

ARTICLE**Multidialectal Practices in L2 Arabic Pragmatics Research:
Methodological Implications**

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Research on learning second language (L2) pragmatics has undergone substantial methodological development in recent years (Taguchi & Roever, 2017; Taguchi, 2019), but it remains limited by a lack of attention to a key feature of pragmatic competence: multilingual and multidialectal practices. In a field dedicated to helping L2 students learn “how-to-say-what-to-whom-when” (Bardovi-Harlig, 2013, p. 68), methodological approaches that do not account for multidialectal practices miss key aspects of pragmatic development that are directly related to learners’ agency and identity. Current research methodologies are still highly influenced by monolingual ideologies often missing crucial layers of the learning process and environment, resulting in an incomplete view of pragmatic development. This article synthesizes existing methods and proposes ways to address these limitations by adopting a multidialectal perspective. Taking research on L2 Arabic pragmatics learning as a case study, a systematic review of the data analytic methods and findings from the past two and a half decades (e.g., Al-Gahtani, 2022; Al-Gahtani & Roever, 2014a, 2014b, 2015; Al Masaeed, 2017; Al Masaeed, Waugh, & Burns, 2018; Al-Rawafi, Sudana, Lukmana, & Syihabuddin, 2021; Roever & Al-Gahtani, 2015) reveals how multidialectal practices have been often overlooked in study methodologies, including data collection and analysis. Based on this synthesis, the article attempts to underscore the crucial role that multidialectal practices play in pragmatic development and the need for adopting a multidialectal perspective to challenge the influence of monolingual ideologies on L2 Arabic pragmatics research.

Introduction

Pragmatics investigates the ways in which language use is influenced by context and how communicative meaning is interpreted within social interaction. Over the past four decades, second language (L2) pragmatics has evolved into a foundational area within second language acquisition (SLA) research, foregrounding pragmatic competence as central to communicative proficiency. Distinct from grammatical accuracy alone, pragmatic competence reflects a speaker’s ability to deploy appropriate language in accordance with social norms, discourse conventions, and context-specific communicative goals. This dual emphasis on both linguistic and sociocultural knowledge underlines the contemporary understanding of communicative competence, as posited by Hymes (1971), Canale & Swain (1980), and Bachman (1990). Within L2 pragmatics the focus is on the development of pragmatic competence among language learners and what factors affect this process (Taguchi, 2019; Taguchi & Roever, 2017).

Arabic presents a uniquely complex landscape for L2 pragmatic development due to its diglossic nature and rich repertoire of spoken varieties. Sociolinguistic research on L2 Arabic offers insights into how learners negotiate these varieties, acquire speech act competence, and develop

agency within multilingual and multidialectal communities. However, methodological limitations in L2 Arabic pragmatics, particularly the tendency to overlook authentic multidialectal practices, mean that much remains to be explored. Therefore, this article synthesizes key constructs and methodological trends using L2 Arabic as a case study. It highlights how multidialectal practices have been historically marginalized in research design and analysis, discusses the implications of this gap, and proposes recommendations for future studies.

Early Influential Frameworks in L2 Pragmatics Research

The conceptualization of L2 pragmatics has always drawn heavily on speech acts theory (Austin, 1962) and Hymes's (1971) work on communicative competence. The main idea of this seminal work is underscoring the understanding that L2 learners need both linguistic resources (i.e., vocabulary and grammar) and cultural knowledge to enhance their ability to communicate by knowing "how-to-say-what-to-whom-when" (Bardovi-Harlig, 2013, p. 68). Building on this school of thought, research on L2 pragmatics has been steadily developing since the 1980s, focusing on how learners understand and use language in social contexts (Taguchi 2019; Taguchi & Roever 2017).

The early foundation of the field was shaped by two influential conceptualizations. The first was Thomas's (1983) concept of *pragmatic failure*, which highlights the possibility that communication may break down not only due to grammatical or lexical errors but also when speakers mismanage the use or interpretation of verbal and non-verbal cues. In other words, pragmatic limitations can hinder the successful delivery and understanding of the intended meaning. Therefore, for L2 learners, effective communication requires more than control over linguistic forms to accomplish functions such as requesting, apologizing, or refusing. Equally important is sensitivity to contextual appropriateness (knowing how language choices should shift depending on the situation, as in borrowing money from a friend or asking to leave work early). This dual dimension was captured in Thomas's distinction between *pragmalinguistics* and *sociopragmatics*. Pragmalinguistics encompasses the linguistic means available for carrying out a communicative act, while sociopragmatics concerns the cultural and social norms that guide how, when, and with whom those forms are appropriately used.

