



The Impact of Linguistic Competence on University-Level Students' Grammatical Accuracy and Pragmatic Awareness

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ABSTRACT

The current research questions the influence of linguistic competence on grammatical accuracy and pragmatic awareness in the students of university level. Linguistic competence, which can be defined as the combined knowledge of grammar, vocabulary and the use of language in a functional way, is viewed as a predictor of both functional and formal language performance. The research design used was qualitative and correlational, and the sample used comprised 100 students who were randomly sampled. The data were gathered through a standardized proficiency test, written and oral tasks, and analysis with a scenario-based questionnaire and evaluated with descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and simple linear regression in SPSS. The results have shown that linguistic competence is a significant predictor of grammatical accuracy and pragmatic awareness, although the latter effect is stronger ($b = .594$, $R^2 = .35$) than the former ($b = .400$, $R^2 = .16$). These findings support the importance of linguistic competence in supporting the structural correctness, as well as context-sensitive use of language in learning environments. This study supports empirically the integrative methodological approaches to the mode of language acquisition, which comprises balanced forces of formal and pragmatically enriched tasks, which contribute to the overall language proficiency in university education.

Introduction

With the fast-paced globalization of the higher education sector, linguistic competence has become a basic prerequisite for academic achievements and successful involvement of students in scholarly communities. At university scales, learners are increasingly required to work on complicated academic assignments like providing research, attending seminars, and writing written discourses based on international standards of transition, accuracy, and suitability. In that sense, linguistic competence is no longer the knowledge of grammatical rules but a large-scale construction, which comprises grammatical accuracy with the capacity to comprehend and generate language in a competent way in a wide range of communicative contexts. The increasing focus on academic mobility, cross-border cooperation, and the multi-lingual learning conditions has only increased the necessity to find out the ways in which linguistic competence determines the overall language performance of students at the tertiary level.

Theoretically, the idea of linguistic competence has been linked to an internal knowledge of the language systems, such as morphology, syntax, and lexis. Nonetheless, the modern theories of communicative competence emphasize on the irreducible bond between the formal linguistic knowledge and the pragmatic application. Grammatical correctness allows the learners to build sentences in proper structures, but being grammatically correct does not ensure proper communication. It is also necessary to have pragmatic awareness, meaning the awareness of context, the intention of the speaker to convey it, social norms, and the language conventions of discourse, as is the case with meaningful interaction in an academic setting. Even with good grammatical ability but low pragmatics, university students might not be able to communicate well, especially in formal discussions, academic and intercultural communication.

The empirical studies in the field of applied linguistics have always shown that there is a large gap between the grammatical knowledge and pragmatic performance of the students. Most learners can work out grammatically correct sentences, but cannot apply the language to the situation, thus committing pragmatic infelicities, which not only influence the perceived meaning but also the scholarly authenticity. Higher education is one of the most obvious areas where such problems are surfacing, as communicative requirements are intricate and situational. Although this problem is gaining increased importance, it is quite common, especially at the university level, where instructional strategies often give more emphasis on grammatical correctness and less emphasis on pragmatic acquisition, so that the resultant effects of learning among students is imbalance in their linguistic proficiency. Such an imbalance highlights the importance of studying the role of linguistic competence that also affects both grammatical accuracy and pragmatic awareness in a university-level setting, particularly in academic communication. Although previous research studies have discussed grammatical development and pragmatic competence separately, there is little literature that has been done on the interrelationship between these two competencies based on linguistic competence. This relationship is critical in establishing language curricula that would ensure that they not only establish structural accuracy but also contextually appropriate language use. Determining how far the linguistic competence will help produce grammatical accuracy and pragmatic awareness, teachers can implement more integrative pedagogical strategies that will be in tandem with the communicative requirements of university students. It is with this background that the current study aims to explore how linguistic competence affects grammatical accuracy and pragmatic awareness of the university level students. The research will offer empirical research on the roles of linguistic competence in determining the most important aspects of language performance in higher education by engaging in a quantitative approach and applying standardized assessment tools. It is anticipated

that the findings will form part of the theoretical debate in the field of applied linguistics, besides providing practical implications in curriculum development, instructional design, and assessment practices at the university level. Finally, this study highlights the necessity of a holistic and balanced approach to linguistic competence that enables the aim and pragmatic befitting usage in academics.

Research Questions

1. To what extent does linguistic competence influence grammatical accuracy among university-level students?
2. How does linguistic competence affect pragmatic awareness in academic communication at the university level?
3. What is the comparative impact of linguistic competence on grammatical accuracy and pragmatic awareness among university-level students?

