The Effect of Explicit and Implicit Instructions of Request Strategies

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Abstract

The aim of this study[1] is to find out whether explicit and implicit instructions of request strategies will be effective in helping Chinese EFL learners gain pragmatic knowledge and achieve pragmatic appropriateness in on-line communication. Participants in this study are randomly distributed into an explicit group and an implicit group. Request strategies and formulae were taught to the two groups in different ways. The explicit group underwent five phases, including request authentic exposure phase, strategy identification phase, metapragmatic information transmission phase, metapragmatic judgment phase, and production practice phase. The implicit group was exposed to the same authentic input as the explicit group, but they experienced meaning-focused tasks before they entered production practice phase. A pre-test and a post-test, each of which consisted of a written discourse completion task (WDCT) and a role play, were given right before and after the intervention. The results showed that both groups demonstrated improvements in the WDCT after the intervention, but to different degree. The explicit group showed greater progress in the appropriate level of formality, directness, and politeness realized through the syntactic patterns, internal and external modifications, and sequence of request components. This suggests the necessity of incorporating consciousness-raising activities in the classroom instruction of pragmatics. However, learners of both groups showed little progress in oral role plays, which indicates that more practice opportunities should be provided through which learners can gain familiarity and control over the target forms and form-function mapping.

Keywords: Pragmatic competence, explicit instruction, implicit instruction, request

Introduction

Since the adoption of the communicative approach to second language teaching, the idea of interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) has been introduced into language education and become one of the main concerns of linguistic scholars (Cohen & Olshtain, 1981). There has been a consensus among them that pragmatic competence is one of the key components of communicative competence and should be given adequate attention by the educators and learners of a foreign language. Despite abundant studies that have been carried out to investigate the relationship

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between language education and interlanguage pragmatic development, there is, in practice, still great reluctance among English teachers in China to help EFL learners develop their pragmatic competence in English. The reasons include inadequate descriptions offered by theoretical pragmaticists, the limited number of teaching resources and the difficult and delicate nature of pragmatics (Thomas, 1983; Matsuda, 1999). This, in part, accounts for the great discrepancy between China's EFL learners' excellent performance in a general proficiency test and their obvious lack of pragmatic competence in real intercultural communications (Chen, 1996, Gu, 2008).

The direct motivation for me to conduct an empirical research on the instruction of EFL learners' pragmatic competence comes from the discovery of my students' incompetence in writing an English note of request for leave. (I require my students to write an English note of request whenever they are unable to attend my class for some acceptable reasons.) Here is a note written by one of my students:

Ms. Gu:
I'll go on a business trip with my supervisor from tomorrow to next Tuesday. I want to inform you that I can't attend your class that day. Thank you.

Though there are few grammatical errors in this note as well as in some other notes that I have received from my students, they sound somewhat abrupt and impolite. Instead of using conventionally indirect strategies, such as Query preparatory (Could you do ....?) or Mitigated Preparatory (I'm wondering if you could do…), my students mostly adopt Want Statements or Imperatives, which indicates negative transfer from the Chinese request formula.

The observation of my students' incompetence in performing the speech act of request drives me to investigate feasible methods of developing Chinese EFL learners' pragmatic competence in English, because pragmatic failure may cause misunderstandings and communication breakdowns as well as the stereotyping of the EFL learners as insensitive, rude, or inept (Thomas, 1983). Through this study, I hope to find out how effective explicit and implicit instructions are in helping students gain pragmatic knowledge of speech acts and the ability to use them appropriately in communication. The present study chooses request as the target of pragmatic instruction in that the knowledge of speech acts and their functions are a basic component of communication in a second or foreign language, and request is one of the most difficult speech acts to be acquired. Many studies have found that instruction of pragmatic knowledge can facilitate the development of EFL learners' pragmatic competence. However, few studies were done in Chinese EFL classroom settings, and the effects of different approaches to teaching pragmatic knowledge are still unclear. The present research attempts to address the following questions:

• Is the development of EFL learners' pragmatic competence, especially the knowledge of making requests more effectively facilitated through input alone (implicit instruction) or through input plus consciousness-raising (explicit instruction)?

• To what extent can explicit and implicit instructions help students improve their ability to make requests in on-line communications?

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Literature Review

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Instruction of Pragmatic Competence

Pragmatic competence is defined by Barron (2003) as "knowledge of the linguistic resources available in a given language for realizing particular illocutions, knowledge of the sequential aspects of speech acts and finally, knowledge of the appropriate contextual use of the particular languages' linguistic resources." In order to prevent potential missteps in cross-cultural communication, language learners must not only improve their overall proficiency and accuracy in using a language, but also seek to develop pragmatic competence in the language they are learning (Canale & Swain, 1980; Gumperz, 1982; Hymes, 1972; Wolfson, 1983).