A second impactful contribution to L2 pragmatics came from the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP), framed by Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper (1989). This large-scale investigation set out to compare speech act patterns across seven languages, including German, Hebrew, French, Danish, and three English varieties. Employing the discourse completion task (DCT), the researchers gathered data on how requests and apologies were performed by both native speakers and learners. Through a systematic coding scheme, they distinguished the range of available strategies, their relative directness or indirectness, and how usage shifted depending on factors such as social distance or power relationships. The combination of the DCT methodology and the coding framework laid the groundwork for numerous replications, which in turn generated an extensive body of cross-linguistic descriptions (see Nguyen 2019 for a review). Findings highlighted not only cross-linguistic patterns but also points of divergence between native and non-native speakers, often pinpointed as potential sites of pragmatic failure. One well-known observation was that learners of English tended to be wordier in formulating requests, often adding lengthy explanations (usually referred to as waffling or verbosity in the literature), while also favoring more direct forms like imperatives and overlooking mitigators.

Challenges to Earlier Approaches and Developments in L2 Pragmatics Research

Both of the frameworks discussed above were foundational in shaping the field of L2 pragmatics during its early stages. Thomas (1983) introduced the notion of pragmatic failure, drawing attention to the essential role of pragmatics in L2 learning and communication. By distinguishing between pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics, she helped clarify the construct of pragmatic competence and what it encompasses. In a similar way, the CCSARP model developed by Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) advanced empirical research in L2 pragmatics, offering a widely adopted model for data collection and analytical procedures. However, while it is undeniable that these works established the groundwork for research in L2 pragmatics, the past forty years have seen their conceptual frameworks, methodological approaches, and key findings revisited and reassessed. This reevaluation has been driven by the growth of intercultural communication studies and the rise of the multidialectal and multilingual perspective, which I will discuss in the following section.

Thomas (1983) conceptualized *pragmatic failure* as the inability to understand, interpret, or produce meaning effectively, framing it primarily as a breakdown in communication. Her model emphasizes the *outcome* of communication—whether an interaction succeeds or fails—rather than the dynamic, ongoing process by which meaning is co-constructed. In this framework, pragmatic failure stems from limitations in either *pragmalinguistic competence* (i.e., the linguistic forms available to a speaker) or *sociopragmatic competence* (i.e., knowledge of the social and cultural norms shaping their use). Consequently, pragmatic knowledge is treated as something stable, pre-existing, and internalized, rather than as a resource dynamically negotiated during interaction. This view contrasts sharply with more recent approaches that highlight how speakers jointly manage exchanges across cultural and linguistic divides (for more details, see Mori & Nguyen, 2019). Such approaches shift the focus away from fixed norms and emphasize how mutual understanding is negotiated, established, and maintained in interaction (e.g., Félix-Brasdefer, 2019; Firth & Wagner, 1997). To this end, interactants draw on a rich repertoire of verbal and non-verbal resources. Thus, while prior pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic knowledge remains relevant, it is used flexibly and adaptively, serving as a toolkit from which speakers can draw to ensure communication progresses smoothly.

Research grounded in the CCSARP framework can have the drawback of always treating native-speaker norms as the benchmark and consequently framing L2 pragmatic competence in deficit terms. In CCSARP-oriented studies, DCTs are often employed to capture learners' speech act realizations, which are then evaluated against data drawn from native speakers. Pragmatic ability is thus measured by how closely learners approximate such native-speaker baselines. Such orientation stands in clear opposition to key findings from multilingual and variational pragmatic scholarship (e.g., Barron, 2019; Schneider & Barron, 2008). Empirical evidence shows that research in L2 pragmatics has been based on a homogeneous native-speaker norm, frequently neglecting the inherent sociolinguistic variation present within native speaker communities. L2 pragmatics research has historically tended to overlook, or at most insufficiently address, the macro-sociolinguistic profiles of native speakers. From a sociolinguistic perspective, reliance on a uniform target language standard cannot be justified, given that linguistic practices are shaped by a complex interplay of both contextual and situational factors (Barron, 2019). Nevertheless, a great deal of CCSARP-inspired research in L2 pragmatics frequently maintain the unspoken premise that macro-social variation is negligible or non-existent (Al Masaeed, 2022a; Al Masaeed et al. 2020).

In the next section, I will demonstrate why embracing a multidialectal perspective in L2 pragmatics is essential for a better understanding of pragmatic development. To this end, I begin with a brief discussion of Arabic as a diglossic language and synthesize some of the key L2 Arabic sociolinguistic findings.

