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Does Instruction Alter the Naturalistic Pattern of Pragmatic Development? A Case of Request Speech Act

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Abstract

This study examined the effects of explicit instruction on the development of pragmatic competence in L2 English. The study is based on Taguchi's (2012) study conducted in an English-medium university in Japan, which revealed patterns of change in Japanese EFL students' production of requests in high- and low-imposition situations. Students showed strong development with low-imposition requests (e.g., asking a friend for a pen) over one year but almost no gain with high-imposition requests (e.g., asking a professor for an extension of an assignment). Based on these findings, in the same institution, we implemented explicit instruction on the target pragmalinguistic forms that never emerged in the students' request data (i.e., syntactic mitigation, hedging, and amplifiers). Results from a new cohort of 23 students revealed strong instructional effects. Students' production rates of the target features jumped by 40-90% from pre- to immediate post-test, and a large portion of the gain was maintained at delayed posttest given four months later.

Key words: interlanguage pragmatics (ILP), teaching pragmatics, longitudinal study, speech act

Introduction

Pragmatics reflects the relationship between *pragmalinguistics* and *sociopragmatics*. Pragmalinguistics means linguistic resources available to perform language functions, while sociopragmatics involves language users' understanding of the context in which such resources are used (Leech, 1983). In the field of L2 pragmatics, while description of knowledge and use of pragmatics has long dominated the research, the research focus in the 1990s has shifted to the teaching of pragmatics. In the same period, the field

expanded the body of longitudinal studies that directly addressed developmental pragmatics. Currently there is a continuous growth of instructional and longitudinal research fueled by a more explicit application of mainstream L2 learning theories and by an expansion of technology-based teaching (Taguchi, 2011; Taguchi & Sykes, 2013).

Instructional studies have revealed that instructed groups, particularly those who received explicit information, tend to outperform their non-instructed counterparts (Jeon & Kaya, 2006; Takahashi, 2010). However, long-term effects of instruction are uncertain because many studies omitted delayed post-tests. On the other hand, longitudinal studies have revealed that acquisition of pragmalinguistic forms is a slow process. Some studies found almost no change in learners' pragmalinguistic knowledge even in a target language context, suggesting that exposure alone does not automatically lead to development (Taguchi, 2010). These findings imply that a longitudinal study that incorporates explicit instruction on slow-developing pragmalinguistic knowledge is needed. Such a study can facilitate learners' pace of development, and, at the same time, help investigate the lasting effects of instruction – whether learners can sustain their learning by applying learned knowledge to their real-life context.

Our study pursued this investigation by replicating Taguchi's (2012) longitudinal study while incorporating explicit instruction as an additional component. We addressed whether instruction is robust enough to remedy the problem of slow-developing pragmalinguistic knowledge found in Taguchi's original study. The author documented naturalistic development of speech acts among Japanese ESL learners in an English-medium university in Japan. An oral discourse completion task (DCT) showed that some request forms never emerged in the learners' data after a year. Our study taught those forms to a new cohort of students in the same school, after which their learning was traced over a year.

Background

Instructional Studies in L2 Pragmatics

The central concern of the instructional and longitudinal research involves a change within the L2 pragmatic systems and its influences on the change. The majority of instructional studies treat direct teaching as the factor affecting the change and assessing its impact on learning. Learning here is operationalized as a change in learners' pragmatic knowledge from pre- to post-instruction. Instructional studies are largely quasi-experimental, comparing learners who received instruction versus those who did not, or examining achievement across two or more groups learning under different teaching methods.

These studies have revealed two major generalizations: (1) Most aspects of pragmatics are teachable, meaning that instruction can cause positive change in learners' pragmatic systems, and (2) Certain instructional methods lead to stronger and more robust learning than other methods (Jeon & Kaya, 2006; Takahashi, 2010). In Taguchi's (2015) review of 58 studies, 28 studies included a control group, and essentially all of these studies found an advantage of instruction over non-instruction. In some studies the effect was observed differently across outcome measures and pragmatic targets.

In terms of teaching methods, explicit vs. implicit teaching comparison has generated the most empirical findings. These studies followed Schmidt's (2001) noticing hypothesis, which argues that learners must notice target features in input in order to acquire these features. Explicit instruction provides direct metapragmatic explanation and focused practice on the target pragmalinguistic forms, while implicit instruction withholds explanation but tries to develop learners' implicit understandings of the target forms via consciousness-raising tasks. Previous research generally confirmed that explicit instruction is more effective than implicit instruction, but the length of instruction, pragmatic targets, and types of outcome measures moderate learning benefits (Jeon & Kaya, 2006; Takahashi, 2010).

Studies that taught English requests are particularly relevant to our study (e.g., Alcón-Soler, 2007; Halenko & Jones, 2011; Li, 2012; Takahashi, 2001; Takimoto, 2009, 2012). Takahashi (2001) compared the explicit condition with three different implicit conditions: form-comparison, form-search, and meaning-focused. The form-comparison group compared their requests with native speakers' requests in conversation transcripts, while the form-search group simply pointed out any native-like language use in the transcripts. The meaning-focused group read the same transcripts and answered comprehension questions. DCT data showed that the explicit group outperformed all implicit groups.

Similar effects of explicit instruction were found in Alcón-Soler's (2007) study. EFL learners in an explicit treatment received direct metapragmatic information on requests and analyzed examples of requests in video scripts. The implicit group received awareness-raising tasks in which request head act (i.e., main request-making forms such as 'Would you mind if…?') and sociopragmatic factors were highlighted, but received no metapragmatic explanation. No significant group differences were found on a recognition task after the instruction, but only the explicit group maintained learning until the delayed post-test was given three weeks after the treatment.

Although the advantage of the explicit treatment is generally recognized, when request modifications are concerned, several studies revealed equal effects of explicit and implicit methods, or even superiority of implicit over explicit teaching (Li, 2012). Li taught request modifications (e.g., giving a reason for request) under three conditions: explicit, enhanced input, and input-output. The explicit group received metapragmatic information via dialogues and then role-played scenarios. The enhanced input group received the same dialogues with target modifications highlighted and then role-played scenarios. The input-output group read the same dialogues without enhancement prior to role-play. DCT results found the superiority of the two implicit conditions.

In summary, previous research has confirmed that instruction can generate positive changes in L2 learners' knowledge of request. At the same time, they have yielded mixed findings regarding the effective method of instruction. The explicit approach is generally effective, but target pragmatic features (head act or modifications) could mediate the effect. Most importantly, very few studies have investigated the long-term effect of explicit or implicit instruction, which the present study intends to address.