Recommendations have been made since the late 1980's, for the inclusion of pragmatic instruction as part of foreign and second language (L2) curricula (e.g. Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper, 1989). These instructional suggestions have been backed up by authors such as Kasper & Schmidt (1996) and Bardovi-Harlig (2001), who pointed out the necessity of conducting research about the role of instruction in ILP development in order to make stronger the link between ILP and second language acquisition (SLA). In recent years, there has been an increasing body of empirical studies on the effectiveness of instruction in the development of pragmatic knowledge dealing with discourse markers (House & Kasper, 1981), pragmatic routines (Tateyama, 2001), conversational structure and management (Myers-Scotton & Bernstein, 1988), conversational closings (Bardovi-Harlig et al, 1991), pragmatic fluency (House, 1996), requests (Hasaal, 1997), apologies (Olshtain & Cohen, 1990), compliments (Manes & Wolfson, 1981; Holmes & Brown, 1987; Rose & Kwai-fun, 2001), complaints and refusals (Morrow, 1996). The results from most of these studies are promising with regard to the positive effect of pedagogical intervention, supporting the view that instruction of pragmatics can facilitate the development of EFL learners' pragmatic competence (Kasper & Rose, 2002; Bacelar da Silva, 2003; Martínez-Flor & Fukuya, 2005).

Research about the performance of speech acts by EFL learners have offered various explanations for the differences between learners' and native speakers' (NSs) realizations (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001). However, studies on the role of instruction of politeness strategies for speech act realization in helping students achieve pragmatic appropriateness in their speech are still limited. What's more, although many research studies have been done on EFL pragmatic development (Kondo, 2001; Eslami-Rasekh, 2004), few have been done in Chinese EFL classroom settings. Most Chinese EFL teachers have never attempted to teach pragmatics since it is not part of China's rigid college curricula. Thus, the effect of explicit instruction of pragmatic knowledge on Chinese advanced EFL learners' pragmatic development is still unclear.

Schmidt's Noticing Hypothesis

Schmidt (1993) proposed the Noticing Hypothesis, according to which the emergence of new forms should be preceded by their being noticed in the input. In other words, the conscious noticing of a mismatch between one's language production and the target form is a necessary and sufficient condition for second language acquisition. Schmidt (2001) argued that "noticing

requires of the learner a conscious apprehension and awareness of input," and "while there is subliminal perception, there is no subliminal learning" (p. 26). Schmidt (1995) further distinguished "noticing' from 'understanding". The former refers to the "conscious registration of the occurrence of some event", which is "surface level phenomena and item learning", whereas the latter "implies the recognition of some general principle, rule, or pattern", which is a "deeper level of abstraction related to (semantic, syntactic, or communicative) meaning, system learning" (1995, p. 29). He points out, "[i]n order to acquire pragmatics, one must attend to both the linguistic forms of utterances and the relevant social and contextual features with which they are associated" (p.30). That is to say, learners acquire pragmatic competence by consciously paying attention to linguistic form, pragmalinguistic function and sociopragmatic constraints. To illustrate this point, he argued,

"In pragmatics, awareness that on a particular occasion someone says to their interlocutor something like, 'I'm terribly sorry to bother you, but if you have time could you look at this problem?' is a matter of noticing. Relating the various forms used to their strategic deployment in the service of politeness and recognizing their co-occurrence with elements of context such as social distance, power, level of imposition and so on, are all matters of understanding" (1995, p. 30).

Bialystok's Two-dimensional Model of L2 Proficiency Development

Different from the Noticing Hypothesis, which accounts for initial input selection, Bialystok's two-dimensional model of L2 proficiency development, as was suggested by Kasper and Rose (1999), "explains the development of already available knowledge along the dimensions of analyzed representation and control of processing" (p. 14). Bialystok claimed that L2 learners have two separate tasks to complete. One is that representations of pragmatic knowledge must be formed, and the other is that control must be gained over processing, i.e., declarative knowledge must be developed into procedural knowledge. Studies of interlanguage pragmatic use and development consistently demonstrate that adult learners rely on universal or L1-based pragmatic knowledge (Kasper & Schmidt, 1996; Kasper & Rose, 2002; Bardovi-Harlig, 2001). That is to say, adult L2 learners have largely completed the task of developing analytic representations of pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic knowledge. What requires more effort of the adult learners is to gain control over the selection of knowledge. However, there is no guarantee that learners will spontaneously use these resources. Bialystok argued that slow and inefficient retrieval of pragmatic knowledge is the primary reason for learners' use of pragmatically inappropriate L2 utterances. Hence, teachers can step in to help adult learners gain control over their already existing pragmatic foundations. Additionally, instructions also help adult learners develop new representations of pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic knowledge not existing in their L1, by means of instruction, including input exposure to pragmatic realizations, discussions of the metapragmatic knowledge underlying communicative action, and engagement in communicative activities where learners can practice using the linguistic knowledge they have acquired (Bialystok, 1993).