Literature Review

1. Linguistic Competence Conceptual Foundations

Linguistic competence has traditionally been considered one of the key constructs in the field of linguistics and language education, which is defined as the internalized knowledge of the language systems in a person, which allows the person to produce meaningful utterances and to understand other utterances through their use (Alhasan, 2025). Initially, the conceptualization of linguistic competence revolved around grammatical knowledge with a focus on the structural knowledge of morphology, syntax and vocabulary. Nonetheless, the modern academic generation has extended the concept of linguistic competence by considering it a multidimensional construct that is dynamically intertwined with communicative, contextual, and cognitive factors that affect the use of language (Mierzwa-Kaminska, 2025). Linguistic competence is becoming more likely to be considered an integrated paradigm that facilitates not only formal correctness but also useful language application, especially in the complex academic and professional discussion setting (Strikovic et al., 2025). Scholars suppose that a lack of solid linguistic competence impedes learners from coping with cognitively challenging academic communication, in which precision, coherence, and contextual suitability are needed (Liu, 2025). This changing conceptualization highlights the significance of the study of the concept of linguistic competence as a distinct structural competence rather than a central determinant of the general language work and communicative effectiveness within the context of higher education (Cockerill et al., 2025).

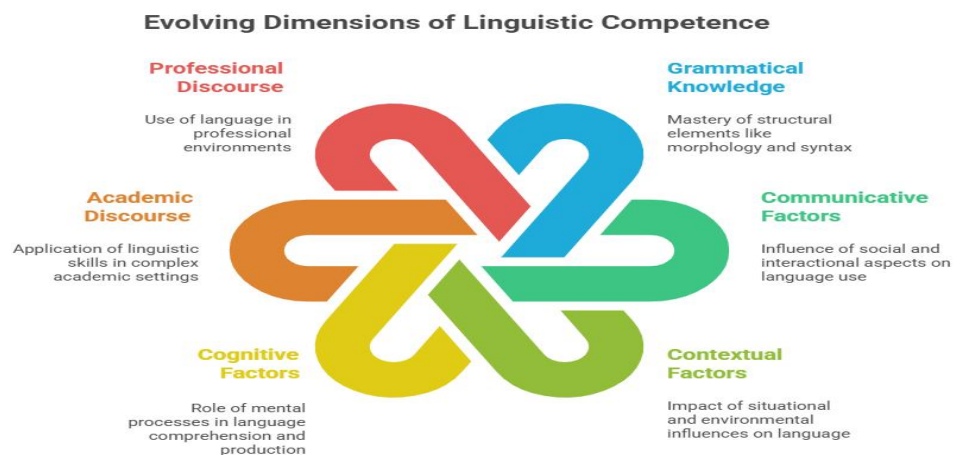


Figure 1: *Linguistic Competence Conceptual Foundations*

2. Grammatical Accuracy & Linguistic Competence

Grammatical perfection has been regarded as the most conspicuous consequence of linguistic competence, especially in the academic setting, where correctness is typically equated with general language competency. Empirical research has always shown that there is a close relationship between the language competence of learners and their capacity to generate grammatically correct language, both written and spoken, particularly in technology-based and teaching environments (Zhao, 2025; Zhang and Zhang, 2025). On the university level, grammatical accuracy is an important aspect of academic writing, presentation, and formal evaluations when exceptions to standard forms may adversely impact the clarity, conciseness, and judgment (Allami et al., 2025). It is also found that students who have a higher linguistic competence have a greater degree of control in sentence structure, grammatical agreement, use of tenses and complex constructions, which results in a better quality of academic writing (Taye and Teshome, 2025; Simon and Stoian, 2025). Nevertheless, recent literature warns against considering grammatical accuracy as the only sign of linguistic competence and places greater emphasis on the fact that accuracy has to be interpreted in the context of wider communicative and functional purposes of language use (Zhao, 2025). However, grammatical correctness is an important aspect of linguistic competence, as a suppository condition that is required on which advanced academic and communicative language competencies are built in tertiary education.

