

## Enhancing English Fluency through Culturally Contextualised Pragmemes and Culturemes

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### ABSTRACT

This study explores how integrating pragmatics and cultural linguistics into English Language Acquisition (ELA) can enhance communicative competence among Arab English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. It addresses a critical gap in traditional grammar-based instruction, which often overlooks language use's sociocultural and pragmatic dimensions. Grounded in Sharifian's (2017) cultural linguistics framework, the research employed a qualitative design involving 30 undergraduate participants at Gulf University for Science and Technology, Kuwait. Data were gathered through naturalistic discourse observations, reflective journals, and discourse-based activities. Findings emerged across three core themes: (1) heightened contextual awareness, particularly in culturally sensitive situations such as complimenting, requesting, and responding to offers; (2) strategic deployment of culturally informed speech acts, such as reassigning compliments and expressing embarrassment (*ihrāj*), influenced by deep-seated cultural values like humility (*tawādu'*); and (3) development of metacultural competence, wherein learners became capable of interpreting and adjusting speech behaviors across cultural boundaries. Student feedback collected through reflective journals and class discussions confirmed that these activities fostered greater confidence, pragmatic sensitivity, and engagement in real-world English use. Thematic analysis of their reflections revealed an increased awareness of contextual appropriateness and appreciation for the cultural depth of communication. Significantly, these competencies were developed through rote memorisation, guided role-play, dialogue analysis, and cross-cultural reflection. The study concludes that embedding culture-based pragmatics into ELA instruction enables learners to communicate with greater fluency, adaptability, and intercultural sensitivity. It recommends that curricula incorporate culturally grounded simulations and interactive strategies to move beyond structural language learning.

**Keywords:** Cultural schemata-speech acts- pragmemes; practs; allopracts; culturemes

### INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly globalized world, proficiency in English is essential, yet many non-native speakers struggle to achieve true fluency (Alsmari, 2020; Rahardi et al., 2023). Traditional grammar-focused teaching methods often fail to equip learners with the cultural and contextual knowledge needed for real-world communication (Hartono, 2023; Pramono & Kurniawan, 2020). This research offers an innovative approach by integrating culturally contextualized speech acts and pragmatic frameworks into English language instruction. English has become the global lingua franca, widely used across various domains, from international business to academic discourse

(Taguchi, 2024; Paronyan, 2021; Alsmari, 2020). However, achieving fluency extends beyond mastering vocabulary and grammar; it requires understanding the cultural and pragmatic contexts in which the language is spoken (Van & Acton, 2022; Hidayani et al., 2023; Sharifian, 2009). Naderi et al. (2013) argue that utilizing culturally contextualized speech acts and pragmatic frameworks is essential for achieving fluency in intercultural communication. Additionally, the findings of Heidari-Shahreza et al. (2014) highlight that vocabulary learning is not an isolated goal but a key to developing deeper communicative competence. Incidental exposure in context-rich reading tasks improves lexical retention and supports learners' ability to interpret and express meaning within pragmatic and cultural contexts. Scholars have highlighted the importance of cultural schemas in interpreting language during social interactions. Recent studies by Heidari et al. (2020) and Sztencel (2020) emphasise the role of speech acts and cultural nuances in fostering communicative competence. Despite these findings, many educational systems prioritize grammatical instruction, neglecting the cultural and contextual dimensions crucial for effective communication (Al Sharoufi, 2013). This gap is particularly evident in multicultural contexts, where pragmemes (context-bound speech acts) and culturemes (cultural expressions) are essential for meaningful exchanges (Bauler, 2022; Wang, 2018; Ezzaoua, 2023). Research supports the integration of these elements into language teaching to enhance learners' fluency and communicative competence. D'Andrade (1995) emphasizes objectivity in cultural research, warning against moral biases that obscure empirical findings. This supports a balanced approach in ELA, integrating linguistic structures with cultural schemata to enhance pragmatic competence.

During the 1920s, ideas about culture began evolving significantly. Bronisław Malinowski developed the biological foundations of culture, introducing the needs theory. He posited that universal biological needs drive cultural behaviour and that customs and institutions are created to fulfil these needs. Malinowski argued that culture is an "instrumental apparatus" that helps humans manage specific environmental challenges and satisfy their needs (Malinowski, 1944). He extended this theory to language, suggesting that communication is purposeful and guided by goals. Michael Halliday (1925–2018), a Systemic Functional Grammar Theory proponent, viewed language as a social phenomenon. Halliday proposed two theoretical approaches to language: rule-based, with grammar specifying rules, or a tool for meaning-making, where grammar serves as a resource for creating meaning (Matthiessen & Halliday, 2009). According to Halliday and Matthiessen, language helps individuals interact and maintain social relations, representing and storing experiences individually and collectively. This perspective aligns with Malinowski's view that communication is deeply tied to cultural and social contexts.

Building on this functional perspective, Farzad Sharifian extended these ideas through cultural linguistics (Sharifian & Jamarani, 2013). Sharifian explored how cultural conceptualizations shape linguistic meaning, proposing that many linguistic features are embedded in cultural schemas (Sharifian, 2017; Sharifian, 2008). In Cultural Linguistics, he defined cultural schemas as shared mental frameworks guiding interpretation, communication, and behaviour within a culture (Sharifian, 2017). For example, a cultural schema for politeness might influence greeting practices, tone of voice, and appropriate or inappropriate gestures. Sharifian also introduced the concept of "pragmatic cultural schemas," which are related to communication and pragmatic meaning. These schemas help explain how different cultures use language pragmatically. For instance, cultural schemas for politeness might affect whether individuals use indirect or direct speech to make requests. Sharifian's model includes a hierarchical structure: pragmatic schema (guiding communication in context), speech acts (basic communication units like requests or advice), pragmemes (broad situational prototypes accommodating various speech

acts), and practs (specific realizations of pragmemes) (Capone, 2005). In this framework, "pract" refers to realising a pragmeme in specific contexts, while "pragmeme" denotes the broader situational prototype guiding multiple speech acts. This distinction clarifies how language is used in practical, context-specific ways.