Request Strategies

"A request is an illocutionary act whereby a speaker (requester) conveys to a hearer (requestee) that he/she wants the requestee to perform an act, which is for the benefit of the speaker" (Trosborg, 1994, p. 187). The recipient may feel that the request is an intrusion on his/her freedom of action or even a power play. As for the requester, s/he may hesitate to make requests for fear of exposing a need or out of fear of possibly making the recipient lose face (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989, p. 11). In this sense, requests are face-threatening to both the requester and the recipient. Since requests have the potential to be intrusive and demanding, there is a need for the requester to minimize the imposition involved in the request.

One way for the speaker to minimize the imposition is by employing indirect strategies rather than direct ones. The more direct a request is, the more transparent it is and the less of a burden the recipient bears in interpreting the request.

Direct Levels	Strategies
Level 1: Direct strategies (impositives)	Mood directives
	Performative
	Obligation statement
	Want statement
Level 2: Conventionally indirect strategies	Suggestory formula
	Query preparatory
Level 3: Non-Conventionally indirect strategies	Strong hint
	Mild hint

Figure 1. Request Strategies

Mitigating the face-threatening nature of requests can also be achieved by use of Internal and External Modifications.

Internal Modifications.
Syntactic downgraders
1. Interrogative (*Could you do the cleaning up?*)
2. Negation (*Look, excuse me. I wonder if you wouldn't mind dropping me home.*)
3. Past Tense (*I wanted to ask for a postponement.*)
4. Embedded 'if' clause (*I would appreciate it if you left me alone.*)
Lexical downgraders
1. Consultative devices (The speaker seeks to involve the hearer and bids for his/her cooperation)
   Do you think I could *borrow your lecture notes from yesterday?*

2. Understaters (The speaker minimizes the required action or object)
   *Could you tidy up **a bit** before I start?*
3. Hedges (The speaker avoids specification regarding the request.)
   *It would really help if you **did something** about the kitchen.*
4. Downtoner (The speaker modulates the impact of the request by signaling the possibility of non-compliance.)
   *Will you be able to **perhaps** drive me?*
5. Politeness device
   *Can I use your pen for a minute, **please**?*

External Modifications (Supportive Moves).
1. Checking on availability
2. Getting a precommitment (The speaker attempts to obtain a precommitment.)
3. Sweetener (By expressing exaggerated appreciation of the requestee's ability to comply with the request, the speaker lowers the imposition involved.)
4. Disarmer (The speaker indicates awareness of a potential offense and thereby possible refusal.)
5. Cost minimizer (The speaker indicates consideration of the imposition to the requestee involved in compliance with the request)
   (Adapted from CCSARP Model in Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989)

Methods

The Subjects

The subjects of this study were first-year postgraduates of software engineering from two of the author's audio-visual-oral English classes at Harbin Institute of Technology. Both classes were of the same size (20 students) and met during two 45-minute sessions per week for a total of 15 weeks. Their proficiency level (measured by the school level placement test) is not significantly different. The demographic survey shows that the participants are between 22 to 27 years old and have all learned English for more than 10-15 years mainly through highly controlled formal education. None of them have been abroad or have any experiences in direct contacts with native speakers of English.

Treatment

The two intact classes were randomly assigned to two experimental groups, an implicit group (IG) and an explicit group (EG). Both groups were given 4 treatments, each of which lasted for approximately 20-30 minutes of the audio-visual-oral English class. They were shown specific clips related to request from an English learning program, *Connect with English*, and provided with the scripts for the video clips.

The two groups received instructions in different ways. In the EG, instruction of request is

realized through five phases. In the first phase, input exposure phase, students watched specific parts related to request from *Connect with English*. In the second phase, strategy recognition phase, students were provided with the script, and were asked to identify the requestive formulas and strategies that characters use to make request. Then they were given a list of requestive strategies and formulas. In the third phase, metapragmatic information transmission phase, metapragmatic rules for requestive strategies are taught. Students ranked the given pragmalinguistic formulas in the order of directness, discuss the factors that affect the choice of these formulas and strategies, such as power, social distance, imposition, settings, and talk about the differences and similarities in the way that the social factors affect the choice of formulas and strategies between Chinese and English speaking cultures. It was expected that this knowledge would help learners make connections between linguistic forms, pragmatic functions, and their social distribution through lectures, handouts, group or pair work, and explanatory feedback. The fourth phase, metapragmatic judgment phase, includes matching various syntactic patterns with scenarios and judging the appropriateness of the strategies and patterns used in a given scenario. The last phase, production practice phase, includes role-played activities which engaged students in different social roles and speech events where they could practice and gain familiarity with pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic aspects of request. During the practice task, errors were pointed out if there were any, and feedback was provided.

