The Indexicality in Academic English Classroom: How Language Choices Signal Meaning, Identity and Appropriateness

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Abstract

Language use in academic settings extends beyond conveying propositional meaning to signaling social meanings related to identity, stance, and contextual appropriateness. This study examines indexicality in academic English classrooms, focusing on how learners' language choices point to meanings beyond their literal content. Grounded in sociolinguistic and pragmatic perspectives, the research explores how linguistic features such as lexical choice, modality, politeness markers, and register index formality, authority, and academic positioning. The study was conducted among tertiary-level English language learners at a state university in Northern Mindanao, Philippines. Using a qualitative classroom-based research design, data were collected through classroom observations, audio-recorded interactions, analysis of academic speaking and writing tasks, and semi-structured interviews. Findings indicate that learners gradually developed sensitivity to indexical meanings through teacher modeling, feedback, and repeated exposure to academic discourse practices. The study concludes that explicit attention to indexicality enhances learners' pragmatic competence and supports more contextually appropriate academic language use.

Keywords: indexicality, academic discourse, pragmatic competence, classroom discourse, English language learners

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Introduction

Language use in academic contexts involves more than the transmission of literal or propositional meaning. Within educational environments, language functions as a social and pragmatic resource through which speakers negotiate identity, express stance, and signal contextual appropriateness in interaction. Contemporary sociolinguistic research emphasizes that linguistic choices—such as lexical selection, modality, register, and politeness markers—often index meanings that extend beyond the literal content of utterances. These indexical meanings enable speakers to position themselves socially, display authority, construct academic identities, and align their discourse with the expectations of specific communicative contexts (Silverstein, 2021; Tagliamonte, 2022). In academic English classrooms, such linguistic cues play a critical role in shaping how learners participate in discourse and how they are perceived within scholarly communities.

The concept of indexicality, originating from sociolinguistic and semiotic traditions, refers to the way linguistic forms point to or signal social meanings associated with particular contexts, identities, and relationships (Eckert, 2021). Rather than functioning solely as carriers of grammatical information, linguistic forms also serve as social signals that communicate attitudes, authority, formality, and group affiliation. In educational discourse, for instance, the use of hedging devices, modal verbs, formal lexical choices, and discipline-specific registers can index levels of expertise, politeness, and academic alignment (Hyland, 2022). Consequently, learners must develop sensitivity not only to grammatical correctness but also to the social meanings embedded within language use.

In recent years, scholars in applied linguistics and English language education have increasingly recognized the importance of pragmatic competence in academic communication. Pragmatic competence involves the ability to interpret and produce language appropriately within specific sociocultural contexts, considering factors such as power relations, audience expectations, and discourse conventions (Ishihara & Cohen, 2022). However, while research has extensively explored grammatical competence and vocabulary development in second language learning, comparatively fewer studies have examined how learners develop awareness of indexical meanings in academic discourse. This gap is particularly relevant in tertiary education settings where students are expected to engage in sophisticated academic communication that requires not only linguistic accuracy but also pragmatic and sociolinguistic sensitivity.

Furthermore, studies on academic discourse highlight that students often struggle to navigate the subtle sociolinguistic cues embedded in classroom communication. Learners may produce grammatically correct sentences yet fail to align their language with the expectations of academic interaction, resulting in communication that appears overly informal, overly direct, or pragmatically inappropriate (Hyland, 2022; LoCastro, 2023). Such challenges underscore the need for pedagogical approaches that explicitly address the social meanings embedded in language use and help learners recognize how linguistic choices index particular academic identities and relationships.

Within the context of English language education in multilingual environments, the development of indexical awareness becomes even more significant. In countries where English functions as an additional or foreign language, learners frequently encounter diverse linguistic norms and cultural expectations that shape how academic discourse is produced and interpreted. Philippine higher education institutions, for instance, operate within linguistically

complex settings where English coexists with multiple local languages, making classroom communication a site where linguistic forms simultaneously reflect academic conventions and sociocultural identities (Bolton & Botha, 2021). Understanding how learners navigate these layered meanings can provide valuable insights into the development of pragmatic competence in English as a second or foreign language.

