



## Recognition and Production of English Conventional Expressions in Relation to Academic Achievement\*

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### ABSTRACT

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This study aims to examine how EFL learners' recognition and production of English conventional expressions are related to their overall English language learning achievement as measured by course grades. To this end, this study employed a recognition task and a production task implemented by 126 Korean and international university students. Analysis of individual conventional expressions showed that higher-level students scored much higher than their lower-level counterparts in recognizing 12 of 13 conventional expressions. Higher-level students also demonstrated a greater production ability than their lower-level counterparts in 8 of 13 expressions. The higher-level students' superiority to lower-level students was confirmed by their overall recognition and production scores. Another noticeable finding was that learners performed better on the recognition task than on the production task regardless of their language achievement levels. Closer examination revealed that there was a positive relationship between recognition and production of conventional expressions for the total number of students and for lower-level students. Based on these results, this study provides helpful suggestions for enhancing pragmatic knowledge of conventional expressions.

### I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of conventional expressions, which is used interchangeably with pragmatic routines, routine formulae, formulaic language, and situation-bound utterances, refers to those sequences that are used frequently by speakers in certain social situations (Bardovi-Harlig, 2009). Conventional expressions or pragmatic routines are (a) at least two morphemes in length, (b) fluently articulated and nonhesitant, (c) used repeatedly and always in the same form, (d) situationally dependent, and (e) community-wide in use (Bardovi-Harlig, 2012; Bardovi-Harlig & Su, 2021).

Knowledge of conventional expressions is deemed an essential part of a speaker's pragmalinguistic competence, and knowledge of their use and the contexts in which they occur is part of sociopragmatic competence (Bardovi-Harlig, 2012). This is in line with Taguchi's (2013) point that L2 learners' appropriate and fluent use of conventional expressions is an important part of their L2 communicative competence. The literature identifies many benefits of using conventional expressions: (a) making a language learner appear native-like, (b) allowing for fluency in production and faster processing, (c) saving the speaker planning time that can be used where it is needed more (Bar-

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dovi-Harlig, 2010). These points taken together suggest that receptive and productive control of routine formulae is highly beneficial to L2 learners, given that it facilitates communication with other language users (Roever, 2012).

Despite the importance of knowledge of conventional expressions, relatively few studies in L2 pragmatics have directly focused on conventional expressions (Bardovi-Harlig, 2018; Bardovi-Harlig & Su, 2021). In particular, little attention has been paid to learners' recognition of conventional expressions (Bardovi-Harlig, 2010) and far less attention to the relationship between the recognition and production of conventional expressions (Bardovi-Harlig, 2009). The paucity of such research also seems apparent in Korean EFL contexts in that only a limited number of studies (e.g. Shin, 2022) have documented Korean EFL students' recognition and production of conventional expressions. More seriously, to date there has been little to no research into how learners' recognition and production of conventional expressions are related to their academic achievement. This indicates a clear need for further research on this issue.

As a response to the call for further research into conventional expressions, the current study seeks to explore to what extent EFL learners' academic achievement is related to their ability to recognize and produce conventional expressions. In order to attain the research purpose, the study is guided by the following research questions:

- 1) Do nonnative speakers of different academic achievement levels exhibit different abilities in the overall recognition and production of 13 English conventional expressions?
- 2) Are there any differences between the higher- and lower-level groups of students in their abilities to recognize and produce each individual conventional expression?
- 3) Are there any differences between the overall recognition and production of the 13 conventional expressions by the higher- and lower-level groups of students, respectively?
- 4) Is there any relationship between the overall recognition and production of the 13 conventional expressions by the higher- and lower-level groups, respectively?

These research questions focused particular attention on academic achievement for the investigation of learners' recognition and production of conventional expressions. Academic achievement refers to the amount of knowledge acquired by learners in a particular course (Winne & Nesbit, 2010). In the present study it has much to do with overall language attainment in a task-based "English Teaching Methodology" course. It is significant for the following reasons. First, a high measurable level of academic achievement is a desired goal in a course for learners. If a learner is said to have a high level of academic achievement in the task-based English Teaching Methodology course, it is taken to mean that he/she has attained a high

ability in English, both in receptive and productive skills. Second, academic achievement in this study demonstrated facility with a wide range of language tasks, all of which are vital components for the mastery of a foreign language. Judging from these characteristics, academic achievement in this study is akin to language proficiency, which encompasses a language learners' communicative abilities, knowledge systems, and language skills (Harsch, 2017). This claim is backed up by Pawlak's (2020) position that proficiency could be equated with course grades. These characteristics taken together indicate that in this study academic achievement is related to language performance and pragmatic performance in one way or another. In this sense, it is worthwhile to examine how L2 learners' acquisition of conventional expressions is related to their level of academic achievement.

Learners differ not only in their learning processes but also in their measured levels of academic achievement. It is assumed that the learners who are seen as having different levels of academic achievement may differ in their abilities to recognize and produce conventional expressions. This supposition stimulated the present study to probe how learners' recognition and production of conventional expressions are related to their academic achievement. Understanding this aspect of language acquisition will help teachers to prepare effective instructions on conventional expressions for the students at different levels of academic achievement.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 1. Learning Environment and Study Abroad

Research on conventional expressions has been undertaken predominantly by Bardovi-Harlig from different angles. One of the most significant variables affecting learners' knowledge of conventional expressions was reported to be language learning environment. Bardovi-Harlig and Su (2021) underlined the significance of learning environment, documenting the superiority of the ESL over the EFL context for the development of conventional expressions. In a similar vein, Roever (2005) reported that learners who had exposure to the ESL context scored much higher than learners who did not in their knowledge of pragmatic routines. In another research, Roever (2012) further showed that learners with further residence in English-speaking countries led to further improvement in the knowledge of pragmatic routines.

