KEY WORDS

Chinese College English, second language acquisition, pragmatics, intercultural communication, English as a lingua franca, language learning strategies, perceptions, language competence, linguistic competence, pragmatic competence.
ABSTRACT

This study investigated Chinese College English students’ perceptions of pragmatics, their pragmatic competence in selected speech acts, strategies they employed in acquiring pragmatic knowledge, as well as their general approach to learning English as a foreign language. The research was triggered by a national curriculum initiative that prioritizes the need for College English students to enhance their ability to use English effectively in different social interactions (Chinese College English Education and Supervisory Committee, 2007).

The traditional “grammar-translation” and “examination-oriented” method is believed to have reduced Chinese College English students to what is dubbed “mute” and “deaf” language learners (Zhang, 2008; Zhao, 2009). Many students lack pragmatic knowledge on how to interpret discourse by relating utterances to their meanings, understanding the intention of language users, and how language is used in specific settings (Bachman & Palmer, 1996, 2010). There is an increasing body of literature on awareness-raising of the importance of pragmatic knowledge and strategies for classroom instruction. However, to date, researchers have tended to focus largely on the teaching of pragmatics, rather than on how students acquire pragmatic competence (Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998; Du, 2004; Hou, 2007; Ruan, 2007; Schauer, 2009). It is this gap in the research that this study fills, with a focus on different types of pragmatic knowledge, learner perceptions of such knowledge, and learning strategies that College English students employ in the process of learning English in general, and pragmatics in particular.

Three strands of theories of second language acquisition (Ellis, 1985, 1994): pragmatics (Levinson, 1983; Mey, 2001; Yule, 1996), intercultural communications (Kramsch, 1998; Samovar & Porter, 1997; Samovar, Porter & McDaniel, 2009) and English as a lingua franca (ELF) (Canagarajah, 2006; Firth, 1996; Pennycook, 2010) were employed to establish a conceptual framework for data collection and analyses. Key constructs derived from the three related theories helped to form a typology for a detailed examination and theorization of the empirical evidence gathered from different sources.
Four research instruments: a questionnaire (N=237), Discourse Completion Tasks (DCTs) (N=55), focus group interviews (N=18), and a textbook tasks analysis were employed to collect data for this systematic inquiry. Data collected by different instruments were analyzed and compared by way of a triangulation to enhance its validity and reliability.

Major findings derived from different sources highlighted that, although College English students were grammatically advanced language learners, they displayed limited pragmatic knowledge and a highly restricted repertoire of language learning strategies. The majority of the respondents, however, believed that pragmatic knowledge was as important as linguistic knowledge in the process of developing communicative competence for interaction in different contexts. It was argued that a combination of a less than sufficient English proficiency, limited knowledge of pragmatics, inadequate language materials and tasks, and a small stock of language learning strategies, were a major hindrance to effective learning and communication, resulting in pragmatic failures in many intercultural communication situations.

As the first systematic study of how Chinese College English students learned pragmatics, the research provided a solid empirical base for developing a tentative model for the learning of pragmatics in a College English classroom in China and similar educational contexts. The model was strengthened by a unique combination of theories of pragmatics, intercultural communication and ELF. Findings from this research provided insights into how Chinese College English students perceived pragmatics in the English as foreign language (EFL) curriculum, the processes of learning, as well as strategies they utilized in developing linguistic and pragmatic knowledge and competence.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Key Words</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table of Contents</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Tables</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Abbreviations</td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of Original Authorship</td>
<td>xii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>xiii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 English in the world</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 College English learning and teaching in China</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 This empirical study</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Research questions and aims of the study</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5 Significance of the study</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6 Overall structure of the thesis</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Pragmatics</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1.1 Introduction to pragmatics</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1.2 Definitions of pragmatics</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1.3 Features of pragmatics</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1.3.1 Language users</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1.3.2 Context</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1.3.3 Meaning</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1.3.4 Social interaction</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1.4 Categorization of pragmatic knowledge</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Research on pragmatics in ESL/EFL learning and teaching</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.1 Learners’ pragmatic awareness</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.2 Instruction in pragmatics</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.3 Pragmatic failure and speech acts</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.4 Pragmatic competence</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Research on language learning strategies in ESL/EFL learning</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 Summary</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Second language acquisition (SLA)</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Theory of pragmatics</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2.1 Interlanguage pragmatics</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2.2 Intercultural/cross-cultural pragmatics</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2.3 Sociopragmatics</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.2.4 Pragmatic competence and communicative competence .................. 67
  3.2.4.1 Canale and Swain’s model........................................... 70
  3.2.4.2 Bachman’s model..................................................... 71
3.2.5 Speech act theory ......................................................... 74
  3.2.5.1 Austin’s speech act theory ......................................... 74
  3.2.5.2 Searle’s speech act theory.......................................... 75
3.3 Theory of intercultural communication........................................ 78
  3.3.1 Culture and language.................................................. 78
  3.3.2 Interculturality.......................................................... 80
  3.3.3 Intercultural communication.......................................... 81
    3.3.3.1 Perception.......................................................... 83
    3.3.3.2 Beliefs ............................................................ 83
    3.3.3.3 Values.............................................................. 83
  3.3.4 Intercultural competence.............................................. 84
3.4 Theory of English as a lingua franca (ELF) ................................ 86
  3.4.1 Kachru’s three circle model of English................................ 86
  3.4.2 World Englishes and world standard English........................ 87
  3.4.3 English as a lingua franca ............................................ 89
3.5 Theories of language learning and teaching .................................. 92
  3.5.1 Language learning strategies........................................ 92
  3.5.2 Task-based language teaching and learning.......................... 94
  3.5.3 Communicative language teaching .................................... 96
3.6 Summary................................................................................ 98

Chapter 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY ........................................... 99
  4.1 Design of the study................................................................ 99
  4.2 Participants ....................................................................... 103
  4.3 Data collection ................................................................... 103
  4.4 Data analysis ..................................................................... 104
  4.5 Questionnaire .................................................................... 106
  4.6 Discourse Completion Tasks (DCTs) ..................................... 109
  4.7 Semi-structured focus group interviews .................................. 111
  4.8 Textbook tasks analysis ..................................................... 114
  4.9 Validity and reliability ...................................................... 115
  4.10 Ethical issues .................................................................... 116
  4.11 Summary .......................................................................... 116

Chapter 5: RESEARCH DATA REPORT .............................................. 117
  5.1 Questionnaire data ................................................................ 117
    5.1.1 Demographic data ....................................................... 117
    5.1.2 Students’ perceptions of pragmatics in College English
          learning and teaching .................................................... 118
    5.1.3 Students’ levels of pragmatic competence ....................... 128
Chapter 6: RESEARCH DATA DISCUSSION ............................................. 171

6.1 RQ1: What are Chinese students’ perceptions of pragmatics in their English learning? ......................................................... 171
   6.1.1 Students’ perceptions of English language learning ............. 171
   6.1.2 Importance of pragmatics in College English learning .......... 174
   6.1.3 Students’ perceptions of learning and teaching pragmatics .... 177
   6.1.4 Students’ perceptions of pragmatics in College English textbooks ................................................................. 183

6.2 RQ2: To what extent do College English students focus on their pragmatic knowledge in their English learning? What are their levels of pragmatic competence? ..................................................... 185
   6.2.1 Students’ focus of pragmatic knowledge in English language learning .............................................................................. 186
   6.2.2 College English students’ levels of pragmatic competence .... 188
      6.2.2.1 Questionnaire data ................................................................. 188
      6.2.2.2 Discourse Completion Tasks data ........................................ 193

6.3 RQ3: How do College English students apply their language learning strategies in the learning of English and pragmatics? .......... 225
   6.3.1 Students’ perceptions of language learning strategies .......... 225
   6.3.2 Students’ practice of language learning strategies ............... 232

6.4 Summary ..................................................................................... 238

Chapter 7: CONCLUSION ................................................................... 239

7.1 Current Chinese College English learning and teaching .......... 239
7.2 Conclusions of the study ............................................................. 241
   7.2.1 Language competence ............................................................ 241
   7.2.2 Language and culture .............................................................. 242
   7.2.3 Language learning and teaching ............................................ 243
LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1 Summary of past studies of pragmatic awareness in ESL/EFL learning and teaching .................................................. 30
Table 2.2 Summary of past studies of instruction in pragmatics in ESL/EFL learning and teaching .................................................. 35
Table 2.3 Summary of past studies of pragmatic failure and speech acts in ESL/EFL learning and teaching .............................. 41
Table 2.4 Summary of past studies of pragmatic competence in ESL/EFL learning and teaching .............................................. 48
Table 2.5 Summary of past studies of language learning strategies in ESL/EFL learning .............................................................. 57
Table 4.1 Design of the study ................................................................. 102
Table 4.2 Data collection timeline and place ................................................................. 104
Table 5.1 Demographic data ........................................................................ 118
Table 5.2 Students’ views on linguistic knowledge and pragmatic knowledge ........................................................................ 119
Table 5.3 Students’ views on English language learning outcomes .......... 121
Table 5.4 Students’ views on communicative language teaching and practice ............................................................................ 123
Table 5.5 Necessary tasks to improve students’ communicative ability .......... 124
Table 5.6 Students’ views on classroom learning and teaching ......................... 126
Table 5.7 Language learning strategies to improve students’ pragmatic competence .............................................................................. 134
Table 5.8 Students’ views on the practice of language learning strategies ...... 137
Table 5.9 Frequency of lexical items and basic formulaic sequences expressing refusals ........................................................................ 142
Table 5.10 Frequency of lexical items and basic formulaic sequences expressing compliment responses .......................................................... 146
Table 5.11 Frequency of lexical items and basic formulaic sequences expressing apology ......................................................................... 150
Table 5.12 Pages of tasks in New College English Integrated Course textbooks ................................................................................. 165
Table 5.13 Pages of task types in New College English Integrated Course textbooks ................................................................................. 166
Table 5.14 Pages of pragmatic tasks in New College English Integrated Course textbooks ................................................................................. 167
Table 5.15 Pages of linguistic tasks in New College English Integrated Course textbooks ................................................................................. 167
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5.16</th>
<th>Pages of pragmatically oriented tasks in <em>New College English</em> Integrated Course textbooks ................................................................. 168</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 6.1</td>
<td>List of seven refusal situations .................................................................................................................................................. 194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 6.2</td>
<td>Refusal 1 – made to a friend’s invitation ................................................................................................................................... 195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 6.3</td>
<td>Refusal 2 – made to the boss’ request ........................................................................................................................................... 196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 6.4</td>
<td>Refusal 3 – made to a friend’s invitation ................................................................................................................................... 197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 6.5</td>
<td>Refusal 4 – made to a student’s request ........................................................................................................................................ 198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 6.6</td>
<td>Refusal 5 – made to a classmate’s request .................................................................................................................................... 199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 6.7</td>
<td>Refusal 6 – made to an employee’s request .................................................................................................................................. 200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 6.8</td>
<td>Refusal 7 – made to a salesman’s invitation .................................................................................................................................. 201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 6.9</td>
<td>List of seven compliment response situations ................................................................................................................................ 204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 6.10</td>
<td>Compliment response 1 – made to a friend’s compliment ......................................................................................................................... 205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 6.11</td>
<td>Compliment response 2 – made to a friend’s compliment ......................................................................................................................... 206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 6.12</td>
<td>Compliment response 3 – made to a classmate’s compliment .................................................................................................................... 207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 6.13</td>
<td>Compliment response 4 – made to a friend’s compliment ....................................................................................................................... 208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 6.14</td>
<td>Compliment response 5 – made to a student’s compliment .................................................................................................................... 209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 6.15</td>
<td>Compliment response 6 – made to a teacher’s compliment .................................................................................................................... 211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 6.16</td>
<td>Compliment response 7 – made to an employee’s compliment ........................................................................................................... 212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 6.17</td>
<td>List of six apology situations .......................................................................................................................................................... 215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 6.18</td>
<td>Apology 1 – made to a friend .............................................................................................................................................................. 215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 6.19</td>
<td>Apology 2 – made to a student ............................................................................................................................................................ 217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 6.20</td>
<td>Apology 3 – made to classmates .................................................................................................................................................... 218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 6.21</td>
<td>Apology 4 – made to a strange teacher ........................................................................................................................................ 220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 6.22</td>
<td>Apology 5 – made to a colleague ..................................................................................................................................................... 221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 6.23</td>
<td>Apology 6 – made to a classmate ..................................................................................................................................................... 222</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1  Categorization of pragmatic knowledge .................................. 23
Figure 3.1  Typology of the theories .......................................................... 61
Figure 3.2  Bachman’s model of language competence ................................ 72
Figure 3.3  Points of articulation between culture and language ............... 80
Figure 3.4  Kachrun’s model of world Englishes ...................................... 86
Figure 3.5  Overview diagram of the strategy system ............................... 93
Figure 4.1  Four elements of research design ............................................ 100
Figure 4.2  Analysis of the data ................................................................. 106
Figure 5.1  Knowledge students want to acquire most in English classroom  

  teaching .................................................................................................. 120
Figure 5.2  Ability students want to gain most in English learning ............. 120
Figure 5.3  Types of English students like to learn to use .......................... 122
Figure 5.4  Pragmatically oriented tasks most often used in classroom  

  teaching .................................................................................................. 125
Figure 5.5  Students’ pragmatic competence - situation 1 ....................... 129
Figure 5.6  Students’ pragmatic competence - situation 2 ....................... 130
Figure 5.7  Students’ pragmatic competence - situation 3 ....................... 131
Figure 5.8  Students’ pragmatic competence - situation 4 ....................... 131
Figure 5.9  Students’ pragmatic competence - situation 5 ....................... 132
Figure 5.10 Most effective way of learning English ................................ 136
Figure 5.11 Students’ learning activities in the English class .................... 137
Figure 5.12 Students’ learning activities after class ................................. 138
Figure 5.13 Student’s preferable way to get information about the use of 

  English .................................................................................................. 139
Figure 5.14 Ways of solving difficulties in English language learning ........ 140
Figure 7.1  Tentative model of learning pragmatics ................................ 248
Figure 7.2  Learning content .................................................................... 251
Figure 7.3  Learning process .................................................................... 253
Figure 7.4  Model of learning pragmatics .................................................. 254
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CLIL: Content and language integrated learning  
CLT: Communicative language teaching  
DCT: Discourse Completion Task  
DCTs: Discourse Completion Tasks  
EFL: English as foreign language  
EIL: English as an international language  
ELF: English as a lingua franca  
ELLSI: English Language Learning Strategies Inventory  
ESL: English as second language  
ICT: Information and communications technology  
IFID: Illocutionary force indicating device  
ILP: Interlanguage pragmatics  
L1: First language  
L2: Second language  
MAQ: Metapragmatic assessment questionnaire  
MET: Multimedia Elicitation Task  
SAQ: Self-assessment questionnaire  
SILL: Strategy Inventory for Language Learning  
SLA: Second language acquisition  
SPSS: Statistical Package for Social Science  
TBL: Task-based learning  
TBT: Task-based teaching  
TL: Target language  
WDCT: Written Discourse Completion Task  
WE: World English  
WEs: World Englishes
STATEMENT OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted to meet requirements for an award at this or any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

Signature: ________________________________

Yifeng Yuan

Date: ________________________________
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis would have been impossible without the support, help and suggestions of my supervisors, friends, colleagues and family. I would like to sincerely thank the following people who helped me to achieve this milestone.

No one has been more influential than Professor Huizhong Shen during the whole thesis writing process. When he was my Principal Supervisor at Queensland University of Technology (QUT), he helped me construct and theorize my thesis. With his help and support, I successfully passed my PhD Confirmation within six months. After he left QUT, he still devoted large amount of time to reading my thesis and gave me invaluable suggestions and encouragement. Without his unfailing help and support, it would have been impossible for me to complete my thesis within two years. All my thanks to him are beyond words.

I would also like to express my deep gratitude to my three supervisors: Dr. Donna Tangen, Professor John Lidstone and Dr. Kathy Mills. I am grateful for their generosity in time, advice, support and encouragement. To Donna, I am grateful for her time, effort and encouragement especially during the tense period before the final oral. To John and Kathy, I appreciate their unfailing support and help throughout the whole thesis writing process, particularly in my most difficult times.

Thanks also go to the academics who offered their help and support along my PhD journey: Associate Professor Cushla Kapitzke, Associate Professor Deborah Henderson, and Dr. Amanda Mergler. Their constructive advice and encouragement have contributed to the betterment of this thesis.

I wish to express my heartfelt thanks to Ms. Xiaoyun Wu, who took care of my life in a motherly way, and gave me great support and encouragement during my whole PhD journey.

Many thanks go to my friends and colleagues: Associate Professor Yiming Zhang, Associate Professor Weiguo Ding, Dr. Xuelai Jia, Mr. Hongquan Ge, and Ms. Jennifer Yared. I appreciate their assistance, understanding and strength.
Special thanks to my parents for their enduring support, encouragement and guidance.

Thanks also go to Professor Shougen Hu, Vice-Chancellor of Shanghai Second Polytechnic University. His understanding and support, and permission for my study leave, allowed me the time to complete this milestone.

Last but not least, I also gratefully acknowledge the financial support provided by QUT Postgraduate Award scholarship, and the international data collection support provided by QUT Grant-in-Aid scholarship.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

With the rapid economic development and further implementation of the reform and opening policy, the role of English, especially communicative competence in English, which refers to both the knowledge of a language and the ability to use that knowledge in social interactions (Barron, 2003; Hymes, 1972; Widdowson, 1992), has become more and more important in the daily life of people in China. Therefore, it is important to examine how Chinese English language learners acquire knowledge of the appropriate use of English and how they practice their knowledge in both their learning contexts and daily life in order to help them better develop their language competence. In particular, Chinese English language learners need to develop pragmatic competence, which is the ability of a second language (L2) learner or a foreign language learner to use the target language appropriately in corresponding social contexts (Nuredden, 2008; Savignon, 1991; Taguchi, 2009), in order to use the language effectively and correctly within various contexts. It is argued in this thesis that the development of both communicative competence and the sub-theme of pragmatic competence are essential for English language learning in China.

1.1 English in the world

“Globalization may be thought of initially as the widening, deepening and speeding up of worldwide interconnectedness in all aspects of contemporary social life” (Held, McGrew, Goldblatt & Perraton, 1999, p.2) and it is an inevitable process. The present world order is globally composed as much in the social and cultural realms as it is in economics and politics (Dewey, 2007). A wider, deeper, accelerated interconnectedness has a far-reaching influence in the area of linguistics. Like no other language, English plays a key role internationally because of the enormous cultural differences of speakers, the extent of its geographical diffusion and the various domains in which it serves (Held, McGrew, Goldblatt & Perraton, 1999).

McKay (2002) argues that English is an international language, for English is one of the five most widely spoken mother tongues in the world today. It is estimated that there are around 427 million native English speakers, and there are arguably about 750 million second- and foreign-language speakers of English throughout the world.
(Crystal, 1997). It is clear that people from different countries or regions worldwide use English to communicate and share their ideas and cultures with each other. English has become fixed in the culture of the country where it is used.

Prodromou (1997) and Crystal (2003) estimate that up to 80% of global communication in English takes place between non-native speakers, which is sure to have a great impact on the English language. Kirkpatrick (2006) suggests that English is used more to communicate between non-native speakers of English than it is between native-English speakers, so both in a global sense and local sense, English is an international language. It can also be called a global language because of its role and status in the very processes of globalization (Crystal, 1997, 2003; Gnutzmann, 1999). Indeed, ‘Englishization’ is currently considered to be a specific dimension of globalization (Čeh, 2008). In many disciplines throughout the world, English plays an important role that cannot be replaced, for example, about 80% of the world’s electronically stored information is in English (British Council, 2011). More books are published in English than in any other language, and English plays a significant role in higher education in many countries.

Phillipson (1992) argues that English is the dominant language of the world. It is used throughout the “international community” and its use is common in “influential frameworks” (Čeh, 2008; House, 1999). In the United Nations, and at all significant international meetings, English is the most important working language. Business people use English for communication in many international trade discussions. Thus, compared with other languages, English is regarded as a global lingua franca (Larsen-Freeman & Freeman, 2008; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000; Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson, 1995).

In core English-speaking countries, “native-speaker” English should be considered a dialectal variety different from “international” English (Jenkins, 2000; Seidlhofer, 2001). Thus native English speakers need to become bilingual in their own language to communicate with other speakers of global English (Larsen-Freeman & Freeman, 2008). In peripheral English countries, where English is used as an international link language or English was imposed in colonial times and has been effectively transplanted (Phillipson, 1992), the language is widely used as a medium of
communication in domains such as government and education, though English is not the native language. In short, there are reasons to suggest that English has a dominant status in the linguistic area. English is a world language, because it is widely used in the world (McArthur, 2001).

As English has played an indispensable role in global communication, it is essential for English language users, both native and non-native, to use clear, comprehensible and educated English that allows smooth communication and avoids misunderstandings in social interactions. Hence, communicative competence, especially pragmatic competence, in English as a lingua franca, can facilitate language users to successfully achieve their communicative aims in intercultural communication. The following section focuses on English language learning and teaching in the Chinese context.

1.2 College English learning and teaching in China

English is regarded as the dominant language in the world as globalization comes to be universally accepted in political and academic discourse (Bamgbose, 2001). English has been the dominant foreign language in the curricula of educational institutions and in foreign language learning in China for more than two decades (Chang, 2006). It is estimated that there are 440-650 million English learners and users in China alone, making it the largest English learning and using population in the world (Bolton, 2003; He & Zhang, 2010; Jiang, 2002). In colleges and universities in China, English is a compulsory course that all students are required to complete. Students have to attend a four-semester College English course for two years and pass all examinations that have been designed to assess linguistic competence, such as knowledge of English grammar, syntax and lexis.

The number of English learners and English teachers in College English is rapidly increasing as English is perceived to be a language of high social status, which provides access to financial and employment opportunities (Qiao, 2010). Wu (2009) indicates that there are about 55,000 College English teachers and 10 million College English students in China. The number is not capped as there is an annual new enrolment of 5 million students in Chinese universities and colleges.
Enormous government and non-government funding has been committed to the development and delivery of the English curriculum at all levels of the education system in recent years. Yet, students’ learning outcomes do not always satisfy the government’s expectations in a society where English is increasingly used as the lingua franca particularly for business (He, 1988; Zheng & Huang, 2010), higher education, school settings and academic studies at home and abroad, as discussed below.

College English is receiving considerable attention from the Ministry of Education of China. Chinese English education experts have compiled the unified *College English Curriculum Requirements* (1985, 1999, 2007) that has been approved by the Ministry of Education. All universities are required to carry out their College English teaching and learning as set out in the *Requirements*. The national College English Test (Band Four and Band Six), which began in 1987, is prepared by the College English Test National Committee and approved by the Ministry of Education, is carried out twice a year in China, generally in June (summer) and January (winter), to assess the implementation of the College English Syllabus and to promote English language learning (Pang, Zhou & Fu, 2002). It is one of the most important English competency tests nationwide according to the College English Test National Committee. The number of candidates sitting the test has now reached eight million annually.

As part of the College English Test, the Spoken English Test is designed to examine how College English students use English appropriately in communication. Students who have passed College English Test (writing) are allowed to sit the College English Test (Spoken English Test). The results of the Spoken English Test provide information about students’ communicative competence, and pragmatic competence in particular, which can help both students and teachers design better English teaching programs.

The discussion of College English teaching and learning in universities and colleges in China can be traced back to the 1980s. The first version of the *College English Curriculum Requirements* was published and implemented in 1985. The main objective of College English teaching and learning, which was outlined in the
Requirements, was to develop learners’ language skills, namely the four macro skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking, with a linguistic model emphasizing discrete language elements. Students from first-tier universities of China were required to pass College English Tests (Band Four) before graduation.

The second version of the College English Curriculum Requirements was published and implemented in 1999. The main goal was to further develop learners’ linguistic competence. While the curriculum document mentioned the development of learners’ communicative competence, there was little explanation as to how communicative competence could be identified and how it could be developed.

This document introduced the requirement that students at university level needed to pass College English Tests (Band Four) before they were able to graduate from the university. Cai (2007) pointed out that the first and second versions of the documents focused on the development of linguistic competence and neglected the learners’ role in the process of College English teaching and learning. This neglected area is the focus of the current study. The challenges facing College English curriculum remain and need to be dealt with in a country that is experiencing a rapid social and economic transformation. English as an international language is indispensable in the increasingly deep engagement of China with the rest of the world.

English is widely used in people’s daily work and life in China (Chang, 2006). Yet traditional “teacher-centered” and “examination-oriented” teaching methods that are currently widely used do not develop learners’ communicative competence in the process of College English teaching and learning. Accordingly, large-scale teaching reforms of College English have begun in Chinese universities and colleges since the 2000s. The Ministry of Education of China published the third version of the College English Curriculum Requirements in draft form in 2004, and in final version in 2007. This document stipulates:

The objective of College English is to develop students’ ability to use English in a well-rounded way, especially in listening and speaking, so that in their future studies and careers as well as social interactions they will be able to communicate effectively, and at the same time enhance their ability to study independently and improve their general cultural awareness so as to meet the
College English has become a mandatory basic course for undergraduate students. It is argued in this thesis that the design and delivery of the curriculum need to be informed by research, theories and best classroom practices for global language teaching. The curriculum has as its main components knowledge and practical skills of the English language, language learning strategies and intercultural communication.

There is now no compulsory requirement for university students to sit and pass the College English Tests (Band Four) before graduation. The document indicates that it is not practical to apply the same test to assess College English teaching and learning because there are great differences among universities across China. Students are only required to pass College English course examinations designed by each university before graduation. However, all university students choose to sit the College English Test (Band Four) as the Test has a high recognition in China and is a great help for their job hunting.

Independent-learning and self-assessment models have been developed and proposed by the *College English Curriculum Requirements* (2007), which are closely related to language learning strategies that have been investigated in this study. Teachers play the role of organizers and facilitators in the whole process of teaching and learning. Student-centered classrooms, it is argued in this thesis, are required to be set up as the teaching and learning aim of College English is to develop students’ communicative competence in using English.

As a component of non-native English speakers’ communicative competence (Savignon, 1991), pragmatic competence is an important ingredient of language proficiency (Bachman, 1990; Bachman & Palmer, 1996, 2010; Canale, 1983; Canale & Swain, 1980). Pragmatic knowledge allows people to be able to understand “how utterances or sentences and texts are related to the communicative goals of the language user and to the features of the language use setting” (Bachman & Palmer, 1996, p.68; 2010). Pragmatic competence is essential if users of a global language
are to achieve successful communication in the target language. It is proposed in this research that the lack of pragmatic competence prevents Chinese College English students from developing communicative competence.

Many College English students do well in their written tests but fail to communicate effectively with others in spoken English, even in a very simple conversation. After ten years of compulsory English language study, students can successfully pass the College English Tests (Band Four or Band Six), but they cannot apply appropriate spoken English in situ. These ‘mute’ and ‘deaf’ (Zhang, 2008; Zhao, 2009) language learners, have developed a large repertoire of lexical and grammatical knowledge, but are often unable to apply that knowledge in real communication, because they have limited pragmatic knowledge, let alone pragmatic competence. The development of the ability to use English appropriately in a given communicative situation is essential if language learners are to achieve communicative competence.

Therefore, informed by second language acquisition (SLA) theory and research (Ellis, 1985, 1994; Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991), which have contributed to the understanding of the language learning, theories of pragmatics (Levinson, 1983; Mey, 2001; Roever, 2010; Yule, 1996), intercultural communication (Kramsch, 1993, 1998; Lustig & Koesters, 2003; Samovar & Porter, 1997; Samovar, Porter & McDaniel, 2009) and English as a lingua franca (ELF) (Canagarajah, 2006a, 2006b; Firth, 1996; House, 2003, 2010; Karsten, 1993; Kirkpatrick, 2007; Pennycook, 2010) explore how students learn pragmatics in the English language learning process in China. The theory of pragmatics is used to explore students’ abilities in using English, while the theory of intercultural communication is employed to examine the cultural differences in social interactions, and the theory of ELF is used to suggest what kind of English university students need to learn. These three theories will be explored in more depth in Chapter 3.

1.3 This empirical study

This study explored Chinese College English students’ perceptions of pragmatics, their pragmatic competence and the language learning strategies they use in learning English as a foreign language (EFL) in general and pragmatics in particular. The
research was carried out in the context of the development and implementation of China’s national curriculum document, the *College English Curriculum Requirements* (2007). The *Requirements* have set out new objectives for College English learning and teaching moving beyond a linguistic model to focus on communicative competence.

As a sub-theme of communicative competence, pragmatic competence has been poorly taught in English learning and teaching in China for a long period of time. Previous studies (Du, 2004; Hou, 2007; Ruan, 2007; Xu, 2003) indicated that College English learners’ pragmatic competence, particularly their pragmatic knowledge – the knowledge that facilitates people’s ability to interpret discourse by relating utterances to their meanings, the intentions of language users and the language use settings (Bachman & Palmer, 1996) – was very poor.

Moreover, some learners did not know what pragmatic competence was (Ji, 2008; Liu, 2004; Men & Liu, 2000; Zhang, 2002). Research on pragmatics has indicated that pragmatic competence plays a key role in developing communicative competence (Bachman, 1990; Canale, 1983; Chavarría & Bonany, 2006), as the proper application of the language in corresponding contexts makes the communication continue smoothly.

This research on College English students’ perceptions of pragmatics, their levels of pragmatic competence and their language learning strategies provides insights into College English learning processes as well as empirical evidence for developing a model for learning pragmatics in the Chinese context. Pragmatic knowledge is an integral part of communicative competence, yet it is an area that is currently under-researched in China (Du, 2004; Ji, 2008; Wang, 2004).

Studies of Chinese English learners’ pragmatic failures (Wang, 2005; Zheng & Huang, 2010) have explored the relationship between learners’ English proficiency and their pragmatic failures, which has referred to the inability to interpret intended meaning because of regional, ethnic and cultural differences that have caused the breakdown of communication (LoCastro, 2003; Thomas, 1983). There is a need to strengthen the teaching of pragmatic knowledge, specifically to raise learners’ cross-
cultural pragmatic awareness – the ability to infer an interlocutor’s intended meaning correctly (Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998; Schauer, 2009), and pragmatic competence. Pragmatic awareness could help improve pragmatic competence and ensure that fewer instances of pragmatic failures arise.

Previous investigations of pragmatic competence in College English teaching (Du, 2004; Hou, 2007; Ruan, 2007; Wang, 2004; Wang, 2005; Xu, 2003) examined the relationship between College English learners’ linguistic competence and pragmatic competence and offered strategies for college English teaching. These strategies included input on pragmatic knowledge in authentic contexts and appropriate handling of learners’ gender differences and personality differences.

While these studies highlighted the importance of pragmatic competence and offered alternative approaches to teaching pragmatic knowledge, they tended to focus on the teaching of pragmatics, rather than on the learning of pragmatics and language learning strategies. Indeed, there have been few studies that specifically examined the learning of English pragmatics in China (Chen & Yang, 2010; Zhang & Huang 2010). It is this gap that this study fills. There is a focus on different aspects of pragmatics and on language learning strategies that College English students employ in the process of learning the target language, and particularly pragmatics in the Chinese context.

1.4 Research questions and aims of the study

Central to this study is the importance of the development of College English students’ pragmatic competence. Adequate pragmatic knowledge and competence facilitate students to achieve communicative competence in language learning. Specifically, this research focuses on learners’ perceptions of pragmatics, levels of pragmatic competence in certain speech acts (refusals, compliment responses and apologies), as well as language learning strategies used in learning English in general and pragmatics in particular. Three research questions designed for this study are as follows:
RQ1: What are Chinese College English students’ perceptions of pragmatics in their English learning?

One aim of this study was to examine College English students’ perceptions of pragmatics. For example, students were asked what English, such as Chinese English, American English or British English, they would like to learn to use most in the questionnaire. This question was designed to explore students’ perceptions of the practical use of English. College English students in China have limited opportunities for exposure to authentic English learning environments and English language input. They have become accustomed to a traditional “grammar translation” and “vocabulary translation” teaching methodology. In a teacher-centered classroom, students are not provided with much in the way of pragmatic knowledge. Previous studies (Liu, 2004; Zhang, 2002) showed that students at university level had little knowledge of pragmatics, and even less capability in applying their pragmatic knowledge in actual communication. Thus, they had difficulty in understanding and communicating in the target language. Understanding students’ perceptions of pragmatics assists both students and teachers to adjust their learning and teaching focuses.

RQ2: To what extent do College English students focus on their pragmatic knowledge in their English learning? What are their levels of pragmatic competence?

A second aim of the study was to examine the levels of College English students’ pragmatic competence in selected speech act situations (declining an offer, offering compliment responses, and making an apology). The process of SLA is complex as it is the process of overcoming the impact of the students’ first language (L1) (Ellis, 1994). Knowledge and understanding of the process of learning and of linguistic and pragmatic competence would provide empirical evidence to inform classroom pedagogy. Students, teachers, textbooks, teaching pedagogy and learning strategies are all important factors to be considered in a successful learning process. Highly motivated students with effective language learning strategies in student-centered classrooms are more likely to achieve optimal learning outcomes. Having a clear picture of students’ levels of pragmatic competence, as well as being able to identify the strategies they use in language learning, is important as it can help recognize
students’ English language in development and provide support for further development in their learning of the target language.

RQ3: How do College English students apply their language learning strategies in the learning of English and pragmatics?

A third aim of the research was to understand how College English students applied language learning strategies in learning English, particularly in learning pragmatics. As suggested by SLA theory and research, language learning strategies can help language learners learn a language more effectively and become more proficient language practitioners (Kaplan, 2002; Oxford, 1990). There has been no study in China that particularly examines language learning strategies applied in learning College English in general, and pragmatics in particular. Strategies are important for language learning as they are tools for active and self-directed involvement that is crucial for the development of communicative competence (Oxford, 1990), which is in line with the requirements suggested by the *College English Curriculum Requirements* (2007). Understanding language learning strategies allows both students and teachers to have a clearer picture of problem areas, and provides information that allows them to apply more useful strategies in learning pragmatics of the target language.

1.5 Significance of the study

The *College English Curriculum Requirements* (2007) stipulates that attainment of communicative competence should be the goal of College English learning and teaching in China. Current College English teaching and learning still follows the traditional “grammar translation” and “vocabulary translation” model. There is a widespread perception that learning outcomes are by no means in proportion to the amount of money and energy that have been invested in College English curriculum reforms.

In the language learning process, little attention is given to the study of pragmatics (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001; Kasper & Rose, 2002). Questions concerning the development of pragmatic competence are seldom considered in College English
learning and teaching processes, and empirical research. In particular, research on how students acquire pragmatic knowledge and their language learning strategies is very limited: most studies focus on teaching and neglect the application of language learning strategies in learning English and pragmatics. It is for these reasons that this research examines Chinese College English students’ perceptions of pragmatics, their pragmatic competence, as well as language learning strategies in learning English in general and pragmatics in particular. Understanding how students learn can help to inform curriculum and textbook writers to better meet the learning needs of students.

The findings of this study fill the gap between research on teaching and learning, and provide valuable data for the development of pragmatic knowledge in College English learning. Three strands of theory are used to conceptualize findings generated by the different research instruments of the study. These three strands of inquiry also inform the development of a new model of learning pragmatics developed by the research. This new model of learning pragmatics is proposed to enable College English students to learn pragmatics more efficiently. The tentative model of learning pragmatics incorporates a range of different theories, for example, the theory of pragmatics which suggests the importance of the appropriate use of the language in communication (Levinson, 1983; Mey, 2001), intercultural communication that indicates the significance of understanding different cultures in communication (Samovar & Porter, 1997), and ELF which proposes the trend of learning various Englishes for English language learners, especially for English as a second language (ESL) or EFL learners (Canagarajah, 2006a, 2006b; Kirkpatrick, 2007).

1.6 Overall structure of the thesis

The thesis consists of seven chapters.

Chapter 1 introduces the background of the research, highlights the aims and significance of the study, and states the research questions that have guided this study.
Chapter 2 presents the research on pragmatics and language learning strategies. An introduction to pragmatics as well as definitions of pragmatics is discussed, and features of pragmatics (LoCastro, 2003; Mey, 2001; Thomas, 1995; Wierzbicka, 2010) are presented. Past studies discussed in this chapter are related to the learning and teaching of pragmatics and language learning strategies in the ESL/EFL context. The issues and arguments that arise from previous studies provide empirical evidence to highlight the significance as well as a theoretical base for this study.

Chapter 3 highlights three strands of theories informed by SLA theory and research: pragmatics, intercultural communication and ELF. SLA theory provides a broad framework for a detailed analysis of language learning strategies and language teaching and learning process. The theory of pragmatics, together with theories of intercultural communication and ELF, forms a typology for theorizing a new model of learning pragmatics.

Chapter 4 describes in detail the four instruments used in this thesis: a questionnaire, Discourse Completion Tasks (DCTs), semi-structured focus group interviews, and a textbook tasks analysis. A detailed description and explanation of the design of the study, procedures of data collection and data analysis are presented.

Chapter 5 reports and categorizes both the collected qualitative and the quantitative data according to different themes. The data are reported and interpreted in the form of tables, figures and texts.

Chapter 6 discusses the findings with reference to the theories presented in Chapter 3 and to the research and scholarship of past studies critically reviewed in Chapter 2. The discussion centers on the development of pragmatic competence as well as communicative competence that can help College English students achieve optimal learning outcomes in an EFL context.

Chapter 7 presents conclusions of the study, linking the findings with the empirical literature. It also discusses implications for College English learning and teaching in China. A detailed, tentative model of learning pragmatics in the Chinese context is proposed. Suggestions for further research in SLA and pragmatics are presented.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

There has been an ever-growing focus on language learners’ development of pragmatics (Levinson, 1983; LoCastro, 2003; Mey, 2001; Trosborg, 2010; Yule, 1996) and language learning strategies (Bremner, 1998; Green & Oxford, 1995; Oxford, 1990) in the language learning process in the past several decades. A growing body of literature derived from research on pragmatics and language learning strategies in different contexts as well as a large number of studies and publications (Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998; Bataineh & Bataineh, 2006; Chen, 2009; Cummings, 2005; Griffiths, 2003; Ji, 2008; Tang & Zhang, 2009; Yan, Chye, Lin & Ying, 2010; Zheng & Huang, 2010) has been produced. The following chapter provides a critical overview of research on pragmatics in general, and research on pragmatics in ESL/EFL learning and teaching in particular. The overview also includes discussion of past studies on learners’ language learning strategies in learning English and pragmatics.

2.1 Pragmatics

2.1.1 Introduction to pragmatics

Communication in society occurs mainly through the medium of language. However, the users of language communicate and use language on society’s premises, and society controls their access to the linguistic and communicative means (Mey, 2001). Pragmatics is concerned with the study of meaning in communication as expressed by a speaker or writer and interpreted by a listener or reader (Yule, 1996). It focuses on the analysis of what people mean by their utterances rather than the verbatim meanings of words or phrases people use in their utterances.

Although pragmatics is a comparatively new branch of linguistics, reference to pragmatics can be traced back to ancient Greece and Rome. The term ‘pragmaticus’ is found in Latin and ‘pragmaticos’ in Greek, and both terms mean ‘being practical’ (Liu, 2005). Pragmatics theory originated as a philosophical theory (Morris, 1938; Strawson, 1964; Trosborg, 1995; Wittgenstein, 1953) but, in contrast with syntax and
semantics, it does not have a long history. The following example shows the importance of learning pragmatics in the study of language:

Two women are discussing their children:

A: How is Tom going at school?

B: Ah, well … you know what they say: *boys will be boys*.

A: Yeah, but girls are no easier … you know what Jess did the other day? …

(Wierzbicka, 1991, p.391)

Speaker B does not exactly state how Tom behaves at school, but the meaning is understood by Speaker A. However, it is difficult for second or foreign language learners to understand the implied meaning of her remark “boys will be boys”, which literally is a meaningless statement. For English speakers, though, there is enough information for Speaker A to continue the conversation. In this example, Speaker B conveyed more than the literal meaning of her words, which is the essence of pragmatics. Thus, pragmatics is needed for language users because they must understand the meaning conveyed by the words rather than the meaning of each individual word. In understanding the pragmatics, language users share certain rules and conventions which enable them to understand each other in many instances where the meaning and the intent of utterances are not clearly stated (Pohl, 2004; Yule, 1996). Pragmatics suggests what cannot be found in traditional linguistics and pragmatic methods assist people in understanding how to use language to better their communicative competence (Ji, 2008).

### 2.1.2 Definitions of pragmatics

The term “pragmatics” is defined in different ways from different perspectives. Pragmatics research, in applied linguistics, mostly focuses on the relationship between language use and the social and interpersonal context of interaction (Roever, 2010). Morris (1938) first introduced the modern usage of pragmatics. He used the term pragmatics in a very broad sense to refer to “the study of the relation of signs to interpreters”, while he defined syntax as “the formal relation of signs to one another” and semantics as “the relation of signs to the objects to which the signs are applicable” (Morris, 1938, p.6).
Morris expanded the scope of pragmatics in accordance with his particular behavioristic theory of semiotics (Black, 1947; Levinson, 1983): “It is a sufficiently accurate characterization of pragmatics to say that it deals with the biotic aspects of semiosis, that is, with all the psychological, biological, and sociological phenomena which occur in the functioning of signs” (Morris, 1938, p.108).

This broad interpretation of pragmatics, covering much more than linguistic pragmatics, suggests that it is the study of understanding intentional human action (Yule, 1996). However, Morris’s definition is on the basis of a semiotic view of pragmatics, and successive definitions of linguistic pragmatics use different terms and are in more detail (Schauer, 2009).

For example, a modern treatment of meaning has been distinguished by two kinds of meaning, natural and non-natural, and by detailing the sense of pragmatism in people’s conversational meanings (Grice, 1975). According to Grice (1975), pragmatics needs to concentrate on the more practical aspect of utterance-meaning. Therefore, pragmatics is the study of language usage (Levinson, 1983).

Another argument is that “Pragmatics is one of those words (e.g., societal and cognitive) that give the impression that something specific and technical is being talked about when often in fact it has no clear meaning” (Searle, Kiefer & Bierwisch, 1980, p.viii). Pragmatics also explores how listeners can make sense of the speaker’s intended meaning by recognizing what is left unsaid by a speaker. Another definition of pragmatics proposed by Levinson (1983) states: “Pragmatics is the study of those relations between language and context that are grammaticalized, or encoded in the structure of a language” (p.9).

This definition restricts pragmatics to the study of linguistic structures, that is, the study of the relationship between language and context only. It is relating to the grammatically relevant usage of the language and is in stark contrast to Katz and Fodor’s (1963) definition. They developed a theory of pragmatics essentially concerned with the disambiguation of sentences by the contexts in which they are uttered. In this viewpoint, contexts do more than only select between semantic readings of sentences because contexts are culturally and linguistically relevant to the
interpretation and production of utterances and they are basic to an account of language understanding (Levinson, 1983).

Trosborg (1995) suggested that pragmatics can be defined as a branch of semiotics dealing with the relation between signs of linguistic expressions and those who use them; it is a branch of linguistics dealing with the contexts in which people use language and the behavior of the speakers and listeners. Pragmatics is not only used in analyzing linguistic words in people’s communication but also applied in interpreting what people mean in a particular context and how the context influences what is said. It examines how speakers organize what they want to say in accordance with who they are talking to, when, where, and under what circumstances (Yule, 1996).

Crystal (1997) proposed pragmatics as “the study of language from the point of view of users, especially of the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction and the effects their use of language has on their participants in the act of communication” (p.301). It affects people’s selection of sounds, grammatical construction, and vocabulary from the resources of the language in social interactions, and influences the effects of people’s choice on others (Crystal, 1985). Therefore, pragmatics can be defined as the study of communicative action in its sociocultural context (Rose & Kasper, 2001).

The above definitions bring one to the heart of the definitional problem of pragmatics: pragmatics covers both context-dependent aspects of language structures and principles of language usage and understanding, and has nothing or little to do with linguistic structure (Levinson, 1983). In other words, the study of pragmatics concentrates on the relationship between language use and the context in which it is used, that is, how features of the outside, real-world context are reflected in the language used (Roever, 2010).

Pütz and Neff-Aertselaer (2008) argued that “pragmatics as a usage-based perspective on the language sciences such as linguistics, the philosophy of language and sociology of language essentially focuses on the exploration of language use and the users of language in real-life situations and, more generally, on the principles
which govern language in everyday interaction” (p.ix). Thus, pragmatics studies the
language used in social interactions to realize interactive contexts (Pütz & Neff-
Aertselaer, 2008).

Drawing from the definitions reviewed above, this study applies a working definition
of pragmatics which is “the ability of language users to match utterances with
contexts in which they are appropriate” (Bardovi-Harlig & Mahan-Taylor, 2003,
p.37). Central to this definition is the emphasis on language users, the
communicative context, situated meaning and the relation between the speaker and
the listener. These features are discussed in the following sections.

2.1.3 Features of pragmatics

Pragmatics, as explored in the study, is characterized by the following key elements:
(a) language users; (b) context; (c) meaning, and (d) social interaction in exploring
Chinese College English language learners’ pragmatic competence. Each of these
features is discussed in detail in the following section.

2.1.3.1 Language users

Second language users or foreign language learners can be understood as individuals
who can freely access the resources available in the target language to make meaning
in situ (Armour, 2004). They are not only required to acquire a new set of
grammatical, lexical, and phonological forms of the target language, but also need to
socially participate in the symbologically mediated lifeworld of another culture
(Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000).

Pragmatics, then, concentrates on language-using humans (Mey, 2001). The proper
domain of pragmatics would be what Chomsky (1965) has called performance,
focusing upon the way people go about using the language in interactions (Cook,
2000). Language users need to properly apply the language knowledge they have
learned within different contexts, and this usage might fall outside of the traditional
purview of institutional correctness-oriented language instruction (Belz, 2002). That
is to say, what language learners learn in class may be different to the language use
they encounter outside the class. Pragmatics focuses on the language producing
process and its producers with a focus on more authentic language use. This distinction is important for this study as the research focuses on the language learners and the process of learning pragmatics and English in an EFL context.

2.1.3.2 Context

Context is a difficult concept to describe, but it is important in distinguishing ambiguities in both the spoken and written language. Bilmes (1986) indicated that context is the total social setting in which the speech event takes place: “the meaning of an utterance is determined in large part by how it responds and how it is responded to, by its place in an interactional sequence” (p.127). It is “a dynamic, not a static concept: it is to be understood as the continually changing surroundings, in the widest sense, that enable the participants in the communication process to interact, and in which the linguistic expressions of their interaction become intelligible” (Mey, 2001, p.39).

Context has a powerful impact on how referring expressions are to be interpreted (Yule, 1996). Understanding the language in communication requires the ability to interpret meaning in context (Leinonen, Ryder, Ellis & Hammond, 2003). Contextual information contains all the information that is utilized when interpreting an expression in a certain situation, and pragmatic comprehension is regarded as an ability to use context in understanding language (Loukusa, Leinonen, Kuusikko, Jussila, Mattila, Ryder, Ebeling & Moilanen, 2007). Efficiently manipulating contextual information, especially in sophisticated contexts, can help language users competently deal with the communication.

Thus, context can provide language users with true pragmatic meanings, permit true pragmatic acts, and allow the use of linguistic resources to understand language as it is used (Mey, 2001). In College English learning in China, there are two broad contexts: the context of language and the context of learning that need to be focused so as to get the meaning of utterances in social interactions. Without understanding the importance of context for interpreting meaning, there is a danger that the focus on language learners’ pragmatic competence might be set aside for a focus instead on
linguistic development. Both are important but without pragmatic competence, language learners cannot become fully competent in communication.

2.1.3.3 Meaning

Marinoff (1999) has suggested that “meaning has to do with how you understand your life on an ongoing basis” (p.210). It is suggested that meaning is about those interpretations, narrative frameworks, philosophical rationales and perspectives, and faith or belief systems that every one of us brings to the various worlds where we live, work, learn, love and worship (Nash & Murray, 2010).

In the words of Yalom (1980), meaning is an “anxiety emollient”. Parks (2000) has argued that meaning involves the “search for a sense of connection, pattern, order, and significance…it is a way to understand our experience that makes sense of both the expected and unexpected…” (p.14); it helps us to make sense of our world (Nash & Murray, 2010). Meaning is neither only inherent in words nor produced by the speaker or the listener alone. Meaning-making is a process, which involves the negotiation of meaning between the speaker and the listener, the potential meaning of an utterance and the context of utterance (Thomas, 1995).

In the field of pragmatics, meaning is a key problem. Levinson (1983) has indicated that pragmatics is concerned with the study of utterance-meaning while semantics researches the study of sentence-meaning. Pragmatics can also be defined as the study of particular kinds of meaning, such as “speaker meaning”, “contextual meaning” (Yule, 1996, p.3), “meaning in use”, and “meaning in context” (Thomas, 1995, p.1). Meaning in pragmatics is related to the understanding of utterances within a particular context a speaker or user of the language has (Leech, 1983).

2.1.3.4 Social interaction

Understanding social interaction is important for the development of social competence (Semrud-Clikeman, Walkowiak, Wilkinson & Minne, 2010). Vygotsky (1978) argued that language and knowledge develop simultaneously through social interactions. Language is considered social in nature (Vygotsky, 1978; Wedin, 2010).
Social interactions are particular forms of externalities, where the actions of a reference group influence an individual’s preferences (Scheinkman, 2008). In human interactions, language is regarded as a tool that can express people’s personality, thoughts, intentions, desires, and feelings (Wierzbicka, 2003, 2010).

On the one hand, any language, including English, represents a universe of meaning, which is shaped by the history and human’s experience. On the other hand, in any language certain culture-specific words act as keys for whole networks of meanings, and understanding the meanings of those key words provides us with the ability to access and understand a complete cultural universe (Wierzbicka, 2010).

Pragmatically speaking, social interactions can refer to either spoken communication involving at least two people or all kinds of written and mixed forms of communication (Kasper & Rose, 2002). Thus, it is essential for English language teachers and learners to be fully aware of different kinds of social interactions that can assist them to become socially competent in communication and to know how to utilize this knowledge effectively (Wierzbicka, 2010).

2.1.4 Categorization of pragmatic knowledge

Bachman and Palmer (1996, 2010) indicated that “pragmatic knowledge enables us to create or interpret discourse by relating utterances or sentences and texts to their meanings, to the intentions of language users, and to relevant characteristics of the language use setting” (1996, p.69; 2010, p.46). Pragmatic knowledge can be categorized as functional knowledge and sociolinguistic knowledge. Functional knowledge enables people to interpret relationships between utterances or sentences and texts and language users’ intentions, and it includes knowledge of four categories of language function: ideational, manipulative, instrumental, and imaginative. Sociolinguistic knowledge enables people to create or interpret language that is suitable in a particular setting (Bachman & Palmer, 1996, 2010).

Guided by Bachman and Palmer’s notion of pragmatic knowledge, Ji (2008) categorized pragmatic knowledge into general pragmatic information, metalanguage information, metapragmatic information, speech acts, cultural knowledge,
pragmatically oriented tasks, and knowledge on how to learn pragmatic knowledge (see Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1 Categorization of pragmatic knowledge

“General pragmatic information” conveys different topics relevant to the usage of pragmatics. “Metalanguage information” refers to a language that can be used to describe languages (Richards, Schmidt, Platt & Schmidt, 2002). “Metapragmatic information” describes language that characterizes or describes the pragmatic function of some speech acts (Silverstein, 2001). “Speech acts” focuses on the detailed and metapragmatic descriptions of speech acts (Ji, 2008). “Cultural knowledge” refers to the target language culture, which contains high culture, popular culture, and deep culture (Hall, 1976). Each of these elements is a piece of the puzzle that constitutes pragmatics and must be included for an overall understanding of the importance of developing pragmatic competence in language learning. It is argued in this thesis that pragmatically oriented tasks assist language learners to develop their pragmatic competence in the learning process. Having knowledge on how to learn pragmatic knowledge enables language learners to develop the perceptions of learning pragmatics and how to apply this knowledge in their language learning. The elements of pragmatic knowledge listed above are at the heart of this study.
2.2 Research on pragmatics in ESL/EFL learning and teaching

Pragmatics is a relatively new branch of linguistics that provides a new way of looking at things ‘linguistic’. Verschueren (1999) characterized pragmatics as “a general cognitive, social, and cultural perspective on linguistic phenomena in relation to their usage in forms of behavior” (p.7). Pragmatics, as a branch of linguistics, offers a different perspective, which constitutes “a radical departure from the established component view which tries to assign to pragmatics its own set of linguistic features in contradistinction with phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics” (Verschueren, 1987, p.36).