Longitudinal Studies in L2 Pragmatics

Because intervention is implemented by the researcher with a sole purpose of producing learning in the instructional research, any change found at post-instruction is an anticipated change. In contrast, longitudinal studies focus on naturalistic change. Longitudinal studies intend to capture changing patterns of learners' pragmatic systems through a cyclical use of comparative tasks (e.g., pre-post-tests results and analysis of changing pragmatic features). Taguchi's (2010) synthesis found 21 longitudinal studies, of which 12 examined the development in the production of pragmatic features, including speech acts, routines, address terms, and interactional particles.

One general finding gleaned from this synthesis is learners' slow-development of pragmalinguistic forms (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1993; Barron, 2003; DuFon, 2000; Hassall, 2006; Schauer, 2004, 2011; Shively, 2011). Learners initially adhere to simple, one-to-one correspondence between form and function. They eventually expand their repertoire of pragmalinguistic forms, but this process takes time. For example, Hassall's (2006) diary study documented his own acquisition of Indonesian leave-taking expressions during his three-month stay in Indonesia. At the beginning, the author used only *permisi* in leave-taking, but began to use another expression, *dulu*, after being corrected for misuse and noticing the form in the media.

Other studies revealed learners' slow acquisition of pragmalinguistic forms in contrast to their strong acquisition of semantic strategies in speech acts. Schauer (2004) analyzed L2 English learners' requests while studying abroad. She found that the learners' understanding of rituals of request, for example establishing positive atmosphere through small talk or showing consideration for another's situation, improved with time. However, their correct use of lexical and syntactic downgraders remained unchanged. These studies suggest that learners' speech act strategies (discourse-level strategies) show steady progress, but precise syntax and lexis used to encode pragmatic intentions (linguistic-level strategies) do not seem to develop as fast even in a target language context.

If acquisition of pragmalinguistics takes place slowly, what factors can facilitate the acquisition? Previous studies point to correction, feedback, and modeling as potential factors (Belz & Kinginger, 2003; DuFon, 2000; Hassall, 2006). In DuFon's study, native speakers' corrective feedback helped learners acquire negative response forms. The effects of feedback become even clearer when we compare findings from two studies on L2 German address forms (Barron, 2003; Belz & Kinginger, 2003). Barron examined acquisition of informal (*T*) and formal (*V*) pronouns among 33 learners of German over a 14-month stay in Germany. DCT data revealed only modest progress. Learners' random switching between these two forms decreased only by 7%. These results form a striking contrast with Belz and Kinginger's findings where learners of German corresponded online with their German peers. Although the learners initially used the *V*-Form, they replaced it with informal *T*-Form after their peers gave corrective feedback. The findings suggest that, even in a foreign language context, explicit feedback, coupled with native speakers' modeling of the target forms, can boost learning. The benefit of explicit feedback supports Schmidt's (2001) noticing hypothesis. In Belz and Kinginger's study, peer feedback promoted learners' noticing of form-function-context mappings,

because, despite their exposure to the *T*-forms in their peers' emails, learners started using them only after their peers explained their misuse of the formal *V*-forms.

Noticing and attention, promoted through explicit correction and feedback, are the critical factors to consider in both longitudinal and instructional research. Longitudinal findings showed that the acquisition of pragmalinguistic forms is a slow process, and input exposure alone does not always lead to development. Some triggering events, such as feedback and modeling, must occur so that learners can register the form-function-context mappings in their systems. On the other hand, in instructional studies, the relative advantage of explicit over implicit teaching in the literature reiterates the importance of noticing in instruction. Saliency of the target form-function-context mappings promoted through direct explicit explanation and communicative activities can facilitate the pace and degree of learning.

While attention and noticing form a common thread in the literature on longitudinal and instructed pragmatics, what is lacking in the literature is a study that combines these two strands to examine the effects of explicit instruction on the long-term development of pragmatic abilities. Previous longitudinal studies found the benefit of explicit feedback, but almost no studies have implemented pre-planned explicit teaching during the course of learners' development. Given the pool of findings about explicit feedback leading to better development, a longitudinal study that incorporates explicit instruction in the design will be important.

On the other hand, a gap in the instructional research is that very few studies have examined the impact of instruction on learners' real-life pragmatics development. Most studies were experimental; testing the effects of planned intervention on learning and rarely went beyond post-test (but see Riddiford & Joe, 2010). Investigation stops at the stage where they have measured the instructional effects by comparing the pre-and post-test performances. The research scope should be expanded by exploring the *after effect* of instruction – whether learners can transfer learned knowledge to real-world situations and maintain long-term learning. Such a study is important because learners' performance beyond the laboratory directly indicates the robustness of instruction and helps examine whether instruction is strong enough to remedy the problem of slow-developing pragmalinguistic knowledge found in many longitudinal studies.

To contribute to the literature, we pursued a combined analysis of longitudinal and instructional investigation by tracing the developmental path of L2 English pragmatics with explicit instruction embedded within the path. Based on the original study that described changes in pragmatics in a particular school (see below), we provided pragmatic instruction to a new cohort of students in the same school to see whether instruction affects development.

The Original Study

The study that formed a basis in our investigation was Taguchi's (2012) longitudinal study that traced pragmatic development of students in L2 English. Participants were 48 Japanese students who entered an English-medium university in Japan in 2008. They completed an oral DCT that assessed production of two speech acts: requests and opinions. The items had two categories: low and high-imposition. The former involved a

situation between interlocutors in an equal power relationship with small imposition (e.g., asking a friend for a pen), while the latter involved a situation between interlocutors of a different power relationship with large imposition (e.g., asking a professor for an extension of an assignment).

Although the production of low-imposition speech acts revealed a strong progress, high-imposition speech acts showed little improvement after a year. Students maintained a direct manner of speech, often lacking syntactic and lexical mitigations. One area that revealed no progress over time was the use of mitigated preparatory expressions in the speech act of request. Mitigated preparatory involves syntactic forms that make reference to the hearer's ability or will, and involve embedded questions or bi-clausal structures (e.g., *I wonder if you could*). These expressions were almost completely absent in the students' data, while they appeared more than 70% of the time in the native speakers' base-line data. The students also lacked internal modifications such as 'hedging' (e.g., *possibly*) and 'amplifiers' (e.g., *really*), and showed no increase over time, although they appeared over 50% of the time in the native speaker data.

The students' direct request found in the data, as marked by the absence of the mitigated preparatory and underuse of hedging and amplifiers, was also found in their interaction with class instructors. In the real-life pragmatics of making a request to their teachers, students often used the direct form of request with please + imperative, strong modals (*should*), and direct expressions of dislike (*I don't like X*). They lacked awareness of negative consequences resulting from this pragmatic failure. At the same time, teachers in general were often keen on getting students' feedback, neglecting to correct students' misuse of pragmalinguistics.