Some other studies have paid considerable attention to the effect of study-abroad experience on the use of conventional expressions. As indicated widely in the L2 pragmatics literature, study-abroad experience had a strong impact on the knowledge of conventional expressions. In this regard, Taguchi (2009) found that Japanese students with study-abroad experience were able to comprehend pragmatic routines more accurately than those without it. This was in keeping with Alcón-Soler and Sánchez-Hernán-

dez's (2017) finding that learners' knowledge of pragmatic routines increased during a semester study abroad, particularly in terms of recognition of pragmatic routines.

However, Bardovi-Harlig and Bastos (2011) reported that the length of stay in the target language country had no significant effect on either recognition or production of conventional expressions. Instead, they highlighted the importance of intensity of interaction with native speakers in the recognition and production of conventional expressions. These findings were consonant with those reported by Barron (2003) and DeBoer (2015), both of whom demonstrated that the mere exposure to target language communities was not sufficient for acquiring conventional expressions and that intensity of interaction had significant effects on the production of conventional expressions. Further evidence to support the significance of intensity of interaction was provided by Sánchez-Hernández and Alcón-Soler (2018) in Brazilian ESL settings, who indicated that the development of pragmatic routines was influenced by both sociocultural adaptation and intensity of interaction, interaction being the main predictor of pragmatic gains in the study-abroad context. On the whole, these findings suggest that more intense interactions with native speakers play a pivotal role in increasing knowledge of pragmatic routines.

## 2. Cultural or Language Background

There have been only a handful of studies which addressed the role of cultural or language background in the acquisition of conventional expressions. Bardovi-Harlig et al. (2008) examined conventional expressions of thanking, apologizing, and refusing realized by four language groups: Arabic, Chinese, Korean, and Japanese ESL students. They yielded some remarkable findings. The four language-specific groups responded similarly to situations with respect to the use of conventional expressions of apologies and refusals. However, significant differences emerged among the four language groups in the use of conventional expressions of thanking since the Arabic group robustly used apologies in one of the thanking contexts, but the Japanese and Chinese groups did so at a much lower rate.

A similar line of research was carried out by Sánchez-Hernández and Alcón-Soler (2019). They focused on three groups of ESL learners from Brazil, China and Turkey in their recognition and production of pragmatic routines and revealed that Brazilian and Chinese students showed a higher ability to recognize pragmatic routines than Turkish learners, whereas Brazilian students outperformed Chinese and Turkish students in the production of routines. These results suggest that ESL learners from different cultural backgrounds differ from each other in their ability to recognize and produce pragmatic routines.

Another area of research deserving our attention was the relationship between conventional expressions and utterance length by native and nonnative speakers. In this connection, Bardovi-Harlig et al. (2010) found that the

learners did not use significantly more words or semantic formulas than the native speakers, and that no significant differences were found in responses that contain conventional expressions between native and nonnative speaker groups. These findings were in stark contrast with those yielded by many other studies (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1986; Kecskes, 2000, 2003), which showed that nonnative speakers sounded more verbose in situations where native speakers used short conventional expressions. Nonnative speakers' verbosity was also evident in Korean EFL classrooms. Y. Park (2016) showed that the Korean students displayed pragmalinguistically infelicitous utterances and more verbosity or utterance length, compared to their native speaker counterparts.

## 3. L2 Proficiency and Language Achievement

Learners' English proficiency has gained increasing interest as a variable affecting the development of conventional expressions. Many studies reported positive proficiency effects. For example, Bardovi-Harlig (2010) revealed that learners were increasingly able to distinguish conventional expressions from grammatical but nonconventional expressions as proficiency increased. Moreover, Tajeddin et al. (2017) found in Persian EFL settings that advanced learners scored higher than intermediate learners in the correct responses in pragmatic routines, who in turn showed higher mean scores than pre-intermediate learners. Some other studies went one step further to examine both recognition and production of conventional expressions. For instance, DeBoer (2015) revealed that L2 proficiency had a significant positive effect on both recognition and production of conventional expressions. Along the same line, Bardovi-Harlig (2009) found that higher proficient learners recognized more conventional expressions than lower proficient ones.

Contrary to the above studies, other research showed no significant proficiency effects on the recognition and production of conventional expressions. Roever (2005, 2012) revealed little influence of proficiency on the knowledge of pragmatic routines in EFL contexts. Alcón-Soler and Sánchez-Hernández (2017) also found no association between proficiency level and knowledge of routines in ESL classrooms. To be more specific, although learners' knowledge of pragmatic routines increased during a semester abroad, particularly in terms of recognition, the three proficiency groups did not show significant differences in their learning of pragmatic routines.

Interestingly enough, some research reported different proficiency effects on the recognition and production of conventional expressions. Bardovi-Harlig and Bastos (2011) found that proficiency did not have a significant effect on recognition but had a significant influence on the production of conventional expressions in that learners produced more conventional expressions as proficiency levels increased. Exactly the opposite was true in Sánchez-Hernández and Alcón-Soler's (2019) investigation, which indicated that proficiency had a positive influence

on the recognition of pragmatic routines but no significant influence on the production of routines. This was in congruity with Bardovi-Harlig's (2008) research, which reported that proficiency does not significantly affect the production of pragmatic routines.

