

CONNECTING DEVELOPMENT OF PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE WITH THE CEFR

1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to look at how the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe 2001) can facilitate research into pragmatic competence development. Developing pragmatic competence in a second/foreign language has been addressed in many articles and publications on cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatics (Bardovi-Harlig 1999; Barron 2003; Blum-Kulka/House/Kasper 1989; Cohen/Ishihara 2005; Ishihara/Cohen 2010; Kasper/Blum-Kulka 1993; McConachy/Hata 2013; Trosborg 2010; Wigglesworth/Yates 2007 etc.), but is still often neglected by practitioners in foreign language teaching and teacher training.

Since its publication, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) has become influential in building understanding of foreign language learners' performance. However, there is a gap between the global description of the communicative language competences at different levels and the level of detail required for syllabus or test design. More detailed description of the particular linguistic means that learners of English are expected to be able to use at different levels is given in the accompanying T-series: Breakthrough (Trim 2009) for A1; Waystage (van Ek/Trim 1998b) for A2; Threshold Level (van Ek/Trim 1998a) for B1; and Vantage (van Ek/Trim 2001) for B2. This problem is to a certain extent addressed by English Profile, a collaborative research programme investigating "what learner English is really like" and working on providing a detailed set of Reference Level Descriptions (RLD) for English to accompany the CEFR. Their publication *Language functions revisited: Theoretical and empirical bases for language construct definition across the ability range* (Green 2012: 1) addresses "how and how well learners identified as being at different levels of the CEFR are able to use English" in terms of communicative functions.

In this study, we also address this problem of granularity. We focus on the function of expressing disagreement: how it is described in the CEFR and how language learners at B2 level express their disagreement. At B2 level, pragmatic competence becomes more important than at previous levels because learners are expected to "interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without imposing strain on either party" (Council of Europe 2001: 129). Therefore, their pragmatic errors are taken more seriously by their interlocutors.

* *Author's address:* Univerzitet "Goce Delcev" Stip, ul. Krste Misirkov br. 10-A, 2000 Stip, Republika Makedonija. E-mail: marija.kusevska@ugd.edu.mk

This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the strategies and linguistic means that Macedonian learners of English at B2 level use to express disagreement?
2. How do these correspond to the descriptions given in the CEFR and the accompanying T-series, in particular Vantage by van Ek/Trim (2001)?
3. What are the most common pragmatic errors made by the learners?

In view of the above, we believe that our research will contribute globally to the broader picture of what learner English is like. Locally, it will provide valuable information for Macedonian teachers on their students' pragmatic development in English and the possible areas of their pragmatic failure.

1.1 Defining pragmatic competence

Pragmatic competence is understood as “the knowledge of the linguistic resources available in a given language for realising particular illocutions, knowledge of the sequential aspects of speech acts, and finally, knowledge of the appropriate contextual use of the particular language’s linguistic resources” (Barron 2003: 10). Thus defined, pragmatic competence includes the ability to perform language functions and the knowledge of socially appropriate language use.

Leeche’s distinction between sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic knowledge is helpful in understanding the difficulty that learners may face. Sociopragmatic knowledge refers to the “specific ‘local’ conditions on language use [...] for it is clear that the Cooperative Principle and the Politeness Principle operate variably in different cultures or language communities, in different social situations, among different social classes, etc.” (Leech 1983: 10). Pragmalinguistic knowledge, on the other hand, refers to the particular linguistic resources which a given language provides for conveying particular illocutions.

1.2 CEFR on pragmatic competence

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (2001) is based on the assumption that the aim of learning a foreign language is communication. In order to do this, learners need to develop a set of communicative competences. Communicative language competences include linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences.

According to the CEFR (Council of Europe 2001: 123), pragmatic competences are concerned with the learner’s knowledge of the principles according to which messages are:

- a. organized, structured and arranged (discourse competence);
- b. used to perform communicative functions (functional competence);
- c. sequenced according to interactional and transactional schemata (design competence).