Based on the findings, we collaborated with instructors in the institution and implemented explicit instruction on the speech act of request. We identified pragmalinguistic forms that were absent in the students' requests in the original data. Then, we taught those forms to a new cohort of students in the same institution to investigate effects of instruction and trace development. This study was guided by the research question: Does explicit instruction alter the naturalistic pattern of development in the speech act of request in L2 English?

Methods

Research Site and Participants

The research site was the same English-medium university as Taguchi's original study. In this school all classes are taught in English. Students study at least one semester in the intensive ESL program. After finishing ESL, students advance to Basic Education and then continue to their major. The school has about 70 faculty members of whom about half are foreign nationals.

This study took place in 2012. Participants included 23 first-semester students in the ESL program. As shown in Table 1, participants in the original study (2012) and our study were comparable. For instance, mean age and male-female ratios were similar. While participants in our study averaged 6.3 years of formal English education, the participants in the original study averaged 6.1 years. Average TOEFL score of our participants was 457.3, which was almost identical with the score of the original study

(mean=459.4). Participants in both studies were living in a residence hall, and only 8% had an English-speaking roommate. Distribution of the medium of English instruction in high school was also similar. Participants in the original study came from 18 different prefectures, while those in this study represented 16 prefectures.

Table 1: Comparison of participant background

	Original study	**Present study**
Number of participants1	48	23
Male-female ratio	33:67	30:70
Average age	18.33 (range: 18-21)	18.84 (range: 18-25)
EAP levels enrolled	Level 1 & 2	Level 1 & 2
Average TOEFL scores	459.4 (SD=17.8; range: 413-497)	457.3 (SD=18.5; range: 430-483)
Average length of formal English education	6.1 years	6.3 years
Medium of instruction in high school English classes	English, 2%; Japanese, 80%; Both, 19%	English, 4%; Japanese, 76%; Both, 20%
% of student who had lived overseas more than one month	7%	8%
Living arrangement	Dorm (100%)	Dorm (100%)
% of students who had an English-speaking roommate	8%	8%

The overall structure of the ESL program was also similar. Both groups were enrolled in the first two levels of the ESL program and received a similar number of class hours in English. Students in the original study had four skills classes: reading (3 times/week, 110 minutes each), writing (2 times/week, 110 minutes each), listening (2 times/week, 80 minutes each), and speaking (2 times/week, 55 minutes each). Students in this study had three classes: reading (2 times/week, 110 minutes each), writing (3 times/week, 110 minutes each), and speaking and listening (2 times/week, 110 minutes each). In addition to these skills courses, students in both studies had self-learning hours (360 minutes/week) where they polished their reading skills (extensive reading, timed reading) and listening skills using a variety of audio-visual materials (movies, news clips) and both groups had a TOEFL preparation class (twice/week).

Comparability of the classes in the two studies was confirmed through analyses of course syllabi and instructor interviews. In both studies, course objectives in the writing class stated that students work on writing fluency and sentence-level conventions and then move on to develop their skills with formal paragraph writing. Students also used the same textbook in the writing class. Although the textbook was different, course objectives in the reading class were the same in both studies: improving reading fluency

and comprehension, and vocabulary knowledge through in-class intensive reading and out-of-class extensive reading. These same course objectives add to the comparability between the two studies: Teachers in both studies were oriented toward similar goals of improving academic English skills required in the same ESL program.

We were particularly interested in the speaking class in the ESL program because the teaching materials and test used in this study involved speaking. There were two instructors for the speaking class (same instructors in both studies). We interviewed them to gain information about their classes. Although the textbooks were different in the two studies, class activities were similar. In both studies, the classes focused on informal communication in a variety of formats, including small talk, interviews, and discussions, which encouraged students to express feelings, opinions, and ideas. The topics were kept to daily, personal experiences (e.g., family, vacations, and university life). There were a few exercises targeting request. Several request-making expressions appeared in the exercises (e.g., 'Can I' + verb), which were followed by a pattern drill and short conversation practice. There was no sociolinguistic information about these forms–when and/or under what circumstances to use one form over another and what situational features constrain their use. Contextual factors were usually fixed, and the textbook did not engage students in practicing this speech act in different sociocultural settings.

Target Pragmatic Features and Instructional Materials

The instructional target was the speech act of request, focusing on three pragmalinguistic forms: mitigated preparatory forms (request head act), hedging, and amplifiers (internal modifications) (see Table 2). These forms were selected based on the findings from the original study: (1) the majority of native English speakers used these forms in the oral DCT, and (2) these forms did not emerge in Japanese students' data and thus were worth teaching.

Table 2: Target Pragmatic Features: Head Act and Internal Modifications

Mitigated preparatory forms

Reference to preparatory conditions (the hearer's ability, will and possibility) or reference to the speaker's want or wish in an embedded question or sentence (bi-clausal structures). Target structures: *I'm wondering if* + clause, *Would it be OK if* + clause, for example, *I'm wondering if* you could give me an extension on the assignment. *Would it be OK if* I get an extension on the assignment?

Hedging

Single words that minimize self-expression. Target hedging: *a little*, *maybe*, *possibly*, for example: I'm wondering if I could *possibly* have an extension on the assignment.

Amplifiers

Single words that strengthen or heighten self-expression. Target amplifiers: *really*, *very*

for example: I'm wondering if I could have an extension on the assignment. I *really* need more time to work on my paper.

Instruction took place on campus during the participants' regular class hours over four sessions. The third author (Budding) was the instructor.[2]The sessions were distributed over two weeks (50 minutes for each session). In designing instruction, we followed five elements of explicit form-focused instruction approach specified by Ellis (2005), which (1) directs learners' attention to target forms; (2) is planned and obtrusive; (3) presents target forms in isolation; (4) involves the use of metalanguage; and (5) includes controlled practice of forms. During the instruction, students:

1. Brainstormed request-making expressions. (7 min)
2. Watched video clips of request-making situations and analyzed them for interlocutor relationship, target request form, appropriateness of the form, and perlocutionary effect of the request (whether the request can be accepted or rejected). (10 min)
3. Analyzed video transcripts and completed fill-in-the-blanks exercises. (8 min)
4. Received explicit explanation on pragmatic forms and practiced them orally. (5 min)
5. Practiced request-making dialogues by reading them aloud. (5 min)
6. Role played request-making situations with a partner using the target forms. (15 min)

These activities were recycled over the four sessions (See Appendix A for sample activities).

Measure of Learning Outcome

The goal of this study was to compare students' requests with those of the original study to see whether the participants showed different patterns of change in response to instruction. Therefore, the same oral DCT was used to assess learning outcomes in this study. The original study went through the following steps to maximize validity of the items used in the task.