The implicit group participants, like those in the explicit group, were also provided with the same video clips and the scripts. However, they did not have any awareness raising activities, including metapragmatic information transmission tasks, metapragmatic judgment tasks. Instead, a packet of comprehension questions for the video clips was provided to the students for discussion. Each packet contained 8-10 comprehension questions, including the questions on the plot and those directly addressing the content of the requests. Students were also involved in role-play activities.

Instrument

A pre-test and a post-test were given before and after the treatment to measure the participants' pragmatic competence in request knowledge and production before and after the treatment. Both tests were composed of a written discourse completion task (WDCT) and an oral role-play. The situations in the WDCTs were set in a hypothetical English speaking context. In view of the fact that request is a type of behavior which is constrained by the structure of politeness formula, three social variables were manipulated when the WDCT items were constructed, namely social distance between interlocutors(D), relative power(P), and the degree of imposition(I). The combinations of these three variables formed 12 scenarios, shown in Table 1.

The oral role play, which includes one scenario, aims to test students' ability to make requests in on-line communication. They involve students making requests suitable to the situations described on the cue cards.

Table 1. Distribution of the Variables in the 12 Situations of the WDCT

Situations	Variables	Situations	Variables
1.	P-, D-, I-	2.	P-, D+, I-

3.	P , D+, I-	4.	P-, D-, I+
5.	P , D+, I+	6.	P , D-, I-
7.	P , D+, I+	8.	P-, D+, I+
9.	P , D+, I-	10.	P , D-, I+
11.	P , D-, I-	12.	P , D-, I+

Data Analysis Methods

The data were coded by means of a modified version of CCSARP coding scheme (Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper, 1989) in order to find the strategies that the participants employed in their requests. The analysis was focused on the discourse strategies, syntactic patterns, internal and external modifications, and information sequencing (how the requestive function is realized through a series of moves).

Students' performances in WDCT and oral role play were examined and scored by the author using an analytical scale adapted from Hudson (2001). The aspects assessed include 1) appropriateness of typical pragmalinguistic formula for request; 2) appropriateness of request strategies; 3) level of politeness including formality, directness, and the use of politeness markers; 4) amount of talk; 5) linguistic accuracy. The rating scale for each aspect went from 1 to 5, with 1 for the least appropriate and 5 for the most appropriate answers. The maximum score participants could receive is 25 and the minimum 5.

Research Results

Pre-test

The Results of WDCT.

In order to find out whether the two groups were at the same level in pragmatic comprehension before the experiment, the mean scores of WDCTs for the pre-test of the IG were compared with those of the EG through an independent t-test (see Table 2). The statistical analysis showed no significant differences between the EG and the IG ($P>0.05$). The mean scores gained by the two groups were very similar (14.87 vs. 14.73).

Table 2. A Comparison of the Mean Scores between the IG and EG in the Pre-Test WDCT

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Score	IGprew	240	14.87	1.417	.091
	EGprew	240	14.73	1.337	.086

P=0.409

Choice of Strategies.

In the pre-test, the two groups did not show much difference in the choice of strategies (see Table 3). For both groups the most frequently used strategies were Query Preparatory (Can you do ....?), Mood Directives, and Want Statement. The other strategies were used at a very low frequency; Suggestory Formula and Strong Hint did not appear in the participants' data at all. Query Preparatory assumed a much higher frequency than any other strategy. Apart from in Situation 6, where Mom asked her son/daughter to carry a box, it was used indiscriminately not only to the people who were unfamiliar or socially superior, but also to those who were familiar or socially inferior. The second most frequently used strategy is Mood Directive, which is mainly used in Situations 6 and 11, where the speech event took place between mother and child. Want Statement is another frequent choice. According to Blum-Kulka et al (1989), Mood Directive and Want Statement have a relatively high degree of directness. Yet interestingly some participants used these strategies in Situations 3, 4 and 10 where a more indirect strategy should be adopted because the addressees had a higher social status and the ranking of imposition was high.