Why do we Need a Multidialectal Perspective in L2 Arabic Pragmatics?

Standard language ideology in pragmatics refers to the belief that a single, standardized variety of a language constitutes the normal, correct, and ideal way of communicating, against which all other ways of speaking are evaluated. In this framework, pragmatic competence is typically measured against the idealized behavior of a monolingual, standardized-variety speaker, thereby marginalizing the diverse and multilingual pragmatic practices that characterize most real-world interaction. This leads to a problematic monolingual assumption in language education and assessment (e.g., Al Masaeed, 2022a, 2022c; Kasper, 2022; May, 2014). Arabic is a diglossic language and different varieties of Arabic are used in different contexts (e.g., Al Masaeed 2022b; Al-Batal 2018; Ferguson, 1959; Younes, 2015). This means that learners must navigate Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) for formal/register-specific contexts and spoken varieties in everyday communication. Multidialectal interaction is the norm, and yet for decades, L2 Arabic pedagogy and research have been dominated by an MSA-centered, monolingual ideology. This misalignment with the sociolinguistic reality has significant implications for the conceptualization of pragmatic competence and for the development of research frameworks attuned to learner agency and identity.

Therefore, diglossia constitutes a central factor shaping both the broader process of learning L2 Arabic and the more specific trajectory of pragmatic development. Unlike languages with a singular standardized form that tends to dominate across formal and informal domains, Arabic presents learners with the dual task of engaging with MSA alongside diverse spoken varieties on the ground. Each variety carries unique social and pragmatic functions, requiring learners not only to acquire linguistic structures but also to determine which variety is most appropriate in each context. For L2 Arabic learners, this diglossic reality complicates the basic pedagogical question of which form of the language should be taught first. MSA typically dominates in academic curricula, largely because of its codified grammar, institutional prestige, and access to an extensive textual tradition. However, its communicative relevance in everyday spoken contexts is relatively limited. By contrast, dialects represent the linguistic fabric of daily life, shaping interpersonal relationships and indexing local and regional identities, though they also vary across geographical contexts and sometimes present issues of mutual intelligibility. The result is that learners encounter Arabic not as a uniform code, but as a constellation of varieties that need to be navigated situationally. This raises critical questions of sequencing, curricular integration, and the selection of varieties for instructional emphasis.

Furthermore, pragmatic development is particularly shaped by this rich diglossic situation. As stated above, communicative competence requires not only grammatically accurate utterances, but also alignment with contextually appropriate varieties. Based on this, one can argue that MSA can be used in formal domains such as lectures, news, or political speech, and dialects might be used in everyday exchanges (or a mixture of both). Exclusive reliance on MSA in casual settings often produces unintended impressions of distance or formality, hindering social integration. Moreover, the multidialectal reality of the Arab world necessitates flexibility, as speakers frequently shift across registers and varieties to accommodate their interlocutors. Therefore, from a pedagogical perspective, these dynamics highlight the limitations of an MSA-only approach. Instead, integrating a spoken variety alongside MSA would better equip learners for real-world communication. Without this, learners may develop grammatical accuracy but remain pragmatically constrained in their engagement with Arabic-speaking communities. Additional insights emerging from learners' lived experiences further substantiate this argument. For example, one student who participated in an Arabic study abroad program in Jordan reflected:

We came here and started out speaking *fusha* [MSA] to taxi drivers, restaurant owners, etc. Some knew *fusha* and were able to speak to us, but many didn't. We were laughed at, not understood, and stood out as foreigners. Then, when I began to pick up and use the dialect, reactions immediately changed. I was taken more seriously; I was complimented on my Arabic; I was asked if I was Jordanian; and I was able to hold lengthy conversations with people. The doors that can open for you if you know the dialect (or at least attempt to use it) are unlimited. (Shiri, 2013, p. 14)

This issue also emerges clearly in learners' narratives. One participant in Trentman (2012), who studied abroad in Egypt, described feeling uneasy when attempting to use MSA with local Arabic speakers, noting the "odd reactions" it elicited and the subsequent challenges to meaningful communication. One learner provided the following:

When I first got here, and I tried speaking Modern Standard to speak to people, you kind of get odd reactions, like they don't really know what you're staying [sic]...they don't respond in a way that encourages you to use it so it made me feel really uncomfortable when I realized I wasn't able to communicate very well, just because I started speaking with something they aren't used to hearing on a daily basis. (pp. 172-173)

Another learner also commented on her experience dealing with this issue by highlighting how relying on MSA limited her ability to communicate basic logistical requests while in Egypt:

I was pretty confident with my Arabic abilities. I mean, I was top of my language class and I had a wide repertoire – like basic greetings, vocabulary to discuss the current nuclear situation in Iran, and I could tell you all about famous Arabs in history. That should have been a good start at least, right? Wrong. I was horrified when I couldn't communicate with the cleaning ladies to tell them that Wednesday mornings worked best for them to change my sheets. (p. 171)

These examples point clearly that diglossia is an important factor in L2 Arabic pragmatic competence development. In other words, developing a robust repertoire of linguistic and sociocultural knowledge enables L2 speakers to take an active role in appropriating language use in ways that express their identities, fulfill communicative intentions, and foster meaningful engagement with members of the target community.

A comprehensive approach to Arabic language pedagogy should actively integrate multidialectal practices into the production and design of instructional materials. Findings from L2 Arabic instructors indicate that pragmatic competence receives limited and inconsistent attention within most existing curricula (McCombie & Al Masaeed, 2025), often leaving learners with an incomplete understanding of how successful interactions take place in authentic contexts. Instead of attributing challenges in L2 Arabic learning to the complexity of the language itself, curriculum development and language policy should be grounded in empirical evidence derived from real sociolinguistic data. This process entails documenting and analyzing how Arabic speakers from diverse geographical, cultural, and social backgrounds use the language across formal and informal settings. Such an empirically informed perspective aligns with the recommendations of empirical L2 Arabic sociolinguistic studies (e.g., Al Masaeed, 2020; Nassif & Al Masaeed, 2022) that call for the systematic inclusion of spoken dialects alongside MSA in language instruction. Embedding multidialectal insights into curricular frameworks can significantly reshape understandings of pragmatic competence, refine

methods for assessing it, and strengthen learners' ability to navigate real-world communicative interactions.

However, the role of multidialectal practices (defined as the ability to employ one or more spoken varieties alongside MSA) remains noticeably underexplored from both the literature and from frameworks for analyzing and assessing L2 pragmatic development. This gap can be attributed, at least in part, to prevailing language ideologies, that is, socially grounded beliefs about language use and structure. Among the most influential of these ideologies for L2 learning are hierarchical conceptions of language, which position languages as superior to dialects. While some have argued that the distinction between languages and dialects is purely linguistic and rooted in mutual intelligibility, this reasoning is problematic. Numerous examples exist of mutually intelligible varieties recognized as distinct languages (e.g., Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish) and of unintelligible varieties labeled as dialects of the same language, such as Yue and Wu, both traditionally referred to as "dialects" of Chinese. Thus, it is more accurate to regard this distinction as sociopolitical rather than linguistic (Blommaert, 1996), as exemplified by the process of language standardization that takes place through the selection of a particular language or variety endowed with sociopolitical authority to serve as the standard of a given community or nation. Accordingly, following contemporary sociolinguistic perspectives (e.g., Blommaert, 2010; Horner & Weber, 2018), every linguistic variety, including the so-called standard, can be viewed as a dialect.

Now that I have demonstrated the relationship between pragmatics and diglossia; and underscored the need for a multidialectal perspective to L2 Arabic pragmatics, it is fundamental to examine how this issue has been addressed in L2 Arabic pragmatics research. Therefore, the remainder of this article will provide a synthesis of how L2 Arabic pragmatics has been conceptualized and, in turn, how this conceptualization relates to data collection and analysis.

What is the Status of Multidialectal Practices in L2 Arabic Pragmatics Research?

Given the crucial role that multidialectal practices play in developing pragmatic competence in L2 Arabic, the goal of this synthesis is to investigate the following main question: What is the status of multidialectal practices in L2 Arabic pragmatics research? To answer this question, I draw exclusively on empirical studies that explicitly explored L2 Arabic pragmatic development over the past two and a half decades. In addition to being empirical, these studies are essentially clear vis-à-vis the conceptualization of pragmatics and research methods for data collection and analysis. Based on these criteria, my synthesis draws on a total of 11 studies (see Table 1 below) (6 on requests; 2 on refusals; 2 on apologies; and 1 on all three speech acts).

Table 1

Studies on L2 Arabic Pragmatic Development over the Past Two and a Half Decades.