The B2 list of functions which is of our interest in this paper gives a more sensitive sub-categorisation, a greater variety of exponents, and more developed realization of structural values than the lists for the previous levels. In listing the disagreement subcategori-

es, van Ek and Trim (2001) distinguish strong disagreement (*Absolute nonsense/rubbish; I couldn't agree less; No way; etc.*) and weak disagreement (*I'm not so sure; I wonder if that is so; etc.*). Strong disagreement is supported by positive, negative and denying statements (*I don't agree; That's not right; You're wrong; I don't think so; That isn't true; That is a downright lie; (Most) certainly not; Not at all; etc.*). Weak disagreement is supported by inviting agreement (*Don't you think it's nice?; Don't you agree she's beautiful?; She is French, isn't she?*) and expressing agreement with reservations (*I agree with you there; I don't disagree with you there; I agree, but; Perhaps so, but; etc.*).

The Threshold (van Ek/Trim 1998a) and Vantage (van Ek/Trim 2001) chapters on sociocultural competence (Chapter 11) also support the development of pragmatic competence. Sociocultural competence is defined as “that aspect of communicative ability which involves those specific features of a society and its culture which are manifest in the communicative behaviour of the members of this society” (van Ek/Trim 2001: 95). These features may be classified as universal experiences (everyday life, living conditions, interpersonal relations, and major values and attitudes) and social conventions and rituals, the latter including non-linguistic (e.g. body language, visiting rituals, eating and drinking rituals, etc.) and linguistic elements (language functions and politeness conventions)¹.

Special focus in these chapters is put on politeness conventions. In explaining politeness, van Ek and Trim rely on the concepts of positive and negative politeness (Brown/Levinson [1978] 1987; Arundale 2006; Culpeper/Kádár 2010; Ogiermann 2009; Watts 2003; Linguistic Politeness Research Group 2011):

‘Positive’ politeness is shown by expressing interest in partners’ interests, activities, opinions, beliefs, etc., congratulating them on their achievements, praising their qualities, etc., but also sympathising with their troubles and sharing one’s own. It may go together with physical closeness and contact, prolonged eye contact and sharing of emotional signals. Positive politeness contrasts with ‘negative’ politeness, in which the speaker tries to avoid embarrassment, distress or displeasure by showing an awareness of the demands made on the partner by what the speaker says. In this way, the possibility of overt conflict with possible hurt or offence is avoided or at least reduced (van Ek/Trim 2001: 99).

With respect to this, the authors note that politeness in English can be formulated by the following maxims:

1. Do not be dogmatic.
2. Be reluctant to say what may distress or displease the partner.
3. Do not force the partner to act.

The maxims quoted above give additional explanations which shed light on the nature of the listed exponents. Native speakers modify their utterances with lexical and syntactic linguistic means in order to comply with the above maxims. The maxim “Do

1 In defining communicative competence, the CEFR separates pragmatic from sociolinguistic competence. However, we find it difficult to separate the two in the study of actual speech production, and they necessarily overlap in our research.

not be dogmatic”, for example, indicates that the partner may have a different opinion. It implies the use of verbs like *I think, I believe, I expect*; pragmatic markers like *you know, of course*, etc.; question tags; etc. The maxim “Be reluctant to say what may distress or displease the partner”, among other functions², offers strategies for reducing the risk of offending the interlocutor:

- seeking the partner’s agreement, (*I hope you don’t mind my saying so, but ...; Don’t you agree that ...?*)
- apologising for not agreeing (*I’m sorry, but I don’t agree*)
- expressing regret for not agreeing (*I’m afraid that isn’t true*)
- implying something unpleasant rather than stating it openly (*Your ideas are interesting ...*, implying “... but I don’t agree with them”).

The maxim “Do not force the partner to act”, allow him/her to appear to act voluntarily, applies most directly to the speech act of making requests.

Because disagreement is such a complex speech act, involving facework, beliefs, emotions, etc., many more linguistic devices are used. Native speakers may also use some of the exponents that van Ek and Trim (2001) list under “expressing knowledge, memory, belief” (*I don’t know*); “expressing degrees of certainty” (declarative sentences with *certainly/definitely/etc.*; *I’m certain/sure/convinced/etc.*); tentative assertions (*It seems/appears; perhaps/maybe; I don’t think/believe; I could be wrong, but*) and hedges (*just, sort of, kind of*). To these, we can add the use of modal verbs, *if*-clauses, personal pronouns, questions, discourse markers, etc.