Table 3. Frequency of Strategies Used by the IG and EG in the Pre- and Post- WDCTs

Test	Strategy	Items												Total
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
IG pre-test	Mood directives	0	5	2	5	2	18	4	7	2	2	11	4	62
	Performative	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2
	Obligation statement	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	3
	Want statement	5	0	2	4	1	0	2	0	5	6	0	4	29
	Query preparatory	15	15	16	11	15	2	14	13	13	9	9	12	142
	Mild hint	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
EG pre-test	Mood directives	0	8	2	4	1	17	3	6	0	1	11	3	56
	Performative	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2
	Obligation statement	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	5
	Want statement	6	0	2	4	4	0	2	0	7	4	0	4	33
	Suggestive formula	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
	Query preparatory	14	12	15	10	12	3	15	14	13	10	8	12	138
	Mild hint	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	4
IG Post-test	Mood directives	0	4	1	4	2	18	4	6	2	2	11	4	58
	Performative	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2
	Obligation statement	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2
	Want statement	5	0	2	3	3	0	2	0	5	6	0	4	30
	Query preparatory	15	16	17	11	14	2	14	14	13	9	9	12	146
	Mild hint	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2

	Mood directives	7	1	2	7	2	7	3	0	4	0	14	2	49
	Performative	2	0	0	2	0	1	2	1	0	1	0	0	9
	Obligation statement	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
EG Post-test	Want statement	2	2	3	0	2	1	0	1	7	1	0	1	20
	Suggestive formula	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	4
	Query preparatory	9	17	15	9	14	11	14	14	9	13	6	14	145
	Mild hint	0	0	0	2	0	0	1	2	0	4	0	3	12

Internal Modification and Supportive Moves.

Requestive force can be redressed or intensified internally or externally. Compared to the request strategies identified by CCSARP (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989), the participants in the pre-test showed a very restricted and less complex repertoire of internal modifications (syntactic and lexical downgraders) (see Table 4 and Table 5). Only three types of syntactic downgraders were used by the participants, namely interrogative, tag and embedded. Among them, Interrogative took up an overwhelmingly high percentage, a result of the participants' frequent use of "Can/Could you do …?" formula. "Tag" took up the second highest percentage, due to many participants' transferred Chinese way of requesting, "Help me do …., OK?", into their English production. Two other popular syntactic downgraders among native English speakers "Embedded" and "Past Tense" were rarely used by the participants of the present study.

Table 4. Syntactic Downgraders Used by the IG and EG in the Pre- and Post- WDCTs

Syntactic Downgraders	Pre-test		Post-test	
	IG	EG	IG	EG
Interrogative	140	132	136	125
Negation	0	0	0	5
Past Tense	0	0	0	6
Embedded	6	4	9	13
Tag	19	25	19	0
Total	165	162	164	149

Table 5. Lexical Downgraders Used by the IG and EG in the Pre- and Post- WDCTs

Lexical Downgraders	Pre-test		Post-test	
	IG	EG	IG	EG
Consultative devices	3	2	3	10
Understaters	0	0	0	4
Downtoner	2	2	2	26
Politeness device	32	34	31	37
Total	37	38	35	77

Compared with syntactic downgraders, lexical downgraders were even less favored in the pre-test. The majority of the participants did not use any lexical downgraders. Those who had used them simply resorted to "Politeness Device", namely adding "please" when using an imperative formula.

Compared with internal modification, the participants of the present study favored external modification more, i.e. supportive moves. They used a wider variety of supportive moves than those often used by native speakers of English identified by Blum-Kulka et al (1989) (see Table 6). As many studies on Chinese requests found, Chinese politeness is achieved mainly through the use of pre-posed supportive moves in which several other speech acts are employed to convey request intentions, such as giving reasons, complimenting, apologizing, showing concerns or appreciation (Kirkpatrick, 1991; Zhang, 1995a, 1995b).

Table 6. Supportive Moves by the IG and EG in the Pre- and Post- WDCTs

Supportive moves	Pre-test		Post-test	
	IG	EG	IG	EG
Checking on availability	2	3	5	12
Getting a precommitment	6	5	7	5
Sweetener	33	38	35	27
Grounder	110	117	112	90
Apologizing	17	15	18	11
Moralizing statement	2	2	2	2
Thanking	6	6	6	9
Promising forward	4	7	4	1
Anticipatory statement	4	4	4	2
Reassuring	2	1	2	1
Total	186	198	195	160

Syntactic Formula.

The syntactic patterns used by the participants in the pre-test were mainly monoclausal. Biclausal patterns such as "I wonder if…", "Do you think I…?", and "I'd appreciate if you could do..." rarely occurred in the pre-test data. In addition, the syntactic patterns were often used in wrong situations. Monoclausal forms were often used in the situations where biclausal forms were more appropriate, e.g. when asking for rescheduling the appointment with the manager. Some participants even used "imperative + please (appealer)" form in these highly impositive situations. One of the participants reported,

"If I want to be polite, I just add "please" or "OK" to the request."