Understanding pragmatic nuances in English can be challenging for Arab learners. Recent studies by Alhozali (2023), Fareh et al. (2023) and Nassar (2021) show that EFL learners often struggle with interpreting implied meanings due to limited socio-cultural knowledge and pragmatic instruction. For example, Arab and Yemeni learners relied heavily on direct strategies or misinterpreted conversational implicatures. In contrast, Saudi learners showed no clear link between language proficiency and pragmatic awareness, highlighting the need for greater emphasis on the linguistic development of implicative strategies. After completing an intensive English course emphasizing pragmatic skills, learners showed significant improvement, underscoring the role of cultural background and nationality in acquiring pragmatic competence. The primary purpose of this study was to examine how the integration of pragmatics and cultural linguistics enhances communicative competence in cross-cultural discourse through the application of pragmemes and culturemes, addressing limitations in traditional grammar-based approaches that often neglect cultural and contextual dimensions. This research argues that utilizing culturally contextualized speech acts and pragmatic frameworks is essential for achieving fluency in intercultural communication. Traditional grammar-focused instruction neglects the sociocultural and contextual factors necessary for effective communication. Incorporating pragmemes and culturemes facilitates a deeper understanding of diverse social interactions across cultural contexts. The study presents quantitative and qualitative evidence to show that a pragmatics-based approach leads to higher fluency than conventional methods. Additionally, it proposes pedagogical strategies, such as role-playing, simulations, and dialogue analysis, to improve language acquisition.

This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by addressing a significant gap in current approaches to pragmatic and cultural integration in communication. While much focus remains on grammar and structure, there is a clear need for methodological approaches that incorporate cultural and contextual nuances. Underscores the importance of pragmatics in communication, yet few linguistic frameworks integrate these findings. By proposing a pragmatics-based instructional model, this study introduces new perspectives on language teaching and offers practical strategies for fostering linguistic and cultural proficiency. The novelty of this research lies in its focus on integrating pragmemes and culturemes into English linguistic practices, which has received limited attention as evidenced by the analysis of pragmatic fluency and metacultural awareness elements rarely emphasized in traditional curricula. Unlike previous studies focused solely on linguistic competence, this research emphasizes cultural linguistics and pragmatics in achieving fluency. By assessing the impact of these elements on linguistic engagement and intercultural competence, the study provides a fresh, evidence-based perspective on the effectiveness of culturally informed communication strategies, filling a critical gap in applied linguistic research. Building on these insights, the present study seeks to explore the following research questions, which examine the practical effects of culturally contextualized instruction on Arab English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' communicative competence and pragmatic development:

- How does the integration of pragmemes and culturemes into classroom instruction influence the communicative competence of Arab EFL learners?
- To what extent does culturally contextualized language instruction improve learners' ability to interpret and use implied meanings in real-world communication?
- How do Arab EFL learners respond to culturally informed speech act instruction compared to traditional grammar-based approaches regarding fluency and pragmatic awareness?

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Figure 1 represents an innovative approach to analyzing speech act verbs within a cultural context in English as a foreign language by incorporating cultural context, following Sharifian's pragma-cultural framework (Sharifian, 2017). It begins by introducing cultural metaphors on the conceptualization and use of English. Cultural metaphors, conceptual frameworks rooted in specific cultures, are key in shaping language use. Understanding these metaphors enables learners to comprehend the literal meanings of words and the deeper cultural nuances embedded in communication. The next level highlights Sharifian's new framework, which provides a way to analyze speech acts through a cultural lens, known as the pragma-cultural perspective. This approach emphasizes the interaction between language and culture, suggesting that effective communication is about following grammatical rules and understanding the cultural context in which speech acts occur. For example, the way requests, apologies, or compliments are made can vary widely across different cultures, and this must be considered when teaching language.

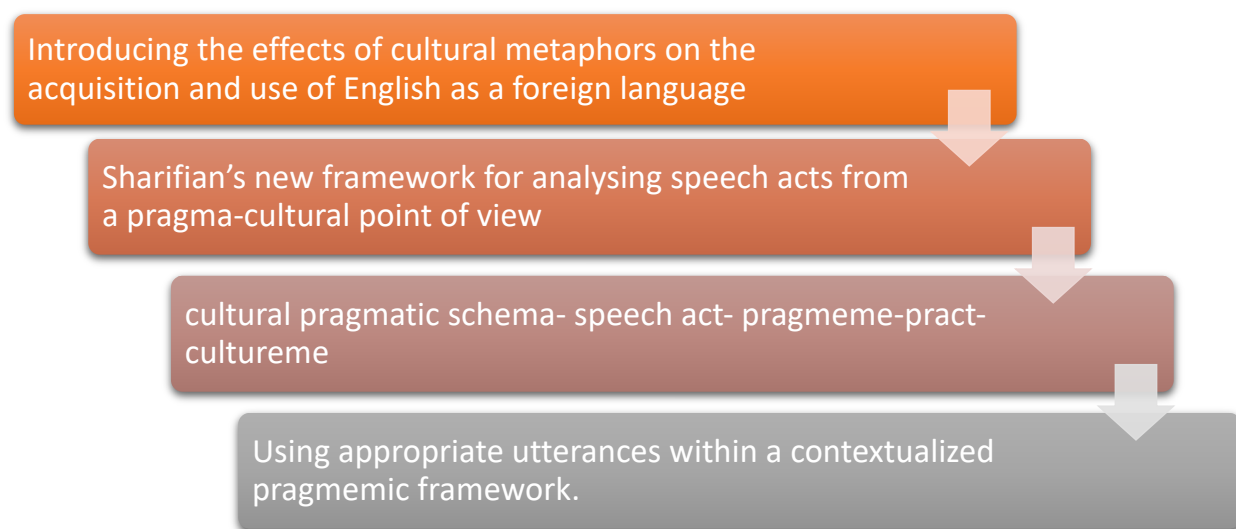


FIGURE 1. Framework for teaching speech acts using cultural metaphors and pragma-cultural schemata.  
*The author constructed it based on Sharifian's (2017) cultural linguistics framework*

The cultural pragmatic schema-speech act-pragmeme-pract section illustrates the hierarchical relationship that forms the foundation of this framework. At the top of this hierarchy is the cultural pragmatic schema, the broader cultural context influencing language use. This schema underpins the speech acts, which are the basic units of communication, such as making a request or offering advice. The next level, the pragmeme, refers to the broader situational prototype

that guides multiple speech acts in specific social contexts (Capone, 2005). Finally, practs are the actual realizations of pragmemes in real-world conversations.

For instance, a pract might be the specific sentence a speaker uses to make a polite request, shaped by cultural expectations and the specific situation. At the final level of the framework, learners are encouraged to use appropriate utterances within a contextualized pragmeme framework, which means they are taught to produce language that is not only grammatically correct but also culturally and contextually appropriate. Focusing on cultural pragmatics helps learners navigate complex social interactions, understand how meaning is constructed in different cultural settings, and communicate more effectively in culturally diverse environments.