2 DATA COLLECTION AND METHODOLOGY

The analysis of how Macedonian learners of English perform the function of expressing disagreement was carried out on 188 speech acts of disagreement obtained through a Discourse Completion Task (DCT). The DCT consisted of nine tasks that required the students to express an opposing view to the one given in the tasks. The tasks in the DCT prompted the learners to disagree with a colleague, a superior and a friend, as illustrated below (see Appendix for all tasks):

Your manager questions the accuracy of the report you submit. S/he says, “I don’t think this information is correct.” However, you are sure it is. You have consulted the company database, and you have also checked it with several of your colleagues. In response you say:

In its first version, the DCT consisted of 12 tasks. The tasks were shorter, and they didn’t provide the reasons for disagreement. When the DCT was first distributed among students, some of them complained that it was too long, and that the tasks were time-consuming. As a result, they left some of the tasks blank. Before employing the DCT

2 In this part the authors also refer to the functions of complaining, granting permission and apologizing. We do not give more details about them here because they are not relevant for our paper.

in the present study, we removed the tasks that were most often left blank, and we added reasons for disagreement.

The DCT, however, did not instruct learners how strongly to disagree with the given opinion. This was supposed to be their own choice. It was assumed that being able to choose would also influence which linguistic means for formulating the required speech act they would use.

The respondents were university students at B2 level, age 18 to 24. Their level of English was determined by a quick placement test based on the Standard English vocabulary and English grammar that is found in English language learning materials produced by Oxford University Press, Longman/Pearson Education and Cambridge University Press³. Those were the materials that the students used in their previous English classes. The test consisted of 75 multiple choice questions, 15 questions for each of the levels: A1, A2, B1, B2 and C1. Every question was assigned one point. 51 to 65 points were required to qualify for B2 level. The test was developed by the teachers at the University for internal use only.

The speech acts of disagreement were analysed with respect to the exponents and the maxims in Vantage (van Ek/Trim 2001). On the basis of the subfunctions of expressing disagreement and the exponents for the realisation of these functions, we grouped the obtained speech acts into the following types:

1. expressing strong disagreement, in which we have included expressing disagreement with a statement, negative or positive, as well as with denying statements;
2. expressing weak⁴ disagreement, in which we have included expressing agreement with reservations;
3. direct disagreement, in which we included those speech acts in which disagreement was not prefaced by any statements, and in which the opposing view was formulated as directly stated explanation; and
4. using hints to express disagreement.

3 RESULTS OF THE ANALYSIS

Most of the speech acts of disagreement produced by Macedonian learners of English were formulated as strong disagreement (n=101). 51 of the remaining speech acts expressed weak disagreement, 30 expressed direct disagreement without preface and in only seven speech acts did the learners use hints to express their disagreement

3 State and private language schools in Macedonia use books published by the above named publishers. The most widely used books in state schools are the *Headway* series (Oxford University Press), the *Gold* series (Longman/Pearson Education), and *English Grammar in Use* (Cambridge University Press). Many of the students will have attended language courses in private language schools, which use a wider variety of books, though mostly by the same publishers.

4 The terms “aggravated” and “mitigated” are also used for strong and weak disagreement, respectively. In this paper we use the terms “strong” and “weak” disagreement to comply with the terminology in the CEFR.

3.1 Expressing strong disagreement

Strong disagreement was often bluntly stated with the verbs *disagree* (n=16) and *don't agree* (n=14). We were also able to find a limited number of expressions with *against* (n=5) and *don't like* (n=10).

- (1) I completely disagree. Taking a language course will help you communicate with people from different countries.
- (2) I don't agree with this.
- (3) I'm against your decision.

Learners' disagreement was also shaped with evaluative expressions questioning the truth of the previous speaker's utterance: *That's not true* (n=7) and *you're wrong* (n=11).

- (4) That's not true. Women are even more reliable at work.
- (5) You are totally wrong. They are reliable at work, and they are maybe more assertive than men.

As examples (1) and (5) show, the expressions with *disagree* were sometimes further intensified with *completely* and *totally*. Epistemic *sure* (n=7) was also used to strengthen disagreement, often internally modified as in the examples *I am more than sure*; *I'm completely sure*; *I'm pretty sure*. Sometimes learners prefaced some of their speech acts of disagreement with an apology (n=13):

- (6) I'm sorry, but I'm totally against it. Those five days are very important for me.

