

Exploring EFL Learners' Pragmatic Competence in Asking for and Giving Permission

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Abstrak – Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji kompetensi pragmatik siswa EFL dalam menggunakan ungkapan meminta dan memberi izin. Penelitian ini dilaksanakan di MTs Muhammadiyah Sukarame, Bandar Lampung, dengan melibatkan 32 siswa kelas VIII. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif untuk menggambarkan kemampuan berbicara siswa selama kegiatan pembelajaran di kelas. Data diperoleh melalui observasi kelas, khususnya saat praktik berbicara. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa siswa masih mengalami berbagai kesulitan dalam menggunakan ungkapan yang tepat. Sebagian besar siswa memiliki keterbatasan kosakata, kurang percaya diri, serta kesulitan dalam menerapkan tata bahasa yang benar. Akibatnya, ujaran yang dihasilkan sering tidak lengkap dan kurang terstruktur dengan baik. Selain itu, banyak siswa merasa ragu dan takut melakukan kesalahan saat menyampaikan ide mereka. Hasil tersebut menunjukkan bahwa kompetensi pragmatik siswa dalam meminta dan memberi izin masih tergolong rendah. Hal ini juga menekankan pentingnya penyediaan kegiatan pembelajaran yang lebih interaktif dan komunikatif untuk mendukung perkembangan kemampuan berbicara siswa.

Kata Kunci: Kompetensi pragmatik, Kemampuan berbicara, Meminta dan Memberi izin, Pembelajar EFL

Abstract - This study aims to examine EFL learners' pragmatic competence in using expressions of asking and giving permission. The research was carried out at MTs Muhammadiyah Sukarame, Bandar Lampung, involving 32 eighth-grade students. A descriptive qualitative approach was applied to describe students' speaking performance during classroom activities. The data were obtained through classroom observation, particularly during speaking practices. The findings indicate that students still encounter several difficulties in using appropriate expressions. Most of them have limited vocabulary, low confidence, and difficulties in applying correct grammatical structures. Consequently, their utterances are often incomplete and poorly organized. Furthermore, many students feel hesitant and afraid of making mistakes when expressing their ideas. These results show that students' pragmatic competence in asking and giving permission remains relatively low. It also highlights the importance of providing more interactive and communicative learning activities to support the development of students' speaking skills.

Keywords: Pragmatic Competence, speaking ability, Asking and Giving permission, EFL learners

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INTRODUCTION

Learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) plays an important role in helping students develop communication skills in everyday life. One of the most important skills is speaking, because through this skill students can express ideas, opinions, and feelings directly. Moreover, speaking ability is not only related to grammatical accuracy but also to how language is used appropriately in social contexts, known as pragmatic competence. According to (Krisnawati, 2011), pragmatic competence is the ability to use language appropriately according to the communication situation, while (Prasatyo et al., 2023) emphasize that EFL learners need to develop both linguistic and pragmatic competence simultaneously for effective communication. However, in practice, many students still experience difficulties in speaking English. Students often experience difficulties in pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary, making them hesitant to speak. This condition leads to low self-confidence and a lack of student participation in speaking activities in class. According to (Sabilla & Kaniadewi, 2025), limited vocabulary is one of the main factors hindering speaking fluency, while (G. B. Chand, 2021) explain that lack of confidence and language proficiency are the main causes of speaking difficulties among students.

More specifically, students also experience difficulties in using certain expressions in communication, such as asking for and giving permission. These expressions are often used in daily interactions, especially in classroom learning situations, but students often do not yet understand how to use them correctly according to the context.



According to (Luijckx et al., 2022), learners can produce grammatically correct sentences but may not necessarily be pragmatically appropriate, while (Alghamdi et al., 2026) emphasize that mastering speech acts such as requesting and granting permission is crucial for achieving effective communication. The ability to ask for and give permission appropriately is important because the expressions used may vary depending on who is speaking, the relationship between the speakers, and the communication situation. For example, expressions used when speaking to a teacher should be more polite and formal than those used when speaking to a close friend. Therefore, students need not only to know the grammatical forms of permission expressions but also to understand when and how those expressions should be used. Based on the initial observations conducted at MTs Muhammadiyah Sukarama, particularly in the VIII Talent 1 class, it was found that the students' speaking skills are still relatively low. Many students lack confidence and feel afraid of making mistakes when speaking in front of the class, so they tend to be passive in learning activities. According to (Wang et al., 2022), anxiety can reduce students' desire to communicate, while (Yousefabadi et al., 2022) states that motivation and confidence play an important role in language learning.