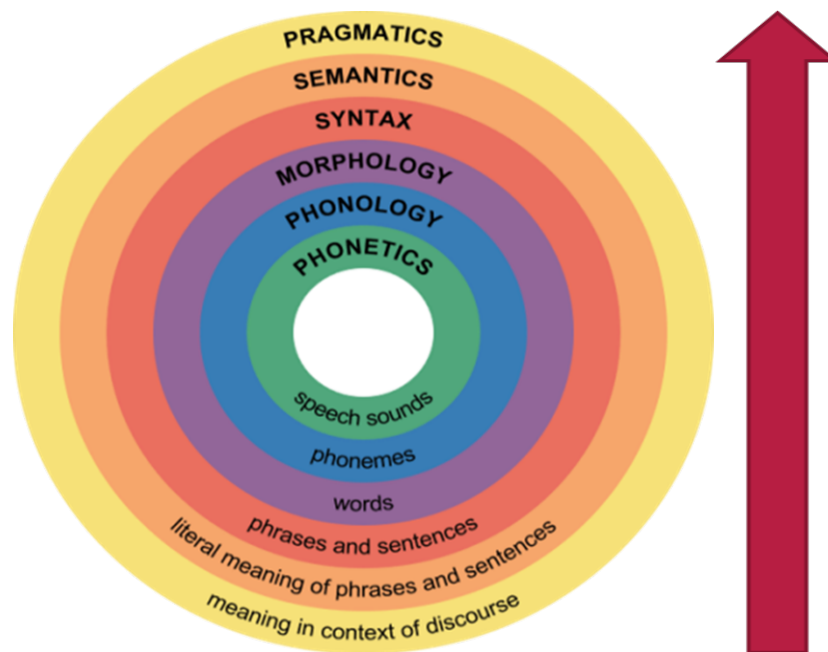


FIGURE 2. Traditional In-Out Approach in linguistics illustrating the significant levels of linguistic structure from phonetics to pragmatics (adapted by the author based on general linguistic theory for illustrative purposes)

Figure 2 illustrates the Traditional In-Out Approach in linguistics, which represents how different levels of linguistic structure build upon one another from the basic elements of sound to complex meaning-making in discourse. The innermost circle represents Phonetics, the study of how speech sounds are physically produced and perceived. These speech sounds, known as phonemes, are then organized systematically in the next level, Phonology, which examines how sounds function in a language and how they combine to form meaningful units. Moving outward, Morphology focuses on how these sound combinations (phonemes) form words by looking at morphemes, the most minor units of meaning. The next layer, Syntax, deals with how words are arranged into structured phrases and sentences according to grammatical rules. This level emphasizes the importance of word order and structure in creating comprehensible and grammatically correct language.

Semantics, which follows syntax, involves understanding the literal meanings of words, phrases, and sentences. It delves into how language conveys meaning at a fundamental level, excluding the role of context. However, the outermost layer, Pragmatics, deals with the meaning in the context of discourse and how language is used in real-life communication, including how meaning is influenced by social situations, speaker intentions, and shared knowledge between speakers. Pragmatics is crucial in interpreting how meaning shifts depending on context, such as idiomatic expressions or conversational implicatures. Together, this model explains how linguistic analysis moves from the inner, more concrete elements of sound production to the outer, abstract aspects of meaning and context, showing how each layer of linguistic structure builds upon the previous one to create full communication in real-world situations.

Developing meta-cultural competence in learners is essential for fostering cultural awareness in second language acquisition, an aspect often underemphasized in conventional linguistic studies. The conceptual knowledge participants bring to ELA (English Language Acquisition) classrooms can be seen as a valuable asset that contributes to developing this meta-cultural competence. This knowledge should be introduced to learners appropriately, enabling them to recognize and differentiate between two distinct cultural systems. Teaching a second language should involve engaging learners in a new system of conceptualizing experiences, aligning with the framework proposed by Sharifian (2005). By integrating these cultural frameworks into language instruction, learners gain deeper insights into linguistic and cultural dimensions, enhancing their communicative competence.

Incorporating cultural pragmatic schemata into language teaching allows participants to compare and contrast cultural strategies expressing specific linguistic structures (Al Sharoufi, 2019; Sharifian, 2016). David Crystal highlights that all linguistic levels are subordinate to pragmatics, emphasizing that teaching cultural pragmatic strategies in the first language (L1) can significantly enhance the teaching and learning of a second language (L2) (Crystal, 1985). Drawing on cultural knowledge and repertoires allows learners to anchor appropriate meanings and structures within the correct situational context. The conceptual knowledge participants bring to the English Language Acquisition (ELA) classroom should be considered an important asset, serving as a resource for developing meta-cultural competence in learners. This approach enriches their linguistic proficiency and fosters cultural awareness and adaptability.

## **METHOD**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN**

This study employed a qualitative research design grounded in Sharifian's (2017) Cultural Linguistics and pragmatics framework. The primary aim was to explore how cultural schemas, speech acts, and pragmemes contribute to developing communicative competence among Arab EFL learners. The research was interpretive, adopting a constructivist paradigm to understand how learners construct meaning through interaction with culturally contextualized language. The approach was exploratory and process-focused, allowing for a detailed observation of learning behaviours and communicative strategies within a real academic setting.

## PARTICIPANTS

The study involved 30 undergraduate EFL participants from the Gulf University for Science and Technology, Kuwait. All participants were enrolled in English language acquisition courses and represented diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Participants included both male and female participants, ranging from beginner to intermediate proficiency levels. Selection was based on voluntary participation through informed consent, ensuring ethical compliance and a representative sample of learners in a typical university classroom. It is important to note that the Arabic expressions provided by participants and analyzed in the study were in the Kuwaiti regional dialect, not Modern Standard Arabic (MSA). This reflects the learners' natural, spoken linguistic practices and was deliberately chosen to ensure authenticity in communicative scenarios.

## INSTRUMENTS

A multi-instrumental approach was used to collect rich, triangulated qualitative data:

- Classroom Observation Checklists: These track participants' participation, pragmatic behavior, and responses to instructional interventions.
- Student Reflection Journals: Participants were asked to write reflective entries after each task, documenting their thoughts on using culture-based expressions and pragmatic choices. These journals also gathered feedback on how the instructional framework, such as role-play, cultural comparisons, and applying pragmemes, enhanced their understanding of cultural communication.
- Transcripts of Group Discussions: Audio-recorded classroom dialogues were transcribed to analyze authentic communication instances and culturally influenced speech acts.
- Culturally Accepted Sayings: Participants contributed Arabic proverbs and expressions, which were analyzed as examples of pragmemes and allopracts.

Each tool was explicitly designed to explore participants' interaction with the target language and their native cultural frameworks, ensuring an authentic and context-sensitive representation of language use. Additionally, the instruments provided insight into the instructional methods' perceived benefits, enabling the researchers to assess the practical impact of culture-based linguistics instruction on communicative competence.

## DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

The study followed three structured procedures, ensuring clarity in implementation:

### CULTURAL SCHEMA AND SPEECH ACT INTRODUCTION

Participants were introduced to cultural schemas from Arabic and English contexts. They then participated in interactive discourse-based discussions, analyzing differences in speech acts such as requests, apologies, compliments, and refusals. They then selected expressions most contextually appropriate based on cultural expectations, highlighting pragmatic sensitivity. Participants were encouraged to reflect on how this instructional approach influenced their

awareness and communication strategies, with feedback captured through written reflections and class discussions.

#### COLLECTION AND COMPARISON OF SAYINGS

Participants submitted everyday sayings and proverbs in Kuwaiti Arabic that exemplify culture-specific pragmemes. These were then compared with English equivalents, prompting participants to reflect on allopracts and potential misinterpretations caused by direct translation. Participants also shared how this comparative method helped them recognize cross-cultural communication challenges and adapt more appropriately, contributing feedback that informed the thematic analysis.

#### ROLE-PLAY AND PRAGMATIC ENGAGEMENT

Participants engaged in role-plays, guided simulations, and dialogue analysis exercises to practice culturally informed communication. Scenarios included everyday events like greeting elders, declining invitations, or giving compliments. Instructors incorporated TV shows, authentic speech transcripts, and culturally contrasting examples to emphasize grammar-pragmatics alignment. Throughout these sessions, participants provided reflective feedback on how role-play and real-world simulations improved their pragmatic competence and cultural understanding.

#### DATA ANALYSIS

The data were analyzed through thematic analysis, focusing on emerging patterns in participants' use of language. A coding system based on Sharifian's hierarchical model was applied:

Cultural Schema → Speech Act → Pragmeme → Pract

Reflection journals, discourse transcripts, and student submissions were examined inductively. Recurring themes such as indirectness, humility, politeness, respect, and embarrassment were identified and mapped to culturally influenced linguistic choices. In addition to analyzing linguistic behaviours, the study also examined participants' explicit feedback on how they experienced and benefited from the instructional approach. Their reflections offered insight into their evolving awareness of pragmatic competence and cultural adaptation, revealing that increased fluency stemmed from memorising rules and immersive, culturally informed practice. This dual analysis of linguistic output and learner perceptions enabled the study to uncover how participants' understanding of language shifted from structural knowledge to contextually and culturally appropriate communication.

#### TRUSTWORTHINESS OF STUDY FINDINGS

To enhance the validity, reliability, and credibility of the findings, the following strategies were implemented:



- Triangulation of Data: Multiple sources (observation, journals, recordings) were used to ensure data consistency and convergence.
- Peer Debriefing: Colleague instructors reviewed the coding and interpretation of data to reduce researcher bias.
- Participant Validation: Participants were asked to review preliminary findings to confirm that the interpretations reflected their experiences.
- Audit Trail: A detailed log of data collection instruments, analytic procedures, and reflective memos was maintained, allowing replication or review of the process.

## RESULTS

### DATA ANALYSIS

The analysis of everyday conversations in this study is deeply connected to Sharifian's (2011) cultural schema theory, which provides a solid linguistic and theoretical foundation for understanding the interaction between language and culture. By utilizing cultural schemas such as (humility) '*tawādu*' and (embarrassment) '*ihraj*', the study identifies speech acts in real-world settings and aligns these examples with the broader framework of cultural pragmatics. Sharifian's theory emphasizes how cultural knowledge is encoded in language, influencing speech acts in context. For instance, the example of humility in Arabic speech where a compliment is reassigned to the complimenter ("It is because you have good taste!") aligns with Sharifian's schema theory, demonstrating how deep-rooted cultural values shape communicative behaviour. This pragmatic behavior goes beyond the surface level of speech and ties back to broader cultural expectations. The concept of reassigning a compliment reflects a communal focus, which contrasts with the individualism often seen in Western communicative practices. Furthermore, this analysis bridges cultural schema theory with pragmatics by showing how speech acts are governed by grammatical rules and the cultural context in which they occur. Using *pract* (actual utterances) and *pragmeme* (the prototype guiding speech acts) illustrates this hierarchical relationship, reinforcing the importance of cultural awareness in shaping language use. The study effectively integrates linguistic theories in an academically robust framework to ground its observations.

### HUMILITY ('*TAWĀDU*')

The concept of '*tawādu*' is deeply ingrained in Islamic traditions and reflects a fundamental Arab moral value that promotes modesty in personal achievements. This schema of humility is prominently expressed through linguistic practices where successes and achievements are seldom credited to personal efforts alone. Instead, they are often attributed to external factors such as divine intervention or community support. This cultural predisposition towards humility starkly contrasts the communicative practices observed in many Western cultures, where speech acts frequently emphasize individualism and personal accomplishment. The analysis highlights how these differing values influence the language used in everyday interactions and the broader communicative behaviors, underscoring the impact of cultural and religious paradigms in shaping communication across different linguistic contexts.

Several examples demonstrate how this schema is applied in conversations:

When Arabs receive compliments, they often strive to exhibit humility and eschew any overt display of egotism. As demonstrated in Example 1, consider a scenario where one compliments another's bracelet; the typical response might be, "It is because you have good taste!" This response subtly shifts the focus from the compliment's object to the complimenter's aesthetic judgment. It implies that the item's beauty reflects the complimenter's discernment and taste, rather than an inherent quality of the item itself. Another similar expression, "عيونك الحلوة" (*ayūnik al-helwah*), which translates to "your beautiful eyes," serves a comparable function. It suggests that the item being complimented appears beautiful because it is seen through beautiful eyes. This approach not only diminishes the direct acceptance of the compliment but also reciprocates it by praising the perceiver's ability to recognize beauty, thus maintaining a balance of modesty and graciousness in the interaction.

Example 1:

TABLE 1. Examples of Humility in Arabic Speech Acts

Pragmatic schema:	[Humility]
Speech act/event:	[responding to a compliment on something]
Pragmeme 2:	[reassign the compliment to the complimenter]
Pract:	هذا من ذوقك
It is because you have good taste ( <i>hādā min dawqik</i> )	

In Arabic communication, references to the divine are frequent and culturally significant, as illustrated in Example 2. When Arabs receive compliments on their achievements, they commonly attribute their success to divine grace, often responding with phrases like "هذا من فضل ربي" (*hatha min fathil rabbi*), which translates to "This is the favor of my Lord." This expression reflects a deep-seated cultural and religious humility, emphasizing that the achievement would not have been possible without divine intervention. Such attributions to a higher power contrast markedly with English-speaking contexts, where achievements are often ascribed to individual effort and personal merit. This fundamental difference in pragmatic schemas significantly influences the production of practs (actual utterances). It can dramatically alter communication dynamics, potentially leading to misunderstandings or disruptions in information flow when interacting across cultures.