We might expect that *sorry* would soften disagreement. However, it doesn't because these speech acts contain linguistic means that are used with the aim of strengthening them. Also, learners sometimes used expressions to disassociate themselves from their interlocutor's opinion, as in (7). This may look like expressing agreement with reservations or giving space for other people's opinion. However, the utterance sounds very firm, and with its first part the speaker clearly distances herself/himself from the previous speaker's opinion.

- (7) That is your opinion. I have a different opinion.

In the DCT speech acts produced by Macedonian learners of English, we found 79 occurrences of *I think* and five occurrences of *I don't think*. In three of the speech acts *I think* was preceded by *so* in order to further strengthen the person's opinion:

- (8) I think people are entitled to a 25-day holiday.
- (9) We are working so hard and we are trying to do completely and successfully all the work in the company. So I think that we deserve five days more for holiday.

In six cases, the learners used the verb *believe* to strengthen their opinion:

- (10) I do believe the so called modern technology is endangering the environment.

There were two cases all together in which emphatic *do* was used. Although limited in number, they present evidence that at B2 level, learners are beginning to broaden their understanding beyond the grammatical use of the linguistic means.

3.2 Expressing weak disagreement

As previously stated, we were able to identify 51 speech acts of expressing weak disagreement, 29 of which represented expressing agreement with reservations. Learners used varieties of expressions to formulate disagreement with reservation. Most often it was prefaced with a phrase expressing agreement followed by *but*: *Yes, but; Yes, maybe, but; I agree, but; It's interesting, but; It's not the best, but I would like to go there; I can't say that I totally disagree, but; etc.*

(11) Yes, maybe is endangering the environment but also with that modern technology our lives become much easier and also help in avoiding a great catastrophe.

The aim of some of the expressions is to recognize the interlocutor's right to have a different opinion: *I don't know about you, but I think; Maybe for you, but; It's okay for you to oppose that, but; For some people yes, but; I think you are right, but I have a different opinion; I understand you don't want to stay later on work, but; etc.*

Others have a function of cushioning the disagreement by making a positive remark: *I think it's an interesting topic, but; It's nice, but it's not my style; Yes, it is lovely, but I suggest you to try another one; etc.*

The speech acts of weak disagreement that were not structured as agreement with reservations were prefaced with different expressions: *well; I don't know; I'm sorry; I was hoping; I think; etc.* They were also softened with a weak modal verb (*can, could, would, might, etc.*), epistemic verbs, adjectives and adverbs expressing doubt or uncertainty (*I don't know; I'm not sure; maybe; if possible; I was hoping; etc.*), limiters (*only*), and *if*-clauses.

The most pervasive are modal verbs. They play a significant role in formulating both strong and weak disagreement. On the basis of their frequency, we classify them into three groups:

1. Verbs with high frequency: *will* (n=66);
2. Verbs with medium frequency: *should* (n=28), *can* (n=24)⁵, *would* (n=22); and
3. Verbs with low frequency: *must* (n=7), *need to* (n=4), *could* (n=4), *might* (n=4), *may* (n=0) and *shall* (n=0).

4 DISCUSSION

4.1 Different politeness systems

Our analysis of how Macedonian learners of English express disagreement showed that these learners more frequently used strong disagreement than weak disagreement. This is in compliance with our previous study on expressing disagreement in US English and Macedonian (Kyceвcka 2012), in which we concluded that Macedonian speakers use strong disagreement more often, whereas US speakers use weak disagreement. Accord-

5 The number includes only the examples of epistemic *can*. However, it also includes the occurrences of *can't*.

ing to some authors who have studied disagreement (Kakava 2002; Locher 2004 etc.), this is a result of two different politeness systems prevailing in these two languages: positive politeness in Macedonian and negative politeness in US English. In light of this, we may expect that the two maxims postulated in Vantage (2001) – “Do not be dogmatic” and “Be reluctant to say what may distress or displease the partner” – may not be always observed by Macedonian learners. The following excerpt between two colleagues, an American and a Macedonian, is an example of the possible consequences:

(12) A: Perhaps we could prepare another performance.

M: No way. We don't have time and it will be a disaster.

A: I am sorry. I was just suggesting another way of doing it.

M's response sounded harsh, authoritative and rude, although it wasn't meant to be. Macedonian people tend to believe that strong arguments may be more convincing than softened ones. When they argue, they usually want to defend their opinions. Sometimes they use strong words just because they want to emphasize their opinion, defend it, and make the listener understand it.