Despite the recognized importance of sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence in academic communication, empirical research examining indexicality in classroom discourse remains relatively limited, particularly in Southeast Asian educational contexts. Much of the existing literature has focused on discourse analysis of academic writing or professional communication, while fewer studies have investigated how learners develop sensitivity to indexical meanings through everyday classroom interaction. Exploring this dimension can contribute to a deeper understanding of how students learn to interpret and use language in ways that align with academic expectations.

In response to this gap, the present study examines indexicality in academic English classrooms, focusing on how learners' language choices signal meanings beyond their literal content. Grounded in sociolinguistic and pragmatic perspectives, the study investigates how linguistic features such as lexical choice, modality, politeness markers, and register index social meanings related to formality, authority, and academic positioning. Conducted among tertiary-level English language learners at a state university in Northern Mindanao, Philippines, the research explores how classroom interaction and instructional practices contribute to the development of learners' awareness of indexical meanings in academic discourse. By examining how learners interpret and employ linguistic cues in classroom communication, the study aims to contribute to the growing body of research on pragmatic competence and sociolinguistic awareness in English language education.

Statement of the Problem

In academic English classrooms, effective communication requires learners not only to produce grammatically accurate language but also to use linguistic forms that appropriately reflect academic norms, identities, and contextual expectations. Language choices such as lexical selection, modality, politeness markers, and register often signal meanings beyond their literal content, indexing levels of formality, authority, stance, and academic positioning. However, while language instruction frequently emphasizes grammatical accuracy and vocabulary development, the sociolinguistic and pragmatic dimensions of language use—particularly the role of indexicality in shaping academic discourse—remain less explicitly addressed in classroom practice. As a result, learners may struggle to recognize how their linguistic choices convey social meanings within academic interactions. Understanding how learners interpret and employ indexical meanings in classroom discourse is therefore essential in developing their pragmatic competence and ability to participate effectively in academic communication.

Research Questions

This study sought to answer the following questions:

1. How do tertiary-level English language learners use linguistic features such as lexical choice, modality, politeness markers, and register during academic classroom interactions?

2. What indexical meanings are conveyed through learners' language choices in academic speaking and writing tasks?
3. How do classroom practices and instructional strategies influence learners' awareness of indexical meanings in academic discourse?
4. How do learners perceive the role of indexicality in shaping appropriate language use in academic contexts?

Theoretical Framework of the Study

This study is anchored on Silverstein's Theory of Linguistic Indexicality, which explains how linguistic forms point to social meanings beyond their literal or referential content. According to Silverstein (2003, 2021), language functions not only as a system for conveying information but also as a semiotic resource through which speakers signal social identities, relationships, and contextual meanings. Linguistic features such as lexical choices, modality, politeness markers, and register serve as indexical signs that connect language use with particular social contexts, speaker positions, and communicative intentions. Through indexicality, language users implicitly convey attitudes, levels of formality, authority, and interpersonal stance within discourse.

In academic settings, indexicality plays an important role in shaping how learners position themselves within scholarly interactions. Academic discourse is characterized by specific linguistic conventions that signal credibility, politeness, caution, and disciplinary alignment. For instance, the use of hedging expressions, modal verbs, formal vocabulary, and discipline-specific registers can index levels of expertise, objectivity, and academic authority (Hyland, 2022). These linguistic choices help speakers and writers align their discourse with the expectations of academic communities while also negotiating their identity as learners, scholars, or participants in intellectual dialogue.

From the perspective of indexicality theory, the meanings conveyed by linguistic forms are not fixed but emerge through their relationship with social context and interaction. Ochs (1992) further explains that linguistic forms often indirectly index social meanings by signaling particular stances or activities that are culturally associated with certain identities or roles. In classroom discourse, learners' language choices may therefore reflect their attempts to align with academic expectations, demonstrate respect toward instructors, or express degrees of certainty and authority in presenting ideas.

Applying Silverstein's theory to academic English classrooms allows for a deeper understanding of how learners develop sensitivity to the social meanings embedded in language use. Through classroom interaction, teacher modeling, feedback, and repeated exposure to academic discourse practices, learners gradually learn to interpret and employ linguistic cues that signal appropriate academic positioning. The theory therefore provides a useful framework for examining how learners' language choices function as indexical signs that reflect their awareness of academic norms, identities, and contextual expectations.