Of particular interest to this study is the idea of performatives as an element of pragmatics. ‘Performative’ implies that “by each utterance a speaker not only says something but also does certain things: giving information, stating a fact or hinting an attitude” (Byram, 2000, p.477). The study of performatives has led to the hypothesis of speech act theory that holds that a speech event embodies three acts: a locutionary act, an illocutionary act and a perlocutionary act (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969). Exploration of speech events are considered in the current research in relation to College English students’ pragmatic knowledge and competence.

Research into pragmatic competence of adult second/foreign language learners (Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1997) has indicated that grammatical development does not assure an equivalent level of pragmatic development, and even advanced learners may fail to comprehend or convey their intended intentions and values (Eslami-Rasekh, 2005). For example, a language learner may successfully pass an exam but, at the same time, not be able to use the same language appropriately in real world communication. Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper (1989) found that fairly advanced second or foreign language learners’ communicative acts frequently had pragmatic errors and suggested that there was a need for L2 instruction to include a concentration on the pragmatics of the language (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1997). Pragmatic competence has been recognized as one of the critical components that help language learners become communicatively competent (Bachman, 1990). Thus, one of the aims of classroom instruction is to raise learners’ pragmatic awareness (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1997).
Language learners’ perceptions of pragmatics are regarded as a broad concept, but an important one. To narrow the focus, this study concentrated on language learners’ pragmatic awareness in relation to their perceptions of learning pragmatics. Language learners’ pragmatic awareness impacts their acquisition of pragmatic knowledge and levels of pragmatic competence. Meanwhile, instruction in pragmatics helps language learners improve their perceptions of pragmatics that influence their achievement of pragmatic competence.

There are a number of activities which are useful for pragmatic development and can be divided into two major types: activities to raise students’ pragmatic awareness, and activities providing chances for communicative practice (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1997). Awareness-raising activities are those that have been designed to develop recognition of how language forms are used correctly in context (Eslami-Rasekh, 2005). For example, Schmidt (1993) suggests a consciousness-raising approach that includes paying conscious attention to related forms, their pragmalinguistic functions and the sociopragmatic constraints these particular forms involve. Activities that provide chances for communicative practice may include group work, in-class discussions and social interactions outside the class.

In pragmatics, awareness of what someone says to their interlocutor is a matter of noticing. What affects understanding is related to the recognition of the social conventions of language within the elements of the context (Schmidt, 1995). In general, studies on pragmatic awareness in ESL/EFL learning have been conducted in relation to the following questions:
(a) Does instruction make a difference in learners’ pragmatic awareness and production?
(b) Does learners’ pragmatic awareness of suggestions improve after instruction?
(c) Does the environment influence learners’ awareness of pragmatics?
(d) Does the learners’ level of proficiency influence their degree of awareness of pragmatics (Alcón-Soler, 2005; Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998; Martínez-Flor & Alcón-Soler, 2007; Niezgoda & Röver, 2001)?

Pragmatic competence is an important component of communicative competence (Zheng & Huang, 2010). Knowledge and understanding of pragmatics and the
culture of the target language can help learners improve their communicative competence. General studies of pragmatic competence in ESL/EFL learning often focus on learners’ pragmatic failures and their speech acts in cross-cultural communication, specifically considering the following questions:

(a) To what extent would the different aspects of speech act, expressions, amount, formality, directness, or politeness be rated differently?
(b) To what extent would the different speech acts differ?
(c) Do students with sufficient linguistic knowledge make mistakes in cross-cultural communication?
(d) Does the degree of input enhancement influence the learning of target request/compliment/apology strategies (Hudson, 2001; Takahashi, 2001; Zheng & Huang, 2010)?

The following sections provide a critical overview of past studies of pragmatics in ESL/EFL learning in response to the above questions and indicate the relationship and necessity of conducting this study.

2.2.1 Learners’ pragmatic awareness

As pragmatic competence has been recognized as one of the essential components of communicative competence (Bachman, 1990), raising learners’ pragmatic awareness is supported with the acquisition of information about pragmatic aspects of language (Eslami-Rasekh, 2005). A number of studies have been carried out on learners’ pragmatic awareness (Alcón-Soler, 2005; Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998; Bardovi-Harlig & Griffin, 2005; Martínez-Flor & Alcón-Soler, 2007; Niezgoda & Röver, 2001; Schauer, 2006).

Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei (1998) conducted a study to examine the extent to which instructed L2 learners of English were aware of differences in learners’ and target-language production in pragmatics and grammar. A videotape with 20 scenarios was used to test 370 Hungarian EFL learners, 173 American ESL learners, as well as 25 Hungarian English teachers and 28 American English teachers. In addition, 112 Italian EFL speakers, who were primary school teachers, took part in the research. The only instrument used for data collection was a questionnaire, which relied on self-reporting.
Results from the study concluded that EFL learners and their teachers identified and ranked grammatical errors more seriously than pragmatic errors, while ESL learners and their teachers ranked pragmatic errors more seriously than grammatical errors. The high-proficiency learners rated the grammar errors lower than the low-proficiency learners. Both EFL students and the teachers showed the same degree of awareness of pragmatics and grammar as did the native English-speaking ESL teachers and students.

The findings of the study indicated that the language learning environment played an important role in language learners’ pragmatic awareness. EFL and ESL learners were different in the intensity of their contact with English in the academic setting. That is, EFL learners learn English in a foreign setting while ESL learners learn English within a largely native-English speaking setting. EFL and ESL learners’ sensitivity to pragmatic and grammatical problems were revealed through their language tests as their English levels were usually assessed by tests. Tests results indicated that ESL learners were more sensitive to pragmatic errors than EFL learners and this was suggested to occur because ESL learners were immersed in authentic language contexts on a daily basis and had more opportunities to communicate with native English speakers. There existed an imbalance in the competencies, where grammatical competence usually exceeded pragmatic competence.

However, language development was associated with the increase of pragmatic awareness. Learners may not be aware of the difference between their interlanguage pragmatics and the pragmatics of the L2. Accordingly, EFL learners’ pragmatic awareness could be improved by increasing the amount of pragmatic input in the classroom teaching and learning and by putting a greater emphasis on this area of communicative competence (Bardovi-Harlig, 1992, 1996; Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998; Gilmore, 2007).

Building on the work described above, Neizgoda and Röver (2001) conducted a replication study. The aim was to discover the degree of learners’ pragmatic and grammatical awareness in relation to their learning environment and their proficiency levels. They followed Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei’s (1998) research questions using
the same questionnaire as in the original study and they also applied a videotape to observe language learning in the class. Unlike Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei’s ESL participants, the 48 L2 learners in this study came from a private language school in Honolulu and represented a diverse population that included seven languages or cultures. In addition, 124 university students studying English in the Czech Republic were selected as EFL learners, and they represented a highly selective sample.

Unlike the first study, Neizgoda and Röver (2001) concluded that EFL learners did not rate pragmatic errors and grammatical errors in any notably different ways. Their findings showed that pragmatic awareness could be acquired in the L2 classroom or in the foreign language classroom. In other words, the language learning environment might not be the most important factor responsible for learners’ pragmatic awareness.

Bardovi-Harlig and Griffin (2005) conducted another recent study, which examined the effectiveness of a pragmatic awareness activity in an ESL classroom. Learners were not given formal instruction in pragmatics prior to the activity. Five complete ESL classes containing 43 students from 18 language backgrounds at Indiana University took part in the activity. Students were asked to work in pairs to recognize pragmatic inappropriateness in interactions between two students in 20 video-taped scenarios. They were asked to perform short role plays to repair the improprieties they had identified and their role plays were video-taped.

The study found that learners were able to identify pragmatic inappropriateness and supplied new utterances to solve the problems. The findings indicated that high-intermediate or low-advanced ESL learners had a certain degree of pragmatic awareness about the L2 even without specific instruction. Building on this awareness, instruction would help learners better their productive abilities in L2 pragmatics (Alcón-Soler, 2005; Martínez-Flor & Fukuya, 2005). L2 learners could benefit from instruction in L2 pragmatics, and with instruction to L2 pragmatics their cultural and personal orientation to speech events could moderate the content. Thus, classroom activities could provide necessary information and choices to raise L2 learners’ pragmatic awareness which could help them become proficient users of the target language (Bardovi-Harlig & Griffin, 2005).
The above past studies all highlighted the importance of understanding appropriate instruction as well as the learning environment in ESL or EFL learners’ pragmatics learning. The findings of the research pointed out that instruction afforded language learners the necessary pragmatic information and helped them raise their pragmatic awareness in their learning. Well-designed classroom activities could help to increase learners’ pragmatic awareness and promote pragmatic competence in the target language.

As Chinese College English students are EFL learners, there is a necessity to understand their perceptions of English pragmatics that may affect their learning and use of English as a target language. The past studies suggested the importance of the language learning environment (Alcón-Soler, 2005; Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998; Niezgoda & Röver, 2001), especially classroom teaching and learning (Bardovi-Harlig & Griffin, 2005; Martínez-Flor & Alcón-Soler, 2007), as well as the language learners themselves (Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998; Schauer, 2006) in improving language learners’ pragmatic awareness in the language learning process. These aspects, particularly the third aspect, appear neglected in College English learning and teaching in China. There is a need for this study to find out whether the English language learning settings, both classroom and residence, and Chinese College English students’ opinions on the English language learning influence their pragmatic awareness in the language acquisition process. As indicated by Bardovi-Harlig and Griffin (2005) appropriate classroom instruction can help raise language learners’ pragmatic awareness, the following table (Table 2.1) gives a critical overview of past studies focusing on language learners’ pragmatic awareness.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Findings</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bardovi-Harlig &amp; Dörnyei</td>
<td>370 Hungarian EFL learners and their teachers (N=25), 173 American ESL learners and their teachers (N=28), and 112 Italian EFL speakers</td>
<td>There existed an imbalance between pragmatic competence and grammatical competence, and an EFL/ESL learning environment (e.g. residency) influenced learners’ pragmatic awareness.</td>
<td>This study focused on pragmatic error analysis and was a seminar work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niezgoda &amp; Röver (2001)</td>
<td>48 ESL learners in a language school in Honolulu, and 124 university students studying English in the Czech Republic</td>
<td>The second language setting and the foreign language setting (e.g. classroom) might not be the most important factor accounting for learners’ pragmatic awareness.</td>
<td>The study was conducted in the classroom that resulted in the absence of any production data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcón-Soler (2005)</td>
<td>132 EFL high school students (95 females and 37 males) in Spain</td>
<td>Awareness-raising tasks or input enhancement techniques were effective in developing language learners’ both linguistic competence and pragmatic competence.</td>
<td>EFL classroom teaching needed to be considered in the study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bardovi-Harlig &amp; Griffin (2005)</td>
<td>43 ESL students from 18 language backgrounds at Indiana University, US</td>
<td>Instruction in pragmatics could help learners to raise their productive abilities in L2 pragmatics.</td>
<td>EFL students needed to be investigated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schauer (2006)</td>
<td>16 German ESL learners and 2 control groups (17 German EFL learners; 20 British English native speakers)</td>
<td>The temporal influence of exposure to the L2 and individual learner differences seemed to have affected learners’ interlanguage pragmatic development.</td>
<td>As participants did not take a standardized language proficiency test, their different language levels might impact the results of the study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martínez-Flor &amp; Alcón-Soler (2007)</td>
<td>81 EFL students (69 males and 12 females) majoring in computer science at Universitat Jaume I in Castellón, Spain</td>
<td>Instruction had positive effects on learners’ pragmatic awareness. Both explicit and implicit instructional approaches were helpful in developing learners’ pragmatic awareness in EFL classroom.</td>
<td>Gender of participants was unbalanced.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.2.2 Instruction in pragmatics

A number of studies have highlighted the role of direct (explicit) instruction in developing pragmatic knowledge in the language classroom (Bardovi-Harlig & Griffin, 2005; Ji, 2008; Liddicoat & Crozet, 2001; Martínez-Flor & Alcón-Soler, 2007; Nikula, 2008; Rose & Kwai-fun, 2001; Savignon & Wang, 2003). The classroom has received special attention in relation to developing learners’ pragmatic competence in both second and foreign language contexts (Rose & Kasper, 2001) because this is the setting where most initial language learning occurs. Explicit instruction is generally teacher-centered. However, one study looked at including implicit instruction for pragmatic learning.

The study conducted by Martínez-Flor and Alcón-Soler (2007) examined the effectiveness of explicit and implicit classroom instruction in terms of raising learners’ pragmatic awareness as well as strategies to support this learning. All together 81 EFL students (69 males and 20 females) aged between 19 and 25 years attending Universitat Jaume I in Castellón, Spain participated in the research. These students all majored in computer science. The study employed a rating assessment test, which included a pre-test and a post-test to rate the effects of instruction on students’ awareness of suggestions.

Explicit instruction involves guiding learners’ attention towards the target forms with the aim of discussing those forms and, in contrast, implicit instruction aims to attract the learners’ attention without any type of metalinguistic explanation while minimizing the interruption of the communicative situation (Doughty, 2003). Results from the study indicated the positive effects of instruction on learners’ pragmatic awareness of suggestions. Both explicit and implicit instruction proved to be effective in developing learners’ pragmatic awareness of appropriate suggestions in particular situations. The study showed that explicit and implicit instruction is beneficial in the development of language learners’ pragmatic awareness in the EFL classroom.

The study’s findings strengthen the notion that further L2 development requires learners’ noticing the target language features (Schmidt, 1993, 1995, 2001). Research
on instruction, more specifically, has explored the teachability of different pragmatic features (Kasper & Rose, 2002). The findings indicated that both explicit and implicit instructional approaches were very helpful in developing learners’ pragmatic awareness in the EFL classroom. It is necessary for this study to consider the role of instruction in pragmatics in the EFL classroom in China, which could better help understand students’ learning pragmatics.

Pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic awareness are particularly difficult for students studying in an EFL context to understand and, consequently, develop (Grant & Starks, 2001; Rose, 2001; Washburn, 2001). Explicit and implicit instruction was investigated in Alcón-Soler’s (2005) study to learn the extent to which these two instructional paradigms influenced learners’ knowledge and ability to use request strategies as a communication tool. A total of 132 EFL high school students (95 females and 37 males) in Spain participated in the research. These participants had studied English for between seven and ten years. They were randomly assigned to three groups (explicit, implicit and control) and exposed to excerpts taken from different episodes of the movie series Stargate through 15 self-study lessons.

The results showed that in contrast to the control group, learners in explicit and implicit groups appeared to have mastered symbolic representations of requesting. They were aware of the appropriate selection of linguistic forms according to social and contextual factors. However, explicit instruction benefited learners’ production of requests more than implicit instruction. The study indicated the importance of setting up a more direct connection between interlanguage pragmatic research and the field of SLA (Rose & Kasper, 2001). It confirmed previous research on the positive effect of instruction on foreign and L2 learning (Doughty, 2003; Norris & Ortega, 2000), particularly the development of learners’ pragmatic competence in request speech acts. The findings suggested that awareness-raising tasks or input enhancement techniques were effective for the development of both learners’ linguistic competence and pragmatic competence.

It would be interesting to know how different teaching approaches could be employed for different instructional contexts and whether they may have different learner outcomes, as Rose and Kasper’s (2001) study only focused on the self-study
lessons but not on EFL classroom teaching. As research indicates that instruction has a positive influence on pragmatics in foreign language learning, it is critical for the current study to explore the impact of instruction in pragmatics in Chinese College English learning and teaching processes.

A qualitative study of pragmatics was conducted by Nikula (2008) in content-based instruction in Finland. The study examined classroom discourse in content and language integrated learning (CLIL) settings. It looked at how pragmatic concerns were considered at the local level of interaction and the nature of CLIL classrooms as environments for pragmatic learning. Six EFL students, aged 13 years, and nine EFL students, aged 15 years at the Department of Languages of the University of Jyväskylä participated in the study. The data were gathered from three 90-minute seventh-grade biology lessons. The classrooms were video and audio recorded for the purpose of the research. Recorded students’ performance and the classroom interaction suggested the way students achieved their pragmatic meaning-making.

The results of the study showed that interactions involved in CLIL classrooms were largely dialogic and students were active participants of the interactions. The classrooms seemed to be different from foreign language classrooms, which were often criticized for offering students limited opportunities to practice the target language. Students had active conversational roles in CLIL classrooms which offered students chances to practice pragmatics of conversational participation.

The research suggested that pragmatic matters were relevant in CLIL classrooms. The linguistic range with which EFL learners conveyed pragmatic meanings was not as resourceful as that of native speakers. EFL learners might not use exactly the same pragmatic strategies that native English speakers would use in similar situations, yet, they could still complete interpersonal communication. This is in line with Bardovi-Harlig’s (2005) argument that it is interactional success rather than convergence with native speaker standards that needs to be the focus of interlanguage pragmatics.

Coming from different cultures with diverse L1, it is impossible for EFL learners to use exactly the same language as native English speakers (Baker, 2009).
Nonetheless, Engishes they use can help them achieve communicative success in intercultural communication.

These past studies highlighted the importance of instruction in pragmatics in the ESL/EFL learning context. Appropriate and adequate instruction in pragmatics could facilitate ESL/EFL learners to possess sufficient pragmatic knowledge and become pragmatically competent in communication. Otherwise, pragmatic failure may arise, which may lead to communicative failure. The following table (Table 2.2) gives a summary critical overview of previous studies focusing on instruction in pragmatics.
### Table 2.2  Summary of past studies of instruction in pragmatics in ESL/EFL learning and teaching

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Findings</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liddicoat &amp; Crozet (2001)</td>
<td>A group of 10 second-year university French students studying in Australia</td>
<td>French students showed differences in the way they organized their talk after instruction that concentrated on the cultural role of two “equivalent” utterances in the L1 and the target language.</td>
<td>The number of participants was too small for convincing the results of the study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose &amp; Kwai-fun (2001)</td>
<td>Two treatment groups and one control group (first-year students) in the Faculty of Business at the City University of Hong Kong and undergraduate students in first-year composition course at the University of Illinois</td>
<td>Learners benefited from instruction in compliments and compliment responses in a foreign language context. Both inductive and deductive instruction could lead to achievements in pragmalinguistic proficiency, but deductive instruction might be effective for developing sociopragmatic proficiency.</td>
<td>Three instruments were used, but the use of speech acts was limited.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Savignon &amp; Wang (2003)</td>
<td>174 EFL learners (105 females and 69 males) from two Taipei universities</td>
<td>There was a difference between the needs and preferences of English language learners and their perceptions of instructional practice.</td>
<td>The elaborately designed questionnaire provided useful data for the study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ji (2008)</td>
<td>196 first-year Chinese College English students and 44 Chinese College English teachers</td>
<td>Although both College English students and teachers agreed that pragmatics was an indispensable part of language teaching and learning, College English textbooks or College English classroom teaching could not provide adequate pragmatic instruction to learners.</td>
<td>Three different research instruments ensured the validity and reliability of the data collection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nikula (2008)</td>
<td>6 EFL students, aged 13 and 9 EFL students, aged 15 at the Department of Languages of the University of Jyväskylä, Finland</td>
<td>Pragmatic matters were relevant in content and language integrated learning (CLIL) classrooms, and linguistic range with which EFL learners conveyed pragmatic meanings was not as resourceful as that of native speakers.</td>
<td>Participants of the study were at a low language proficiency level so the results could not embody those high proficient language learners.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.2.3 Pragmatic failure and speech acts

Pragmatic failures can hardly be avoided by ESL/EFL learners in intercultural interactions, and they are barriers to the success of cross-cultural communication (Zheng & Huang, 2010). Some studies have explored the key errors that may cause pragmatic failures (Hou, 2007; Nikula, 2008; Zheng & Huang, 2010).

The study conducted by Zheng and Huang (2010) investigated pragmatic failures that Chinese College English students tended to commit. It aimed to find out the pragmatic competence of Chinese College English learners and to provide constructive suggestions as to how to improve the learners’ pragmatic competence. Sixty-eight Chinese College English students were randomly selected from first year to fourth year studies at Zhejiang University. Questionnaires and interviews were used to collect data.

It was found that Chinese College English students’ pragmatic failures were due to cultural differences between China and English-speaking countries, negative pragmatic transfer, teaching-induced errors and native English speakers’ tolerance towards Chinese speakers’ pragmatic failures, which set up barriers to the success of intercultural communication. The researchers proposed that pragmatic knowledge and cultural information associated with the target language needed to be involved in language teaching. However, the qualitative data collected from the interview of this study was not detailed and substantial, and the focus remained on teaching and pragmatic errors by the learner. It identified the important role that cultural perspectives have played in communication. Thus, applying theories of intercultural communication in the current study can better support the development of an efficient model of teaching and learning to help Chinese EFL learners achieve pragmatic competence.

A great deal of research concentrating on learners’ speech acts aims at examining their pragmatic competence. Speech acts are often considered to be language functions and include communication such as offering compliments or compliment responses (Chen & Yang, 2010; Farghal & Al-Khatib, 2001; Rose & Kwai-fun, 2001; Tang & Zhang 2009); making apologies (Afghari, 2007; Bataineh & Bataineh,
2006; Nureddeen, 2008), knowing how to refuse someone (Félix-Brasdefer, 2006; Keshavarz, Eslami & Ghahraman, 2006), making requests (Alcón-Soler, 2005; Rose, 2009; Takashashi, 2001) and knowing how to respond appropriately to a question (Liddicoat & Crozet, 2001). Speech acts pragmatic functions are regarded as the most complex aspect of language, for they require collaboration or synergy of all levels of language, and use the interaction between cognition and language (Spanoudis, Natsopoulos & Panayiotou, 2007). They require that the speaker understands the subtle nuances of a language and its culture.

A study on the effects of inductive and deductive approaches to instruction in the pragmatics of compliments and compliment responses was conducted by Rose and Kwai-fun (2001). Undergraduate students in the Faculty of Business at the City University of Hong Kong and undergraduate students in a first-year composition course at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign participated in the study. Three instruments were used for data collection: a self-assessment questionnaire (SAQ), a metapragmatic assessment questionnaire (MAQ), and a discourse completion task (DCT).

It was observed that instruction in pragmatics could benefit learners in a foreign language context. Both inductive and deductive instruction could help learners achieve pragmalinguistic proficiency, and deductive instruction might lead to better results for developing sociopragmatic proficiency. However, the study only applied the speech acts of compliments and compliment responses to examine language learners’ pragmatics learning, which is only one aspect of developing pragmatic competence. While the current research explored three speech acts: refusals, compliment responses and apologies in relation to Chinese College English students’ pragmatic competent abilities.

Recently, a number of studies exploring speech acts have been carried out in Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, and Persian language learning contexts (Afghari, 2007; Chen & Yang, 2010; Nureddeen, 2008; Yu, 2003). The study conducted by Nureddeen (2008) attempted to identify the type and extent of use of apology strategies in Arabic with Sudanese students to clarify the sociocultural attitudes and values of the community. Fifty-five female and 55 male adult native speakers of Arabic in the
Khartoum area doing higher studies in subjects other than English or linguistics took part in the study. A discourse completion test, which consisted of ten different social situations, was used to collect data. Students were required to provide responses in English to the different social situations.

The results indicated that students liked to use illocutionary force indicating devices (IFIDs), which was an expression of responsibility for the offense, an account of cause of violation, an offer of repair and a promise of forbearance (Nureddeen, 2008), and explanations in situations to make their apologies. As students were aware that apologies damaged their positive face, they became cautious in choosing apology strategies. The concept of ‘face’ originated in China (Bargiela-Chiappini, 2003; He, 2007), and is connected with some emotional concepts, such as embarrassment, shyness, and losing face (Goffman, 1967). The study strengthened the understanding of the culture-specific aspects of language use, and the generalization of apology strategies. They provided insights into the opinion of politeness in this community and were conducive to intercultural communication. Thus, this thesis considers culture and cultural knowledge as a key component in investigating students’ use of English in communication.

Keshavarz, Eslami and Ghahraman (2006) investigated the speech act, refusals, in a study designed to explore interlanguage pragmatic studies in EFL contexts with understudied EFL groups. Forty Iranian native speakers of Persian in Tehran, 111 Iranian EFL learners in Tehran, and 37 native speakers of American English in Washington, DC, participated in the study. A written discourse completion task (WDCT) of the dialogue completion type was the instrument used to collect data in the study. The results of the study revealed that Iranian native speakers of Persian and Iranian learners of English showed differences with native English speakers regarding the directness level of the refusals they applied. Impacted by language learners’ L1 – Persian, the level of directness of refusals in using English was higher in refusing invitations and offers than requests and suggestions.

The findings of the study supported findings from the previous studies (Scarcella, 1983; Takahashi & Beebe, 1987) on L2 speech acts, which showed that even advanced proficient language learners’ speech acts contained non-native pragmatic
features arising from pragmatic transfer. Learners’ limited target language knowledge prevented them from transferring their pragmatic knowledge from their native language (Blum-Kulka, 1982; Olshtain & Cohen, 1989; Cohen, 1997; Hill, 1997). It was found that students seemed to be selective about the types of semantic formulas they chose to transfer from their native language to the target language. Acquiring and practicing different sets of sociolinguistic rules in the target culture was vital to language learners. Although the results of the study were persuasive, a range of different instruments for data collection may yield different results. The present study applied different instruments, including DCTs in different speech act situations, for data collection. Language learners’ L1 and first culture are also considered an important aspect in analyzing the data of the current study.

Takahashi (2001) conducted a study examining the effects of input enhancement on the development of English request strategies in EFL learning. One hundred and thirty-eight Japanese college EFL students, who all majored in science (freshmen or sophomores), took part in the study. Four intact general English classes were set up and taught by the researcher, and four input conditions were assigned: explicit teaching, form comparison, form search, and meaning focused conditions. A quasi-experimental, pre-test/post-test design was used. Questionnaires, discourse completion tests and written retrospection were used to collect both quantitative and qualitative data.

It was observed that explicit teaching led to greater use of the target forms than the form comparison, form search and meaning focused conditions. Meanwhile, learners in the form comparison condition provided more target request forms than those in the form search and meaning focused conditions, and their confidence in formulating request expressions was influenced by the levels of input enhancement. The findings highlighted that under the condition of a relatively high degree of input enhancement with explicit metapragmatic information, the target pragmatic features were effectively learned. It could be suggested that providing metapragmatic information on the target features is most likely to improve learners’ L2 pragmatic competence (Takahashi, 2001). Pragmatic information/knowledge can facilitate language learners in improving their pragmatic competence, and it is an important research aspect of the current study. Acquiring sufficient pragmatic knowledge in the English language
teaching and learning process can help learners achieve pragmatic competence in an effective way.

While a number of past studies were conducted by applying DCTs to reveal ESL/EFL learners’ pragmatic competence in different speech acts (see Table 2.3), the current study was carried out in the Chinese context and applied three selected speech acts: refusals, compliment responses, and apologies in DCTs to explore students’ levels of pragmatic competence. Influenced by the Chinese culture and L1, Chinese language users might employ different functions in these three speech acts from native English speakers. The inappropriate use of the language causes pragmatic failures that result in communication failures. Thus, it was necessary for the present research to understand how Chinese College English students used both language factors and social factors in achieving pragmatic competence.
Table 2.3  Summary of past studies of pragmatic failure and speech acts in ESL/EFL learning and teaching

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Findings</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Farghal &amp; Al-Khatib (2001)</td>
<td>268 Jordanian undergraduate college students at Yarmouk University</td>
<td>Compliment response played an important role in managing ‘face’ in Jordanian communication.</td>
<td>Lack of varieties in participants’ majors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Takahashi (2001)</td>
<td>138 Japanese EFL learners at a Japanese university</td>
<td>The target pragmatic features were found to be most effectively learned.</td>
<td>Gender of participants was unbalanced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bataineh &amp; Bataineh (2006)</td>
<td>100 Jordanian undergraduate EFL students from Yarmouk University and Jordan University of Science and Technology</td>
<td>Male and female respondents were different in choosing to use apology strategies: Female respondents chose non-apology strategies; male respondents used those that veered towards blaming the victim.</td>
<td>Only one instrument – Discourse Completion Tasks (DCTs), was used in the study, and gender was the only variable examined.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Félix-Brasderfer (2006)</td>
<td>20 Mexican male university students at the Universidad Autónoma de Tlaxcala</td>
<td>Social factors, such as power and distance, played a vital role in determining appropriate degrees of politeness in Mexican society.</td>
<td>Only male students were involved in the study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keshavarz, Eslami, &amp; Ghahraman (2006)</td>
<td>40 Iranian native speakers of Persian of Tehran, 111 Iranian EFL learners, and 37 native speakers of American English in Washington, DC</td>
<td>Iranian native speakers of Persian and EFL learners were different from English native speakers in terms of directness level of the refusal they use, and there was the need for L2 learners to develop awareness and sensitivity for their own L2 use.</td>
<td>Only one instrument – DCTs, was used to collect data in the study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afghari (2007)</td>
<td>100 native Persian-speaking students in different academic fields at Isfahan University</td>
<td>Persian apologies were as formulaic in pragmatic structures.</td>
<td>Ten fixed discourse situations in DCTs were close to students’ daily interactions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hou (2007)</td>
<td>12 College English teaching classes at Taiyuan University of Technology, China</td>
<td>College English students’ low level of pragmatic competence led to pragmatic failures in communication.</td>
<td>The sample number was large and could generalize the whole group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nureddeen (2008)</td>
<td>110 Arabic college students in Khartoum area majoring other than English or linguistics</td>
<td>The selection of apology strategies in the study reinforced the culture-specific aspect of language use.</td>
<td>Different social groups needed to be examined.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose (2009)</td>
<td>Students in Lai King Catholic Secondary School, Hong Kong</td>
<td>Students made pragmalinguistic development, particularly in what appeared to be the beginning of pragmatic expansion, but they made little sociopragmatic development.</td>
<td>Participants were middle- to lower-middle language proficient learners and could not generalize the high proficient learners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source</td>
<td>Context</td>
<td>Findings</td>
<td>Comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tang &amp; Zhang (2009)</td>
<td>30 Mandarin Chinese native speakers from Mainland China and 30 Australian English native speakers at Curtin University of Technology in Western Australia</td>
<td>No universal pattern could be generalized concerning the use of compliment responses by Mandarin Chinese and Australian English speakers. Chinese and Australians had different expectations and followed different linguistic and cultural protocols that may cause communication breakdowns.</td>
<td>Only four situations were included in DCTs to collect data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chen &amp; Yang (2010)</td>
<td>160 undergraduate students at Xi’an International Studies University, China</td>
<td>Chinese students accepted compliments as much as do speakers of many Western languages, such as English and German.</td>
<td>The study was possibly the first longitudinal study in pragmatics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zheng &amp; Huang (2010)</td>
<td>68 Chinese College English students at Zhejiang University, China</td>
<td>Cultural differences, negative pragmatic transfer, teaching-induced errors and native English speakers’ tolerance towards Chinese speakers’ pragmatic failures caused Chinese College English students’ pragmatic failures.</td>
<td>The qualitative data collected from the study was not presented in detail.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jebahi (2011)</td>
<td>50 male and 50 female third year university students at the Higher Institute of Humanities, Medenine, Tunisia</td>
<td>Tunisian university students used a statement of remorse most frequently in the situations. Strategies of self-castigation, offer of repair, blaming the victim, intensification, minimization, and humor were less used, which influenced intercultural communication.</td>
<td>Only a discourse completion test was used in the study.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.2.4 Pragmatic competence

Pragmatic competence is an indispensable component for language learners to achieve in developing their language competence (Bachman, 1990). Pragmatic competence will develop with sufficient input containing enough models of the target feature (Bialystok, 1993). There are a number of studies that highlight the importance of pragmatic competence and language learners’ pragmatic competence development (Alcón-Soler, 2005; Du, 2004; Hou, 2007; Riddiford & Joe, 2010; Rose, 2009; Ruan, 2007; Schauer, 2006; Takimoto, 2009; Wang, 2004; Wang, 2005; Xu, 2003) and these will be discussed below.

Hou (2007) conducted a survey to examine the pragmatic competence development of Chinese College English learners and the implications of these levels of competence for pragmatic English teaching. College English students from 12 teaching classes at Taiyuan University of Technology participated in the survey. Questionnaires were used to collect data. The collected data were analyzed by Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). The study showed that Chinese College English students’ levels of pragmatic competence were much lower than their levels of linguistic competence because their teachers paid too much attention to linguistic competence and neglected pragmatic competence. Therefore, the students’ low level of pragmatic competence frequently resulted in pragmatic failures in communication in English.

The study concluded that that pragmatic failures would generate misunderstandings, and even extreme emotions (e.g., prejudice and resentment) in cross-cultural communication as communication failures or obstacles to harmonious interpersonal relationships may arise through such misunderstandings. If the objective of language learning is to communicate successfully in the cross-cultural context, then it is necessary to recognize and reduce College English students’ pragmatic failures and to effectively develop their pragmatic competence. As one focus of the current research, data collected on College English students’ levels of pragmatic competence were investigated to provide empirical evidence for developing a tentative model of learning pragmatics in the Chinese context.
In terms of the relationship between Chinese College English learners’ pragmatic and linguistic competence, Ruan (2007) conducted a study to examine the relationship as well as individual differences in pragmatic competence and learning strategy choices in pragmatic competence development. Two hundred and seventy-nine Chinese College English students completed the questionnaire, and 14 students from this group were invited to attend a follow up interview. Quantitative and qualitative data analysis showed that Chinese College English students’ pragmatic competence was closely related to their English linguistic competence. There existed a distinct gender difference in that the female students were better language users than the male students, but there was no notable personality differences in English pragmatic competence of these College English students.

It was observed that there was no significant difference between students with high English pragmatic competence and those with low English pragmatic competence in the use of learning strategies for pragmatic knowledge learning. The data revealed that understanding utterances in proper contexts was an important factor in the development of pragmatic competence.

The two studies discussed above were conducted in a Chinese context with Chinese College English learners as participants. The findings of these two studies highlighted the importance of understanding the appropriateness of utterances in a variety of contexts, especially in the cross-cultural context. Thus, the present research has combined theories of intercultural communication in order to better clarify College English students’ pragmatic competence. In addition, it used more diverse instruments than the questionnaire, which was the only research instrument used in the above two studies, to gain a better understanding of the pragmatic competence of College English students.

Another study, which monitored language learners’ pragmatic competence development, was conducted by Rose (2009) in Hong Kong, which was a follow up of Rose’s (2000) first phase study. Participants in the study were students in Lai King Catholic Secondary School in Hong Kong. Students were from middle- to lower-middle class social backgrounds, who completed a questionnaire.
Unlike the first phase study (Rose, 2000), this study provided evidence of language learners’ considerable pragmalinguistic development. All students made frequent use of the popular, conventionally indirect, request strategy, which indicated they had moved past earlier pre-basic and formulaic stages. The study also showed that students had made little progress in the development of sociopragmatics, particularly in foreign language contexts as students used more alerters in hearer-dominant situations and the use of supportive moves remained at a very low level. The study found that language learners had huge pragmalinguistics development but lacked sociopragmatic development, particularly in foreign language contexts. It suggested further exploring the relationship between grammatical and pragmatic development, and instrument effects that might prevent the development of sociopragmatic competence.

Research conducted by Riddiford and Joe (2010) followed development of skilled migrants’ sociopragmatic performance from the classroom to the workplace. Sociopragmatic skills are regarded as important aspects of communicative competence in the workplace (Candlin, 2002; Clyne, 1994; Geluykens & Pelsmaekers, 1999) because they help people become accepted as members of workforce (Holmes, 2005) and to maintain good relationships with colleagues.

Eleven migrants from mainland China, Taiwan, Russia, and the Philippines living in New Zealand with a minimum English language proficiency of IELTS 6.0 (International English Language Test System, which is the world’s proven English language test) took part in the research. An IELTS score of 6.0 in 2008 and 2009 indicated a good level of English language proficiency. Their professional backgrounds involved accounting, business analysis, insurance, public relations, office management, mechanical engineering, and information systems. DCTs, role-plays, retrospective interviews and workplace recordings were used as data. The study focused on the speech act of requests in workplace interactions.

It was found that the participants had developed an advanced ability to precisely analyze and correctly negotiate requests through classroom instruction and they applied this learning to their workplaces. Participants’ perceptions of the significance of status differences and their levels of imposition of the request changed after
classroom instruction and workplace experience. It was suggested that incorporating a carefully designed workplace communication program in the classroom would benefit learners in their future employment and enhance their sociopragmatic competence and performance. The study found that there was a necessity to develop these learners’ sociopragmatic competence because social interactions occurred in the participants’ daily life and so they needed abilities to deal with them. As one aspect of pragmatics, sociopragmatics has an impact on the use of English in social interactions. This is examined in the current study as social factors.

Schauer (2006) conducted a similar study to investigate the development of learners’ pragmatic competence during their stay in the L2 target environment. The pragmatic development of ESL learners was examined in two aspects – pragmatic awareness and productive pragmatic competence. Participants of the study included 16 German ESL learners and two control groups: 17 German EFL learners, and 20 British English native speakers. The instruments used for investigating pragmatic awareness were a video-and-questionnaire task, which was developed by Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei (1998), and a semi-structured interview. The Multimedia Elicitation Task (MET), a 16-scenario multimedia production questionnaire focusing on requests developed by the researcher was used to collect data on the learners’ productive pragmatic competence. Two different kinds of statistical analysis were used to examine the data: paired sample t-tests, and one-way analyses of variance (ANOVA). The External and Internal Request Modification frameworks developed by House and Kasper (1987), Blum-Kulka, House Kasper and (1989), and Trosborg (1995) were applied to analyze the data of the learners’ pragmatic competence.

It was observed that the temporal effects of exposure to the L2 and individual learner differences were two major factors that affected learners’ interlanguage pragmatic development. The ESL learners’ pragmatic development in the study showed that a sojourn in the L2 context promoted the development of learners’ pragmatic awareness. In order to achieve pragmatic competence, the study found that there was a need to combine learners’ pragmatic development with contextual, personal and temporal factors.
Compared with many other studies, this study showed the close connection between learners’ pragmatic awareness and their pragmatic competence, and explored the process of learners’ pragmatic development. Therefore, it was essential for the current study to include social factors and individual differences in the research because of their potential impact on language learners’ development of pragmatic awareness and pragmatic competence. The following table (see Table 2.4) gives a summary of critical overview of past studies on ESL/EFL learners’ pragmatic competence.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Findings</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Xu (2003)</td>
<td>1000 College English students and 45 College English teachers</td>
<td>There was a low degree of correlation between College English students’ English language level and their pragmatic competence. The exam results could not truly represent learners’ English language proficiency.</td>
<td>The number of participants was large and could provide reliable data for the study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Du (2004)</td>
<td>91 newly registered non-English major graduates in China</td>
<td>There was no significant correlation between pragmatic competence and attitude toward pragmatic study. Interests in target culture demonstrated a significant correlation with pragmatic competence.</td>
<td>The questionnaire could not provide adequate data for the study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wang (2004)</td>
<td>15 Chinese College English students and their diaries</td>
<td>There was an imbalance between the development of pragmatic competence and linguistic competence, and various learning and teaching strategies could help to cultivate learners’ pragmatic competence.</td>
<td>The number of participants of the study was small and limited that could not make generalization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wang (2005)</td>
<td>50 Chinese College English students’ compositions</td>
<td>Chinese culture and language greatly influenced the students’ development of pragmatic competence.</td>
<td>Investigating samples were limited.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruan (2007)</td>
<td>279 Chinese College English students</td>
<td>Chinese College English students’ pragmatic competence was closely related to their English linguistic competence.</td>
<td>Elaborately designed questionnaires were used to ensure the reliability of the data collection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Takimoto</td>
<td>Three treatment groups (N=45) and one control group (N=15)</td>
<td>Input-based tasks could work efficiently when they offered an emphasis on forms and meanings in teaching pragmatics in an EFL context.</td>
<td>The number of control group was small.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riddiford &amp; Joe (2010)</td>
<td>11 migrants with minimum English language proficiency of IELTS 6.0 in New Zealand</td>
<td>Participants developed a greater ability to precisely analyze and properly negotiate requests, and careful attention in program design could improve sociopragmatic competence and performance.</td>
<td>The number of participants was too small and could not make generalization.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Past studies, especially those conducted in the Chinese context, indicated the importance of developing language learners’ pragmatic competence, which helped them become communicative competence. The purpose of this study was to investigate Chinese College English students’ pragmatic competence as well as factors influencing the development of their pragmatic competence.

The following is a summary of major findings and arguments of previous studies discussed above:

(a) Raising language learners’ pragmatic awareness, which is influenced by the learning environment, helps them obtain information about pragmatic features of language (Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998; Niezgoda & Röver, 2001).

(b) Instruction in pragmatics, particularly explicit instruction, could facilitate language learners to acquire adequate pragmatic knowledge and encourage the development of pragmatic competence (Bardovi-Harlig & Griffin, 2005; Martínez-Flor & Alcón-Soler, 2007; Takahashi, 2001; Tateyama, 2001).

(c) Pragmatic knowledge of speech acts, cultural knowledge, pragmatic routines, metalanguage information, metapragmatic information as well as pragmatic strategies are teachable (Afghari, 2007; Alcón-Soler, 2005; Jebahi, 2011; Ji, 2008; Liddicoat & Crozet, 2001; Rose & Kwai-fun, 2001; Takahashi, 2001; Tateyama, 2001).

(d) Social factors, and cultural and individual differences influence language learners’ development of pragmatic competence (Bataineh & Bataineh, 2006; Chen & Yang, 2010; Du, 2004; Félix-Brasderfer, 2006; Keshavarz, Eslami & Ghahraman, 2006; Nikula, 2008; Nureddeen, 2008; Savignon & Wang, 2003; Schauer, 2006; Tang & Zhang, 2009; Wang, 2005; Zheng & Huang, 2010).

(e) Pragmatically oriented tasks help language learners practice pragmatic knowledge and become pragmatically competent (Alcón-Soler, 2005; Ji, 2008; Riddiford & Joe, 2010; Takimoto, 2009).

(f) It is necessary to keep a balance between pragmatic competence and linguistic competence as even grammatically advanced language learners might not be able to properly use the target language in appropriate contexts (Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyer, 1998; Nikula, 2008; Rose, 2009; Ruan, 2007; Wang, 2004; Xu, 2003; Xu, Case&Wang, 2009).
Language learners’ low level of pragmatic competence and other factors, such as cultural differences and negative pragmatic transfer, lead to their pragmatic failures in communication (Hou, 2007; Tang & Zhang, 2009; Zheng & Huang, 2010).

Research on pragmatics in ESL/EFL learning has indicated that it is necessary to help language learners to develop pragmatic awareness and ability with instruction in pragmatics so as to achieve pragmatic competence. Findings of the above previous studies provide rich evidence to support the need for learners to develop pragmatic competence, yet further studies need to be conducted in different contexts, with diverse samples to gain a deeper understanding of how learners can develop such competency efficiently and effectively. It is also worth exploring strategy-instruction for learning pragmatics as research has shown that strategy-based instruction has been effective for learners to develop macro skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing (Mendelsohn, 1998). The following section discusses past studies focusing on language learning strategies in learning a language in general, and pragmatics in particular.

### 2.3 Research on language learning strategies in ESL/EFL learning

Language learning strategies are described as behaviors, techniques, steps or actions used in learning a language (Oxford, 1993; Rubin, 1981). Strategies are often referred to as techniques that learners use to remember what they have learned (Oxford & Nyikos, 1989), and they also help learners promote their own achievement in language proficiency (Bremner, 1998; Green & Oxford, 1995; Oxford, 1990).

Many researchers have conducted studies to investigate the importance and influence of learning strategies on language learning. Green and Oxford (1995) believe that “more proficient language learners use more learning strategies and more types of strategies than less proficient language learners” (p.285). Thus, language learning strategies not only help learners become competent in learning and using a language, but they also increase learners’ self-directed learning (Hong-Nam & Leavell, 2006).
Research shows that all learners consciously or unconsciously employ different kinds of learning strategies, and successful language learners apply more purposeful language learning strategies than less successful ones (Hong-Ham & Leavell, 2006). In general, studies on English language learning strategies have been conducted in order to find out the answers to the following questions:

(a) What language learning strategies are most frequently used in ESL/EFL learning?

(b) Are there any differences in the use of language learning strategies according to learners’ different backgrounds, such as gender, language proficiency and study major?

(c) How do monolingual and bilingual foreign language learners differ in their use of language learning strategies while learning a language?

(d) Can some of the strategies preferred by language learners be explained with reference to the cultural and/or educational background in which they learn the language (Chen, 2009; Ersözlü, 2010; Sheorey, 1999; Tuncer, 2009; Yılmaz, 2010)?

In response to the general questions above there seems to have been limited research on strategy training for learning English pragmatics, particularly in an EFL context. This gap in the literature highlights a need for research in this specific area. The current research investigated Chinese College English students’ perceptions and practice of language learning strategies in learning English and pragmatics. What follows is an overview of studies on learning strategies in language learning, as they provide insights into the process of learning and the nature of learning strategies. Such studies may also shed light on how learners go about their learning of pragmatics in the language classroom.

Yılmaz (2010) conducted a study to examine English majors’ learning strategies at Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University in Turkey. The study investigated the relationship between preferred language learning strategies, gender, proficiency, and self-efficacy beliefs. One hundred and forty English majors (23 males and 117 females) participated in the study. A questionnaire with a 5-point Likert scale was used to collect data. Oxford’s (1990) 50-item Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) was used in the study.
Data showed that the English majors employed compensation strategies (e.g., using other clues, and switching to their mother tongue) as their preferred language learning strategy, and affective strategies (e.g., lowering anxiety by use of music, encouraging oneself and discussing feelings with others) least often. Compensation strategies include filling knowledge gaps of language through guessing, repeating, using gestures and taking notes, while affective strategies are used for handling feelings, attitudes and motivations of L2 learners (Yılmaz, 2010). These findings were consistent with a study of Chinese students with a high use of compensation strategies (Chang, 1991).

The findings indicated that students’ use of particular language learning strategies depended on their cultural and educational experience. The research also suggested that gender and language proficiency influenced language learners’ strategy use; however, more research was needed in the area of gender influence as there was a huge gender imbalance in Yılmaz’s (2010) study.

A similar study investigating bilingual learners’ language learning strategies was carried out by Purdie and Oliver (1999). The study examined students’ language efficiency beliefs and their attitudes toward English in relation to the use of language learning strategies. It comprised 58 participants drawn from four schools in Australia. Participants belonged to three main cultural groups: Asian (N=25), European (N=23) and Arabic (N=10). A structured interview was designed to gather information about each participant’s family, educational and cultural background, attitude toward English, English efficiency beliefs, and the use of language learning strategies. A 5-point Likert scale questionnaire was employed to investigate learners’ language learning strategies in detail.

The study found that the degree of differences between strategies was important in finding out what students did when they were strategic in their language learning behaviors. The most frequently used strategies were cognitive strategies (e.g., repeating, analyzing, quickly acquiring the idea and taking notes). Social strategies (e.g., cooperating with others, and developing cultural understanding) were the least used strategies. It was observed that different cultural backgrounds and educational backgrounds significantly influenced students’ strategy use, and the type of
knowledge required for a given task may also have affected students’ use of strategies (Bialystock, 1978; Purdie & Oliver, 1999). This study only applied a questionnaire and a structured interview to collect data. More instruments, such as observations, might help provide insights into other related aspects and process of learning.

Research on bilingual or monolingual students’ use of language learning strategies has been conducted all over the world. Tuncer (2009) conducted a study to examine the difference between monolingual and bilingual language learners’ use of language learning strategies. A total of 246 participants, 162 females and 84 males, studying EFL at the English Language Teaching Department of Mersin University in Turkey took part in the study. The SILL scale prepared by Oxford (1990) with 50 Likert-type statements was used in the study.

The results of the study showed that bilingual learners made more use of language learning strategies than monolingual learners, and bilinguals were more likely to employ cognitive and meta-cognitive skills. The rate of males’ and females’ use of learning strategies was different. Female learners seemed to be more successful and positive in the use of language learning strategies. Moreover, more proficient language learners used more learning strategies than less proficient learners. The study suggested that the conditions, culture or previous language learning experience may have had an influence on learners’ use of language learning strategies for language learning.

It is essential to consider the influence of learners’ first culture as well as their educational background when researching language learning strategies in learning the target language and pragmatics. Learners’ different language proficiency levels and genders may be factors in employing language learning strategies, which were also considered in analyzing the data of the present study.

Yang (1999) conducted a study to investigate college EFL students’ beliefs about language learning and their language learning strategies. Five hundred and five students from 14 English classes of six public and private universities in Taiwan participated in the study. A questionnaire with a Likert-type scale and open-ended
questions was employed in the study. Forty-nine items of the SILL (Oxford, 1990) were adapted for the questionnaire.

It was found that students in this study had some contradictory beliefs that were reflected in their use of language learning strategies. Students’ self-efficacy beliefs about learning English were strongly relevant to their use of all types of language learning strategies, particularly functional practice strategies. Furthermore, students’ beliefs about the value and nature of learning spoken English were closely related to the use of formal oral-practice strategies (Yang, 1999). Appropriate beliefs may have improved their effective use of language learning strategies and this is an area worthy of further study.

More recently, Hong-Nam and Leavell’s (2006) study examined the overall language learning strategy of ESL learners, and the relationship between language learning strategy and L2 proficiency. Fifty-five ESL students enrolled in an Intensive English Program at a large Southwestern university in the US participated in the study. The SILL (Oxford, 1990) self-report questionnaire was used to judge the frequency of use of language learning strategies, and an individual background questionnaire was applied to collect demographic information about the students.

The study found that students were aware that learning strategies were a part of their language learning process. Meta-cognitive strategies were the most preferred strategy, which helped in directing, organizing, and planning language learning. Affective and memory strategies were the least used strategies. Female students tended to employ affective and social strategies more often than male students. Meanwhile, students at the intermediate level applied more strategies than beginning or advanced level students regarding teacher intervention in the learning process. More strategic language learners progressed along the proficiency continuum faster than less strategic ones. Thus, this thesis included an exploration of overall language learning strategy use and its relationship with the language proficiency to better understand College English students’ learning situations.

Sheorey (1999) conducted a study to investigate strategy use among Indian college students. A total of 1,261 students enrolled in the first year of their three-year
undergraduate degree program in Indian colleges participated in the study. These students learned an ‘indigenized’ form of English (Shridhar & Shridhar, 1986, 1994), in other words, they learned English in their native settings with little or no support from native English speakers. A questionnaire, which was an English Language Learning Strategies Inventory (ELLSI), was employed to collect data, particularly information about their language learning.

The study concluded that Indian female students used language learning strategies more frequently than male students. Students showed strategy usage that was similar in some aspects to those studying in other settings, despite their learning of an indigenized form of English. Students with higher language proficiency in English more frequently used learning strategies than those with lower language proficiency, especially functional practice strategies, such as reading authentic materials, watching original English movies, imitating native English speakers’ pronunciation and intonation, etc.

It was observed that functional practice strategies helped these Indian students improve their practical, communicative performance in English. It was also found that examination-oriented memory strategies helped them become more successful in their examination-driven educational system. The results of the study also indicated that students’ cultural and educational backgrounds influenced some of the strategies they used. This study provided quantitative evidence to examine Indian English learners’ learning strategy use in the environment of an indigenized form of English. The findings are relevant to the current study because cultural and educational backgrounds as well as the strategy (and types of strategies) used in learning English and pragmatics are examined in the present study.