On the other hand, biclausal patterns were used in the situations where more direct forms were appropriate. For example, a participant used "I wonder if …" when borrowing a note from his friend.

Request Sequence.

The results of the request sequence of the pre-test of this study coincide with that of Zhang

(1995a). The participants' requests were characterized by a series of pre-request supportive moves followed by the request form, namely "Salutation – Preamble (facework) – Reasons for request – Request". This indirect, inductive way of requesting in Chinese is particularly noteworthy in Chinese politeness. For Chinese native speakers, external modification was an obligatory choice, while internal modification was optional in the realization of requests, while the English rule of using internal and external modification is opposite (Faerch & Kasper, 1989).

Results of the Role Play.

A comparison between the mean scores gained by the two groups in the role play shows that they did not differ much in the role play performance. A statistical analysis further indicates that there was no significant difference between the two scores (see Table 7).

Table 7. A Comparison of the Mean Scores of the IG and EG in the Pre-Test Role Play

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
IG pre oral	20	13.60	1.046	.234
EG pre oral	20	13.20	1.005	.225

$P=0.225$

Post-test

The post-test served to measure the effects of the pedagogical intervention on the participants' pragmatic competence. To see how effective the two types of instruction were, the mean scores for the post-test WDCTs of the two groups were compared with those for the pre-test through paired samples tests (Table 8 and Table 11). The results showed both groups did better in the post-test than in the pre-test. The statistical analysis showed that there was a significant difference between the means of the pre-test and post-test. This indicated that both implicit and explicit instruction helped facilitate the participants' pragmatic knowledge of request.

To find out which approach is more effective, the mean scores of the IG and EG for the post-test WDCT were compared through an independent t-test (Table 9). It was found that the EG gained a higher mean score in the post-test WDCT than the IG did. The statistical analysis showed there was a significant difference between the two means. This indicated that the explicit instruction was more effective in helping EFL learners gain the pragmatic knowledge of request.

Table 8. Paired Samples of Statistics of the Mean Scores of Pre-Test and Post-TWDCTs

Group	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Prescore	14.87	240	1.417	.091
Postcore	16.90	240	1.522	.098

$P < 0.05$

Table 9. Independent T-Test of the Mean Scores of the IG and EG in the Post-Test WDCT

GROUP	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
IG pre oral	240	16.90	1.522	.098
EG pre oral	240	19.42	1.132	.073

$P<0.05$

Results of Post-Test WDCT of the Implicit Group.

Both the IG and the EG demonstrated improvement in the production of requests through their post-test WDCTs, but to different degrees. The improvement made by the IG was mainly seen in language accuracy and the variety of syntactic formula they used to realize the request (see Table 10). The use of "Can/Will you do …?" was reduced to some extent. They turned to the more polite version "Could you do …?" in more situations. A number of participants in this group also tried some biclausal formulas such as "I wonder if you could…", "Do you think I could…?", etc., despite some grammatical errors. This indicated that some competent learners are able to pick up complicated request formula through the implicit instruction, i.e. by watching the video, studying the scripts, talking about the plot, and teacher's recast. However, the majority of the participants in the IG still resorted to their more familiar monoclausal formula. The typical Chinese formula "Imperative + appealer" was still favored by some participants in this group even the instructor had corrected one of the participants through "recast" during the instruction. The knowledge of form-function mapping gained through the implicit instruction was still limited. Though many participants used "Could/Would you do ...?" formula, they tended to overuse them, without considering to whom they were making the request, and for what. Some participants reported that it was probably better to adopt a more polite version when making a request no matter to whom and for what.

In the aspect of internal and external modifications, the improvement made by the IG was not satisfactory (see Tables 4 and 5). External modifications were still much more favored by the participants of this group than internal modifications. The typical Chinese way "Do … + Ok?" appeared a number of times in the post-test data of the Implicit Group. Many participants in fact reported that they put more emphasis on the formulation of a good explanation for making a request than on the request formula itself. To them, an appropriate degree of politeness was realized through conveying their sincerity in the form of elaborating the explanation (i.e. reason/excuse) rather than the appropriate requestive formula. In addition, their focus was concentrated on the best sequence of the utterances involved in request realization.

Table 10. The Syntactic Formula Used by the IG and EG in the Pre- and Post-WDCTs

Syntactic formula	Pre-test		Post-test	
	IG	EG	IG	EG

direct	Do sth (please)	51	41	48	45
	You (should) do sth	16	12	6	6
	I'd like (wanted) to do sth	21	27	20	20
	How about doing sth?	0	2	0	2
	Can/will you do sth?	106	98	83	51
	May I do sth?	2	4	0	6
	Could/Would you do sth?	29	35	48	50
	I wonder if you could do sth	3	1	8	15
	I'd like (wanted) to ask if ...	1	2	4	7
	I would appreciate it if you could …	2	2	5	7
	Do you think I could do?	2	1	4	9
indirect	Is it possible if...	0	0	3	9
	Is there any chance that...	0	0	1	10
Inappropriate	I'm afraid to tell you that...	2	2	3	1
	Imperative + appealer	9	13	7	0
Total		240	240	240	240

Results of Post-test WDCT of the Explicit Group.