Example: 2

TABLE 2. Divine Attribution in Arabic Responses to Compliments

Pragmatic schema:	[Humility]
Speech act/event:	[responding to a compliment on an achievement]
Pragmeme 2:	[reassign the compliment to god]
Pract:	هذا من فضل ربي
This is the favour/grace of my lord ( <i>hatha min fathil rabbi</i> )	

In Arabic cultural interactions, a significant emphasis is placed on politeness and respect, particularly towards individuals with greater status or experience. This cultural etiquette is vividly demonstrated in how compliments are handled, especially when they come from someone

perceived as a mentor or a senior figure. As depicted in Example 3, when an Arab individual receives praise for their knowledge or skills, the typical response often involves diminishing one's role and attributing success to the mentor's influence.

The phrase "ما سويت شي، هذا كله من جهدك وقدراتك بالتدريس" (*mā sawayt shay', hādā kullahu min juhdik wa qudrātik bil-tadrīs*), which translates to "I did nothing, this is all a result of your efforts and good teaching skills," exemplifies this practice. It reflects a form of humility where the compliment recipient minimizes their contributions, effectively elevating the mentor's role. This approach honors the mentor and aligns with the broader cultural values of deference and respect towards those considered more experienced or knowledgeable, illustrating how deeply interwoven respect and modesty are in the Arab communicative schema.

Example 3:

TABLE 3. Responding to Compliments on Knowledge or Talent

Pragmatic schema:	[Humility]
Speech act/event:	[responding to a compliment on knowledge or talent]
Pragmeme 2:	[scale down the compliment and return it to the complimenter]
Pract:	ما سويت شي، هذا كله من جهدك وقدراتك بالتدريس
I did nothing, this is all a result of your efforts and good teaching skills ( <i>ma swait shay, hatha kla min jihdek w qudratik bltadrees</i> )	

In Arab culture, hospitality is deeply revered, and guests are treated with the utmost respect and care, often by preparing meals. When a guest compliments the food, a typical response might be, "اسفة ادري انه الطبخة مو وايد حلوة، بس بالعافية" (*Asfa adri altabkha mu hilwa, bs bil'afiya*), which translates to "Sorry, I know it is not very good, but enjoy". This response exemplifies a humility schema where the host modestly downplays the food quality.

The underlying message conveys that the food may not deserve the guest's praise, reflecting a high standard of hospitality where even compliments are met with self-effacement. This practice can be particularly poignant when interacting with older family members, such as a grandmother, where the host might suggest that their culinary efforts pale compared to the elder's renowned skills. Such interactions underscore the cultural emphasis on humility and respect within the familial and social hospitality framework.

Example 4:

TABLE 4. Responding to Compliments on Food

Pragmatic schema:	[Humility]
Speech act/event:	[responding to a compliment on food]
Pragmeme 2:	[Apologise]
Pract:	اسفة ادري انه الطبخة مو وايد حلوة، بس بالعافية
Sorry, I know it is not yummy/good, but enjoy! ( <i>Asfa adri altabkha mu hilwa, bs bil'afiya</i> )	

In Arab communication, the 'ihrāj schema, which involves expressing embarrassment or shame, significantly influences interpersonal interactions, especially when requesting or receiving assistance. For instance, responses such as "شكرا انا وايد متقشش منك" "Thank you, I am so embarrassed" (*Shukran ana wayid mitfashil*) and "اعتذر اذا سببت لك أي احراج", "I apologize if I caused you any

embarrassment". (*Aa'tither 'itha sababt lik 'ihrāj*), exemplify this schema by conveying a high degree of discomfort associated with imposing on others. These expressions articulate gratitude and highlight the speaker's acute awareness of the social implications of their request.

Further elucidating this communication style are the retorts to expressions of embarrassment, such as "اذا تتفشل مني وانا اخوك، ما من احراج"، "It is nothing, do not even mention it! How can you feel embarrassed of me when I am like a brother to you", (*Afa tatafashal mini wana akhook, ma min ihrāj*) or "ازعل منك اذا قلت هالكلام" "Are you serious? Do not say this ever again or feel embarrassed of me, it will make me sad", (*Az'al minik itha gilt hatha al-kalam*). These responses aim to reassure and alleviate discomfort, strengthening the social bonds between the individuals involved. They reflect a profound cultural emphasis on maintaining dignity and support within relationships, where even the potential for discomfort must be managed with sensitivity and care. This dynamic is akin to saying "You are welcome" in English, albeit with a deeper engagement with the recipient's emotional state, underscoring the rich tapestry of social norms and values that govern Arab interpersonal communication.

Example: 5

TABLE 5. Expressions of Embarrassment in Arab Interactions

Pragmatic schema:	[Humility]
Speech act/event:	[expressing gratitude for a favour]
Pragmeme:	[express embarrassment as much as possible]
Pract:	شكرا انا وايد متفشل منك (1)
Thank you, I am so embarrassed, ( <i>Shukran ana wayid mitfashil</i> ), اعتذر اذا سببت لك أي احراج, Sorry if I am asking for a favour that troubled you, ( <i>Aa'tither 'itha sababt lik 'ihrāj</i> ),	

In Arab cultural interactions, making a request is often permeated with expressions of embarrassment, reflecting deep-seated norms about respect and consideration. This is illustrated through the use of the *'ihrāj* schema, which emphasizes the speaker's discomfort and hesitancy when needing to ask for help. For example, phrases like "انا منخرجة من الموضوع ومادري من وين ابلس", "I am so embarrassed, I do not know where to start", (*Ana minharja wa madri wain abolish*) and "مو عارفة شلون اقول لك، بس محتاجة أطلب منك طلب لو ما عليك أمر", "I do not know how to tell you, but I need your help in something if it is not troublesome", (*Mu a'arfa shloun aqoulik, bs mihtaja atlib minik talab*), are frequently used. These expressions convey the speaker's reluctance and respect, underscoring their intent not to burden the listener. This behaviour indicates a broader cultural imperative to avoid inconvenience to others, demonstrating a high level of politeness and consideration in personal and social relations within Arab societies.