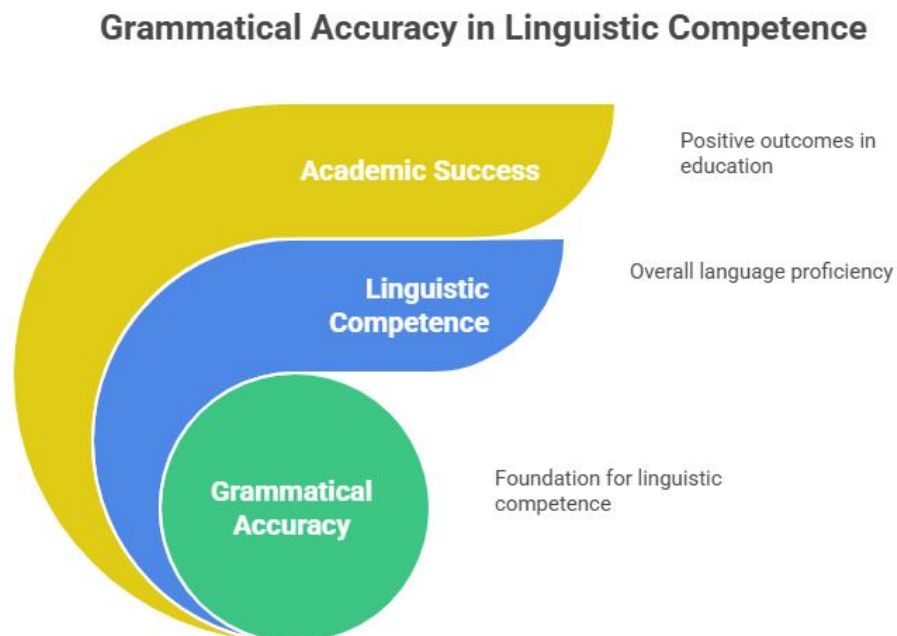


Figure 2: Grammatical Accuracy & Linguistic Competence

3. Pragmatic Consciousness in Academic Communication

Pragmatic awareness describes the capacity of learners to decode and apply language in a suitable way concerning context, communicative purpose, and communally agreed standards of interaction. In the academic environment, pragmatic awareness is necessary to handle discourse conventions, including politeness strategies, critical stance, argumentation, hedging, and turn-taking, which determine successful academic communication (Farashaiyan et al., 2025). Student-level students often meet and have to deal with practical problems of attending seminars,

engaging in collaborative conversation, and academic writing, where there are implicit rules governing the use of acceptable language and evaluative evaluation. According to the literature, pragmatic awareness does not necessarily come with the mere teaching of grammar; it can be cultivated via the prolonged exposure to real communicative situations and consideration of processes of meaning-making (Benassi and Cardenas, 2025). The scholars also note that, in grammatically correct language, pragmatic failures can still take place, which can lead to misunderstanding, interactional failures, and decreased communicative efficiency in academic language (Baggio, 2025). As a result, a growing academic interest has been attached to pragmatic awareness as an essential element of academic literacy and communicative competence in higher education.