The Explicit Group did much better in the post-test WDCTs than in the pre-test, with a rise in the mean score almost by 5 (see Table 11). A detailed examination of their post-test WDCT responses showed that progress in request realization made by the EG was evident. First, there was a considerable increase in the varieties of typical syntactic patterns used by the EG. The formula "Can you do …?" gave way to many other appropriate monoclausal and biclausal forms. Compared with the IG, the EG showed a better mastery of biclausal requestive forms (see Table 10).

Second, the participants of the EG demonstrated improved knowledge of form-function mapping. The majority of them could choose a formula and strategy appropriate for each situation. Many of them reported in the retrospective interview that through the instruction, they had learned about different kinds of requestive force carried by different formulas, and under what circumstances these formulas should be used. This indicated that the explicit instruction, which focused not only on the requestive formulas themselves, but also on metapragmatic knowledge, was more effective than the implicit instruction in facilitating learners' acquisition of pragmatic knowledge.

The EG also showed progress in the aspect of internal and external modifications. The frequency of internal modifications, especially that of lexical downgraders, increased to a large extent. Instead of simply using the Politeness Device, "please", they also resorted to other ways to soften the imposition, such as "Downtoner", "Consultative devices", and "Understaters". They also used a wider variety of syntactic downgraders than they did in the pre-test (see Table 4).

Additionally, the sequences of the components of the request discourse were also more target-like. Instead of arranging their request in the typical Chinese order, i.e. Preamble

(facework)–Reasons for request–Request, as most of them did in the pre-test, they more often followed the English way, i.e., request first followed by supportive moves.

Table 11. Paired Samples of Statistics of the Mean Scores of the Pre-Test and Post-Test WDCT by the EG

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
EXPREW	14.73	240	1.337	.086
EXPOSTW	19.42	240	1.132	.073

$P<0.05$

Role Plays of the Post-test.

To see whether there was progress in the on-line production of request by the two groups, and if there was, then to what extent, the mean scores for the post-test role play performance of the two groups were respectively compared with those of their pre-test. The results showed that the improvement was rather slight (see Table 12 and Table 13).

Though the EG did slightly better in the post-test role play, difference was not significant. A detailed examination of the syntactic patterns they used revealed that many learners of the explicit group still resorted to the monoclausal requestive formulae when dealing with high ranking imposition. This shows that a short period of explicit instruction was still inadequate in helping learners gain ability of instantaneous production. The major improvement between the pre- and post- oral tests of the explicit group was found in the sequence of the requestive components. They more often followed the English sequence in which the request formula was put before the reasons.

Table 12. Independent T-Test of the Mean Scores of the Pre-Test and Post-Test Role-Plays of the IG

	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Equal variances assumed	.281	.599	-1.622	38	.113	-.60	.370
Equal variances not assumed			-1.622	36.538	.113	-.60	.370

Table 13. Independent T-Test of the Mean Scores of the Pre-Test and Post-Test Role-Plays of the EG

	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Equal variances assumed	.132	.719	-3.041	38	.054	-1.00	.329
Equal variances not assumed			-3.041	37.643	.054	-1.00	.329

Discussion of the Post-test Results

Results from the WDCT of the post-test support the fact that both implicit and explicit instruction in pragmatics contribute to the development of pragmatic competence. However, the explicit instruction appears to be more effective than the implicit one in facilitating the acquisition of L2 pragmatic routines as demonstrated by the WDCT analysis. The fact that learners in the explicit group showed greater progress in the appropriate level of formality, directness, and politeness realized through the syntactic patterns, internal and external modifications, and sequence of request components suggests the success of consciousness-raising by explicit instruction. The explicit instruction encompasses the two types of activities that Kasper puts forward that are used for pragmatic development, namely activities aiming at raising students' pragmatic awareness, and activities offering opportunities for communicative practice. On the other hand, the implicit approach may not be adequate for the learners to notice the salient features of the target knowledge.