4.2 Disagreement modification

On the basis of our analysis, we could conclude that the learners are able to internally modify their disagreement. Yet the number of the lexical modifiers they used was quite limited. For strong disagreement it was the intensifying adverbs *completely*, *absolutely*, and *totally*. For weak disagreement it was mostly epistemic verbs, adjectives and adverbs, but their distribution was limited to individual cases. There was one example with *a little* (*It is. But maybe you should look around a little more.*) and one example with *seem* (*don't seem important*). However, no other verbs of hesitation and uncertainty (*guess*, *suppose*, *assume*) or hedges (*just*, *sort of*, *kind of*) were used to formulate disagreement.

Although learners were able to modify their disagreement lexically to a certain degree, they were not able to modify it syntactically. They did not use two very important strategies for expressing weak disagreement: inviting agreement and inviting disagreement with a statement. As a result they did not use any question tags (*She is French, isn't she; I like this music, okay*), any interrogative sentences (*Don't you think it's nice?; Surely you agree?*), and neither did they use statements which would invite disagreement (*Surely you don't think it's cold?*). Learners may rely more on lexical than on syntactic forms because lexical forms are more simple and syntactic forms are more complex. It is also easier for learners to find one-to-one correspondences between the L1 and L2 for lexical than for syntactic linguistic means.

The findings of our study concerning disagreement modification are in congruence with other studies on how learners express opposing views. Nguyen (2008), who studied how Vietnamese learners of Australian English modified their criticisms, and Behnam (2011), who studied disagreement among Iranian EFL learners, also found out that the learners tend to modify their criticisms less frequently than native speakers do. They also concluded that learners tend to rely on lexical forms rather than on syntactic structures in realization of their modifiers.

This analysis of expressing disagreement revealed that Macedonian learners of English do not vary the exponents that they use in relation to the interlocutor. There was no difference in how they expressed their disagreement to a colleague and to a superior. They were more careful only when disagreeing with a friend. In the light of this, all but one of the disagreements involving hinting were with a friend. This supports the claims that learners of foreign languages most often opt for linguistic means with neutrality in meaning (Takahashi and Beebe 1993; Nguyen 2008). Nguyen (2008: 780) also notes that even when learners use modifiers, they do not achieve the same effect as native speakers, “probably because the language that they used was quite neutral and lukewarm”.

What also struck us in our analysis was that learners did not use most of the expressions for strong emotions, such as *Rubbish*; *Nonsense*; *That’s a downright lie*; *Not at all*; etc. We suppose that the origins of this failure are multiple. First, the instrument that was used to collect the speech acts elicited written, not spoken real life conversational turns. Second, the data was collected on the University premises, which are perceived as a rather formal environment, and the learners probably thought such language was inappropriate. Third, the learners were expressing themselves in a foreign language.

4.2.1 *Modal verbs as modifiers*

Our current study shows that modals verbs are a significant characteristic of expressing disagreement by Macedonian learners of English. However, the results differ from our previous research on speech acts of disagreement produced by native US speakers (Kyceвcka 2012), in which we found out that *would* and *can* were the most frequent words expressing disagreement. They were followed by *could*, *may*, *might*, *will*, *need* and *should*, in this order, while *must* had only one occurrence. These findings are similar to the frequency rates of modal verbs found in other corpus-based studies. Biber et al. (2007: 495) assign the low frequency of *must* to its high command force. Because of this it is often replaced by *should*, which has weaker force, and which is thus considered more polite in conversation.

With Macedonian learners of English, the frequency rates of specific modal verbs were in the following order: *will*, *should*, *would*, *can*, *must*; *need to*, *could* and *might* had very low frequency, while *may* had zero occurrences. Bardovi-Harlig (1999) gives an example when a non-native speaker addresses a faculty adviser with *I will take syntax*, which is very different from the native speaker’s *I was going to take syntax*. According to her “The use of *will* seems to have an opposite effect of a mitigator, operating instead as an aggravator indicating a strong commitment by the student to his suggestion for a course” (Bardovi-Harlig 1999: 694). Our students also widely use *will* as a marker of the future, and, like the student in the example, they are probably not aware that it additionally conveys a meaning of confidence, firmness and decisiveness, which may not be quite appropriate in this context. *Could* and *might* seem to be the most difficult modal verbs for Macedonian learners of English. Generally, *could* is understood as past tense of *can*. As a politeness marker, it is properly used in requests (*Could you help me?*). The use of *could* in future or hypothetical situations, however, is

more problematic. The meaning of *might* is very elusive and students are not comfortable using it, even at B2 level. *May* is usually understood to express permission, and learners rarely use it as an epistemic marker.