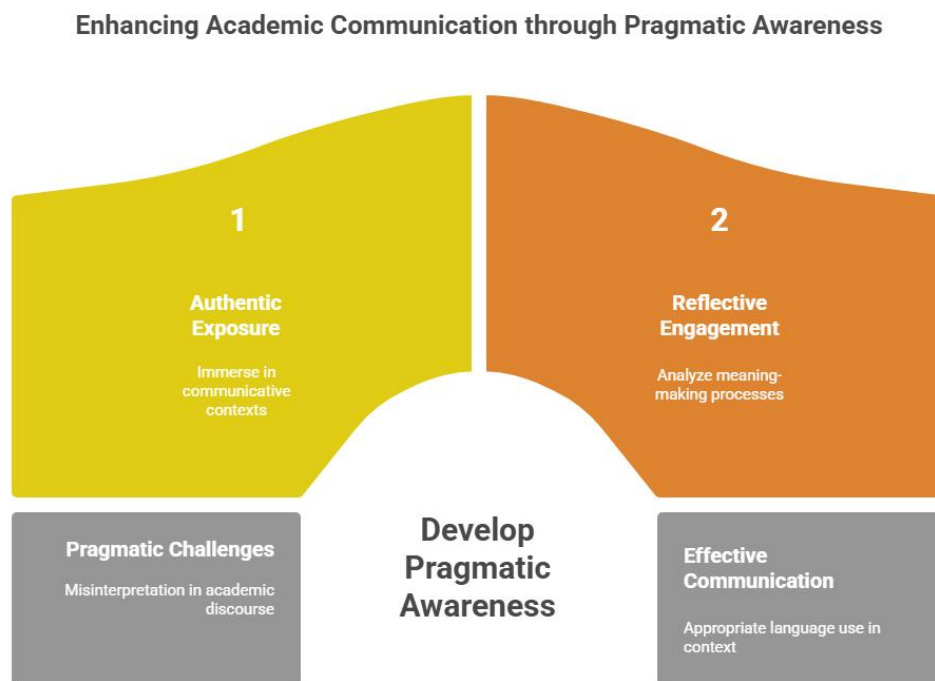


Figure 3: Pragmatic Consciousness in Academic Communication

4. Interrelationship between Linguistic Competence & Pragmatic Awareness

The connection between linguistic competence and pragmatic awareness has been empirically accepted as a widely recognized aspect of literature, but it is still conceptually complicated and situation-specific. Whereas linguistic competence involves the structural and functional means that generate the production and understanding of language, the pragmatic awareness is in charge of the proper choice, understanding and suitability of such means within socially and scholarly situated contexts (Liang and Hwang, 2025). Empirical studies indicate that greater levels of linguistic competence ensure the development of pragmatics as it allows the learners to receive the subtle meanings, emotional statements, and contextual cues more efficiently in the interaction process (Qian et al., 2025). Nevertheless, the literature also suggests that linguistic competence alone is not a factor ensuring pragmatic success, especially in culturally diverse and multilingual academic settings where the social expectations and discourse standards differ significantly (Wu, 2025). This interdependence brings out the fact that grammatical accuracy and pragmatic awareness are complementary and mutually reinforcing consequences of linguistic competence and not separate abilities (Saban-Bezalel, 2025). In the university level, wherein communicative

needs are both cognitively complex and contextual in nature, the knowledge of this interaction is necessary in learning how to explain academic linguistic performance differences among students.

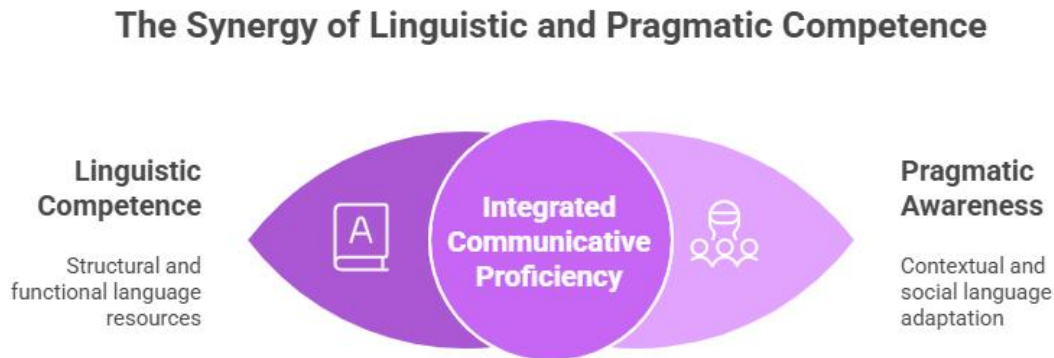


Figure 4: *Interrelationship between Linguistic Competence & Pragmatic Awareness*

5. University-Level Instructional Practices and Language Learning

Universities and colleges can be critical in influencing the language competence of students in their curriculum development and teaching methods that dictate the level at which students learn the form and use of language in their learning contexts. According to the literature, most of the language programs at the university level remain more form-centred learning, and this occurs at the expense of pragmatic growth and contextualized language application. Such techniques can improve the level of grammatical accuracy, but they often cannot meet the pragmatic requirements of academic communication, especially concerning interactive and technological-mediated communication (Yang et al., 2025). Recent pedagogical studies are moving towards more integrative forms of instruction to incorporate explicit grammatical instruction and pragmatically rich tasks, such as academic discussions, simulations, immersive learning, and genre-based writing tasks (Tayan et al., 2025; Broermann et al., 2025). The empirical data imply that these types of integrative models facilitate balanced linguistic competence, i.e., the coordination of structural knowledge and meaningful contextual implementation and communicative interactions (Li and Zhao, 2025). This increasing trend in the focus of academic literacy and communicative competence in higher education is one more reason why it is necessary to re-evaluate the systematic way of how linguistic competence is prepared and evaluated at the tertiary level.