1. Target situations were selected based on Garcia's (2004) corpus-based study of naturalistic conversations in U.S. university settings. From the corpus examples, speech acts from professor-student and study group conversations were adapted.
2. As a pilot study, a survey was administered to 20 participants asking them to rate the degree of psychological ease/difficulty in performing speech acts. Different ratings between high- and low-imposition speech acts were statistically confirmed.
3. To ensure comparability of the items, length of situational descriptions was kept similar across items, ranging from 55 to 57 words. To ensure understanding, vocabulary used to write the descriptions was adapted from JACET's (2003) list of 3,000 frequent high school-level words.
4. The oral DCT was piloted with 25 native English speakers and 12 ESL students.

The oral DCT had 12 items: two high- and low-imposition requests, two high- and low-imposition opinions, and four filler items. Two parallel versions of the test were created to avoid practice effect. Because the instruction targeted at formal requests, the two high-imposition request items were the focus of the present analysis [3] (see Appendix B for sample situations).

Although DCT has been criticized because of a lack of authenticity and non-interactive nature (Golato, 2003), DCT has merit because the data can provide information about learners' off-line knowledge of normative conventions of pragmatic language use (McNamara & Roever, 2006). DCT can also control social factors in scenarios and help us obtain data that are comparable across learners over time. Based on these advantages and the goal of this study (analysis of the production of forms rather than their use in social interaction), DCT was used.

Data Collection

Timing and procedures of test administration closely followed those of the original study. The participants completed the test individually three times during the academic year of 2012: Time 1 (April), Time 2 (July), and Time 3 (December). While the original study traced naturalistic change in students' speech acts, in this study, Time 1 served as pre-test, Time 2 as immediate post-test, and Time 3 as delayed post-test. Instruction took place in early July, and the immediate post-test was given one week after the instruction. Different from the original study, in the current study another pre-test was administered just before the instruction because there was an eight-week gap between the first pre-test and instruction. It was confirmed that the students' performance was similar to that of the first pre-test: they were not able to use target forms before the instruction.

All tests were given individually via computer. First, the students read the directions in Japanese. Then, they were told to read each scenario and respond to the scenario as if they were in a real situation and performing the role. Each item started with a situational scenario on the computer screen. When they were ready, they clicked on the "continue" button and started speaking. After they finished speaking, they moved on to the next item. The computer recorded their speech.

Table 3: Flow of the Study (2012)

April	Week 4	Pre-test
July	Week 1	Instruction sessions 1 & 2
	Week 2	Instruction sessions 3 & 4
	Week 3	Immediate post-test
December	Week 1	Delayed post-test

Note. The Japanese academic year begins in April.

Data Analysis

Speech acts were transcribed and analyzed for their linguistic expressions. All expressions were categorized based on Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989) framework

(see Appendix C), which was used in the original study. Frequencies of each expression were compared with those from the original data. To ensure accuracy, two authors checked the coding.

Results

Analyses of Instructional Effects

Table 4 displays the frequency of the request head acts in the high-imposition requests. There was a strong instructional effect on the target head act, mitigated preparatory. At Time 1, just like in the original study, none of the students were able to use this form, but after the instruction, the production rate went up to 97.8%, indicating that almost all students became able to produce this form. They were largely able to retain the knowledge at delayed post-test because the form appeared in 70% of their production. This retention is notable, considering that the delayed post-test was given four months after the instruction. These patterns sharply contrast with those from the original study, because the students' production rate of the target form remained almost zero throughout the time period (see Figure 1 for illustration). The Chi-square test revealed significant difference between the original and present study for the immediate post-test, $x^2=59.08$ ($p<.001$), and for the delayed post-test, $x^2=91.07$ ($p<.001$).

Table 4. Frequency Distribution of Request Head Acts

	Original study			Present study		
	Time 1	Time 2	Time 3	Time 1 Pre	Time 2 Post	Time 3 Delayed
1. Imperatives	20.8%(20)	28.1%(27)	15.0%(14)	25.0%(12)	0	0
2. Performatives	3.10(3)	0	0	0	0	0
3. Obligation statements	0	0	0	0	0	0
4. Want statements	28.1(27)	19.8(19)	33.0(31)	29.1(14)	0	0
5. Preparatory questions	21.9(21)	24.0(23)	38.3(36)	20.8(10)	0	20.0(9)
6. Suggestions	0	0	0	2.1(1)	0	0
7. Permissions	20.8(20)	29.8(28)	25.5(24)	23.0(11)	0	8.9(4)
8. Mitigated preparatory	**2.1(2)**	**1.0(1)**	**1.1(1)**	**0**	**97.8(44)**	**71.1(32)**
9. Hint	0	0	0	0	2.2%(1)	0
Total	100(93)	100(98)	100(106)	100(48)	100 (45)	100(45)

Note. The original study had 48 participants. Each participant produced two high-imposition requests, so the total high-imposition requests analyzed were 96. In this study of 23 participants, total high-imposition requests were 46. There were several missing/inaudible responses.

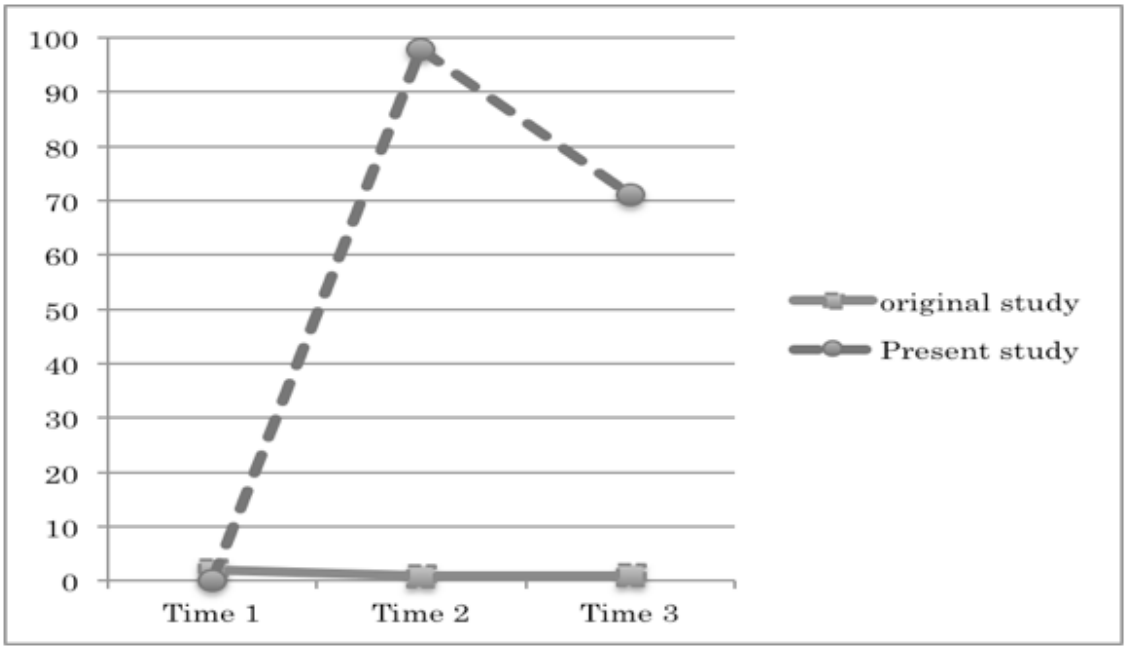

Figure 1. Comparison of production rate of mitigated preparatory forms (request head act)