Li (2010) conducted a study to examine the pragmatic strategies and syntactic forms used by Cantonese students in the speech act of making suggestions in English (their L2), compared with native English-speaking Australian students and other Cantonese students in Cantonese (their L1). The study was conducted because an increasing number of Hong Kong students were going to study in Australia and the chances of intercultural communication between these two cultural groups were growing.
Three groups, 18 students in each group, were involved in the study. The first two groups were Cantonese speakers from different high schools in Hong Kong. One group carried out the task in English (their L2), and the other in Cantonese (their L1). The third control group was native English-speaking Australian students from a high school in Sydney. Students were paired up to perform an open role play which was taped and transcribed for analysis.

It was found that in terms of syntactic forms the L2 Cantonese students used fewer syntactic types in making suggestions and their suggestions were more likely to be followed by textual themes and interpersonal metaphors compared with the Australian students. The Cantonese students preferred to use simple sentences rather than complex ones, and they employed paratactic complex sentences when they did use complex ones. In terms of pragmatic strategies, the L2 Cantonese students preferred less implicit strategies. With respect to the level of directness, both the L2 Cantonese students and Australian students preferred direct strategies. However, they exhibited significant differences in choosing suggestion strategies and redressive actions on the issue of politeness.

The study indicated that due to the lack of pragmalinguistic knowledge and ability, the L2 Cantonese students were not able to effectively apply pragmatic strategies in language practice. This study investigated pragmatic strategies of ESL learners through a speech act. The present research compared results derived from this study in an EFL context of learning English in China to explore if language learners might have different perceptions and competence and use different strategies in language practice. Therefore, the current study examined Chinese College English students’ pragmatic strategies in the use of the language in communication, which in some aspects, shows the influence of the L1 and the first culture in learning the target language of English.

The following table (see Table 2.5) shows a summary of previous studies on language learning strategies in ESL/EFL learning.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Findings</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purdie &amp; Oliver (1999)</td>
<td>58 bilingual students in Australia</td>
<td>Different places of birth, cultural backgrounds and educational backgrounds influenced students’ strategy use.</td>
<td>The questions of the questionnaire and the interview were not elaborately designed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheorey (1999)</td>
<td>1261 Indian college students</td>
<td>Indian female students employed language learning strategies more frequently than male students, and their cultural and educational backgrounds influenced some of the strategies they used. Higher language proficient students more frequently used learning strategies than those lower language proficient ones.</td>
<td>The study only provided quantitative data for analysis, and including qualitative data could make the study more substantial.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yang (1999)</td>
<td>505 university students from six public and private universities in Taiwan</td>
<td>Students held some conflicting beliefs that were reflected in their use of language learning strategies.</td>
<td>Elaborately designed questionnaire ensured the validity of the data collection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Griffiths (2003)</td>
<td>348 students from 21 different countries in a private language school in Auckland, New Zealand</td>
<td>Higher level students made highly frequent use of a great number of language learning strategies, particularly strategies relevant to interaction with others, vocabulary, reading, the tolerance of ambiguity, language systems, the management of feelings and learning, and the utilisation of available resources.</td>
<td>A large number of participants and different research instruments ensured the reliability of the collected data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong-Nam &amp; Leavell (2006)</td>
<td>55 ESL students enrolled in a university Intensive English Program at a large Southwestern university in the US</td>
<td>Students preferred to use meta-cognitive strategies most, but affective and memory strategies least. Students at the intermediate level more frequently used learning strategies than beginners and advanced learners.</td>
<td>The sample number was small, and EFL samples needed to provide a different perspective.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bonney, Cortina, Smith-Darden &amp; Fiori (2008)</td>
<td>694 students from 36 foreign language classrooms in a large high school in a rich Midwestern city</td>
<td>Compared to the cognitive strategies, social strategies were most helpful in developing students’ foreign language proficiency and ability to interact with native speakers successfully.</td>
<td>Gender of participants was unbalanced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chen (2009)</td>
<td>390 junior high school students in southern Taiwan</td>
<td>Taiwanese EFL students used compensation strategies most frequently, but hardly used cognitive and affective strategies.</td>
<td>Participants had low levels of language proficiency so that the results could not make generalization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source</td>
<td>Context</td>
<td>Findings</td>
<td>Comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuncer (2009)</td>
<td>246 students at English Language Teaching Department of Mersin University, Turkey</td>
<td>Bilinguals employed more learning strategies than monolinguals. Males used some more specific learning strategies than females. More proficient learners used more learning strategies than less proficient learners.</td>
<td>Only SILL scale was used to collect data in the study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ersözlü (2010)</td>
<td>190 teacher students at Education Faculty of Gaziosmanpaşa University, Turkey</td>
<td>There existed differences between males and female students in employing learning strategies, but not significant. Levels of possessing and using learning strategies are various relying on the departments of education.</td>
<td>Qualitative data were necessary for a deeper analysis of strategy instruction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Li (2010)</td>
<td>2 groups from different high school in Hong Kong and 1 group from a high school in Sydney (18 students in each group)</td>
<td>The L2 Cantonese students preferred less implicit strategies. Both the L2 Cantonese students and Australian students preferred direct strategies, but they showed significant differences in choosing suggestion strategies and redressive actions of the issue of politeness.</td>
<td>Participants were only paired up to perform an open role play, and employing other instruments for data collection could make the results more substantial.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yan, Chye, Lin &amp; Ying (2010)</td>
<td>480 pupils at Edgefield Primary School, Singapore</td>
<td>Female pupils did better than male pupils in all Oxford’s (1990) six strategies. Male and female pupils had significant differences in using cognitive, compensation, meta-cognitive, and affective strategies.</td>
<td>All participants were beginners and could not represent intermediate and advanced learners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yılmaz (2010)</td>
<td>140 English majors at Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University, Turkey</td>
<td>Students preferred to use compensation strategies most but affective strategies least.</td>
<td>Gender of participants was very much unbalanced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheng (2011)</td>
<td>15 native English speakers, 15 Chinese ESL speakers, and 15 Chinese EFL speakers in a mid-size state university in south-western US</td>
<td>Compared to native English speakers, Chinese ESL speakers used different sets of strategies in responding to compliments. Chinese EFL speakers had difficulties in mastering strategies in responding to compliments. Both Chinese ESL and EFL speakers had difficulties in responding to personal compliments.</td>
<td>Data collection might be too complex to control, and authentic situations in data collection were hard to achieve.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The following is the summary of major findings and arguments of past studies on language learning strategies in ESL/EFL learning discussed above:

(a) Different educational backgrounds and cultural backgrounds affect language learners’ use of language learning strategies (Ersözlu, 2010; Li, 2010; Purdie & Oliver, 1999; Sheorey, 1999; Yang, 1999).

(b) Gender differences exist in employing learning strategies in language learning (Ersözlu, 2010; Sheorey, 1999; Tuncer, 2009; Yan, Chye, Lin & Ying, 2010).

(c) More proficient language learners use language learning strategies more frequently than less proficient language learners (Griffiths, 2003; Sheorey, 1999; Tuncer, 2009).

(d) Language learners are likely to employ meta-cognitive and compensation strategies most, but affective strategies least (Chen, 2009; Hong-Nam & Leavell, 2006; Yılmaz, 2010).

(e) Social strategies are helpful in developing learners’ language proficiency and improving their intercultural communication (Bonney, Cortina, Smith-Darden & Fiori, 2008; Griffiths, 2003; Sheorey, 1999).

(f) Bilingual learners make more use of language learning strategies than monolingual learners (Tuncer, 2009).

Research on learning strategies in language learning has indicated that language learning strategies are helpful to students in improving their language proficiency, particularly in ESL/EFL learning contexts. The effective use of language strategies can contribute to successful language learning (Griffiths, 2003). The findings of the above previous studies are convincing, however, few studies on pragmatic learning strategies, which play an important role in achieving learners’ pragmatic competence, have been conducted. Therefore, further studies on pragmatic learning strategies in the language learning are expected.

2.4 Summary

This chapter has discussed the development of pragmatics as a discipline in a new field of linguistics, as well as its definitions and features. It has examined studies on pragmatics in ESL/EFL learning and teaching as well as learners’ language learning
strategies in ESL/EFL learning. The literature presents a consensus that pragmatic knowledge can be taught and instruction in pragmatics in ESL/EFL learning and teaching helps language learners in their development of pragmatic competence. It also has been observed that learners’ different language learning strategies may have helped them achieve optimal language learning outcomes. However, this overview also shows that more research needs to be conducted in different contexts and cultures to identify factors that may impact on the way learners go about developing pragmatic competence as well as the strategies they use to acquire pragmatic knowledge. In the following chapter, the theoretical perspectives applied in the current study are clarified in detail for theorizing and enhancing the arguments.
CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Chapter 2 provided a detailed literature review on the development of the field of pragmatics and past studies on the teaching and learning of pragmatics in ESL/EFL contexts, as well as language learning strategies for learning English in general and pragmatics in particular. Informed by SLA theory and research, theories of pragmatics, intercultural communication and ELF are discussed in detail in this chapter. The three theoretical strands form a typology (see Figure 3.1) for examining College English students’ perceptions and learning of English and pragmatics in a Chinese context. The discussion involves key concepts such as intercultural/cross-cultural pragmatics, pragmatic competence, communicative competence, interculturality and ELF and their links with the arguments of this thesis.

Figure 3.1 Typology of the theories
3.1 Second language acquisition (SLA)

First language acquisition is the study of the development of a person’s mother tongue (Richards, Schmidt, Platt & Schmidt, 2002). People are born with special language learning abilities, and they learn their mother tongue through exposure to people around them. Their linguistic rules develop unconsciously (Chomsky, 1969). Ellis (1994) indicates SLA is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. The field of SLA studies is concerned with how learners learn an additional language after they have acquired their native language (Ellis, 1985).

In the process of language acquisition, both L1 and L2 learners pass through sequences of development. Many of these developmental sequences are similar for L1 and L2 learners. Lightbown and Spada (1999) have argued that developmental sequences are similar even among some L2 learners who have different L1 backgrounds and different learning environments. However, it is widely accepted that SLA is strongly influenced by learners’ L1 (Ellis, 1985), and that the L1 plays a decisive and negative role in SLA (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991).

The process of SLA is often regarded as the process of overcoming the influence of the L1, which can be seen as a slow process to replace the features of the L1 in developing the L2. During the process of SLA, errors made by learners in both comprehension and production cannot be avoided (Ellis, 1994). Where the L1 and L2 share a meaning but express it in different ways, an error is likely to arise in the L2 because learners will transfer their L1 into the L2 (Ellis, 1985). L1 learning habits will also inhibit the L2 learning process. Ellis (1985) proposed that SLA is “the subconscious or conscious processes by which a language other than the mother tongue is learned in a natural or a tutored setting. It covers the development of phonology, lexis, grammar, and pragmatic knowledge, but has been largely confined to morphosyntax” (p.6).

The major aim of SLA research is to explore learners’ primary knowledge of the L2, and to describe and explain their competence (Ellis, 1994). Chomsky (1965) points out that competence is made up of the mental demonstration of linguistic rules that comprise the speaker-hearer’s internalized grammar. An SLA study is interested in how competence is developed. Communicative competence is a major focus in SLA
research because language plays an institutional and social part in the community. In contrast, foreign language learning only occurs in settings where the language plays no main role in the community and is generally learned in the classroom (Ellis, 1994). However, according to past studies (Jenks, 2007; Sakui & Gaies, 1999; Zhang & Cui, 2010; Zhong & Shen, 2002), research theories applied in SLA can be transferred to examine language acquisition in foreign language learning contexts, such as the theory of communicative language teaching (CLT) (Feryok, 2008; Kuo, 1995; Rao, 2002). Conceptions of foreign language learning are changing among foreign language learners. Indeed, some use their foreign language as an L2 in some contexts. For example, Chinese students use English as an L2 when they study in English-speaking countries though English is a foreign language to them. Thus, this study employs SLA theory and those theories informed by SLA to explore pragmatics learning in Chinese College English as all participants were EFL learners in a Chinese context.

In the SLA process, pragmatics has two roles: “It acts as a constraint on linguistic forms and their acquisition, and it represents a type of communicative knowledge and object of L2 learning in its own right” (Kasper & Rose, 1999, p.81). It is clear that the first role of pragmatics is in functionalism (Tomlin, 1990) and interactionism (Long, 1996) views of SLA, which allows powerful functionalist explanations of linguistic phenomena in using an L2 in social interactions (Levinson, 1983). The second role combines pragmatics with morphosyntax, lexis, and phonology that concentrates on learners’ knowledge, use and acquisition of L2/foreign language pragmatics (Kasper & Rose, 1999).

However a word of caution is needed as new developments in SLA show that the L1 could be helpful in the development of the L2, particularly for more advanced learners who often transfer their L1 knowledge and thinking skills creatively to the learning of a second or foreign language. This is particularly so in the context where English is used as an international language (Kachru, 1997; Karsten, 1993) and the development of pragmatic competence plays a key role. The following section describes theories of pragmatics as a backdrop to the current research.
3.2 Theory of pragmatics

This thesis utilizes Bardovi-Harlig and Mahan-Taylor’s (2003) working definition to pragmatics as “the ability of language users to match utterances with contexts in which they are appropriate” (p.37), and explores language users’ abilities in using appropriate utterances in corresponding contexts to effectively complete communication in English. The following sections describe various perspectives of pragmatics featuring this definition.

3.2.1 Interlanguage pragmatics

Selinker (1972) first coined ‘interlanguage’ as the continuum that L2 learners construct when they are learning L2 grammar systems on their way to the target language norms. In the SLA literature, Ellis (1985) described it as “the systemic knowledge of language which is independent of both the learner’s L1 and the L2 system that he is trying to learn” (p.42). Interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) is a subfield of both interlanguage studies, which belong to the realm of SLA, and pragmatics. Interlanguage pragmatics, which originated from pragmatics theory and developments in L2 pedagogy, is a comparatively new area. It brings the study of acquisition to a mix of structure and use (Bardovi-Harlig, 2010), and applies pragmatic theories, principles and frameworks to study how L2 or foreign language learners encode and decode meaning in their L2 or foreign language (Schauer, 2009).

Kasper (1989), and Kasper and Blum-Kulka (1993) defined ILP as the study of non-native speakers’ use and acquisition of linguistic action patterns in an L2. Kasper and Rose (2002) described ILP as a second-generation hybrid that belongs to both pragmatics and SLA by definition as follows:

As the study of second language use, interlanguage pragmatics examines how nonnative speakers comprehend and produce action in a target language. As the study of second language learning, interlanguage pragmatics investigates how L2 learners develop the ability to understand and perform action in a target language. (Kasper & Rose, 2002, p.5)

Interlanguage pragmatics is concerned with both pragmatic competence and language performance of second or foreign language learners (Ji, 2008) and the
development of pragmatic competence by non-native speakers. Second or foreign language learners must not only be able to produce utterances that are appropriate to the context of their target language, but also must be aware of what constitutes suitable linguistic behavior in a range of social situations in their L2 or foreign language (Schauer, 2009).

Second or foreign language learners often employ the norms, strategies and phrases, which are used in their native language, to achieve a certain purpose in a translated form of their L2 or foreign language to achieve the same purpose (Schauer, 2009). Coulmas (1981) described this behavior as ‘transfer’. Kasper (1992, 1998) divided ‘transfer’ into ‘positive transfer’ where the pragmatic norms, forms and strategies of L1 and L2 match and L1 knowledge can be transferred to L2, and ‘negative transfer’ where the pragmatic norms, forms and strategies of the L1 and L2 do not match and L1 knowledge cannot be transferred to L2. As the notion of ‘transfer’ has become central to the term ‘interlanguage’, interlanguage pragmatics research has frequently concentrated on the concept of ‘negative transfer’ (Schauer, 2009). The present research examines how Chinese College English students use English, including the transference of the phrases, norms and strategies of their L1 to the use of English, which is within the research scope of interlanguage pragmatics.

### 3.2.2 Intercultural/cross-cultural pragmatics

Communication in many contexts is becoming increasingly cross-cultural. It involves people who have different cultures, different first languages, and different conceptualizations. Although use of a grammatically common language, or lingua franca such as English, that language is a pragmatically diversified instrument of communication because it represents different cultures and different norms and values. For example, many non-native English speaking cultures use English as a common language of communication with each other and native speakers of English. Intercultural/cross-cultural pragmatics explores interactions between insights from pragmatics and from intercultural communication for these diverse speakers to come to a common understanding in relation to the roles and functions of language and communication in a world-wide communication network (Pütz & Neff-van Aertselaer, 2008).
Yule (1996) has pointed out that “the study of differences in expectations based on cultural schemata is part of a broad area of investigation generally known as cross-cultural pragmatics” (p.87). Kasper and Blum-Kulka (1993) defined cross-cultural pragmatics as the study of linguistic acts conducted by language users with different cultural backgrounds. In a pragmatic view, there is no culture without a user (Mey, 2008). Cross-cultural pragmatics aims to define the systematic relationships between the sociocultural contexts and the functions and structure of language in use, so it belongs to applied sociolinguistics (Boxer, 2002).

Cross-cultural pragmatics reveals language users’ values, beliefs, cultural assumptions and communication strategies in using the language (LoCastro, 2003). It holds the point of view that “individuals from two societies or communities carry out their interactions (whether spoken or written) according to their own rules or norms, often resulting in a clash in expectations and, ultimately, misperceptions about the other group” (Boxer, 2002, p.151). These misperceptions are normally two-way with each group misunderstanding the other (Singh, Lele & Martohardjono, 1988).

Three domains most relevant to cross-cultural pragmatics are the spheres of social interaction, educational encounters, and work life (Boxer, 2002). Cross-cultural discourse plays an important role in social interactions, for social encounters set the steps for perceptions and misperceptions of people from societies whose norms of speaking are different from their own. In educational interactions it is an important domain to examine (Boxer, 2002).

As language and culture are closely interrelated, the ability to efficiently interact with people who are from different cultures is the key to achieving successful cross-cultural communication. College English Curriculum Requirements (2007) clearly indicates that College English aims to enhance students’ abilities to use English effectively in intercultural communication. Investigating College English students’ abilities of using English in (intercultural) communication is an important aspect of this study that is within the domain of intercultural pragmatics.
3.2.3 Sociopragmatics

Leech (1983) described sociopragmatics as “the sociological interface of pragmatics” (p.10). It mainly “concerns itself with any aspect of social context that is specific to the pragmatic meanings of particular language use” (Culpeper, 2011, p.1). Sociopragmatics involves speakers’ and hearers’ beliefs built on relevant social and cultural values and social actions, which are considered to be of prime importance.

Many scholars comment that if L2 speakers do not have knowledge of relevant social and cultural values and do not know how to vary their speech strategies in cross-cultural communication, sociolinguistic failure occurs (Harlow, 1990; Holmes & Brown, 1987; Kasper, 1997; Thomas, 1983). Sociopragmatics is very much about applying appropriate social behavior and aims to teach people what functions to apply in corresponding social interactions. The assumption is that L2 learners must be made aware of the results of making pragmatic choices (Rose & Kasper, 2001).

Social variation, social context and social behavior are regarded as part of metapragmatic knowledge, and have great influence on second, foreign or language teaching and learning (Ji, 2008). ‘Sociopragmatic competence’ is the ability to adjust speech strategies appropriately according to different social variables, such as the degree of imposition, social dominance and distance between participants of conversation, and participants’ rights and obligations in communication (Harlow, 1990). The nature of pragmatic knowledge, competence levels, patterns of interaction and contexts are examined in the thesis.

3.2.4 Pragmatic competence and communicative competence

Pragmatic competence is “the ability to act and interact by means of language” (Kasper & Röver, 2005, p.317). Taguchi (2009) broadly defined pragmatic competence, as “the ability to use language appropriately in a social context, has become an object of inquiry in a wide range of disciplines including linguistics, applied linguistics, anthropology, sociology, psychology, communication research, and cross-cultural studies” (p.1).
Pragmatic competence is also defined as “the ability of the second language learner to use language according to the pragmatic rules that govern the use of linguistic utterances as used by native adult speakers” (Nureddeen, 2008, p.280). In essence, having pragmatic competence means that culture is a decisive factor in encoding and decoding utterances. The cultural context of discourse plays a key role in understanding meaning, so cultural awareness is crucial in achieving a successful intercultural communication.

Pragmatic competence is regarded as part of communicative competence and demonstrated through communicative abilities in English (Savignon, 1991). In relation to this view, this thesis focuses on examining Chinese College English students’ pragmatic knowledge and competence in the EFL context that facilitates them in achieving communicative competence.

Pragmalinguistic competence and sociopragmatic competence are described as two types of pragmatic competence (Leech, 1983). Pragmalinguistic competence refers to the linguistic resources available to perform pragmatic functions, while sociopragmatic competence refers to the correctness of the linguistic resources in a given cultural context (Leech, 1983; Taguchi, 2009; Thomas, 1983).

In order to have sociopragmatic competence, people need to have knowledge about how to interpret interactions in which power and social distance are involved (Brown & Levinson, 1987), and the knowledge of mutual rights, obligations, taboos, and traditional practices (Thomas, 1983). In order to have pragmalinguistic competence, learners need to have the ability to apply conventions of both means and forms for organizing knowledge in real communication. Learners also need to have a range of linguistic forms to perform their language functions and understand sociocultural norms and rules that direct the usage of these forms (Taguchi, 2009). Thus, this research examines students’ pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic competence through three selected speech act situations to obtain their pragmatic competence.

The importance of pragmatic competence has been strengthened both in theory and practice. Theoretical models of L2 communicative competence (Bachman, 1989, 1990; Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Canale & Swain, 1980), interactional competence
(Young, 2000; Young & He, 1998) and “symbolic competence” (Kramsch & Whiteside, 2008), have advanced the field by situating pragmatic and sociolinguistic competencies as distinct, essential components within L2 proficiency. Meanwhile, these models have served as a tool in the investigation of pragmatic competence (Taguchi, 2009).

Pragmatic competence development has become one of the important aims in SLA because the emphasis changes from grammatical competence to communicative competence in L2 teaching pedagogy (Trosborg, 1987). Grammatical competence is important for developing overall competence in communication, but communicative competence extends the learning into the realm of authentic language learning.

The conventional ‘grammar-translation’ approach in language teaching only focuses on the development of learners’ grammatical and linguistic competence and restricts development of language functions, which, to a certain degree, prevents language learners from achieving their communicative competence. The communicative approach in language teaching pedagogy, in contrast, can help learners attain global language competence. In relation to the current study, *College English Curriculum Requirements* (2007) indicates that the focus of College English teaching and learning needs to shift from developing students’ linguistic competence to pragmatic competence in order to facilitate their achievement of communicative competence, which is in accordance with the key focus of this study.

Chomsky (1965), who based linguistic theory on an ideal speaker-listener with perfect linguistic knowledge, introduced the so-called “linguistic competence”. He defined his conception of competence as the knowledge of a language and could not serve in real-life communication. Habermas (1970) pointed out that:

communicative competence relates to an ideal speech situation in the same way that linguistic competence relates to the abstract system of linguistic rules...

Communicative competence is defined by the ideal speaker’s mastery of the dialogue constitutive universals irrespective of the actual restrictions under empirical conditions. (pp.140-141)
In other words, communicative competence depends on the speaker’s mastery of the L2 functions and features. Milroy and Milroy (1990) defined communicative competence as “the capacity of persons to select and recognize the type of language appropriate to the occasion” (p.503).

Hymes (1972) related his notion of communicative competence both to theoretical needs and practical needs. In other words, communicative competence is not only the knowledge of a language but also the ability to apply that knowledge (Barron, 2003; Widdowson, 1992). Hymes (1972) proposed that communicative competence contributes to other aspects of competence that a language learner needs to have. From this perspective, the core concern of communicative competence is speech communication and the interaction between language and culture. Thus, communicative competence is “relative, not absolute, and depends on the cooperation of all the participants involved” (Savignon, 1983, p.9).

Communicative competence might be thought of as a kind of ‘mixer’ that performs the function of balancing available linguistic forms chosen by the linguistic competence of the user, against available social functions housed in some kind of social competence (Thomas, 1983). A certain amount of communicative competence is needed in social interactions at an interpersonal level and organizational and public levels, and for intercultural exchanges (Rickheit, Strohner & Vorwerg, 2008). Many communicative failures arise in our societies because of the lack of communicative competence among people. Based on these conceptualizations, some detailed models of communicative competence have been developed and are briefly described below. Models suggested by Canale and Swain (1980, and revised by Canale, 1983) and Bachman (1990) are the most influential ones to be examined in relation to this research.

3.2.4.1 Canale and Swain’s model

Canale and Swain (1980) developed a theoretical model of communicative competence, which was further extended by Canale (1983). The key features of this model include four types of competencies to consider:
(a) grammatical competence, knowledge of vocabulary, such as syntax, semantics, phonology, etc;
(b) sociolinguistic competence, knowledge of appropriate language use in different contexts;
(c) discourse competence, the knowledge of applying correct coherent devices to achieve a unified spoken or written text in different genres; and
(d) strategic competence, knowledge of how to use communication strategies appropriately to deal with breakdowns in communication and enhance the effectiveness of communication.

In this model, pragmatic competence is represented as sociolinguistic competence, which includes both “appropriateness of meaning” and “appropriateness of form” (Canale, 1983, p. 7). Sociolinguistic competence challenges L2 learners, for they need to obtain cultural knowledge and sensitivity, as well as linguistic knowledge, so as to achieve communicative competence. Appropriateness of meaning involves an interlocutor’s knowledge of pragmatic conventions and the ability to evaluate situational context and speech intentions (Leech, 1983), and appropriateness of form involves the planning of a linguistic realization of a speech intention to a situation (Niezgoda & Röver, 2001). These are relevant to the study of learners’ pragmatic competence through a detailed analysis of responses derived from DCTs, which were used in the present study. DCTs require language learners to provide responses to various social situations and so are a measure of their pragmatic competence. That is, responses to DCTs identify not only a learner’s level of language competency but their awareness of the pragmatic features of that language. A more thorough discussion of DCTs used in this research is provided in Chapter 4.

### 3.2.4.2 Bachman’s model

Bachman (1990) proposed a model of language competence (see Figure 3.2). Language competence is regarded as the “knowledge of language” (Bachman, 1990, p. 85). Pragmatic competence and organizational competence are described as two main components of language competence. In order to be organizationally competent, people need to have grammatical competence (vocabulary, syntax,
morphology and phonology) and textual competence (cohesion/coherence and rhetorical organization) (Niezgoda & Röver, 2001).

Pragmatic competence consists of illocutionary competence and sociolinguistic competence. Bachman (1990) indicated that “illocutionary competence enables us to use language to express a wide range of functions, and interpret the illocutionary force of utterances or discourse” (p.94), which can be introduced by reference to the theory of speech acts (described below). Illocutionary competence includes four functions: ideation, manipulation, heuristic and imagination. To be illocutionary competent, people need to develop the abilities of all these functions.

Figure 3.2  Bachman’s model of language competence
“Knowledge of ideational functions enables us to express or interpret meaning in terms of our experience of the real world. Knowledge of manipulative functions enables us to use language to affect the world around us. Knowledge of heuristic functions enables us to use language to extend the knowledge of the world around us. Knowledge of imaginative functions enables us to use language to create an imaginary world or extend the world around us for humorous or aesthetic purposes” (Bachman & Palmer, 2010, pp.47-49). According to sociocultural features, the performance of these functions varies in different language use contexts.

Sociolinguistic competence refers to sensitivity to dialect or variety, register and naturalness, and cultural references and figures of speech. It includes the ability to correctly perform language functions in the corresponding context (Bachman, 1990). In almost every language there are variations in language use in different geographic areas or with different social groups.

The regional and social varieties or dialects represent different conventions and the appropriateness of that language use will be different, depending on the different contexts. Sensitivity to register enables us to distinguish variation in language use within a single dialect or variety. Sensitivity to naturalness refers to the ability of language learners to formulate and interpret an utterance which is not only linguistically accurate, but which is also phrased in a ‘native-like’ way (Pawley & Syder, 1983). The ability to interpret cultural references and figures of speech enables us to use and interpret cultural references and figures of speech in certain contexts (Bachman, 1990; Bachman & Palmer, 2010).

Communicative competence is considered to be the global language proficiency of a language learner, and pragmatic competence is an essential component of this. Without pragmatic competence, language competence would be incomplete and assessment of language proficiency would be inexact. This study focuses on researching College English students’ pragmatic competence that facilitates them in becoming language competent.
3.2.5 Speech act theory

Speech act theory has aroused the widest interest of all the issues in the general theory of language usage (Levison, 1983). It plays a core role in the field of pragmatics. Philosophers, such as Wittgenstein, Austin and Searle, proposed the foundations of speech act theory. Wittgenstein (1953, cited in Bach, 2004) made a significant contribution to the field of pragmatics by stating that language was a social activity and “the meaning of a word is its use in the language” (Bach, 2004, p.463). Austin was regarded as the father of pragmatics (Mott, 2003) and founded speech act theory (Austin, 1962, 1975), which was later elaborated by Searle (1969, 1971, 1975, 1976, 1979).

3.2.5.1 Austin’s speech act theory

Austin (1962) introduced the concept of the “speech act”, and his speech act theory was built on the basis of his belief that speakers do not only use language to say things, but to do things. Therefore, utterances are regarded as speech acts. Austin developed a system to distinguish three components of speech acts, which was regarded as seminal work:

(a) the locutionary act: the utterance of a sentence with determinate sense and reference

(b) the illocutionary act: the making of a statement, offer, promise, etc. in uttering a sentence, by virtue of the conventional force associated with it or with its explicit performative paraphrase

(c) the perlocutionary act: the bringing about of effects on the audience by means of uttering the sentence, such effects being special to the circumstances of utterance. (Levison, 1983, p.236)

The concept of illocutionary force is closely associated with the notion of the illocutionary act, “which is the communicative plan or design behind a speaker’s remark” (Leech, 1983, p.200). Yule (1996) pointed out that “of these three dimensions, the most discussed is illocutionary force. Indeed, the term ‘speech act’ is generally interpreted quite narrowly to mean only the illocutionary force of an utterance” (p.49).
3.2.5.2  **Searle’s speech act theory**

Searle developed Austin’s speech act theory further and indicated that the illocutionary force of an utterance and the perlocutionary effect an utterance has on the hearer relies on the speakers’ choice of words and expression in their utterance (Schauer, 2009; Searle, 1969, 1975, 1976). Although Searle’s (1969) theory of speech acts is Austin’s theory systematized, it has had most of its influence on linguistics (Levinson, 1983).

Searle (1976) advanced Austin’s notion of speech acts and classified five categories of illocutionary force:

(a) representatives, which commit the speaker to the truth of the expressed proposition (paradigm cases: asserting, concluding, etc.)

(b) directives, which are attempts by the speaker to get the addressee to do something (paradigm cases: requesting, questioning).

(c) commissives, which commit the speaker to some future course of action (paradigm cases: promising, threatening, offering).

(d) expressives, which express a psychological state (paradigm cases: thanking, apologizing, welcoming, congratulating).

(e) declarations, which effect immediate changes in the institutional state of affairs and which tend to rely on elaborate extra-linguistic institutions (paradigm cases: excommunicating, declaring war, christening, firing from employment). (Levison, 1983, p.240)

These five categories clearly suggest the basic kinds of action that one can perform in speaking as well as paradigms of different speech acts. With these categories, the researcher can better understand language users’ discourse meaning and communicative intention in social interactions. The current study has explored three selected speech acts: refusals that belong to commissives, and compliment responses and apologies which are expressives, in examining College English students’ levels of pragmatics as these categories can assist the researcher in understanding students’ levels of communication competence.
Trosborg (1995) indicated that speech act theory “has exerted great influence on functional aspects of pragmatic theory” (p.18). It has been applied in a large number of empirical studies on intercultural/cross-cultural pragmatics. Speech act theory also has a great impact on second or foreign language learning and teaching. In this study, it provides a tool for the analysis of College English language learners’ perceptions, understanding and strategies of pragmatics in using English as a foreign language.

The present research on selected speech acts often focuses on the appropriateness with which language is used in different contexts, and politeness theory is often applied to examine interactions between people (Bravo & Briz, 2004; Eelen, 2001; Félix-Brasdefer, 2006; Locher, 2004; Locher & Watts, 2005; Mills, 2003; Watts, 2003). Politeness theory indicates that “politeness makes communication possible...because it seeks to neutralize the potential for aggression present in social interaction” (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p.1).

In the course of social interactions, pragmatic skills are employed to express a series of communicative acts in conversation, such as refusing, offering compliment responses, and apologizing. These three selected speech act skills are the focus of this research on Chinese College English students’ pragmatic competence. The following sections discuss the three selected speech acts used in the study to collect data about College English students’ pragmatic knowledge and competence.

Refusals

Refusals are face-threatening acts (Brown & Levinson, 1987) and only happen when a speaker directly or indirectly says no to a request or an invitation. Refusals belong to the classification of commissives, for they commit speakers to future action (Searle, 1977). Chen (1996) indicated that refusals are opposite to the interlocutor’s expectation, and they are often achieved through indirect strategies. Refusals are important as they are sensitive to social variables, such as gender, age, education level, power and social distance (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Fraser, 1990; Smith, 1998).
Refusals are also complex speech acts, for they require both long sequences of negotiation, and cooperative achievements and face-saving strategies to adapt to the perceived ‘disobedient’ nature of the act (Félix-Brasdefer, 2006; Gass & Houck, 1999) (e.g., the interlocutor does not expect the refusal). Therefore, to execute them successfully, refusals need a high level of pragmatic competence (Chen, 1996). This study employed the refusal speech act to examine Chinese College English students’ levels of pragmatic competence as well as strategies in using English as a foreign language.

Compliment responses

Holmes (1988) stated that “a compliment is a speech act which explicitly or implicitly attributes credit to someone other than the speaker, usually the person addressed, for some ‘good’ (possession, characteristic, skill, etc.) which is positively valued by the speaker and hearer” (p.446). Compliments are viewed as positive speech acts but can also be regarded as face-threatening acts (Holmes, 1988; Tang & Zhang, 2009). They serve as a serious sociocultural linguistic function which reflects agreed ways of behaving (Doohan & Manusov, 2004; Tang & Zhang, 2009).

Whether a compliment is a positive or a negative speech act relies on a number of factors, such as context, cultural courtesy, and a person’s interpretation of what has been said (Tang & Zhang, 2009).

As compliments are an act of judgment on another person, people may feel uneasy or defensive regarding the compliments they receive, and they may have difficulty in appropriately making responses to these compliments (Knapp, Hopper & Bell, 1984). Compliment responses are intricate speech acts as they are multifunctional and ubiquitous (Yu, 1999), and they can reflect the social-cultural values and politeness diversity of the speakers (Cheng, 2011).

The acceptance of compliments is commonly adopted by native English speakers (Chen, 1993; Herbert, 1986; Holmes & Brown, 1987), while downgrading and rejections are often used by speakers of other languages, particularly those from Asian countries such as China, Japan and Vietnam (Chen, 1993; Tran, 2006; Yu, 2004). Thus, compliment responses are worth studying (Yu, 2003). Accordingly, by
using the compliment response speech act in data collection, the present study was able to investigate Chinese College English students’ pragmatic knowledge, competence and skills in using the target language and trace the social and cultural influences in using English.

**Apologies**

Olshtain (1989) proposed that an apology was “a speech act which is intended to provide support for the hearer who was actually or potentially malaffected by a violation” (pp.156-157). When a person apologizes, he/she shows a willingness to disgrace himself/herself to the person/s being apologized to. Apologizing is a face-saving act for the hearer and a face-threatening act for the speaker (Bataineh & Bataineh, 2006).

Márquez-Reiter (2000) further described that an apology is a “compensatory action for an offense committed by the speaker which has affected the hearer” (p.44). Apologies are acts that express negative politeness (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Nureddeen, 2008), and belong to the classification of expressives. The person who offers an ‘appropriate’ apology admits “the wrong doing, accepts ultimate responsibility, expresses sincere sorrow and regret, and promises not to repeat the offense” (Gooder & Jacobs, 2000, p.237). An apology is issued to resolve a conflict (Takaku, Weiner & Ohbuchi, 2001) where the wrongdoer needs to show the so-called three Rs, regret, responsibility, and remedy, for the offended to accept the apology as sincere (Bataineh & Bataineh, 2006). This research employed the apology speech act to examine students’ pragmatic knowledge, levels of competence, and strategies in using English in corresponding situations.

3.3 **Theory of intercultural communication**

3.3.1 **Culture and language**

Culture makes human beings unique (Byrne, Barnard, Davidson, Janik, McGrew, Miklósi & Wiessner, 2004) but is one of the most elusive words to define. Culture is dynamic rather than static (Pinto, 2000). Cultures are created and recreated through shared interactions (Gudykunst, 1983). People often move between cultures.
Understanding culture is critical for educators because cultural orientation is present in every interaction.

Geertz (1973) described culture as “a historically transmitted pattern of meaning embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life” (p. 89). Hofestede (1991) described culture as “the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from those of another” (p. 5). Further, Grant (1997) defined culture at a more tangible level:

How we do things, what things we do and how we think about them. It includes ‘high culture’ – a highly subjective catalogue of things we choose, and other more widely accepted, like language, religion, folklore and myths, beliefs, values, rituals and observations, family and kinship structures, history, political structures and conventions, etiquette and patterns of impersonal behavior, sexual norms, diet, economic activity and leisure. (p. 16)

Culture covers every aspect of human life, and influences our values, beliefs, and behaviors. Samovar, Porter and Stefani (1998) defined culture as “the deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, actions, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe, and artifacts acquired by a group of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving” (p. 36). From these definitions it can be deduced that culture can include everything from rites of passage to concepts of the soul.

For a long time, there was a view that the best way to learn about a foreign culture was to be ‘exposed’ to it, for instance, to study abroad (Crozet & Liddicoat, 1999). However, there is no evidence showing that study overseas can lead to a better knowledge of culture or improved cross-cultural understanding (Kramsch, 1991). Culture is not learned by osmosis. It needs an intellectual effort because culture is not readily accessible to be noticed, analyzed and taught. Culture is inserted into language as an intangible, all-pervasive and highly variable force (Crozet & Liddicoat, 1999; Liddicoat, Papademetre, Scarino & Kohler, 2003). The following figure (Figure 3.3) shows points of articulation between culture and language:
Language and culture are tightly interwoven and neither should be studied in isolation from the other (Ahearn, 2001). Language is “the primary symbolic medium through which cultural knowledge is communicated and instantiated, negotiated and contested, reproduced and transformed” (Garret & Baquedano-Lopez, 2002, p.339). Culturally based practices, settings and interactions are the main vehicles which “powerfully and necessarily affect both language teaching and learning processes” (Poole, 1992, p.610; Shi, 2010, p.2476).

Understanding the culture of the target language is helpful in learning a language. Hoebel and Frost (1976) indicated that culture can be learned both consciously and unconsciously. Thus, culture is an indispensible aspect in College English learning in this study. The following sections discuss different aspects of culture that impact language learners’ use of the target language in intercultural communication that influence Chinese College English students’ use of English in communication.

### 3.3.2 Interculturality

With increasing interaction and communication of people, different cultures begin to blend with each other, that is, one culture begins to adopt and adapt different aspects of culture with its own. The term ‘interculturality’ is linked to language use and explorations of differences and similarities between cultures. It indicates recognition and reflection of the learner’s own culture as well as the target culture and
concentrates on a point of critical observation and understanding of both home and target cultures.

Interculturality can be defined as the development of mutual understanding between members of different cultural groups, involving “an awareness and a respect of difference, as well as the socioaffective capacity to see oneself through the eyes of others” (Kramsch, 2005, p.553). It helps people achieve intercultural competence in social interactions.

To practice effective interculturality, people need to be aware of cultural differences, make comparisons between cultures and acquire cultural knowledge in a situated context. Through reflection and interaction, a critical understanding of the target culture can be developed (Paltridge, Harbon, Hirsch, Shen, Stevenson, Phakiti & Woodrow, 2009). Understanding different cultures in language learning facilitates communication between learners of diverse cultures. Understanding both the target language and the target culture can help people to be communicatively competent in social interactions. Therefore, interculturality can help the researcher in this research better examine and understand the data about Chinese College English students’ pragmatic knowledge and their use of English.

3.3.3 Intercultural communication

With the development of technology and science, the world is becoming more connected and a place where no nation, group or culture can remain in isolation (Samovar & Porter, 1991). On the one hand, modern technology makes it easier for people living in different parts of the world to communicate with other people throughout the world. On the other hand, such interactions can be difficult if people do not know how to deal with other cultures.

Samovar and Porter (1997) have pointed out that communication practices and behaviors of people from different cultures will unavoidably vary due to their different perceptions of the world and the contexts in which they live. It occurs “whenever a person from one culture sends a message to be processed by a person from a different culture” (Samovar, Porter & McDaniel, 2009, p.7). Intercultural communication is characterized as “a transactional, symbolic process involving the
Some errors or misunderstandings undoubtedly occur in the process of communications or dealing with other cultures, even with two native-English speaking countries (Jandt, 2001). These misunderstandings can be minimized if people have a better knowledge and understanding of other cultures. Miller (1974) stated that most of our misunderstandings of other people are not due to any inability to hear them, to parse their sentences or to understand their words (a focus on linguistics). A far more important source of difficulty in communication is that people often fail to understand a speaker’s intention. This difficulty could be better explained by the study of pragmatics.

Intercultural communication is defined as “acts of communication undertaken by individuals identified with groups exhibiting intergroup variation in shared social and cultural patterns. These shared patterns, individually expressed, are the major variables in the purpose, the manner, the mode, and the means by which the communicative process is affected” (Damen, 1987, p.23). Lustig and Koesters (2003) pointed out that intercultural communication is “a symbolic process in which people from different cultures create shared meanings” (p.49).

People with different cultural backgrounds share information at different levels of awareness and control. Different cultural backgrounds include both national cultural differences and differences existing in the different activities within a national unit (Allwood, 1985). The similarity of the cultures decides the amount of influence a culture puts on communication. Learning cultures is of great importance in achieving communication competence. Liaw (2006) indicated that culture learning required “gaining insights into how the culture of the target language interacts with one’s own cultural experiences” (p.50). It is necessary to consider people’s cultural perception, beliefs and values when using the target language in social interactions as this may help them achieve successful intercultural communication.
3.3.3.1 Perception

*Perception* comes from Latin meaning, “receiving, collecting, action of taking possession, apprehension with the mind or senses” (Flanagan & Lederman, 2001, p.390). It can also be defined as “the internal process by which we select, organize and interpret information from the outside world” (Klopf & Park, 1982, p.26). People’s perceptions of the world are what they tend to notice, reflect on and respond to in the surroundings which are meaningful and important to them. Everyone is unique. What people tend to perceive and the ways they perceive the world are different. It is impossible for two people to have the same perceptions of the world, especially when people interact with others who come from different cultural backgrounds. Interculturality suggests that people should try to learn how others perceive the world together with their cultural experiences. People’s perceptions are culturally determined and affect the way they communicate with others.

3.3.3.2 Beliefs

The term *belief* refers to the psychological state in which an individual holds a proposition or premise to be true (Schwitzgebel, 2006). Beliefs are the judgments about what people believe to be true or probable (Samovar & Porter, 1997). For instance, people keep religious beliefs. Many Western people prefer to believe in God, while a number of Asian people believe in Buddha. Many beliefs are concerned with unpredictable or mysterious explanations. Price (2000) indicates that most of people’s beliefs are the ideas about why things work, how they work and where they come from. Beliefs are also determined by a person’s cultural experiences and background. People are taught through their culture what is considered to be true and worthy when they are young. Their behaviors or interactions may follow these taught beliefs. Step by step, their belief systems form their value systems, which greatly influence their behaviors.

3.3.3.3 Values

Klopf and Park (1982) define *values* as an everlasting set of beliefs that guide or direct people’s behaviors. In other word, values are a set of emotional rules that
people often apply to help them make the right decisions in their lives. Values, which represent morals of cultures, provide people with rules for their decisions and behaviors. Although values are related to the norms of a culture, they are more general and abstract than norms (Samovar & Porter, 2003). They usually represent what is right or wrong, good or evil. Different types of values, including moral values, religious values, political values, social values and aesthetic values are applied by people in different aspects of their life. They help people solve problems and become the roots of people’s traditions (Samovar & Porter, 2003). Like perception and beliefs, values are also learned by people through their cultural experiences. People apply values in their everyday decision making at work and at home. Therefore, values, which are important in every culture, can help people better understand others’ cultural beliefs and become more adept in communication.

Thus, by understanding people’s perceptions of the world, their beliefs and values, others can better understand their ideas, predict potential misunderstandings in communication, and achieve intercultural communication. This view is in agreement with the argument of this study that considers culture or cultural knowledge as a key component of the study of College English learners’ pragmatics.

### 3.3.4 Intercultural competence

Intercultural competence refers to effective skills for achieving successful intercultural communication (Xiao & Petraki, 2007). Intercultural competence includes knowledge of and ability in another language and culture that enables people to effectively interact with others who are from that culture and having the skills to negotiate between that culture and their own (Guilherm, 2004). It is the ability of people with different cultural and social backgrounds to reach a shared understanding and to deal with multiple cultures (Byram, Nichols & Stevens, 2001). Intercultural competence can be identified as four skills: personality strength, communication skills, psychological adjustment and cultural awareness (Jandt, 1998, 2001, 2004).

Several models are applied to intercultural competence. Byram’s (1997) model is the most distinctive and widely accepted in foreign language teaching and learning (Deardorff, 2006; Liaw, 2006), especially in Europe because of his work with the
Council of Europe (Byram, Gribkova & Starkey, 2002; Corbett, 2003). There are five components to Byram’s model. These can be explained as follows:

(a) Intercultural attitudes (savoir-être): curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one’s own.

(b) Knowledge (saviors): of social groups and their products and practices in one’s own and in one’s interlocutor’s country, and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction of distant peoples and cultures converging within shared geographies and common political scenarios.

(c) Skills of interpreting and relating (savoir comprendre): ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to a document or events from one’s own.

(d) Skills of discovery and interaction (savoir apprendre/faire): ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability and to operate the knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction.

(e) Critical cultural awareness (savoir s’engager): an ability to evaluate, critically and on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in one’s own and other cultures and countries. (Byram, Gribkova & Starkey, 2002, pp.12-13)

These five components interconnect each other and work together to achieve significant intercultural competence; however, they can be assessed independently (Deardorff, 2006). The notion of intercultural competence is important for this thesis in regards to the role of a person’s source culture in the interactive language learning process.
3.4 Theory of English as a lingua franca (ELF)

3.4.1 Kachru’s three circle model of English

Kachru (1992, 2005) divides the English-using world into three concentric circles. The uses and users of English internationally can be discussed in terms of these three concentric circles (see Figure 3.4).

![Figure 3.4 Kachrun’s model of world Englishes](source)

The inner circle refers to countries where English is spoken as a first or dominant language, such as the United States, Britain, Canada, and Australia. Although other languages are spoken in these countries, English has a dominant place.

The outer circle refers to countries where English has a long history of institutionalized functions and has important roles in education, governance, literacy creativity and popular culture (Kachru, 2006; Kiong, Pakir, Choon & Crope, 2001), for example, India, Singapore, Pakistan, and Philippines, in most cases former colonies of Great Britain.
The expanding circle comprises countries in which English has various roles and has acquired cultural or commercial importance, but it is used in a more restricted way (Kachru, 2006; Kiong, Pakir, Choon & Crope, 2001), for instance, China, Japan, Korea, and Indonesia.

Contrary to the theory of ELF used in this study, Kachru’s three circles may be misinterpreted as showing the different status of the English used by people from the three circles. In the current study, language is fundamentally seen as a tool of communication. ELF underpins the notion that there are a good variety of Englishes, each enjoying the same status in the process of communication, regardless of the different accents typical of each of the varieties, as long as they are comprehensible. However, the varieties of English used in these three circles are known as “world Englishes” (WEs). This term indicates that English shows differences in form, function, creativity, and acculturation in different contexts (Čeh, 2008).

### 3.4.2 World Englishes and world standard English

With the development of English, new Englishes have appeared, which have resulted from British English. In North America, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, English is spoken as a native or L1. In these countries English developed differently from English in Britain, partly because of the original mixtures of dialects and accents among the early settlers in these areas, and partly because of the influence of the languages of the native populations (Jenkins, 2003).

In some countries or areas, where English is taught as an L2 or as one language in a wider multilingual repertoire of requisition, for example, India, Singapore, Philippines, etc., Englishes are also called new Englishes. The term “world Englishes” is used to refer to links between them. Bolton (2004) has pointed out that there are three possible interpretations of the expression “world Englishes”.

First, it covers all varieties of English worldwide and the different ways used to describe and analyze them. Second, it is used in a narrower sense to indicate the so-called new Englishes in Asia, Africa and the Caribbean. Third, it is used to represent the multi-linguistic approach to the study of English associated with the
‘Kachruvian’ approach: English is used locally as a lingua franca and is the basis for local identity (Modiano, 2009).

Therefore, there exist great differences amongst the different types of English used worldwide. Different types of English have unique internally consistent vocabulary, grammatical innovations and tolerances, pronunciations, idioms and discourse (Burns, 2001), because they are influenced by the different cultures, customs, mother tongues, and so on. However, these Englishes, including British English, share certain features, for instance, the very basic grammatical rules.

“Standard English” is a variety of English. Standard English is an unusual combination of linguistic features in matters of grammar, vocabulary, spelling and punctuation. Standard English carries a prestige that has an influence on desirable educational targets for English language learners. Standard English is widely understood, but it is not widely produced outside of academic study (Crystal, 2010).

English in a standard form is used as a world language. Crystal (1995) has indicated that from a linguistic point of view, it is no longer adequate to call one American English and the other British English, instead they are part of “world standard English”. World standard English acts as a strongly unifying force among all kinds of existing variations of English.

Crystal (2003), Görlach (1990) and McArchur (1987, 1998) has pointed out that the so-called phenomenon of “world standard English” was a hypothetical and monolithic form of English which, they anticipated, would develop of its own accord. However, this “single monochrome standard form” (Quirk, 1995, p.6) is built on the basis of native English speakers rather than non-native English speakers and does not consider the communicative context (Jenkins, 2006).

English has indeed become a world language with differently developed varieties. To achieve communicative competence between people whose native languages and cultures are different could be difficult if communication is conducted based only on that of native speakers of English. Rubdi and Saraceni (2006) claimed that:

An alternative viewpoint to English as an international language (EIL)/ELF … is one which acknowledges the polymorphous nature of the English language
worldwide, identifying such different varieties under a World Englishes paradigm. The emphasis, in this case, is not on prescribing either a reduced or extended form of standard English, but on questioning the very concept of ‘standard’, and on advocating a pluricentric model rather than a monolithic one. (p.13)

Rajagopalan (2004) indicated that “‘World English’ (WE) belongs to everyone who speaks it, but it is nobody’s mother tongue” (p.III). Further, it has been suggested that “how English develops in the world is no business whatever of native speakers in England, the United States, or everywhere else” (Widdowson, 1994, p.385). Therefore, this study of pragmatics for College English learners must take into consideration these issues about different Englishes and the context of learning English.

### 3.4.3 English as a lingua franca

A lingua franca is the common language used by people of different language backgrounds to communicate with each other, and lingua francas can be used both intranationally and internationally (Canagarajah, 2006a, 2006b; Kirkpatrick, 2007). The notion of lingua franca has been used to characterize the global functions of the English language (James, 2000; McArthur, 2001; Seidlhofer, 2001) and there are attempts to define the core (Jenkins, 2000) of this lingua franca English. The term ‘English as a lingua franca’ (Canagarajah, 2006a, 2006b; Jenkins, 2007; Seidlhofer, 2001) has emerged as a way of describing communication in English between speakers with different first languages (Seidlhofer, 2005).