From another perspective, Taguchi (2013) combined proficiency and study-abroad experience as a variable affecting the production of pragmatic routines. Her results revealed a significant effect of proficiency combined with study-abroad experience on the production of pragmatic routines. The previous studies discussed hitherto failed to provide conclusive evidence of the proficiency effects on conventional expressions, given that some studies revealed significant proficiency effects, but others did not.

To date, no research has documented facility with conventional expressions vis-à-vis language learning achievement. To be more precise, although language achievement has been without doubt a popular variable for the investigation of many research themes, especially in the use of language learning strategies (e.g. Habok et al., 2022), it has paid scant attention to facility with conventional expressions. This motivated the present study to examine the role of language learning achievement in the recognition and production of conventional expressions.

#### 4. Instructional Effects

Very few studies have explored the effect of instructions on the acquisition of conventional expressions. In this line of investigation, House (1996) examined the effects of explicit metapragmatic instruction on the use and functional distribution of pragmatic routines. His study yielded some important results, showing that metapragmatic instruction is essential in counteracting negative pragmatic transfer and promoting the use of a more interpersonally potent repertoire of different discourse lubricants, discourse strategies, and speech act realization, thus increasing learners' pragmatic fluency.

On the other hand, Bardovi-Harlig et al. (2015) examined the effect of instruction on the acquisition of pragmatic routines used in academic discussion. They revealed that production of both speech acts and target conventional expressions increased significantly in the experimental condition, whereas the opposite was the case in the control group. This clearly indicates that instruction had a positive effect on the use of conventional expressions.

The previous studies on conventional expressions considered here have paid attention to the potential roles of study-abroad experience, intensity of interaction with native speakers, and L2 proficiency, among others, in the acquisition of conventional expressions. They, however, revealed mixed results, with some findings reporting positive effects but others showing the opposite. These inconclusive findings call for further investigation into this research theme.

### III. METHOD

#### 1. Participants

A total of 126 EFL English major university students took part in this research. The native language of the participants was mostly Korean ( $n = 113, 89.7\%$ ), with a few other native language users ( $n = 13, 10.3\%$ ): 9 Uzbek, 1 Kazakh, 1 Vietnamese, and 2 Chinese. These students were enrolled in the course "English Teaching Methodology" at a 4-year university in the Gyongsang area of Korea. Demographic information of the participants was detailed in Table 1.

TABLE 1  
Distribution of the Participants

Variable	High group		Low group		Total		
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	
Gender	Male	13	19.1	29	50.0	42	33.3
	Female	55	80.9	29	50.0	84	66.7
Academic year	1	1	1.5	-	-	1	0.8
	2	46	67.6	30	51.7	76	60.3
	3	11	16.2	16	27.6	27	21.4
	4	10	14.7	12	20.7	22	17.5
Major	English major	61	89.7	48	82.8	109	86.5
	Double major	7	10.3	10	17.2	17	13.5
English study hours per week	Mean/SD	7.16	6.95	5.84	5.09	6.56	6.18
Study-abroad experience	Yes	9	13.2	11	19.0	20	15.9
	No	59	86.8	47	81.0	106	84.1
Length of residence	Mean/SD	3.33	3.61	4.18	2.75	3.80	3.11
Total		68	100	58	100	126	100

Length of residence = The duration of residence in English-speaking countries by the students who had study-abroad experience

Since learners' academic achievement was a core variable in this study, the participants were divided into two achievement groups: higher- and lower-level students. This division was based upon the median split of the final achievement grades on the "English Teaching Methodology" course. As this course dealt with four language skills coupled with grammar and vocabulary skills, it was related to the current research theme in one way or another. To put it differently, the course objectives stress function over content.

The final academic achievement scores were calculated on the basis of student performance on tests and classroom tasks. The midterm and final exams included many language tasks, which required the students to use English to complete them. The classroom tasks included listening, role plays, discourse completion, reading, essay writing, grammar recognition, and vocabulary tasks. The students' performance scores on the tests and tasks were added, and the median score was calculated to divide the participants

into two groups. This grading system was adopted from Pintrich and De Groot (1990). The median split adopted for this study has been widely used for the division of proficiency groups (e.g., Allen & Mills, 2014; Kepner, 1991). The median of the participants' achievement scores was 68 out of the 90 points. Hence, those with a score above the median were placed into the higher-level group ( $n = 68$ , 53.9%) whereas those with a score below the median into the lower-level group ( $n = 58$ , 46.1%).

In terms of gender, females ( $n = 84$ , 66.7%) outnumbered males ( $n = 42$ , 33.3%). A large number of participants were sophomores ( $n = 76$ , 60.3%), who were followed by juniors ( $n = 27$ , 21.4%), who were in turn followed by seniors ( $n = 22$ , 17.5%). However, there was only one freshman (0.8%) for the reason that this course was offered to sophomores through seniors. Most of the participants were English majors ( $n = 109$ , 86.5%) with a few students ( $n = 17$ , 13.5%) doing a double major in English and another field. With respect to English study hours per week, the higher-level group ( $M = 7.16$ ) tended to spend more hours studying English per week than the lower-level group ( $M = 5.84$ ). A limited number of participants ( $n = 20$ , 15.9%) had study-abroad experience with a majority of the students ( $n = 106$ , 84.1%) having no such experience. Mean length of residence in English-wwas 3.33 months in the higher-level group and 4.18 months in the lower-level group.