Table 4 displays frequency distributions of the internal and external modifications. While the results were not as impressive as the head act, there was a clear instruction advantage in modifications. Headings and amplifiers were rare in the original study, ranging from 1 to 7%, and there was no increase over time. Similarly, the students in this study started out with almost no use of these forms; however, the production rates increased dramatically after the instruction. Headings appeared in about 40% of the speech acts. Change in amplifiers was even more dramatic, from zero at pre-test to 76% at post-test. However, these forms were not retained at delayed post-test: the percentage dropped to below 20 (see Figures 2 and 3). Still, the Chi-square test reveled significant difference between the original and present study for the hedging: x^2=184.3 (p<.001) at immediate post-test and x^2=11.1 (p<.001) at delayed post-test, as well as for the amplifiers: x^2=102.8 (p<.001) at immediate post-test and x^2=11.13 (p<.001) at delayed post-test.

Table 5: Frequency Distribution of Request Modifications

	Original study			Present study		
	Time 1	Time 2	Time 3	Time 1 Pre	Time 2 Post	Time 3 Delayed
1. Heading	**1.0%(1)**	**3.1%(3)**	**2.1%(2)**	**2.2%(1)**	**39.1%(18)**	**17.4% (8)**
2. Amplifier	**0**	**7.3(7)**	**2.1(2)**	**0**	**76.1(35)**	**17.4(8)**
3. Grounder	92.7(89)	94.8(91)	113.8(107)	102.2(47)	106.5(49)	97.8 (45)
4. Apology	28.1(27)	29.2(28)	25.5(24)	28.3 (13)	10.9 (5)	19.6 (9)
5. Preparator	5.2(5)	5.2(5)	7.5(7)	10.9 (5)	45.8(11)	28.3(13)
6. Confirmation	1.0(1)	1.0(1)	5.3(5)	10.9(5)	6.5 (3)	6.5 (3)
7. Appreciation	0	0	0	0	13.0 (6)	2.2(1)
8. Minimizer	2.1(2)	2.1(2)	1.1(1)	4.3(2)	13.0(6)	4.3(2)
9. External please	11.5(11)	2.1(2)	3.2(3)	6.5(3)	8.7 (4)	4.3(2)
10. Hearer benefit	0	0	1.1(1)	0	2.2(1)	0
11. Promise	0	0	0	6.5(3)	2.2(1)	6.5(3)

Note. The percentage was calculated by the raw count divided by the total number of requests. The percentages greater than 100 mean that more than one modification appeared in request.

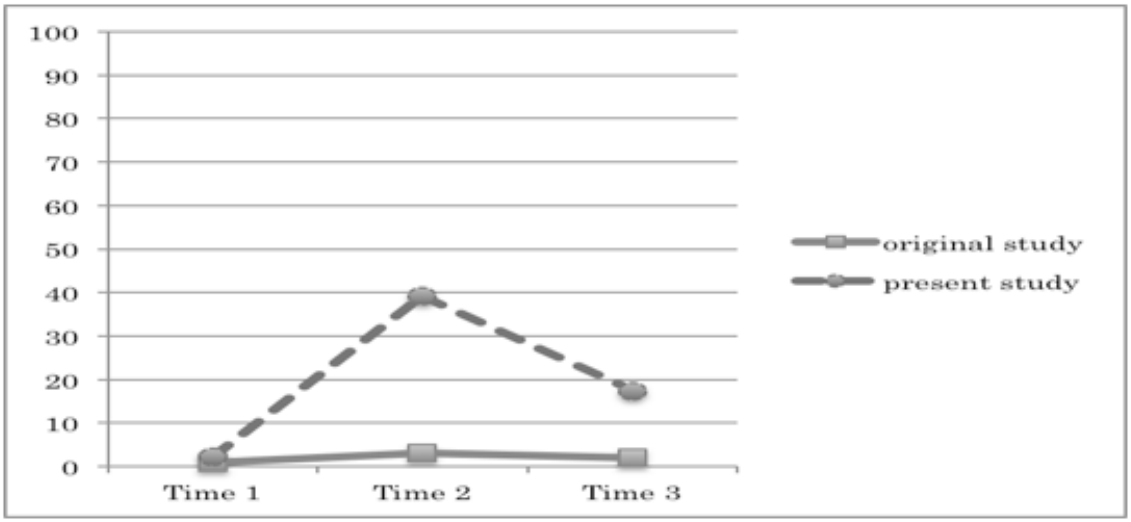

Figure 2. Comparison of production rates, hedging

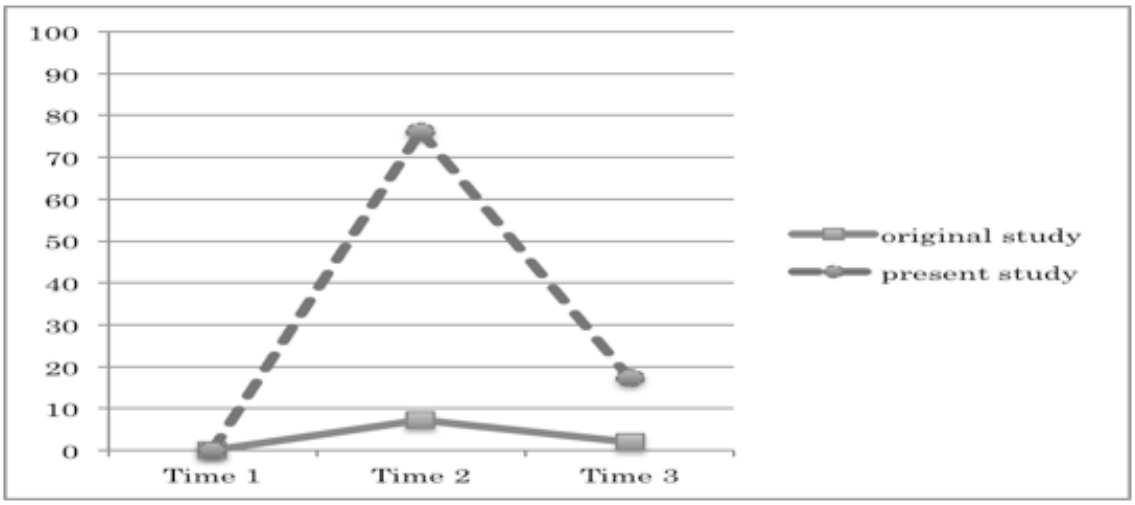

Figure 3. Comparison of production rate, amplifiers

The excerpts below illustrate changes before and after the instruction. This situation involved asking a teacher for an extension of an assignment. Target features are underlined. The pre-test sample contained no target features. While the request contained key semantic elements (address term, reason for the request, and request head act), the student used preparatory question (*Can you*) in the head act. The student's speech changed dramatically at immediate post-test. She was able to produce the target head act, *I'm wondering if you could* + verb, and furnished her request with a variety of hedging and amplifiers she learned in the instruction (*maybe*, *a little*, *really*). These forms remained in her production four months later at delayed post-test. She used the bi-clausal request form again, and two hedging expressions to soften the tone of request.

> Student #13 (female)
>
> Pre-test
> Professor Lee, um, tomorrow I'm expected to hand in the 10 page, um 10 page paper, but I'm, I'm afraid but I can't. I don't think I can do it by tomorrow. I have a bad cold. I couldn't do it, so can you wait for, for two more days?
>
> Immediate post-test
> Hello Mr. Robinson, ah, I'm wondering if you could maybe.. all right if you could give me a little more time for the art project? I, I, I will be busy this weekend, I have two tests, two exams and I have doctor appointment. And, I feel really sorry but I can't have the time for the art project, so I'm wondering if you could give me a little more time.
>
> Delayed post-test
> Hello, Professor Lee. Tomorrow I'm supposed to submit the paper assignment, but I have been cold and I didn't finish it and I don't think I can finish it by tomorrow. So I'm wondering if you could possibly give me a little bit more time to finish my assignment.

Analyses of *Post hoc* Interviews

The robustness of instruction found in the delayed post-test, at least with the request head act, makes us wonder what helped students sustain their pragmatic knowledge during the four months after the instruction. To address this question, we conducted a *post hoc* interview with five participants. The purpose was to gain information about their use of the learned forms in their everyday situations in the immersion context. Because there was no focused classroom instruction on request after the instruction, we suspected that the large degree of retention stemmed from the students' investment – conscious application of the knowledge to their real-life communication on campus. The immersion context can support such application of knowledge. It offers abundant opportunities to use English for authentic purposes. Students use English to comprehend lectures, express themselves in writing, and exchange opinions. English also serves as a medium for social interaction because they regularly converse with international students in English. We were interested to see whether this immersion environment gave students opportunities to use learned request-making forms for authentic communication. To seek relationships between the contextual opportunities and retention of learning, we interviewed five students: four successful students who were able to produce target forms at delayed post-test and one unsuccessful student who was not able to produce the forms. Interviews were conducted in Japanese in the succeeding semester (15 to 25 minutes each) after the last oral DCT session; therefore, they did not influence the learners' test performance. The following questions were asked:

1. What do you remember from the instruction sessions?
2. Have you had any opportunities to use the forms you learned in real-life communication?
3. Were you able to remember the forms you learned? What factors assisted your memory?

All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and then examined for trends by noting salient, recurring comments and grouping the comments for similarity.

Responding to the first question, all students recalled the content of the instruction as making a request to someone in higher status. Two students reported the precise target form– "I'm wondering if," and all five recalled how they learned the form (video clips, handout and situation-based role plays). The successful students reported using the form in a variety of real-life interactions with the ESL instructors: requesting an extension of an assignment to a teacher; asking for a permission to be late for the class; making an appointment with a teacher outside of the class; making a request to a senior person; asking for advice from a teacher; and writing an email to a teacher in the previous school. See excerpt below:

> *We have a lot of group presentations in Professor Y's class this semester. Since I live off campus, I have difficulty with group work assignments, preparing for a presentation with my peers with a limited time between the assignment announcement and the actual presentation. So, I can say to the teacher, "Excuse me, but I don't think I can manage time because I live off campus and I have a part time*

job on Wednesday. So I'm wondering if we could possibly do a presentation next week." I can ask him to change the order of the presentation so that I can have more time with my group members.

In addition to the interaction with their ESL teachers, two students reported that they sometimes used the forms with their Japanese peers just for the sake of practice. One student reported that he used the form 'I'm wondering if' to his Australian roommate. His roommate corrected him saying that the form is too formal, which probably helped him to confirm the contextual requirements of the form (typically used in a formal, high-stake situation). Commitment in applying the learned knowledge to daily interaction seems to have assisted the retention of the knowledge because the unsuccessful student reported not using the form. She commented that she was aware of the timing of use, but in actual communication, she often fell back to the old, familiar forms (e.g., 'Could you'). Because this student was able to report a number of situations in which the form 'I'm wondering if' should be used, she clearly had a good understanding of the sociopragmatic value of the target form. Absence of the form in her linguistic repertoire indicates that consciousness, agency, and investment are the necessary conditions for the transfer of learned knowledge and continuous development in the knowledge.

The successful students' investment in using the forms seems to come from their sociopragmatic sensitivity, which is common across languages. One student reported that she always pays attention to her language when speaking to someone superior to her in Japanese and that she tries to conform to the same norm and attitude of politeness when speaking in English. Following the L1-based concept and practice of politeness and formality, she is attentive to using appropriate linguistic means to encode politeness in L2 English. She added that she should be able to use the target form in the future when she studies abroad, in such a situation as asking for useful reference materials from a professor whom she has never met before. Two other students mentioned that while practicing the forms during instruction, they were thinking of classroom situations where these forms could be useful, which further supports their stance and commitment in using the learned knowledge in real-life interaction.

These interview findings, together with frequency analyses, tell us that explicit teaching on pragmalinguistic forms is important, but students' positive stance toward the forms is equally vital. The target forms are internalized and retained if students act on them through practice and recycled use in their everyday situations, and this process can be facilitated with students' internal characteristics such as attitudes and motivation.

Discussion

This study revealed strong instructional effects on students' learning of request-making expressions. Frequency of mitigated preparatory forms shifted from zero at pre-test to 98% at post-test, almost perfect mastery after the instruction. Although the rate went down at delayed post-test, retention rate of 70% is remarkable, considering that it was four months later, and there was no focused instruction on request during that period. These patterns of development are distinctively different from those in the original study in which the mitigated preparatory forms never appeared. Hence, we can

conclude that instruction was powerful enough to alter the naturalistic pattern of development in students' ability to make high-imposition requests.

The findings lend support to the previous longitudinal studies that showed the positive role of noticing and attention, promoted through explicit correction and modeling, in accelerating pragmatic development (Belz & Kinginger, 2003; DuFon, 2000; Hassall, 2006). Although previous studies documented explicit feedback leading to learning, such a case was described at the individual-level: most studies did not document the effect of explicit feedback on group-level improvement. This study adds to the existing literature. By documenting group-level change before and right after the instruction, and again four months later, it showed that explicit teaching could re-shape the naturalistic developmental trajectories found in the previous study.

In addition, this study revealed how much was learned after the instruction, and how much of it was maintained for a long term. Near-perfect mastery of the target forms and high retention rate indicate a strong instructional effect, lending support to the previous instructional studies that found benefits of explicit teaching conditions (Alcón-Soler, 2007; Halenko & Jones, 2011; Takahashi, 2001). The present study goes beyond the previous findings and adds to this body of literature by demonstrating that explicit teaching is strong enough to sustain learning for a long term, and to bring about change in naturalistic patterns of development.

However, when the instructional effects between the request head act (e.g., *I'm wondering if* + clause) and internal modifications were compared, the effects on the modifications were somewhat limited. While production rates of the hedging and amplifiers increased dramatically after the instruction by about 40-75%, they were not maintained at delayed post-test, although the rates were still higher than those at pre-test (2% at pre-test vs. 17% at delayed post-test). Hence, instruction revealed only moderate effects on the acquisition of modifications.

Several interpretations are possible for these contrasting patterns of change. First, the head act, by definition, is the 'minimal unit which can realize a request; it is the core of the request sequence' (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). Because the head act is a single, necessary component in the request, its salient role in request probably assisted learners' retention of the form. In contrast, modifications are attached to the head act and modify its impact by mitigating the force. Modifications are optional and are not essential for realizing the request. Because one can still convey the illocutionary force without modifications, it is possible that the learners did not pay attention to them as much as they did to the head act. As a result, the learning outcomes of the modifications were rather weak.

In addition to the rather minor role played by the modifications in the illocutionary force, difficulty in using these forms probably led to their low production rates. Internal modifications are lexical items loosely attached to sentences. They have no fixed position and the rules on where and how to use them are ambiguous. They occur anywhere in the sequence – as part of the head act or other semantic moves. Native speakers' samples below illustrate this point. In the request of asking for an extension of a paper, both samples contain the same hedging: *a bit* and *maybe*, but they appear

differently in the sequence. In (1), this speaker used *a bit* to mitigate the cold he caught, perhaps to minimize the degree of sickness and show his confidence in finishing the work if an extension was given. However, in (2), *a bit* downgrades the length of extension and functions to reduce the imposition of the request. Similarly, the hedge *maybe* appears at the end of the head act in (1) and reduces the imposition of the request itself, but in (2), *maybe* comes in front of *two days* and downgrades the length of extension, not the request itself.

> Native speaker sample (1)
>
> Excuse me, Professor Lee, umm, I wanted to talk to you about tomorrow's paper. Umm, it's ten pages and I've already written two but I, I've caught a bit of a cold, and I am not sure I can finish the rest of it before tomorrow, so I was wondering if I could get an extension for a couple of days, maybe.
>
> Native speaker sample (2)
>
> Professor Lee, I've been sick this week, and I was wondering if I could have a bit of an extension, maybe two days, for the paper?

These idiosyncratic characteristics of the modifications probably made them difficult to learn. In contrast, the head acts are fixed, syntactic chunks. They can appear independently by themselves without modifying or mitigating other elements of request. This nature probably contributed to their relative ease of learning.

In addition to the effect of instruction, this study revealed an instance of incidental learning occurring through instruction. After the instruction, more students produced the preparator ¬– the semantic move used to prepare the hearer for the upcoming request (e.g., Could you do me a favor?). At pre-test, the preparator appeared only in about 10% of the times, but the percentage went up to over 45% at immediate post-test. Retention of the preparator was higher than that of headings and amplifiers, reaching 28%. Because the preparator was not part of the instructional targets, it seems that the students learned it incidentally while listening to the conversations in the video clips or reading dialogues in the teaching materials. The video clips used in this study were not scripted. We asked American students to produce requests in various situations and adapted them to the materials. Because the American students' speech was semi-spontaneous production, it often contained preparator and other request modifications. For example, the fill-in-the-blanks exercise below was created from an American student's request. This exercise was designed to provide practice on the target request head act (*Would it be all right if* + clause), hedging (*a small*), and amplifier (*really*). However, the preparator (*I am sorry to bother you*) also appeared in the salient initial position as an element of a request. By listening to the speech and reading it aloud, the students probably remembered these introductory expressions and became able to produce them in the oral DCT task.

While the robustness of learning differed between the head act and internal modifications, explicit instruction still produced a notable degree of learning. Interview data revealed that the immersion context of the research site afforded learners with plenty of opportunities to use learned pragmatic forms in their real-life situations, which helped them maintain the pragmatic knowledge, and in some cases, to continue growing

in the target-area knowledge. Most of these situations centered around their communication with classroom instructors, but the students also said that they 'practiced' the forms with their Japanese peers.

These findings contribute new knowledge to the pragmatics literature because they showed what learners actually do with their knowledge after instruction. To our knowledge, no previous studies have followed up on learners' use of the target forms beyond experiment. Because research stops at post-test in most studies, we do not know what impact the instruction caused in learners' use and development of L2 systems. Retention of the target forms and interview data in this study show that the instruction clearly had an impact on learners' development and socialization process in the English-medium institution. The findings revealed the transfer of training. Although limited to one speech act, knowledge of pragmatic forms and rituals learned via direct instruction can be applied to everyday interaction with great consequence. Learners' performance in this study reflects the robustness and stability of learned pragmatic knowledge as well as the meaningfulness of pragmatic instruction.

Teaching Implications

The major teaching implication from the present findings is the value of teacher-researcher collaboration in teaching pragmatics in an authentic institutional context. This study was not a laboratory study. It was a need-based, situated instructional study emerged from a one-year diagnostic study of Japanese ESL learners' acquisition of English politeness language (operationalized as the use of appropriate request head act and modification) in an English-medium university. The original study revealed that the students, despite their exposure to English and daily interaction with a variety of people (e.g., teachers, international students), showed negligible progress with politeness expressions in high-imposition speech acts, because instructors did not give corrective feedback, and students did not experience pragmatic failure from their impolite manner of speaking. Based on this observation, instructors and the researchers recognized the need for providing direct instruction on politeness, and we chose the speech act of request as a unit of instruction. Hence, the focus of this study was to see whether or not direct instruction, implemented in the course of regular ESL curriculum, could equip students with knowledge of how to make a polite request and help maintain their knowledge. In other words, the instruction and context (immersion setting) were not separable in this study. Instruction was a trigger for learning, and the immersion context served as a platform for students to implement learned knowledge and continue with development. To this end, positive instructional effects found here suggest that pragmatics can be effectively incorporated into the institutional curriculums through collaboration between the teachers and researchers. Analysis of institutional context, learning opportunities, students' needs and learnability, and student-relevant instructional tasks serve as a sample of a situated practice of teaching pragmatics.

Limitations of the Study and Implications for Future Research

This study has several limitations. First, the study is limited to a small number of adult Japanese learners of English. As a result, findings cannot be generalized to other age groups or other L1/L2 groups. Because learners of different age groups and language

backgrounds might exhibit different patterns of pragmatic development, future researchers should expand the scope of the research by investigating different language groups and adopting a larger sample size.

In addition, oral DCT used in this study assessed learners' knowledge of pragmalinguistic forms, but it was not adequate to assess learners' ability to use their knowledge in naturalistic social interaction. Future studies should create a more authentic, interactive task that could elicit and evaluate learners' speech acts in interaction. Furthermore, this study is limited because it used only one outcome measure. Future studies should employ multiple measures to capture learning from different modalities and task perspectives.

Future research can be extended to include different learning environments. This study examined pragmatic development in immersion in a foreign language context. Because learners in a second language context (e.g., study abroad) probably have greater exposure to everyday authentic pragmatics practice, their potential for the application of learned pragmatic knowledge to outside-class-context might be greater, resulting in faster progress. Future research can explore this possibility by expanding the types of context in which instruction takes place. Alcón-Soler (2015) serves as a good model for such a study.

Another limitation of this study is the lack of qualitative data between immediate and delayed post-test stages to reveal learners' use of learned pragmatic forms in daily communication. Although post-hoc interviews revealed some meaningful findings, more systematic data collection through interviews and class observations is necessary to generate a more profound account of the connection between instructional experience and real-life communicative experience. One thing this study failed to address is individual differences in the outcome and application of learning. Some learners showed strong increase in their pragmatic knowledge after the instruction and retained the learned forms at delayed post-test, but others went back to their pre-test-level performance. Individuals differ in their orientation toward sociocultural, pragmatic implications of language use, and their investment in using learned pragmatic knowledge when opportunities arise. These individual differences in attitudes and motivation are likely to manifest in the degree of learning and retention of knowledge. Future research should investigate this relationship among instruction, context, and individual differences.

Notes

[1] The number of participants enrolled in the first two ESL levels (students with entry TOEFL below 480) was smaller in the present study. There were a total of 25 students, and all participated in the study. Two students' data were removed from the analysis because of missing instruction or data.

[2] Although one of the authors was the instructor, the researcher expectancy was considered small in this study for three reasons. First, this study used the one-group pre-post design. There was only one group who received the treatment, and they were not aware of the cohort of students who were researched in the original study. Second,

the researcher-teacher did not select the treatment group. The treatment group was identified by purely objective criteria (students in the first two levels of the same ESL program as the original study). All (100%) of the students who met these criteria participated; thus, there was no selection process involved. Third, we kept the study purpose confidential to the students and incorporated the treatment into their regular English classes so it was perceived as an extension of their speaking practice.

[3] The small number of test items is the limitation of the study; however, because the purpose of the study was to compare present findings with those from the original study, the same DCT task that contained two high-imposition request items was used.

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Appendix A

Sample activities

A: Work with your partner and role-play the situation. Do NOT just read the sentences; try to look at your partner when you talk to your partner.

Situation 1
Student A: Hello, Professor Budding. May I come in?
Professor B: Sure, come on in. What can I do for you?
Student A: I believe we have arranged our advising meeting tomorrow from 3 p.m.
Professor B: That's right.
Student A: I'm very sorry, but I am wondering if we could change the time from 3 p.m. to 11 a.m. I just found out that I had to go to a club meeting from 3 p.m.

B: Listen to the video clips and fill in the blanks.

I'm ( ) ( ) sorry, but would it be alright ( ) we change the time? I know you're very busy. But I ended up, I found out that I have a scheduling conflict during that time. So ( ) ( ) ( ) alright if we changed it from 3 pm to 11 am?

C: Role-play the situations.

(1) You are taking Professor Robinson's writing class this semester. For the final paper, you have submitted the first draft and second draft and received his comments. Before writing the final draft, you would like to make an appointment with him to get more advice about your essay, but cannot visit his office hours because you have classes. What do you say to Professor Robinson?

Appendix B

Oral DCT sample situations
Below are sample high-imposition request situations. To reduce practice effect, two parallel versions of the situations were created by making minor changes in wordings and situations.

> • You are taking Professor Smith's intercultural communication class this semester. You have a small test in her class next Monday, but you just realized that you have to go out of town that day because of your cousin's wedding. You want to take the test at some other time. What do you say to Professor Smith?
>
> • Tomorrow is the due date of a paper for Professor's Land's history class. The paper is a 10-page assignment. You caught a cold, and you've written only two pages so far. You don't think you can finish the paper. You want to ask for two extra days to finish. What do you say to Professor Land?

Appendix C

Coding frameworks for the speech act of request

I. Direct expressions

1. Imperatives: The illocutionary force is directly conveyed by imperative sentences.
(e.g.) *Please lend me a pen.*

2. Performatives: The illocutionary force is explicitly stated by performative verbs.
(e.g.) *I'd like to ask you to lend me a pen.*

3. Obligation Statements: The illocutionary force is derivable in obligatory sentences.
(e.g.) *You should lend me a pen.*

4. Want Statements: The illocutionary force is derivable in want/wish/need sentences.
(e.g.) *I want you to lend me a pen.*

II. Indirect Expressions

5. Preparatory Questions: Reference to preparatory conditions such as the hearer's
ability, willingness or possibility to perform the action.
(e.g.) *Could you lend me a pen?*

6. Suggestions: The illocutionary intent is phrased as a suggestion.
(e.g.) *How about lending me a pen?*

7. Permissions: The speaker asks for the hearer's permission.
(e.g.) *May I borrow a pen?*

8. Mitigated Preparatory: Reference to preparatory conditions or reference to the speaker's
want and wish in embedded questions or sentences.
(e.g.) *I'm wondering if you could lend me a pen.*

9. Hint: Questions or statements with implicit reference to the action.
(e.g.) *My pen just quit.*

III. Conventional Questions: Formulaic questions that convey the request intent.
(e.g.) *Do you have a pen?*