners tend to be more motivated to learn L2 as their aims tend to be part of the community of the target language.

The findings that both types of awareness were not related to the awareness of the other type suggesting that the L2 learners might be competent in one aspect but not the other, such as having the grammatical knowledge but not the appropriateness in using the utterance to suit the context. The implication of these findings is that the grammatical knowledge exists as separate part from the pragmatic knowledge in the mind of the learners. The findings support the notion that the grammatical awareness is different from the pragmatic one, and the development of grammatical knowledge does not imply the learning of the pragmatic one. This suggests that the teachers should provide learning materials on the grammatical content as well as pragmatic aspect so that the L2 learners experience both types of awareness.

The findings also revealed that each type of awareness was significantly related to the sensitivity L2 Thai learners were to their errors. This might imply that there should be more exercises on grammatical and pragmatic error identifications so that the learners can practice. Then, the teachers should encourage their students to be aware of the grammatical and pragmatic mistakes, and take these errors as a serious mistake. They might show students the effect of these mistakes on communication, such as having a role play with the scenes of miscommunication of English expressions when one does not understand the others and the consequences of this. These results shed light on the importance of the awareness in the grammatical and pragmatic mistakes in L2 that should be the focus in the L2 teaching, especially in the EFL context. The teachers should place the emphasis on the seriousness in the mistakes of the grammar and pragmatics and explain how the appropriate uses of grammar and pragmatics yield effective communication in L2. They can also develop the learning activities that highlight the importance of the seriousness in the mistakes of the two types of awareness. For example, students tell their friends an experience of the mistakes in these two aspects.

For the limitation of the study, as this study did not find significant correlation between two types of grammatical and pragmatic awareness and motivation (as many other studies mentioned above), this might be due to different sets of research tools used in this study compared to the tools used in other studies. Different questionnaires for motivation investigation and tests for two types of grammatical and pragmatic awareness might be used

in future studies. Also, as only quantitative exploration on motivation was carried out in this paper, future studies may use qualitative methods, such as interviews, to explore in-depth, the L2 learning motivation of the learners.

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