## 2. Instrument and Procedure

In order to collect data, this study employed a modified version of Bardovi-Harlig's (2009) audio-based recognition and production tasks and Roever's (2012) task. Bardovi-Harlig (2009) developed the recognition and production tasks in several steps: (a) observation of conversations, (b) scenario construction, (c) piloting, (d) further revision and culling of expressions, (e) repiloting, and (f) selection of final contexts and expressions. Hence, the present study adopted a similar procedure to Bardovi-Harlig's (2009). Prior to the two main tasks, the participants were asked to provide their demographic information such as gender, academic year, major, English study hours per week, study-abroad experience, and nationality.

This study selected 13 conventional expressions from Bardovi-Harlig's (2009) task and Roever's (2012) task. These 13 items were used not only in the recognition task but also in the production task to draw a comparison between recognition scores and production scores. To put it differently, the study used a total of 26 task items, the half of them (13 items) involving the recognition task and the other half (13 items) pertaining to the production task.

The conventional expressions covered 9 initiating utterances (item 1 through item 9) and 4 responding utterances (item 10 through item 13). The former type refers to expressions used to initiate an interaction, whereas the latter pertains to those used to respond to an interlocutor's turn (Bardovi-Harlig, 2009). These expressions are listed in Table 2.

TABLE 2

A List of Target Conventional Expressions

Conventional expression	
1. Be careful!	8. For here or to go?
2. Can I get you anything?	9. Stay tuned.
3. Excuse the mess.	10. That works for me.
4. Can I get a ride?	11. I'm just looking.
5. Watch out!	12. I'd love to.
6. I gotta go.	13. Thanks for having me.
7. Do you think you could make it?	

These conventional expressions involved a wide array of speech act behaviors such as requesting, thanking, apologizing, inviting, accepting, and warning, among others. Both the recognition and production tasks were digitally recorded by a single native speaker of American English (a male from Oregon with 26 years' English teaching experience). There was a 7 second interval between each task item, following Bardovi-Harlig's (2009) procedure.

Unlike Bardovi-Harlig's (2009) research, which allowed the participants to hear each task item twice, the present study allowed them to hear each item just once largely because conventional expressions occur frequently in daily conversation. As noted earlier, this study used the aural mode of the tasks rather than the written mode for the following reasons: (a) It gives a more accurate picture of the linguistic resources available to learners; (b) It demonstrates better ecological validity by matching the mode of real-world tasks; (c) Conventional expressions are used in conversation (Bardovi-Harlig, 2010; Bardovi-Harlig & Su, 2021). The participants were given detailed guidelines on how to implement the two tasks, together with an example for each task to minimize misunderstanding and confusion. The two tasks were administered during the fall semester of 2021.

### 1) The Audio-based Recognition Task

Recognition was operationalized as the determination of how often participants heard conventional expressions (Bardovi-Harlig, 2009; Bardovi-Harlig & Bastos, 2011). The recognition task was presented to the participants aurally. On receipt of an answer sheet, each of the participants was guided to listen carefully to the instructions on how to complete the task and decide how often he or she hear a conventional expression provided by the native speaker of English in the audio recording. The detailed instructions provided were as follows:

If you hear the following conventional expression often, circle "I often hear this." If you hear the following expression less often, circle "I sometimes hear this." If you never hear the following expression, circle "I never hear this." (Bardovi-Harlig, 2009, p. 762)

Before the main task began, the participants were given an example as follows: How often do you hear the following expression: “Can I leave a message?” On the answer sheet, there were three options for each item: (1) I never hear this; (2) I sometimes hear this; (3) I often hear this. These three options were written on the answer sheet in Korean to avoid misunderstanding. Target conventional expressions were, however, not indicated on the answer sheet mainly because they were delivered by the recorded voice via a computer. To put it differently, the participants were required to listen to the recorded voice and choose one of the three options involving the extent to which they hear the conventional expression provided aurally.

## 2) The Audio-based Production Task

As stated earlier, the 13 conventional expressions used in the recognition task were also employed in the production task to make a comparison between the two tasks. However, there were differences between the two tasks. Unlike the recognition task, which provided only the target conventional expressions, the production task provided 13 scenarios, each of which was designed to elicit a relevant conventional expression from the respondents. The 13 scenarios appear in the Appendix. The production task included 9 scenarios regarding initiating expressions and 4 scenarios involving responding expressions. The initiating scenarios focused on what one of the characters in each scenario would probably say in the given situation, whereas the responding scenarios focused on what the character in each scenario would probably reply in the given situation (Bardovi-Harlig, 2009). Bardovi-Harlig’s (2009) original version of the production task focused on what the task performer (“you”) would say in the given situation, but the modified version used in the current study focused on what the character (e.g. “Tom”) in the scenario would probably say in the situation. This approach was chosen for the reason that this production task was intended to elicit knowledge of commonly used conventional expressions rather than the task performer’s preference (Roever, 2005). An example of the scenarios for the production task is presented below:

Tom calls his friend, Mary. Her roommate answers the phone and tells him that she is not in. He would like the roommate to tell her something.  
What would Tom probably say in this situation?

The expected conventional expression in this situation is “Can I leave a message?” At this point, it is vital to note that the production task was given to the participants prior to the recognition task mainly because the earlier provision of the latter task would have biased the results of the former task. In other words, if the recognition task had been provided prior to the production task, the learners’ exposure to conventional expressions in the recognition task might have influenced their performance in the production task.

## 3. Data Analysis

### 1) Analysis of the Recognition Task

The recognition task was scored in two ways, as was done by Bardovi-Harlig (2009). First, recognition scores for each item ranged from 0 to 2 points. When a respondent chose “I never hear this,” he/she received 0. When he/she chose “I sometimes hear this,” he/she got 1 point. When he/she chose “I often hear this,” he/she received 2 points. Scores were added within language achievement levels for a single item and divided by the number of respondents for a mean level score (Bardovi-Harlig, 2009). As scores were calculated in this manner, the maximum score per item was 2 points. This scoring system was developed to facilitate comparison between the higher- and lower-level groups.