Studies on L2 Arabic Pragmatic Development Over the Past Two and a Half Decades
Al Masaeed, K. (2017). Interlanguage pragmatic development: Internal and external modification in L2 Arabic requests. <i>Foreign Language Annals</i> , 50(4), 808–820.
Al Masaeed, K. (2022c). Bidialectal practices and L2 Arabic pragmatic development in a short-term study abroad. <i>Applied Linguistics</i> , 43(1), 88–114.
Al Masaeed, K., Waugh, L. R., & Burns, K. E. (2018). The development of interlanguage pragmatics in L2 Arabic: The production of apology strategies. <i>System</i> , 74, 98–108.

Al Masaeed, K., Taguchi, N., & Tamimi, M. (2020). Proficiency effects on L2 Arabic refusals: Appropriateness, linguistic strategies and multidialectal practices. <i>Applied Pragmatics</i> , 2(1), 26-53.
Al-Gahtani, S. (2022). The development of L2 interactional competence in Arabic: The case of multiple requests. <i>Foreign Language Annals</i> , 55(2), 610-634.
Al-Gahtani, S., & Roever, C. (2014a). Insert and post-expansion in L2 Arabic requests. <i>System</i> , 42, 189-206.
Al-Gahtani, S., & Roever, C. (2014b). Preference structure in L2 Arabic requests. <i>Intercultural Pragmatics</i> , 11(4), 619-643.
Al-Gahtani, S., & Roever, C. (2015). The development of requests by L2 learners of Modern Standard Arabic: A longitudinal and cross-sectional study. <i>Foreign Language Annals</i> , 48(4), 570-583.
Al-Rawafi, A., Sudana, D., Lukmana, I., & Syihabuddin, S. (2021). Students' apologizing in Arabic and English: An interlanguage pragmatic case study at an Islamic boarding school in Indonesia. <i>Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics</i> , 10(3), 589-602.
Morkus, N. (2018). Negative pragmatic transfer and language proficiency: American learners of Arabic. <i>The Language Learning Journal</i> , 49(1), 41-65.
Roever, C. & Al-Gahtani, S. (2015). Multiple requests in Arabic as a second language. <i>Multilingua</i> , 34(3), 405-432.

The conceptualization of speech acts has profoundly shaped the focus of L2 pragmatics, with the lion's share of studies focused on requests, refusals, and apologies. These speech acts are performed through both linguistic and non-linguistic means, with varying degrees of directness and politeness contingent upon the context and interlocutor. Requests, for instance, are typically face-threatening and elicit indirectness or mitigation to reduce imposition. Therefore, when it comes to data collection, speech acts are often explored through DCTs, role-plays, and authentic interactions. L2 Arabic pragmatics research has followed this trend: speech acts are found to be the focus in all 11 examined studies in this paper. Most of these studies (10 out of 11) focused on one of following three speech acts: apologies, requests, or refusals. Only one study (Al Masaeed, 2022c), however, addressed all three combined.

Requests emerge as the most extensively studied speech act in this context. The work of Al-Gahtani and Roever (2014a, 2014b, 2015) and Al-Gahtani (2022) has analyzed L2 Arabic requests initially from an interactional perspective, considering features such as insert and post-expansions and preference structures, and later from a longitudinal developmental standpoint. Collectively, these studies contribute significant insights into the production and development of various request types by L2 Arabic learners in Saudi Arabia. In addition, Al Masaeed (2017) was the first to examine how American university learners of L2 Arabic in various levels of proficiency developed their ability to perform requests, particularly through the use of internal and external modification strategies. Continuing this line of inquiry, Al Masaeed (2022c) investigated requests as part of a broader study on speech acts in study abroad contexts, additionally addressing refusals and apologies. Apology strategies were also the focus of Al Masaeed et al. (2018), while Al-Rawafi et al. (2021) analyzed apologies produced by Indonesian L1 speakers of Arabic and English, concentrating on head acts and supportive moves. Refusals were further explored in Al Masaeed (2022c) in study abroad and within the United States (Al Masaeed et al., 2020), as well as in Morkus (2018), who compared refusal strategies among learners of Egyptian Arabic at various proficiency levels and native speakers. Overall, most research in this domain has employed speech act theory as the primary conceptual framework for investigating L2 Arabic pragmatics, with requests receiving the most attention, followed by refusals and apologies.