Consciousness Raising: From Input to Intake

In both groups, participants gained authentic input of the target speech act through accessing audio-visual materials. Input is an indispensable factor for learning, especially for the learning of pragmatics, which is particularly sensitive to the sociocultural features of a context. However, getting in touch with a large amount of input does not guarantee learning. As noted by Faerch and Kasper (1989), "what is needed in a theory of second language learning is an explanation of how input becomes 'learning intake." Schmidt's noticing hypothesis accounts for how to turn input into intake. The hypothesis argues that in order for input to become intake and thus be available for further processing, it has to be 'noticed', or 'detected' under 'awareness' (Schmidt, 1995). Therefore, the teacher needs to encourage the learners to carefully observe salient pragmatic phenomena and share their observation results with the peers, through which the learners notice specific phenomena and items for learning. By focusing the learners' attention on relevant features of the input, such observation tasks helped students make connections between linguistic forms, pragmatic functions, their occurrence in different social context, and their cultural meanings. The learners were thus guided to notice the information they need in order to develop their pragmatic competence in English.

L1 Transfer

The findings of the present study reveal that participants demonstrate both positive and negative pragmatic transfer of requestive patterns and strategies from their L1 when trying to fulfill the requestive goals in English. For example, Want Statements or Mood Directives were favored by the participants because these two strategies are most frequently used strategies in Chinese. This supports Kasper's and Bialystok's claims that some aspects of pragmatics are universal and that adults rely strongly on L1 and universal pragmatics. Some participants reported that they knew that strategies of communicative actions vary according to context, and requesting involves configuring such factors as social power, social and psychological

distance, and the degree of imposition. This further proves Bialystok's claim that L2 learners have largely completed the task of developing analytic representations of pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic knowledge. Yet what the participants are lacking is the knowledge of how they could meet the existing pragmalinguistic knowledge with the target sociopragmatic constraints. Therefore, before gaining control over processing or attention in selecting knowledge when appropriate, the second task of language development proposed by Bialystok, what adult L2 learners need to fulfill is to form the mappings of the correlations between grammatical, pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic knowledge. That is to say, they need, in regard to requests, to acquire the knowledge of what forms can be used to fulfill requestive functions, what are their imposition degrees, and what strategies should be chosen for a certain communicative context when various social factors are taken into consideration. This aspect of knowledge can consume much time and effort if Ll learners try to fathom it out by themselves. Therefore, teachers can play a facilitative role in helping EFL learners with the formation of L2 interwoven pragmatic representations. Through explicit instructions, learners notice the nuances and similarities between the native and target pragmatic knowledge so as to foster positive transfers while avoiding negative ones.

Grammar Prior to Pragmatics

The pre-test results showed that the participants' requests seemed not to vary much according to situations. Many of them used just one or two forms for all the situations. Some participants reported that they had deduced that the tasks involved consideration of different social factors, but they would put more emphasis on grammatical correctness and the complexity of the syntactic formula than on appropriateness of strategies. In other words, the priority is to get the idea conveyed rather than how to get it conveyed. The pedagogical implication here is that the teacher should stress the importance of pragmatic appropriateness in cross-cultural communications. In addition, to help learners acquire form-function mapping, pragmatic knowledge should be taught hand-in-hand with grammatical knowledge, rather than waiting till learners have formed wrong representations.

Insufficient Practice

The little improvement in the post-test role-play performance both by the EG and IG participants means that although learners' pragmatic knowledge increased through explicit instruction, their ability to apply this knowledge in real time communication was still lacking. This indicates that more practice opportunities should be provided through which learners can gain familiarity with and control over the target forms and form-function mapping.

Conclusion

The present study confirmed the findings of many other empirical studies of pragmatic competence of EFL learners that pragmatic competence, an indispensable component of communicative competence, cannot be acquired without proper instruction. Most Chinese

adult EFL learners are pragmatically incompetent because they lack adequate formal training in this aspect. Therefore, I have argued in this paper that Chinese adult EFL learners should be provided with classroom instructions of pragmatic knowledge to facilitate the development of their pragmatic competence.

The main benefit of explicit instruction is that it may facilitate noticing, raise learners' awareness of English pragmatic knowledge, and thus help in converting input to intake (Schmidt, 1995).

This research also indicated that explicit instruction of pragmatic knowledge is more beneficial to the realization of requests compared with implicit instruction. The study showed that teaching metapragmatic knowledge had helped learners under my instruction (1) raise their pragmatic awareness; (2) improve their abilities to choose appropriate pragmatic forms and strategies for certain social circumstances. The main benefit of explicit instruction is that it may facilitate noticing, raise learners' awareness of English pragmatic knowledge, and thus help in converting input to intake. The study also found that to gain pragmatic familiarity and fluency, more practice opportunities should be provided to learners.

Nevertheless, it should be cautioned that the facilitative effect of explicit classroom instruction will vary among learners. The main pedagogical implication of this study is that learners need to be given multiple opportunities, through a variety of instructional techniques, to develop awareness of features of the pragmatics.

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