Second, an additional score was calculated to facilitate comparison between the recognition and production scores (Bardovi-Harlig, 2009). This scoring system centered on the binary distinction between the case where a respondent hears the given conventional expression and the case where he/she does not. In other words, if he/she selected “I never hear this,” he/she got the recognition score of 0, but if he/she selected “I sometimes or often hear this,” he/she got the recognition score of 1 point. This means that the response with “sometimes” and that with “often” received the same score (1 point). The maximum score per item calculated in this way was 1 point.

### 2) Analysis of the Production Task

The production task yielded a total of 1,638 responses (13 scenarios multiplied by 126 participants). Unlike the recognition data, the production data were evaluated by two raters, both of whom were professors in the field of TESOL (one male and one female), each having more than 15 years’ English teaching experience. Now that the production data exhibited variability, which took different forms, it was of importance to use two raters.

Bardovi-Harlig (2009) noted that variability seems to be built into certain conventional expressions. Following her criteria, allowances were made for minor grammatical errors. For example, although native speakers usually say *I’m just looking*, noncontracted copula (*I am just looking*) was also accepted in this study. Variations in tense, however, were not admitted, as was done by Bardovi-Harlig (2009). Although native speakers consider *Can I get a ride?* as a more polite expression, *Can you give me a ride?* was also taken to be an appropriate expression. As Bardovi-Harlig (2009) noted, *Don’t go away* was also accepted as an alternative to *Stay tuned*. In addition, all other minor deviations or alternative forms were admitted in this study.

Production scores consisted of 0 point (inappropriate or no response) and 1 point (appropriate response). Production rates in percentages for each learner group were calculated for each expression ( $[\text{number of uses of targeted expression} \div \text{number of respondents}] \times 100$ ) (Bardovi-Harlig, 2009).

**TABLE 3**

Inter-Rater Reliability for the Production Data

Item	Coefficient
Item 1: Be careful!	.975
Item 2: Can I get you anything?	.890
Item 3: Excuse the mess.	.728
Item 4: Can I get a ride?	.889
Item 5: Watch out!	.920
Item 6: I gotta go.	.810
Item 7: Do you think you could make it?	.850
Item 8: For here or to go?	.937
Item 9: Stay tuned	.959
Item 10: That works for me.	.730
Item 11: I'm just looking.	.842
Item 12: I'd love to.	.700
Item 13: Thanks for having me.	.970

The analysis of the data was carried out by using IBM SPSS Statistics 25. Cohen's Kappa coefficient was computed to measure inter-rater reliability for the production data, as revealed in Table 3.

As all the Kappa values were 0.7 or above, they were indicative of acceptable, good or very good agreement between the two raters. Any discrepancies between the two raters were resolved through discussion until a consensus was reached.

Referential statistical tests were used to answer the research questions. An independent samples *t*-test was performed to determine whether there are any differences between the higher- and lower-level groups in the recognition of each individual conventional expression and whether there are any differences between the two groups in the overall recognition of 13 conventional expressions and in the overall production of the same expressions, respectively. A Pearson's chi-square test was run to assess whether there are any differences between the higher- and lower-level groups in the appropriate production of each individual conventional expression. On the other hand, a paired samples *t*-test was used to identify any differences between the overall recognition score and the overall production score obtained by each learner group. Lastly, correlation coefficients were calculated to gauge whether there is any relationship between the overall recognition and production scores obtained by each group.

#### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The first research question pertains to whether there are any differences between the higher- and lower-level groups in the overall recognition of the 13 conventional expressions on the one hand and in the overall production of the same expressions on the other. The results of the independent samples *t*-test are provided in Table 4.

**TABLE 4**

Overall Recognition and Production Scores by Academic Achievement

	Group	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Overall Recognition	High	68	20.44	2.62	4.420	.000***
	Low	58	16.81	5.77		
Overall Production	High	68	4.29	2.22	5.985	.000***
	Low	58	2.34	1.40		

\*\*\**p* < .001

As shown above, the differences between the higher- and lower-level groups were statistically significant in the overall recognition of the 13 expressions, with the former group (*M* = 20.44) being superior to the latter (*M* = 16.81) (*t* = 4.442, *p* = .000). This suggests that the higher-level students were more familiar with the 13 conventional expressions than the lower-level students. Exactly the same was true for the overall production scores in the sense that the higher-level students (*M* = 4.29) outperformed the lower-level students (*M* = 2.34) (*t* = 5.985, *p* = .000) in their ability to produce the 13 expressions. These results clearly indicate that the learners' language learning achievement was a crucial consideration in the overall recognition and production of the 13 conventional expressions.

Another research issue worthy of closer consideration was whether there are any differences between the higher- and lower-level groups in their recognition of each individual conventional expression. An independent samples *t*-test was run to answer this inquiry. The statistical results are presented in Table 5.