4.2.2 *I think in disagreement*

It is interesting that structures beginning with *I think* were found both in strong and weak disagreement. While many authors list *I think* as a hedge in expressing politeness (Holmes 1990; Aijmer 1997; Kärkkäinen 2003; Baumgarten/House 2010), it can also convey the meaning of confidence and persuasion, in which case it does not mitigate the illocution force of the speech act. It is this latter use of *I think* that is pervasive in the speech acts produced by Macedonian learners of English. We would like to point out that sentence-initial *I think* is used to intensify rather than soften disagreement. It is often accompanied by intensifiers and strong and medium modal verbs⁶.

The use of *I think* seems more tentative only when used in expressing agreement with reservations, but such examples were rare. We noticed only two examples formulated with *I think* and one example when the interrogative form *don't you think* was used after the marker *but*. There was also one example in which *think* was used with multiple softening devices, including the inclusive pronoun *we*, *maybe* and *could*:

(12) Maybe we could think about another place and another day.

The things that we discussed in this part comply with the metaphor for B2 level in the CEFR, “having been progressing slowly but steadily across the intermediate plateau, the learner finds he has arrived somewhere things look different, he/she acquires a new perspective, can look around him/her in a new way” (CEFR 2001: 35).

5 CONCLUSIONS

The goal of this paper was to investigate how the CEFR can be used as a tool for measuring foreign learners’ development of pragmatic competence. The list of functions and their exponents, as well as the explanations on sociolinguistic competence, enabled us to draw valuable conclusions about some behaviours of our learners.

Our research had several limitations: the instrument that was used elicited written responses by the respondents, whereas oral responses would have been more appropriate; it focused on only one of the levels and only one of the functions listed in the CEFR; and our respondents all belonged to the same group. Still, we are convinced that this kind of analysis can enable examiners, material designers, administrators, etc. to work towards monitoring the pragmatic development of their learners.

Thus used, the CEFR and the T-series are useful both for native speaker and non-native speaker teachers. Native speaker teachers have intuition about the language, but the principles that are at play are not always obvious and they need instructions for giving

6 Based on their gradient and scalar strength of meaning, Huddleston and Pullum (2002: 175–177) classify modal verbs as strong, medium, and weak. Hence, *must* is strong, *should* is medium and *may* is weak.

viable explanations. Non-native speaker teachers, meanwhile, provide instructions for appropriate understanding of the situations and communication in a foreign culture.

Finally, we would like to raise two issues that we believe are important for further consideration. One is development of further research across all levels with the aim of better understanding the processes governing the acquisition of pragmatic competence. The other is developing research on what teaching methods and techniques should be employed to facilitate the development of pragmatic competence. Possible points of departure for both are given in the CEFR (2001: 154).

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Abstract
CONNECTING DEVELOPMENT OF PRAGMATIC
COMPETENCE WITH THE CEFR

The aim of this paper is to look at how The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) can facilitate research of pragmatic competence development. Central to developing pragmatic competence are the language functions (or speech acts) and the conventions of politeness. In particular, we focus on how Macedonian learners of English at B2 level express their disagreement, and we put their performance in relation to the functions and the politeness maxims postulated in *Vantage* (van Ek/Trim 2001) and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (2001). Data for the analysis was compiled by means of a Discourse Completion Task (DCT) consisting of nine tasks which required the students to express an opposing view to the one given in the tasks. In our analysis, we classified disagreement as strong, weak, direct and hints. We focus on the linguistic means that learners used to express and to modify their disagreement. In particular, we discuss the use of lexical and syntactic modifiers, putting more emphasis on the use of modal verbs and *I think*. We end the paper with a conclusion that the CEFR and the accompanying books provide a valuable tool not only because they list the exponents of the functions, but also because they explain the principles that these exponents are motivated by. Finally, we raise two issues that we believe are important for further consideration. One is development of further research across all levels with the aim of better understanding the processes governing the acquisition of pragmatic competence. The other is developing research on what teaching methods and techniques should be employed to facilitate it.