These studies highlight interesting trends in L2 Arabic pragmatics. Both Morkus (2018) and Al-Rawafi et al. (2021) demonstrate that learners tend to rely heavily on pragmatic transfer from their first languages (i.e., English and Indonesian, respectively). Together, studies by Al-Gahtani (2022), Al-Gahtani and Rover (2014a, 2014b, 2015), and Roever and Al-Gahtani (2015) show that L2 Arabic pragmatics cannot be captured by static head-act coding alone; development involves how learners sequence, modify, and manage preference in requests over time, and how their proficiency shapes the interlocutor's behavior. Insights from Al Masaeed (2017, 2022c), Al Masaeed et al. (2018), and Al Masaeed et al. (2020) illustrate that L2 Arabic learners can develop rich pragmalinguistic repertoires for requests and apologies (internal/external modifiers, multiple strategies), but sociopragmatic alignment with Arabic norms remains delayed: learners talk longer, explain more, and apologize more explicitly than native speakers, and underuse culturally embedded devices like religious intensifiers and vague accounts.

As for data collection, while methodological variation in data collection is evident in L2 Arabic pragmatics research, an examination of the available studies indicates that there are five CCSARP-oriented studies (i.e., Al Masaeed, 2017, 2022c; Al Masaeed *et al.*, 2018; Al Masaeed *et al.*, 2020; Al-Rawafi *et al.*, 2021), five Conversation Analysis (CA)-oriented studies (i.e., Al-Gahtani, 2022; Al-Gahtani & Roever, 2014a, 2014b, 2015; Roever & Al-Gahtani, 2015) and one discourse-oriented study (i.e., Morkus, 2018). Some studies relied exclusively on institutional interactions (Al-Gahtani & Roever, 2014a, 2014b), whereas others used only role-plays (Al-Gahtani, 2022; Al-Gahtani & Roever, 2015; Morkus, 2018). In some cases, both role-plays and institutional interactions were combined (Roever & Al-Gahtani, 2015). Additional data collection methods included oral DCTs (Al Masaeed, 2017, 2022c; Al Masaeed *et al.*, 2018; Al Masaeed *et al.*, 2020) and written DCTs (Al-Rawafi *et al.*, 2021), all aimed at capturing learners' pragmatic performance in L2 Arabic.

The institutional interactions were meant to elicit spontaneous and authentic responses from participants without knowing that their exchanges with school administrators were being studied. At the beginning of the semester, for example, students were added to a class with an inconvenient time and were instructed to request a schedule change. Later, at the semester's end, they were placed in a similar situation in which they needed to request an exam rescheduling due to overlapping exam times (Al-Gahtani & Roever, 2014a, 2014b; Roever & Al-Gahtani, 2015). The earliest role-play tasks of this type were implemented by Al-Gahtani and Roever (2015), who designed institutional scenarios requiring learners to negotiate changes to class or exam schedules. In a later study, Morkus (2018) employed six open-ended role-plays adapted from Beebe *et al.* (1990) incorporating situations that varied according to social power relations (e.g., equal, low-to-high, and high-to-low). Methodological variation in data collection is evident across studies employing DCTs as well. The oral DCTs used by Al Masaeed and his collaborators were informed by earlier work (Beckwith & Dewaele, 2008; Bella, 2012, 2014) and integrated key sociopragmatic variables such as power and social distance (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Task content differed according to the examined speech act, such as requesting that a roommate clean up (Al Masaeed, 2017), refusing a superior's request to work overtime (Al Masaeed *et al.*, 2020), or apologizing to a friend for arriving late (Al Masaeed, 2022c). In contrast, written DCTs were rarely used. Al-Rawafi *et al.* (2021), adopted this format, presenting eight apology scenarios with various degrees of offense that were contextually grounded in the context of Indonesia. This contrast highlights varying methodological emphases across studies, with oral DCTs favored for their elicitation of more spontaneous pragmatic responses.

Regarding data analysis, researchers in the examined studies have employed diverse analytical approaches tailored to the nature of their data. Al-Gahtani and Roever (2014a) drew on CA to quantify the occurrence of request realizations among learners. Although CA did not serve as the overarching analytical framework, it proved useful in tracing patterns of pragmatic growth over time. This analytical orientation persisted in subsequent studies (Al-Gahtani, 2022; Al-Gahtani & Roever, 2014b;

Roever & Al-Gahtani, 2015), where CA was applied to capture interactional features reflecting the development of learners' pragmatic competence. In their 2015 study, Al-Gahtani and Roever advanced this approach by integrating the next-turn proof procedure from CA with a CCSARP coding framework, thereby combining quantitative categorization with interactional interpretation.