**TABLE 5**

Recognition of the Individual Items by Academic Achievement

Item	High group		Low group		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Item 1	1.93	0.26	1.78	0.50	2.073	.041*
Item 2	1.66	0.54	1.33	0.76	2.811	.006**
Item 3	0.74	0.73	0.48	0.68	2.003	.047*
Item 4	1.69	0.50	1.38	0.67	2.923	.004**
Item 5	1.97	0.17	1.66	0.64	3.663	.001**
Item 6	1.71	0.55	1.38	0.70	2.889	.005**
Item 7	1.65	0.51	1.33	0.73	2.785	.006**
Item 8	1.71	0.55	1.38	0.79	2.649	.009**
Item 9	1.10	0.69	0.95	0.78	1.176	.242
Item 10	1.22	0.69	0.88	0.75	2.661	.009**
Item 11	1.74	0.48	1.48	0.60	2.586	.011*
Item 12	1.96	0.21	1.74	0.55	2.815	.006**
Item 13	1.38	0.62	1.05	0.78	2.639	.009**

\**p* < .05, \*\**p* < .01

There were statistically significant differences between the higher- and lower-level groups in the recognition of 12 individual conventional expressions except item 9 (*Stay tuned*). Specifically, the higher-level students scored much higher than the lower-level students in the recognition of 12 out of 13 items. Items with the greatest difference between the mean values in the two different groups included item 2 (*Can I get you anything?:* high group ( $M = 1.66$ ) vs. low group ( $M = 1.33$ )), item 6 (*I gotta go:* high group ( $M = 1.71$ ) vs. low group ( $M = 1.38$ )), item 8 (*For here or to go?:* high group ( $M = 1.71$ ) vs. low group ( $M = 1.38$ )), item 10 (*That works for me:* high group ( $M = 1.22$ ) vs. low group ( $M = 0.88$ )), and item 13 (*Thanks for having me:* high group ( $M = 1.38$ ) vs. low group ( $M = 1.05$ )). These results taken together indicate that the higher-level students were more familiar with each of the 12 conventional expressions than their lower-level counterparts. This finding is compatible with Bardovi-Harlig's (2009) finding that higher proficient students recognized more conventional expressions than lower proficient ones.

However, both the higher-level students ( $M = 1.10$ ) and the lower-level students ( $M = 0.95$ ) had a low level of familiarity with *Stay tuned*. This may be due to the fact that this expression is not normally used in interpersonal communication but in TV or radio programs to ask people to keep watching a TV show or listening to a radio broadcast. Hence, the students in EFL contexts do not have many opportunities to be exposed to this expression.

Another research question as to whether there are any differences between the higher- and lower-level students in their production of individual conventional expressions was examined using Pearson's chi-square tests. The results are tabulated in Table 6.

As displayed in Table 6, 8 items out of 13 items showed statistically significant differences between the two language achievement groups. To be specific, the higher-level students were able to produce 8 conventional expressions more successfully than the lower-level students. Out of the 8 items, item 12 showed the greatest difference between the mean values in the two learner groups (*I'd love to:* high group ( $M = 67.6\%$ ) vs. low group ( $M = 32.8\%$ )), which was followed by item 10 (*That works for me:* high group ( $M = 54.4\%$ ) vs. low group ( $M = 25.9\%$ )), which was in turn followed by item 2 (*Can I get you anything?:* high group ( $M = 45.6\%$ ) vs. low group ( $M = 19.0\%$ )).

Taken together, these findings suggest that the higher-level students were more capable of producing each of the 8 conventional expressions than the lower-level students. This means that the former group gave more appropriate responses in the use of the 8 expressions than the latter group. This finding concurs with Tajeddin et al.'s (2017) finding that the more proficient the learners were, the higher mean scores they earned in the correct use of pragmatic routines. The results of the learners' recognition and production of conventional expressions, as displayed in Table 5 and Table 6, respectively, demonstrated that the higher-level students had overwhelming superiority over

**TABLE 6**  
Production of the Individual Items  
by Academic Achievement

Item		High		Low		Total		$\chi^2$	p
		n	%	n	%	n	%		
Item 1	No	56	82.4	46	79.3	102	81.0	0.188	.665
	Yes	12	17.6	12	20.7	24	19.0		
Item 2	No	37	54.4	47	81.0	84	66.7	9.984	.002**
	Yes	31	45.6	11	19.0	42	33.3		
Item 3	No	54	79.4	54	93.1	108	85.7	4.792	.029*
	Yes	14	20.6	4	6.9	18	14.3		
Item 4	No	26	38.2	37	63.8	63	50.0	8.178	.004**
	Yes	42	61.8	21	36.2	63	50.0		
Item 5	No	60	88.2	52	89.7	112	88.9	0.064	.800
	Yes	8	11.8	6	10.3	14	11.1		
Item 6	No	41	60.3	37	63.8	78	61.9	0.163	.687
	Yes	27	39.7	21	36.2	48	38.1		
Item 7	No	50	73.5	52	89.7	102	81.0	5.279	.022*
	Yes	18	26.5	6	10.3	24	19.0		
Item 8	No	61	89.7	56	96.6	117	92.9	2.212	.137
	Yes	7	10.3	2	3.4	9	7.1		
Item 9	No	59	86.8	54	93.1	113	89.7	1.359	.244
	Yes	9	13.2	4	6.9	13	10.3		
Item 10	No	31	45.6	43	74.1	74	58.7	10.526	.001**
	Yes	37	54.4	15	25.9	52	41.3		
Item 11	No	42	61.8	48	82.8	90	71.4	6.760	.009**
	Yes	26	38.2	10	17.2	36	28.6		
Item 12	No	22	32.4	39	67.2	61	48.4	15.256	.000***
	Yes	46	67.6	19	32.8	65	51.6		
Item 13	No	53	77.9	53	91.4	106	84.1	4.233	.040*
	Yes	15	22.1	5	8.6	20	15.9		
Total		68	100	58	100	126	100		

No = Inappropriate response, Yes = Appropriate response  
\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

their lower-level counterparts, not only in their ability to recognize conventional expressions but also in their ability to use them in the given situations. These findings are by no means surprising in the sense that higher-level learners have a greater range of linguistic devices and knowledge including pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic knowledge, and they use them more often (Bardovi-Harlig & Bastos, 2011), which seemed to contribute to the more successful completion of the pragmatic tasks.