ELF researchers do not believe any monolithic variety of English will ever exist (Jenkins, 2006), that is, there will not be only one version of English that all people in the world will use. ELF is part of the more general phenomenon of English as an international language or “world Englishes” (Jenkins, 2003; McArthur, 1998; Melchers & Shaw, 2003; Seidlhofer, 2005). ELF is not a language for specific purposes or a pidgin, but a language showing full linguistic and functional range (Kachru, 1997).
Karsten (1993) offers a definition that characterizes ELF as follows:

There is no consistency in form that goes beyond the participant level, i.e., each combination of interactants seems to negotiate and govern their own variety of lingua franca use in terms of proficiency level, use of code-mixing, degree of pidginization, etc. (p.108)

The most important components of a lingua franca for House (2003) are “negotiability, variability in terms of speaker proficiency, and openness to an integration of forms of other languages” (p.557). ELF has been defined as “a ‘contact language’ between persons who share neither a common native tongue nor a common (national) culture, and for whom English is the chosen foreign language of communication” (Firth, 1996, p.240). House (1999) emphasizes that ELF interactions occur between speakers with different language backgrounds, none of which is English. In other words, ELF is “a language for communication, and a medium that can be given substance with different national, regional, local, and individual cultural identities” (House, 2010, p.365). However, with the unprecedented spread of English throughout the world and the unpredictable settings in which English is used, it is now recognized that ELF interactions also occur with English native speakers (Seidlhofer, 2004).

In its conceptualization, ELF could be distinguished from the concept of EFL, and ELF users could be distinguished from English language learners. The ultimate goal of EFL is native linguistic and cultural proficiency. In contrast, ELF learners acquire English as a foreign language at school and use English as a means of communication for their own purpose and in their own way. In terms of form, EFL and ELF appear to be the same, but they serve different purposes of language use (Seidlhofer, 2001, 2004). Native speakers, their Englishes, and their ownership of English do not maintain a core role in ELF, for English is the language for international communication and nowadays it is used by more non-native speakers than native speakers (Kuo, 2006).

In relation to ELF not being a pidgin, pidgins are “languages that are born after contact between at least two other languages” (Kirkpatrick, 2007, p.13). Pidgins are restricted in function and are often used in specific areas and surroundings. There is
no such restriction for ELF as it can be used for all purposes (Lichtkoppler, 2010). In addition, ELF is not limited in its linguistic form and offers every possible opportunity for linguistic expansion and creativity (Hollander, 2002).

ELF encourages learners to learn and use their local variety of English in a range of communicative contexts, regardless of whether it is an inner, outer or expanding circle of English. Furthermore, any participants in international communication need to be familiar with, and have in their linguistic repertoire for use when suitable, certain forms (lexicogrammatical, phonological, etc.) that are widely used and accepted across groups of English speakers with different mother tongues (Jenkins, 2006) to aid in communicative competence.

Since native speakers are no longer a privileged group in the global spread of English, non-native speakers are now entitled to share the ‘privileges’ that have until now been reserved for native speakers. These include a claim to ownership, a right to use English without others passing judgment, an equal footing with speakers of other English varieties, and, more profoundly, a right to shape the future of English (Kuo, 2006; Melchers & Shaw, 2003).

Comprehensibility remains a central concern in developing learners’ communicative competence. Accordingly, while it is justifiable to use a native speaker’s English variety as a benchmark to assess learner English or English in development, there are other elements that need to be taken into consideration in the process such as learners, contexts and cultural and intercultural issues. Even though English is taught and learned in the bilingual context of China, there is a misconception that we need to learn ‘standard native-like English’. Thus, this study examined Chinese College English students’ perceptions of various Englishes which, to great extent, influence the achievement of pragmatic competence in communication.

As language learning strategies could be applied in every aspect of the language learning process, such as learning pragmatics, intercultural communication and ELF, they are described in theories of language learning and teaching. The following section describes various strategies that have been associated with learning English to develop communicative competence.
3.5 Theories of language learning and teaching

3.5.1 Language learning strategies

‘Learning how to learn’ has been regarded as a critical and necessary component of the language learning process from which the idea of learner training and strategy instruction has emerged (Ellis & Sinclair, 1989; Hurd & Lewis, 2008; Weaver & Cohen, 1997). Strategies are the tools for active, self-directed involvement that is essential for developing communicative ability (O’Malley & Chamot, 1990; Wenden & Rubin, 1987). Oxford (1996) pointed out that “strategies are not a single event, but rather a creative sequence of events that learners actively use” (p.x).

Learning strategies are commonly defined as “the operations or processes which are consciously selected and employed by the learner to learn the target language (TL) or facilitate a language task” (Hurd & Lewis, 2008, p.9). They are connected with learning styles, personality, gender, and culture (Ehrman & Oxford, 1995; Cohen, 1998). Strategies offer a set of choices for learners, which promote more effective learning (Kaplan, 2002; Rubin, 1987). Successful learners have developed a series of strategies from which they are able to choose for given contexts and subsequently adapt flexibly to meet the needs of a given situation (Nisbet & Shucksmith, 1986).

There is a distinction among three types of strategies: production, communication, and learning. A production strategy is an effort to use one’s linguistic system effectively and clearly with a minimum of effort. Communication strategies refer to attempts to cope with problems of communication that have arisen in interaction. A language learning strategy consists of an effort to develop linguistic and sociolinguistic competence in the target language (Tarone, 1980). Although these distinctions are important, they are not easily applied when they rely on learners’ intentions that are often not clear or easy to set up (Ellis, 1994).

It is also helpful to distinguish two types of learning strategy: language learning strategies and skill learning strategies. Language learning strategies are concerned with the learners’ attempts to master new linguistic and sociolinguistic information about the target language (Tarone, 1980). Skill learning strategies engage the
learners’ efforts to become skilled listeners, speakers, readers, or writers (Ellis, 1994).

Strategies characterize the relationship between intention and action, and are built on the basis of the insights of learners who are aware of their needs, preferences, goals and problems (Hurd & Lewis, 2008). One aim of this study was to investigate College English students’ language learning strategies in learning English and pragmatics. To do this, Oxford’s (1990) SILL was used in analyzing the collected data. The SILL divides language learning strategies into direct strategies (memory, cognitive and compensation strategies) and indirect strategies (metacognitive, affective and social strategies) (see Figure 3.5).

![Diagram of Strategy System]

(Source: Oxford, 1990, p.16)

**Figure 3.5 Overview diagram of the strategy system**

Direct strategies consist of “strategies that directly involve the target language” and “require mental processing of the language” (Oxford, 1990, p.37). Indirect strategies provide “indirect support for language learning through focusing, planning, evaluating, seeking opportunities, controlling anxiety, increasing cooperation and empathy and other means” (Oxford, 1990, p.151).
Language learning strategies focus on developing an understanding of how to tackle learning a language in a variety of contexts, including independent settings. Learners must be aware of the learning task and the appropriate strategies to use in a given context in order to develop a meaningful boundary within the learning environment (Hurd & Lewis, 2008).

L2 learning strategies are very important, because conscious and modified use of learning strategies is closely associated with language achievement and proficiency (Oxford, 1996). A capacity to use strategies flexibly in accordance with task requirements is one of the five major aspects of successful language learning (Ellis, 1994). Strategies or combinations of strategies are effective in promoting language learning (O’Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1996; Wenden, 1983). In terms of this study, Chinese College English students’ perceptions and practice of language learning strategies in learning English and pragmatics were examined.

3.5.2 Task-based language teaching and learning

Task-based teaching (TBT) and task-based learning (TBL) appeared in the late 1980s (Willis, 1996). In the language teaching and learning process, a task is a classroom activity with a concentration on meaning. It includes real communication between teachers and students, or between two or more students communicating with one another, and producing something as a result (Willis & Willis, 2009). Nunan (1999) proposed the effectiveness of tasks for organizing the learning of an L2:

A task is an activity or action which is carried out as the result of processing or understanding language (i.e., as a response). For example, drawing a map while listening to a tape, listening to an instruction and performing a command, may be referred to as tasks. Tasks may or may not involve the production of language. A task usually requires the teacher to specify what will be regarded as successful completion of the task. The use of variety of different kinds of tasks in language teaching is said to make language teaching more communicative. (p.25)

A task-based approach uses meaningful tasks to organize the learning of an L2. In language teaching, TBL has gained great importance over the last few decades (İlin, İnözü & Yumru, 2007). It requires students to engage in interaction so as to
accomplish a task, and it is claimed that the principal language systems will develop while students concentrate on the process of performing tasks (Bygate, Tonkyn & Williams, 1994). Brown (2001) characterizes TBL as follows:

Task-based curricula differ from content-based, theme-based, and experiential instruction in that the course objectives are somewhat more language-based. While there is an ultimate focus on communication and purpose and meaning, the goals are linguistic in nature. They are not linguistic in the traditional sense of just focusing on grammar or phonology; but by maintaining the centrality of functions like greeting people, expressing opinions, requesting information, etc., the course goals center on learners’ pragmatic language competence. (p.244)

Long and Crookes (1991) stated that tasks have a clear pedagogic relationship to out-of-class language use. Task development is based on needs analysis. In the TBT-process, students play a central role. In the language teaching class, students are provided with plenty of opportunities to be engaged in activities, and the teacher is more like a patient listener rather than a talkative speaker. Therefore, TBT is both student-centered and task-based (Yu, 2007).

TBL recognizes both the importance of knowing how to do something and the need to know and understand the principles underlying the required action (Halloran, 2001). Rather than developing native-like, communicative competence, TBT may lead to the development of some sort of non-native competency which is full of communication strategies that make communicative task completion possible (Salmani-Nodoushan, 2007).

Salmani-Nodoushan (2007) has indicated the goals in TBT are to help language learners become more native-like in performance in a second or foreign language, develop more effective communicative efficiency in difficult performance circumstances, and become more accurate and fluent in communication. Willis (1996) emphasized that “tasks are always activities where the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose” (p.23). That is to say, communicative tasks are the core of TBT.
TBT is a well-integrated approach to language teaching which requires language teachers to organize classroom teaching with practical tasks so as to engage language learners in the ‘out there’ in the real world (Brown, 2001). TBL as a teaching and language learning strategy provides a framework to explore the pragmatic tasks involving in the classroom teaching and learning as well as in textbooks in this research.

3.5.3 Communicative language teaching

Teaching is an indispensable part of the language learning process. The origins of CLT can be traced back to the late 1960s and early 1970s. Current understandings of CLT can be traced back to Hymes (1972), who suggested that knowing a language should involve more than knowing a set of grammatical, lexical, and phonological rules. Language learners need to develop communicative competence, which is the ability to use the language they are learning properly in a given social encounter so as to use the language efficiently (Hiep, 2007).

Breen and Candlin (1980) viewed CLT in terms of syllabus and methodology. Stelma (2009) indicated that the central aspect of CLT is how to understand the concept of communication and how it should inform language teaching. A concern for communication, particular in functional practice, is one of the chief aspects of successful language learning (Ellis, 1994). CLT is based on a broad theoretical position about the nature of language and language learning and teaching (Brown, 1994). Richard and Rodgers (1986) described their understandings of CLT as follows:

Communicative Language Teaching is best considered an approach rather than a method. Thus although a reasonable degree of theoretical consistency can be discerned at the levels of language and learning theory, at the levels of design and procedure there is much greater room for individual interpretation and variation than most methods permit. (p.83)

Understanding communicative competence is one way of understanding CLT. Halliday’s (1973) work on the semantic potential of language, Hyme’s (1972) investigation of the relationship between language as a system and communication in
social situations, and Wilkins’ (1976) development of the analytical functional syllabus have great influence on the understanding of communicative competence.

Oller (1983) indicated that communicative competence include grammatical competence, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competence. Speakers need to draw on a variety of competencies when they use language for communication. Any definition of communicative competence indicates that communicative competence attempts to represent “in a few abstract constructs the complex realities of language use across an unforeseeable range of variation and situational contingency” (Lee, 2006, p.351). The range of changeability extends both to real-time situations and to variation in patterns of communication across and within not only small cultures but also large national cultures (Stelma, 2009).

Comprehending what is included in the process of communication is another way of understanding CLT. It is apparent that there is much correspondence between communication processes and language teaching, but there is also practical evidence that challenges as to which communication as process can inform language teaching.

Understanding the contexts in which communication takes place can help to understand CLT. CLT in language teaching has been carried out worldwide. Communication is universal; how we understand communication, how it is influenced by changes in society and technology, and how it is intertwined with context and cultures is complex (Stelma, 2009). Communication happens in different contexts, and the situational and cultural dynamic cannot be ignored in any context. CLT explores communication not only in its own language teaching situations, but also in small or large cultural contexts.

CLT theory suggests a focus on learning, and learning is likely to happen when classroom practices are made real and meaningful to learners. CLT requires more than attention to strategies for presenting the structures and functions of language; it requires the involvement of learners in the dynamic and interactive process of communication (Savignon, 1987). The aim CLT sets for language learning is to teach language learners to be able to use the language efficiently for their actual communicative needs, rather than merely to provide learners with knowledge about
the grammar system of the language (Hiep, 2007). Thus, CLT provides an essential aspect to investigate current College English teaching and learning in this study.

3.6 Summary

The three strands of theory, particularly their related key concepts, definitions, and arguments informed by SLA theory and research: Pragmatics, Intercultural communication, and ELF form a typology for a detailed examination of College English students’ perceptions and learning of English and pragmatics. The theory of SLA provides a broad framework for a deep analysis of learner behaviors such as perceptions, processes, strategies, learning tasks and materials. Theories of pragmatics, intercultural communication, and ELF allow for a focused study of issues that are related to the treatment of specific cultural assumptions, the relationship between different cultures, an understanding of English as an international language, as well as the relationship between the language use and its specific context.
CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Informed by the theoretical framework presented in the previous chapter, this chapter describes the research methods employed for data collection and analysis in this study as well as the detailed design of the study. The four instruments: a questionnaire, DCTs, semi-structured focus group interviews and a textbook tasks analysis, provide empirical evidence of Chinese students’ perceptions of pragmatics, their language learning strategies of learning English and pragmatics as well as their pragmatic competence relating to selected speech acts in College English learning. Procedures and processes of sample and data selection and analysis, as well as ethical considerations are also described.

4.1 Design of the study

Informed by Crotty (1998), the four basic elements in any research process are:

Methods – the techniques or procedures used to gather and analyze data related to some research questions or hypothesis; methodology – the strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods and linking the choice and use of methods to the desired outcomes; theoretical perspective – the philosophical stance informing the methodology and thus providing a context for the process and grounding its logic and criteria; epistemology – the theory of knowledge embedded in the theoretical perspective and thereby in the methodology. (Crotty, 1998, p.3)

The four elements inform one another, and their relationship is shown in Figure 4.1.
This research is designed as a case study conducted at a second-tier university in Shanghai, China. A case study focuses on “one (or just a few) instances of a particular phenomenon with a view to providing an in-depth account of events, relationships, experiences or processes occurring in that particular instance” (Denscombe, 2007, p.36). A case study is typically discussed under the label of qualitative research, and allows for a variety of research data collection methods (Bryman, 2001; Dörnyei, 2007), including quantitative data collection instruments (Verschuren, 2003). The case study has played an important role in applied linguistics research, particularly in studying first and second language acquisition (Nunan & Bailey, 2009). It encourages researchers to use multiple methods in order to maximize their understanding of characters of the social being or object studied (Denscombe, 2007; Dörnyei, 2007; Silverman, 2005).

As case studies have been used for a wide range of purposes in social research, they can be categorized into three specific types: exploratory, explanatory, and descriptive (Yin, 2003). The present study was exploratory in that the purpose was to explore College English students’ English pragmatics learning in the Chinese context, and to explore the issues students had in learning pragmatics. This study opens new research possibilities because there is a relative lack of research in this area, especially in China.
The case study approach allows the researcher to use a variety of sources, a variety of data and a variety of research methods as part of the investigation (Denscombe, 2007). Combining qualitative and quantitative methods to collect, analyze and mix data in a single study can help one understand research questions and gain a better understanding of a complex phenomenon (Creswell, 2005; Dörnyei, 2007; Johnson & Christensen, 2004). Mixed methods research also improves the validity of the research and reaches multiple audiences (Dörnyei, 2007).

Both quantitative and qualitative methods were applied in this study and data were collected and analyzed with quantitative techniques embedded into a primarily qualitative research framework. It was believed that a combined quantitative and qualitative approach was better than only one approach in discovering Chinese university students’ deeper perceptions and practice of pragmatics, as well as the language learning strategies used in their College English learning.

The combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches can assist to achieve a fuller understanding of a target phenomenon and improve the validity of the research (Sandelowski, 2003). Quantitative and qualitative methods were used in a sequential order where the results of the first method informed the development of the second (Dörnyei, 2007). Quantitative approaches usually help to map the major trends or features across a group under study, and then the subsequent qualitative approaches enable the researcher to present a more realistic picture of the reality of the situation and reveal more complexities (Erickson, 1991).

The study is informed by SLA theory and research, particularly the theoretical frameworks of Pragmatics, Intercultural communication and ELF. Theory of Pragmatics (Interlanguage pragmatics, Intercultural/Cross-cultural Pragmatics, Sociopragmatics, Pragmatic competence, Communicative competence, and Speech acts) are combined with theories of Intercultural communication (Interculturality, Intercultural communication, and Intercultural competence) and ELF to explore and theorize College English students’ perceptions of their language learning and pragmatic knowledge, their pragmatic competence as well as language learning strategies in learning pragmatics and English in general. Thus, the research design of this study can be presented in the following table.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Epistemology</th>
<th>Theoretical perspective</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Methods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Language learned through interaction, use and engagement in meaningful contexts</td>
<td>- SLA</td>
<td>- Case study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Pragmatics</td>
<td>- Mixed methods</td>
<td>- Discourse completion tasks (DCTs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Intercultural communication</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- English as a lingua franca</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Textbook tasks analysis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(adapted from Crotty, 1998, p.5)

There are two levels of universities or colleges in China: the university level (four-year study program for undergraduates) and the college level (three-year study program for undergraduates). This study was conducted at one university because College English teaching and learning at the university level has unified curriculum requirements and focuses on the students’ language development. In contrast, College English teaching and learning at the college level in China concentrates on professional development and curriculum requirements vary to suit different disciplinary studies.

After the researcher completed the design of the study, he contacted the Heads of the College English Department or Associate Deans of the Faculty of Foreign Languages of eight universities in Shanghai to request permission to conduct the research. Seven of them politely declined the request as they were worried that the study might disturb their normal classroom teaching and learning, and might cause psychological burdens to both students and teachers. One university agreed to the request to carry out the study. The university believed that it might be a good opportunity for them to learn about potential deficits in their teaching and learning processes and the results could promote their College English teaching and learning reform.
4.2 Participants

Participants in the study were first-year university students from one university in Shanghai studying College English courses in the second semester. The first-year students are usually streamlined into the College English classes at two levels (Level 1 and 2) according to the results of the English proficiency test given at the beginning of the first semester in second-tier universities in China. Data were collected after students had completed one-semester of study. This allowed for them to have adapted to study at university and to have acquired enough English language proficiency to participate in the research. Thus, the participants in this study were studying College English at levels 2 and 3.

Students were invited to participate in the study voluntarily and anonymously. They were fully informed of the aims and significance of the study by the researcher before the commencement of the study, and made their decisions independently as to whether to participate or not. They were also informed that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

A total of 237 first-year university students were invited to complete the questionnaire on a voluntary basis. Upon completion of the questionnaire, a sub-group of 55 students, who had completed the questionnaire were invited to voluntarily complete the DCTs two weeks after the questionnaire. From this group, 18 students volunteered to participate anonymously in focus group interviews one week after the DCTs.

4.3 Data collection

Quantitative data was gathered from closed-ended questions on the questionnaire and textbook tasks analysis, while the qualitative data was gathered from responses or transcripts of responses to open-ended questions on the questionnaire, the DCTs responses, and the transcripts from focus group interviews. The data collection procedures of this research took place in the following chronological order. First, approval was sought from the Human Ethical Committee of Queensland University of Technology. Then, data collection comprising a questionnaire, DCTs and semi-
structured focus group interviews occurred between February and March 2011 in Shanghai, China.

In order not to disturb students’ study routines, the study was conducted outside of normal teaching hours. The questionnaire, which took 30 minutes for students to complete, was conducted at a fixed time and place. Regarding DCTs, participants were organized into two groups to complete the 30 minute DCTs and different times were negotiated so as to avoid inconvenience. Participants of focus group interviews were arranged in two groups of nine in each, and times outside of normal teaching hours were negotiated in order not to disrupt participants’ study routines. Each group interview lasted for 60 minutes. Table 4.2 shows the details of the timeline and places for data collection.

**Table 4.2  Data collection timeline and place**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Data collection</th>
<th>Place</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>24th February 2011</td>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
<td>Room 1A 301, Teaching Building 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8th March 2011</td>
<td>Discourse Completion Tasks (Group 1)</td>
<td>Room 1A 301, Teaching Building 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10th March 2011</td>
<td>Discourse Completion Tasks (Group 2)</td>
<td>Room 1A 301, Teaching Building 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16th March 2011</td>
<td>Focus group interviews (Group 1)</td>
<td>Room 304, Building of Foreign Languages College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22nd March 2011</td>
<td>Focus group interview (Group 2)</td>
<td>Room 304, Building of Foreign Language College</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**4.4  Data analysis**

The process of data analysis is to obtain information that lies behind the surface content of the data. The researcher needs to interpret and analyze the collected data in a logical way in order to identify the crucial components used to explain the nature of the thing being studied (Denscombe, 2007). The raw quantitative data collected from the questionnaire and textbook tasks analysis in this study were used for
quantitative analysis, which is more straightforward than qualitative analysis to address research issues (Dörnyei, 2007). These data were transformed into numbers by the process of coding and applied to the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 17 for analysis.

The qualitative data collected in this study were transformed into textual forms and used for qualitative analysis. The analytic process followed the four basic principles: (a) the analysis of the data and the conclusions drawn from the research must be rooted in the data; (b) the researcher’s explanation of the data should come from a detailed study of the data; (c) unwarranted perceptions of data analysis should be avoided; and (d) the data analysis should include an iterative process (Denscombe, 2007).

The process of interpreting and analyzing the qualitative data in this study included: 1) coding the data; 2) categorizing the codes; 3) identifying themes and relationships among the codes and categories; and 4) developing some generalized statements.

The triangulation approach was used to examine and compare the data gathered from the different sources as this allows a better understanding of the phenomenon being studied by viewing it from different positions, which can enhance the validity of the data (Denscombe, 2007). “Interpretations that are built upon triangulation are certain to be stronger than those that rest on the more constricted framework of a single method” (Denzin, 1997, p.319).

Data from the questionnaire were used to identify overarching themes for the research. These themes were refined through analysis of the DCTs data, focus group interview data and textbook tasks analysis data. The collected data were coded according to the identified themes with the additional emerging themes noted. The four broad themes from the research included:

(a) students’ perceptions of pragmatics knowledge and pragmatic competence;
(b) pragmatics in College English learning and teaching;
(c) students’ levels of pragmatic competence; and
students’ perceptions and practice of language learning strategies in learning English and pragmatics.

The process of data analysis is shown in the following figure.

![Figure 4.2: Analysis of the data](image)

The following sections describe the research data collection and analysis methods used in the study.

### 4.5 Questionnaire

A questionnaire is one of the quantitative data collection instruments that can obtain a broad perspective from the research subjects (Denscombe, 2007). Questionnaires are defined as “any written instruments that present respondents with a series of questions or statements to which they are to react, either by writing out their answers or selecting from among existing answers” (Brown, 2001a, p.6). In addition, a questionnaire is one of the research techniques that can be classified as
‘introspective’ as it facilitates recollecting past experiences, analyzing current sensations, thinking about problems and planning for the future (Delamillieure, Doucet, Mazoyer, Turbelin, Delcroix, Mellet, Zago, Crivello, Petit, Tzourio-Mazoyer & Joliot, 2010).

A questionnaire is easy to arrange and provides standardized answers because all respondents are exposed to the same questions (Dörnyei, 2003, 2007; Denscombe, 2007). Moreover, a questionnaire encourages pre-coded answers which allow for the fast collation and analysis of data by the researcher. Respondents do not need to spend a lot of time working out how to express their opinions (Dörnyei, 2007). A questionnaire also provides accurate collected data for the researcher (Denscombe, 2007).

The questionnaire designed for this study consisted of multiple choice closed-ended, Likert-type questions, and three concluding open-ended questions to explore students’ perceptions of pragmatic knowledge in familiar situations and consisted of two sections. Questions were adapted from previous studies or were modified questions from the literature (for example, see Ji, 2008; Keshavarz, Eslami & Ghahraman, 2006; Nureddeen, 2008; Yuan & Shen, 2009). One example was derived as an authentic situation from the researcher’s life experience. In this section, there were 12 Likert-type questions with 5-point multiple choice answers ranging from: 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neutral; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree. The use of Likert-type scales can avoid loading participants with immense work and ensure an accurate report of the reality under study. A sample closed-ended question used in the research was: *I prefer my English class to be focused on communicative language teaching and practice, with grammar explained when necessary.* (The full questionnaire can be found in Appendix A.)

Three open-ended questions were included in the questionnaire. A sample of an open-ended question on the questionnaire was: *What kind of tasks do you think is necessary to improve students’ communicative ability in English language teaching and learning?* Open-ended questions let respondents decide the wording of the answer, the length of the answer and the kind of matters to be raised in the answer. The information gathered from open-ended questions was more likely to reflect the
full richness and complexity of the views held by the respondent. At the same time, respondents were given space to express themselves in their own words (Denscombe, 2007).

The questionnaire was in English, but students were allowed to answer the open-ended questions in English or in Chinese, whichever they felt would enable them to express themselves better. This method was used to ensure that the collected data were as accurate and precise as possible, however the researcher has acknowledged that because there is a difference in language and culture between Chinese and English there was a possibility that a fully accurate translation might not occur.

Language users’ L1 and first culture are sure to influence the use of their L2 or foreign language as they might transfer their L1 knowledge and thinking skills as well as their first culture to the use of an L2 or foreign language (Karsten, 1993; Liaw, 2006). Every effort was made by the researcher to ensure that translation of data was as accurate as possible. As the collected data were analyzed in English, a ‘back translation’ approach, that is, translating from Chinese to English, and back to Chinese, was used to ensure the reliability of the data. All transcripts were translated by professional translators to maintain validity as much as possible.

The first section of the questionnaire provided demographic information about the students. The information was analyzed to explore the implications of the relationship between the demographic features and students’ perceptions of pragmatics in College English learning in the Chinese context. The raw data were grouped and statistically transformed into a table reporting frequency and percentages.

In the second section of the questionnaire, 12 items used a 5-point Likert rating scale. They were used to rate students’ perceptions of pragmatics in College English learning and teaching. According to the criteria of mean (Oxford, 1990), a mean score equal or above 3.50 was interpreted as having a strong degree of impact (3.50 ≤ M ≤ 5.00 = strong); a mean score equal or above 2.50 but below 3.50 was interpreted as having a moderate impact (2.50 ≤ M < 3.50 = moderate), and a mean score below 2.50 was considered as having a weak degree of impact (M < 2.50 = weak).
Percentages, means, and standard deviations were used to analyze these statements. Results were presented in tables and figures, as well as described in words. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 17 was used to obtain statistical analysis of the data. The results of other questions were presented by bar charts, which are an effective way of presenting frequencies in research (Denscombe, 2007).

Open-ended questions in the second section aimed to draw out the students’ personal responses. Students were free to answer these questions by providing any information of their language learning experiences that was relevant. They were also encouraged to provide extra information. More than 75% of the answers to the open-ended questions were written in Chinese as the students were allowed to use whichever language they felt comfortable with when providing the answers. However, responses in English were an important means of exploring a confident and accurate representation of language learners’ identity in their L2 (Kramsch & Lam, 1999). The overlapping data were presented in word descriptions in one voice, and the unrelated and unnecessary information was not included in the data report.

The raw data collected from the second section of the questionnaire was coded into three themes: students’ perceptions of pragmatics in College English learning and teaching; students’ levels of pragmatic competence, and students’ perceptions and practice of language learning strategies that were reported in the next chapter.

4.6 Discourse Completion Tasks (DCTs)

First employed by Blum-Kulka (1982) to explore pragmatic speech acts, DCTs have become one of the most commonly used research instruments in pragmatics research (Kasper & Rose, 2002; Roever, 2010). Zuskin (1993) highlighted that a DCT is a data collecting device particularly designed to obtain responses to problematic, contextually-specific prompts. To some degree, DCTs have become essential tools in eliciting language responses. In interlanguage and cross-cultural pragmatics research, DCTs are used as the standard way of gathering data because they allow a fast and targeted collection of a large amount of data (Roever, 2010). Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989) and Parvaresh and Tavakoli (2009) have indicated that DCTs, as
pragmatics tools, are not only used for examining the L2 pragmatic knowledge, but also for pragmatic research in the L1.

This research used a WDCT, which requested students to read a written description of a situation and then asked them to write down what they would say in that situation (Blum-Kulka, 1982; Brown, 2001b; Parvaresh & Tavakoli, 2009). Cohen and Olshtain (1994) suggested that discourse completion “is a projective measure of speaking and so the cognitive processes involved in producing utterances in response to this elicitation device may not truly reflect those used when having to speak relatively naturally” (Cohen & Olshtain, 1994, p.13). WDCTs do not require participants to interact conversationally, only to write responses which they would use in certain situations. Such responses can indirectly reveal a participant’s accumulated experience within a given situation (Woodfield, 2008). Thus, WDCTs represent highly constrained instruments of data collection.

The use of DCTs (see Appendix B) in this study aimed to collect data about students’ pragmatic knowledge, levels of pragmatic competence and their strategies in using English. A sub-group of 55 students who had completed the questionnaire were invited to complete the DCTs. Students were provided with sufficient time and privacy to consider whether to continue to participate in the DCTs or not. They were allowed to withdraw from the study at any point of time. Twenty situations adapted from previous studies (for example, see Allami & Naeimi, 2011; Bataineh & Bataineh, 2006; Chen & Yang, 2009; Keshavarz, Eslami & Ghahraman, 2006; Lorenzo-Dus, 2001; Schauer & Adolphs, 2006; Tanck, 2004) were used in the DCTs and all of the situations were in English. For example, students were asked to write a response in the blank after “you”:

You are wearing a new Rolex watch. You meet one friend at your office.

Friend: Wow! What a nice watch! I wish I had one like that.

You: ____________________________

The three selected speech acts of refusal, compliment response, and apology were applied in DCTs. Students had to complete these questions in English rather than
having a choice of English or Chinese in order to analyze students’ pragmatic knowledge and pragmatic competence as well as strategies in using English.

The raw data were classified into three different groups in accordance with their speech act types. In each group, short expressions relating to each different speech act were reported in frequency and percentages in order to give a brief picture of pragmatic knowledge and pragmatic competence, and followed by students’ responses in each situation. The overlapping data was reported in one voice.

4.7 Semi-structured focus group interviews

Interviewing is a most often used data collection strategy to acquire people’s insights on social phenomena (Dörnyei, 2007). Interviews are an often-used tool for researchers and involve a set of assumptions and understandings about the situation that are not generally connected with a casual conversation (Denscombe, 1983; Silverman, 1985). In a variety of applied linguistic contexts, interviews can help acquire language learners’ rich and complex experiences and the understanding of the experience both inside and outside the classroom (Dörnyei, 2007; Tinto, 1995).

Interviews are especially good at producing data which deal with topics in depth and in detail. The researcher can obtain valuable insights based on the depth of the information gathered. Interviews need only simple equipment and build on conversational skills that researchers already have. Meanwhile, informants have the opportunity to expand their ideas and explain their views during the interview. Interviews are probably the most flexible strategy, for some adjustments to the lines of enquiry can be made during the interview itself. (Denscombe, 2007).

Interviews can be classified from “unstructured, semi-structured to structured on a continuum” (Nunan, 1992, p.149) in accordance with the degree of formality of the relationship between interviewer and interviewee. Semi-structured interviews are useful as they fall between structured and unstructured interview formats. Moreover, they are partially interviewer-led and informant-led (Arksey & Knight, 1999). Interviews have a clear list of issues to be addressed and questions to be answered, while interviewees can develop ideas and speak more widely on issues raised by the
researcher (Denscombe, 2007). Dörnyei (2007) highlighted the characteristics of semi-structured interviews as follows:

The semi-structured interview is suitable for cases when the researcher has a good enough overview of the phenomenon or domain in question and is able to develop broad questions about the topic in advance but does not want to use ready-made response categories that would limit the depth and breadth of the respondent’s story. (p.136)

In the interview, the interviewer offers guidance and direction and is also keen on interviewee’s emerging worldview of certain issues (Merriam, 1998). With this in mind, semi-structured interviews were used in this research.

All participants of a focus group interview have similar knowledge or experience on the topic and, as a group, they can channel the discussion onto something specific and concrete. During a focus group session, participants are encouraged to discuss the topic among themselves, which can lead to a consensus and shared viewpoint. This interaction provides the researcher with a method of investigating the reasoning behind the views and opinions that are expressed by group members. The ideal size of focus groups is between six and nine people and the ideal length time is about one and a half to two hours (Denscombe, 2007).

The aim of interviews in this study was to collect data about students’ viewpoints on their knowledge, competence, and language learning strategies for acquiring pragmatic knowledge in the College English learning process. All the data collected from interviews assisted in learning more about the students’ understanding and practice of the present College English learning and teaching, especially in pragmatics.

A total of 18 students who had finished DCTs were invited to take part in the focus group interviews. A sample interview question for the study was: How important do you think it is to develop students’ pragmatic competence (ability to use English appropriately)? (The full interview protocol is attached as Appendix C.) During the interview, the researcher recorded field notes to aid in the data analysis. Students were asked a series of questions regarding pragmatic knowledge acquisition,
pragmatic competence and language learning strategies practice in their College English learning process. Some clarifications to the questions were provided to avoid misunderstandings between the interviewer and interviewees.

The interview questions were modified questions from the literature (for example, see Chen, 2009; Ersözü, 2010; Hudson, 2001; Martínez-Flor & Alcón-Soler, 2007; Takahashi, 2001; Tuncer, 2009; Yılmaz, 2010; Zheng & Huang, 2010), from the questionnaire data and from the DCTs data and were prepared in both English and Chinese. Interviews were conducted in Chinese because participants could understand the interview questions better and express themselves much more freely and accurately in their L1. Using L1 in the interviews helped to produce a relaxing and comfortable atmosphere for the participants. The intent was to facilitate the interview process and generate more accurate data. Thus, all written records were in Chinese and back translated as previously described.

During the interviews, the researcher tried not to interrupt the interviewees’ responses. The questions were asked according to the flow of the conversation. Each interviewee was able to take his or her time to respond and explore his or her ideas as they related to the various questions. As the interviews were carried out in two groups, it was very common that the students had the same opinion on the same subject. Accordingly, it was essential for the researcher to compare the collected data and remove the overlapping data so as to avoid redundancy.

The collected qualitative data were categorized into five themes in the data report:
(a) students’ perceptions of pragmatic knowledge;
(b) students’ perceptions of pragmatic competence;
(c) students’ perceptions of pragmatics in College English learning and teaching;
(d) students’ perceptions of pragmatic information in textbooks; and
(e) students’ perceptions and practice of language learning strategies in learning English.

These themes were used to clarify understanding about students’ perceptions and practice in regards to learning College English in general and pragmatics in particular.
4.8 Textbook tasks analysis

Textbook tasks analysis is a method that allows the researcher to analyze the tasks involved in textbooks. It is a technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of the structure of learning tasks in textbooks (Bazeley, 2003). Textbook tasks analysis provides a way for quantifying tasks included in textbooks by using a means of measuring quantitatively the number and kinds of tasks and presenting these as tables and graphs. The purpose of textbook tasks analysis in this study was to explore the nature of learning tasks provided by Chinese College English textbooks as it is proposed in this research that these prescribed learning tasks may have effects on the development of students’ pragmatic competence.

*New College English* (Li, 2001, 2002, 2003), one of the four typical College English set of textbook (*New College English, New Horizon College English, Experiencing English,* and *TAPESTRY English*) recommended by the Ministry of Education of China in 2004, was selected for the textbook tasks analysis in this study. This set of textbooks is divided into six levels, and each level involves Integrated Course books, Listening and Speaking Course books, Extensive Reading Course books, and Fast Reading Course books. According to the information provided by Shanghai Foreign Languages and Education Press, *New College English* is used nationwide by about 2.4 million university students every year and it is used more than the other three sets of textbooks.

This study chose four main textbooks: Integrated Course book 1, 2, 3, and 4 (student’s book), from the set of *New College English* for analysis. Most College English classroom teaching and learning time concentrates on the study of Integrated Course books, and the other books are for students’ self-study or after-class assignments. These four books are used over the four semesters of College English classroom teaching and learning and provide a good scope of expected teaching and learning that occurs in the classroom.

The data collected from textbook tasks analysis was quantitative data, which was used to support the data collected from the questionnaire and interviews. The data focused on the English language learning and teaching tasks provided by the College
English textbooks as language tasks helped learners practice the target language by integrating corresponding content (Candlin & Murphy, 1987). Tasks provided by the textbooks were analyzed according to different focuses, such as linguistic tasks and pragmatic tasks. The results were statistically transformed into tables by reporting frequency and percentage scores as well as word descriptions.

4.9 Validity and reliability

Validity and reliability are concepts closely related to the quality of a study. It is often believed that there is no validity without reliability (Nunan & Bailey, 2009). ‘Validity’ is another word for truth (Silverman, 2005) and is “a property of the conclusions, interpretations or inferences that we draw from the assessment instruments and procedures, not the instruments and procedures themselves” (Lynch, 2003, p.149). It is a quality of the interpretations and a unitary concept that is supported by different types of evidence (Bachman, 2004). By applying multiple sources of data that demonstrated the convergence of data from different sources, and setting up a chain of evidence to the research questions (Yin, 2003), increased validity was lent to the current study.

Reliability refers to the “consistencies of data, scores or observations obtained using elicitation instruments, which can include a range of tools from standardized tests administered in educational settings to tasks completed by participants in a research study” (Chalhoub-Deville, 2006, p.2). In other words, reliability has to do with consistency (Nunan & Bailey, 2009), and indicates the degree to which measurement instruments and procedures produce consistent results in a given population in various circumstances (Dörnyei, 2007). In order to secure the reliability of this study, specific procedures of the study need to be clarified and documented to avoid inconsistencies or measurement error if other researchers follow the same procedures to repeat the study (Bachman, 2004; Yin, 2003). This was achieved through careful record keeping and data collection to ensure that a consistency of practices was maintained through the course of the research.
4.10 Ethical issues

As human beings were involved in the study, ethical issues had to be considered in conducting the study. The research project was conducted after the approval had been obtained from the Human Ethics Committee of Queensland University of Technology. All participants were informed by the researcher in advance, and they were fully aware of their roles in the study and had adequate preparation for the research. No participant was coerced into the study. Every participant could withdraw from the study at any point of time without repercussions, such as academic penalty. All the collected data were securely and confidentially kept. To ensure anonymity, participants were identified with pseudonyms in all research processes, including the questionnaire data collection and analysis, DCTs data collection and analysis, and the questionnaire and focus group interviews transcripts. Transcriptions were de-identified before translations took place.

4.11 Summary

This chapter has presented a detailed description of the research methodology of this study, including the discussion of the procedures and processes of sampling, data collection and data analysis. Students from a second-tier university in Shanghai, China were invited to participate in the questionnaire (N=237), DCTs (N=55) and interviews (N=18), and tasks in the *New College English* Integrated Course books were examined. The questionnaire, DCTs, semi-structured interviews and textbook tasks analysis were the primary instruments for gathering both quantitative and qualitative data. The data from the different sources were cross-checked through a process of triangulation. In the next chapter, a detailed data report is presented.
CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH DATA REPORT

The previous chapter described the research methodology and, in particular, the four research instruments: the questionnaire, DCTs, semi-structured focus group interviews and textbook tasks analysis, used in collecting and analyzing the data in this empirical study. In this chapter, both qualitative and quantitative data on how College English students acquire pragmatic knowledge and practice pragmatic knowledge in both language learning classrooms and daily life is reported. In addition, how students apply language learning strategies in learning English and pragmatics is presented. The collected data are reported and described by categorizing them into different themes. Analyses of the data are presented in Chapter 6.

5.1 Questionnaire data

This section reports on the findings of the questionnaire in regard to the three research questions: 1) What are Chinese College English students’ perceptions of pragmatics in their English learning? 2) To what extent do College English students focus on their pragmatic knowledge in their English learning? What are their levels of pragmatic competence? 3) How do College English students apply their language learning strategies in the learning of English and pragmatics? Quantitative data gathered from 237 participants’ responses to the questionnaire were analyzed by means of descriptive statistics, while qualitative data were analyzed by matching text to themes then collapsing these themes into categories.

5.1.1 Demographic data

In the first section of the questionnaire, students supplied their personal demographic data. Approximately 90% of the students were males, and 10% were females; about 73% of the students were aged 20 years or over, with 27% under 20 years. Around 5% of the students majored in liberal arts, 7% in science, 44% in engineering, and 44% of the students specialized in other subjects. Around 80% of the students had learned English for six to ten years; with 14% for more than ten years, and around 6% had learned English for less than six years. Only one student reported having an
overseas learning experience. Around 81% of the students had finished studying the College English I course and were undertaking the College English II course, and around 19% of the students, who took the College English III course, were involved in the College English fast teaching class. Table 5.1 shows a summary of demographic data of the students who participated in the questionnaire.

Table 5.1 Demographic data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>89.87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>10.13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 20</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>27.43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 or over 20</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>72.57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Major</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal Arts</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4.64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7.17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>44.31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>43.88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Length of learning English</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 6 years</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5.91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>80.17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 10 years</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>13.92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Overseas English language learning experience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>99.58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Course</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College English II</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>81.01%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College English III</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>18.99%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.1.2 Students’ perceptions of pragmatics in College English learning and teaching

This section reports on the questionnaire findings regarding the research question:

What are Chinese College English students’ perceptions of pragmatics in their
English learning? The questionnaire (see Appendix A) investigated how students viewed pragmatics in learning English as a foreign language in China.

With respect to the relationship between linguistic knowledge and pragmatic knowledge, students highlighted the importance of acquiring both linguistic knowledge and pragmatic knowledge in a balanced way in the learning process (see Table 5.2). Questions 7 and 8 looked at students’ views on linguistic knowledge and pragmatic knowledge, and a moderate degree of impact was reported for Question 7 (Mean=2.70) and Question 8 (Mean=3.37). Less than 40% of the students agreed that learning English grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation meant learning English, while nearly 60% of the students believed that they needed to acquire other knowledge besides linguistic knowledge. More than 65% of the students believed that the knowledge of how to use the language – pragmatic knowledge, was equally important as linguistic knowledge in learning a language.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q7</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>16.87%</td>
<td>40.51%</td>
<td>5.91%</td>
<td>29.54%</td>
<td>7.17%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q8</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>3.37</td>
<td>1.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>10.97%</td>
<td>21.10%</td>
<td>2.53%</td>
<td>50.63%</td>
<td>14.77%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: SD= Strongly Disagree, D= Disagree, N= Neutral, A= Agree, SA= Strongly Agree
Q7  I believe learning English grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation mean learning English.
Q8  I think that the knowledge of how to use the language is as important as linguistic knowledge (e.g., vocabulary and grammar).

From the above data, it appears that students recognized that knowledge other than linguistic knowledge is equally important in the language learning process. The data suggest that students seemed to be aware of the importance of pragmatic knowledge in the use of the English language. When asked to list the most preferred knowledge that students desired in English classroom teaching, more than 50% of the students responded that they liked to learn communication skills, less than 20% of the students wanted to acquire the knowledge on how to use English, and around 13% of the students indicated that they wanted to learn cultural knowledge. Only about 11%
of the students indicated that they preferred to learn linguistic knowledge (see Figure 5.1).

![Bar chart showing the percentage of students who prefer linguistic knowledge, cultural knowledge, communicative skills, and knowledge on how to use English.](image)

**Figure 5.1  Knowledge students want to acquire most in English classroom teaching**

When it comes to the ability students want to gain most in their English learning, around 66% of them indicated that they wanted to acquire the ability to communicate with people. Around 17% of the students indicated that they wanted to obtain the ability to do well in English examinations, around 12% of the students wanted to acquire the ability to read materials related to their majors, and around 5% indicated that they preferred to gain the ability to translate (see Figure 5.2)

![Bar chart showing the percentage of students who want to acquire different abilities.](image)

**Figure 5.2  Ability students want to gain most in English learning**

Being communicatively competent language users appeared to be College English students’ learning aim because a strong degree of impact was reported for Question
12 (Mean=3.84) and Question 18 (Mean=3.78) (see Table 5.3). Nearly 80% of the students indicated that they would like to show their admiration to people who can fluently and accurately communicate with others in English. More than 75% of the students wished to speak like English native speakers and would like to imitate native speakers’ pronunciation and intonation. Question 9 (Mean=2.53) investigated students’ learning purpose (see Table 5.3). Only 30% of the students conceded that the main reason for them to learn English was to pass the examination.

Table 5.3  Students’ views on English language learning outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q9</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>1.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>18.14%</td>
<td>51.48%</td>
<td>0.42%</td>
<td>19.41%</td>
<td>10.55%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q12</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>1.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
<td>13.50%</td>
<td>0.42%</td>
<td>44.73%</td>
<td>33.75%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q18</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>1.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>11.39%</td>
<td>12.24%</td>
<td>1.27%</td>
<td>37.12%</td>
<td>37.98%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: SD= Strongly Disagree, D= Disagree, N= Neutral, A= Agree, SA= Strongly Agree
Q9 The main reason I need to learn English is to pass the examination.
Q12 I admire the people who can communicate with others in English fluently and accurately.
Q18 I wish to speak like native English speakers and would like to imitate their pronunciation and intonation.

As indicated by the responses to Question 18, most of the students wanted to imitate native English speakers’ pronunciation and intonation. Influenced by society and classroom teaching, there are different kinds of Englishes the students want to learn to use as a tool in communication. More than 50% of the students responded that they would like to learn to use American English, about 26% of the students indicated a preference to learn British English, around 16% of the students indicated a preference to learn Chinese English, and only three students (1%) responded that they wanted to learn other varieties of English (see Figure 5.3). These results show that students might have a strong desire for classroom teaching to be focused on CLT and practice.
Table 5.4 indicates students’ views on communicative language and teaching practices in College English classrooms and includes responses to Questions 11, 13 and 16 of the questionnaire. A strong degree of impact was reported for Question 16 (Mean=3.62) and Question 13 (Mean=4.00) (see Table 5.4). Around 70% of the students showed a strong preference that English class activities should be concentrated on CLT and practice, with grammar explained only when necessary, and more than 81% of the students indicated that language teachers should teach students how to communicate with people and how to use English appropriately in classroom activities. A weak degree of impact was reported for Question 11 (Mean=2.08). Less than 20% of the students indicated that communicative activities in the English class were a waste of time, while nearly 80% of the students held the opposite view. These results indicate the importance to students of including CLT and practices in the classroom.
Tasks, which are used for a communicative purpose, can help language learners develop communicative competence in the target language effectively (Salmani-Nodoushan, 2007; Willis, 1996). Students were provided with an opportunity to respond to a series of open-ended questions to provide more information about their perceptions in relation to developing and practicing pragmatics in their learning. The first open-ended question investigated the tasks that students thought were necessary to improve their communicative ability in English language learning.

Open-ended question 1

What kind of tasks do you think is necessary to improve students’ communicative ability in English language teaching and learning?

In each response, there were at least two tasks listed by student respondents. Thus, tasks were classified and presented in a frequency table as follows (see Table 5.5):
Table 5.5  Necessary tasks to improve students’ communicative ability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tasks</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Watching original English films and videos</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>82.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Reading original English materials (e.g., newspapers, magazines)</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>76.79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Group discussions</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>75.11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Debate</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>45.15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Pair-work (e.g., practicing dialogues)</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>43.04%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Learning to sing English songs</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>40.93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Role play</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>30.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Presentations</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10.55%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen in the table above more than 82% of the students indicated that watching original English films and videos was helpful in improving their communicative ability. Around 77% of the responses showed that students preferred to improve their communicative ability through reading original English materials and participating in group discussions. Classroom tasks of debate, pair-work and learning to sing English songs were close in preference by the students, 45%, 43% and 41%, respectively. About 30% of the students indicated that role play was the task that they would like to do to develop their communicative ability. Around 11% of the students specified that doing classroom presentations was the preferred task for them to do to improve their communicative ability.

Different explanations were given by the students in listing tasks they thought essential in developing their communicative ability (see Appendix D). More than half (N=136) of the respondents explained that it was very helpful to Chinese university students to be exposed to original authentic English materials, such as English movies and videos, English newspapers and magazines, English news reports, English songs and so on. These were interesting and vivid teaching materials through which students could learn native-like English. Meanwhile, while using these materials, students could develop a feel of the language that could help them improve their communicative ability (Cai, 2007).
Fifty-one students indicated that tasks, such as group discussions, role play, pair-work and debate, would help them gain confidence in their use of English. Group work helps build up students’ confidence where individual differences can support other’s strengths and overcome shortcomings (Fushino, 2010; Hoegl & Gemuenden, 2001). Two students gave their responses to this question by indicating a preference for group work over whole class presentations. They indicated that giving presentations in front of the others in class made them feel nervous as they were afraid of making mistakes, especially grammatical mistakes, which made them feel embarrassed and lose face.

In regard to the pragmatically oriented tasks that College English teachers most often used in the classroom teaching, respondents indicated that group discussion (27%), debate (28%) and pair-work (28%) were used with a similar frequency in the classroom. Role-play was the least used task in the classroom teaching at 16% (see Figure 5.4).

![Figure 5.4 Pragmatically oriented tasks most often used in classroom teaching](image)

Regarding classroom learning and teaching, although a moderate degree of impact was reported for Question 17 (Mean=2.95) (see Table 5.6), more than 50% of the students indicated their dislike of “grammar translation” and “vocabulary translation” methodology. In terms of the tasks and textbooks used in the classroom, a moderate degree of impact was reported for Question 10 (Mean=2.80) and Question 15.
(Mean=2.59) (see Table 5.6). More than 67% of the students did not believe that the tasks applied in the classroom would provide them with sufficient knowledge and skills to improve their abilities to use English appropriately. Less than 40% of the students responded that the College English textbooks they used in the classroom could provide information about culture, conversation rules, usage, and pragmatic knowledge.

### Table 5.6  Students’ views on classroom learning and teaching

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q10</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>1.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q15</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>1.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q17</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>1.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: SD= Strongly Disagree, D= Disagree, N= Neutral, A= Agree, SA= Strongly Agree

Q10  College English textbooks provide much information on culture, conversation rules, usage, and how to use English correctly.

Q15  Tasks used in English class provide me knowledge and skills to improve my ability to use English appropriately.

Q17  I like grammar and vocabulary explanation, and sentence drills in my English class.

Students gave their views on current Chinese College English teaching and learning in answering the third open-ended question. This question was posed to better understand students’ perceptions, in particular, to the use of pragmatics.

**Open-ended question 3**

*Do you believe that the current College English teaching and learning will enable you to improve your ability to communicate with people and to use English appropriately? Why or why not?*

One hundred and ninety-five students (82%) gave a negative response. The reasons for these negative responses were summarized and are listed as follows:
(a) College English teachers spent most of the time in class explaining linguistic knowledge in detail, such as grammar, vocabulary, sentence structures, and so on.

(b) The current classroom teaching and learning was teacher-centered. Teachers paid little attention to the development of students’ pragmatic competence.

(c) Students were not given chances or time to practice their communicative ability in the English class because College English was taught in large classes; commonly 70 or more students in one classroom.

(d) College English teaching and learning was examination-oriented. Both students and teachers focused their attention on passing the College English Test (Band Four and Band Six).

(e) The texts selected in College English textbooks were out-dated and the tasks provided by the textbooks focused on the development of students’ linguistic competence rather than pragmatic competence.

(f) It appeared hard for students to get updated authentic English language learning materials that suited them well.

(g) Students had few chances to communicate with native English speakers either in class or after class.