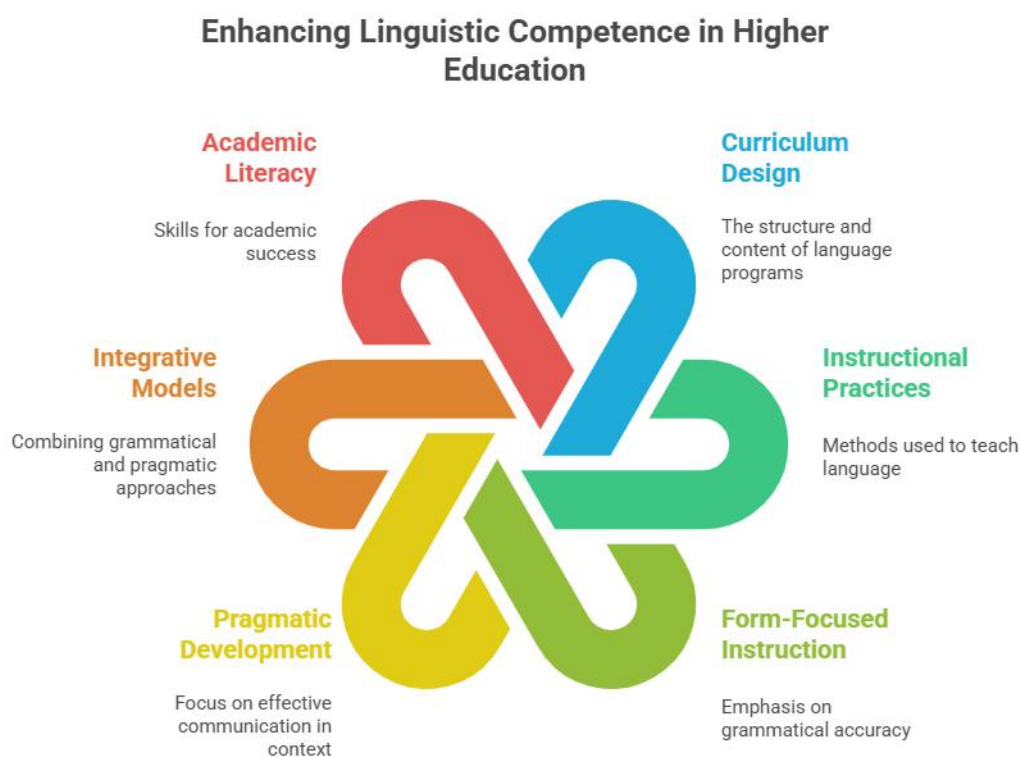


Figure 5: University-Level Instructional Practices and Language Learning

6. Research Gaps and Need for the Present Study

Although there is a lot of research information about grammatical accuracy and pragmatic awareness, a lot of gaps are still present in comprehending the combination of linguistic competence in relation to both dimensions at the university level. A lot of literature presented to date considers grammatical accuracy and pragmatic awareness as two distinct constructs, with little empirical research on their joint relation with linguistic competence. Also, the research directly related to academic communication of university students is quite limited, especially when English is utilized as a second language. The absence of integrated research does not allow the creation of holistic pedagogical systems that can cover the entire range of linguistic competence. The given research aims to fill these gaps by investigating the influence of linguistic competence on grammatical accuracy and pragmatic awareness in university students in a structured way, thus adding to the holistic perspective of the language performance in higher education.

Methodology

Research Design

The research design used in this study was a quantitative and correlational research design aiming at investigating the effect of linguistic competence on the grammatical accuracy and pragmatic awareness of university students. The correlational method was chosen because it would allow us to determine the strength and direction of relationships between the independent and dependent variables without controlling the experimental conditions. Also, regression analyses were employed to identify the predictive value of linguistic competence to both grammatical and pragmatic results.

Population and Sample

The study population entailed the students of the university level who undertook the courses in the English language in various disciplines. A sample of 100 students was selected using simple random sampling to minimize selection bias and make it representative. Both the male and female students aged between 18 and 25 years were included as participants who had at least one year of university-level instruction in English.

Variables

The independent and dependent variables were a study on linguistic competence and grammatical accuracy, and pragmatic awareness, respectively. Linguistic competence was also established as the internalized knowledge of the structures of the English languages such as morphology, syntax, vocabulary, and functional use. Grammatical accuracy meant that one was capable of writing and speaking syntactically and morphologically correct sentences. Pragmatic awareness was operationalized in the level of the students to use language appropriately on the basis of social norms, context and the conventions of discourse of academic performance with the skills of politeness strategies, argumentation, hedging and turn-taking. These variables were picked to have both formal and functional aspects of language proficiency at the university level.

Instrumentation

To assess the study variables, a mix of standardized tests, written tasks, oral activities, and a series of questionnaires that were scenario-based was used. The validity of linguistic competence has been established through a validated test of proficiency that includes grammar, vocabulary, and sentence construction, which is a sure indication of the structural language knowledge. Grammatical correctness was assessed by the written compositions of students and oral presentation, whereby they scored themselves in order to be objective and create inter-rater reliability. The pragmatic awareness was assessed by structured role-play activities and scenario-based questionnaire, which simulated real-life academic interactions, giving an insight into the context-sensitive language use by students. The instruments were highly reliable, as the Cronbach alpha coefficients were above 0.85, which proves consistency and validity.