It is also worthwhile to identify whether the learners' overall recognition scores differ significantly from their overall production scores. The potential differences between the two were examined using a paired samples *t*-test, the result of which is summarized in Table 7.

The total number of students showed statistically significant differences between the overall recognition and production scores. They obtained a mean score of 11.33 calculated from all of the 13 recognition items, which surpassed a mean score of 3.40 calculated from all of the 13 production items by 7.93 ( $t = 36.228, p = .000$ ).

A closer look at each learner group's scores showed that statistically significant differences were detected between the overall recognition and production scores obtained

**TABLE 7**

Differences between the Overall Recognition and Production Scores

Group	Type	n	M	SD	Mean differ	SD differ	t	p
High group	Rec	68	12.01	0.98	7.72	2.41	26.399	.000***
	Pro	68	4.29	2.22				
Low group	Rec	58	10.52	2.51	8.17	2.51	24.825	.000***
	Pro	58	2.34	1.40				
Total	Rec	126	11.33	1.99	7.93	2.46	36.228	.000***
	Pro	126	3.40	2.12				

Rec = Recognition, Pro = Production, Differ = Difference

\*\*\*p < .001

by the higher-level students ( $t = 26.399, p = .000$ ), with their overall recognition score ( $M = 12.01$ ) exceeding their overall production score ( $M = 4.29$ ). As was the case with the higher level group, the lower-level group scored significantly higher on the recognition task ( $M = 10.52$ ) than on the production task ( $M = 2.34$ ) ( $t = 24.825, p = .000$ ). These findings clearly indicate that the students, irrespective of their language achievement levels, were better able to recognize the 13 conventional expressions than to produce the same expressions, which in turn suggests that they had far greater difficulty in producing the expressions than in recognizing them. This may be largely because the language production process is more complex than the recognition process, given that the latter process involves mere exposure to or familiarity with conventional expressions (Bardovi-Harlig, 2009), whereas the former process requires work in memory retrieval, motor planning (articulatory program), executive control, self-monitoring, and serial order in action planning (MacDonald, 2013).

The finding that the overall recognition scores were much higher than the overall production scores across the language achievement levels prompted us to consider whether there is any relationship between the overall recognition and production of conventional expressions. Pearson correlation coefficients were run to answer this question. The results are set out in Table 8.

**TABLE 8**

Relationship between the Overall Recognition and Production Scores

		Recognition		
		High group	Low group	Total
Production	Pearson $r$	.018	.279	.285
	$p$	.881	.034*	.001**

\*p < .05, \*\*p < .01

When the total number of students' data were considered, the correlation coefficient value ( $r = .285$ ) showed a positive relationship between the overall recognition and production scores. Since the  $p$ -value ( $p = .001$ ) was less

than 0.01, the correlation was statistically significant. This suggests that a higher level of recognition of conventional expressions leads to a higher ability to produce the same expressions or the other way around.

Upon closer inspection, the results further showed that no correlation was found between the overall recognition and production scores for the higher-level students ( $r = .018, p = .881$ ). This finding does not support the interpretation that as learners' recognition ability increases, so does their production ability. This may be because the higher-level learners' production scores were spread out over a wide range (from a minimum of 0 to a maximum of 13), which was in stark contrast to their much narrower range of recognition scores (from a minimum of 9 to a maximum of 13).

Unlike the higher-level learners, their lower-level counterparts showed a positive correlation between their overall recognition score and their overall production score ( $r = .279, p = .034$ ). The performances given by the total number of students and by the lower-level students suggest that those who were better able to recognize conventional expressions had a greater ability to produce them or the other way around.

## V. CONCLUSIONS AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The data on the conventional expressions analyzed here have demonstrated that the EFL learners' academic achievement in the task-based language course plays a vital role in the recognition and production of conventional expressions, revealing that the level of academic achievement is closely related to the performance of conventional expressions.

In regard to the recognition task, the higher-level students were found to score significantly higher than the lower-level students in the recognition of 12 out of 13 individual items except *Stay tuned*. A similar tendency was evident in the overall recognition scores in that the higher-level students were superior to the lower-level students in the overall recognition scores. These findings demonstrated that the higher-level group had a higher level of familiarity with the conventional expressions than the lower-level group. They seem to have been more exposed to the target conventional expressions through multimedia or through face-to-face interactions with native speakers of English. Given that conventional expressions occur frequently in everyday conversation, the lower-level students' lower level of recognition ability can be improved by listening to daily English conversation where various conventional expressions occur. However, no significant differences were found between the two learner groups in the recognition of *Stay tuned*, which showed low recognition scores across the two groups. This is probably because this expression is generally not used in a person-to-person conversation but in a special situation (TV or radio broadcasts). Hence, this situation-bound utterance is less likely to be heard in EFL contexts. In this sense, due attention should also be given to conventional expressions which occur in special situ-

ations such as TV or radio shows (*Stay tuned*) or service encounters (*For here or to go?*). In this case, the active use of corpus-based resources will assist the students to familiarize themselves with the target conventional expressions.