Example: 6

TABLE 6. Expressions of Embarrassment in Request-Making in Arab Culture

Pragmatic schema:	[feeling ashamed/embarrassed "احراج"]
Speech act/event:	[making a request]
Pragmeme:	[express احراج]
Pract:	انا منخرجة من الموضوع ومادري من وين ابلس (1)
I am so embarrassed, I do not know where to start, ( <i>Ana minharja wa madri wain abolish</i> ), بس محتاجة أطلب منك طلب لو ما عليك أمر (2), I do not know how to tell you, but I need your help in something if it is not troublesome, ( <i>Mu a'arfa shloun aqoulik, bs mihtaja atlib minik talab atlib minik talab</i> )	

In Arab culture, receiving an offer of food is governed by a schema of maintaining respectful distance and honouring social hierarchies. This is often reflected in the refusal to decline food offers outright, even when one is genuinely uninterested or unable to consume more. This practice stems from a deep-rooted respect for the host and recognition of their efforts to provide hospitality. Declining food is typically seen as a sign of disrespect or ingratitude, especially when the host has gone to considerable lengths to create a welcoming environment. As a result, phrases like "انترست بس باخذ وحدة عشانج" (*Interast bs bakhith wahda 'ashanich*, "I am full, but I will take one just for you") and "والله حدي شبعانة ومفولة مافي مجال اكل اكثر، بس ماقدر ارد لج طلب" ("I am so full and overstuffed there is no room for more, but I cannot turn it down", (*wallah hadi shaba'ana w mfawla mafi majal akthar, bs maqdar arid lich talab*) are commonly used. These responses serve to avoid confrontation and express gratitude and appreciation for the hospitality extended, thus reinforcing social bonds and adhering to cultural norms of respect and politeness.

Example 7:

TABLE 7. Navigating Offers of Food in Arab Culture

Pragmatic schema:	[feeling ashamed/embarrassed" احرآج]
Speech act/event:	[making a request]
Pragmeme:	[احرآج express]
Pract:	(انا منخرآة من الموضوع ومادري من وين ابلس (1) ،مو عارفة شلون اقول لك (Ana minharja wa madri wain abolish), I am so embarrassed, I do not know where to start 2 بس محتآة اطلب منك طلب لو ما عليك امر Mu a'arfa shloun aqoulik, bs mihtaja, (I do not know how to tell you, but I need your help with something if it is not troublesome) Mu a'arfa shloun aqoulik, bs mihtaja atlib minik talab atlib minik talab
Pragmatic schema:	[respectful distance]
Speech act/event:	[receiving an offer of food]
Pragmeme:	[do not reject the offer, even if you do not like or need it]
Pract:	(انترست بس باخذ وحدة عشانج (1) والله حدي شبعانة ومفولة مافي مجال اكل (Interast bs bakhith wahda 'ashanich), اكثر، بس ماقدر ارد لج طلب (2) (wallah hadi shaba'ana w mfawla mafi majal, akthar, bs maqdar arid lich talab)

In Arab culture, offering and receiving food is governed by a complex interplay of social etiquette and the pragmatic schema of 'ihrāj (feeling embarrassed/ashamed). This schema is prominently displayed when one individual offers food while another presents. A deep-seated sense of communal responsibility and respect prompts the offeror to insist multiple times on sharing their meal, as exemplified by the common practice of saying, "حياآ انا مو يو عانة اخذي نص" (*Hayyaj ana mu yoaana, 'ikh-thay nis samunti*, "Here, take half of my sandwich; I am not that hungry"). This insistence stems from a cultural aversion to eating in front of others who are not partaking, as it may induce a desire for food in the observer and potentially cause discomfort.

Furthermore, the recipient typically rejects the offer several times before possibly accepting, as seen in responses like, "لا حبيبي شكرا شبعانة كليت قبل لا ابي، علبج بألف بالعافية" (*La habibti shukran shabaa'na klait gabil la ayyi, 'alich 'ib 'aalf 'aafya*), "Thank you so much dear, but I ate before coming, so I am not hungry, enjoy it!". This pattern of refusal and eventual acceptance illustrates a nuanced layer of social interaction where both parties demonstrate humility and consideration to avoid any implication of greed or discomfort. Such interactions underscore the cultural importance of mutual respect and maintaining social harmony, reinforcing the belief that one should not indulge in a meal alone if others are present without offering to share.

EMBARRASSMENT (*IHRĀJ*)

Example 1:

TABLE 8. The Pragmatic Schema of 'Ihrāj in Offering and Receiving Food

Pragmatic schema:	[‘ <i>ihrāj</i> ]
Speech act/event:	[offering goods]
Pragmeme 1:	[Insist on the offer for several turns]
Pract:	حياج انا مو يو عانة اخذي نص صمونتي
	Here, take half of my sandwich, you can join me if you want some, I am not that hungry, <i>Hayyach ana mu yoaana</i> , (‘ <i>ikh-thay nis samunti</i> ),
Pragmeme 2:	[Reject an offer several times before possibly engaging in a final acceptance] [when offered half of the sandwich] لا حبيبتي شكرا شبعانة كلبت قبل لا ابي، عليج بألف بالعافية
Pract:	“Thank you so much dear but I ate before coming so I am not hungry, enjoy it!” ( <i>La habibti shukran shabaa’na klait gabil la ayyi</i> , ‘ <i>alich ‘ib ‘aalf ‘aafya</i> )

In Arab culture, politeness and indirectness are key elements in social interactions, especially during leave-taking or when extending or declining invitations. Rather than rejecting an invitation outright, Arabs often use indirect language that softens the refusal while maintaining respect and preserving social harmony. For instance, when offering an open invitation, one might say, "تنورينا بأي وقت البيت بيتج" (*Tnawrina ‘ib ay waqt ‘ilbait baitich*, "You are welcome to visit us anytime, our house is your house"), which emphasizes hospitality and a sense of community.

Conversely, a direct "no" is considered impolite or disrespectful when rejecting an invitation. Instead, Arabs might respond with phrases like "بشوف ان شاء الله" (*Bashouf insha’a Allah*, "I will see, if God wills") or "اذا ربي كتب" (*Itha rabi katab*, "If it is what God has written for us"), avoiding an explicit refusal. This indirect approach reflects a cultural tendency to maintain positive social relations and avoid confrontation. The expression "insha’ Allah" is beneficial, as it conveys uncertainty while leaving room for divine intervention, thus providing a respectful way to avoid making definitive commitments. This cultural practice underscores the importance of social grace and tact in Arab communication, where direct refusals are often softened through religious and respectful expressions.