The students’ positive responses are as follows:

(a) College English teachers sometimes conveyed knowledge of a few simple communicative functions in the classroom teaching, such as asking the way, booking a hotel, etc.

(b) Occasionally, students could apply these functions in their daily life, if necessary.

(c) Teachers occasionally taught students skills and strategies on how to correctly apply language communicative functions to appropriate contexts.

The results indicated that there was a perceived importance and necessity for improving students’ perceptions of pragmatics in learning EFL in China. Having good perceptions of pragmatics can better help language learners develop their pragmatic competence, and provide learning opportunities to develop pragmatics through appropriately directed tasks. The next section presents the data about students’ levels of pragmatic competence.
5.1.3 Students’ levels of pragmatic competence

The questionnaire data reported in this section is in regard to the research question:
*To what extent do College English students focus on their pragmatic knowledge in their English learning? What are their levels of pragmatic competence?* There are five different situations designed in the questionnaire to examine students’ levels of pragmatic competence as well as their pragmatic knowledge. The situations were adapted from the researcher’s life experience and from previous studies (for example, see Ji, 2008; Keshavarz, Eslami & Ghahraman, 2006; Nureddeen, 2008).

The first situation depicts an episode that occurred between a native English speaker (ticket seller) and a non-native English speaker (customer Tom) in an English speaking country. The customer was buying a ticket at the booking office of a theme park and he requested a map of the theme park. He felt puzzled at the reply from the ticket seller – “What’s your post code?” Then, the ticket seller explained – “Where are you from?” In actual fact, the ticket seller wanted to know the language the customer used so that he could be given a map of the theme park in the appropriate language.

This situation was included in this study to learn whether Chinese students, non-native English speakers, could understand the question from the ticket seller. The results showed that less than 20% of the students got the implied meaning of the question from the ticket seller. More than 40% of the students believed that the ticket seller wanted to get Tom’s post code. Nearly 24% of the students thought that the ticket seller wanted to find out Tom’s post code on the map, and around 17% of the participants thought that the ticket seller wanted to register Tom’s address (see Figure 5.5).
The second situation came from a movie where a conversation took place between two native English speakers. A villain, Jack, met one of his acquaintances, Richard, in the corridor in a hospital. When Jack told Richard that he was going to get a new heart, the answer from Richard – “It is about time.” implied that Jack needed to acknowledge his evil behaviors and totally change his actions. Less than 30% of the students understood what Richard was indicating. Around 35% of the students thought that Jack had become a good man. Approximately 20% of the students believed that Jack had found a new heart to cure his heart disease. And around 16% of the students considered that Jack had a serious heart disease and needed a new heart (see Figure 5.6).

Figure 5.5  Students’ pragmatic competence - situation 1
The next three situations were adapted from past studies focusing on language learners’ competence in using English (for example, see Ji, 2008; Keshavarz, Eslami & Ghahraman, 2006; Nureddeen, 2008). In the first of three situations, Mary put a heavy bag on the bus shelf while travelling. The bus stopped suddenly and the bag fell on a passenger. The passenger was scared and complained, and the reply from Mary was, “It is my bag. It’s all right.” The findings from the questionnaire showed that more than 40% of the students believed that Mary had given an inappropriate answer to the passenger, and around 28% of the students thought Mary’s answer was not at all appropriate. However, around 21% of the students thought Mary had given an appropriate answer. Twenty students (8%) believed that Mary’s response was very appropriate (see Figure 5.7).
In the second situation, a university student borrowed a book from his teacher, but he forgot to return the book to the teacher on time. When the teacher asked whether or not the student had brought the book, the reply from the student was “Sorry, I forgot. Don’t worry. I will bring it tomorrow.” The results indicated that more than 41% of the students thought that it was not an appropriate answer. While more than 28% of the participants believed that the student’s answer was not at all appropriate. Around 21% of the students thought that the reply was appropriate, and 20 students (8.43%) thought that the student’s response was very appropriate (see Figure 5.8).

While traveling, Mary put a heavy bag on the bus shelf. The bus stopped suddenly and the bag fell on a passenger.

Figure 5.7 Students’ pragmatic competence - situation 3

A university student borrowed his teacher's book and promised to returned it that day. When he reached the university, he discovered that he forgot the book at home.

Figure 5.8 Students’ pragmatic competence - situation 4
In the last situation, Mary was at John’s house, and she was offered dessert by John after dinner. Mary was full and she refused the offer twice by saying “Thanks. I am full” and “No more, thanks.” More than 40% of the students thought that Mary had given an appropriate reply and more than 22% of the students believed that Mary’s answer was very appropriate. On the other hand, more than 26% of the students thought Mary had not given an appropriate reply, and around 11% of the students believed that Mary’s response was not at all appropriate (see Figure 5.9).

**Figure 5.9  Students’ pragmatic competence - situation 5**

The data presented above indicated that College English students’ levels of pragmatic competence in this study was generally low because many of them were not able to understand the implied meaning in the settings (see Situation 1 and 2) and correctly use appropriate speech acts in corresponding situations (see Situation 3, 4 and 5). In order to be efficient language learners and become pragmatically competent, students must learn how to apply language learning strategies in English language learning process (Chinese College English Education and Supervisory Committee, 2007) as language learning strategies can facilitate College English students to better acquire language knowledge and achieve their learning outcomes in efficient ways. The next section presents the data about students’ perceptions and practice of language learning strategies in learning English, particularly in learning pragmatics.
5.1.4 Students’ perceptions and practice of language learning strategies

This section reports on the questionnaire findings concerning the research question: *How do College English students apply their language learning strategies in the learning of English and pragmatics?* The questionnaire examined how students learned English and pragmatics by using different language learning strategies. As College English students generally do not receive any professional education in SLA, it is more than likely that they are not aware of specific terms used in language learning strategies. Therefore, rather than using the specific language of SLA, students were required to list different methods or activities they were involved in while learning English. These methods or activities were categorized into specific language learning strategies such as: direct strategies, which directly involve the target language, and indirect strategies that support and manage language learning without directly involving the target language (Oxford, 1990). A further explanation of these strategies is discussed in Chapter 6 in the analysis of the data.

The second opened-ended question in the study required students to list essential language learning strategies that they believe assisted them to improve pragmatic competence in learning English. The results are as follows.

Open-ended question 2:

*What kind of language learning strategies do you think is necessary to improve the students’ pragmatic competence in English language learning?*

The students’ responses suggested the different strategies they use in learning English, particularly in learning pragmatics. The results are summarized below (see Table 5.7).
Table 5.7  Language learning strategies to improve students’ pragmatic competence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language learning strategies</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Memorizing English words, expressions and texts</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>92.83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Imitating native English speakers’ pronunciation and intonation</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>83.12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Cooperating with others</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>77.22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Note-taking</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>69.62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Translation</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>65.82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Preparing lessons in advance</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>55.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Guessing the meaning of (key) words and sentences from the context</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>40.93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Using some images and videos</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>36.29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Self-management or self-monitoring</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>13.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Self-evaluation</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>11.39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Transferring the knowledge and thinking skills of Chinese to learning English</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7.17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Selective attention</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Contextualization</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4.64%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results above indicated that around 93% of the students preferred to use the strategy of memorizing English words, expressions and texts in learning English. More than 83% of them liked to imitate native English speakers’ pronunciation and intonation. One hundred and eighty-three students (77%) would like to work in cooperation with others, and 165 students (70%) preferred note-taking skills while learning English. More than 65% of the students preferred to use a translation method. One hundred and thirty-two students (56%) indicated that they had a habit of preparing for their lessons in advance. More than 40% of the students wanted to apply the skill of guessing the meaning of (key) words and sentences from the context, and around 36% of the students liked to use some images in learning English. Thirty-two students (14%) indicated that self-management or self-monitoring was necessary to improve students’ pragmatic competence, and only 27 students (11%) believed that self-evaluation was necessary. Seven percent of students wanted to use the skills of transferring the knowledge and thinking skills of Chinese to learning English, selective attention was around 7% and contextualization was about 5%.
The students listed various reasons why they thought it necessary to use different language learning strategies to improve their pragmatic competence in learning English. One hundred and eighty-seven students (79%) agreed that Chinese students were asked to memorize English new words, expressions and texts by their teachers when they started to learn EFL in primary school so they were used to applying memory strategies in learning English. Students indicated that they were encouraged to imitate English native speakers’ pronunciation and intonation while learning English. Ninety-seven students (41%) indicated that Chinese English teachers asked students to do preview work before class, and this strategy helped students better acquire knowledge in class. Students indicated that they were also required to do note-taking during class as this could help them do revision after class.

More than 75% of the students indicated that the translation method was often used to learn English, and that cooperating with other students helped them overcome their fear in the English learning process and helped them gain confidence. Jesse in the interview of this study (Jesse: 22 March, 2011) indicated that students might feel safe in group work to overcome their fear of using English. More detail of the interview data will be discussed below. Fifty-nine students (25%) pointed out that they were encouraged by their English teachers to guess the meaning of (key) words and sentences from the context of scenarios in their textbooks before looking the words up in the dictionary to help them develop their reading skills.

Five students (2%) highlighted that they did not know how to conduct self-management or self-evaluation although they were aware that self-management and self-evaluation could help them in learning English. Sixty-five students (27%) agreed that using images and videos in learning English made the learning more vivid. It was much easier for students to take in new language knowledge when it was provided in a natural context. Three students (1%) pointed out that selective attention helped them improve their learning more efficiently, but they had not received any specific instructions on how to use or develop this strategy. Only two students (0.84%) indicated that learning English in China needed to consider the Chinese context, and applying L1 knowledge and thinking skills in learning English could help language learners better use English in the Chinese context (see Appendix D).
When asked to list the most effective way of learning English, nearly 30% of the students indicated that they would like to imitate a language model and apply the model in a new context. Other strategies included doing self-studying and self-evaluation (24%), memorizing vocabularies and reciting texts (23%), and doing sentence drills and translation exercises (23%) (see Figure 5.10).

**Figure 5.10 Most effective way of learning English**

In a practical situation, a moderate degree of impact was reported for Question 14 (Mean=3.05) showing students’ views on the practice of language learning strategies in the English language learning process. More than 53% of the students indicated that they knew how to obtain cultural knowledge and appropriateness of language use in the English learning process. In contrast, around 46% of the students indicated that they did not know the right way to gain the needed knowledge. It appeared that nearly 50% of the students did not know the appropriate language learning strategies to acquire cultural knowledge or knowledge of the appropriateness use of the language (see Table 5.8).
Table 5.8  Students’ views on the practice of language learning strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q14</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>1.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>11.81% 34.60% 0.84% 42.62% 10.13%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: SD= Strongly Disagree, D= Disagree, N= Neutral, A= Agree, SA= Strongly Agree
Q14 I know how to obtain cultural knowledge and appropriateness of language use in my learning.

Classroom teaching and learning, and after class study are connected with each other. They are indispensable processes in acquiring language competence. After class learning is an extension of classroom teaching and learning. Students can consolidate the knowledge they have learned in the classroom and try to find learning opportunities to further enhance their language competence. As for the activities that students indicated that they were usually involved in within the English class, around 57% of them reported that they often made presentations and around 52% of the students were involved in group-discussions. The proportion of the students who took notes (45%) or listened to the teacher’s explanations only when necessary (45%) was relatively the same. More than 43% of the students indicated that they would like to listen to the teacher throughout the English class (see Figure 5.11).

![Figure 5.11 Students’ learning activities in the English class](image)

When asked how they acquired English language competence after class, more than 51% of the students indicated that they preferred to read English newspapers and
magazines. Around 47% of the students indicated that they would like to do preview and review work, and more than 40% of the students tried to memorize English words and recite texts. More than 39% of the students indicated that they preferred to watch English movies and listen to English broadcasts, and practice English with classmates. Less than 20% of the students did language exercises such as sentence drills or translation, and around 14% of the students conducted self-evaluation. Only twelve students (5%) tried to practice English with English native speakers (see Figure 5.12).

![Figure 5.12 Students’ learning activities after class](image)

What do you usually do to learn English after class?

- Watching English movies and listening to English broadcasts: 40.93%
- Doing preview and review work: 39.24%
- Reading English newspapers and magazines: 51.48%
- Doing exercises, such as translation, sentence drills: 18.14%
- Practicing English with classmates: 39.24%
- Practicing English with English native speakers: 13.50%
- Doing self-evaluation: 5.06%
- Memorizing English words and reciting texts: 10.00%

There are a variety of methods or activities involved in the English language learning process that are able to help students acquire language knowledge and language competence effectively. Figure 5.13 shows the students’ preference in ways to get information about using the English language. Nearly 34% of the students preferred to listen to radio programs/dialogues and watch TV programs/videos, and nearly 30% of the students wanted to get the related information from teachers’ explanations. Less than 20% of the students indicated that they liked to get
information from a classroom discussion, while a similar proportion of the students preferred to learn by themselves.

![Bar chart showing the preferred ways to get information about the use of English](chart.png)

**Figure 5.13 Student’s preferable way to get information about the use of English**

During the language acquisition process, there can be difficulties that are unavoidable for language learners. Proficiently resolving difficulties can help language learners obtain the language competence; therefore, it is important to understand how students resolve such difficulties. As for the difficulties students indicated that they met in College English learning, more than 35% of the students chose to work out difficulties by relying on their own individual language knowledge. Around 28% of the students used dictionaries or tried to find answers from the Internet, and more than 21% of the students preferred discussions and working with their classmates. Around 15% of the students indicated that they would ask their English teachers or native speakers for help (see Figure 5.14).
The results highlight the roles that language learning strategies have played in acquiring English as a foreign language for participants in this research. Language learning strategies are effective in promoting language learning, and help language learners achieve better learning outcomes (Oxford, 1996). It is necessary for language learners to efficiently apply language learning strategies to their language acquisition process to facilitate successful language learning.

Another way to understand students’ English pragmatic knowledge and competence as well as strategies in learning and using English is to use DCTs. The following section details and recounts the DCT data from the research.

### 5.2 Discourse Completion Tasks data

This section reports the results with regard to the second research question: To what extent do College English students focus on their pragmatic knowledge in their English learning? What are their levels of pragmatic competence? and the third research question: How do College English students apply their language learning strategies in the learning of English and pragmatics? DCTs used in this study required students to read a written description of a situation and then asked them to provide responses to each situation.
Twenty different situations in the DCTs covered three different speech acts: the speech act of refusal, the speech act of compliment response and the speech act of apology. Situations 1-7 focused on the speech act of refusal. Situations 8-14 concentrated on the speech act of compliment response, and situations 15-20 focused on the speech act of apology. The following section reports on the collected data in relation to the speech act of refusal.

5.2.1 Data of the speech act of refusal

The speech act of refusal occurs when a speaker directly or indirectly says no to a request or an invitation, and can be seen as a face-threatening act to the requestor as the response contradicts the speakers’ expectations (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Students were required to decline a request or an invitation in the seven situations for speech acts of refusal. Table 5.9 shows the frequency of single lexical items and basic formulaic sequences that were provided by the students to express refusal. The items are presented as generalized responses from the respondents. These figures only demonstrate lexical items and sequences that were used to make up a complete turn on the basis of the results in the DCT data.
Table 5.9  Frequency of lexical items and basic formulaic sequences expressing refusals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expression of refusal</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sorry.</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>19.48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m sorry.</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>12.99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’d like to, but…</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>9.35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thanks/Thank you.</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>8.05%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>7.53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, thanks/thank you.</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>7.27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’d love to, but…</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5.19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m glad to, but…</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4.93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am so sorry.</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4.93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want to, but…</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4.42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thank you/Thanks, but…</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3.64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well, but…</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It sounds good, but…</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think I can’t.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m afraid I can’t.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No way.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.04%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Let me see.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OK.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.52%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To clarify their responses to the seven different situations, some of the students provided a variety of subsequent explanations to their concise refusals. In each situation, students were asked to write a refusal. For example, students provided responses to social situations such as refusing a friend’s invitation to a party by saying, “I’d like to, but I am sorry I cannot because I have three examinations next Monday”. Refusals from the students in each situation are presented as follows. Each situation is written as it was presented to the students in the study.

In Situation 1, a friend invites you to a party at his house on Saturday. However, you cannot go to the party as you will sit three exams next Monday. In the meantime, his house is very far from the place you live. Some replies from the students are listed as follows:

- I’m sorry. I’d love to, but I have to prepare three exams next Monday.
- I’m glad to, but I really have to do some revision of my lessons.
- I’d like to, but I will have three exams next Monday and your house is a little far from my home. How about next time?
- Oh, no. I’m very busy with my exams this weekend. But you are welcome.
- Let me see. I think I will not go because I have exams to take.
- Sorry, I cannot go, for I have three exams next Monday and your home is far from my home.
- No, I want to go but on Saturday I will have a meeting.

In Situation 2, you refuse the request from your boss of working overtime. Some of the extended responses from students are listed as the following:
- I’m sorry. I really want to finish it up today but I have to pick up my son.
- I’m sorry. My daughter will have her five-year-old birthday party this evening.
- Sorry. I’d like to, but I have to go to the hospital to see my wife.
- Sorry, I have an appointment with a friend.
- I’d like to help, but it’s really too late for me. I’m very exhausted.
- No, I could not stand to stay at the office all day long.
- Oh, no, with no extra money I will not work.

In Situation 3, a friend offers you a cup of coffee, but you cannot drink because you have an upset stomach. Only 30% of the students gave more extended responses to this situation. A few replies are listed as follows:
- Thank you. I’d like to, but I have an upset stomach and I cannot drink it.
- Thanks, it’s very kind of you, but I have an upset stomach.
- No, thanks. I am not able to drink coffee because I have an upset stomach.
- No, my stomach is upset, but thank you all the same. How about next time?

In Situation 4, you are an English professor at a university. One of the students, on behalf of others, comes to meet you and suggests that you should give students more practice in conversation and less on grammar in class. Some extended responses given by the students are listed as follows:
- Thank you for your suggestion, but I think that grammar is more important.
- Thank you for your advice, but all of you have to attend the exam.
• Thanks, but I think my teaching has no problem.
• Sorry, I have my own teaching plan.
• OK. But you know without grammar you cannot practise conversations.
• Thank you. I may give you more practice in both conversation and grammar.
• Thanks, your suggestion is good. But I have to teach you all the grammar in the classroom. It is my duty.
• Thanks. Give me the time and I’ll think about it.

In Situation 5, as a university freshman who always attends classes on time and works hard, you do not want to lend your lecture notes to one of your classmates once again, who often misses class. The following are some of extended responses from the students in the research:
• I’m sorry, I need to use my notes, too. Don’t miss the class next time.
• I’m sorry, I have lent it to others.
• Sorry, I have left my notebook at home.
• I’m sorry. I will review the notes this evening, so…
• I’m glad to, but as you know I want to prepare for tomorrow’s exam. So I can’t.
• I’m sorry I can’t. If I lend you I will do you bad. I hope that you will take lecture notes by yourself in the future.
• No way. You must pay for your action.

In Situation 6, one of the best workers in your restaurant requests an increase in pay. As the owner of the restaurant, you refuse the request. Some extended refusals given by the students are listed as follows:
• Well, I know you are one of the best employees here. But I have to say sorry because I do not have extra money after I have paid every cost of the restaurant.
• Sorry. I appreciate your work. As a matter of fact, your payment is higher than others of the same position. So I cannot increase your salary.
• I’m sorry. I cannot increase your pay. As you know, the restaurant has a detailed principle about the increase of pay, but you do not match it.
I’m sorry. You should know the profit of the restaurant is very low. Thus, I cannot agree with your request.

No. The restaurant only has a little profit. If I increase your pay, I cannot earn money at all.

Sorry. I have paid the right money for you.

Sorry. I want to pay you more, but you know that we have not earned so much.

In Situation 7, a salesman from a computer company invites you to one of the most expensive local restaurants to have dinner. As the president of a very large research centre, you kindly refuse the invitation from him. The following are several responses from the students:

- Thank you. But our company does not need computers at the moment.
- I’m so sorry. I have no time this evening.
- Well, but I have got an important meeting to attend.
- I’m sorry. I have bought computers from another company.
- Thanks. But I have not time now.
- I’m glad to, but you know I’m very busy now. I cannot spare time to have dinner with you.
- Sorry. I’m busy now. How about another time?
- Sorry. My wife is ill and I cannot go with you tonight.

The above data indicate how students gave refusals in various situations. As can be seen, when provided with an opportunity to extend their ideas, students in the study were able to provide appropriate responses. However, not all of them provided extended responses. A detailed analysis of these data is presented in Chapter 6. The next section presents the collected data concerning the speech act of compliment response.

5.2.2 Data of the speech act of compliment response

Compliment response is another important speech act that was examined in this study to examine College English students’ practical use of EFL. It is a complex speech act that reflects sociocultural values and politeness differences of the speakers (Cheng, 2011). The following table shows the frequency of single lexical items and
basic formulaic sequences that were applied by the students to express compliment responses (see Table 5.10). The figures only demonstrate lexical items and sequences that were used to make up a complete turn depending on the results in the DCT data.

Table 5.10 Frequency of lexical items and basic formulaic sequences expressing compliment responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expression of compliment response</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thank you.</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>40.78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thanks.</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>20.52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thank you very much.</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>8.83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m glad to hear that.</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>8.57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thank you for…</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3.64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yeah.</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3.12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OK.</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2.86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That’s great.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s nice of you.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thanks a lot.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You are welcome.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sorry.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.52%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students were asked to write a compliment response in each situation. For instance, students provided responses to situations such as responding to a friend’s compliment on a new hairstyle by saying, “Thank you. It’s nice, isn’t it?” Only 20% of respondents provided extended responses to their brief ones. Responses given by the students in each situation are presented as follows.

In situation 8, a friend compliments you on your fashionable hair style. Some compliment responses given by the students included:

- Thank you. It’s cool, isn’t it?
- Thank you very much. I like it, too. I had my hair done in the university barber’s.
- Thank you very much. I’m glad you like it. I believe that you will look more beautiful if you have a same one.
Thanks. It’s my style.

Yeah, I want to have a different hair style.

No, I don’t like it very much.

In Situation 9, a friend compliments you on your new Rolex watch. The following are some of compliment responses provided by the students:

- Thanks. If you want, you can buy one for yourself, too.
- Thank you. It’s a birthday present from my mother. I like it very much.
- Thank you. It’s inexpensive and I bought it on discount.
- Thank you. It’s not too bad, is it?
- Yes. It’s a Rolex watch. You will also look nice when you wear it.
- Thanks. Your dream will come true one day.
- OK. I do not want to have another same watch.

In Situation 10, a friend compliments you on the presentation you gave in English class. Some compliment responses from the students are listed as follows:

- Thank you. I will have another presentation this weekend. You can come to listen.
- I’m glad to hear that. It is my luck.
- Thanks. It took me a whole week to make preparations for it.
- No, no. You can do better than me.
- I’m glad to hear that. Thank you for your listening.

In Situation 11, a friend gives a compliment about your new sweater. The following are some of extended compliment responses from the students:

- Thank you. I wanted to get rid of it several weeks ago.
- Thanks. I like it, too.
- Thank you. Your words make me happy.
- Thanks. You are dressing beautifully today, too.
- Thanks a lot. It’s a gift from my mother.
In Situation 12, you invite a group of students to your house for a meal. After the meal, a student praises your good cooking. Several compliment responses are listed as follows:

- Thank you. It’s great that you enjoyed it.
- You are welcome. I am happy that you like the food.
- Thanks. Enjoy yourself just as at your home.
- Thank you. Would you like to have any more?
- I’m glad to hear that. If you like, I will cook more for you.
- Thanks. Wish you have a good taste.
- No. I am a new hand in cooking.

In Situation 13, your computer teacher praises your intelligence and talent in learning how to use the computer. The following are some of extended compliment responses that came from the students:

- Thank you. I enjoy your class very much, too.
- Thank you. I will spare no effort to do better.
- Thanks. I’m very happy to take your class.
- Thank you for your encourage. I like this course and I will work harder.
- Thanks. It is my duty of a student.
- No. Thanks a lot. It’s totally because of your good teaching.
- Yeah, computer is my love.
- Thanks. I’m interested in your lessons and computer, and I have really learned a lot from what you taught in class.

In Situation 14, you are a newly appointed sales manager of a large department store. One of the employees praised your beautiful eyes when having coffee with a group of colleagues. Several compliment responses provided by the students are listed as follows:

- Thanks. I have heard of that many times.
- Thanks a lot. And is there anything else you want to say?
- I’m glad to hear that. Your eyes are beautiful, too.
- Thank you. But I think that my hair is more beautiful.
- Thank you very much. But I more like blue eyes.
As one of the three speech acts examined in this thesis, compliment responses provided by the students can help to understand students’ level of pragmatic competence and the practice of language learning strategies. Students appeared to follow the classroom instructions to the related speech act to complete the DCTs (Ma & Xu, 2010). That is, they did not appear to have enough pragmatic knowledge in English to respond spontaneously to the various situations. The data indicated that memory strategies and cognitive strategies were more often applied when completing the speech act of compliment response in DCTs. Chapter 6 provides more details and an analysis of these data. In the next section, the data from the speech act of apology is reported.

5.2.3 Data of the speech act of apology

The final speech act, the speech act of apology, was applied to further examine students’ pragmatic competence in communication as well as the practice of language learning strategies. It is a speech act that shows regret, an explanation or defense of one’s beliefs, and can be a face-saving act for the hearer and a face-threatening act for the speaker (Bataineh & Bataineh, 2006). Table 5.11 shows the frequency of single lexical items and basic formulaic sequences that were used by the students in providing speech acts of apology. The figures demonstrate lexical items and sequences that are used to make up a complete turn based on the results in the DCT data.
Table 5.11  Frequency of lexical items and basic formulaic sequences expressing apology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expression of apology</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I’m sorry.</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>33.64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sorry.</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>27.58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m very/so sorry.</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>16.97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s my fault/mistake.</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4.54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yeah.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.03%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I apologize.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2.42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I forgot.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please forgive me.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t know.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excuse me.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t worry.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It doesn’t matter.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.61%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students were asked to apologize for each situation. For example, students provided responses to social situations such as apologizing for being late for a group trip by saying, “I’m terribly sorry. I got up late this morning, and I promise that it won’t happen again”. Nearly 50% of the students gave extended responses to brief apologies according to different situations. Apologies from the students in each situation are presented as follows.

In Situation 15, you rip the cover page of a magazine your best friend lent you by accident. The following are some of apology responses that the students gave:

- I’m sorry. I was so careless that I tore the cover.
- Sorry, my friend. I will buy a new one for you.
- Yeah. This book is really wonderful and I’m sorry I have torn the cover.
- I’m so sorry. I damaged the cover page of the book because of my carelessness.
- It’s my fault. Can you forget it?
- I’m very sorry. My carelessness leads to it. I won’t make the same mistake again.
In Situation 16, as an English teacher, you have realized the mistake that you mistook one student’s exam paper for another because of the similarity in their names and failed him. The following are several apologies given by the students:

- I’m sorry. I made a mistake that I mistook your name for another similar name. You did a good job in the exam and I have already corrected it. Just to say sorry to you.
- I’m so sorry. I mistook your examination paper and your mark. I will handle it soon.
- It’s my fault. I have corrected it.
- Sorry, my student. I have made a silly mistake. Believe me, and I will resolve it as soon as possible.
- Don’t worry. It’s just a small mistake. I have an idea how to deal with it.

In Situation 17, you were one hour late for a group trip because you slept in. The following are some of apology responses that the students gave to criticisms from classmates on the trip:

- I apologize. I got up late and I promise that it will not happen again.
- I’m so sorry. I got up late this morning. I won’t do next time. Please forgive me.
- I’m very sorry. Sorry to waste your time waiting for me.
- Sorry. It is god who plays jokes on me.
- I’m so sorry. I set a wrong alarm clock.
- Sorry. I came here late because of the traffic jam.
- I’m sorry. I was too tired last night so I got up late this morning.

In Situation 18, you went into the wrong office and interrupted another teacher’s writing. Some apologies given by the students are listed as follows:

- Sorry, Sir. I got the wrong room.
- Sorry. I want to know which office is my English teacher’s room.
- I’m sorry. I interrupt your writing.
- I’m sorry, Sir. I went into a wrong office. Sorry to interrupt you.
- Sorry. I interrupted your writing. I want to see my English teacher.
- Excuse me, can you tell me Mr. Smith’s office?
In Situation 19, you have forgotten to pass on a private message to your co-worker, Tom, for a second time. Tom comes up to you to ask you for the message. Some of responses provided by the students are listed as follows:

- Sorry. I forgot it again. I apologize for it.
- Yes, I got it. I will send it to you as soon as possible.
- I forgot, Tom. I will not do like this again.
- Yes. But I am sorry to give it to you so late.
- Sorry. I did not have time to pass it to you these days. I will do it another day.
- I’m so sorry. Sit down, please. I will tell you about it.
- Yes. I am in a bad memory. I will send it to you as soon as possible. This is the last time.
- Sorry. I won’t make mistakes for a third time.
- I’m sorry. Oh, my god, I forgot to pass it to you again. Can you forgive me again?

In Situation 20, you insisted that your classmate, Mary, had borrowed money from you and had not given it back. Finally, you found that you had made a mistake. Some of apology responses that the students gave Mary are listed as follows:

- Yes. Much to my regret, I blamed you unfairly. I wish it would not hurt you. I’m very sorry.
- It’s my fault. Now please accept my apology.
- I’m sorry. It’s a little thing for our friendship.
- Sorry. I should believe you all the time.
- I’m so sorry. I felt ashamed at what I have done.
- Please forgive me, my good friend. Now, I make an apology for my misunderstanding.
- Sorry, my friend. I did not mean to hurt you.
- I’m very sorry, my god. Forgive me, Mary. What a bad memory I have!

The speech act of apology was valuable in exploring students’ competence in using English. The data collected from the three speech acts provided convincing information for examining students’ focus of pragmatic knowledge, their levels of
pragmatic competence as well as the practice of language learning strategies in selected situations.

The DCT data supported those found from the questionnaire and deepened the understanding of College English students’ levels of pragmatic competence in China by examining the students’ responses provided in each social situation. In the next section, the data collected from semi-structured focus group interviews is reported with the categorized themes: students’ perceptions of pragmatic knowledge; students’ perceptions of pragmatic competence; students’ perceptions of pragmatics in English teaching and learning; students’ perceptions of pragmatic information in textbooks, and students’ perceptions and practice of language learning strategies.

5.3 Semi-structured focus group interview data

The data to be reported in this section is closely centered on all three research questions of the study. Students’ viewpoints on their pragmatic knowledge and pragmatic competence, as well as language learning strategies for acquiring pragmatic knowledge in the process of College English learning were examined.

The interview questions were prepared in both English and Chinese (as per the attached Appendix C). In the following results, pseudonyms in place of the real names were used. Students were given identification codes to ensure anonymity. They were identified as Ann, Benson, Cindy, Edgar, Flora, Gilbert, Harlow, Jesse, Kevin, Lindy, Martin, Norman, Oliver, Sunny, Tom, Victor, Wilson, and Yin.

5.3.1 Students’ perceptions of pragmatic knowledge

Regarding the importance of the development of language knowledge, a total of 16 participants indicated that it is important to learn both pragmatic knowledge and linguistic knowledge in the English learning process, particularly at the university level. Sunny gave his reasons for that. He said:

Both pragmatic knowledge and linguistic knowledge play the same important role in the development of students’ English language knowledge. First of all, linguistic knowledge is the basis of pragmatic knowledge. Without rich vocabulary and enough grammatical knowledge, people cannot carry out
effective conversations. Even people can organize conversations, they cannot proceed smoothly without sufficient linguistic knowledge. Second, pragmatic knowledge is more widely used in people’s daily life. We can express ourselves more accurately with our limited vocabulary if we can better master the flexible use of the vocabulary. In summary, linguistic knowledge is regarded as the building basis, while pragmatic knowledge is regarded as the building structure. Pragmatic knowledge, together with linguistic knowledge, helps build the final model. They support each other and help language learners achieve their language competence. (Sunny: 16 March, 2011)

Ann indicated:

I think that learning pragmatic knowledge is very important. All university students want to find decent jobs after graduation. Effectively communicating with people in English can help find good jobs in China. Meanwhile, some students plan to go abroad for further study after they graduate from the university. In order to better communicate with people from other countries, we need to learn pragmatic knowledge. These are the reasons why pragmatic knowledge is more important than linguistic knowledge. Pragmatic knowledge and linguistic knowledge support each other and progress together. (Ann: 22 March, 2011)

In contrast, Yin said:

Compared with pragmatic knowledge, linguistic knowledge is more important because university students are not high level English language learners although most of us have learned English for more than nine years. English is regarded as a foreign language in China. We have few chances to use English after class. We do not have a high level of using English. Therefore, developing the linguistic knowledge at the present stage is the most important task for us all. (Yin: 16 March, 2011)

Students provided different responses when they were asked what kind of English they wanted to learn. Twelve students said that they wanted to learn American English. Lindy explained:

Compared with British English, American English does not belong to pure English, for it develops from British English and has borrowed so many words
from other languages. However, I still want to learn American English because it is very popular among Chinese students. At the same time, the United States of America is a leading developed country and its great impact to the whole world will keep a relative long period of time. Thus, American English is more likely to be accepted by people from different kinds of countries or areas. English works as an international language for people from different countries to communicate with each other in both international businesses and daily life. Learning American English can let us better use English in wider fields. (Lindy: 16 March, 2011)

Sunny added:

I think that I was taught American English when I started to learn English in the primary school. The first time for me to contact British English was to listen to BBC news in the university. It is hard for me to change to learn British English at present stage. (Sunny: 16 March 2011)

In contrast, six students wanted to learn British English. Gilbert stated:

I think that British English is the standard English. All kinds of Englishes originated from British English. It is also the noble English. Therefore, it is important for Chinese students to learn the standard English that can be accepted by everyone in the world. (Gilbert: 16 March, 2011)

5.3.2 Students’ perceptions of pragmatic competence

When it came to the importance of the development of pragmatic competence, all 18 interviewees believed that it was very important to develop pragmatic competence in the English learning process. They suggested that achieving pragmatic competence could help English language learners achieve competence in communication.

Kevin said:

Enhancing pragmatic competence helps students get more opportunities and create better developing space for their future study and careers. Students can get chances to further their studies overseas or work in foreign investment companies in China that offer high salaries. In addition, we can learn different cultures through the communication with people coming from different cultures. Cultural knowledge helps us improve our pragmatic competence.
Nevertheless, our English teachers spent most of the time in the classroom teaching explaining the grammar and language points. We have very poor listening and speaking abilities because of poor pragmatic competence. I believe that only obtaining the knowledge of grammar and vocabulary is not sufficient to help us become proficient English language users. (Kevin: 22 March, 2011)

Tom stated:

Practicing English with people coming from different cultural backgrounds can help us learn different cultures, which can help English language learners achieve pragmatic competence in communication. However, we have few chances to practice English in class, let alone after class. Whenever I try to speak English on campus or in the dormitory, my classmates or roommates will laugh at me and I feel embarrassed and discouraged. I think I have poor communicative competence. (Tom: 22 March, 2011)

5.3.3 Students’ perceptions of pragmatics in College English learning and teaching

When asked questions concerning students’ perceptions of the importance of pragmatic or communicative tasks in developing students’ pragmatic competence in the classroom teaching and learning, students gave different responses with different reasons. Ten students preferred the task of debate. Benson commented by saying:

Different tasks applied in the classroom teaching and learning can help improve students’ pragmatic competence. I think that debate can develop students’ pragmatic competence. Students need to make enough preparations before the debate and make prompt responses according to different happenings during the debate. On the other hand, activities as presentation and role play can be prepared in advance but do not need any instant reactions at all, which is on the contrary to the principle of the flexible use of a language. Learning the knowledge of a language, particularly the pragmatic knowledge, needs to learn to make quick and accurate responses in many unexpected situations. At the same time, debate can also encourage students’ participation and enthusiasm. (Benson: 16 March, 2011)
Flora stated:

I like role play because students can have enough time to prepare and rehearse. Role play has a lively style that needs every student’s participation. Group work can bring confidence to every participant. Role play can also practice students’ communicative abilities in corresponding situations. (Flora: 22 March, 2011)

Jesse said:

I prefer group discussion and pair work because students can help each other when performing these tasks. Students do not need to worry about losing faces when they make mistakes in communication. In addition, it is also a good opportunity for students to exchange their different opinions on some issues. (Jesse: 22 March, 2011)

Kevin added:

We do not like giving presentations at all. Although we can make preparations in advance, we still feel very nervous when giving presentations. (Kevin: 22 March 2011)

In respect to the tasks that College English teachers often apply in classroom teaching to develop students’ pragmatic competence, interviewees gave a variety of answers. Cindy responded that:

My College English teacher follows the very traditional teaching method. She follows the flow of explaining new words and expressions, translating and analyzing the texts, and checking answers to exercises. The only task she uses in classroom teaching and learning is questions and answers. She raises some questions regarding the text or exercises for students to answer. We can easily find the keys from reference books. There is no need for the teacher to repeat the same answers. I think it is helpless to the development of our pragmatic competence. (Cindy: 16 March, 2011)

Benson added:

The classroom activities or tasks designed and used by College English teachers are not interesting enough. Sometimes students have no interest in taking part in these activities which limits the development of students’ pragmatic competence. (Benson: March 16, 2011)
Wilson described a different experience:

My College English teacher sometimes conducts group discussions, role play, presentation, etc. in classroom teaching so as to practice students’ spoken English and develop their communicative abilities. However, due to the limited time and large classes not every student can actively take part in these activities. Moreover, some students are unwilling to speak aloud in front of others. (Wilson: 22 March, 2011)

Tom said:

My College English teacher often conducts situational conversations. These tasks can facilitate developing students’ pragmatic competence. (Tom: 22 March, 2011)

Kevin pointed out some problems existing in the current College English teaching and learning by saying:

My English teacher only asks students to do some tasks, such as pair work, group discussions and role play in class. He never gives pragmatic explanations to these tasks and contexts. These tasks are not practical at all. We cannot apply what we have learned in our daily life. (Kevin: 22 March, 2011)

Regarding the question of whether the current College English classroom teaching and learning processes can help students develop their pragmatic competence, all 18 students said that current English teaching and learning provided little help to the development of their pragmatic competence. Jesse stated:

The present College English classroom teaching and learning is not well designed. The teaching and learning process cannot closely integrate with each other, which, to some degree, hinders the development of students’ pragmatic competence. Pragmatic knowledge and pragmatic competence need to be taught in class, and students need to do more practice to enhance their pragmatic competence after class. (Jesse: 22 March, 2011)

When the students were asked the questions “In which way do you like to get pragmatic information/knowledge?” and “What do you usually do to obtain pragmatic information/knowledge after class?” they described similar methods. All
18 students expressed that they liked to watch original English movies, read original English novels or magazines, and listen to English songs. Martin explained in detail:

Watching original English movies with English titles at the bottom of the screen is a good way of gaining pragmatic information. It is an easy way for us to learn English, particularly pragmatic knowledge, from the context in the movie and develop the skill of guessing the meaning of new words or sentences in certain contexts. We can learn to use English, especially the spoken English, in appropriate situations. We can also learn to use the colloquial English language from the movies. Reading original English novels or magazines is also a good way of getting pragmatic information. While reading novels with fascinating or charming plots, students can not only learn English but also keep the interest of reading and get rid of the boredom of English learning. English magazines can provide us with updated language. Both English novels and magazines present us examples of English writings. We can learn authentic English from these authentic learning materials. (Martin: 16 March, 2011)

Benson added:

I learn the use of English through playing computer games. Most of the computer games are written in English. I have developed the skill of guessing the meaning of new words in playing computer games. (Benson: 16 March 2011)

Edgar said:

Learning to sing English songs can help students gain pragmatic knowledge and develop their pragmatic competence. Although the pragmatic knowledge that students get from English songs might not be applied in very formal situations, students can still develop their pragmatic competence by imitating singers’ pronunciation and intonation. Classical English songs exhibit the ever-lasting use of the language, while popular songs show the current language. Meanwhile, students might have more interest to learn a language due to the influence of singers. (Edgar: 22 March, 2011)

With respect to the question as to whether students felt that they could apply the English knowledge they had learned in class to real situations or not, 13 students gave a negative response. Flora explained:
It is really difficult for us to apply the bookish knowledge into practice. The English language we have learned in class is totally different from everyday English. The English language knowledge we have learned in the College English classroom teaching and learning is not practical at all. Meanwhile, there is no English-speaking context for us to practice English. (Flora: 22 March 2011)

Four students were more open in the response they gave to the question. Harlow said:

I can apply some English language knowledge I have learned in class to some real situations. However, I am not sure whether it is appropriate or not due to different contexts. Knowledge such as English literature cannot be used in daily communication because it is not practical at all. (Harlow: 22 March, 2011)

Only one student thought that he could apply what he had learned in English class to the daily life, but he did not give any explanation.

The students described a variety of difficulties in learning pragmatic knowledge. Ann stated:

I have no chance to be involved in communication with native English speakers in the real context. (Ann, 22 March 2011)

Tom said:

It is not easy for me to make prompt responses in English in communication. I need time to fully understand people’s words and organize responses in my mind, which makes me feel very uneasy and nervous. (Tom: 22 March, 2011)

Benson pointed out:

A lot of words we have learned in class cannot be used in daily conversations. Many of them are big words or very formal words that are seldom used in conversations. (Benson: 16 March 2011)

5.3.4 Students’ perceptions of pragmatic information in textbooks

College English textbooks are the main teaching and learning materials for both students and teachers. Students involved in the interviews used the New College
When asked questions such as “What do you think of the quantity of pragmatic knowledge and pragmatically oriented tasks in the current College English textbooks?” and “Do you believe that current College English textbooks can help you develop your pragmatic competence?” students gave relatively similar answers. Norman said:

I think that the percentage of pragmatic knowledge and pragmatically oriented tasks involved in the College English textbooks at most occupies 30%. Most tasks in the textbooks focus on the development of students’ linguistic competence, such as vocabulary, sentence structures and grammar. They can help reinforce my linguistic knowledge, which consolidate the basis of the development of pragmatic competence. However, textbooks do little help to developing students’ pragmatic competence. (Norman: 16 March, 2011)

Cindy agreed and added:

The design and the writing of current College English textbooks cannot keep up with the needs of society, and cannot meet our needs. The teaching materials are out-dated, and the learning tasks in textbooks do little help to the development of students’ pragmatic competence. It is hard for College English teachers to well design their classroom teaching and learning to help students achieve their optimal learning outcomes with these teaching materials. (Cindy: 16 March, 2011)

Kevin stated:

I do not like the current College English textbooks. Although many of them have been published recently, texts were selected from very old stories. Easy texts and difficult ones are mixed together, which makes hard for students to develop linguistic competence or pragmatic competence step by step. There is little cultural knowledge included in texts. The instruction to pragmatic knowledge and routines is limited. The design of exercises to each text is examination-oriented that overlooks the development of students’ pragmatic competence. These books have no new concept or are old-fashioned that cannot help us improve our pragmatic competence. (Kevin: 22 March, 2011)
5.3.5 Students’ perceptions and practice of language learning strategies in learning English

Language learning strategies are another important research aspect in this study, as they can help language learners more effectively develop their language learning (Kaplan, 2002). When the students were asked what language learning strategies they believed important to improve their pragmatic competence, they raised different strategies with a variety of reasons. Oliver stated:

I think that recitation and imitation are very important for students to improve students’ pragmatic competence. Though most university students have learned English more than nine year, we, I think, are still low proficient language learners. Remembering new words and reciting texts are helpful to low proficient English learners, which can assist in accumulating their vocabulary and cultivating the feel of the language. In my mind, imitation is the best way of learning English. I think that trying to imitate the native speakers’ pronunciation and the way they express themselves is the most efficient way of learning English, particularly in learning pragmatic knowledge. If students are familiar with native speakers’ pronunciation and the way they express themselves, they can better understand their words and make responses in a more natural way. (Oliver: 22 March, 2011)

Victor said:

I find that watching original English movies and listening to English songs do great help to progress students’ pragmatic competence. Original English movies are visual materials that provide more vivid images while learning a language. Students can better understand the target language used in certain contexts. English songs are auditory materials that can arouse great interests among students. Meanwhile, both movies stars and popular singers have great charisma to young students. They have great influence on the youngsters. Some students transfer their love to these stars to the interest of learning English. (Victor: 16 March, 2011)

Gilbert added:

Doing note-taking does great help to improve our English language proficiency. It can help students get familiar with English native speakers’ pronunciation and
intonation and practice the word spelling and sentence structuring. (Gilbert: 16 March, 2011)

When students were asked to list the language learning strategies they used in learning English and pragmatics and how they chose to use these strategies, few of them seemed to have their own ideas on appropriate language learning strategies. Martin indicated:

Guided by our English language teachers, we make our options of using language learning strategies. We follow teachers’ requirements and words to practice, such as finishing assignments, remembering new words and expressions, and memorizing texts. (Martin: 16 March, 2011)

Benson added:

I often watch original English movies, read original English novels, and try to find opportunities to communicate with native English speakers to improve my English proficiency. These language learning strategies are recommended by my English teacher. (Benson: 16 March, 2011)

Lindy expressed the same opinion:

I follow the words of my English teacher to read English newspapers, watch English news and listen to English broadcast, such as BBC and VOA, to improve my English proficiency. (Lindy: 16 March, 2011)

Harlow stated that:

It was a great pity for us to follow teachers’ words all the time to choose language learning strategies in learning English. Everyone needs to find appropriate language learning strategies due to their individual different learning situations. Students always believe that teachers’ words are right. Having been taught by the traditional methods for a long period of time, many students might have lost their own ability of independent learning. They rely on their teachers too much and do not know how to choose suitable language learning strategies by themselves. (Harlow: 22 March, 2011)

The results from the focus group interviews supported those found in the data gathered in the questionnaire and DCTs of the study, which indicated the importance
of the role of pragmatic knowledge and competence, as well as language learning strategies, in helping language learners achieve communicative competence in intercultural communication. The further discussion of the data will be provided in Chapter 6. In the next section, the data collected from the College English textbook tasks analysis is presented.

5.4 Textbook tasks analysis data

A textbook tasks analysis was performed to examine the nature of learning tasks provided by Chinese College English textbooks. The learning tasks provided by textbooks can have an impact students’ development of pragmatic competence. Four Integrated Course books, 1 to 4, chosen from New College English series were used to understand what preferred students’ learning tasks were provided in textbooks. Quantitative data collected from the textbook tasks analysis were analyzed by means of descriptive statistics. Results are presented below.

In the preface of the textbooks, the authors indicated that this series of textbooks was designed in accordance with the principles of eclecticism, which combined the advantages of various teaching methodologies from China and overseas countries. It advocated for students’ independent learning through a student-centered teaching and learning approach. The stated aims of the textbook were to develop students’ all-around English linguistic knowledge and strong English integrated abilities by combining reading, listening, speaking, writing and translation practice in and out of class. Different types of texts were provided on the basis of themes that were purported to be closely related to students’ real life. The design of the tasks were said to be based on the principles of interaction and a task-based approach that benefits students in their progress of language competence.

There were around 382 pages in each of the four Integrated Course books. As the textbooks were approximately of an equivalent length, a page-by-page scrutiny of the textbooks was conducted to examine the amount and nature of the language learning tasks, especially pragmatic tasks, provided.
Table 5.12 describes the distribution of tasks by the number of pages in each book. According to the table, the average percentage of pages of learning tasks included in the four textbooks was around 45%.

Table 5.12  Pages of tasks in New College English Integrated Course textbooks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Textbook</th>
<th>Pages of tasks</th>
<th>Total number of pages</th>
<th>Percentage of tasks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Integrated Course Book 1</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>378</td>
<td>41.01%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrated Course Book 2</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>364</td>
<td>45.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrated Course Book 3</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>390</td>
<td>45.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrated Course Book 4</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>399</td>
<td>47.12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>685</td>
<td>1531</td>
<td>44.74%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.13 shows the number of different types of tasks provided by each textbook. It should be noted that metalanguage information, cultural information and pragmatically oriented tasks belong to pragmatic knowledge and help language learners develop their pragmatic competence. As can be seen from the table, these three tasks together account overall for only about 20% of the tasks while tasks of vocabulary, structure, translation, writing and text comprehension, which help students develop their linguistic competence (Bachman, 1990), account for approximately 80% of the textbook tasks.

In textbooks 1 to 4, linguistic tasks were ranked from high to low as follows: vocabulary tasks, text comprehensive tasks, writing tasks, translation tasks, and structure tasks. Of pragmatic tasks, pragmatically oriented tasks were ranked the highest, followed by metalanguage tasks and cultural information tasks (see Table 5.13).
Table 5.13  Pages of task types in *New College English* Integrated Course textbooks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task types</th>
<th>Book 1 (Pages)</th>
<th>Book 2 (Pages)</th>
<th>Book 3 (Pages)</th>
<th>Book 4 (Pages)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary tasks</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>39.36%</td>
<td>40.61%</td>
<td>44.07%</td>
<td>43.62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text comprehensive tasks</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>16.13%</td>
<td>15.15%</td>
<td>15.26%</td>
<td>15.43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pragmatically oriented tasks</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>14.19%</td>
<td>12.12%</td>
<td>11.30%</td>
<td>10.64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing tasks</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>9.68%</td>
<td>13.33%</td>
<td>10.73%</td>
<td>14.36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translation tasks</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>7.74%</td>
<td>7.88%</td>
<td>6.78%</td>
<td>6.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metalanguage tasks</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>6.45%</td>
<td>4.85%</td>
<td>4.52%</td>
<td>3.19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure tasks</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>5.16%</td>
<td>4.85%</td>
<td>5.08%</td>
<td>5.32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural information tasks</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>1.29%</td>
<td>1.21%</td>
<td>2.26%</td>
<td>1.06%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.14 demonstrates the descriptive statistics by percentage of different kinds of tasks on pragmatic knowledge in the four *New College English* Integrated Course textbooks. As shown, the percentages of each type of pragmatic tasks in the four textbooks were ranked from high to low as follows: pragmatically oriented tasks, metalanguage tasks and cultural information tasks. There were no tasks concerning general pragmatic information, metapragmatic information, speech acts or knowledge on how to learn pragmatic knowledge.
Table 5.14  Pages of pragmatic tasks in New College English Integrated Course textbooks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pragmatic tasks</th>
<th>Pages</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Percentage of tasks in the set of textbooks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pragmatically oriented tasks</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>66.13%</td>
<td>11.97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metalanguage tasks</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>25.81%</td>
<td>4.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural information tasks</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8.06%</td>
<td>1.46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>18.10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Table 5.15, the percentage of each type of linguistic task in the four textbooks were ranked from high to low as vocabulary tasks, text comprehensive tasks, writing tasks, translation tasks, and structure tasks. The percentages of the tasks in the set of textbooks were ranked from high to low as follows: vocabulary tasks, text comprehensive tasks, writing tasks, translation tasks, and structure tasks (see Table 5.15).

Table 5.15  Pages of linguistic tasks in New College English Integrated Course textbooks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Linguistic tasks</th>
<th>Pages</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Percentage of tasks in the set of textbooks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary tasks</td>
<td>288</td>
<td>51.34%</td>
<td>42.04%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text comprehensive tasks</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>18.89%</td>
<td>15.48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing tasks</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>14.80%</td>
<td>12.12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translation tasks</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>8.73%</td>
<td>7.15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure tasks</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>6.24%</td>
<td>5.11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>561</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>81.90%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pragmatically oriented tasks included in the textbooks were in the form of listening and speaking tasks. Answering questions was the only kind of listening task presented in the textbooks. Speaking tasks included pair work, group work, group discussions, oral presentation, debate, role play and speech contests. Table 5.16 demonstrates that pair work was ranked highest among all pragmatically oriented tasks. The second to the fifth ranked tasks were group work, group discussions,
questions and answers, and debate. Oral presentation and speech contests were the lowest ranked tasks.