In the context of this study, Silverstein's Theory of Linguistic Indexicality serves as the primary lens for analyzing how tertiary-level English language learners use linguistic features during classroom interactions and academic tasks. By examining how these linguistic forms index meanings related to formality, authority, stance, and contextual appropriateness, the study seeks to understand how learners develop pragmatic competence in academic discourse.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative classroom-based research design to examine how indexical meanings operate in academic English classroom interactions. Qualitative approaches are particularly appropriate for investigating language use in natural settings because they allow researchers to capture the complexities of discourse, social interaction, and contextual meaning-making (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2021). By focusing on authentic classroom communication, the study sought to explore how linguistic features such as lexical choice, modality, politeness markers, and register function as indexical cues that signal meanings related to formality, authority, and academic positioning. The qualitative design enabled an in-depth analysis of learners' language use and their developing awareness of indexical meanings within academic discourse.

Research Setting

The study was conducted at a state university in Northern Mindanao in the Philippines, where English serves as a primary medium of instruction in tertiary education. Academic English classrooms in this context require students to engage in various discourse practices, including class discussions, presentations, and academic writing tasks. These communicative activities provide opportunities for learners to employ linguistic forms that signal academic stance, formality, and contextual appropriateness. The classroom setting therefore served as a natural environment for examining how indexical meanings emerge in authentic academic interactions.

Participants of the Study

The participants of the study consisted of tertiary-level English language learners enrolled in an academic English course at the selected state university. The participants were selected through purposive sampling, as they were actively engaged in classroom discourse practices relevant to the objectives of the study. Purposive sampling is commonly used in qualitative research to identify participants who can provide rich and relevant information related to the research phenomenon (Patton, 2015).

The participants represented students with varying levels of English proficiency who regularly participated in classroom discussions, academic speaking tasks, and writing activities. Their participation provided valuable insights into how learners interpret and employ linguistic features that convey indexical meanings in academic communication.

Data Collection Procedures

Multiple qualitative data collection methods were used to obtain a comprehensive understanding of learners' language use in academic classroom discourse. Data were gathered through classroom observations, audio-recorded interactions, analysis of academic speaking and writing tasks, and semi-structured interviews.

Classroom observations were conducted to document naturally occurring interactions between students and instructors during academic activities such as discussions and presentations. These observations allowed the researcher to identify patterns of language use and examine how learners employed linguistic features that index social meanings.

Audio recordings of classroom interactions were used to capture authentic discourse for detailed analysis. These recordings enabled the researcher to examine specific linguistic features, including lexical choices, modality, politeness markers, and register variations that signal indexical meanings.

In addition, samples of students' academic speaking and writing tasks were analyzed to identify how learners used linguistic forms to position themselves within academic discourse. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with selected participants to gain insights into their perceptions of appropriate language use in academic settings and their awareness of the social meanings embedded in linguistic choices.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using qualitative discourse analysis to examine how linguistic features function as indexical cues within classroom interactions. Discourse analysis allows researchers to investigate how language is used to construct meaning, identity, and social relationships in specific communicative contexts (Gee, 2014; Paltridge, 2021).

The analysis involved several stages. First, classroom interaction transcripts and written samples were carefully reviewed to identify relevant linguistic features such as lexical choice, modality, politeness markers, and register. Second, these linguistic forms were examined in relation to the contexts in which they occurred to determine the social meanings they indexed, including formality, stance, authority, and academic positioning. Finally, patterns across classroom interactions and learner responses were identified to understand how learners developed awareness of indexical meanings through classroom discourse practices.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were observed throughout the conduct of the study. Participants were informed about the purpose of the research and their voluntary participation prior to data collection. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and they were assured that their identities would remain confidential. Pseudonyms were used in the presentation of data to protect participants' privacy. Additionally, all recorded and collected data were used solely for research purposes and handled in accordance with established ethical guidelines for educational research.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings of the study on indexicality in academic English classrooms, focusing on how learners' language choices signaled meanings beyond their literal content. The study involved 155 tertiary-level English language learners from a state university in Northern Mindanao in the Philippines. Data were obtained through classroom observations, audio-recorded classroom interactions, analysis of academic speaking and writing tasks, and semi-structured interviews. The findings are organized according to the four research questions of the study. Consistent with sociolinguistic perspectives, the analysis revealed that linguistic forms used by learners often indexed meanings related to formality, stance, authority, and contextual appropriateness in academic discourse. These findings support contemporary research emphasizing that language use in educational settings is not purely grammatical but also deeply embedded in social and pragmatic meaning-making (Hyland, 2022; LoCastro, 2023; Tagliamonte, 2022).