Similar but slightly different results were observed in the production task. The higher-level students had a greater success rate than the lower-level students in producing the following 8 items: *Can I get you anything?*, *Excuse the mess*, *Can I get a ride?*, *Do you think you could make it?*, *That works for me*, *I'm just looking*, *I'd love to*, and *Thanks for having me*. The higher-level students' greater performance in the production of individual conventional expressions was also supported by their overall production scores, which indicated that the higher-level learners' overall production score was much higher than the lower-level learners'. These findings suggest that the former group had a greater ability to produce many conventional expressions than the latter group, which in turn suggests that the latter group failed to take sufficient control of conventional expressions. This finding lends support to Cohen's (2012) claim that it is difficult for L2 learners, especially the lower-level students, to use pragmatic routines appropriately. If learners use conventional expressions inappropriately in conversation, they may encounter confusion or communication breakdown (Bardovi-Harlig, 2014). Such being the case, the EFL learners, especially the lower-level learners, should be given a wide range of scenarios so that they can produce conventional expressions relevant to the given scenarios. In this way, the learners can take effective control of conventional expressions not only as initiating utterances but also as responding utterances.

Another noteworthy finding in this study was that the learners' recognition ability was significantly greater than their production ability regardless of their language achievement levels. This finding was in complete accord with Bardovi-Harlig's (2008, 2009) finding that the learners reported very high rates of recognition of conventional expressions, but they produced the same expressions at much lower rates. This suggests that it is easier to recognize conventional expressions than to actually use the same expressions in conversation. This is understandable, seeing that the recognition of conventional expressions does not necessarily require high cognitive load, whereas the production of them requires a greater amount of working memory resources. In order to improve the poorer performance in the production of conventional expressions, the learners should be aware of many factors: In what situation the conversation is taking place; what type of background knowledge is required to capture the target conventional expression in the given situation; who says the conventional expression to whom, to name only a few. Only when the learners take these factors into full consideration can they select and use the most appropriate expression in the given situation.

The careful scrutiny of the recognition and production data showed that there was a positive relationship between the two for the total number of students on the one hand and for the lower-level students on the other. This suggests that as their recognition scores increase, so do their pro-

duction scores or the other way around. Since recognition precedes production, the lower-level students in particular should make efforts to improve their ability to recognize conventional expressions in one way or another, which will eventually serve as a good basis for the improvement of their production ability.

This study has some limitations that need to be addressed in future studies. First, it employed only 13 conventional expressions for each task. Second, each task was implemented by the limited number of participants. In future research, the use of a larger sample size and a more diverse range of conventional expressions would be a good attempt to confirm the results drawn from the present study. In addition, this research did not attempt to explore the role of the learners' study-abroad experience in their acquisition of conventional expressions mainly because there were a limited number of students who had such an experience. This is another vital issue worthy of further investigation in the future.

Despite these limitations, the findings of the study demonstrated that the language learners' academic achievement in the task-based language course is a vital variable which is closely related to their recognition and production of conventional expressions, suggesting that high levels of academic achievement in the language course also had concomitantly high levels of pragmatic competence with special reference to conventional expressions. They will provide some insightful ideas of how the higher- and lower-level students recognize and produce conventional expressions and what should be accentuated in the instructions on conventional expressions in EFL classrooms. When the learners are able to recognize and produce conventional expressions successfully, they can increase their pragmatic fluency, which will in turn help them enhance the development of communicative competence.

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## APPENDIX

### Scenarios for the Production Task

In this part of the task, there are 13 scenarios. You will hear a situation in each item. Think about what one of the people would probably say or reply in the situation. Provide the best expression in the situation.

1. Mary sees her brother standing on a chair trying to reach a book at the top of a bookshelf. She knows that the chair he is standing on has a broken leg. What would Mary probably say in this situation?
2. Brian ordered a meal in a restaurant and the waitress just brought it. She asks him if he wants to order additional items. What would the waitress probably say in this situation?
3. David has a birthday party in his home. The apartment is untidy and he is just cleaning up. His friend, Steph, comes by. He invites her in. What would David probably say in this situation?
4. Many of Laura's friends are going to the movies, but she does not have a car. She asks one of her friends for a ride in his car. What would Laura probably ask her friend in this situation?
5. After class Tom is walking to the library with a friend. It's been raining all morning, and he notices that his friend is about to step into a big puddle. What would Tom probably say in this situation?
6. Emily is at the bus stop. While waiting, she is talking with her friend on her cell phone. The bus arrives and she needs to hang up. What would Emily probably say in this situation?
7. Sara is inviting her friend to a little party she's having at her house tomorrow night. She says, "I'm having a little party tomorrow night at my place." How would Sara probably go on in this situation?
8. Bill is ordering food at a restaurant where you can sit down or take the food home with you. What would the woman behind the counter probably ask Bill in this situation?
9. There is a TV show on. The anchor pauses the program for a commercial. He wants the audience to continue watching the program after the break. What would the anchor probably say in this situation?
10. Morgan and her classmates are deciding where to study for the upcoming exam. After some discussion, everyone seems to agree on the library, which is good for her because she lives near there. One of her classmates says, "So, is the library ok for everyone?" What would Morgan probably reply in this situation?
11. Julie goes to a clothing store and she needs to find a new shirt. A salesperson approaches her. She does not want the salesperson's assistance. The salesperson says, "Can I help you?" What would Julie probably reply in this situation?
12. Stacy's teacher invited the whole class to his house next Friday. Stacy is happy that he has invited her, and she would like to go. When she is leaving the class, the teacher says, "How about you? Will you be able to join us next Friday?" What would Stacy probably reply in this situation?
13. There's a reception on campus. The organizer invited Jack and a few other students as well. It is getting late, and he decides to leave. He goes over to the organizer. The organizer says, "Thanks for coming." What would Jack probably reply in this situation?