CCSARP was also adopted in many studies either to establish coding schemes or to categorize and quantify various speech act types. For example, Al Masaeed (2017, 2022c), Al Masaeed et al. (2018), and Al Rawafi et al. (2021) each presented distinct approaches to integrating the CCSARP into their analytical procedures. While Al Masaeed et al. (2018) and Morkus (2018) adopted the methodological procedures introduced by Beebe et al. (1990), Al Masaeed et al. (2020) and Al Masaeed (2022c) outlined a multi-step analytical approach for assessing the pragmatic appropriateness of speech acts, paying special attention to bidialectal and multidialectal practices. Because this last investigation encompassed requests, refusals, and apologies, it referenced several key studies for coding linguistic strategies in line with CCSARP: Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) for apologies, Beebe et al. (1990) and Salazar-Campillo et al. (2009) for refusals, and both Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) and Woodfield and Economidou-Kogetsidis (2010) for requests.

In regard to multidialectal practices, although several studies acknowledged the inherent multidialectal nature of Arabic, only two of the above examined studies have systematically examined how the use of spoken varieties directly relates to the development of pragmatic competence. A close reading of the literature reveals three trends: (1) a group of studies overlook the issue of multidialectal practices entirely, (2) a group mentions it only briefly, and (3) only two studies treat it as a central focus of analysis. Starting with the first group, for instance, Roever and Al-Gahtani's (2015) investigation of request realizations does not explicitly engage with dialect or MSA distinctions. Their participants are described simply as Arabic speakers, with no clarification of their dialectal backgrounds. Although their literature review refers to Saudi Arabic speakers, the empirical analysis neither differentiates between MSA and spoken forms nor considers how this distinction might influence performance. Similarly, in their study on apologies, Al-Rawafi et al. (2021) make no reference to dialectal variation at all. However, given the written format of their DCTs, it is plausible that the responses were composed in MSA.

Moreover, while studies in the second group make cursory reference to spoken varieties of Arabic, such acknowledgment tends to be peripheral rather than central to the analysis. Al-Gahtani and Roever (2014a) note in a brief footnote that participants used both MSA and a dialect, but this observation is not pursued further in their analysis. In their subsequent study, Al-Gahtani and Roever (2014b) highlight the sociolinguistic implications of this divide, emphasizing that exclusive instruction in MSA may constrain learners' ability to interact naturally within the local speech community, given that MSA is not commonly used in day-to-day communication. Building on this line of inquiry, Al-Gahtani and Roever (2015) later acknowledge that their research did not systematically explore learners' opportunities to engage with Saudi Arabic in informal environments such as student dormitories.

Within this group of studies, Morkus (2018) represents a distinct case, as it explicitly centers on a single spoken variety (i.e., Egyptian Arabic). However, although Morkus notes that participants had prior exposure to both MSA and spoken Arabic, the data were elicited exclusively in Egyptian Arabic, with no further discussion of whether learners maintained using Egyptian Arabic or alternated between varieties in their production of refusals. Other studies within this group, such as Al Masaeed (2017), recognize that Arabic learners navigate exposure to multidialectal practices; however, the primary aim of that research was to investigate modification strategies in request formulations rather than to examine the broader multidialectal nature of Arabic. A similar pattern appears in Al Masaeed et al. (2018), which analyzes apology strategies without specifying or problematizing the varieties

employed by participants, thereby leaving the role of dialectal variation unaddressed. More recently, Al-Gahtani (2022) examines how learners' language proficiency affected their use of multiple requests in daily-life interactions. Although his analysis does not deal with multidialectal practices, the author does also make a note that there was a clear sociolinguistic divide: Saudi speakers relied almost exclusively on the local Saudi dialect in performing pragmatic tasks, whereas L2 learners predominantly used MSA. Based on this remark, Al-Gahtani advocates for integrating spoken varieties more systematically into L2 Arabic curricula to better reflect authentic communicative practices.

Finally, the third group of studies demonstrates a notable paradigm shift regarding the role of multidialectal practices in L2 Arabic pragmatic development. The only two studies in this group thus far include Al Masaeed et al. (2020) and Al Masaeed (2022c). These studies represent a deliberate and theoretically informed turn toward examining how multidialectal practices shape the development of pragmatic competence. Collectively, they constitute the most comprehensive exploration to date of bi- and multidialectal practices within L2 Arabic pragmatics research. Al Masaeed et al. (2020) directly investigate the interplay between learners' proficiency levels and their use of linguistic strategies, degrees of pragmatic appropriateness, and multidialectal practices in the performance of refusals. Extending this line of inquiry, Al Masaeed (2022c) employs pre- and post-study-abroad oral DCTs to trace learners' pragmatic growth during study abroad in Jordan. Mirroring the 2020 study, his analysis focuses on learners' choices of linguistic strategies, appropriateness judgments, and bidialectal behavior across multiple speech acts (i.e., apologies, refusals, and requests), thereby offering a nuanced account of how exposure to more than one dialect informs pragmatic development. The results from these two studies show that L2 Arabic pragmatic development involves not just identifying "appropriate" strategies but also learning to manage MSA–dialect choices in ways that align with real-life Arabic sociolinguistic norms. And, methodologically, this line of research strengthens the argument that L2 Arabic pragmatics research must move beyond "language-generic" speech-act metrics (appropriateness + linguistic strategy counts) to "language-specific" metrics that incorporate multidialectal and multilingual practices as central, not peripheral, variables.