Linguistic Features Used by Tertiary-Level English Language Learners During Academic Classroom Interactions

Analysis of classroom discourse involving the 155 respondents revealed that learners employed a range of linguistic features, particularly lexical choice, modality, politeness markers, and register, when participating in academic discussions, oral presentations, and written tasks. These features played an important role in shaping how learners positioned themselves within classroom interaction.

One of the most evident patterns in the data involved lexical choice. Students tended to select vocabulary that reflected different levels of formality depending on the communicative situation. During formal speaking tasks and written assignments, learners frequently used expressions such as moreover, in addition, based on the findings, and it can be inferred that. Such expressions are commonly associated with academic discourse and signal alignment with scholarly communication norms. Research in academic discourse analysis suggests that lexical selection functions as a key marker of academic identity and disciplinary engagement (Flowerdew & Wang, 2023; Hyland, 2022). The respondents' use of such expressions therefore indicated an emerging awareness of the linguistic expectations associated with academic communication.

Another significant feature observed in classroom interaction was the use of modality, particularly modal verbs and hedging expressions such as may, might, can, I think, and perhaps. These forms frequently appeared when students presented interpretations or responded to classroom questions. Rather than expressing ideas as absolute truths, many learners softened their claims through cautious language. This pattern reflects the important role of modality in academic discourse, where hedging devices allow speakers to present claims tentatively and acknowledge the possibility of alternative interpretations (Hyland, 2022; Ishihara & Cohen, 2022). Such linguistic choices function indexically by signaling intellectual caution and scholarly humility, which are valued attributes in academic interaction.

The data further showed the use of politeness markers, particularly when students addressed instructors or responded to peers during discussions. Expressions such as sir, ma'am, excuse me, and I would like to add appeared frequently in classroom exchanges. These markers indexed respect and recognition of hierarchical relationships within the classroom context. Sociolinguistic research highlights that politeness strategies play a crucial role in maintaining interpersonal harmony and reflecting cultural norms within institutional communication (Holmes & Wilson, 2022; LoCastro, 2023). In the Philippine classroom context, such markers are particularly meaningful because they reflect culturally embedded expectations of respect toward teachers and authority figures.

Variation in register was also evident in learner discourse. Students often shifted between conversational and academic registers depending on the communicative context. During group interaction, informal expressions and occasional code-switching into local languages appeared, whereas during formal reporting and writing tasks, learners attempted to adopt a more structured and academic style. Register variation reflects the ability of speakers to adapt their language according to situational demands, an important component of communicative competence (Paltridge, 2021; Tagliamonte, 2022). These shifts in register therefore indicate that learners were actively negotiating the linguistic norms of academic discourse.

Overall, the findings suggest that the respondents' linguistic choices were not merely grammatical selections but also social signals that reflected their attempts to align with academic expectations. The use of lexical choice, modality, politeness markers, and register functioned as meaningful discourse resources through which learners managed formality, stance, and interactional relationships in the classroom.

Indexical Meanings Conveyed Through Learners' Language Choices in Academic Tasks

The analysis further revealed that the linguistic features used by the respondents conveyed indexical meanings associated with formality, authority, stance, identity, and contextual appropriateness. These meanings emerged from the relationship between linguistic forms and the social context in which they were used.