Data Collection Procedure

The data were collected within four weeks of the normal classroom sessions. Before taking part in the study, informed consent was given to the participants on the objectives of the study. The linguistic competence test was conducted in a one-on-one manner, and subsequently written exercises and or oral tasks to test grammatical accuracy. Pragmatic awareness was also assessed through the use of scenario-based questionnaires and role play activities that would simulate real-life academic communication scenarios. All the answers were coded and graded on the basis of standardized rubrics.

Data Analysis

SPSS Version 28 was used to analyze the data. The performance of the participants on all variables was summarized using descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum). Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated to test the correlation between linguistic competence, grammatical accuracy, and pragmatic awareness. Simple linear regression analyses were carried out to find out the predictive power of linguistic competence in each dependent variable. A comparative study was done on the relative effect of linguistic competence on grammatical accuracy and pragmatic awareness. The analysis was done at $p < .05$ with all analysis results reported under APA 7th edition guidelines.

Data Analysis & Interpretation

Table 01: Linguistic competence influence grammatical accuracy among university-level students

Variable	N	M	SD	Min	Max
Linguistic Competence (LC)	100	75.08	10.0	50	100
Grammatical Accuracy (GA)	100	70.15	11.3	50	100
Pragmatic Awareness (PA)	100	76.12	11.5	50	100

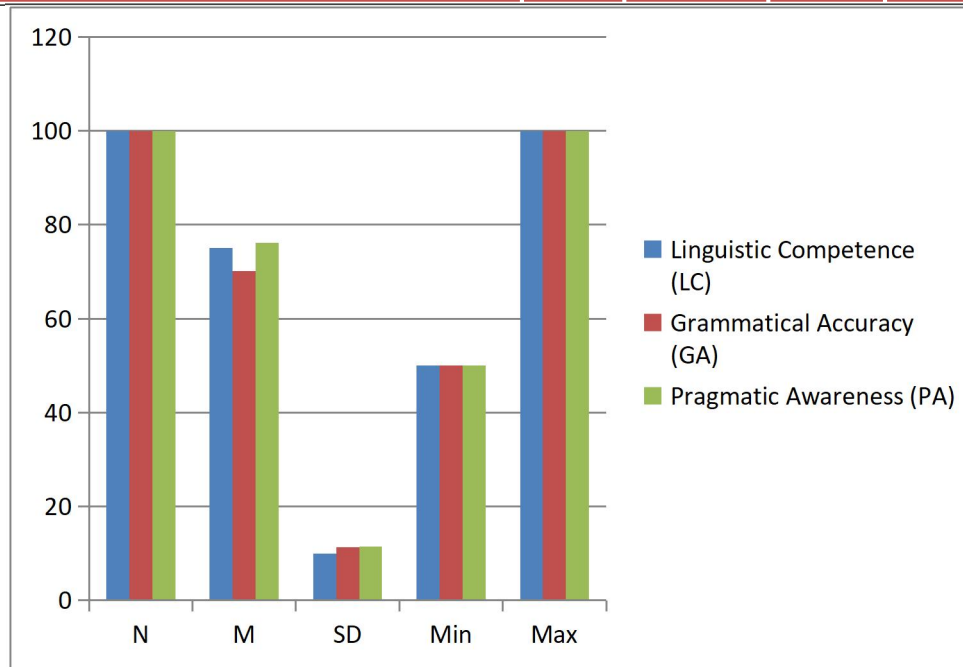


Figure 6: Linguistic competence

Interpretation:

The average scores suggest, based on the average scores, that the linguistic competence of the students is relatively high ($M = 75.08$), which implies that they have a good understanding of the language systems underpinning. The rate of grammatical accuracy is medium ($M = 70.15$) and indicates that students are able to use correct forms of language on the whole, but there is also some variability ($SD = 11.3$), which puts the difference between individuals in terms of syntactic and morphological control. The mean score of pragmatic awareness is the largest ($M = 76.12$), which means that students are more likely to express greater context-sensitive language use than formal accuracy. The variation of all three variables indicates the variety of linguistic skill sets of the students and the importance of the specific interventions that would allow focusing on the weak areas and allowing the use of the already developed ones.

Table 02: Linguistic competence affects pragmatic awareness in academic communication

Variables	1	2	3
Linguistic Competence (LC)	1	0.400*	0.594*
Grammatical Accuracy (GA)	0.400*	1	0.253*
Pragmatic Awareness (PA)	0.594*	0.253*	1

*Note: $p < .01$ (2-tailed).