### Table 5.16 Pages of pragmatically oriented tasks in New College English Integrated Course textbooks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pragmatically oriented tasks</th>
<th>Pages</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pair work</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>26.83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group work</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>24.39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group discussions</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>19.51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions and answers</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14.63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debate</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7.32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role play</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral presentation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech contest</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>82</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data reported in this section indicated that both linguistic tasks and pragmatic tasks were provided by the College English textbooks, both of which played important roles in helping students become language competent.

### 5.5 Summary

The quantitative and qualitative data collected from four instruments – the questionnaire, DCTs, semi-structured focus group interviews, and textbook tasks analysis, were reported in this chapter. The results of the data highlighted that College English students believed that it was important and essential for them to learn pragmatics in their English language acquisition process, which could help them achieve communicative competence in communication. They described that applying effective language learning strategies could help them achieve optimal learning outcomes. Students in the study held different perceptions about current English classroom teaching and learning, English language learning tasks, and tasks provided by College English textbooks, which played important roles in helping them become pragmatically competent. In the next chapter, a detailed discussion and
interpretation of the data are presented by integrating the findings with the theoretical perspectives of this study.
CHAPTER 6: RESEARCH DATA DISCUSSION

In the previous chapter, the collected research data were reported in detail. This chapter describes the analysis of the data by way of triangulation to enhance the accuracy of the study through corroborating evidence from different data sources. The three research questions proposed by this research are addressed in relation to College English students’ perceptions of pragmatics, their levels of pragmatic competence, and their perceptions and practice of language learning strategies in learning English and pragmatics. The key findings are analyzed and discussed by integrating the theoretical perspectives of this study with the findings of the previous studies.

6.1  RQ1: What are Chinese students’ perceptions of pragmatics in their English learning?

Research question 1 focused on College English students’ perceptions of pragmatics in their College English classroom learning and teaching, and after class English learning. In the following sections, the findings of this thesis are examined and discussed under four categories:

(a) students’ perceptions of English language learning;
(b) the importance of pragmatics in College English learning;
(c) students’ perceptions of learning and teaching pragmatics; and
(d) students’ perceptions of pragmatics in College English textbooks.

6.1.1 Students’ perceptions of English language learning

English is taught as a foreign language in China (Crystal, 2003), and it is a compulsory course from primary school to university across China (Hu, 2005; Zhao & Campbell, 1997). As shown in Table 5.1 (p.118), around 94% of the participants have studied English for more than six years, but only one of them had an overseas English language learning experience. It could be surmised that Chinese College English students are advanced language learners as they have been taught English in the Chinese context for quite a long period of time, and therefore, they have developed a high level of English language competency. However, English education has unbalanced levels of teaching and learning in different regions in China. For
example, students from western areas of China tend to have a low proficiency in English because most of them have learned English for less than six years due to a shortage of qualified English language teachers, learning materials, and learning environments (Su, 2011; Zhao, 2005).

As noted in Table 5.3 (p.121), nearly 70% of the participants indicated that the main reason they needed to learn English was not to pass the examination. This may be because, nowadays, Chinese society requires students not only to have relevant English certificates, such as the College English Test (Band Four or Band Six), but also to obtain practical abilities to communicate effectively in English. Motivation plays an important role in helping L2 learners to achieve L2 competency (Yuan & Shen, 2009) and is a powerful factor in SLA that helps determine the level of proficiency achieved by different learners (Ellis, 1985).

MacNamara (1973) argues that the really important part of motivation is the act of communication itself. Motivation relies on the learner’s learning goal, and gaining a sense of academic or communicative success can highly motivate students in their language learning. Driven by different motivations, the majority of College English students in the study indicated that they focused more attention on their development of pragmatic competence in the English language learning process. This changing trend in focus can be seen in the responses to Question 8 in the questionnaire where more than 65% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that “…the knowledge of how to use the language is as important as linguistic knowledge”.

Regarding the type of English students wanted to learn, American English was mostly preferred, followed by British English. Less than 20% of the students would like to learn Chinese English (see Figure 5.3, p.122). One student indicated in the interview, “…I still want to learn American English because it is very popular among Chinese students. … American English is more likely to be accepted by people from different kinds of countries or areas…” (Lindy: 16 March, 2011). While American English was popular for its world-wide usage one student who preferred to learn British English highlighted, “…British English is the standard English. … it is important for Chinese students to learn the standard English that can be accepted by everyone in the world…” (Gilbert: 16 March, 2011). Whether it was American
English or British English, more than 75% of the students wished to speak like native English speakers, and they were keen on imitating native speakers’ pronunciation and intonation.

These findings indicated that students wanted to learn English they could use in everyday settings and learning ‘native-like’ English was preferred over more traditional language learning. However, students who held the concept that they would like to use English in the exact same way as native speakers did was contrary to the notion of ELF that encouraged language learners to learn and use their local variety of the language in the appropriate communicative context (Kirkpatrick, 2010) (see 3.4.3). Excessive imitation of native speakers, to a great extent, limits non-native speakers’ development of pragmatic competence.

To Chinese College English students, the English they used was influenced by their Chinese language, Chinese culture, and the Chinese learning context. These results support the findings of a previous study conducted by Wang (2005). Influenced by the speaker’s L1, the target language the speaker uses is different from the language used by native speakers, particularly in phonology and the use of vocabulary. Language learners’ L1 plays a decisive role in the L2 learning or foreign language learning as learners’ L1 affects their pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar in the L2 or foreign language (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991). Meanwhile, some features of the L1, such as lexis and grammar, are transferred to the L2 or the foreign language (Kachru, 1997) (see 3.1). Therefore, it is extremely difficult for an L2 or foreign language learner to speak, and generally use language, in the same way as a native speaker does.

Foreign language learners often transfer phrases, strategies and norms of their L1 to learning a foreign language (Schauer, 2009). Students indicated in the interviews: “We often borrow Chinese phrases and norms to express our ideas in English.” (Edgar and Oliver: 22 March, 2011), but they were not sure whether such transference would be accepted or not. In order to be effective speakers in communication, it is essential for Chinese students to be aware of the transfer in pragmatics in College English learning as interlanguage pragmatics is closely related to the pragmatic competence and performance of L2/foreign language learners (Ji,
2008; Schauer, 2009) (see 3.2.1). The following section discusses the role of pragmatics in Chinese College English learning.

### 6.1.2 Importance of pragmatics in College English learning

Results of both the questionnaire and interviews identified that College English students had strong desires to acquire pragmatic knowledge, and they believed that it was essential to learn pragmatics either in their classroom or after class. In responses to Question 7 and Question 8 of the questionnaire, nearly 60% of the students indicated that learning English was much more than learning English grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation, and they indicated that pragmatic knowledge was as important as linguistic knowledge in learning English. These data were supported by the interview data in which students highlighted, “Pragmatic knowledge, together with linguistic knowledge…support each other and help language learners achieve their language competence.” (Sunny: 16 March, 2011; Ann: 22 March, 2011).

These findings indicated that College English students’ perceptions of pragmatics have changed. College English students reported that students who were impacted by the traditional English language teaching and learning in China, were taught that learning English meant developing their linguistic competence, such as grammar, vocabulary, and syntax, and this led to a large number of ‘mute’ and ‘deaf’ English language learners with high performance in linguistics but low pragmatic awareness (Cindy: 16 March, 2011; Ann: 22 March, 2011). However, with the publication and implementation of curriculum requirements such as the third version of *College English Curriculum Requirements* in 2007, developing students’ ability to use English effectively has become the objective of College English learning and teaching.

This orientation was reflected by the data that suggested that College English learners understand the need to develop communication competency in English. For example, Chinese university students were aware of the English language needs of society and the new requirements of College English, as well as the importance of pragmatics in achieving English language competence. As indicated in Table 5.3 (p. 121), more than 75% of the students in the questionnaire showed their admiration of people who could communicate in English in a fluent and accurate way. Kevin
claimed in the interview that “enhancing pragmatic competence helps students get more opportunities and create better developing space for their future study and careers” (22 March, 2011).

Influenced by society and learning environments, students had strong desires to learn to be pragmatically competent English language users through their English studies. These data reflected the findings of previous studies (Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998; Niezgoda & Röver, 2001), which found that the learning environment impacts language learners’ pragmatic awareness in that the learning environment could assist students to get information about pragmatic features of the language and improve their pragmatic competence. The findings for the current research must be considered against the model proposed by Bachman (1990) that it is essential for language learners to have both organizational competence and pragmatic competence to achieve language competence (see 3.2.4.2). Pragmatic competence is an indispensable component of global language proficiency.

Nevertheless, the findings of the study indicated that College English students, who were grammatically advanced language learners, were not always able to properly use English in appropriate situations. Data from the DCTs revealed that students often misunderstood what appropriate responses were needed in a variety of everyday situations. Despite the low level of pragmatic knowledge revealed through these data, the students also indicated that they understood that in order to be competent in English they needed to have both knowledge of how to use English as well as linguistic knowledge of English. This finding resonated with the findings of past studies which suggested that it was essential to keep a balance between pragmatic competence and linguistic competence (Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998; Nikula, 2008; Ruan, 2007; Wang, 2004; Xu, 2003; Xu, Case & Wang, 2009). More research in this area is warranted.

As one of the components of language knowledge, pragmatic knowledge plays a key role for language learners in achieving pragmatic competence. As proposed by Apte (1974) “language competence should go hand in hand with cultural competence” (p.67). Learning a language involves learning its pragmatics and culture as well as its form (Wong, 2010). Such arguments are consistent with the findings of previous
studies that culture and social factors play an important part in language learners’
development of pragmatic competence have also been revealed in this study (Du,
2004; Félix-Brasderfer, 2006; Nureddeen, 2008; Wang, 2005; Zheng & Huang,
2010).

As indicated in Figure 5.1 (p.120), College English students’ preference of language
knowledge included knowledge on how to use English appropriately, cultural
knowledge, and linguistic knowledge. The majority of participants indicated that
only maintaining grammar or linguistic forms of a language was not sufficient to
learn to use a language. Also, as noted in Figure 5.2 (p.120), more than 66% of the
students claimed that they would like to gain the ability to communicate with people
while learning English. The data suggested that students were aware of the
importance of pragmatic knowledge, which included cultural knowledge, in
developing their pragmatic competence.

Respondents in the study indicated their understanding and agreement with the
viewpoint that language was an expression of the culture in which it was used
because a natural language was much more than form (Wong, 2010). For example,
Tom indicated in the interview: “Practicing English with people coming from
different cultural backgrounds can help us learn different cultures, which can help
English language learners achieve pragmatic competence in communication” (22
March, 2011).

Culture and language are closely related to each other because a new culture might
be created through social interactions (Gudykunst, 1983) (see 3.3.1), and
misunderstandings can be avoided by people with better knowledge and
understanding of other people’s perceptions of the world, their beliefs and values of
other cultures (Samovar & Porter, 1997) (see 3.3.3). Effective cultural interactions
among people, who have different cultures, are the aim of intercultural/cross-cultural
pragmatic competence (see 3.2.2). In social interactions, cultural and social values,
and social actions are key components to achieve sociopragmatic competence (see
3.2.3), for language is regarded as a product of social action, not a tool to be used
(Pennycook, 2010). Language learners with a high level of intercultural competence
can effectively communicate with people from multiple cultures (see 3.3.4).
Only one student in the study identified having an overseas experience where such intercultural competence for communication could be developed. This is concerning as China’s rapidly growing population of English language learners may not have sufficient opportunities to engage in intercultural experiences to develop key competencies. However, China’s population is now among the most frequently travelled so this might indicate a new trend in gaining intercultural experiences and more research in this area would help teachers in China to better understand how to adapt teaching strategies to meet the needs of younger, more mobile English language students.

Though College English students indicated a realization of the importance of pragmatics in their College English learning, lexical and grammatical knowledge learning still occupied most of their learning time. This over-focus on lexical and grammatical knowledge has posed the danger of ignoring the importance of pragmatics in College English learning. Data from the study indicated that students needed opportunities to include pragmatics in their English language acquisition process.

### 6.1.3 Students’ perceptions of learning and teaching pragmatics

Both classroom teaching and learning and after class study play important roles for language learners in successfully acquiring knowledge of the appropriate use of English language (Lightbown & Spada, 1999). In the Chinese context, classroom teaching and learning is important for English language learners to obtain language knowledge, especially pragmatic knowledge (Wang, 2010). Students habitually follow the teacher’s instructions in selecting language learning methods and strategies, as well as learning materials. The traditional teacher-centered classroom teaching and learning model has a long history in China; however, this approach is now being challenged (Zhang, 2007) as the *College English Curriculum Requirements* (2007) advocates student-centered and computer-based teaching and learning models to inspire students’ individualized and independent learning. The data results from the study indicated that students’ perceptions of College English learning and teaching, particular in learning pragmatics, had changed and that
students wanted a different approach to teaching and learning than that offered traditionally.

As noted in Table 5.4 (p.123), more than 81% of the students wanted to be taught how to communicate with people and how to use English in an appropriate way. They believed that communicative activities were necessary teaching and learning practice in the classroom. It appears that College English students had strong desires to acquire pragmatic knowledge both in class and after class to become communicative competent language users. These findings were in accordance with those of Savignon and Wang’s (2003) study which suggested that there were differences between the needs and preferences of English language learners and their perceptions of instructional practice.

In the 1980s, students learned English with a focus on vocabulary, sentence structures, and grammar. As a result of this approach to teaching and learning, students could not competently communicate in English even after learning English for about ten years. From the late 1990s, with the further implementation of the reform and opening policies in China, students and teachers have gradually realized the importance of the use of English, particularly in communication (Zhao, 2009). As indicated in Table 5.4 (p.123), around 70% of the students in this study wanted their English language teachers to concentrate on CLT and practice, with grammar explained only when needed. Students indicated that CLT and learning, which aimed at helping language learners effectively use the target language (Hiep, 2007), facilitated to enhance students’ communicative competence. High level communicatively competent language users could well recognize and choose the type of language applied in appropriate occasions (Taguchi, 2009).

In the language teaching and learning classroom, tasks play an essential part in helping develop students’ communicative abilities. Students involved in interactions to complete tasks have more opportunities to develop competency in language skills (Bygate, Tonkyn & Williams, 1994). Accordingly, task-based teaching and learning has the potential to facilitate language learners in becoming more native-like in their performance in either an L2 or a foreign language (Salmani-Noudoushan, 2007) (see 3.5.2).
As tasks have enabled the language acquisition process to operate, the data from the study indicated students’ preference to engage with different tasks involved in classroom teaching and learning, for example, through watching English videos and films, reading authentic English materials, group discussions, debates, pair work, learning to sing English songs, role play, and presentations. More specifically, students indicated that they would like their English language teachers to organize pragmatically oriented tasks such as debates, role play, group discussions and pair work in the classroom teaching and learning to enhance their pragmatic competence, which was in accordance with the findings of previous studies (Alcón-Soler, 2005; Takimoto, 2009).

It is nearly 30 years since College English started to be taught in China. Both Chinese students and teachers are familiar with the traditional grammar-translation teaching and learning model (Zhang, 2007) where questions and answers are the only common tasks used in class. College English textbooks were the only teaching materials applied in classroom teaching and learning (Zhao, 2005). However, as stated above, students these days are expecting changes in College English teaching and learning that can facilitate them in developing their pragmatic competence (Wang, 2010).

The data indicated that students would like to be exposed to authentic learning materials, such as original English movies, songs, newspapers and magazines as they believed that they could “learn authentic English from these authentic learning materials.” (Martin: 16 March, 2011). They would like to imitate “singers’ pronunciation and intonation” (Edgar: 22 March, 2011), and “learn to use the colloquial English language from the movies” (Martin: 16 March, 2011).

Compared with the traditional learning tasks, film watching and newspaper or magazine reading are more authentic strategies for students to obtain both linguistic and pragmatic knowledge. With the help of visual images and music, “students can better understand the target language used in certain contexts” (Victor: 16 March, 2011). Students indicated that “students might have more interest to learn a language due to the influence of singers” (Edgar: 22 March, 2011). Newspapers and magazines were also cited as providing all-round information in every aspect of life,
and “...students cannot only learn English but also keep the interest of reading and not get bored of English learning. English magazines can provide us with updated language” (Martin: 22 March, 2011).

The data also indicated that due to a lack of confidence in using a foreign language, College English students preferred to conduct tasks in groups. They could ask others for help when they had difficulties, and they suggested that they might feel more safe and confident in group work. “Students do not need to worry about losing face when they make language mistakes in communication” (Jesse: 22 March, 2011). Accordingly, in classroom teaching and learning, pragmatically oriented tasks such as debates, role play, group discussions and pair work are more welcome than individual presentations in learning English.

It was found from the data that much time has been spent in explaining the usage of the vocabulary and analyzing texts in College English classes. Participants described that “it is really difficult for us to apply the bookish knowledge to practice. The language we have learned in class is the formal language that is different from the colloquial language, particularly in College English learning” (Flora: 22 March, 2011). Even if students can apply some English knowledge to real situations, they are “not sure whether it is appropriate or not due to different contexts” (Harlow: 22 March, 2011). On the other hand, some students indicated that a small group of teachers were prepared to provide a limited amount of time to conduct pragmatically oriented tasks as “group discussion, role play, and presentation” (Wilson: 22 March, 2011) in class in order to enhance “students’ pragmatic competence” (Tom: 22 March, 2011). Yet, some students stated that the design of tasks was not interesting at all, and teachers did not give “pragmatic explanation about the tasks and the context” (Kevin: 22 March, 2011).

These data highlighted that teachers might not be sufficiently trained on how to implement authentic tasks to increase students’ pragmatic competence and if this is so, then more work in this area is needed to better understand how this situation can be improved. Students might feel puzzled at how to apply the knowledge they have learned to practical situations as metapragmatic instructions that can help improve language learners’ pragmatic competence (Bardovi-Harlig & Griffin, 2005;
Martínez-Flor & Alcón-Soler, 2007; Rose & Kwai-fun, 2001). Without properly trained teachers in this area, students are not able to develop appropriate strategies for language learning.

College English teaching and learning was examination-oriented in the 1980s and 1990s. To pass College English Test (Band Four) was a priority because it was a compulsory requirement for university students to get their bachelor degrees. There was no oral examination to test students’ speaking ability in the College English Test until 2000. Students who passed the College English Test (writing) were allowed to sit the College English Test (Spoken English Test). Although it is no longer a compulsory requirement for university students to pass the College English Test (Band Four), forms of written tests are still the major testing methods to examine students’ language competence.

From the present research there is no doubt that students were dissatisfied with the present College English classroom teaching and learning process. They indicated that current College English classroom teaching and learning did little to help the development of their pragmatic competence. Edgar stated in the interview:

I think that the current College English classroom teaching and learning is not well designed by teachers due to different kinds of reasons, such as large classes, limited teaching hours, curriculum requirements, and so on. The relationship between the teaching and the learning is very loose. There is no effective integration between the teaching and the learning. Teachers cannot effectively organize pragmatically communicative activities in the classroom teaching and learning. Students are not well guided in learning the appropriate use of English. (22 March, 2011)

College English students indicated the importance of developing pragmatic competence in the English language acquisition process, and they had strong desires to achieve pragmatic competence within their study time in the university. They had high expectations of their teachers and they hoped that teachers could cover everything they need to support their language learning in classroom teaching and learning. Students expressed a desire that they could obtain the ability of successfully
communicating with others in English after completing their university study. Ann indicated:

All university students want to find decent jobs after graduation. Effectively communicating with people in English can help find a good job in China. Meanwhile, some students plan to go abroad for further study after they graduate from the university. (22 March, 2011)

While students indicated that they understood the importance of successful communication skills, they also neglected language practice in the English language learning process. When they were asked to do some pragmatically oriented tasks or communicative tasks or activities in class, not many of them expressed enthusiasm in participating in the tasks or activities. Some of them even indicated that “some students are unwilling to speak aloud in front of others” (Wilson: 22 March, 2011), not to mention speaking in public.

It was observed from the data that different attitudes and motivations towards practicing pragmatics led to an imbalance in pragmatic competence among different individual students. These findings confirmed the findings of previous studies that individual differences impacted language learners’ development of pragmatic competence (Bataineh & Bataineh, 2006; Chen & Yang, 2010; Keshavarz, Eslami & Ghahraman, 2006; Nureddeen, 2008; Savignon & Wang, 2003; Schauer, 2006; Tang & Zhang, 2009).

As shown in Figure 5.12 (p.138), less than 40% of the students practiced their English with their classmates after class, and only around 5% of them had any chance to communicate with native English speakers. Language practice plays an indispensable role for language learners in improving their pragmatic competence (Pennycook, 2010). Although some Chinese students practice English with their classmates, it is hard for them to detect the mistakes in their communication as they are not highly proficient language users and they share the same culture and a very similar education background. Often they mix Chinese with English in communication so as to make themselves understood. Practicing English with native English speakers could help Chinese students make faster progress in using English. However, students may also develop ELF that cannot be understood “outside the
realm of practice” (Canagarajah, 2007, p.94) so needs to be understood in each specific context of communication (Canagarajah, 2007; Pennycook, 2010).

Related to the need to develop pragmatic competence in the English language teaching and learning process is the role of teaching and learning materials. The following section discusses the findings in relation to College English students’ perceptions of pragmatics included in College English textbooks.

6.1.4 Students’ perceptions of pragmatics in College English textbooks

Textbooks play an important role in English language teaching and learning, particularly in the EFL classroom where they provide the main form of linguistic input (Kim & Hall, 2002; Vellenga, 2004). The textbook is considered to be the most important tool used in the classroom (Altbach, 1991) and College English textbooks are one of the major resources for students to gain their pragmatic knowledge in classroom teaching and learning (Ji, 2008).

It is only in the past decade that Chinese English language learners have been able to access a large number of various English language learning materials due to the further implementation of the reform and opening policy in China and the widespread use of the Internet. Students are exposed to large quantities of original English learning materials, such as English newspapers, magazines and movies. They can easily access the materials they are interested in with the help of the Internet. However, only a small number of students in this study indicated that they spent time learning English using these extra-curriculum materials after class. Most of the university students stated that they learned English through their learning with College English textbooks and their learning was focused on learning to pass their exams. Wilson indicated in the interview:

   We still use College English textbooks as the main sources for learning English. College English course examinations are based on College English textbooks. In addition, we have many courses to study, and we have limited time to look for extra-curriculum materials after class. (22 March, 2011)

The data from the textbook tasks analysis highlighted that textbook linguistic tasks, such as vocabulary tasks, structure tasks, translation tasks, writing tasks, and text
comprehensive tasks, occupied more than 80% of all language tasks provided by the textbooks. Conversely, pragmatic tasks such as metalanguage tasks, cultural information tasks and pragmatically oriented tasks comprised less than 20% of all tasks (see 5.4). This information highlighted why students then had this focus for learning (see above) and why pragmatics was not a higher priority for teaching and learning. Students’ attention concentrates on the meaning of words rather than the use of the language itself as is needed for their exams. As noted in Table 5.16 (p.168), tasks of pair work, group work and group discussion were the most common pragmatically oriented tasks provided by the textbooks and the data from the study indicated that these tasks were frequently used in English classrooms in China.

However, in response to Question 10 (College English textbooks provide much information on culture, conversation rules, usage, and on how to use English correctly) of the questionnaire, more than 60% of the students believed that the current College English textbooks were not able to provide them with adequate pragmatic knowledge as well as cultural knowledge. Students indicated in the interviews that most language learning tasks provided by the textbooks were linguistics-focused or “examination-oriented” (Kevin: 22 March, 2011), which did “little help to the development of students’ pragmatic competence” (Cindy: 16 March, 2011).

Typically, textbooks contain little information about pragmatic language use (Boxer & Pickering, 1995; Vellenga, 2004). Students confirmed that the current College English textbooks “focused on the development of students’ linguistic competence” (Norman: 16 March, 2011) and provided “little help to developing students’ pragmatic competence” (Norman: 16 March, 2011). They commented that selected texts in the textbooks were “very boring and out of style” (Oliver: 22 March, 2011) and that “little cultural knowledge” (Kevin: 22 March, 2011) was included in texts. Meanwhile, “easy texts and difficult ones are mixed together, which makes it hard for students to develop linguistic competence or pragmatic competence step by step” (Kevin: 22 March, 2011).

Researchers have noted that “it is important to recognize, that, in general, textbooks cannot be counted on as a reliable source of pragmatic input for classroom language
learners” (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001, p.25). However, Chinese College English students almost totally rely on textbooks to acquire pragmatic knowledge and practice pragmatic competence in the Chinese learning context. This practice is contrary to that found in previous research where findings revealed the importance of instruction of pragmatic routines, metapragmatic information and pragmatically oriented tasks to facilitate improvement in language learners’ pragmatic competence (Alcón-Soler, 2005; Bardovi-Harlig & Griffin, 2005; Takahashi, 2001; Takimoto, 2009; Tateyama, 2001). It appears that the indispensable role that College English textbooks play in Chinese students’ English language learning process cannot be neglected and further research in this area is needed.

While the findings of this study highlighted that College English textbooks failed to adequately portray communicative practices or ideological constructs in the target language appropriately, students stated that they were not given tools in the textbooks to recognize and analyze language in a variety of contexts, which, to a great degree, prevented students from becoming proficient language users in the target language (Ji, 2008).

Influenced by social needs and curriculum requirements, College English students’ perceptions of pragmatics in English language learning have changed. They desire to acquire pragmatic knowledge in the learning process and be taught how to correctly use English in appropriate contexts (Ji, 2008). In the next section, College English students’ levels of pragmatic competence will be analyzed and discussed to address the second research question of this study.

6.2 RQ2: To what extent do College English students focus on their pragmatic knowledge in their English learning? What are their levels of pragmatic competence?

As pragmatic knowledge is necessary for students to develop their pragmatic competence, it is important to obtain an understanding of students’ perceptions of pragmatic knowledge. It is also important to understand students’ levels of pragmatic competence in relation to designing an effective pragmatics learning model. The second research question of this study investigated the extent to which students concentrated on pragmatic knowledge in their College English learning and their
levels of pragmatic competence. The following sections describe the analysis and discussion of the findings to the second research question.

6.2.1 Students’ focus of pragmatic knowledge in English language learning

According to Bachman’s (1990) model of language competence, pragmatic knowledge is classified into general pragmatic information, metalanguage information, metapragmatic information, speech acts, cultural knowledge, pragmatically oriented tasks, and knowledge on how to learn pragmatics (Ji, 2008). This pragmatic knowledge is teachable (Alcón-Soler, 2005; Takahashi, 2001; Tateyama, 2001), and pragmatically oriented tasks can help improve language learners’ pragmatic competence (Alcón-Soler, 2005; Ji, 2008; Riddiford & Joe, 2010). To be more precise, pragmatic knowledge contains the knowledge of communicative actions and how to carry it out, while pragmatic competence includes the ability to properly use the language in accordance with the context (Ji, 2008).

The College English Curriculum Requirements (2007) proposes that “the objective of College English is to develop students’ ability to use English in a well-rounded way, especially in listening and speaking” (Chinese College English Education and Supervisory Committee, 2007, p.25). Developing students’ pragmatic competence in communication has become the major task in the current College English learning and teaching in China.

College English students have indicated a realization that pragmatic knowledge is as important as linguistic knowledge and they are required to pay more attention to acquire pragmatic knowledge in College English learning so as to become pragmatic competent. As indicated in Figure 5.1 (p.120), they preferred to learn communicative skills, knowledge on how to use English and cultural knowledge in their English language learning process.

The interview data and the researcher’s classroom practice indicated that there was not a balance in conveying linguistic knowledge and pragmatic knowledge in current College English learning and teaching. The main task for students and teachers was still to acquire linguistic knowledge to pass examinations. It is hard for both students and teachers to strictly distinguish pragmatic knowledge from linguistic knowledge.
as students indicated that “linguistic knowledge is the basis of pragmatic knowledge” (Sunny: 16 March, 2011). In order to achieve language competence, language learners need to effectively integrate linguistic knowledge with pragmatic knowledge. The current research found that as foreign language learners who have learned English for more than six years, College English students did not have sufficient linguistic knowledge they could employ to accurately express themselves. A lack of adequate pragmatic knowledge results in failures in communication.

Nevertheless, the interview data indicated that students had a keen desire to obtain pragmatic knowledge because they believed having sufficient pragmatic knowledge could help them become pragmatically competent in social interactions. Chinese College English students understood the importance of acquiring pragmatic knowledge that could assist them in becoming communicatively competent language users. They would like to imitate native English speakers’ pronunciation and intonation, and learn cultural knowledge from original English movies, newspapers and magazines. In the process of trying to use native-like English, there is a danger that the influence of the Chinese language and the Chinese culture may be neglected, which is impractical for bilingual language learners learning to use a foreign language. More research needs to occur to understand how English can be taught within the Chinese context without losing that element of the learning.

The current study reaffirms the importance of pragmatic knowledge in acquiring an L2 or foreign language. Pragmatic knowledge plays a significant role in becoming pragmatically competent (Bachman, 1990). Appropriately acknowledging different kinds of pragmatic knowledge can help language learners obtain required knowledge about the use of the language better, which is essential for learners in becoming pragmatically competent. Language learners need to consider the influence of their L1 and first culture as well as ELF in communication and how this affects their learning of pragmatic knowledge as well as their levels of pragmatic competence. The next section discusses College English students’ levels of pragmatic competence.
6.2.2 College English students’ levels of pragmatic competence

In current College English learning and teaching in China, becoming linguistically competent language learners has only begun to attract attention (Wang, 2010; Zhao, 2005). However, both students and teachers have now begun to pay more attention to developing students’ pragmatic competence (Wang, 2010), which is an essential component of the language proficiency construct (Bachman, 1990; Canale & Swain, 1980; Garcia, 2004).

Recent empirical research has begun to pay more attention to its role in interlanguage development, particularly in the aspect of comprehension (Bardovi-Harlig, 1999; Kasper & Rose, 1999). Knowing students’ levels of pragmatic competence can provide convincing evidence for language education experts to prepare effective curriculum and teaching materials. In addition, language teachers can be kept informed of students’ needs in learning the target language so that they can better design the classroom teaching and learning to facilitate students to achieve optimal learning outcomes.

Analyzing the use of language in communicative situations is regarded as the core business in pragmatics (Haugh, 2009). This study employed a questionnaire and DCTs to examine Chinese College English students’ levels of pragmatic competence. There were five multiple choice questions in the questionnaire to examine students’ understanding of various communicative situations and their pragmatic competence in using English. In the DCTs, 20 situations related to three different selected speech acts – declining an offer, giving a compliment response, and making an apology – were used to investigate College English students’ pragmatic competence. The discussion and analysis of the findings are presented below.

6.2.2.1 Questionnaire data

Five situations presented in the questionnaire aimed at examining College English students’ understandings or misunderstandings of pragmatics and their pragmatic competence in communication. Understanding contains a construction of a mental representation of the text (the text-base) and a representation of the situation (the situation model) (van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983). Two modes of understanding proposed
by Dascal and Berenstein (1987) are comprehending and grasping. Comprehending suggests being able to understand the pragmatic level (deciding the sentence meaning, the utterance meaning and the speaker’s meaning), while grasping implies being able to perceive what can and what cannot be said in a given situation (Dascal & Berenstein, 1987; Verdonik, 2010).

Misunderstanding has created an increasing interest in research on pragmatics and language learning (Bazzanella & Damiano, 1999; Bosco, Monica & Bara, 2006; Dascal & Berenstein, 1987; Schegloff, 1987; Thomas, 1983; Weigand, 1999; Weizman & Blum-Kulka, 1992; Verdonik, 2010; Zaefferer, 1977). Misunderstandings can be interpreted as misperceptions or misinterpretations that could impact the phonological, syntactic, semantic or situational level of interpretation, and they could also impact the illocutionary force, the propositional content, or both (Zaefferer, 1977).

The first two situations in the questionnaire were intended to examine College English students’ (mis)understandings in using English. Language users, context, meaning and social interactions are the key features of pragmatics. Language users play a key role in communicative situations (Armour, 2004), and context is a dynamic situation in which communication is allowed to be processed (Mey, 2001). Meaning is claimed to be the central concern of pragmatics (Levinson, 1983) as it is defined as “arising from speakers expressing intentions through what they say, and recipients recognizing or attributing those intentions to speakers” (Haugh, 2009, p.92), while social interaction carries speaker’s specific meanings in communication (Wierzbicka, 2010) (see 2.1.3).

The first situation focused on students’ understanding of an inquiry. While buying an entry ticket to a theme park in an English speaking country, a non-native English speaker asked for a map of the theme park. As the theme park provided maps in different languages, the ticket seller, a native English speaker, needed to make sure what language the customer used by asking: “What’s your post code?” The data indicated that more than 60% of the students understood the literal meaning of the words “post code”. The other students appeared to try to respond to an implied
meaning. However, less than 20% of the students actually understood the ticket seller’s inquiry.

As the data indicated that only a small number of the students understood the implied meaning of the inquiry, it would appear that the majority did not have adequate pragmatic knowledge or a high enough level of pragmatic competence to facilitate their understanding of the situation. Even though some students made the right choice in their response to the question, they did not really understand the implied meaning of the words from the interlocutor. Indeed, students indicated in the interviews that “we tried to guess the implied meaning of the words from the interlocutors” (Martin: 16 March, 2011; Kevin: 22 March, 2011). Guessing at the answer gave students only a low percentage of chance to respond to the question correctly and so one can surmise that the actual percentage of correct responses may well be lower than that indicated from the questionnaire data.

The second situation that was adapted from a movie aimed at examining students’ understanding of the discourse in the related context. Jack, a villain, met an acquaintance, Richard, in the corridor in a hospital. Having been told that Jack was going to get a new heart, Richard replied contemptuously, “It is about time.” There can be two levels in understanding the Richard’s reply. At the literal level, under such a circumstance, Jack has a serious heart disease and is going to have a heart operation. At the metaphorical level, Jack, a villain, needs to realize his evil ways and totally change his behavior. However, according to the context of the movie, Richard did not express the literal meaning; he stated his implication.

The data indicated that more than 36% of the students selected the literal meaning of Richard’s words, and less than 30% of them were able to provide a correct understanding of the words in the related context. Students highlighted that they were not sure about the implied meaning of Richard’s words. “We tried to compare the four choices and use the problem-solving skills to make the final decision” (Gilbert: 16 March, 2011; Oliver, 22 March, 2011). This finding may relate back to students’ conditioning in completing formal exams over their schooling lives where they picked the answer most likely not to be eliminated from the mix, or it may be as with
the situation above, they simply guessed at an answer. Data from both situations indicated that students did not use high pragmatic competence in their responses.

Indeed, the findings suggested that College English students had a low level of pragmatic competence in using English. Their understanding of discourses in the corresponding context was limited to the literal level although many of them appeared to have realized this and began to focus their attention on working out the potential implied meaning of the discourses. Not being familiar with the cultural knowledge and appropriate contexts, language users might fail to accurately get the interlocutor’s implied meaning and communicative intention that leads to pragmatic failures in communication.

The next three situations, which were adapted from past studies, were to explore College English students’ levels of pragmatic competence. The first and second situations examined students’ pragmatic competence in giving apologies. In the first situation, Mary needed to apologize to a passenger as the heavy bag she had put on the bus shelf fell on a passenger when the bus suddenly stopped. Mary gave the apology as: “It is my bag. It’s all right.” In this situation, the apology is not appropriate at all. Mary claimed that the bag was hers and seemed to suggest that it was fine that her bag was not secured and had fallen on the other passenger. Yet, there were around 28% of the students who thought that Mary had given an appropriate apology. While this situation could be described as universal, in that it could happen anywhere in the world, Mary’s response in English was not pragmatically correct.

In the second situation, a university student had to apologize to his teacher as he had forgotten to bring back a book the teacher had lent him. The student gave his apology as: “Sorry, I forgot. Don’t worry. I will bring it tomorrow”. In this situation, the student was aware of his mistake and apologized to the teacher, but his apology did not seem to be appropriate in regard to the relationship between a student and a teacher. In both Western countries and Eastern countries, students are expected to maintain a deferential relationship with teachers to a greater or lesser degree. In China, teachers usually have an unchallengeable authority. However, around 21% of the students believed that the student had given an appropriate apology to the teacher.
when in fact the response would be considered as too friendly and familiar in Chinese interactions between students and teachers.

There were two possible explanations for these findings. The first indicated that College English students were not proficient language practitioners in employing the correct speech act of giving an apology. Although they were grammatically advanced English language learners, they were not able to detect obvious pragmatic mistakes in the communication situation. Few were able to correctly apply suitable language functions to the above situations in accordance with the specific context. Language learners’ low level of pragmatic competence resulted in pragmatic failures in communication (Hou, 2007). The other possible explanation for the 21% of students who believed that an appropriate apology had been given might relate to the changing social ideas young Chinese students had in their desire to learn English as a native speaker. Perhaps they believed that a native speaker might respond in such a way. More research in this area is needed.

The third situation on the questionnaire was to explore College English students’ pragmatic competence in declining an offer. Mary declined the offer of an after dinner dessert twice by saying “Thanks. I am full” and “No more, thanks.” This situation seemed to be hard for students to decide on whether Mary’s response was appropriate or not. Considering the Chinese traditional culture, it is impolite for Chinese language users to decline an offer due to the influence of the concept of ‘face’ (Bargiela-Chiappini, 2003). However, more than 60% of the students indicated that the replies given by Mary were suitable in this situation which was contrary to Chinese tradition, although there were more than 37% of the students who thought that Mary had not provided appropriate replies to decline the offer of dessert.

The above findings highlighted different cultural conflicts in learning a foreign language that could have an influence on language learners’ pragmatic competence in communication within different contexts, and indicated that language learners’ cultural differences could lead to their pragmatic failures (Zheng & Huang, 2010). Culture is closely related to language, and cultural knowledge is essential to L2 or foreign language learning (Lamber, 1999). Obtaining cultural knowledge could help language learners become pragmatically competent in the target language in
communication. In order to further examine College English students’ levels of pragmatic competence, the following section discusses the data collected from DCTs in relation to students’ levels of using EFL.

6.2.2.2 Discourse Completion Tasks data

Pragmatic competence is the ability to use language forms in a wide range of environments, and affects the relationship between the language users and the social and cultural context of the situation (Gass & Selinker, 2001; Lightbown & Spada, 1999). Grammatically advanced language learners, who may be considered to be good L2 learners or good foreign language learners regarding their mastery of vocabulary and grammar of the target language, might still be unable to produce socially and culturally appropriate language (Xu, 2009).

Language users employ a variety of speech acts to achieve their communication aims. Speech act theory explains how speakers use the language to achieve intended actions and how hearers deduce intended meaning from the words. Speech acts are claimed to operate by pragmatic principles (Austin, 1962; Brown & Levinson, 1978; Searle, 1969, 1975), and they play a key role in the field of pragmatics that concentrates on the language users’ appropriate use of the language in different contexts (Bravo & Briz, 2004; Félix-Brasdefer, 2006; Watts, 2003). Three specific speech acts – declining an offer, giving a compliment response, and making an apology – were applied in DCTs to explore College English students’ levels of pragmatic competence and the practice of language learning strategies in learning EFL. Students’ responses in DCTs were evaluated in terms of appropriateness and grammar or structure.

Refusals/Declining an offer

The refusal or declining an offer is a frequent performance in people’s daily life. The refusal speech act, which is a face-threatening act to the listener, requestor, and inviter (Brown & Levinson, 1987), happens when a speaker directly or indirectly says no to a request or invitation. Refusal speech acts differ in directness with situation and culture (Li, 2007). As a refusal speech act contradicts the speaker’s
expectations and is often realized through indirect strategies, it requires language learners to obtain a high level of pragmatic competence (Chen, 1996).

Speech acts of refusal try to abide by the Politeness Principle, as politeness plays a core role in interpersonal communications in the traditional Chinese culture, which impacts Chinese language learners’ learning a target language. Chen (1996) indicated that in the case of a refusal, one may properly produce three separate speech acts as: (1) an expression of regret, “I’m sorry,” followed by (2) a direct refusal, “I cannot come to your birthday party,” followed by (3) an excuse, “I will be on business in the US”. Similarly, Tanck (2004) stated the three components are: (1) an expression of regret; (2) an excuse; (3) an offer of alternative (in invitation situations). Currently there are not many studies on acts of refusals in the literature. This study investigated College English students’ application of speech acts of refusal in the Chinese learning context.

In DCTs, there were seven situations designed to examine students’ speech acts of refusal (see Table 6.1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Refusal 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refusal 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refusal 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refusal 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refusal 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refusal 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refusal 7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Guided by the data analysis method used by other researchers (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1991; Beebe, Takahashi & Uliss-Weltz, 1990), the collected data were analyzed using semantic formulas as units of analysis. A semantic formula refers to “a word, phrase, or sentence that meets a particular semantic criterion or strategy; any one or more of these can be used to perform the act in question” (Cohen, 1996, p.265). After the completion of the coding, the data were analyzed regarding the
frequency of the semantic formulas, and all the frequencies were converted into percentages. The collected data were also analyzed in terms of response length, content, and suitability to certain contexts.

As indicated in Table 5.9 (p.142), the first six places of frequency of lexical items and basic formulaic sequences used by the students to give refusals were listed as: “Sorry”, “I’m sorry”, “I’d like to, but...”, “Thanks/Thank you”, “No”, and “No, thanks/thank you”. Judging from the formulaic sequences used by the students, it could be concluded that a certain number of College English students were able to apply the functional expressions of refusal to corresponding situations although some responses, such as “No” and “No way”, appeared to be impolite in declining offers in Chinese contexts.

Combining Chen’s (1996) ideas with Tanck’s (2004) on producing speech acts of refusals, this study analyzed the situations according to the three different components described above.

The first refusal prompt required the speaker to decline an invitation to a party to be held at a friend’s house. The frequency of the individual components of the speech act set for this prompt can be found in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components</th>
<th>Frequency of Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expression of regret</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excuse</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offering alternative</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The findings showed that most subjects avoided refusing directly by employing a direct refusal (“no”). More than 50% of the students expressed their regret of not being able to accept the invitation, and most of them provided excuses or reasons as a way to convey their inability or unwillingness. However, there were a small number of students who tried to offer an alternative for their absence at the party.
It was found that College English students had realized that they needed to show politeness in social interactions. It is impolite in Chinese society to give a direct refusal “no” to decline one’s invitation. Even when a small group of students used the direct refusal “no”, they provided additional excuses to explain their absence. Due to the influence of politeness in Chinese culture in relation to their English pragmatic knowledge, many of the students expressed regret (“I’m sorry”), and most subjects presented excuses or reasons for their inability to attend (“I will have three exams next Monday”). These findings confirmed those found in an earlier study that non-native speakers produced few offers of alternative excuses (Tanck, 2004) but did not neglect the social interaction of politeness.

Cultural elements impact on the application of refusal speech acts. Non-native speakers may feel that it is less necessary for them to offer alternatives due to the familiarity or social distance found in the situation, while native speakers may believe that these components are culturally and socially important in communication (Tanck, 2004). One the one hand, students’ responses in this research were acceptable in the Chinese context. On the other hand, their responses might not be accepted by native English speakers. In order to achieve intercultural pragmatics in communication, there is a need for language learners to understand cross-cultural similarities and differences in learning a language (Oxford, 1996) (see 3.2.2).

In the second refusal prompt, the speaker declined a request to work overtime for his boss. The frequency of use of the components of the speech act for this prompt can be found in Table 6.3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components</th>
<th>Frequency of Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expression of regret</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct refusal</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excuse</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants in the research tended to respond to this prompt using a polite refusal, perhaps considering the relationship between an employee and a boss. Most of the subjects applied the expressions “sorry” and “I’m sorry” to suggest their inability or
unwillingness to issue direct refusals. At the same time, however, almost every student provided excuses for their not being able to work overtime.

The data indicated that students responded appropriately for the relationship in this prompt, and tried to indicate the correct kind of politeness in the interaction. These data complied with the notion of sociopragmatics, in that language learners needed to obtain proper knowledge of relevant social and cultural values that could help them vary their speech strategies in communication (Harlow, 1990; Kasper, 1997). Yet, there were a few students who provided a direct refusal “no” with no excuse or alternative offered, which indicated that quite a small number of students had a very low level of pragmatic competence for this particular situation (particularly if they wanted to keep their job). Not understanding cultural and social elements and lacking social strategies in using English may lead to pragmatic failures in social interactions.

The third refusal prompt required the speaker to decline a friend’s invitation to have a cup of coffee. The frequency of use of the individual components of the speech act for this prompt can be found in Table 6.4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components</th>
<th>Frequency of Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expression of regret</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excuse</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offering alternative</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data indicated that more than 60% of the respondents refused the friend’s invitation by providing brief replies of “sorry” or “no”. More than 30% of the subjects gave excuses for not accepting the invitation (“...I have an upset stomach”), and few students offered alternatives to the speaker (“How about next time?”). Students understood that they had to be polite in expressing their refusals in this situation. “Thanks” and “thank you” were applied by students to show that they were familiar with the Politeness Principle, and subjects tried to minimize the threat to face because turning down an invitation threatened face (Turnbull & Saxton, 1997).
The use of speech acts is greatly impacted by learners’ L1 and their first culture. The direct refusal “no” is generally not considered to be an impolite word in Chinese if it is spoken in a mild tone. Giving a direct refusal “no” to reject an invitation might not be considered rude in the Chinese context. The directness level of the refusal, however, can be interpreted differently between native speakers and EFL speakers (Keshavarz, Eslami & Ghahraman, 2006) and cause misunderstandings.

Nevertheless, as indicated by Kuo (2006), native speakers do not own English because English has become the language for international communication and is used by more non-native speakers than native speakers. Local interpretations of Englishes, which are influenced by non-native speakers’ L1 and first culture, are acceptable if they can help complete communication successfully (see 3.4.3). It is necessary for native English speakers to be aware of this language phenomenon influenced by the Chinese and the Chinese culture so as to keep communication moving smoothly.

In the fourth situation in the DTCs, the speaker declined a request from a student to make some changes to the teaching method. The frequency of use of the components of the speech act can be found in the following table.

### Table 6.5  Refusal 4 – made to a student’s request

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components</th>
<th>Frequency of Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expression of regret</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct refusal</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excuse</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This was a different situation to the previous three situations, as participants in the research, acting as university teachers, were required to refuse a request from a student. According to traditional Chinese ideas, teachers and students always have a “top-down” relationship, with teachers taking it for granted that they have unchallengeable authority. It has only been in recent years that students are encouraged to speak up about their opinions about teaching, but only few students would be inclined to propose suggestions regarding teaching to teachers.
The students indicated in the interviews that “…we had to think about the relationship between teachers and students…Teachers are well-educated professionals, and their words must appear to be polite in communication” (Edgar: 22 March, 2011; Norman: 16 March, 2011). In order to appear to be cultured, the participants applied polite expressions such as “thank you” and “thanks”. Participants also tried to avoid giving direct refusals and tried to use possible excuses to turn down the request from the student (“…but all of you have to attend the exam”).

The data demonstrated that almost all the refusal excuses revealed the teacher’s authority. It was observed that College English students had transferred their Chinese culture to the use of EFL and that culture had greatly influenced the development of language learners’ pragmatic competence (Wang, 2005; Zheng & Huang, 2010). In order to achieve intercultural competence, it is essential for people coming from different cultures to understand the culture of the target language as well as their own and how the two can be used together.

The fifth refusal prompt required the speaker to decline a request to lend lecture notes to one of his/her classmates. The frequency of use of the components of the speech act for this prompt can be found in Table 6.6.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components</th>
<th>Frequency of Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expression of regret</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct refusal</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excuse</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Classmates keep an equal and close relationship with each other. They often treat one another as friends in the Chinese context. The data indicated that almost all the subjects expressed their regrets and gave excuses in making refusals. Most of them avoided using direct refusals to reject the demand. The refusal made to a classmate’s request of borrowing lecture notes might make the requester face a dilemma. Any extreme responses might break down the close relationship. Thus, speakers need to consider face-saving strategies to protect the requester’s face when refusing the request.
A few respondents did not consider the face-saving strategies when they gave their responses. The face-threatening responses “no way”, “you must pay for your action”, and “don’t miss the class next time”, seemed to be blame words generally given by supervisors rather than classmates. The requester would feel awkward in such a dilemma, and the conversation might not continue.

These findings, contrary to those using face-saving responses suggested that some of the College English students had a low level of sociolinguistic competence that resulted in the failure of pragmatic competence; their responses indicated that they did not have the pragmatic understanding or ability to repair the communicative failure. These students did not use either compensation strategies or social strategies when they used EFL. Applying appropriate speech acts in corresponding social interactions ensures the smooth process of communication. Being aware of the specific social situations and the appropriate speech acts for each situation could help language users become communicatively competent in intercultural communication (Zhao & Throssell, 2011).

The sixth refusal prompt required the speaker to decline an employee’s request to raise the employee’s salary. The frequency of use of the components of the speech act for this prompt can be found in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components</th>
<th>Frequency of Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expression of regret</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct refusal</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excuse</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Similar to the fourth refusal prompt, the boss and the worker kept a “top-down” relationship. Compared with the results of the fourth prompt, more participants chose to directly refuse the request in this particular situation. Students indicated in the interviews that “the owner of the restaurant boss has the unique power to decide whether to raise the salary or not, to some extent, he does not need to consider the face-threatening principle when he refuses employees’ requests” (Edgar: 22 March, 2011; Norman: 16 March, 2010).
Impacted by traditional Chinese culture, the participants indicated that the boss seemed to have ‘sovereign’ power. Few people would like to argue with their boss. It is only in recent years, that people in China have started to argue or negotiate with their boss regarding issues such as salary, working conditions or welfare. However, bosses still believe that they have the unchallengeable power, and they would not like to make concessions to employees’ requests in most cases.

Although many students expressed their regrets when they rejected the request, some responses they provided did not make excuses to refuse the request, for example, “I have paid the right money for you” and “as you know, the restaurant has a detailed principle about the increase of pay, but you do not match it”. These findings highlighted that Chinese culture had played an important role in developing Chinese English language learners’ pragmatic knowledge as well as their pragmatic competence. Language users would like to apply both Chinese language rules and Polite Principles that are often used in similar Chinese contexts to express themselves in English. In order to become pragmatically competent language users in intercultural communication, people are required to be familiar with such principles in other cultures that can help avoid misunderstandings in communication.

In the last refusal prompt, the speaker was required to decline a salesman’s invitation to have dinner. The frequency of use of the individual components of the speech act for this prompt can be found in Table 6.8.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components</th>
<th>Frequency of Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expression of regret</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excuse</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offering alternative</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The situation indicated the business relationship between a salesman and his important customer. As the president of a large research center, he had the power to decide whether to buy computers from a computer company or not. It was not hard to understand that the salesman from the computer company invited him to have dinner in an expensive restaurant so as to flatter him.
The data demonstrated that most of the subjects expressed their regrets and excuses when rejecting the invitation, and only a few of them offered alternatives to the requester. Students were aware that “people had to be polite in making refusals to salesman’s invitation. If they did not take care of it, it would bring troubles to their work” (Jesse & Norman: 16 March, 2011; Wilson: 22 March, 2011).

Most of the students seemed to be familiar with such happenings in their daily life, which indicated that they had experienced certain social strategies in dealing with similar matters. However, several students gave direct refusals to the requester such as “no”, “I can’t”, and “no way”, which indicated impoliteness and non-professional behavior of a senior person. At the same time, responses such as “I have not time now” and “how about another time” implied that some students did not know how to respond appropriately in the situation. They had a low level of linguistic competence and some even made linguistic mistakes in their responses. Not being able to recognize the correct relationship between two speakers in the Chinese context or not obtaining adequate linguistic knowledge about giving refusals leads to pragmatic failures in communication.

The findings in relation to giving refusals highlighted that Chinese College English students had learned what speech acts of refusals were, but not all of the participants understood how to correctly apply them appropriately to all situations. The improper use of refusal speech acts led to pragmatic failures in communication.

These findings also indicated that a certain number of College English students had a low level of linguistic competence. These students were not able to properly understand word descriptions of the situations and had some problems in organizing correct linguistic knowledge that prevented them from achieving pragmatic competence. In other words, they were not efficient language practitioners in using English, and misunderstandings might arise due to their incorrect use of English.

These ineffective language strategies may be due to the fact that many of these students did not have sufficient social strategies in dealing with corresponding situations because they had limited access to communicating with native English
language speakers. These participants also appeared to not have enough compensation strategies to repair pragmatic failures in communication.

The following section discusses the findings of the second speech act used in this study – compliment responses.

Compliment responses

There are two main reasons for selecting the speech act of compliment responses to include in this research. First, a number of studies have been conducted on the speech act of compliment responses in different varieties of English and other languages, which provides a basis for comparative analysis. Second, compliment responses provide an invaluable and under-utilized insight into speakers’ responses to praises of their personal and social identities (Lorenzo-Dus, 2001).

Compliments are easily heard in people’s daily conversations. Responding to compliments is a usual feature of discoursal activities. Speakers do not have time to plan the utterance in advance, and they are forced to react promptly to the action or utterance (Schaucer & Adolphs, 2006). They may feel uneasy, defensive, or even cynical regarding the compliments they receive as compliments could be threatening to the addressee’s face, and accordingly it may be hard for them to appropriately respond to such compliments (Knapp, Hopper & Bell, 1984). Thus, compliment responses are worthy of studying (Yu, 2003).

There are seven situations designed to examine how students give responses to compliments in DCTs (see Table 6.9).
Table 6.9 List of seven compliment response situations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Compliment response 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compliment response 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compliment response 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compliment response 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compliment response 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compliment response 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compliment response 7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Holmes (1988, 1995) established her taxonomy of compliment responses, which includes the following items:

(a) **Accept**: Appreciation/agreement token, agreeing utterance, downgrading/qualifying utterance, return compliment;
(b) **Reject**: Disagreeing utterance, question accuracy, challenge sincerity; and
(c) **Deflect/evade**: Shift credit, informative comment, ignore, legitimate evasion, context needed to illustrate, request reassurance/repetition (Holmes, 1988, p.460; 1995, p.141).

These categories help identify the DCTs data and provide effective parameters in researching related speech acts for the current study.

As noted in Table 5.10 (p.146), the first four most frequent lexical items and basic formulaic sequences used by the students to give compliment responses were listed as: “Thank you”, “Thanks”, “Thank you very much”, and “I am glad to hear that”. From the formulaic sequences used by the students, it was found that most College English students had a realization of the importance of showing politeness when giving compliment responses, and they could apply the expressions of replying to compliments in the corresponding situations.

In the eighth situation, the speaker was required to respond to the compliment on a new hairstyle. The frequency of sequence categories used to make responses to the compliment can be found in the following table.
Table 6.10  Compliment response 1 – made to a friend’s compliment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category type</th>
<th>Frequency of Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accept</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reject</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deflect/evade</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data indicated that most students accepted the compliment and showed their acceptance of the compliment by saying “Thank you”, “Thanks”, and “Thank you very much”. Students applied an appreciation token (“Thank you”, “Thanks”, and “Thank you very much”), agreeing utterance (“It’s cool, isn’t it?”), and return compliment (“I believe that you will look more beautiful if you have the same style”) to show their politeness and pleasure to accept the compliment.

There were a few students who rejected the compliment by employing a disagreeing utterance (“I don’t like it very much”). Cindy indicated in the interview that “I did not intend to reject the compliment when giving my compliment responses. I just followed the wording of the Chinese language by using ‘No’ in offering compliment responses. In addition, I considered the Chinese traditional ‘face-saving’ theory to show the politeness when giving compliment responses” (16 March, 2011). Students employed phrases and norms that were often used in Chinese to achieve the same purpose in applying the target language (Schauer, 2009).

A few students gave deflective responses by providing the informative comment (“I had my hair done in the university barber’s”). Such responses are acceptable in the Chinese context as it is a common way for Chinese people to respond to compliments in their mother tongue. People try to show their modesty when offering compliment responses. It is considered as one of the core values of Chinese culture that guides Chinese communication behavior (Wu, 2011) which is a further indication that language learners’ first culture affects the use of their target language (Liaw, 2006). The data also indicated that most students used acceptance strategies and combined strategies when responding to compliments, which implied that they had become skilful language practitioners in applying these strategies in offering compliment responses.
In the ninth situation, the speaker was required to make a response to the compliment on a new watch. The frequency of sequence categories of compliment responses is listed in the following table.

Table 6.11 Compliment response 2 – made to a friend’s compliment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category type</th>
<th>Frequency of Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accept</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reject</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deflect/evade</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Almost every student provided the appreciation token first (“Thank you”, “Thanks”) when responding to the compliment before stating explanations to the interlocutor. Most of them applied combined strategies in giving compliment responses in this situation.

More students gave deflective responses by providing a shift credit (“It’s a birthday present from my mother”), and informative comments (“It’s inexpensive and I bought it on discount”), which was different to the first compliment response situation. At the same time, in order to show politeness and avoid showing off, more students chose to use downgrading in their utterances (“It’s not too bad, is it?”), and used return compliments (“You will also look nice when you wear it”). Some students gave responses (“Your dream will come true one day”) to comfort the interlocutor as well. Only a few students rejected the compliment by providing a response such as “I do not want to have another same watch”. This small group of students did not really intend to reject the compliment from the interlocutor. They just wanted to show their politeness to save the interlocutor’s face.

Influenced by the L1 and the first culture, it is not hard to see from the compliment responses provided by the students that they would like to follow the principles of giving compliment responses in Chinese. They often employed their language preferences and strategies in Chinese to give compliment responses in English to achieve the same purpose (Shauer, 2009). Students also have considered the face-saving theory when giving responses because face plays an important role in social communication in China, and it is impolite to threaten a person’s face in
communication. Yet, there were a few students who gave ‘rough’ responses that threatened the face of the interlocutor, indicating that these students may have had a lower level of pragmatic competence for this situation.

In situation 10, the speaker was requested to respond to a compliment on the presentation he had given in an English class. The frequency of sequence categories used to make responses to compliments can be found in the following table.

**Table 6.12 Compliment response 3 – made to a classmate’s compliment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category type</th>
<th>Frequency of Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accept</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reject</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deflect/evade</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data indicated that 72% of the students were glad to accept the compliment from their classmate by providing the appreciation token (“Thank you”, “Thanks”, “I am glad to hear that”). Some of them provided downgrading utterances such as (“It is my luck”) to show their modesty. The reject response (“No”) was followed by the return compliment “You can do better than me” to show modesty and politeness as modesty plays a central role in interpersonal relationships in Chinese societies (Wu, 2011). Few students, who gave deflective responses, provided informative comments such as (“It took me a whole week to make preparations for it”) to show their modesty.

Students tried to appear humble and used excuses to downgrade their efforts in order to show their modesty. Chinese people are taught to keep a “low tone” when they receive compliments or praises. This does not mean that the Chinese do not think positively of themselves but the norm of Chinese society is to be modest (Chen, 1993). It appears that there is a strong link between the language and the culture, and effective cross-cultural communication needs better cultural understanding (Shaul & Furbee, 1998).

Due to different perceptions of the world, communication practices and behaviors of people with different cultures are inevitably different (Samovar & Porter, 1997).
Understanding people’s perceptions of the world, as well as their beliefs and values, can effectively facilitate language learners to gain insights into the culture of the target language, which promotes language learners’ pragmatic competence (Liaw, 2006) (see 3.3.3). Understanding their own cultural norms and how these affect language learning could also assist students in developing pragmatic competence.

In the eleventh situation, the speaker was required to respond to the compliment on the new sweater he was wearing. The frequency of sequence categories of compliment responses is listed in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category type</th>
<th>Frequency of Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accept</td>
<td>98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reject</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deflect/evade</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.13 Compliment response 4 – made to a friend’s compliment

In this situation, no students gave a negative response to reject the compliment from the friend. Almost all of them gave the short appreciation tokens such as “Thanks”, “Thank you” and “Thanks a lot” to accept the compliment first, and some extended explanations were added after the short responses. Agreeing utterance (“I like it, too”), downgrading utterance (“I wanted to get rid of it several weeks ago”), and return compliment (“You are dressing beautifully today, too”) were used by the students to accept the compliment. Students applied informative comment (“It’s a gift from my mother”) to give deflective responses.

The data indicated that students seemed to be familiar with such a situation as they might have experienced it in their daily life, and they appeared to be skilful in dealing with the situation. The responses from students covered all four dimensions in accepting compliments recommended by Holmes (1988; 1995), and combined strategies were frequently used to provide responses. Many of the students used some downgrading utterances as would be normal in Chinese society to please the interlocutor. However, one response “I wanted to get rid of it several weeks ago”, appeared to go to the extreme and conveyed a danger in that it might raise embarrassment to the interlocutor. Most students were aware of showing their
politeness in communication, but for a few their low level of pragmatic competence restricted their correct application of appropriate linguistic knowledge in the situation.

At the same time, many students only gave appreciation tokens to the interlocutor without any extended explanations. Generally, Chinese people are used to providing enlightenments to their short compliment responses. Students in the present research were not able to provide extended explanations in English to expand on their simple responses, possibly because they were not proficient language users and could not convey in English what they knew in Chinese.

In situation 12, as a teacher, the speaker was requested to respond to a student’s compliment on the food he prepared. The frequency of sequence categories used to make responses to compliments can be found in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category type</th>
<th>Frequency of Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accept</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reject</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deflect/evade</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The speakers involved in the current situation kept a “top-down” relationship in that they took on the role of the teacher rather than a student, which was different to the previous four situations. It was expected that this changed identity would affect the use of the language because language and identity had a mutually constitutive effect (Butler, 2005; Gu, 2010; Pavlenko, 2001). Weedon (1997) indicated that “language is the place where actual and possible forms of social organization and their likely social and political consequences are defined and contested. Yet it is also the place where our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity, is constructed” (p.21).

In this situation, as a language teacher, the speaker needed to give a compliment response to his student. Most students appeared to be aware of the situation and their identity within it when giving their responses. They applied acceptance strategies in accepting the compliment by first using an appreciation token such as “Thank you”,
and “I am happy that you like the food”. After the appreciation token, they tried to show their politeness by offering more food (“Would you like to have any more?”), or giving wishes (“Enjoy yourself just as at your home” and “Wish you have a good taste”).

The data indicated that students applied the rules of their L1 in giving compliment responses in the target language. When they expressed themselves, they tried to translate their L1, particularly at the syntactic and lexical levels, into the target language, such as “Wish you have a good taste”. Such responses could be understood if the listener had knowledge of the Chinese language and the Chinese culture. Yet, it was hard for those coming from different cultural backgrounds and having no related knowledge of Chinese language and culture to understand the responses.

The responses from the respondents were appropriate within the Chinese context. Different syntax and lexis might lead to linguistic misunderstanding and cause pragmatic failures in communication, which highlights the importance of the role of ELF in international communication. English language users are encouraged to use their local variety of English in communicative contexts (Jenkins, 2006), and both English native speakers and non-native speakers would benefit by being familiar with lingua franca English used intranationally and internationally (Canagarajah, 2006a, 2006b).

The data also demonstrated that students had the realization that they needed to give the response as an educated professional. They tried to be polite and paid great attention to the wording of their responses. A few students gave a reject response (“No”) to the interlocutor, followed by the downgrading utterance (“I am a new hand in cooking”).

These few students had intended to accept the compliment, but they followed the choice of word preference in giving compliment responses in Chinese that might cause misunderstandings and pragmatic failures in communication. It shows that in Chinese society people with a higher social position would like to show the maximum of modesty when they respond to a compliment (Liu, 2010). The findings
reaffirmed that language learners’ L1 and first culture have played an important role in their responses (Ellis, 1985; Liaw, 2006).

In the thirteenth situation, the speaker was required to respond to the computer teacher’s praise on his intelligence and talent in learning computer. The frequency of sequence categories of compliment responses is listed in the following table.

### Table 6.15 Compliment response 6 – made to a teacher’s compliment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category type</th>
<th>Frequency of Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accept</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reject</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deflect/evade</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this situation the speaker and the interlocutor had a “bottom-up” relationship which, contrary to the fifth compliment response situation, the student responded to a compliment by the teacher. As one student indicated in the interview, “We have recognized that the student and the teacher keep a ‘bottom-up’ relationship. We have to consider the relationship when we have conversations with the teacher. We have to provide polite and modest replies to the teacher” (Yin: 16 March, 2011).

Influenced by traditional Chinese culture, teachers have an unchallengeable authority. Students habitually show great respect to their teachers and follow the teachers’ words in their performance.

The data indicated that most students accepted the teacher’s compliment by providing appreciation tokens (“Thanks” and “Thank you”). A number of students gave a return compliment to the teacher (“I enjoy your class very much, too”, “It’s totally because of your good teaching”, and “I have really learned a lot from what you taught in class”). The students also provided additional information to show their determination to work hard (“I will work harder”, and “I will spare no effort to do better”). Acceptance strategies were applied by the students when offering compliment responses.

Impacted by the Chinese language and Chinese culture, students delivered their responses in typical Chinese language patterns, and showed great respect and
politeness to their teachers in their responses. Students transferred their L1 patterns and first culture to the use of the target language. There is an indivisible relationship between the culture and the language learning (Ahearn, 2001; Crozet & Liddicoat, 1999; Liddicoat, Papademetre, Scarino & Kohler, 2003).

The transference of the language patterns might cause misunderstanding to the listener. A few students borrowed the Chinese response (“No”) to show their politeness in accepting the compliment. It is a reject reply in English. Misunderstanding is inevitable unless the listener is aware of the Chinese culture and the Chinese language in accepting a compliment. An awareness of the target culture is essential in achieving intercultural competence in successful intercultural communication (Xiao & Petraki, 2007).

In situation 14, the speaker was requested to respond to the compliment on his/her eyes given by an employee. The frequency of sequence categories used to give compliment responses can be found in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category type</th>
<th>Frequency of Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accept</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reject</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deflect/evade</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As with the fifth compliment response situation, the speaker has a “top-down” relationship with the interlocutor in this situation. As a new sales manager of a large department store, it was usual that he/she would receive all kinds of compliments from his/her employees due to the senior position he/she kept. Hence, this identity has to be considered in giving the appropriate response when responding to compliments.

The data indicated that most of the students used appropriate acceptance strategies, amendment strategies and combined strategies in providing compliment responses. Many of them provided brief appreciation tokens (“Thanks”, “Thanks a lot”, and “I’m glad to hear that”). Return compliments (“Your eyes are beautiful, too”) were
used as extended responses by a small group of students to accept the compliment. Students also used disagreeing utterances (“But I think that my hair is more beautiful”, and “But I more like blue eyes”) to reject the compliment, and one student used an ignoring reply (“And is there anything else you want to say?”) to give a deflective response.

It was observed that students were aware of the relationship that the manager kept with the employee, and they tried to use strategies to give polite responses to the employee that would not threaten the face of the employee (Kasper, 1997; Thomas, 1983). Nevertheless, some rejecting responses and deflective responses given by the students were sure to threaten the interlocutor’s face (even if unintended), which indicated that they were not skilful English language users. They might understand the concept of the proper use of the language, but they were not able to apply appropriate responses when using the target language in this communication.

The findings highlighted that College English students were familiar with situations of giving compliment responses. They could provide the basic appreciation tokens to accept compliments, and they were able to consider the speaker’s identity and the relationship between the speaker and the hearer when giving responses. A number of students were capable of providing extended explanations to brief acceptance tokens. Some of them were able to consider face-saving theory when they gave their responses. Some were also able to select appropriate strategies to give compliment responses (Yu, 2003).

However, some College English students were not proficient English language users either in linguistic competence or in pragmatic competence. A number of students used the translation approach to directly translate their responses from Chinese to English without considering the context and the appropriateness of their responses. And some of them only transferred the word preference and the rule of giving compliment responses in Chinese to the use of English, which could cause misunderstandings in communication. Meanwhile, some students were not able to recognize errors and repair pragmatic failures that may cause the breakdown of communication.
The following section discusses the findings of the third and final speech act used in this research – apology, which is aimed at further examining College English students’ levels of pragmatic competence.

**Apologies**

An apology is a remedial action, which is used to re-establish social harmony after a real or virtual offense and can be found and is common in all societies (Goffman, 1971). Apologies fall under expressive speech acts in which the speaker intends to indicate his state or attitude (Cohen, 1996), and they are face-threatening acts (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The speaker needs to admit having done wrong when performing an apology, which undermines the speaker’s face. On the other hand, if the speaker fails to apologize, it will threaten the recipient’s ‘face’ (Wouk, 2006). Thus, when one offers an apology, one shows willingness to humiliate oneself, which makes an apology a face-saving act for the hearer but a face-threatening act for the speaker (Bataineh & Bataineh, 2006).

Gooder and Jacobs (2000) pointed out that “the features of the proper apology are the admission of trespass, the implied acknowledgement of responsibility, an expression of regret, and a promise of a future in which injury will not recur” (p.241). A successful apology can lead to significantly less aggression toward the offender. Brown and Attardo (2000) propose five components of an apology:

(a) an expression of apology, in which the wrongdoer repeats the feelings of regret;
(b) an explanation of the situation, whereby the wrongdoer tries to reconstruct the incident to see that he/she deserves forgiveness;
(c) an acknowledgment of responsibility, in which the wrongdoer states his/her responsibility for what has happened as a part of the apology;
(d) an offer of repair, whereby the wrongdoer tries to offer a way to compensate for the harm; and
(e) a promise of non-recurrence, in which the wrongdoer promises not to repeat the offense.
In DCTs, there were six situations designed to examine how students make apologies (see Table 6.17).

**Table 6.17 List of six apology situations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apology 1 Apologize for ripping a magazine cover</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apology 2 Apologize for mistaking a student’s exam paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apology 3 Apologize for being late for a group trip</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apology 4 Apologize for accidently interrupting a strange teacher’s writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apology 5 Apologize for forgetting to pass on a private message</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apology 6 Apologize for a bad memory and rudeness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data indicated that the five most frequent lexical items and basic formulaic sequences used by the students to offer apologies are: “I’m sorry”, “Sorry”, “I’m very/so sorry”, “Yes”, and “It’s my fault/mistake” (see Table 5.11, p.150). The results highlighted that most College English students were able to offer appropriate expressions to show their regret in the corresponding situations. They tried to show politeness and considered face-saving theory when giving apologies. Yet, there were still a small group of students, who expressed low levels of linguistic competence in that they could not use proper expressions to give a satisfactory apology.

Based on Brown and Attardo’s (2000) five components of an apology, the present study applied three R’s: regret, responsibility, and remedy (Bataineh & Bataineh, 2006) to analyze the apologies provided by the College English students in DCTs.

The first apology prompt required the speaker to apologize to his best friend for accidentally ripping a magazine’s cover page. The frequency of use of the components of the speech act for this prompt can be found in Table 6.18.

**Table 6.18 Apology 1 – made to a friend**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components</th>
<th>Frequency of Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regret</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remedy</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The data indicated that most apologies offered by the students contained an apology and regret for the offense (“I’m sorry”, “Sorry”, and “I’m very/so sorry”). More than 50% the apologies stated the speaker’s responsibility for the offense (“I damaged the cover page of the book because of my carelessness”, and “My carelessness leads to it”), and more than 30% of the apologies provided a remedy and promise for committing the offense (“I will buy a new one for you”, and “I won’t make the same mistake again”).

The findings demonstrated that many College English students were able to recognize the apology situation and apply proper expressions of apology. Many provided an apology together with an indication of taking responsibility as well a promise to rectify the situation in order to win forgiveness from the recipient. Students used the apology strategies of offering an apology, explaining the situation, acknowledging the responsibility, promising forbearance, and offering a remedy in their apologies (Brown & Attardo, 2000). Influenced by the concept of ‘face’ (Bargiela-Chiappini, 2003), their polite apologies were to save the recipient’s face, which reaffirmed that culture affected language learners in learning a target language (Ahearn, 2001) (see 3.3.1).

Nearly 50% of the students offered an apology without any extended explanation or information. A few apologies offered by the students were not polite enough to be accepted by the recipient. The apology such as “It’s my fault. Can you forget it?” appeared to forcefully request the recipient to accept it. Even if this conversation occurred between two good friends, such an apology would be hard to accept in the Chinese culture.

Although students were able to recognize the situation they were involved in, only a small group of them had good perceptions of the speech act of apology, and could skillfully manage the situation in English. Many of them only offered short apologies without providing any extended information. A few apologies offered by the students even threatened the recipient’s face. The findings indicated that not all the College English students were proficient language practitioners. A small group of students not only had low levels in organizational competence, but also lacked appropriate pragmatic knowledge in applying their linguistic knowledge in practice, which
prevented them from achieving language competence (Bachman, 1990) in this particular situation.

In the second apology prompt, the speaker is an English teacher, who had mistaken one student’s exam paper for another, and needed to apologize to the student. The frequency of use of the individual components of the speech act for the prompt can be found in Table 6.19.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components</th>
<th>Frequency of Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regret</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remedy</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The speaker kept a “top-down” relationship with the recipient in this situation. As discussed above, speakers’ different identities influence the choice of discourses. The data highlighted that 94% of the students made apologies and showed their regret to the recipient (“Sorry”, “I’m sorry”, and “I’m so sorry”). More than 65% of the students accepted further responsibility for the offense in their apologies (“I made a mistake that I mistook your name for another similar name”, and “I mistook your examination paper and your mark”). More than 75% of the apologies included a remedy for the offense (“I have corrected it”, and “I will resolve it as soon as possible”).

As a well-educated professional, it was necessary for the English language teacher to show politeness when giving an apology in Chinese culture. The students in this study seemed to be aware of the identity the speaker kept in this social situation, and they showed their politeness in their responses to save the recipient’s face when they apologized. They employed appropriate words and speech acts to express their regret for the incident. Remedies provided by the students showed their willingness to make up for the mistake. This kind of appropriate social behavior in such a social interaction helps to avoid pragmatic failures in communication (Rose & Kasper, 2001).
However, there was still a group of students, who expressed low proficiency in pragmatic competence, and were unable to provide additional information for their apologies. One student indicated in the interview:

Although we have realized the identity of the speaker and the “top-down” relationship between the teacher and the student, it is still hard for us to well convey our ideas as we have limited English language knowledge either in linguistics or in pragmatics..., we borrowed Chinese phrases and norm to provide apologies in English. However, we were not sure whether such apologies could be accepted or not. (Victor: 16 March, 2011)

These findings highlighted that the students were able to identify the “top-down” relationship between different speakers, and they kept the face theory in mind when they apologized. However, not every student had a high enough level in English language competence to appropriately apologize. Even when students recognized apology situations, they could only provide simple apologies, and they were not confident in the correct usage of English in this “top-down” situation. By transferring the L1 knowledge and thinking skills to the use of a target language (Kasper, 1992, 1998), students tried to deliver their apologies to effectively complete social interactions, but were not always successful.

The third apology prompt required the speaker to apologize to all other classmates for being late for a group trip. The frequency of use of the components of the speech act can be found in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components</th>
<th>Frequency of Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regret</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remedy</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data indicated that almost every student apologized for the lateness for the group trip ("Sorry", “I’m very sorry”, and “I’m so sorry”). Responsibilities for their lateness were explained, such as “I got up late this morning”, “I set a wrong alarm clock”, “I was too tired last night so I got up late this morning”, and “I came here
late because of the traffic jam”. However, less than 30% of the respondents expressed their willingness to make up for the offense (“I promise that it will not happen again”, and “I won’t do next time”).

In this situation, the speaker held an equal relationship with the recipients, and they were well-known to each other. It was found that the students did not consider the face theory when apologized, similar to its application in other situations for the research. They provided similar reasons that might be often used as excuses for lateness in the Chinese context. A few students even tried to avoid admitting responsibility for their lateness by saying “It is god who plays jokes on me”. Meanwhile, some apologies that had grammatical mistakes could not convey the speakers’ intentions effectively and this lack of proper use of English resulted in the breakdown of communication in that their apology made no sense in English.

The findings highlighted that College English students have unbalanced levels of English language linguistic competence and in pragmatic competence. Even while they are grammatically advanced language learners, the students in this research were not skillful English language practitioners, that is, they could not properly use English in appropriate contexts as was needed to be considered pragmatically competent language users (Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyer, 1998; Nikula, 2008; Rose, 2009). Students’ L1 and its pragmatic norms, together with their first culture, impacted the usage of the target language, and these factors have to be considered in intercultural communication (Boxer, 2002; Ellis, 1985; Lustig & Koesters, 2003; Samovar, Porter & McDaniel, 2009; Schauer, 2009).

In the fourth apology prompt, the speaker went into the wrong office and interrupted a teacher who was unknown to him/her. The speaker had to apologize to the teacher for his/her carelessness. The frequency of use of the individual components of the speech act for the prompt can be found in Table 6.21.
In this apology situation, the speaker and the recipient kept a “bottom-up” relationship, which implied the importance of the Politeness Principle where the teacher was in the more powerful position when the speaker offered an apology to the teacher. The speaker was required to apologize as politely as possible because of the relationship kept with the teacher. The data indicated that 93% of the apologies from the respondents contained regret from the speaker (“Sorry”, and “I’m sorry”). Less than 50% of the students offered to take responsibility for the offense (“I went into a wrong office”, and “I got the wrong room”), and only 7% of the apologies included information of a remedy for the offense (“Sorry to interrupt you”). On the other hand, the students employed words to provide explanations to the offense (“I want to see my English teacher”), or requested the correct information from the recipient (“I want to know which office is my English teacher’s room”, and “Can you tell me Mr. Smith’s office?”).

Flora indicated:

It was an embarrassing situation when a student accidently went into a strange teacher’s office and interrupted the teacher’s writing. Although the student knew that he had to be polite in that situation, he must have felt awkward or even overwhelmed and did not know how to appropriately express himself at that moment because of the “bottom-up” relationship he kept with the teacher. (22 March, 2011)

As grammatically advanced language learners, College English students must have been aware of the importance of being polite to save the recipient’s face. However, they were not able to effectively apply their linguistic knowledge to this situation. The students only provided simple regrets, and less than 50% of them accepted responsibility for the offense. Some words employed by the students were not accurate enough to convey their apology. It can be concluded that students were not
proficient language practitioners either in linguistic competence or in pragmatic competence in this particular situation. Moreover, some of the students requested that the teacher should provide them with the correct information. Influenced by the ‘face’ theory, such impolite requests might result in pragmatic failures in communication.

The findings affirmed that pragmatic competence is an essential component in achieving communicative competence in L2 or foreign language proficiency (Bachman, 1990; Canale & Swain, 1980) (see 3.2.4), and cultural factors have to be considered as they affect language users’ application of the speech act of apology (Nureddeen, 2008; Zheng & Huang, 2010).

The fifth apology prompt required the speaker to apologize to his colleague as the speaker forgot to pass on a private message. The frequency of use of the individual components of the speech act for the prompt can be found in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components</th>
<th>Frequency of Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regret</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remedy</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data indicated 78% of the responses were apologies for the offense (“Sorry”, and “I’m so sorry”). Less than 50% of the responses included taking responsibility for the offense (“I forgot”, “I am in a bad memory”, and “I did not have time to pass it to you these days”), although more than 50% of the replies included a remedy for the offense (“I will tell you about it”, and “I will send it to you as soon as possible”). Promises such as “I won’t make mistakes for a third time”, and “This is the last time” were used to comfort the recipient.

Instead of offering regrets to the recipient, students chose to provide positive answers (“Yes, I got it”) that are commonly used to confirm one’s suspicion. Positive responses of “Yes” in the Chinese language and context are acceptable because confirmation from the speaker is expected by the recipient and offered by the speaker
if the same situation had been repeated. As students in this study came from a Chinese cultural background and Chinese was their L1, there was no doubt both the Chinese language and the Chinese culture affected their application of English in this social interaction.

The findings highlighted that students borrowed the Chinese way of apology to the way one apologizes in English. This transference of cultural norms to English can be hard for native English speakers or other English language users coming from different cultures to understand such pragmatic usages in the Chinese context. Being aware of the different usages of the same language in different cultures or contexts can help to avoid pragmatic failures in intercultural communication (Gudykunst & Mody, 2002; Liaw, 2006).

In the last apology prompt, the speaker insisted his classmate, Mary, had borrowed his money and had not given it back. However, another classmate claimed that it was he who had borrowed money from the speaker. The speaker had to apologize to Mary for his bad memory and rudeness. The frequency of use of the components of the speech act for the prompt can be found in Table 6.23.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components</th>
<th>Frequency of Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regret</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remedy</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Almost every student gave their apologies for the offense (“Sorry”, and “I’m so/very sorry”). Less than 50% of the responses included their responsibility for the offense (“What a bad memory I have”, “I blamed you unfairly”, “It’s my fault”, and “I make an apology for my misunderstanding”). Less than 25% of the responses had a remedy for the offense (“I wish it would not hurt you”, and “I did not mean to hurt you”). And some students employed words to ask for forgiveness (“Forgive me”).

In the Chinese context, money borrowing is a sensitive issue for people to discuss. Generally, Chinese people are unwilling to discuss such an issue with others face to face. Tom indicated in the interview:
The money issue is not a subject that Chinese people would like to discuss, particularly the money borrowing issue. Either the debtor or the borrower might feel embarrassed when discussing the related money matters. Generally, Chinese people try to avoid talking about such concerns, or people might use words as economically as possible if they have to. People, as debtors, consider saving faces of borrowers when they mention the money matters because the relationships the debtor and the borrower keep are often friends, classmates, relatives, etc. If people cannot effectively deal with such issues, it will definitely influence the relationship they keep. (22 March, 2011)

Face theory appeared to play an important role when students provided their responses in this situation. Influenced by Chinese culture, people naturally tried to consider using face-saving strategies in order not to threaten the face of the recipient. Language learners’ first culture is an important component that affects the development of an L2 or foreign language (Crozet & Liddicoat, 1999). There is a necessity for language learners to understand different cultures to facilitate communication among language users of diverse cultures (Kramsch, 2005) (see 3.3.2).

Responses, such as “It’s a little thing for our friendship”, indicated that students were not proficient language practitioners as this would be an inappropriate response. At the linguistic level, students were not able to use the linguistic knowledge to express themselves clearly. At the pragmatic level, they were not able to effectively apply language functions to successfully complete these social interactions. It was found that these students had a low level of proficiency in either linguistic competence or pragmatic competence or both when applying the speech act of apology in this situation.

The above findings highlighted that the Chinese College English students were able to recognize apology situations and provide simple apologies for an offense and to distinguish speakers’ different identities and the relationship between the speaker and the recipient when offering apologies. Some of the students had the ability to apply face-saving strategies when offering apologies. Responsibility or remedy for the offense was provided by a small group of students. By not maintaining high levels of linguistic competence or pragmatic competence, some students were not able to
express themselves clearly and complete social interactions in an ideal way. The transference of the L1 knowledge and thinking skills, as well as the first culture, to the use of EFL resulted in misunderstandings in communication situations in some instances.

The findings from both the questionnaire and the DCTs indicated that on the whole Chinese College English students were not high level language practitioners either in linguistic competence or in pragmatic competence. It is necessary for them to keep a balance between linguistic competence and pragmatic competence so as to properly use the target language of English appropriately (Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyer, 1998; Nikula, 2008; Rose, 2009). As pragmatic knowledge and pragmatic strategies are teachable (Afghari, 2007; Alcón-Soler, 2005; Rose & Kwai-fun, 2001; Takahashi, 2001; Tateyama, 2001), College English students need more practice in speech acts, strategies in using speech acts, pragmatic routines and metapragmatic information in their language learning process to further develop their pragmatic competence.

It was observed that students were able to recognize different situations (refusals, compliment responses and apologies), but they could not apply their learned knowledge to the related situations effectively. Most of the students could only provide simple responses without extended well-organized information, which might become a block in their ability to engage in communication with others. Even if they gave extended information, many of them were not able to convey the real intention of the speaker efficiently, which was likely to cause misunderstandings with the recipient. Their low levels of linguistic competence and pragmatic competence has led to pragmatic failures in the social interactions presented in DCTs.

In the process of acquiring an L2 or foreign language, language learning strategies facilitate language learners to achieve learning aims in an efficient way (Oxford, 1996). As the important role of language learning strategies in the language learning process, College English students’ application of language learning strategies in learning English and pragmatics is discussed in the following section.
6.3 **RQ3: How do College English students apply their language learning strategies in the learning of English and pragmatics?**

Students’ language learning strategies are another important research aspect in this study. Language learning strategies are crucial for language learners to develop their communicative ability in the target language (O’Malley & Chamot, 1990) as they facilitate language learners in obtaining, storing, retrieving, and using information (Wenden & Rubin, 1987). Applying language learning strategies effectively in the learning process can help language learners achieve optimal learning outcomes efficiently (Gu & Johnson, 1996). The third research question concentrates on students’ perceptions and practice of language learning strategies in learning College English, particularly in learning pragmatics. The discussions of the findings are presented in the following sections.

6.3.1 **Students’ perceptions of language learning strategies**

It was assumed by the researcher that College English students were not familiar with the term “language learning strategies” as they would not have received professional trainings in linguistics. To illustrate this point, when responding to the questions about language learning strategies in the questionnaire and interviews, students listed different learning methods they applied in learning English, but they were not able to clearly classify these methods into corresponding language learning strategies. College English for Chinese students is not a course specifically in linguistics and so it was not expected that the students in the study would respond to the language of linguistics. Instead more general terms in relation to language learning strategies were used.

As noted in Figure 5.10 (p.136), nearly 30% of the students preferred to imitate language models and apply these models in new contexts, which was a cognitive strategy. Students also identified other memory, cognitive and metacognitive strategies they used such as memorizing vocabularies and reciting texts, doing sentence drills and translation exercises, as well as self-studying and self-evaluation. Influenced by society and classroom teaching and learning, using language learning strategies such as imitating native English speakers’ pronunciation and intonation and the ways they use the English language affect College English students’
motivation and provide further possible options of language learning strategies in learning English for these students.

Grammatically advanced language learners as they were, College English students were not skilful language learners in choosing and using appropriate language learning strategies. With their schooling background in China it is probable that the students’ limited knowledge of language learning strategies has come from the conventional teacher-dominated classroom teaching (Wang, 2002). As passive language learners, students almost totally rely on teachers’ language knowledge and personal viewpoints to learn about the English language (Liu, 2010). Accordingly, it was apparent that, on the whole, College English students had limited knowledge of language learning strategies.

As indicated in Table 5.1 (p.118), nearly 90% of the participants in the study were males, and more than 50% of them majored in science and engineering. In the Chinese context, it is generally accepted that female students are better language learners and language practitioners than male students (Liu, 2010). This may account for the differences between males and females in applying language learning strategies in the current study. If male students were not as proficient language learners as female students they might experience more difficulty in recognizing and using a variety of language learning strategies to acquire language knowledge. This was an interesting result and is an area of research that needs to be explored further in research.

However, as noted in Figure 5.14 (p.140), more than 60% of the students indicated that they liked to use cognitive strategies to resolve difficulties in English language learning. For example, they tried to solve problems by looking up words in a dictionary or trying to find answers on the Internet. So, while the students in the research were mostly males, they did show initiative in using some strategies to improve their English. Social strategies of discussing and working with classmates, or asking English language teachers or native English speakers, were not the favored methods for most of the students to solve learning problems. More research needs to be done to see if this is a general trend for male students or for Chinese students generally.
It is generally recognized that male students are more independent in solving problems than female students in the Chinese context (Liu, 2010). They prefer to find effective ways to solve problems by themselves rather than to ask people for help. On the other hand, female students do not like struggling to find solutions for learning by themselves (Liu, 2010). They prefer to ask for help or seek suggestions from other people. As most of the participants in this study were male students, the results strongly suggested that there continued to be a gender imbalance in employing different language learning strategies in the Chinese language learning context (Ersözlü, 2010; Sheorey, 1999; Yan, Chye, Lin & Ying, 2010).

Language learning strategies are regarded as an indispensable part in the learning process (Oxford, 1996), which act as tools for active and self-directed participation that is crucial for developing communicative competence (O’Malley & Chamot, 1990). Applying learning strategies in the language learning process can effectively facilitate language learners in achieving their optimal learning outcomes (Gu & Johnson, 1996). Thus, it is essential for language learners to be familiar with certain language learning strategies that they could apply in their language learning process. While the College English students were not aware of the exact professional terms used to categorize language learning strategies, they were able to list the methods that they believed to be necessary for them to improve their pragmatic competence in learning College English.

The data indicated that College English students preferred to employ direct strategies rather than indirect strategies to improve their pragmatic competence. As outlined in Table 5.7 (p.134), memory strategies such as memorizing English words, expressions and texts, and imitating native speakers’ pronunciation and intonation ranked highest as desired strategies used by the students. One of the students in the study, Oliver, also indicated that:

recitation and imitation are very important for students to improve students’ pragmatic competence...Remembering new words and reciting texts are helpful to low proficient English learners, which can assist in accumulating their vocabulary and cultivating the feel of the language...imitate the native speakers’ pronunciation and the way they express themselves is the most efficient way of learning English. (22 March, 2011)
Students are required to memorize English words and expressions, and recite texts when they begin to learn English in primary schools in China. In addition, students are required to imitate native English speakers’ pronunciation and intonation as they are informed by English language teachers that imitation is the most effective way to achieve communicative competence. Many Chinese popular magazines, such as *Crazy English*, encourage English language learners to imitate native English speakers’ pronunciation and intonation, as well as the way they use language to express themselves.

It was found from the data that another memory strategy that students would like to use to improve their pragmatic competence was through the use of images and videos. With the development of sophisticated technologies, it has become more convenient for language learners to access visual language learning materials, such as videos and images. In comparison to traditional language learning textbooks, images and videos are able to provide more lively and authentic materials as well as current language use. Students in the study indicated that “watching original English movies” (Benson: 16 March, 2011), and “listening to English broadcast and reading English newspapers” (Lindy: 16 March, 2011) could help them better acquire pragmatic knowledge and improve their English language proficiency.

As noted in Table 5.7 (p.134), the cognitive strategy of note-taking was listed fourth among the students’ preferred cognitive strategy for learning. Note-taking is one of the strategies that Chinese English language teachers expect students to master in learning English. It requires students to write down key words or concepts in abbreviated verbal, graphic, or numerical form when listening and reading (O’Malley & Chamot, 1990). Understanding what they are writing plays a key role in the whole process. Students need to understand different Englishes and cultures, and different thinking skills of various cultural backgrounds because speakers have diverse education backgrounds and experiences.

Chinese students have a habit of taking notes in class as they are requested to do so by teachers when they start their study in primary schools. Students in the study stated that notes could remind them of the important information in classroom teaching and learning. As one student indicated, “note-taking does great help to
improve our English language proficiency. Only when students make out the speaker’s pronunciation and intonation, and completely understood the delivering idea and logical relations, can they write down their needed information” (16 March, 2011).

It was observed from the data that translation was another kind of cognitive strategy that College English students suggested was essential to improve their pragmatic competence. Translation requires language users to skillfully and accurately produce meaning between the L1 and an L2 or a foreign language. Grammar-translation teaching and learning has a long history in China (Littlewood, 2007). Both students and teachers are familiar with the method and believe that the practice of translation can indeed improve their English level because only when students are fully aware of the target culture and appropriately apply their linguistic knowledge of the target language, are they able to successfully make the translation between their mother tongue and the target language. Students in this study indicated that translation was an indispensable strategy for them to improve their language competence.

In the meantime, translation tasks have been a crucial component of College English textbooks ever since their first version in China. Although there are various versions of College English textbooks published by different presses nowadays, translation tasks are always included. As outlined in Table 5.13 (p.166), translation tasks were contained in the New College English Integrated Course textbooks and they occupied around 7% of all linguistic tasks (see Table 5.15, p.167).

Yet, both the classroom translation practice and the design of translation tasks in New College English textbooks focused on the practice of linguistic knowledge and achieving linguistic learning aims; there was little attention focused on the development of language learners’ pragmatic competence or appropriate applications of translation strategies in social interactions that might enable language learners to become communicatively competent. This is an area for English language teachers to consider when deciding on appropriate resources to use in classroom teaching and learning.
As indicated in Table 5.7 (p.134), transferring the knowledge and thinking skills of Chinese to English and contextualization were another two cognitive strategies listed by a small group of students. As College English students were not highly proficient language learners, it might well be hard for them to transfer the knowledge and thinking skills of their L1 to learning a foreign language competently, or apply their linguistic knowledge to suitable contexts properly and effectively even though contextualization assisted comprehension or recall by placing a word or phrase in a meaningful language sequence or situational context (Oxford, 1990). These two strategies could help students practice their linguistic knowledge and become pragmatically competent in an efficient way but there was no strong evidence found in the current research to suggest that students were proficient in these areas.

The data indicated that the only compensation strategy students used to improve their pragmatic competence was to guess the meaning of words and sentences. In actual language teaching and learning processes, students are encouraged by their teachers to guess the meaning of some words and sentences from contexts while reading and listening and discouraged from consulting a dictionary whenever they meet new words. Guessing the meaning of words and sentences can help students improve their comprehension abilities and the ability of absorbing new knowledge, which are sure to be helpful in social interactions (Yuan, 2006).

The data from this study revealed that social strategies and metacognitive strategies were listed by the students as important factors as they described that these indirect strategies could help them improve their pragmatic competence. As outlined in Table 5.7 (p.134), the only social strategy that College English students used in class was to cooperate with others, which ranked third in preference on the list. Working together with peers to perform language activities and solve language problems allows students to feel confident and helps to enhance learning outcomes (Fushino, 2010; Jacobs, Power & Loh, 2002). Students demonstrated that “group work can bring confidence to every participant” (Flora: 22 March, 2011), and “students do not need to worry about losing faces when they make language mistakes in communication” (Jesse: 22 March, 2011).
It was found that metacognitive strategies that students liked to use were advance preparation, self-management or self-monitoring, self-evaluation and selective attention. Students indicated that they were familiar with the strategy of advance preparation because they were frequently required to do it by teachers. They were often requested to go through the learning texts to acquire main ideas or concepts before class. Students suggested that they could understand the learning material and master the knowledge in a faster way by using these strategies in the language learning process.

As indicated in Table 5.7 (p.134), around 14% of the students liked to use a self-monitoring strategy and around 11% of the students preferred to apply a self-evaluation strategy to improve their pragmatic competence. These two strategies could lead language learners to become independent learners, which has been proposed by the *College English Curriculum Requirements* (2007). By applying these strategies in their language learning process, language learners are able to do critical reflection, and make decisions independently. They can adjust their learning content and rhythm, and method of their learning that may result in better progress and learning outcomes.

It could also be found from Table 5.7 (p.134) that only around 7% of the students thought selective attention strategy could help them develop their pragmatic competence. This strategy is used for specific purposes and might not be easy for students to use at all times in the learning process. Students need to focus on specific items while reading or listening, and they need to be trained to be high proficient language learners who are able to make correct decisions. Otherwise, unskillfully using strategies might become an obstacle to the development of language learners’ language competence.

There was no data that indicated that students in the study preferred to use affective strategies. As suggested by Stern (1992), good language learners employ distinct affective strategies, but these strategies are rarely used by general language learners (Chen, 2009; Hong-Nam & Leavell, 2006; Yılmaz, 2010). Language learners can feel frustrated in some cases, particular in L2 or foreign language learning and may have negative feelings about the language learning. Good language learners have the
ability to realize these emotional problems, and are able to create associations of positive effects towards them. Affective strategies can help language learners face up to the emotional difficulties and overcome them by drawing attention to the potential frustrations or pointing them out as they arise (Stern, 1992).

The findings of this study highlighted that College English students had an understanding that language learning strategies could facilitate them to become competent language users, particular in becoming pragmatically competent language practitioners. Data demonstrated that students focused more on using direct strategies than indirect strategies. They had various perceptions of employing different strategies to improve their English language learning in general, and pragmatics in particular. As College English students were not highly proficient language learners, they were not likely to employ affective strategies in learning English as a foreign language. The following section discusses College English students’ practice of their language learning strategies in their English language acquisition process, particularly in learning pragmatics.

6.3.2 Students’ practice of language learning strategies

According to the *College English Curriculum Requirements* (2007), knowledge and practical skills of English language, language learning strategies and intercultural communication are the main components of College English teaching and learning. College English students indicated that they understood that language learning strategies could assist them to achieve their learning outcomes efficiently. By applying language learning strategies in the learning process, language learners can make their learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more effective, more self-directed, and more transferable to new situations (Oxford, 1990). Applying language learning strategies in practice was of importance to the language learners in this study.

A variety of language learning strategies were applied by College English students in the classroom teaching and learning process. As outlined in Figure 5.11 (p.137), cognitive strategies in the form of presentations and note-taking ranked first and third, respectively. The social strategy of group-discussion was ranked second. The metacognitive strategy of listening to the teacher only when necessary also ranked the third place. The memory strategy of listening to the teacher all the time ranked
last, although this might be inferred as somewhat indicative of students around the world and not confined solely to English language classes in China.

It could be observed from the data that College English students knew how to enhance their cognitive strategies rather than simply using memory strategies as well as being involved in the social network to practice the target language. Compared to cognitive strategies, social strategies and metacognitive strategies, students appeared to be more familiar with using memory strategies as they had been required to use these ever since they had begun their English language learning in primary school.

The data from this research indicated that students were required to complete the tasks of presentations, debates, role-plays, group-discussions, and pair-work, and these strategies had proven helpful in developing their pragmatic competence in communication. Traditional classroom teaching and learning could help students accumulate adequate linguistic knowledge to be used in real-world situations; however, practice related to communicative activities in the classroom can enhance students’ pragmatic competence (Peng, 2002). Language learning strategies can facilitate the development of their English language learning after class and in their life-long learning (Li, 2002).

It was found from the data that memory strategies was the first option of language learning strategies that College English students applied to acquire English language knowledge after class. As noted in Figure 5.12 (p.138), students liked to read English newspapers and magazines, memorize English words and recite texts, watch English movies and listen to English broadcasts in their spare time. Students indicated that they followed their English language teachers’ recommendations to apply language learning strategies of engaging in these activities to improve their English proficiency (Benson & Lindy: 16 March, 2011). In addition, “listening to English songs” (Victor: 16 March, 2011) was another kind of memory strategy that helped language learners to improve their pragmatic competence.

Students preferred to apply memory strategies to learn English and pragmatics perhaps because these were mechanical language learning strategies that did not need complicated understanding processes. They could manage their language learning by
employing memory strategies without guidance from their teachers. English newspapers and magazines, and English broadcasts offer students updated and authentic information about what is going on in the world. Visual materials such as original English-speaking movies and auditory materials such as English songs keep students interested in the English learning process.

Authentic audio-visual materials offer a much richer source of input for language learners and have the potential to be utilized in a variety of ways and on different levels to enhance learners’ communicative competence (Gilmore, 2007). Moreover, as one student in the study suggested, students might be influenced by movies stars or popular singers and “transfer their interests from stars to their English language learning” (Victor: 16 March, 2011).

The data indicated that students frequently did their review work after class so that they could consolidate what they had learned in class. Many of them had the habit of previewing new lessons and going over lessons after class because they had been requested to do so by teachers since primary school. Learning English after class is a self-study and self-exploration process. Students need to work independently to achieve their learning goals and only consult others for help occasionally (Xu, Peng & Wu, 2004). Students have to arrange and plan the learning by themselves, and monitor and evaluate their own learning by employing metacognitive strategies (Hu & Zhang, 2006).

However, as noted in Figure 5.1 (p.138), the metacognitive strategy of self-evaluation was only applied by a small group of students to learn English by themselves although the College English Curriculum Requirements (2007) has highlighted the importance of self-evaluation in students’ independent learning. Students’ reluctance to self-evaluate might have been impacted by the traditional teacher-dominated model and the language assessment systems in China.

College English students are used to the assessment systems employed in English language teaching and learning in China. These systems are controlled by teachers and provide information for teachers that help them improve their English language teaching (Niu, 2001). It might not be easy for students to acquire the related
information on their own without a teachers’ help to facilitate their English language learning. As the College English students are guided by teachers in learning English, they might have no idea of how to effectively evaluate their own language learning even when the *College English Curriculum Requirements* (2007) provides self-assessment forms for their English language competence. Students might not be able to draw their own conclusions about their learning from the self-assessment and so do not develop effective methods to progress their English language learning by themselves.

The data indicated that students preferred to practice English with their classmates rather than with English native speakers in the self-study process. Practicing English with others, particularly with native English speakers, could help to improve English language learners pragmatic competence and achieve language competence. In self-evaluating English language learning, communicating with people is a social strategy that can help language learners develop communicative abilities to be communicatively competent. Students may ask others for help when they meet difficulties in their language learning, or may take on opportunities to practice the target language with other people.

College English students indicated that they would “try to find opportunities to communicate with native English speakers to improve English proficiency” (Benson: 16 March, 2011) but this did not appear to be a common practice. Practicing English with native speakers could assist College English students to acquire the target cultural knowledge and pragmatic knowledge in social interactions, which can facilitate the progress of their English proficiency efficiently in intercultural communication. However, as one student noted, they had “no chance to be involved in communicate with native English speakers in the real context” (Ann: 22 March, 2011).

College English students expressed another factor worthy of consideration, which was the need to save face when communicating with people in English. They may become uneasy and nervous when they communicate with native English speakers, which might hinder the effective usage of the target language and lead to pragmatic failures in intercultural communication. As one student explained, “Many students
are reluctant to communicate with native English speakers even if they are given the chance” (Tom: 22 March, 2011). Accordingly, students seem to be reluctant in looking for opportunities to practice English with native English speakers, though they recognized the importance of doing so.

It was found that less than 20% of the students would use the cognitive strategy of doing language structure exercises to acquire English language knowledge by themselves. Students seemed to be bored with translation and sentence drills that might have made them lose interest in English language learning. These exercises are usually applied by English language teachers in classroom teaching and learning, and students were not likely to repeat the same exercises to practice English after class.

The data also indicated that there were individual differences among College English students when they chose to use language learning strategies in learning EFL. Students demonstrated that having been taught by the traditional methods, they relied too much on teachers’ instructions, which might have resulted in the loss of the ability for independent learning. “Everyone needs to make their own choice in using language learning strategies due to their individual different learning situations” (Harlow: 22 March, 2011).

The findings of this study has highlighted that College English students were not good language practitioners in applying language learning strategies to learn English and pragmatics. Informed and impacted by English language teachers, students did not develop balanced language learning strategies for effective learning. Memory strategies, social strategies, metacognitive strategies, and cognitive strategies were employed by students in their College English learning (Li, 2002). Compensation strategies and affective strategies, which are helpful in lowering students’ anxiety in language learning and in achieving pragmatic competence, were frequently neglected by students (Li, 2002).

Through detailed discussion of the collected data and combining the theories applied in this study as well as the research from previous studies, the major findings of the study are summarized as follows:
(a) Pragmatic knowledge is as important as linguistic knowledge in developing Chinese College English students’ pragmatic competence in their English language learning process. Pragmatic competence can facilitate them in achieving communicative competence in intercultural communication.

(b) It is suggested in the data that College English students are not highly proficient language users though they are grammatically advanced language learners, and thus there is an imbalance between the skills. It is necessary for them to keep a balance between linguistic competence and pragmatic competence.

(c) College English students’ L1 (Chinese) and their first culture influence the development of their English language; they want to transfer L1 knowledge and thinking skills as well as their first cultural knowledge to the use of English.

(d) Influenced by society and English language teaching and learning in China, College English students tend to learn American English or British English rather than other Englishes in their language learning process.

(e) The current College English classroom teaching and learning methods do little to help the development of students’ pragmatic competence, which leaves current teaching and learning processes unable to meet students’ needs.

(f) The data suggest that tasks, especially pragmatically oriented tasks, involved in the English language teaching and learning process are believed to assist College English students to develop their pragmatic competence effectively.

(g) It is suggested in the data that the currently used College English textbooks do little to help the development of students’ pragmatic competence because they do not provide adequate pragmatic knowledge or pragmatic tasks. Students want to be exposed to authentic English language learning materials as they believe they can acquire sufficient pragmatic knowledge/information from these materials that facilitates in developing their pragmatic competence in communication.