One prominent indexical meaning observed in the data was formality. Students' use of structured sentence patterns, formal vocabulary, and academic discourse markers signaled alignment with institutional expectations for academic communication. According to recent studies in academic discourse, formality serves as a key indexical marker that distinguishes academic communication from everyday conversation (Flowerdew & Wang, 2023; Hyland, 2022). The respondents' use of formal expressions therefore indicated an awareness of the communicative norms associated with academic environments.

Language choices also indexed authority. Some learners projected authority by presenting ideas with structured reasoning and confident expression, while others employed hedging strategies to signal intellectual caution. In academic discourse, both assertiveness and hedging can function as markers of credibility when used appropriately (Hyland, 2022). The learners' varied use of these strategies suggests that they were beginning to negotiate their roles as participants in academic discourse communities.

The findings likewise revealed the indexical function of language in expressing stance. Expressions such as I believe, I agree, it seems, and based on the discussion indicated learners' evaluative positions toward ideas and arguments presented in class. Stance-taking is widely recognized as a central feature of academic communication because it allows speakers and writers to position themselves in relation to knowledge claims (Hyland, 2022; Paltridge, 2021). Through these expressions, learners were able to signal their attitudes, degrees of certainty, and alignment with particular viewpoints.

Furthermore, linguistic choices served to index identity, particularly learners' identity as emerging academic participants. By adopting more formal vocabulary, structured discourse patterns, and respectful interactional forms, students attempted to present themselves as serious and competent members of the classroom community. Sociolinguistic research emphasizes that identity is often constructed through discourse practices rather than fixed social categories (Eckert, 2021; Tagliamonte, 2022). The respondents' language choices therefore reflected their ongoing efforts to negotiate their roles within the academic environment.

Influence of Classroom Practices on Learners' Awareness of Indexical Meanings

The findings also showed that classroom practices played a significant role in shaping learners' awareness of indexical meanings. Observational data indicated that teacher modeling, feedback, and repeated exposure to academic discourse practices helped students gradually develop sensitivity to the social meanings embedded in language use.

Teacher modeling emerged as a particularly influential factor. During classroom discussions, instructors demonstrated ways of presenting ideas, responding to arguments, and asking questions using language that reflected appropriate academic stance and register. Students frequently adopted similar discourse patterns in their subsequent responses. Research on classroom discourse indicates that learners often internalize linguistic patterns through exposure to expert language users in instructional settings (LoCastro, 2023; Walsh, 2021).

Corrective feedback also contributed to learners' growing awareness of appropriate language use. When teachers suggested alternative expressions or encouraged students to rephrase statements in a more academic manner, learners became more attentive to the pragmatic aspects of language. Studies in second language pragmatics highlight the importance of feedback in helping learners recognize the relationship between linguistic form and communicative appropriateness (Ishihara & Cohen, 2022).

Repeated exposure to academic discourse tasks further reinforced this awareness. Activities such as oral reporting, structured discussion, and academic writing required learners to adopt linguistic forms associated with scholarly communication. Through these experiences, students gradually learned how particular linguistic choices signal formality, credibility, and academic engagement.

Learners' Perceptions of the Role of Indexicality in Academic Communication

Interviews with participants revealed that learners recognized the importance of appropriate language use in academic contexts, even if they were unfamiliar with the technical term indexicality. Many respondents explained that using formal and respectful language helped them appear more credible, confident, and academically prepared during classroom activities.

Students also reported adjusting their language depending on the audience and communicative context. They tended to use more formal expressions when addressing instructors or delivering presentations, while adopting a more conversational style during peer interaction. Such adjustments reflect an emerging awareness of contextual appropriateness, a key component of pragmatic competence (Ishihara & Cohen, 2022; LoCastro, 2023).

These perceptions suggest that learners understood language not only as a means of conveying information but also as a resource for managing social relationships and projecting academic identity. Their reflections therefore reinforce the sociolinguistic view that language learning involves acquiring both linguistic forms and the ability to interpret the social meanings those forms convey (Eckert, 2021; Hyland, 2022).