Key words: CEFR, pragmatic competence, language functions, politeness, disagreement.

Povzetek
RAZVOJ PRAGMATIČNE KOMPETENCE V POVEZAVI S SEJO

Cilj prispevka je raziskati, kako lahko Skupni evropski okvir za jezike olajša raziskovanje razvoja pragmatične zmožnosti. Osrednjo vlogo v razvoju te zmožnosti imajo jezikovne funkcije (ali jezikovna dejanja) in vljudnostne konvencije. V raziskavi se osredotočamo na makedonske govorce, ki so pri učenju angleščine na ravni B2; opazovali smo, na kakšen način izražajo nestrinjanje in njihovo jezikovno performanco povezali s funkcijami in vljudnostnimi načeli, kot so definirana na višji ravni sporazumevalnega praga, *Vantage* (van Ek/Trim 2001) in Skupni evropski jezikovni okvir. Korpus za analizo je bil sestavljen z metodo *discourse completion task* (DCT) in je vseboval devet nalog, v katerih smo od študentov zahtevali, da izrazijo mnenje, nasprotno mnenju, izraženemu v nalogah. V analizi smo nestrinjanje razvrstili v različne kategorije: močno, šibko, direktno in namige. Osredotočamo se na jezikovna sredstva, ki so jih študentje uporabili, da so izrazili in omilili svoje nestrinjanje, še posebej na leksikalna in sintaktična sredstva, modalne glagole in glagol *mislim*. Članek sklenemo z mislijo,

da so SEJO in spremljevalni dokumenti dragocena orodja, ne le zato, ker razvrščajo eksponente teh funkcij, pač pa tudi zato, ker razlagajo, kako ti eksponenti nastanejo. Na koncu opozorimo še na dve zadevi, pomembni za prihodnje razprave: prva je nadaljnje raziskovanje na vseh ravneh, s ciljem boljšega razumevanja procesov, ki upravljajo nadziranje pragmatične kompetence, druga pa razvijanje raziskav na področju učnih metod in tehnik, ki lahko omogočijo usvajanje te kompetence.

Ključne besede: SEJO, pragmatična kompetenca, jezikovne funkcije, nestrinjanje.

APPENDIX

Discourse Completion Test

*Thank you for participating in this questionnaire.
The information you provide will be used for study purposes only.*

Native Language _____

Sex: F M | **Age:** 18–24 25–34 35–44 45 and over

Directions: Imagine yourself in the following situations. Please disagree with the given statements. Write down what you would say in real life.

1. You are having coffee with some of your colleagues. You are talking about the new software that is being introduced in your department. A colleague of yours doubts its practicality and says, “I wonder if it is worth the time and money. It will take us ages to learn how to use it. Besides, I wonder if it is reliable at all.” However, you disagree. In response you say:
2. You are at a meeting discussing the next training. A colleague of yours says, “Why don’t we hold the training on company premises during the first weekend next month?” You don’t like the idea at all. You work long hours during the week and you don’t want to spend any of your weekends at work. And the company premises are not suitable for any kind of training. You believe you need a friendlier and more pleasant environment. In response, you say:
3. In a meeting on introduction of modern technology, one of your colleagues says, “The so-called modern technology is endangering the environment.” You don’t like his/her attitude. In response you say:
4. You and your friend are watching a programme on women in society. Your friend says, “Ah, women are not reliable at work. They spend too much time gossiping and worrying about other things. And they are too busy at home.” You disagree. In response you say:
5. You are having coffee with some friends, relaxing and discussing various topics. Someone starts talking about vacations and says, “For me, South East Asia is the best vacation destination in the world.” In response you say:
6. You are out shopping with a friend. She picks a sweater and says, “Isn’t it lovely. I hope they have it in my size.” You don’t think the sweater suits her. In response you say:
7. People in your company have a 25 day vacation per year. Your boss thinks it is too long and wants to shorten it to 20 days. He says, “We need to discuss paid leave. I’d like to propose a 20 day vacation per year.” You are against it. You say:

8. Your manager questions the accuracy of the report you submit. S/he says, "I don't think this information is correct." However, you are sure it is. You have consulted the company database and you have also checked it with several of your colleagues. In response you say:
9. At the end of the semester, you have to hand in a paper. You have found an interesting topic and have done some literature review. When talking to your professor about it, s/he says, "Would you consider a different topic?" In response you say: