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The Effect of Implicit and Explicit Metapragmatic Awareness on the Pragmatic Comprehension of Request and Refusal

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Abstract

Interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) has attracted significant attention from researchers over the last two decades. According to the recent research in ILP, it is verified that some traits of pragmatics are agreeable to instruction in the second or foreign language classroom. In spite of the proven facts in ILP, there are still arguments over the teaching approaches. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the relative effectiveness of implicit vs. explicit metapragmatic awareness on the pragmatic comprehension of speech acts of request and refusal on eighty three (22 male and 61 female) Persian intermediate students of English at Islamic Azad University of Mashad who were assigned to three groups (explicit, implicit, and control). The three groups were exposed to 30 video vignettes (15 for each speech act) extracted from different episodes of *Flash Forward* for eight 45-minute sessions of instruction once a week. Results of the pragmatic listening test indicated that learners' awareness of speech acts of requests and refusals benefited from both explicit and implicit types of instruction. In other words, explicit meta-pragmatic awareness had a statistically significant effect on the pragmatic comprehension of request and refusal. Furthermore, implicit pragmatic awareness had a statistically significant effect on the pragmatic comprehension of request and refusal. It was also found that there was a meaningful difference between these two types of awareness in these groups. In other words, the explicit group outperformed the implicit group. It is concluded that providing learners with rich and contextually appropriate input is considered a necessary condition to enhance learners' pragmatic ability when understanding and performing speech acts in the target language.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	iii
Abstract	iii
Table of Contents	iii
List of Tables	iii
List of Figures	iii
List of Abbreviations	iii
List of Appendices	iii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1. Introduction	1
1.2. Statement of the Problem	5
1.3. Significance of the Study	7
1.4. Objectives of the Study	7
1.5. Research Questions	8
1.6. Research Hypotheses	8
1.7. Definitions of Key Terms	8
1.7.1. Consciousness-raising	8
1.7.2. Interlanguage pragmatics	8
1.7.3. Metapragmatic awareness	9
1.7.4. Pragmatics	9
1.7.5. Pragmatic competence	9
1.7.6. Pragmatic comprehension	9

1.7.7. Pragmalinguistic competence	9
1.7.8. Sociopragmatic competence	9
1.7.9. Speech act	9
1.8. Limitations and delimitations	9
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE	11
2.1. Introduction	11
2.2. The Emergence of Pragmatics within the Construct of Communicative Competence	13
2.3. Defining Pragmatics and Interlanguage Pragmatics	20
2.3.1. Speech Act Theory	22
2.3.2. Cooperative Principle	23
2.3.3. Politeness Theory	25
2.3.4. Culture	28
2.4. Issues Being Addressed in ILP Research in EFL/ESL Contexts	28
2.5. Theoretical Approaches to Comprehension	30
2.5.1. Approaches to Pragmatic Comprehension	31
2.6. Rationales behind the Study: Consciousness-raising (CR) Approach & Noticing Hypothesis	33
2.6.1. Implications for Teaching based on CR & Noticing Hypothesis	35
2.7. Assessing Second Language Pragmatics	37
2.7.1. Methods of Testing Pragmatic Ability	38
2.7.1.1 Written Discourse Completion Test	38
2.7.1.2 Multiple-choice Discourse Completion Test (MDCT)	39
2.7.1.3 Oral Discourse Completion Task (ODCT)	39
2.7.1.4 Discourse Role-play Task (DRPT)	39
2.7.1.5 Discourse Self-Assessment Task (DSAT)	40
2.7.1.6 Role-play Self-Assessment Task (RPSAT)	40
2.7.2. Components of a Test of Interlanguage Pragmatic Ability	40

2.7.2.1 Speech Acts	40
2.7.2.2 Conversational Implicatures	41
2.7.2.3 Pragmatic Routines	42
2.8. Components of Pragmatic Knowledge: Speech Acts of Request & Refusal	42
2.8.1. Request	43
2.8.1.1. Functions and Strategies for Making Requests	43
2.8.1.2. Request Perspectives	44
2.8.1.3. Syntactic Downgraders	45
2.8.1.4. Other Downgraders & Upgraders	45
2.8.2. Refusal	46
2.8.2.1. Functions & Strategies for Refusal	46
2.8.2.2. Adjuncts to Refusals	48
2.9. Empirical Studies on the Pragmatic Comprehension of Requests & Refusals in EFL/ESL Contexts	48
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY	55
3.1. Introduction	55
3.2. Participants	56
3.3. Instrumentation	56
3.3.1. Oxford Placement Test	56
3.3.2. Test of Listening Pragmatic Comprehension of Request and Refusal	57
3.4. Design of the Study	59
3.5. Instructional Materials	59
3.5.1. Speech Act Vignettes	59
3.6. Procedure	60
3.6.1. The Control group	60
3.6.2. The Implicit Group	60
3.6.3. The Explicit Group	60
3.7. Data Analysis	62
3.7.1. Reliability Statistics of the Test	62
3.7.1.1. Cronbach's alpha	62

3.7.2. Paired-sample t-test	62
3.7.3. ANOVA	62
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION	63
4.1. Introduction	59
4.2. Statistical Test	59
4.3. Research Questions Revisited	60
4.3.1. Research Question One	60
4.3.2. Research Question Two	60
4.3.3. Research Question Three	60
4.4. Discussion	61
4.4.1. Research Questions One, Two, and Three	61
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION	62
5.1. Introduction	63
5.2. Restatement of the Problem	63
5.3. Summary of the Findings	64
5.4. Conclusion	64
5.5. Implications	65
5.5.1. Theoretical Implications of the Study	65
5.5.2. Pedagogical Implications of the Study	66
5.6. Suggestions for Further Research	69
References	70
Appendices	91
Appendix A: Listening Pragmatic Comprehension	91

List of Tables

Table 3.1 Oxford Placement Test Scoring Criterion	57
Table 4.1 Summary of Descriptive Statistics of All Groups before and after the Instructional Period	66
Table 4.2 Summary of Paired Samples t- test of All Groups before and after the Instructional Period	67
Table 4.3 ANOVA for Learners' Development of Requests and Refusals in the Post-test	68
Table 4.4 Multiple Comparisons through Post Hoc Test of Tukey (HSD)	69

List of Figures

Figure 2.1 Bachman's model of communicative competence	15
Figure 2.2 Schematic representation of the proposed framework of communicative competence integrating the four skills	17
Figure 2.3 Possible strategies for doing FTAs	19
Figure 4.1 Summary of descriptive statistics of pragmatics listening test	67

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

CR	Consciousness-raising
DCT	Discourse Completion Task
DRPT	Discourse Role-play Task
DSAT	Discourse Self-assessment Task
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ESL	English as a Second Language
FTA	Face-Threatening Act
ILP	Interlanguage Pragmatic
IRF	Initiation, Response, Feedback
MDCT	Multiple Discourse Completion Test
NNS	Non-native Speaker
NS	Native Speaker
ODCT	Oral Discourse Completion Task
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
TL	Target Language
WDCT	Written Discourse Completion Task

List of Appendices

Appendix A Listening Pragmatic Comprehension

91



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An Outline of MA. Thesis

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Abstract:

Interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) has attracted significant attention from researchers over the last two decades. According to the recent research in ILP, it is verified that some traits of pragmatics are agreeable to instruction in the second or foreign language classroom. In spite of the proven facts in ILP, there are still arguments over the teaching approaches. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the relative effectiveness of implicit vs. explicit metapragmatic awareness on the pragmatic comprehension of speech acts of request and refusal on eighty three (22 male and 61 female) Persian intermediate students of English at Islamic Azad University of Mashad who were assigned to three groups (explicit, implicit, and control). The three groups were exposed to 30 video vignettes (15 for each speech act) extracted from different episodes of *Flash Forward* for eight 45-minute sessions of instruction once a week. Results of the pragmatic listening test indicated that learners' awareness of speech acts of requests and refusals benefited from both explicit and implicit types of instruction. In other words, explicit meta-pragmatic awareness had a statistically significant effect on the pragmatic comprehension of request and refusal. Furthermore, implicit pragmatic awareness had a statistically significant effect on the pragmatic comprehension of request and refusal. It was also found that there was a meaningful difference between these two types of awareness in these groups. In other words, the explicit group outperformed the implicit group. It is concluded that providing learners with rich and contextually appropriate input is considered a necessary condition to enhance learners' pragmatic ability when understanding and performing speech acts in the target language.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction

Interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) is a promising area in second language acquisition. It has achieved a significant notice from researchers and practitioners. Linguistic pragmatics has its origins in language philosophy and developed as a result of postulations concerning the functions and use of language by philosophers such as Austin (1962), Searle (1969, 1975, 1976, cited in Schauer, 2009) and Grice (1968, cited in Schauer, 2009). Interlanguage Pragmatics, in particular, as the name signifies, is a subdiscipline of both interlanguage studies, rooted in the domain of second language acquisition research, and pragmatics. ILP is a comparatively nascent area in linguistics that derived its roots from pragmatics theory and developments in L2 pedagogy and research in the 1970s. ILP research is also greatly affected by Hymes's (1971; 1972) concept of *communicative competence* which placed a premium upon development away from a more grammar-oriented L2 pedagogy. Hymes (ibid) conceptualizes that a speaker's communicative competence encompasses four types of knowledge which can take account of their ability to assess whether and to what extent an utterance is a) grammatically possible, b) cognitively feasible, c) socially and culturally appropriate and d) actually performed. Literature on ILP has clearly witnessed that Hymes's model of communicative competence as well as subsequent ones by Canale and Swain (1980), Canale (1983) and especially Bachman (1990) have culminated in a growing interest in ILP studies. In a seminal work, Kasper and Rose (2002) perspicaciously

recapitulate that communicative competence models shed light on pragmatic studies, and ever since these studies have focused on three major questions which are as follows:

1. “Whether the targeted pragmatic feature is teachable at all (Liddicoat & Crozet, 2001; Morrow, 1996; Olshtain & Cohen, 1990).
2. Whether instruction in the targeted feature is more effective than no instruction (Bouton, 1994, 1999; Lyster, 1994).
3. Whether different teaching approaches are differentially effective (p. 323)”.

Kasper and Rose (ibid) conclude that without any exception, the teachability studies indicate that the targeted features are indeed teachable. Alternatively, the instruction vs. no-instruction studies illustrates a clear advantage for instruction. As to the third question, literature on ILP still seeks more empirical studies to be done to ascertain and authenticate which teaching approaches are differentially effective and conducive to learning.

Such potential framework within which pragmatic development can be investigated from an acquisitional and interventional vantage point is Schmidt’s (1990; 1993) *noticing hypothesis* and Sharwood Smith’s (1981; 1993) *consciousness raising*.

Schmidt (2001) pinpoints that if students are provided with enough input or exposure of any kind, but they are not made aware of the sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic features of the input, they cannot develop their ILP. Schmidt (1993; 2001) cogently propounds that according to psycholinguistic theory and research on second language learning, for input to be acquisitionally germane, it ought to be noticed, or detected under attention. Schmidt (2001) elaborates that global alertness to target language input is not adequate, but attention has to be allotted to specific learning objects. He further states that “in 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”. Schmidt (1995) further makes a demarcation between noticing and understanding. Noticing is defined as the ‘conscious registration of the occurrence of some event,’ while understanding purports “the recognition of some general principle, rule, or pattern. Noticing refers to surface level phenomena and item learning, while understanding refers to deeper level(s) of abstraction related to (semantic, syntactic, or communicative) meaning, system learning” .

Regarding language instruction, Sharwood Smith (1981, 1993) advanced the concept of consciousness raising, later modified to input enhancement, as way to draw learners’

attention to particular linguistic aspects of a target language. The techniques to make certain aspects of the grammar more salient do not necessarily entail direct teaching of rules or paradigms. Instead, alerting the learners to TL structures can be done by stress and intonation in teacher talk or color-coding in printed materials. Tomlin and Villa (1994) list several studies where instructional strategies, such as explicit discussion, metalinguistic description, overt error correction, and input flooding, led to increased performance of the same items by learners.

Schmidt (1993) examines the role of *consciousness* in the learning of pragmatic rules in a L2, drawing on previous research from psychology, linguistics, and language acquisition. Although he characterizes his work as “speculative,” he argues that, based on the evidence from studies of human learning and the acquisition of L1 and L2 pragmatics, learning the pragmatics of a L2 necessitates “attention to linguistic forms, functional meanings, and relevant contextual features” (p. 35). As to the actual instruction, Schmidt suggests that access to TL pragmatics through “sociolinguistically appropriate input” alone is not enough for learners to acquire competence in using language in a host of situations and with different hearers. Even as they progress to more advanced levels of communicative competence, realizations of certain TL speech acts may remain unnoticed by learners if specific strategies are not made clear to them during instruction. Therefore, as for some TL grammatical items, explicit instruction of TL pragmatics appears to be necessary for the acquisition of pragmatics in a L2.

Quite on par with Schmidt’s noticing hypothesis and Sharwood Smith’s consciousness raising, Kondo (2008) points out that one approach that may assist learners to develop their own interlanguage pragmatics is awareness raising. Similarly, Bardovi-Harlig (1996) emphasizes the significance of helping learners to increase their pragmatic awareness, rather than following the model of a teacher-fronted classroom where the teachers ‘impart’ information and the learners ‘receive’ information.