In addition, several students tended to use the same permission expressions in different situations without considering politeness and formality. Some students also had difficulty distinguishing expressions used for asking permission from those used for giving or refusing permission. These problems indicate that students' difficulties are not limited to vocabulary and grammar but also involve their ability to use language appropriately in particular social contexts. Previous studies have generally discussed pragmatic competence, speaking difficulties, and speech acts in broader educational contexts. However, limited attention has been given to the pragmatic competence of junior high school students in asking for and giving permission, particularly at MTs Muhammadiyah Sukarama. Furthermore, previous studies have mostly focused on students' grammatical accuracy or general speaking performance rather than examining the appropriateness, politeness, and contextual suitability of the expressions they produce. Therefore, the novelty of this study lies in its specific focus on analyzing how eighth-grade EFL learners use expressions of asking for and giving permission in terms of linguistic form, pragmatic appropriateness, politeness, and context. This study also attempts to identify the specific difficulties and influencing factors that affect students' pragmatic performance.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze students' pragmatic competence in using expressions of requesting and granting permission. This research focuses on identifying the difficulties faced by students as well as the factors that influence their speaking abilities. The results of this study are expected to help teachers develop more effective learning strategies and create a more supportive learning environment. The results of this study are expected to provide both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, this study may enrich discussions on pragmatic competence and speech acts in EFL learning. Practically, the findings are expected to help English teachers design more contextual speaking activities, provide explicit instruction on politeness and social context, and create a more supportive learning environment for students. According to (Berezenko et al., 2022), the development of communicative competence is very important in EFL learning, while (Afrouz et al., 2023) state that explicit teaching of pragmatic aspects can improve students' speaking abilities.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research uses a qualitative descriptive method to analyze students' pragmatic competence in using asking and giving permission expressions. This method was chosen because the research focuses on understanding students' abilities in real communication contexts, rather than on numerical data. Additionally, the qualitative approach allows researchers to describe phenomena in greater depth based on conditions occurring in the field. According to (Furidha, 2024), qualitative methods are used to understand phenomena naturally through in-depth descriptions, while (S. P. Chand, 2025) states that qualitative research focuses on exploring the meaning of a social issue. The subjects in this study are the 32 students of class VIII Talent 1 at MTs Muhammadiyah Sukarama. The selection of these subjects is based on initial observations that indicate the students still face difficulties in speaking skills, particularly in the use of expressions for asking and giving permission. In addition, this class was chosen because it is considered to represent the actual conditions of students' speaking abilities. According to (Ahmad & Wilkins, 2025), the selection of participants in qualitative research is done purposively based on the goals and needs of the research. The data sources in this study consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data is obtained directly from students' activities in speaking lessons, such as conversations, speaking practice, and students' responses during the learning process. Meanwhile, secondary data is obtained from books, journals, and other relevant sources to support the research analysis. According to (S. P. Chand, 2025), data in qualitative research can consist of words, actions, and documents that are directly observed by the researcher.

Data collection techniques are carried out through observation and documentation. Observation is used to directly observe how students use asking and giving permission expressions in speaking activities in the classroom.

Additionally, documentation is carried out by recording and collecting data related to the learning process. According to (Lofland, 2022), the observation technique aims to obtain accurate data based on real conditions in the field, while documentation is used as a complement to data in qualitative research. The data analysis technique is carried out by organizing, categorizing, and interpreting the data that has been collected. Data is analyzed to identify students' difficulties as well as the factors that affect their ability to use expressions correctly. The analysis process is conducted systematically to produce clear and focused findings. According to (Monaro et al., 2022), qualitative data analysis includes three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Based on this method, this research is expected to provide a clear picture of students' pragmatic competence in the use of asking and giving permission expressions. In addition, the results of this study are expected to serve as a basis for improving the quality of speaking lessons and assisting teachers in developing more effective teaching strategies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that students experience various difficulties in speaking activities, particularly in using expressions of asking for and giving permission correctly. These difficulties are influenced by linguistic factors and psychological factors that are interconnected during the communication process. In classroom practice, students appear to face obstacles in constructing correct sentences, selecting appropriate vocabulary, and delivering speech fluently. According to (Fernández-García & Fonseca-Mora, 2022), speaking ability is influenced by various factors, including language competence and affective conditions, while (Katiandagho et al., 2022) states that self-confidence plays an important role in the success of communication. These findings show that students' speaking difficulties are not caused by a single factor. Instead, their performance is influenced by the interaction between their knowledge of language forms, their understanding of social context, and their psychological readiness to communicate. Therefore, students may know certain permission expressions grammatically but still fail to use them appropriately in actual communication.