Conclusion and Future Directions

Recent work has begun to highlight the intricate sociolinguistic landscape of Arabic, where learners often aim to acquire proficiency in both MSA and at least one spoken variety, varying their language use between them in daily communication. Multidialectal practices are thus an inherent feature of communicating in Arabic, not an exception. This article, therefore, has examined the status of multidialectal practices in L2 Arabic pragmatics research. To this end, it surveyed the 11 empirical studies found in the literature to explore the representation of multidialectal practices in these studies' conceptualization of pragmatics and research methods for data collection and analysis. In so doing, the article is well-positioned to highlight significant trends vis-à-vis the status of multidialectal practices, and common trends in general, within the field of L2 Arabic pragmatics research.

First, the synthesis underscores the early and still developing state of research on L2 Arabic pragmatics. Current investigations remain concentrated primarily on three speech acts (i.e., apologies, refusals, and requests), leaving significant gaps in our understanding of the full range of L2 Arabic pragmatic development. Moreover, existing studies have largely relied on analyzing learners' use of linguistic strategies in relation to factors such as proficiency level or length of residence abroad. While useful, this narrow focus has limited the development of a comprehensive account of how pragmatic competence develops in L2 Arabic. Second, there has been a tendency to overlook the role of multidialectal practices in the field. This might be attributed to monolingual/standard language ideologies and the continuing dependence on frameworks originally designed for other languages

(particularly those based on the CCSARP model for coding and analyzing production data). This is found to be the case even in studies that employed CA (e.g., Al-Gahtani, 2022) to go beyond traditional conceptualizations of L2 pragmatic development grounded in Thomas (1983) and in the CCSARP.

The third trend, however, shows that a limited number of studies has meaningfully started engaging with this linguistic reality (i.e., Al Masaeed 2022c; Al Masaeed et al., 2020). This line of inquiry is the first step in examining how learners' ability to move fluidly across varieties and registers (and their awareness of social context and agency) shapes their pragmatic development. Such a perspective is particularly crucial as it challenges the monolingual and hierarchical ideologies that have too often defined the field (Al Masaeed, 2023). Viewing L2 pragmatic competence through a multidialectal lens also opens the door to more innovative methodologies for exploring and assessing pragmatic development. The rich interplay of spoken dialects and MSA provides scholars with multiple reference points for tracing learners' pragmatic growth. Recognizing the multidialectal character of Arabic thus allows for more accurate and contextually grounded ways of measuring learners' performance. A multidialectal lens forces researchers to treat "choice of variety" (MSA vs dialect) as an analytic category alongside strategy type and appropriateness, turning multidialectal practices into a criterion for measuring pragmatic competence. Therefore, multidialectal (and multilingual) practices can undoubtedly (1) offer significant implications for how L2 pragmatic competence and its development are conceptualized across languages, and (2) enhance the processes used to measure learners' pragmatic competence in a range of linguistic contexts.

Future research would benefit from extending its scope beyond the currently dominant domains to include other aspects of pragmatic production, such as humor, compliments, and complaints. Expanding attention to underrepresented areas like pragmatic comprehension and perception (Nguyen, 2019) would also yield a more complete picture of learners' communicative capacities. In L2 Arabic pragmatics research in particular, the following areas are still waiting to be examined:

- The field lacks longitudinal, multi-scenario corpora that track how learners' multidialectal use, strategy choice, and appropriateness co-develop across different genres and interaction types (beyond a small set of DCT prompts).
- Proficiency is still operationalized mainly via program level; more precise, independent proficiency measures are needed to unpack why some learners are highly multidialectal and appropriate while classmates at the same level remain MSA-heavy.
- There is limited work linking intensity and type of social contact (e.g., homestay vs. classroom only, peer networks, etc.) to changes in multidialectal pragmatic practices.
- Instructional interventions explicitly targeting variety choice, mitigation norms, and "how much to say" in Arabic are largely missing; most studies call for pedagogy that aligns with the multidialectal reality of Arabic speakers, but systematic intervention studies have yet to be done.

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