Schmidt’s (ibid) *noticing hypothesis* and Sharwood Smith’s (ibid) consciousness raising have been mainly implemented in production-oriented studies although Kasper and Dahl (1991) define the discipline of ILP as the study of non-native speakers’ acquisition, *comprehension* and production of pragmatics. Within ILP development, nevertheless, the pendulum has swung much towards production-oriented studies (Rose, 2009) and

comprehension is “the least well-represented, with only a handful of studies done to date” (Kasper and Rose, 2002, p.118). Rose (2005) cogently states that whereas most studies in ILP have focused on the production of the target features or their use in interaction, “instruction specifically aimed at improving learners pragmatic comprehension has received far less attention” (p.388). More research is needed on pragmatic comprehension.

As to the studies done, Lee (2010) recapitulates that they have found a correlation between the comprehension of implied meaning among adult L2 learners and certain social and psychological variables, including language contact with speakers of the target language (Schmidt, 1983; Taguchi, 2008), the learners’ proficiency level (Kasper, 1984; Yamanaka, 2003), comprehension speed and accuracy (Taguchi, 2005, 2007), and interlanguage pragmatic comprehension of young learners of English (Lee, 2010).).

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Language speakers come to realize a vast repertoire of communicative acts as they negotiate with different hearers in a wide array of situations.

Needless to say that native speakers capitalize on the resources of their linguistic and sociocultural knowledge to articulate their speech appropriately for a given context. This knowledge is referred to as *pragmatic competence*. Unlike native speakers, most language learners have limited resources in a target language (TL) with which to undertake their interactions. Thus, their utterances may be inappropriate for the addressees and the situation. So,

- a. *What should be done to compensate for the scarcity of resources in the classroom setting?*
- b. *What should be done to simulate real life situations in the classroom?*
- c. *What should be done to visualize almost all pragmatic features and peculiarities of speech and interaction in an EFL context?*
- d. *What should be done to conspicuously sensitize foreign language learners to language speech act?*

Although it is widely accepted that instruction plays a crucial role in the acquisition of pragmatics (Lyster, 1993; 1994; Kasper & Schmidt, 1996; Kasper, 1997; Rose and Kasper, 2001; Jeon & Kaya, 2006; Taguchi, 2007; Kondo, 2008), the foreign language classroom

may expose students to a limited environment to foster pragmatics learning. There is a consensus among pragmatics practitioners and theoreticians that the opportunities for student interaction in the classroom settings are rather restricted (Kasper, 2001; Kasper & Rose, 1999; Lyster, 1994), and the materials to which the students are exposed are decontextualized (Bardovi-Harlig *et al.*, 1991), and they may not produce the sociolinguistic input that is essential in order for learning to take place. Alternatively, some researchers propound that textbook conversations are really limited and unreliable source of input to tap upon pragmatics learning (Lo'rscher & Schulze, 1988; Bardovi-Harlig *et al.*, 1991; Boxer & Pickering, 1995; Gilmore, 2004).

Therefore, researchers should seek other ways which are most viable and can resemble real life situations. Being inspired by a need to innovate methodological techniques that are most conducive to learning, it is postulated that consciousness-raising video-driven prompts could simulate real life more and have the potentiality to contextualize language learning more thoroughly.

As to these limitations, studies on the teachability of pragmatic competence in the language classroom have been attempting to find those techniques and methods that positively affect pragmatics learning (House, 1996; Alc3n, 2002; Bardovi-Harlig & Mahan-Taylor, 2003; Mart'nez--Flor *et al.*, 2003; Rose & Kasper, 2001; Alc3n & Mart'nez--Flor, 2005). Subsequently, pragmatics advocates have theoretically shown great interest in video prompts as one of the pedagogical tools to develop interlanguage pragmatics. To the researcher's best knowledge, the previous studies, surprisingly however, have not undertaken video-driven prompts in their studies as one of the interventional tools to instruct pragmatics.

Given that the research to date mainly focused upon the production of speech acts (Alc3n ,2005; Mart'nez--Flor ,2007) and given that to the researcher's best knowledge, no research, if any, has empirically scrutinized the effectiveness of implicit and explicit metapragmatic awareness on the pragmatic comprehension of request and refusal, it, therefore, makes sense to bridge the gap in the literature by doing a study on comprehension of request and refusal drawing on video-driven prompts as an interventional tool to boost learners' ILP.

1.3. Significance of the Study

Interlocutor's familiarity with the pragmatic norms and rules of a particular language, community, and culture is crucially indispensable for successful communication. Schauer (2009), for example, cites Kachru (1999) stating that speakers and hearers of a particular language need to have access to some kind of shared knowledge to correctly construct and reconstruct the meaning of spoken or written acts. Hence, if someone does not have access to this knowledge and is therefore unfamiliar with the norms of that particular language, it may be a burden for that person to convey what he intends to communicate in a manner that enables the interlocutors to understand it in the way that it was intended.

There are some potential difficulties native speakers and non-native speakers may face when communicating with each other. In a nutshell, teaching ILP is justified on the ground that language learners may encounter difficulties to produce and comprehend language appropriately due to cross-cultural mismatches regarding the linguistic and social appropriacy of target language norms, and negative pragmatic transfer from their L1 to L2, to just name a few.

More importantly, among those studies which have investigated the effectiveness of implicit and explicit metapragmatic awareness on the pragmatic comprehension of request and refusal, this study adds to the body of knowledge on pragmatic development by immersing learners in video-prompts which can visualize and simulate real life peculiarities, social and cultural norms.

Therefore, the vitality of such an undertaking can shed light on the pragmatic literature since few studies, if any, have ever simulated such a research; therefore, new horizons can be opened for further research in the realm of ILP.

1.4. Objectives of the Study

The present study aims to investigate the effect of implicit vs. explicit metapragmatic awareness on the pragmatic comprehension of request and refusal. This purpose arises from two basic needs, one general and one specific. The general need was established on the

basis of a literature review substantiating a serious gap in the area of developmental interventional research on L2 pragmatics, and the specific need to quench the researcher's curiosity about the efficacy of this particular mode of instructional intervention.

1.5. Research Questions

1. Does implicit pragmatic awareness enhance the pragmatic comprehension of request and refusal?
2. Does explicit metapragmatic awareness augment the pragmatic comprehension of request and refusal?
3. Is there any significant difference between explicit and implicit pragmatic awareness on the pragmatic comprehension of request and refusal?

1.6. Research Hypotheses

1. Implicit pragmatic awareness does not enhance the pragmatic comprehension of request and refusal.
2. Explicit metapragmatic awareness does not augment the pragmatic comprehension of request and refusal.
3. There is not any significant difference between explicit and implicit pragmatic awareness on the pragmatic comprehension of request and refusal.

1.7. Definition of Key Terms

1.7.1. Consciousness-raising: "C-R is a continuum ranging from intensive promotion of conscious awareness through pedagogical role articulation on one end, to the mere exposure of the learner to specific grammatical phenomenon the other." (Rutherford & Sharwood-Smith, 1988 p.3)

1.7.2 Interlanguage pragmatics: As the study of second language use, interlanguage pragmatics examines how nonnative speakers comprehend and produce action in a target language. As the study of second language learning, interlanguage pragmatics investigates

how L2 learners develop the ability to understand and perform action in a target language. (Kasper & Rose, 2002, p. 5)

1.7.3. Metapragmatic awareness: Explicit knowledge that a language user has about the forms and functions of pragmatic speech acts. (House,1996)

1.7.4. Pragmatics: Pragmatics is the study of language from the point of view of users, especially of the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction and the effects their use of language has on other participants in the act of communication. (Crystal, 1985, p. 240)

1.7.5. Pragmatic competence: “concerned with the relationships between utterances and the acts or functions that speakers (or writers) intend to perform through these utterances”(1990,p.89).

1.7.6. Pragmatic comprehension: Thomas (1995) points out that meaning has two levels: utterance meaning, or assigning sense to the words uttered; and force, or speakers’ intention behind the words. Pragmatic comprehension entails understanding meaning at both levels. It involves the ability to perceive what words and sentences mean, as well as to understand what speakers mean by them. Therefore, comprehension of implied meaning, namely, meaning “that goes beyond what is given by the language form itself or what is literally said” (Verschueren, 1999, p. 25; cited in Taghuchi, 2007), is an important aspect of comprehension ability.

1.7.7. Pragmalinguistic competence: “pragmalinguistics refers to the resources for conveying communicative acts and relational or interpersonal meanings” (Rose & Kasper, 2001, p. 2)

1.7.8. Sociopragmatic competence: “sociopragmatics refers to the social perceptions underlying participants’ interpretation and performance of communicative action” (Kasper, 2001, p. 2)

1.7.9. Speech act: “an utterance that performs a locutionary and an illocutionary meaning in communication. For example, ‘I like your dress’ is a locutionary speech act concerning a proposition about a person’s dress with the illocutionary force of a compliment”. (Ellis, 2008, p.979).

1.8. Limitations and Delimitations