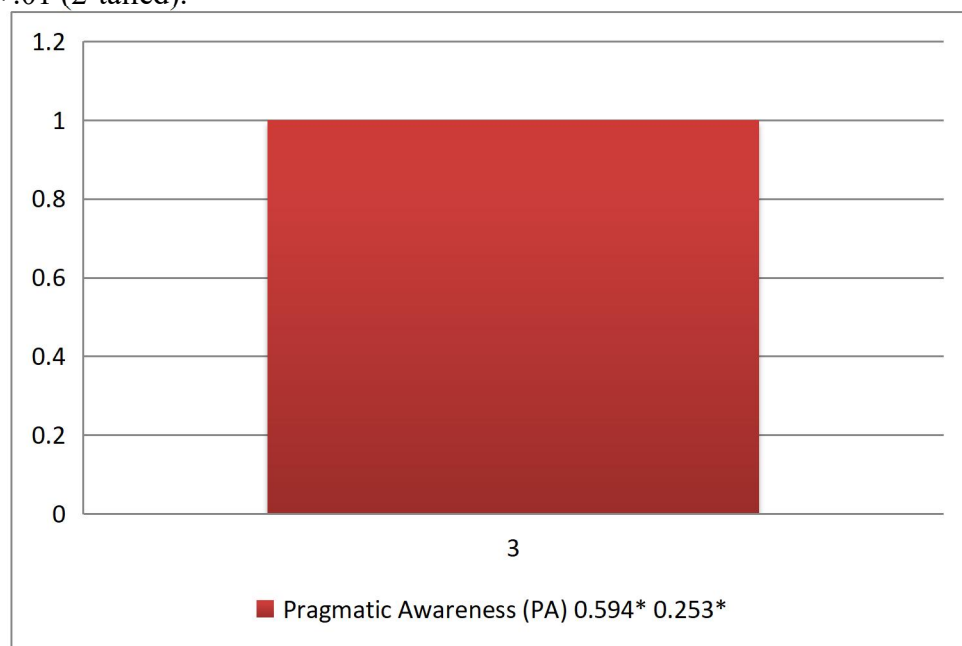


Figure 7 : Linguistic competence

Interpretation:

The correlation table indicates that there are moderate positive associations of linguistic competence with both dependent variables. Its association with grammatical accuracy ($r = .40$) is indicative that students who have better background-level knowledge of linguistics are more likely to produce more grammatically correct sentences. The more significant proportion of the relationship with pragmatic awareness ($r = .59$) demonstrates that linguistic competence plays a greater role in mastering the ability to apply language in context. The fact that grammatical accuracy and pragmatic awareness are less closely related in the correlation coefficient ($r = .25$) suggests that, although independent of each other, these two abilities are independent although complementary aspects of language proficiency, which is consistent with the theoretical view of the fact that formal accuracy and pragmatic proficiency are independent and complementary matters of language competence.

Table 03: Grammatical Accuracy predicted by Linguistic Competence

Predictor	B	SE B	β	T	p
Constant	40.004	2.687	—	14.889	<.001
Linguistic Competence (LC)	0.156	0.036	0.400	4.315	<.001

$R^2 = .16$, $F(1,98) = 18.62$, $p < .001$

Interpretation:

The regression results reveal that linguistic competence is a significant predictor of grammatical accuracy. The beta ($b = .400$) is standardized, and it shows a moderate effect, that is, a one-unit increment of linguistic competence raises grammatical accuracy by about 0.156 units. The model explains 16 per cent of the variability in grammatical accuracy, indicating that although linguistic competence is a predictive variable, there are other variables, including instructional quality, previous exposure, or motivation, that can also predict grammatical performance. These results support the need to incorporate structural language knowledge in university programs and the fact that linguistic development is multi-dimensional.

Table 04

Predictor	B	SE B	β	T	p
Constant	21.912	4.637	—	4.726	<.001
Linguistic Competence (LC)	0.455	0.062	0.594	7.307	<.001

$R^2 = .35$, $F(1,98) = 53.40$, $p < .001$

Interpretation:

The influence of linguistic competence on pragmatic awareness is also significant ($b = .594$), and more so than grammatical accuracy. This is to show that the basic knowledge of language of students is much more important in their capability to process social cues, process discourse conventions, and choose language that is contextually appropriate. The model accounts for 35 per cent of the variation in pragmatic awareness, which is a significant role of linguistic competence, but allows the other factors to play a role as intercultural experience, classroom interaction, or exposure to authentic language situations. The greater influence on pragmatic awareness supports the point that structural knowledge of language allows not only to be correct, but also to communicate effectively and in different situations.