Example 2:

TABLE 9. Indirect Communication in Offering and Declining Invitations in Arab Culture

Pragmatic schema:	[‘ <i>ihrāj</i> ]
Speech act/event:	[leave taking]
Pragmeme:	[Offer invitations as part of leave-taking]
Pract:	تنورينا بأي وقت البيت بيتج (1)
	<i>Tnawrina ‘ib ay waqt ‘ilbait baitich</i> , (You are welcome to visit us anytime, our house is your house)
Pragmatic schema:	[‘ <i>ihrāj</i> ]
Speech act/event:	[Rejecting an invitation]
Pragmeme:	[Never reject in a direct way]
1) بشوف ان شاء الله	
Practs:	(I will see, if God wills), <i>Bashouf insha’a Allah</i>
	(2) اذا ربي كتب (If it is what God have written for us)

In Arab culture, politeness plays a crucial role in everyday interactions, particularly during leave-taking and hanging up the phone. Unlike in English, where a conversation may end abruptly or without formal goodbyes, Arabs greatly emphasise using respectful language when concluding a phone call. As demonstrated in the example, phrases such as "الله يسلمك ويحفظك ويخليك" (May God bless you, protect you, and keep you) and "نشوفك على خير" (I hope we will see you in good situations) are commonly exchanged to ensure that the conversation ends on a positive and respectful note. The act of hanging up without proper leave-taking is considered disrespectful and contrary to cultural expectations.

Language is inherently goal-oriented, with individuals using it to achieve social objectives. Approaching language purely as a set of formal rules, devoid of its cultural context, can hinder participants ability to learn and communicate in a second language effectively. Emphasis should be placed on cultural schemas and context, allowing learners to not only master grammar but also the social nuances of the language. Functionalist theory, which views language as a form of social activity, supports this approach, in contrast to formalist theories that separate language from its social context, leading to a more mechanical view of communication. Learners unconsciously rely on their cultural schemas when communicating in a foreign language, affecting their strategies to achieve their communicative goals. Therefore, teaching English or any language should intensely focus on cultural pragmatics, helping learners understand the cultural schemas and pragmemes that guide effective communication. Sharifian (2011) asserts, "A thorough understanding of practs requires an equally thorough understanding of cultural schemas and speech acts/events underpinning the pragmemes that are being instantiated." This cultural understanding is vital to fluency and competence in a second language.

TABLE 10. Politeness in Arab Leave-Taking and Phone Conversations

Pragmatic schema:	[ <i>'ihrāj</i> ]
	المتكلم: الله يسلمك ويحفظك ويخليك... سلم على الأهل ان شاء الله تكونون بخير المستمع: تسلم ويحفظك ويخليك... ان شاء الله يوصل.. نشوفك على خير المتكلم: ان شاء الله بإذن الله.. مع السلامة المستمع: ان شاء الله، مع السلامة
Speaker:	May God bless you, protect you, and keep you... Please give my kind regards to your family. I hope you all are doing well.
Receiver:	Thank God bless you and keep you too... Inshaa' Allah, I will give them your greetings...I hope we will see you in good situations.
Speaker:	Inshaa' Allah if God wills... goodbye
Receiver:	<i>Inshaa' Allah</i> , goodbye (hangs up)
Pragmatic schema:	[ <i>'ihrāj</i> ]
Speech act/event:	[Hanging up the phone]
Pragmeme:	[Never hang up without saying goodbye]
Practs:	Illustrated in the conversation below

Figure 3 illustrates how cultural pragmatic schemas influence communication through a structured hierarchy, beginning with culturemes cultural values that shape communication within a particular context. In the case of your study, examples of these culturemes include humility (*tawādu*) and embarrassment (*ihrāj*), which are deeply embedded in Arab cultural communication norms. These cultural values shape practices, the practical expressions or actions derived from these values. For instance, humility influences the pract of downplaying personal achievements, while respectful distance affects how food offers are received and accepted, even when not needed.

These practs are then encapsulated within specific pragmemes, which are contextualized communicative strategies.

For example, in the case of humility, a pragmeme could be reassigning compliments to God or others, while for embarrassment, a pragmeme might involve expressing discomfort when asking for help. These pragmemes produce speech acts, the spoken responses or behaviours observed in communication. Examples include responding to compliments with, "This is the favour of my Lord," or hesitating when requesting, "I am so embarrassed, I do not know where to start." Collectively, these speech acts contribute to the broader Cultural Pragmatic Schemata, which illustrate how culture governs and structures everyday communication.

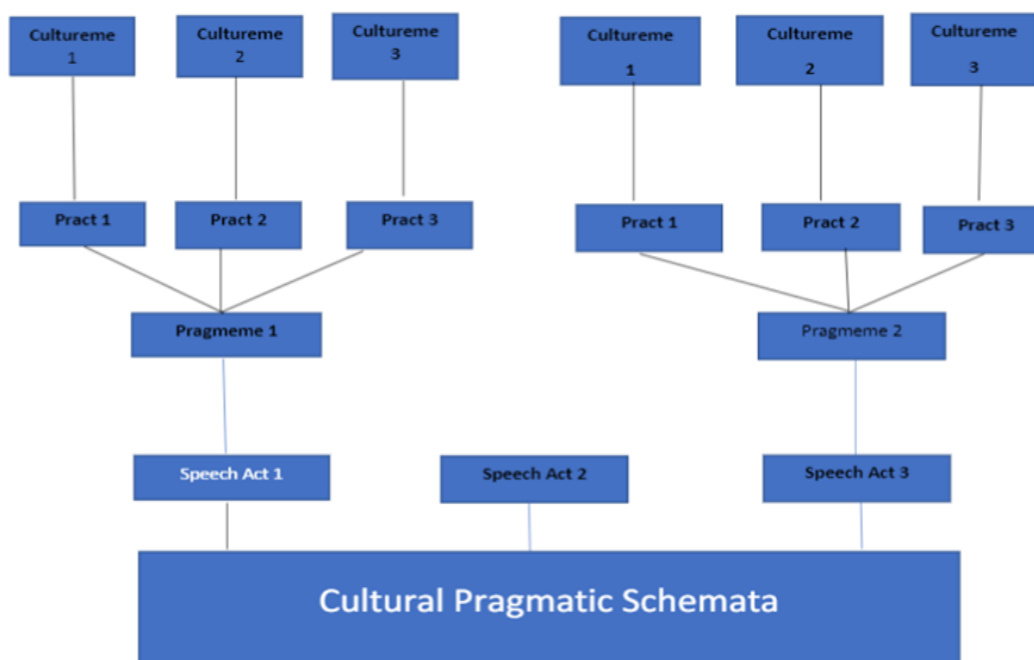


FIGURE 3. Author-constructed model illustrating the hierarchical relationship between culturemes, pragmemes, and speech acts based on Sarafian's (2017) Cultural Linguistics framework

## DISCUSSION

This study contributes to the evolving understanding of English Language Acquisition by highlighting the often-overlooked role of pragmatics and cultural linguistics in fostering communicative competence. Grounded in a culturally rich linguistic context, it builds upon previous theoretical models to explore how learners develop pragmatic awareness through structured exposure to pragmemes and culturemes. Rather than restating objectives, the discussion here focuses on how these culturally embedded strategies manifested in learner behaviour and what this implies for language instruction in multilingual environments like Kuwait.