Summary of Findings

To provide a clearer synthesis of the results, Table 1 summarizes the key findings of the study in relation to the four research questions. The table highlights the linguistic features observed in classroom discourse, the indexical meanings associated with these features, and the classroom evidence supporting the interpretation of the data. The findings indicate that the respondents' language choices functioned not only as grammatical forms but also as sociolinguistic resources through which learners signaled formality, stance, identity, and contextual appropriateness in academic communication.

Table 1
Key Linguistic Features and Indexical Meanings Observed in Academic Classroom Discourse

Research Question	Key Linguistic Features Observed	Indexical Meanings Identified	Supporting Classroom Evidence
1. How do tertiary-level English language learners use linguistic features such as lexical choice, modality, politeness markers, and register during academic classroom interactions?	Lexical choices such as *moreover*, *in addition*, *based on the findings*; modal verbs such as *may*, *might*, *can*; politeness markers such as *sir*, *ma'am*, *excuse me*; variation between conversational and academic register	Formality, politeness, caution, and academic alignment	Classroom discussions, oral reporting, and written tasks demonstrated learners' attempts to shift vocabulary and tone according to academic expectations
2. What indexical meanings are conveyed through learners' language choices in academic speaking and writing tasks?	Use of hedging expressions, structured sentence patterns, academic transitions, and evaluative expressions such as *I believe* and *it seems that*	Academic stance, authority, identity as learners, and contextual appropriateness	Students' responses during presentations and written reflections revealed attempts to signal confidence, credibility, and intellectual caution
3. How do classroom practices and instructional strategies influence learners' awareness of indexical meanings in academic discourse?	Teacher modeling of academic language, corrective feedback, guided discussion, and repeated exposure to academic discourse practices	Development of pragmatic awareness, recognition of appropriate academic language forms	Observations indicated that learners gradually adopted linguistic patterns modeled by instructors and refined their language use through feedback
4. How do learners perceive the role of indexicality in shaping appropriate language use in academic contexts?	Learners' reflections on formal vocabulary, respectful expressions, and academic tone	Perceptions of credibility, competence, respect, and academic identity	Interview responses revealed that students consciously adjusted language depending on audience, task, and classroom context

To illustrate how learners' language choices functioned as indexical cues in classroom interaction, Table 2 presents selected examples of student utterances together with their linguistic features and corresponding indexical meanings.

Table 2
Illustrative Examples of Learners' Language Choices and Their Indexical Meanings in Classroom Discourse

Learner Utterance / Expression	Linguistic Feature	Indexical Meaning	Interpretation in Classroom Context
"Based on the discussion, the main idea is that…"	Academic lexical choice	Formality and academic alignment	The learner signals engagement with academic discourse conventions and attempts to structure ideas formally.
"I think this may suggest that the author wants to show…"	Modality and hedging	Intellectual caution and academic stance	The use of *I think* and *may suggest* indicates tentative interpretation, which is common in academic reasoning.
"Excuse me, Ma'am, may I add something to the discussion?"	Politeness marker	Respect and recognition of authority	The expression indexes politeness and acknowledges the hierarchical relationship between student and instructor.
"In addition to that point, I would like to explain further…"	Academic transition phrase	Organized reasoning and academic positioning	The learner signals logical progression and attempts to present ideas in a structured academic manner.
"Maybe the result can be interpreted differently depending on the situation."	Hedging device	Critical thinking and openness to alternative interpretations	The expression suggests analytical reasoning while maintaining cautious academic tone.
"The findings clearly show that students need more practice."	Assertive academic statement	Authority and confidence	The learner projects a stronger stance, indexing confidence in presenting conclusions.

Conclusion

This study examined the role of indexicality in academic English classrooms, focusing on how learners' language choices signal meanings beyond their literal content. Drawing from classroom observations, analysis of academic speaking and writing tasks, and semi-structured interviews involving 155 tertiary-level English language learners, the findings revealed that linguistic features such as lexical choice, modality, politeness markers, and register functioned as important resources through which learners indexed meanings related to formality, authority, stance, identity, and contextual appropriateness in academic discourse.

