

# INPLASY

## A Scoping Review of EFL Learners' Interlanguage Pragmatic Development

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### ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

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**Conflicts of interest** - None declared.

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**Amendments** - This protocol was registered with the International Platform of Registered Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis Protocols (INPLASY) on 06 August 2024 and was last updated on 06 August 2024.

### INTRODUCTION

**Review question / Objective** RQ1: What are the patterns and trends in research on EFL learners' interlanguage pragmatic development, taking into account journal sources, country of origin, and publication timeline?  
RQ2: What can be learned about interlanguage pragmatic development in EFL learners, including its definition, relationship to English language proficiency level, instructional resources available, and other intervening factors?

**Background** Interlanguage pragmatic competence, which refers to the ability of L2 learners to use language appropriately and effectively in various communicative contexts, has been the subject of extensive research in language teaching and learning (Xu & Wannaruk, 2017). The development of pragmatic competence in English

as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners has been a focal point of investigation, with studies exploring various aspects of interlanguage pragmatic development and its implications for language education.

In Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research, it is assumed that L2 learners develop an internalized system based on linguistic aspects from both their target language and their original language, creating what is known as an "interlanguage." (Zangoei & Amirian, 2019a). Given the non-linear and variable nature of L2 pragmatic development, interlanguage pragmatic studies have compared data sets between L1, L2, and interlanguage by following the examples established by earlier work in cross-cultural pragmatics and interlanguage research. In recent years, the development of interlanguage pragmatic competence in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners has garnered significant attention in

language teaching and research. It has been proven that EFL learners may encounter challenges in recognizing and producing pragmatic expressions, particularly in speech acts such as requests, apologies, compliments, disagreements, and refusals (Barón et al., 2020; El-Dakhs & Amroun, 2020; Loranc & Brett, 2022; Su, 2021; Timpe-Laughlin & Dombi, 2020). These challenges are often attributed to learners' sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic awareness and their interlanguage development of a range of strategies and modifiers (Lenchuk & Ahmed, 2019). As a result, there is a growing need to explore effective instructional strategies and interventions to enhance EFL learners' interlanguage pragmatic competence (Qari, 2021).

**Rationale** This study employs a literature review approach to identify critical aspects of a subject or topic by analyzing previous research to identify gaps. A scoping review is used to showcase the specific issues that are most relevant to the investigation. The current study's primary analytical technique is thematic grouping, which entails searching for and analyzing relevant data from databases. Previous studies have used this method to conduct systematic reviews on various topics (Kim & Michel, 2023; Napoli & Tantucci, 2022b). To manage the literature search, the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) were used (Page et al., 2021). The research tenets are to analyze and interpret the findings to recommend future research in EFL learners' interlanguage pragmatic competence development.

## METHODS

**Strategy of data synthesis** The articles were uploaded as primary documents to ATLAS.ti 23. Then, each piece was grouped into author, journal name, journal number, publisher, volume, and year of publication, following the manner introduced by Zairul (2020). In doing so, the articles can be analyzed based on the year they were published and the discussion pattern based on the year. The statistical section focuses primarily on the distribution of academic research articles by region, journal, and country. At the same time, in the qualitative part, thematic analysis was the primary method used to classify and summarize the articles and ultimately construct an overarching framework. The current study adheres to Braun and Clarke's 6-step procedure (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The steps are as follows: (1) becoming familiar with the data, (2) generating codes, (3) identifying themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining themes, and (6) explaining themes.

This first step entails immersing yourself in the data to understand its contents per the research question thoroughly. During the stage to identify critical elements in the data that stand out, line-by-line coding was conducted on the six levels of pragmatic analysis in Barron (2019): formal level, actional level, interactional level, topic level, organizational level, and stylistic level. Then, using an inductive approach, themes emerged from specific observations in the empirical studies. All established themes were reviewed, and those strongly interrelated were eliminated. Furthermore, all the shortlisted themes were merged and defined so that all sub-themes were grouped under the main themes. Finally, ready-to-use themes were redefined to the point where an agreement on each theme was reached through in-group discussion.

**Eligibility criteria** The retrieved studies were selected based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Studies were included if they: 1) having at least keyword(s) "English as foreign language Learners (EFL)" or "English as a second language (ESL)", and "Interlanguage competence" or "Interlanguage competence development", 2) targeting at least one question in the review study, and 3) focusing on English as foreign language learning. Studies were excluded if they 1) having no keyword(s) like "English as foreign language Learners (EFL)" or "English as a second language (ESL)", and "Interlanguage competence" or "Interlanguage competence development", 2) unrelated to any question in the review study, 3) Focusing on other foreign language than English. The decision to limit the language studied was made to aid in the definition of the issues and problems associated with interlanguage pragmatic competence development of homogeneity.

### Source of evidence screening and selection

The review followed the rapid assessment of the literature method. The literature search was done using three international databases: Web of Science, Scopus, and ScienceDirect. The initial search yielded 93 articles from Web of Science, 76 from Scopus, and 123 from Science Direct. However, 95 pieces were removed because of their premature conclusions and anecdotes or because they did not discuss English as a second language. Some of the articles were also discovered to be incomplete, or the full versions to be inaccessible, with broken links and overlaps. With duplication removed, the final papers reviewed were reduced to 60 articles.

**Data management** Crowe's Critical Appraisal Tool (CCAT) was used to evaluate the overall quality of each study included in the review. The

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suitability of this tool for the study was justified by its ability to accommodate various study designs, such as quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods studies. The CCAT is divided into eight categories: preliminary, introduction, design, sampling, data collection, ethical matters, results, and discussion. Each category is scored on a five-point scale, with a maximum total score of 40. The CCAT User Guide includes detailed explanations and references for scoring each category item (See Appendix A Table A1). Following the application to each study, any discrepancies were resolved through ongoing discussion among the first author and other authors. Table A2 shows the characteristics and CCAT scores for all 60 studies.

**Language restriction** English language.

**Country(ies) involved** Malaysia.

**Keywords** EFL learners, interlanguage pragmatic development, scoping review.

#### **Contributions of each author**

Author 1 - Huaqiang Li - Author 1 drafted the manuscript.

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Author 2 - Zalina Mohd Kasim - The author provided conceptualization, supervision, and validation.

Author 3 - Lay Hoon Ang - The author provided methodology, supervision, and validation.