Table 05: Comparative impact of linguistic competence on grammatical accuracy and pragmatic awareness

Dependent Variable	R ²	F	β (LC)	p
Grammatical Accuracy	.16	18.62	.400	<.001
Pragmatic Awareness	.35	53.40	.594	<.001

Interpretation:

This comparative table shows that pragmatic awareness is more affected by linguistic competence than grammatical accuracy. Although both performances respond positively to the proficiency of the language of students, the difference in the effect indicates that more advanced and context-sensitive abilities are based more on the overall linguistic knowledge than on simple grammar production. These findings present a practical rationale for the use of integrated pedagogical strategies to build grammatical and pragmatic competence as opposed to structural correctness.

Discussion

The current research evaluated the role of linguistic competence in grammatical accuracy and pragmatic awareness of university-level students. The findings have shown that the language competence is a good predictor of both outcomes, but the influence on pragmatic awareness ($b = .594$, $R^2 = .35$) is more favorable than on grammatical accuracy ($b = .400$, $R^2 = .16$). These results corroborate the theoretical approach to linguistic competence as a source of structural accuracy as well as a key theme of contextually suitable language application. The average relationship between linguistic competence and grammatical accuracy indicates that even though structural knowledge helps to produce language error-free, it does not precondition full communicative competence. This is in line with the past literature (Zhao, 2025; Allami et al., 2025) that has indicated that grammatical knowledge does not guarantee proper communication in a real academic environment. On the other hand, the fact that the connection between linguistic competence and pragmatic awareness is stronger supports the belief that the capacity of students to read between the lines and rely on the language according to social norms to participate in a complex discourse depends greatly on the combination of an integrated knowledge of language rules, functional language, and social, pragmatic cues (Farashaiyan et al., 2025; Liang and Hwang, 2025).

Also, the fact that grammatical accuracy and pragmatic awareness are somewhat less correlated ($r = .25$) implies that the two domains are closely interconnected but are still distinct areas of language performance, which makes it possible to draw an argument that the balanced approach to language teaching is required. Students of higher levels can be able to use correct grammar without completely mastering the context-sensitive usage, and therefore it is essential to have pedagogical approaches that combine both formal and functional elements of language (Tayan et al., 2025; Broermann et al., 2025). The implications of the findings on curriculum design are also present, since the integrative teaching strategies, including blended learning, immersive assignments, and practical communicative activities, seem to be critical to developing both grammatical and pragmatic competence at the same time. Introducing such strategies, the

teachers may raise the general academic literacy and readiness of the students to professional communication.

Conclusion

This paper is able to support empirical data that linguistic competence is a strong foreteller of grammatical excellence and pragmatic awareness among higher education learners. Although the quality of grammar is relatively determined by the prior knowledge of linguistics, pragmatic integrity is more affected by linguistic competence as it represents the complex cognitive and interpersonal aspects of scholarly communication. These findings indicate that linguistic competence is a two-sided facilitator: it facilitates formal accuracy and allows the presence of context-dependent and pragmatic language use. Thus, enhancing linguistic competence in students is not only important in grammar skills, but also in higher-order communicative, social-linguistic skills, which are also indispensable to achieve academic and career success.

Recommendations

The language programs taught in universities need to embrace teaching models that would be sensitive to both grammatical and pragmatic consciousness. This can take the form of task-oriented learning, group discussions, roles and writing activities with real educational situations. The courses are to be created so as to place emphasis on the form-centered teaching, as well as on the functional usage of a language. Pragmatic awareness of students can be improved by incorporating practical activities, e.g., discourse assessment, peer review and simulation of real-life academic interactions.

Use AI-aided learning tools, gamified approaches and simulated environments (e.g., virtual reality) to offer a real-life setting in which students can train pragmatic communication and support linguistic knowledge. Teachers ought to consider the grammatical accuracy as well as the context-sensitive and socio culturally acceptable application of language among students. The dimensions of the rubrics can be coherence, politeness strategies, and audience awareness. The teachers of languages should be given professional training on how to incorporate the teaching of grammar and teaching of pragmatic development, to ensure that they are able to provide scaffolding to not only accuracy, but also appropriateness in academic language. To more clearly understand how linguistic competence influences grammatical and pragmatic performance, further research is needed to be done on other mediating variables, including intercultural competence, motivation, and previous exposure to natural language settings.

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