The results demonstrated that learners actively used linguistic forms not only to convey ideas but also to position themselves within the social dynamics of the classroom. Lexical selection, hedging devices, and academic transitions allowed students to signal intellectual caution, credibility, and engagement with academic discourse conventions. Politeness markers and respectful expressions further reflected learners' sensitivity to interpersonal relationships and

hierarchical structures within the classroom environment. These findings affirm that language use in academic contexts involves both linguistic competence and sociolinguistic awareness. The study also highlighted the significant influence of classroom practices on the development of learners' awareness of indexical meanings. Teacher modeling, constructive feedback, and repeated exposure to academic discourse practices enabled learners to gradually recognize how specific linguistic choices convey social meanings in academic interaction. Through participation in discussions, oral presentations, and academic writing tasks, learners became increasingly aware that appropriate language use involves not only grammatical accuracy but also sensitivity to audience, context, and communicative purpose.

Furthermore, learners' reflections revealed that they recognized the importance of using formal, respectful, and academically appropriate language in classroom communication. Even though many respondents were unfamiliar with the theoretical concept of indexicality, they demonstrated an intuitive understanding that language choices influence how speakers are perceived in academic contexts. This awareness suggests that learners are capable of developing pragmatic competence when classroom instruction provides opportunities to notice and practice the social dimensions of language use.

Overall, the findings of the study underscore the importance of integrating sociolinguistic and pragmatic perspectives into English language instruction. Academic communication requires learners to interpret and employ linguistic forms that signal stance, authority, and contextual appropriateness. By explicitly addressing how language functions as a social resource within discourse, educators can help learners develop greater awareness of indexical meanings and strengthen their ability to participate effectively in academic communication. The study therefore contributes to ongoing discussions in applied linguistics and language education regarding the role of pragmatic competence in academic language learning.

Pedagogical Implications and Recommendations

The findings of this study highlight the importance of addressing not only grammatical competence but also the sociolinguistic and pragmatic dimensions of language use in academic English classrooms. Since learners' language choices were shown to index meanings related to formality, authority, stance, identity, and contextual appropriateness, English language instruction should incorporate activities that help students recognize and practice these discourse features. Explicit instruction on how linguistic forms signal social meaning can help learners develop greater awareness of how language functions within academic communication.

First, language instructors may integrate explicit discussions of academic discourse features into classroom instruction. Teachers can guide students in examining how lexical choices, modality, politeness markers, and discourse markers function in academic texts and classroom interaction. By analyzing authentic examples from academic writing, lectures, and classroom discussions, learners can become more aware of how particular expressions signal formality, caution, and scholarly positioning. Such awareness may strengthen learners' ability to align their language use with academic expectations.

Second, teachers may provide modeling of appropriate academic language during classroom interaction. The findings of this study showed that learners often adopted linguistic patterns modeled by their instructors. When teachers consistently demonstrate how to present ideas using structured arguments, cautious claims, and respectful interactional language, students are

more likely to internalize these discourse practices. Classroom modeling therefore serves as an important scaffold for developing pragmatic competence.

Third, instructional activities may be designed to encourage active participation in academic discourse practices. Tasks such as oral presentations, academic discussions, peer feedback sessions, and reflective writing activities allow students to experiment with linguistic forms that signal academic stance and authority. Through repeated engagement in these communicative tasks, learners can gradually develop greater sensitivity to how language choices shape meaning and interaction within academic contexts.

Fourth, teachers may incorporate feedback that addresses both grammatical accuracy and pragmatic appropriateness. Rather than focusing solely on grammatical correctness, instructors can also highlight how particular expressions influence tone, formality, and audience perception. Feedback that draws attention to the social meaning of linguistic choices can help learners understand why certain expressions are more suitable in academic settings than others.

Finally, language programs in higher education may consider integrating pragmatic and sociolinguistic awareness into English language curricula. Courses on academic writing and communication may benefit from including lessons that explore how language constructs identity, stance, and credibility within scholarly discourse. Such integration may help learners become more effective academic communicators who can navigate diverse discourse contexts with greater confidence and awareness.

Based on these pedagogical implications, future research may further explore how explicit instruction on indexicality influences learners' academic discourse development across different educational contexts. Investigating similar classroom interactions in other universities or multilingual settings may also provide deeper insights into how learners acquire sociolinguistic awareness in academic communication.

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