Research findings indicate that students' difficulties in speaking, particularly in requesting and granting permission, can be categorized into three main aspects: pragmatic, linguistic, and affective. In the pragmatic aspect, students still often use inappropriate expressions of permission and make errors in sentence structure, resulting in less accurate messages being conveyed. From a linguistic perspective, limited vocabulary and pronunciation errors cause students' speech to be disfluent and fragmented. Meanwhile, from an affective aspect, students exhibit anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and a lack of self-confidence, which impact their participation in speaking activities. Based on the findings, it can be seen that students' difficulties are divided into three main aspects, namely pragmatic, linguistic, and affective aspects. First, in the pragmatic aspect, students often use inappropriate expressions when asking for or granting permission, leading to misunderstandings in communication. This indicates that students have not yet fully mastered the use of language according to social context. According to (Takkaç Tuglar, 2016), pragmatic competence relates to the ability to use language appropriately in specific contexts. This finding suggests that students' difficulties were not limited to producing grammatically correct sentences. They also had difficulty recognizing that permission expressions should be adjusted according to social distance, power relations, and formality. For example, expressions used when speaking to a teacher should be more polite than those used when speaking to a close friend. The students' inappropriate choices indicate that their pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic knowledge still requires further development.

Second, from a linguistic perspective, limited vocabulary and pronunciation errors are quite dominant factors in hindering students' speaking abilities. Students tend to hesitate when speaking because they do not have enough vocabulary to express their ideas clearly. As a result, the speech produced becomes fragmented and less effective. According to (Afna, 2018), vocabulary mastery is an important component of speaking ability because it greatly affects fluency and accuracy in language use. In the context of asking for and giving permission, linguistic limitations may directly affect pragmatic meaning. An incorrect modal verb, word choice, or sentence pattern can make an expression sound too direct, unclear, or inappropriate. Therefore, students need to master not only the meaning of permission expressions but also their grammatical patterns, pronunciation, and variations of use. Third, affective factors become one of the strongest obstacles in students' speaking performance. Many students show feelings of anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and lack of confidence when asked to speak in English. This condition causes students to tend to be passive and avoid participation in speaking activities. According to (Nath et al., 2017), in the affective filter hypothesis, it is explained that a high level of anxiety can hinder the language acquisition process. The students' fear of being corrected or laughed at may have reduced their willingness to communicate. As a result, even students who understood the expressions were sometimes unable to produce them confidently. This finding indicates that speaking performance is not always a direct reflection of students' knowledge, because psychological pressure may prevent them from demonstrating their actual competence.

Furthermore, the results of this study indicate that these three factors are interconnected and form a cycle that hinders the development of students' speaking abilities. Students with limited vocabulary tend to feel less confident, and this low self-confidence increases anxiety, which ultimately affects their ability to produce accurate speech. Therefore, this issue cannot be addressed separately, but rather requires an integrated learning approach. This interrelationship indicates that the three difficulties should not be addressed separately. Improving vocabulary without providing meaningful speaking practice may not sufficiently improve students' pragmatic performance. Similarly, teaching permission expressions without reducing students' anxiety may not encourage them to use the expressions actively. An integrated instructional approach is therefore necessary. From a pedagogical perspective, these findings indicate that teachers need to create a more supportive and interactive learning environment. The use of communicative activities such as role play, pair work, and simulations of real situations can help students practice language in a more meaningful context. Teachers are also encouraged to provide explicit instruction on pragmatic aspects by presenting several permission expressions, explaining their levels of politeness, and demonstrating the contexts in which each expression is appropriate. Corrective feedback should be delivered supportively so that students can recognize their mistakes without feeling embarrassed or discouraged.

According to (Nath et al., 2017), the communicative approach can enhance students' confidence as well as their fluency in speaking. Overall, the findings demonstrate that students' competence in asking for and giving permission involves more than the ability to memorize expressions. It requires knowledge of language forms, awareness of social context, and confidence in using English during interaction. Consequently, effective teaching should address pragmatic, linguistic, and affective dimensions simultaneously.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that the eighth-grade Talent 1 students at MTs Muhammadiyah Sukarama still experience various difficulties in speaking skills, particularly in using expressions of asking for and giving permission. These difficulties encompass three main aspects: pragmatic, linguistic, and affective. In the pragmatic aspect, students are not yet able to use expressions correctly according to the context of the situation. In the linguistic aspect, limited vocabulary and pronunciation errors are the main obstacles in conveying ideas clearly. Meanwhile, in the affective aspect, low self-confidence and high levels of anxiety also affect students' speaking performance in the classroom. Furthermore, these three factors are interconnected and create a complex barrier in the speaking learning process. Limited vocabulary can lower students' confidence, which in turn increases anxiety and affects their ability to use expressions correctly. This shows that speaking ability is not only influenced by language proficiency but also by the psychological condition of students during the learning process. Therefore, teachers need to implement teaching strategies that not only focus on linguistic aspects but also consider the affective aspects of students. The use of communicative activities such as role play, pair work, and simulation of real situations can help students become more active, confident, and accustomed to using English in meaningful contexts. Thus, it is hoped that students' speaking skills can develop more optimally.

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