The findings of this study align with previous research, which emphasizes the importance of cultural linguistic competence and communication. Bouton (1988) and Sharifian (2011) have demonstrated how cultural schemas shape communication patterns, and the current study supports their claims by showing that participants trained to recognize and apply pragmemes and culturemes



were better equipped to navigate social interactions in English. This aligns with Taguchi (2024) and Alsmari (2020), who argue that grammatical competence alone is insufficient for achieving communicative fluency. In contrast to the traditional grammar-focused instruction that Pramono & Kurniawan (2020) critiqued, this study demonstrated that participants who engaged with culturally embedded expressions developed more pragmatic awareness. The results also extend Heidari et al.'s (2020) and Bauler (2022) research, which showed that teaching speech acts in isolation is insufficient; instead, embedding them in cultural frameworks provides a richer learning experience.

Furthermore, while past studies such as Al Sharoufi (2019) and Ezzaoua, (2023) have examined politeness and indirectness in Western and Eastern languages, this study contributes to the literature by emphasizing Arabic communicative strategies, such as (humility) *tawādu'* and (embarrassment) *'ihrāj*. The analysis of complement reassignments and divine attributions in Arabic contrasts with Western directness, reinforcing that pragmatic competence is culturally specific. These findings justify cultural pragmatics as a framework for language acquisition and show that pragmatic fluency requires both linguistic proficiency and cultural awareness.

The results suggest that language acquisition is not merely a cognitive process but also a social one, influenced by cultural expectations and communicative norms. The participants' ability to navigate English interactions effectively was not the result of rote memorization but culturally informed engagement. Using pragmemes in role-play and discussions allowed participants to internalize communicative norms naturally. For example, when participants were taught to respond to compliments in English, many initially applied Arabic communication norms, such as reassigning the compliment or invoking divine attributions. Through practice and cross-cultural comparisons, participants became more aware of when these expressions were appropriate in English contexts. This supports Sharifian's (2011) model, which states that pragmatic schemas influence real-world speech acts and that second-language learners must adjust their communicative strategies to match their target language's cultural expectations. Furthermore, the study showed that participants developed metacultural competence to recognize, interpret, and adapt speech acts across different linguistic and cultural contexts. This skill is crucial in multilingual societies and international communication, where literal translations can lead to misunderstandings.

The findings indicate that incorporating pragmemes and culturemes into English instruction significantly enhanced participants' fluency, adaptability, and confidence in real-world interactions. This was observed through linguistic analysis and consistently echoed in participants' reflective journals and group discussions. For instance, several learners noted that understanding how to reassign compliments or express *'ihrāj* (embarrassment) in English made them "feel more natural" and "less anxious" in conversations with native speakers. One student wrote, "Role-playing real situations helped me realize why direct translations from Arabic do not always sound polite in English." Such reflections validate that participants were absorbing content passively and actively internalizing culturally appropriate communication strategies. These insights challenge traditional ELA approaches that prioritize grammatical correctness over pragmatic appropriateness, demonstrating the value of sociocultural and intercultural norms. Grammar and vocabulary instruction should be complemented with cultural pragmatics. Language learning should include simulations, role-play, and exposure to authentic conversational contexts. Participants should be encouraged to analyze their native and target languages to understand cultural influences on communication. Additionally, the findings have implications for digital learning environments. With the rise of AI-powered language tools, it is crucial to integrate

pragmatic features into computer-assisted language learning (CALL) programs. Digital platforms should move beyond translation-based models and incorporate cultural explanations of speech acts, allowing learners to practice culturally appropriate communication in online settings.

While the study offers valuable insights, some limitations should be acknowledged. Although sufficient for qualitative research, the sample size (30 respondents) limits the generalizability of findings to wider populations. Future studies could involve larger, more diverse groups to explore how learners from different linguistic backgrounds interact with pragmemes and culturemes. Another potential limitation is student familiarity with Arabic pragmatics, which may have influenced their ability to analyze cultural differences in communication. Since the study was conducted in a bilingual setting (Arabic and English), it remains unclear whether learners from monolingual backgrounds would show similar improvements. Moreover, the study focused on spoken interactions. However, future research should investigate how pragmemes and culturemes function in written and digital communication, particularly on social media platforms, where language norms constantly evolve.

## CONCLUSION

This study examined how integrating pragmatics and cultural linguistics through applying pragmemes, culturemes, and cultural schemas can effectively enhance communicative competence among Arab EFL learners. Drawing on Sharifian's (2017) framework, the research challenged traditional grammar-based instruction by highlighting the vital role of sociocultural context in language acquisition. The findings revealed that participants significantly improved their ability to interpret and produce contextually appropriate expressions, particularly in culturally sensitive situations like complimenting, requesting, and offering help.

These gains were achieved not through rote memorization, but through culturally informed linguistic activities such as role-play, reflection, and comparative analysis. Participants' feedback collected through reflection journals and discourse-based discussions indicated that the instructional framework made them more confident and context-aware communicators. Learners expressed that understanding cultural pragmatics helped them avoid miscommunication, feel more fluent in real-life interactions, and understand how speech acts function in English.

The discussion emphasized that pragmatic competence is inherently culture-bound, with norms such as humility (*tawādu'*) and embarrassment (*ihrāj*) shaping learners' communicative choices. The study concludes that traditional ELA methods are insufficient for developing pragmatic fluency and that embedding cultural and contextual instruction is essential. Learners who engaged with culturally grounded speech acts developed greater linguistic adaptability and intercultural competence, supporting cultural linguistics as a more effective pedagogical framework for second language instruction.

Given the evolving nature of language learning in digital spaces, future studies should explore how pragmemes and culturemes manifest in online communication (e.g., WhatsApp, Twitter, and Instagram). The long-term impact of pragmatic-based instruction on participants' communicative competence over months or years should be examined. Cross-linguistic comparisons between Arabic-English learners and learners from other cultural backgrounds, such as East Asian or Latin American learners, could provide further insight into the effectiveness of cultural pragmatics. The potential of AI-driven conversational agents in facilitating the acquisition of cultural pragmatics also warrants further exploration.—This study's linguistic and cultural

approach aligns with the broader cultural linguistics framework proposed by Sharifian (2017) and the functional view of language advocated by Halliday and Matthiessen (2009), reinforcing the theoretical foundation of the study's design and instructional model.

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