(h) College English students are not capable language practitioners in applying language learning strategies in the English language acquisition process as only limited language learning strategies are used in their learning process. Moreover, students are significantly influenced by their English language teachers on the application of language learning strategies.
6.4 Summary

This chapter has addressed the three research questions of this study. By analyzing and discussing the collected data, it is argued that Chinese College English students are not highly proficient language users although they are grammatically advanced language learners. They are not good language practitioners and are unable to effectively employ language knowledge, particular pragmatic knowledge in social interactions, which has resulted in pragmatic failures in communication situations. As the traditional grammar-translation method still holds the major position in the current Chinese College English classroom teaching and learning process, it is hard for College English students to develop their pragmatic competence effectively and become communicatively competent, let alone language competent. Additionally, College English textbooks cannot provide adequate pragmatic tasks for students to practice their pragmatic competence. Furthermore, they are not able to skillfully apply language learning strategies to acquire language knowledge in English. In the following chapter, a tentative model for learning pragmatics for College English students is proposed by drawing conclusions and suggesting implications of this study.
CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

The three key research questions in this research focused on exploring College English students’ perceptions and practice of pragmatics, and the application of language learning strategies in learning English and pragmatics. These three questions were analyzed with reference to research and theories of pragmatics, intercultural communication, and ELF. This was the first systematic study that effectively utilized three different theories: pragmatics, intercultural communication, and ELF informed by SLA theory and research, to understand the role of pragmatic knowledge and knowledge of language learning strategies for Chinese College English students.

In this chapter, conclusions drawn from the study are presented. A tentative model of learning pragmatics in College English teaching and learning processes is proposed that offers a new perspective for English language educators, policy makers, curriculum writers, English language teachers and practitioners in the area of learning pragmatics. Such a feature has been neglected in the past and in the current College English learning and teaching in China and this suggests a new direction is necessary for future teaching and learning in foreign language acquisition practice. The implications for learning and teaching pragmatics in the College English learning and teaching processes, College English course designs and material development are also presented. Suggestions for further research, as well as the limitations of the study, are taken into consideration.

7.1 Current Chinese College English learning and teaching

Since the early 1980s, College English, a required basic course for undergraduate students, has developed into a systematic and independent subject, which is an integral part of higher education in China (Ruan & Jacob, 2009). The instruction and practice of College English teaching and learning at university level are guided by the College English Curriculum Requirements (1985, 1999, 2007), which have been approved by the Ministry of Education of China. Informed by the College English Curriculum Requirements, the practice of College English has progressed greatly over the last decade (Cai, 2005, 2010).
With continuous education innovation and the fast development of society in China, College English learners are facing unprecedented challenges. They are required to master pragmatic and sociolinguistic knowledge as well as linguistic knowledge in their language learning process in order to become communicative competent language users in intercultural communication. Keeping up with all the changes challenges not only students but all who are involved in education.

College English students are required to develop their ability to use English effectively, especially to develop greater competence in using English for intercultural communication. According to the College English Curriculum Requirements (2007), the focus of College English has shifted from reading to listening and speaking, and special attention is given to independent learning by means of advanced information technologies. This movement suggests a shift from the long established grammar-translation and teacher-centered language practices towards learning for communication and communicative competence (Lamie, 2001).

Chomsky (1965) and Hymes (1972) argued that communicative competence involved much more than knowledge of language structures. It involves contextualized communication to take precedence over form, which includes speakers’ knowing whether something is appropriate in relation to the context (Larsen-Freeman & Freeman, 2008). Researchers have come to an agreement that communicative competence is regarded as the measure of global language proficiency of a language learner, particularly in an L2 or foreign language instruction, and pragmatic competence is a vital component of proficiency (Bachman, 1990; Bachman & Palmer, 1996, 2010). According to Bachman (1990), it is impractical for a language learner to achieve language competence without pragmatic competence. Therefore, the acquisition of pragmatics in an L2 or foreign language has received a great deal of attention recently, and enhancing language learners’ pragmatic competence has become one of the indispensable parts in L2 or foreign language instruction (Ji, 2008).

In contrast to this global trend, the current College English teaching and learning process in China overemphasizes the development of linguistic competence and neglects the enhancement of students’ pragmatic competence, which might lead to
pragmatic failures in communication (Cai, 2005; Wang, 2005; Zhao, 2009). Though English has been taught and learned as a foreign language in China for a long period of time, little attention has been given to the study of pragmatics in EFL contexts (Wang, 2010; Zhao, 2009). *College English Curriculum Requirements* (2007) has proposed the necessity of the development of College English students’ pragmatic competence, especially in intercultural communication. In the meantime, China has been experiencing explosive progress in commerce, technology, and cultural exchanges with Western countries, which has raised demand for a large number of competent English users in a wide range of professions and businesses. In order to meet the needs of *Curriculum Requirements* and China’s social development and international exchanges, large numbers of English language competent users, who are engaged in intercultural communication, are needed. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen the importance of pragmatics in College English learning and teaching processes. It is against this backdrop of a changing China that the conclusions from this research are presented.

### 7.2 Conclusions of the study

The conclusions of this study have been drawn from the collected data and related findings described in previous chapters. They are discussed and highlighted from four different perspectives: language competence, language and culture, language learning and teaching, and language learning tasks, and are presented as follows.

#### 7.2.1 Language competence

In referring to Bachman’s (1990) model, language competence consists of organizational competence and pragmatic competence that specifies the importance of pragmatic competence in enhancing language learners’ communicative competence. As part of sociolinguistic competence (Koike, 1989), pragmatic competence includes knowledge about social distance, social status between speakers, cultural knowledge, such as politeness, and linguistic knowledge both explicit and implicit, which can help language learners comprehend and produce a communicative act (Kasper, 1997).
The findings of the study indicated that current Chinese College English learning and teaching still concentrated on the development of language learners’ linguistic competence (organizational competence) although the *College English Curriculum Requirements* (2007) clearly proposed the requirement of achieving communicative competence in intercultural communication. College English students are unable to obtain adequate pragmatic knowledge used in communication because neither classroom teaching nor the textbooks provide sufficient pragmatic knowledge for them.

As a result of this limited range in teaching English with few opportunities to practice English in authentic ways, College English students are not becoming skillful language practitioners and they have developed limited perceptions of pragmatic knowledge. Though they have recognized the importance of developing their pragmatic competence, they are left to their own devices in acquiring pragmatic knowledge to improve pragmatic competence in communication. Without structured facilitation of their learning, students return to older paradigms where the focus is solely on passing examinations. As indicated in this research, the focus on examinations limits the scope for students to develop pragmatic competence.

### 7.2.2 Language and culture

Language and culture have an interactive and reciprocal relationship (Kiet, 2011) as culture is inserted into language as an intangible, all-pervasive and highly variable force (Crozet & Liddicoat, 1999). The terms ‘languaculture’ (Risager, 2005) or ‘culturelanguage’ (Papademetre & Scarino, 2006) reveals this relationship. Language, as well as culture, is a dynamic system (Larsen-Freeman & Freeman, 2008). Language is the major means by which people perform their social lives, and when language is used in contexts of communication, it is concerned with culture in complicated ways. Language expresses cultural reality, embodies cultural reality, and symbolizes cultural reality (Kramsch, 1998). Knowledge about the world, such as people’s ideas, facts, beliefs, or events, can become communicable through language.

As language itself has cultural value, culture plays an important role when using a language. Speakers coming from different cultural backgrounds identify themselves and others through their use of language. That is to say, people regard their language
as a symbol of their social identity (Karmsch, 1998). As culture is regarded as instrumental in shaping speakers’ communicative competence (Berns, 1990), not being able to correctly use the language to communicate might cause speakers to reject a social group and its culture. Consequently, language learning should be seen as languaging (a way of being) and intercultural being (living and acting in a patchwork of disordered cultures) (Phipps & Gonzalez, 2004).

With regard to College English teaching and learning in China, this research found that both students and teachers focused on the language itself rather than the pragmatics of language. They frequently paid great attention to language structure and vocabulary instruction in the teaching and learning processes. Cultural knowledge introduction was limited to “broad culture”, such as festivals (Thanksgiving, Halloween or Christmas) which were not closely relevant to the Chinese context. Little attention was given to the relationship between language and culture as it is taught in China. In addition, it was hard for College English students to access cultural information in their learning process that related specifically to them because neither College English textbooks nor classroom teaching could provide sufficient knowledge about various cultures, let alone the knowledge of appropriate language use in different contexts.

Understanding different cultures can help language learners achieve communicative competence in intercultural communication. Students in the study indicated that they liked to access other cultures though media such as movies and newspapers. These avenues provide them with current language practices which allow for the development of pragmatic competence. The researcher would suggest that as a result of these findings, teachers need to access opportunities to provide such materials to students as a supplement to their textbooks. The inability to acquire adequate cultural knowledge might lead to pragmatic failures in intercultural communication.

7.2.3 Language learning and teaching

Foreign language teaching and learning has a long history in China, which started with a focus on grammatical systems that were learned and taught through many different strategies such as translation (Kelly, 1969; Titone, 1968). “Grammar-translation” has been widely used in foreign language teaching and learning and
widely criticized on the grounds that it does not develop learners’ communication skills for years (Jin & Cortazzi, 2011). The proposal of communicative competence (Hymes, 1972), has helped reshape thinking about the nature of language itself.

A language, as a tool or instrument, is used in particular settings (Larsen-Freeman & Freeman, 2008). Using it appropriately is at the heart of having pragmatic competence. Since the 1980s, communicative competence has become firmly established as a foundational concept in language teaching and learning (Canale & Swain, 1980). It concentrates on oral and transactional use of language in a variety of contexts that assists language learners to understand the appropriateness or acceptability of language use in exact settings. The researcher is not advocating that traditional teaching and learning should be abandoned, but rather there needs to be more offered students to address the need to develop communicative competence.

The rise of task-based learning and teaching, and CLT put the focus of learning on the language learners. This process of language teaching and learning reduces the time on the mere mastery of grammar and vocabulary, and assists language learners in developing greater competence in the use of English for communication (Liao, 2004). Tasks used in language learning can be viewed as a vehicle for integrating theory and practice (Halloran, 2001). It has shifted from the traditional teacher-centered language teaching and learning model to the student-centered model. Language learners who are scaffolded to acquire language knowledge independently also learn how to effectively apply language learning strategies in their learning process.

It was found that College English teaching and learning still focused on the development of students’ linguistic competence, such as grammar and vocabulary, even though the *College English Curriculum Requirements* (2007) recommended developing learners’ communicative competence and independent language learning abilities. As with “grammar-translation” teaching and learning in large classes, the teacher-centered mode was largely applied, which suggested that instead of acquisition and learning, it still focused on teaching and the teacher. Students rarely had opportunities to be engaged in language learning and experience the process of
learning, and their individual differences and requirements in learning English were often neglected.

Students in this study expressed some frustration with this process and indicated that while they were ready to take on the responsibilities that came with change they were mindful that change was not happening quickly enough for them to abandon their traditional mode of learning that focused on preparing for examinations. The time contributed to the practice of English either in the classroom or outside the classroom was found to be very limited. Only a small number of pragmatics and language learning strategies instructions were contained in the teaching and learning processes, which indicated that the students’ inadequate preparation of pragmatic knowledge as well as their low independent learning abilities created the danger of them having low proficiency as language learners in intercultural communication.

7.2.4 Language learning tasks

The language learning task is defined as “any activity that learners engage in to further the process of learning a language” (Williams & Burden, 1997, p.168), and it is one of three main factors that impact on the production of learning outcomes (Murphy, 2003). Estaire and Zanon (1994) distinguished the two main categories of tasks as communication tasks, in which “the learner’s attention is focused on meaning rather than form”, and enabling tasks, in which “the main focus is on linguistic aspects (grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, functions, and discourse)” (Estaire & Zanon, 1994, pp.13-20). Well designed and organized language teaching and learning tasks could effectively provide a link between inside-classroom pedagogy and outside-classroom reality, which reflect students’ needs, interests, and experiences, enhance automaticity in language learning (Ridder, Vangehuchten & Gómez, 2007), and facilitate students become communicatively competent (Littlewood, 2004).

The findings of the study indicated that most tasks provided by College English textbooks were linguistic tasks, focusing on vocabulary, structure, grammar, and discourse. Only a small number of tasks in the textbooks were pragmatic tasks, which aimed at developing students’ pragmatic competence. In addition, the forms of
the pragmatic tasks were monotonous and might easily result in learners losing interest in practicing English.

It was also observed that tasks, especially pragmatic tasks, conducted in the College English teaching and learning classroom were limited. These classroom tasks were chiefly designed to practice and develop students’ linguistic competence, such as sentence drills, vocabulary practice, and translation. Pragmatic tasks, such as group discussions, role play, and debating, were seldom applied in classroom practice. As a result of the linguistic focus on classroom learning tasks, students’ preferences and understanding towards various pragmatic tasks might become obstacles in developing their pragmatic competence.

The findings of the study revealed that College English students were not competent language practitioners. They were not exposed to enough qualified instructions on pragmatics to develop pragmatic competence and they were not exposed to appropriate and adequate pragmatic input (Ji, 2008). The present College English teaching and learning processes provide limited opportunities for students to practice communication in the classroom setting, let alone practice of spontaneous communication in real contexts outside the classroom.

As College English students are not able to obtain adequate pragmatic materials and practice opportunities, there is no wonder that they are kept at a low level of pragmatic competence even though they are advanced grammatical language learners. On the other hand, it is necessary for College English students to have the ability to acquire pragmatic knowledge independently and cultivate chances to practice communication by applying various language learning strategies in the EFL context.

Findings from this research demonstrated that College English students were not independent language learners with advanced grammatical skills. They needed more scaffolding instruction on how to become independent and how to access language beyond the classroom. Therefore, more engaging research focusing on learning pragmatics independently needs to be conducted.
Informed by SLA theory and research, the present empirical study has provided significant enlightenments to College English learners and teachers, English language researchers, curriculum designers, and textbook writers. The data highlighted the importance of learning pragmatics and the application of language learning strategies in developing language competence in China and similar educational contexts.

The findings have indicated that teachers and teaching materials need to play a bigger role in facilitating students to better use language learning strategies to acquire pragmatic knowledge and practice communication in the EFL context in order to achieve optimal learning outcomes. The study also suggests that teachers need to recognize the deficiencies in the present teaching and learning process; they need to make a conscious effort to learn what their students’ needs are in relation to developing communicative competence, and they need to conduct English language teaching more effectively to meet the needs proposed by the *College English Curriculum Requirements* (2007). In addition, the study provides suggestions to textbook writers that they need to involve more pragmatic principles and tasks in the teaching and learning materials.

### 7.3 Model of learning pragmatics

By incorporating a range of different theories (e.g., SLA, pragmatics, intercultural communication, and ELF), frameworks suggested by previous studies (Bachman, 1989, 1990; Bachman & Palmer, 2010; Byram, 1997; Liddicoat, Papademetre, Scarino & Kohler, 2003; Hall, 1976; Ji, 2008; Oxford, 1990, 1996; Skehan, 2003), and the findings of this study, a tentative model of learning pragmatics in the Chinese context is proposed (see Figure 7.1).
The above tentative model identifies what this research has found missing in supporting students in developing communicative competence. The model identifies that learning pragmatics is a key in this process with two suggested components of study.

The first component is the learning content which includes developing pragmatic knowledge, knowledge of intercultural communication, knowledge of ELF and knowledge of language learning strategies. As can be seen already, this model has moved away from the traditional process of language learning. In the model there is more accountability from both teachers and students and more opportunities for the two to work together. For example, gaining knowledge of language learning strategies involves teachers first knowing what these strategies are and then applying them in the class so that students can develop this knowledge. In this way, teachers play a vital role in helping students learn skills about how to become independent learners.

The second component of the model is the learning process, which includes new approaches to learning pragmatics such as task-based learning, intercultural communicative learning and developing language learning strategies. Below is a further description of the various elements of the model.
7.3.1 Learning content

7.3.1.1 Pragmatic knowledge

The findings of the study highlighted that it was hard for College English students to acquire adequate pragmatic knowledge either from their classroom teaching and learning or from College English textbooks. Also, students did not have sufficient knowledge on how to acquire pragmatic knowledge by themselves. This lack of pragmatic knowledge is sure to result in pragmatic failures in communication. Including more pragmatic knowledge in the College English teaching and learning processes as well as in College English textbooks could develop students’ pragmatic competence, which can help them become communicatively competent language users.

7.3.1.2 Knowledge of intercultural communication

Informed by the *College English Curriculum Requirements* (2007), intercultural communication is one of the main components of College English. It is necessary for language learners to acquire cultural knowledge while learning the language as culture is integrated at all levels of language (Crozet & Liddicoat, 2000). Languages are carriers of culture, and all foreign language learning is intercultural (Edmondson & House, 1998). As foreign language learners, it is essential for Chinese College English students to obtain knowledge of the target culture in their language learning process so as to raise their global cultural consciousness (Kumaravadivelu, 2008) that can help improve their intercultural competence in intercultural communication.

7.3.1.3 Knowledge of English as a lingua franca

It was found from this study that Chinese College English students did appreciate the notion of learning ELF, through which they could express their own values and identities (Gilmore, 2007). Nowadays, non-native English speakers outnumber native English speakers by 4:1 (House, 2010). In a large number of interactions in the absence of native speakers, English is used as an L2 or a foreign language; thus, English is no longer “owned” by its native speakers (House, 2003, 2010). As English is used transnationally, it is crucial for non-native English speakers to obtain the
knowledge of ELF that serves as a means of communication for speakers of different L1s.

7.3.1.4 Knowledge of language learning strategies

As language learning strategies are helpful to language learners in developing their language proficiency and improving their intercultural communication (Bonney, Cortina, Smith-Darden & Fiori, 2008; Griffiths, 2003), effectively applying language learning strategies in learning and using a language could assist language learners to achieve communicative competence. It was observed that College English students had limited knowledge of language learning strategies: a fact that might limit them in fully developing their learning potential. Involving knowledge of language learning strategies in College English teaching and learning could help students obtain knowledge on language learning strategies so that they could apply these strategies in their learning to efficiently assist them to achieve their learning aims.

Figure 7.2 outlines the learning content of pragmatics in College English learning in detail, including pragmatic knowledge, knowledge of intercultural communication, knowledge of ELF, and knowledge of language learning strategies.
7.3.2 Learning process

7.3.2.1 Task-based approach

The task-based approach requires language learners to engage in classroom interactions in order to complete a task, where there is an eventual concentration on communication, purpose, and meaning (Brown, 2001). Language learners play a central role in task-based learning through their exposure to plenty of opportunities to be involved in activities. The task-based approach has gained greater importance in the past several decades (İlin, İnozü & Yumru, 2007), especially in helping language learners develop communicative competence. It is “a development within the communicative approach” (Littlewood, 2004, p.324) as communicative tasks serve not only as primary components of methodology but as units of how a course
may be organized (Littlewood, 2007). In the present model, a task-based approach could facilitate College English students to develop their pragmatic competence.

### 7.3.2.2 Intercultural communicative approach

Communicative language teaching and learning has a long history and aims at assisting language learners to use language efficiently in actual communication (Brumfit & Johnson, 1979; Hiep, 2007; Richard, 2005; Skehan, 2003). It is regarded as “a broad, philosophical approach to the language curriculum” (Nunan, 2004, p.10). By including an introduction to various cultures, particularly the target culture, in CLT and learning can help language learners achieve communicative competence in intercultural communication. As language and culture are closely interrelated (see Figure 3.3, p.80), the target culture plays an indispensable role in the development of a target language. The language learners’ own culture is sure to influence their understanding of the target culture, which, in turn, impacts the development of the target language, particularly in intercultural communication. The proposed model suggests involving a culture introduction in CLT and learning in order to help College English students become competent language practitioners in intercultural communication.

### 7.3.2.3 Language learning strategies approach

Language learning strategies can assist language learners to learn a language more efficiently (Kaplan, 2002). Various language learning strategies offer different options for learners. As bilingual advanced grammatical language learners, language learning strategies can more effectively help Chinese College English students acquire language knowledge and put their knowledge into practice, especially in learning and practicing pragmatics. In addition, language learning strategies can promote independent language learning and allow College English students a greater opportunity to become independent language learners to meet the goal proposed by the *College English Curriculum Requirements* (2007).

Figure 7.3 illustrates the detail of the pragmatic learning process by combining the task-based approach, the intercultural communicative approach, and the language
learning strategies approach. This process merges the traditional approach to language teaching with the newly proposed approach from this research.

**Figure 7.3 Learning process**

Figure 7.4 gives a summary of a series of points of learning pragmatics proposed by the study. The tentative model has signified that there is a necessity to include pragmatics in ESL and EFL learning, especially in the Chinese EFL context and other similar contexts. In addition, English language teaching instruction and learning materials need to focus on language learners and facilitate the appropriate use of English for learners.
Figure 7.4 Model of learning pragmatics
There might be other aspects that affect the application of the tentative model in the present Chinese EFL context, such as students’ individual differences, large classroom sizes, grammar-based examinations, and so on. However, these issues are beyond the scope of the current study as they focus more on teaching pragmatics.

7.4 Implications of the study

7.4.1 Implications for College English learning

As suggested by the College English Curriculum Requirements (2007), College English students are required to obtain the ability of learning English independently in EFL contexts. They need to enhance their ability of using English effectively in social interactions. Language learning strategies need to be skillfully used in the language knowledge acquisition process, social interactions and intercultural communication. Students are requested to do self-assessment and peer-assessment in the learning process so that they can better achieve their learning goals.

Consequently, College English students need to experience change in their present perceptions of language learning and the present learning methods in acquiring language knowledge. Educators are the ones who must provide the stage for such change to occur. Linguistic language learning and pragmatic learning are indispensable parts of ESL and EFL learning. Regardless of learners’ language proficiency, pragmatic competence and linguistic competence can progress side by side (Ji, 2008).

Informed by the needs of society, students have recognized the importance of the use of English in social interactions and intercultural communication. It was observed that College English students understood the significance of developing their pragmatic competence in their English language learning process and they were aware that the lack of the pragmatic input and practice in the present English language learning process led to failures in communication.

Students need to recognize that they play a core role in the language learning process. They need to consider their learning goals as well as the needs of society, and make adjustments to their present study situation wherever possible. Students
need to keep in mind that they are required to cultivate the ability to use the L2 in actual contexts and the ability to learn language independently, which may assist their development of lifelong learning.

In addition to knowledge instruction from language teachers, students need to apply language learning strategies in their language learning process efficiently to obtain their required knowledge, especially pragmatic knowledge used in intercultural communication. Students need to be able to develop a series of effective learning methods that are suitable to their individual learning preferences that could help them develop their full learning potential. Students would benefit in their learning if they could overcome the influence of ‘face’ theory and try to find opportunities to be actively involved in communication with native speakers that could be helpful to the development of their pragmatic competence in communication.

7.4.2 Implications for College English teaching

Teaching is an indispensable part of students’ knowledge acquisition process. Impacted by traditional methods, the teacher-dominated and grammar-translation (Littlewood, 2007; Watkins, 2005) teaching pattern still takes hold of the main stream in current College English classroom teaching in China. There are few chances for students to attain pragmatic knowledge and practice the use of English in class under this old regime of teaching and learning, and few students dare to challenge the authority of the teacher. To a great extent, the current teaching model hinders the development of students’ pragmatic competence that produces many ‘deaf’ and ‘mute’ language learners because they have limited knowledge of pragmatics and are unable to apply the little knowledge they do have in real social interactions.

It has been widely acknowledged that teaching pragmatics must be included in the ELF context. The findings have indicated that College English students have inadequate pragmatic knowledge instruction and inadequate pragmatically-oriented tasks in teaching, which has resulted in students’ pragmatic failures in general communication, and in intercultural communication.
As teaching pragmatics is an essential part of College English classroom teaching, College English teachers need to provide more pragmatic knowledge and design more pragmatically oriented tasks for students in their classroom teaching to help students become pragmatically competent. At the same time, language teachers should not neglect the development of students’ linguistic competence and examination skills in their teaching process.

College English teachers need to shift from a teacher-centered to a student-centered method (Chow & Mok-Cheung, 2004) by combining the strengths of the traditional teaching model with the new one. Teachers need to combine the principles of practicality and knowledge, and facilitate students’ active participation. By applying a task-based approach and intercultural communicative language approach, language teachers can give students opportunities in class to practice language (Ho, 2004) and thus achieve student-centered classrooms.

A variety of communicative language tasks can effectively assist language learners to develop their communicative competence. In addition to language knowledge, teachers are required to convey knowledge of language learning strategies and skills that can help students become more efficient in their language learning. Language teachers need to pay attention to students’ individual differences and help them develop their individualized learning model according to their different language proficiencies. In order to adapt to the continuous development of society and the requirements of the new curriculum, College English teachers have to be involved in the process of continuing professional self-development (Hedge, 2000) that is helpful to both students and themselves.

7.4.3 Implications for College English course design

The design of College English course systems needs to follow the guidelines of the Curriculum Requirements and goals of College English learning and teaching. Informed by the College English Curriculum Requirements (2007), the College English course system should be a combination of required and elective courses in comprehensive English, language skills, English for practical uses, language and culture, and English for specific purposes that can ensure that students at different
language levels have sufficient training and make progress in their abilities to use English.

It was noted that although the present College English course was regarded as an integrated course aimed at developing students’ ability to use English effectively in social interactions, it still focused on linguistic knowledge and neglected the development of students’ pragmatic competence as well as communicative competence. Students’ individual differences and requirements were seldom taken into account. It is crucial to realize that the College English course is not only a language course offering basic linguistic knowledge as well as pragmatic knowledge, but also a capacity enhancement course assisting students to broaden their horizons and learn about different cultures from all over the world.

A well-designed College English course can efficiently guarantee steady progress in English proficiency throughout students’ learning processes. When designing College English courses, it is essential to consider the development of students’ linguistic and pragmatic capacity as well as their cultural capacity, which can help students achieve a solid foundation in the English language while enhancing their ability to use English appropriately and proficiently. Students’ individual language proficiencies, study backgrounds and regional differences, as well as students’ needs and social requirements, must be taken into account in designing the course.

**7.4.4 Implications for the development of College English learning and teaching materials**

Learning and teaching materials are another important aspect that needs to be considered in learning a language, especially in ESL and EFL contexts. College English textbooks play a key role in the language learning and teaching process because both College English students and teachers rely on the textbooks to acquire and teach English language knowledge. Well-designed, written textbooks can more effectively facilitate language learners to obtain the language knowledge, and assist language teachers to conduct more efficiently the language teaching.

The findings of this study demonstrated that College English textbooks used in the present learning and teaching focused on the development of language learners’
linguistic knowledge, and did not contain adequate pragmatic knowledge or pragmatically oriented tasks to develop language learners’ pragmatic competence. As the content and quality of textbooks could determine the extent of students’ enhancement of their language proficiency (Hedge, 2000), it is necessary for textbook writers to develop appropriate instructional materials involving instructions on pragmatics in EFL contexts.

Informed by the *College English Curriculum Requirements* (2007), College English textbooks need to include more instructions on pragmatics as well as pragmatically oriented tasks to help language learners develop their pragmatic competence so as to achieve communicative competence in intercultural communication. In order to achieve the aim proposed by the curriculum requirement documents, sufficient qualified pragmatic input and pragmatically oriented tasks have to be included in the textbooks. Although it is not practical to cover the full range of pragmatic input suggested by the tentative model in every unit, textbook writers need to have sensitivity in pavilioning pragmatic information as one of the key elements in designing textbooks (Ji, 2008).

In addition, as learners’ goal is to be able to operate independently in L2 or foreign language outside the classroom, it is essential for them to be exposed to authentic learning materials to acquire pragmatic information (Gilmore, 2004). Authentic input allows language learners to concentrate on a wider range of features than is normally possible, which has a beneficial influence on enhancing learners’ communicative competence (Gilmore, 2007). Authentic language learning materials and tasks are needed to be included in textbooks so that students could become familiar with the true nature of different settings and obtain the ability to practically use the language.

This empirical study has provided a tentative model for Chinese College English learners to learn pragmatics in their language acquisition process. It could facilitate College English students to become pragmatically competent, assist teachers to change their teaching pedagogies and course designs effectively, and inform material writers to update textbooks. However, any study has its limitations. In the following few paragraphs, limitations of the current study and recommendations for further research are presented.
7.5 Limitations of the study and recommendations for further research

7.5.1 Limitations of the study

Informed by SLA theory and research, this study combined three strands of theories of pragmatics, intercultural communication, and ELF, which contributed to the body of literature in learning pragmatics in the Chinese EFL context. The study was carried out in one university in Shanghai, involving 237 College English students in the questionnaire, 55 students in DCTs, and 18 students in interviews. Compared with 10 million College English students in over 2,000 universities in China, the sample may be regarded proportionally as small. Although the university, where the research was conducted, may be representative of second-tier universities in China as 80% of the universities in China are of second-tier universities, it could not signify a small group of first-tier universities and third-tier universities, especially in the West of China.

7.5.2 Recommendations for further research

This study has proposed a tentative model for learning pragmatics by applying language learning strategies in the College English learning and teaching process. It effectively combines three strands of theories of pragmatics, intercultural communication, and ELF that are informed by SLA theory and research to well explain the present College English learning situations and arrive at a model of learning pragmatics for Chinese College English students. However, there are still some questions that require study in future research.

First, language learners’ motivation in learning a language has not been explained in depth in the current study. It is believed to have a close relationship with the achievement of learners’ learning outcome (Lightbown & Spada, 1999). While motivation is beyond the scope of the current study, its influence should be addressed in further research.

Second, with the development of information and communications technologies (ICTs), more advanced information technology has been applied in language learning and teaching. The computer-aided learning approach that can help language learners
more easily acquire authentic materials and conduct self-study has been suggested by *College English Curriculum Requirements* (2007), and the influence of this is beyond the scope of this study. This approach to teaching and learning is gaining momentum in language learning around the world and more research about how it may affect Chinese language learners is needed.

Third, the study has proposed a tentative model for College English students to develop their pragmatic competence. It is also necessary to set up an efficient evaluation system that can help both language learners and language teachers assess the learning outcomes of pragmatics. While language evaluation is beyond the scope of this study, it is an important area that should not be neglected in meeting the *College English Curriculum Requirements* (2007).

In conclusion, this study has shown that pragmatics and language learning strategies in College English have become an indispensable part of College English learning in China. The globalization of English highlights the fact that English is both a lingua franca and an international language transnationally, used in all aspects of intercultural communication. Findings from the research have provided insights into how Chinese College English students have perceived pragmatics in the EFL curriculum, the processes of learning as well as strategies they have utilized in developing linguistic and pragmatic knowledge and competence. As the first systematic study investigating College English students’ learning of pragmatics in the Chinese context, the research has provided a solid empirical base for developing a tentative model for the learning of pragmatics. Being the first model of learning pragmatics, though yet to be tested, it could well be employed to inform the learning of English and pragmatics in the Chinese, and in other similar contexts of Confucian heritage cultures. The proposed empirical model in learning pragmatics could better assist learners in their classroom language learning, the use of the target language for effective communication, as well as assist EFL practitioners in China to adopt a principled approach to curriculum design and classroom instruction.
REFERENCES


Pavlenko, A. (2001). In the world of the tradition I was unimagined: Negotiation of identities in cross-cultural autobiographies. *The International Journal of Bilingualism*, 5, 317-344.


Interlanguage and Cross-cultural Perspectives, (pp.ix-xviii). Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter.


Tinto, V. (1995). *Discovering the sources of student success from vision to reality: Student affairs agenda for the ’90s.* Iowa City, Iowa: ACT.


Appendix A: Questionnaire

Instructions: As part of a research project on Pragmatics (appropriate use of a language), Perceptions and Strategies in Chinese College English Learning, we would like you to help us by completing this questionnaire about your pragmatic knowledge/competence and your language learning strategies of pragmatics in using English. This is not a test and you do not need to write your name on it. We are interested in your personal experiences of learning and your views. Your answers to the questions will help us ensure the accuracy of the data. The information obtained will be kept confidential and used only for the purposes of academic research. Thank you very much for your help.

Section I Demographic information (Please choose your answer from the following choices.)

1. What is your gender?
   A. Male.  B. Female.
2. What is your age?
   A. Under 20.  B. Over 20 (include 20).
3. What is your major?
   A. Liberal Arts.  B. Science.
   C. Engineering.  D. Other.
4. How many years have you learned English?
   A. Less than 6 years.  B. 6-10 years.
   C. More than 10 years.
5. Do you have any overseas English language learning experience?
   A. Yes.  B. No.
6. Which College English course do you take this semester?
   A. College English II.  B. College English III.
Section II  Your views on pragmatics in College English learning and teaching.

Part A: The Likert 1-5 rating scale is used. You can choose only one answer to each question.

<p>| | | | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>I believe learning English grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation mean learning English.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>I think that the knowledge of how to use the language is as important as linguistic knowledge (e.g. vocabulary and grammar).</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>The main reason why I need to learn English is to pass the examination.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>College English textbooks provide much information on culture, conversation rules, usage, and on how to use English correctly.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Communicative activities are a waste of time in the English class.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>I admire the people who can communicate with others in English fluently and accurately.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>I think teachers should teach us how to communicate with people, and how to use English appropriately in the classroom teaching.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>I know how to obtain cultural knowledge and appropriateness of language use in my learning.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Tasks used in English class provide me knowledge and skills to improve my ability to use English appropriately.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>I prefer my English class to be focused on communicative language teaching and practice, with grammar explained when necessary.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>I like grammar and vocabulary explanation, and sentence drills in my English class.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>I wish to speak like native English speakers and would like to imitate their pronunciation and intonation.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Part B: Please choose only one answer from following choices to each question.

19. What English would you like to learn to use most?
   C. British English.   D. Other.

20. What tasks do your teachers most often use in the classroom teaching?
   A. Group discussion.   B. Pair-work.
   C. Role-play.   D. Debate.

21. In which way do you want to get information about the use of English?
   A. Teacher’s explanation.
   B. Classroom discussion.
   C. Listening to radio programs/dialogues and watching TV programs/videos.
   D. Self-study.

22. What kind of abilities do you want to develop most in learning English?
   A. Ability to communicate with people.
   B. Ability to do well in English examinations.
   C. Ability to read materials related to my major.
   D. Ability to translate.

23. What kind of knowledge do you want to learn most in your English classroom teaching?
   A. Linguistic knowledge (e.g. grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation).
   B. Cultural knowledge.
   C. Communicative skills.
   D. Knowledge on how to use English.

24. If you meet some difficulties in English learning, what will you do first?
   A. Ask the English teacher or other native speaker.
   B. Discuss and work with your classmates.
   C. Try to solve the problem on your learned language knowledge by yourself.
   D. Look up a dictionary or try to find the answer on the Internet.
25. What is the most effective way of learning English?
   A. Memorizing vocabularies and reciting texts.
   B. Doing sentence drills and translation exercises.
   C. Imitating a language model and applying it in a new context.
   D. Self-studying and self-evaluation.

26. Tom is buying a ticket at the booking office of a theme park.
   Tom: I’d like to buy one ticket, and I want to have a map of the theme park.
   Ticket seller: All right. What’s your post code?
   Question: What does the ticket seller mean?
   A. The ticket seller wants to book Tom’s address.
   B. The ticket seller wants to have Tom’s post code.
   C. The ticket seller wants to know the language Tom uses.
   D. The ticket seller wants to find Tom’s post code on the map.

27. Jack, a villain, met one acquaintance, Richard, on the corridor in a hospital.
   Jack: I am going to have a new heart.
   Richard (contemptuously): It is about the time.
   Question: What does Richard imply?
   A. Jack has a serious heart disease and needs a new heart.
   B. Jack has become a good man.
   C. Jack has found a new heart to cure his heart disease.
   D. Jack needs to realize his evil and totally change his behavior.

28. While traveling, Mary put a heavy bag on the bus shelf. The bus stopped suddenly and the bag fell on a passenger.
   The passenger: Oh, my god! What is that?
   Mary: It is my bag. It’s all right.
   Question: How appropriate do you think the reply from Mary was?
   A. Very appropriate.       B. Appropriate.
   C. Inappropriate.        D. Not at all appropriate.
29. A university student borrowed his teacher’s book and promised to return it that day. When he reached the university, he discovered that he had left the book at home.

*The teacher: Have you brought the book?*

*The student: Sorry, I forgot. Don’t worry. I will bring it tomorrow.*

**Question: How appropriate do you think the reply from the student?**

A. Very appropriate.  
B. Appropriate.  
C. Inappropriate.  
D. Not at all appropriate.

30. Mary was at John’s house. After dinner, she was offered dessert.

*John: How about another piece of cake?*

*Mary: Thanks. I am full.*

*John: Come on, just a little piece?*

*Mary: No more, thanks.*

**Question: How appropriate do you think the replies from Mary was?**

A. Very appropriate.  
B. Appropriate.  
C. Inappropriate.  
D. Not at all appropriate.

**Part C:** Please choose your answers from following choices to each question. You can choose more than one answer to each question.

31. What do you usually do in the English class?

A. Note-taking.  
B. Group-discussion.  
C. Presentation.  
D. Listening to the teacher all the time.  
E. Listening to the teacher only when necessary.

32. What do you usually do to learn English after class?

A. Watching English movies and listening to English broadcasts.  
B. Doing preview and review work.  
C. Reading English newspapers and magazines.  
D. Doing exercises, such as translation, sentence drills.  
E. Practicing English with classmates.  
F. Practicing English with English native speakers.  
G. Doing self-evaluation.  
H. Memorizing English words and reciting texts.
Part D: Please answer following questions either in English or in Chinese.

33. What kind of tasks do you think is necessary to improve students’ communicative ability in English language teaching and learning?

34. What kind of language learning strategies do you think is necessary to improve the students’ pragmatic competence in English language learning?

35. Do you believe that the current College English teaching and learning will enable you to improve your ability to communicate with people and to use English appropriately? Why or why not?
Appendix B:  Discourse Completion Tasks (DCTs)

Instructions: As part of a research project on Pragmatics (appropriate use of a language), Perceptions and Strategies in Chinese College English Learning, we would like you to help us by completing this Discourse Completion Tasks about your pragmatic competence in using English. This is not a test and you do not need to write your name on it. We are interested in your personal experiences of learning and your views. Your answers will help us ensure the accuracy of the data. The information obtained will be kept confidential and used only for the purposes of academic research. Thank you very much for your help.

Directions: Please read the following 20 situations. After each situation you will be asked to write a response in the blank after “you”. Please read each question carefully. Respond as if you would talk to the person in English in real life conversation. Please respond as naturally as possible. Do not worry about your grammar. You have 30 minutes to finish the following tasks.

1. You are walking on campus. A friend of you invites you to come to a party at his house this Saturday. You cannot go to the party because you will have three exams to take next Monday, and his house is very far from your place.
   Friend: Hi, we are having a party this Saturday. Do you want to come?
   You: __________________________________________________________

2. You are at the office in a meeting with your boss. It is getting close to the end of the day and you want to leave the office.
   Boss: If it is fine with you, I’d like you to spare two extra hours tonight so that we can finish up with this task.
   You: __________________________________________________________
   Boss: That’s too bad. I was hoping you could stay.

3. You are taking a break in the student lounge. A friend comes by and gets himself a cup of coffee from the coffee machine. He offers you a coffee, too, but you cannot drink now because you have an upset stomach.
   Friend: Hey, you want some coffee?
   You: __________________________________________________________
4. You teach English at a university. It is just about the middle of the term. One of the students comes to speak to you.

Student: Excuse me, Professor. Some of the students discussed English lessons after class yesterday. We believe that we could achieve better learning outcomes if you gave us more practice in conversations and less on grammar.

You: ___________________________________________________________

Student: Well, it was only a suggestion.

5. You are a university freshman. You attend classes on time and prepare complete lecture notes. One of your classmates often misses class and asks you to lend him the notes before the examination once again.

Classmate: Oh, my god! There is an exam tomorrow but I don’t have notes from last week. I am sorry to disturb you, but could you please lend me your notes once again?

You: ___________________________________________________________

Classmate: Well…then I guess I’ll have to ask someone else.

6. You are the owner of a restaurant. One of your best workers asks to speak to you in private for salary increase.

Worker: As you know, I’ve been working here for over one year, and I know you’ve been pleased with my work. I also enjoy working here, but, to be honest, I really need an increase in pay.

You: ___________________________________________________________

Worker: Well, then I guess I’ll have to look for another job.

7. You are the president of a large research center. A salesman from a computer company invites you to one of the most expensive local restaurants to have dinner.

Salesman: We have met for several times, and I’m hoping you will buy my company’s computers. Would you like to have dinner with me at the restaurant to firm up the contract?

You: ___________________________________________________________

Salesman: Well, maybe we can meet another time.
8. You have just had your hair cut in a fashionable style, and you bump into a friend in the street.

Friend: That hair cut makes you look great. It makes you look younger!
You: ________________________________________________________________

9. You are wearing a new Rolex watch. You meet one friend at your office.

Friend: Wow! What a nice watch! I wish I had one like that.
You: ________________________________________________________________

10. You have given a presentation in English class. After the presentation, one of your classmates comes to you.

Classmate: That was a great presentation. I really enjoyed it.
You: ________________________________________________________________

11. You are wearing a new sweater. One of your friends meets you on the playground in the morning.

Friend: What a nice sweater! You look great in it!
You: ________________________________________________________________

12. You are a teacher in a language school. You have invited a group of students to your house for a meal. After the meal, one of your students comes to speak to you.

Students: I didn’t know you were such a talented cook. The food was wonderful!
You: ________________________________________________________________

13. You started a computer course three months ago. At the end of a lesson your teacher comes up to you.

Teacher: You are very intelligent and have a flair for computers. Besides, you show a lot of interest in what we do in the lessons.
You: ________________________________________________________________

14. You have been appointed as the sales manager of a large department store recently. You are out for coffee with a group of colleagues. One of your employees says to you.

Employee: You’ve got beautiful eyes.
You: ________________________________________________________________
15. You borrowed a magazine from your best friend, and you ripped the cover page by accident. You are giving back the magazine to your friend.

Friend: Oh! What happened to the magazine?
You: _______________________________________________________

16. You are the English teacher who mistook one student’s examination paper for another due to the similarity in their names and failed him. You have recognized that you had made a mistake, and the student has known what had happened and came to meet you in your office.

Student: What has happened, Sir?
You: _______________________________________________________

17. You showed up an hour late for a group trip on a winter morning because you got up late on that morning. Your classmates are blaming you at the meeting place.

Classmates: Hey, what’s happened to you? You are so late!
You: _______________________________________________________

18. You wanted to meet your English teacher in his office, but you went to the wrong office and interrupted a strange teacher’s writing.

You: _______________________________________________________

Teacher: It’s all right. Take it easy.

19. You and Tom are co-workers. You forgot to pass a private message to Tom, and this is the second time you forgot to pass a message on to him. Tom knew you had a message for him and went up to you.

Tom: I’ve been told that you have a message for me.
You: _______________________________________________________

20. You and Mary are classmates. Someone in the class borrowed money from you and did not give it back. You insisted that Mary was the person who borrowed money from you. Mary insisted that she did not borrow money from you. At that moment, another student came into the classroom and told you that he was the person who had borrowed the money.

Mary (angrily): Do you believe me now?
You: _______________________________________________________
Appendix C: Interview questions

(Interview questions are prepared in both English and Chinese. Considering that participants can understand the interview questions better and express themselves much more freely and accurately in their first language – Chinese, interviews were conducted in Chinese.)

1. What kind of knowledge do you need most at the present stage of English learning, for example, linguistic knowledge (such as vocabulary, grammar, phonology, etc.), pragmatic knowledge (such as functions, speech acts, appropriate use of English, etc.), or both? Give your reasons.

2. How important do you think it is to develop students’ pragmatic competence (ability to use English appropriately)?

3. In which way do you like to get pragmatic information/knowledge?

4. What kind of communicative tasks in classroom teaching (such as role-play, group discussion, pair work, presentation, debate, etc.) do you think is important in developing students’ pragmatic competence?

5. What tasks/activities do your English teachers usually conduct in the classroom teaching? What do you think of your English teachers’ classroom teaching in terms of developing your pragmatic competence?

6. What do you think of the quantity of pragmatic knowledge and pragmatically oriented tasks in the current College English textbooks?

7. Do you believe that current College English classroom teaching and textbooks can help you develop your pragmatic competence? Why or why not?

8. What kind of language learning strategies do you think is important to improve the students’ pragmatic competence? Why?

9. What do you usually do to obtain pragmatic information/knowledge after class? What kind of English do you want to learn? Why?

10. Do you often apply the English knowledge you have learned in class to the real situations? Why or why not?

11. Please list a few language learning strategies you have used in learning English and pragmatics? How do you choose to use these strategies?

12. What difficulties do you have in learning pragmatic knowledge?
**访谈问题**
（此次访谈用中英文两种文字表述。考虑到学生能更好地理解访谈问题，并更有效地用第一语言——中文表述自己的看法，所以此次访谈用中文进行。）

1、在目前的英语学习阶段，你最想学的是哪些知识，比如：语言学知识（词汇、语法、语音等）、语用学知识（语言功能、语言行为、英语的正确使用等）、还是两者都想学？给出恰当的理由。
2、你如何看待提高语用能力的重要性？
3、你喜欢用哪种方式获取语用信息/知识？
4、你认为在课堂教学中哪种交际任务（比如：角色扮演、小组讨论、配对活动、陈述发言、辩论等）对于提高学生的语用能力起到重要作用？
5、在课堂教学中你的英语老师经常开展哪些教学任务或活动？就从提高语用能力方面来说，你怎样看待你英语老师的课堂教学？
6、你认为当前使用的大学英语教材中语用知识和语用练习所占比重是多少？
7、你认为当前大学英语课堂教学和大学英语教材有助于你语用能力的提高吗？为什么？
8、你认为哪些语言学习策略对于提高学生的语用能力很重要？为什么？
9、你在课后经常如何去做去获取语用信息/知识？你想学哪种英语？为什么？
10、你能把课堂里所学的英语知识运用于真实生活中吗？为什么？
11、请列举你在英语学习和语用知识学习中经常使用的语言学习策略。你是如何去选用这些语言学习策略的？
12、你在语用知识学习中碰到哪些困难？
Appendix D: Transcripts to students’ responses to open-ended questions in the questionnaire

Open-ended question 1

What kind of tasks do you think is necessary to improve students’ communicative ability in English language teaching and learning?

Tasks:
- Group discussions
- Role play
- Debate
- Pair-work (e.g. practicing dialogues)
- Watching original English films and videos
- Learning to sing English songs
- Reading original English materials (e.g. newspapers, magazines)
- Presentations

Reasons listed by the students:
- Original English videos and films are very authentic and vivid English learning materials.
- Original English newspapers and magazines can help us learn the native-like English.
- We can learn the native-like English from English news report.
- English songs are very interesting learning materials, which can help us increase our interests in learning English and increase our English proficiencies.
观看原版英语电影和视频，阅读原版英语报纸和杂志，听英语歌曲能够帮助提高英语语感，提升我们的交际能力。

Watching original English movies and videos, reading original English newspapers and magazines, and listening to English songs can help develop the feel of the English language and improve our communicative ability.

小组讨论、分角色表演和辩论都是集体活动，可以消除学习过程中个人的恐惧感。

Group discussions, role play and debate are group work, which help overcome the individual fear in the learning process.

小组讨论、分角色表演、配对活动和辩论能帮助我们增强在使用英语时的信心。

Group discussions, role play, pair work and debate can help us strengthen our confidence in using English.

在集体活动中我们可以取长补短。

Individual differences can make up for each other’s shortcomings in the group work.

在班级里做讲演让我们感到很紧张。

Giving presentations in front of the others in class makes us feel nervous.

在讲演时我们害怕讲错，特别是犯语法错误，这会让我们感到很尴尬很没有面子。

We are afraid of making mistakes, especially grammatical mistakes when giving presentations, which makes us feel embarrassed and lose face.

Open-ended question 2

What kind of language learning strategies do you think is necessary to improve the students’ pragmatic competence in English language learning?

Language learning strategies:

背诵英语单词、词组和课文 Memorizing English words, expressions and texts
模仿以英语为母语者的发音及语音语调 Imitating native English speakers’ pronunciation and intonation
Reasons listed by the students:

背诵和模仿是中国学生学习外语的基本技能。
Memorizing and imitation are the basic skills that Chinese students use in learning a foreign language.

我们已经习惯了背诵单词、词组和课文，因为从小学开始学习英语时老师就让我们背诵单词、词组和课文。
We get used to memorizing words, expressions and texts because English language teachers asked us to do so when we started learning English in the primary school.

英语老师鼓励我们模仿英语为母语者的发音及语音语调，把他们的发音和语音语调作为范本。
English language teachers encourage us to imitate native English speakers’ pronunciation and intonation. We need to set their pronunciation and intonation as our examples.

英语老师让我们在课前做好预习工作，在课后做好复习工作，这能帮助我们更好地掌握语言知识。
English language teachers ask us to do the preview work before class and go over lessons after class that can help us better master the language knowledge.

English language teachers require us to do the note-taking during the class, which helps us do the revision work after class.

English language teachers encourage us to guess the meaning of (key) words and sentences from the context before look up the dictionary while reading, which helps develop our reading skills.

Cooperating with other students, such as group work, can help us conquer the fear during the English language learning process and assist us to gain confidence.

Images and videos make English language learning more vivid. It is easier for us to take in language knowledge by using images and videos.

We do not have a good English learning context that helps improve our pragmatic competence.

Learning English in China needs to consider the practical situations and Chinese learning context. We can try to transfer the knowledge and thinking skills of Chinese to learning English.

Self-management and self-assessment can help us discover the不足 in our English learning, but we are not clear specifically how to do it.
Self-management/self-monitoring and self-evaluation can help us detect the deficiencies in the English language learning. However, we are not aware how to conduct self-management or self-evaluation.

选择性地关注自己想要学习的内容，能帮助我们提高学习效率，但是我们没有得到具体的指导，如何去。

Selectively paying attention to the content we intend to learn can help us improve our learning efficiency. However, we have not received specific instructions on how to conduct it.

Open-ended question 3

Do you believe that the current College English teaching and learning will enable you to improve your ability to communicate with people and to use English appropriately? Why or why not?

Negative responses:

在课堂教学中老师主要注重讲解语言点和语法点。

English language teachers focus on the explanation of language points and grammatical points in the classroom teaching and learning.

老师把课堂里的大部分时间花在讲解语言知识上，如：词汇、语法、句子结构等等。

English language teachers spend most of the time in class explaining linguistic knowledge, such as vocabulary, grammar, sentence structures, etc.

大学英语都是大班教学，通常一个教室里有七十或更多的学生。所以，当前的大学英语教学都是以老师讲为主，学生没有时间和机会进行口语实践及操练交际功能。

College English is commonly taught in large classes, usually seventy or more student in one classroom. Therefore, the current College English teaching and learning are teacher-centred, and students are not given chance or time to practice their spoken English and communicative functions.

当前大学英语教学还是以通过考试为主，特别是大学英语四六级考试，往往忽视了语言的实际应用。
The current College English teaching and learning is still examination-oriented, particularly focuses on College English Test (Band Four and Band Six), which neglects the practical use of English language.

Both students and teachers pay their attention on passing College English Test (Band Four and Band Six).

In the classroom teaching and learning, teachers pay little attention to the development of students’ pragmatic competence.

The current College English textbooks focus on language points, sentence structures and grammar practice.

Texts in College English textbooks are out-dated, and there are few exercises help students improve their pragmatic competence.

It is difficult for students to get appropriate updated authentic English language learning materials.

Students have few chances to communicate with native English speakers either in class or after class.

Positive responses:

In the College English teaching and learning, sometimes teachers teach some simple communicative functions, such as asking the way, booking a hotel, etc.

有时，老师会教学生一些技巧和策略，关于如何正确地把语言交际功能运用到相应的情形中。
Occasionally, teachers teach students skills and strategies on how to correctly apply language communicative functions to appropriate contexts.

Students sometimes can apply simple language communicative functions that have been taught by teachers in their daily life.