Evaluating the Effects of Input-based Approaches to the Teaching of Pragmalinguistics and Sociopragmatics in Second Language Pragmatics: A Case of English Request Hedges

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Abstract

The present study examined the effects of two types of input-based approaches —combination of pragmalinguistics- and sociopragmatics-focused instruction (CI) and sociopragmatics-focused instruction (SI) on learners' recognizing and producing English request hedges. 45 Japanese learners of English participated in the study. Treatment group performance was compared to that of a control group on the pre-tests, post-tests, and delayed post-tests: an unplanned written-production test, an unplanned written-judgment test. The results showed that the CI and SI groups performed significantly better than the control group on an unplanned written-judgment test. There were no statistically significant differences between the two treatment groups on the unplanned written-judgment test, which indicated that the sociopragmatics-focused instruction attracted the attention of the SI group to the sociopragmatic features of English request hedges directly, and the group perhaps then transferred their attention to the pragmalinguistic features of English request hedges. As a result, the sociopragmatics-focused activities alone had some effects on recognizing English request hedges. However, a comparison of those learners in the two experimental groups in the unplanned written-production test demonstrated an advantage for the CI group and implied that the input-based learning through not only sociopragmatics-focused   activities   but   also   pragmalinguistics-sociopragmatics connection activities contributed more to deep perceptual and mental processing of English request hedges, thereby resulting in developing more firmly established explicit knowledge.

Keywords: sociopragmatics, input-based, hedge, pragmatics

1. Introduction

Schmidt (1993) argued that three senses of consciousness (attention, awareness, and intention) are all useful and necessary in second language (L2) learning, and the recent studies in L2 pragmatics within the consciousness-raising instruction framework have provided empirical support that some forms of consciousness-raising instruction help learners *notice target pragmalinguistic* and *sociopragmatic* features (e.g., Alcón, 2005, 2012; Koike & Pearson, 2005; Martinez-Flor & Fukuya, 2005). The term "pragmalinguistics" refers to the knowledge of the strategies for realizing speech intentions and the linguistic items used to express these intentions, whereas the term "sociopragmatics" refers to the knowledge of the social conditions governing language use. (Leech, 1983; Thomas, 1983). The findings of L2 pragmatics suggest that without a pragmatic emphasis on L2 or foreign language lessons, learners would not pay attention to or be aware of the target pragmatic features. These studies have mainly been designed to raise learner consciousness of the pragmalinguistic factors of target pragmatic features. That is, in the aforementioned studies, the pragmalinguistic features had priority over the sociopragmatic features. However, in regular communication, the sociopragmatic factor plays a key role and people first raise their consciousness toward the sociopragmatic features and then enhance their awareness of the pragmalinguistic features, arriving at their own generalization with respect to contextually appropriate language use. Thus, a key issue here is the extent to which it is possible for learners to reach their own generalization regarding contextually suitable language use based solely on sociopragmatics-focused activities.

1.1. Input-based Studies of L2 Pragmatics

Schmidt (1993) suggested that consciousness as awareness, consciousness as attention, and consciousness as intention play significant roles in language learning. According to Schmidt, awareness and attention are closely related. In other words, what we are aware of is what we attend to, and if attention is required for learning, then awareness is also required for learning. The attention- and awareness-oriented instruction is to some extent linked with input-based explicit/implicit instruction. Among the interventional studies in the teaching of pragmatics, some have found that pragmatic features can be taught either explicitly or implicitly together with certain input-based activities (e.g., Fukuya & Clark, 1999; Rose & Ng, 2001; Takahashi, 2001, 2005; Tateyama, 2001; Tateyama, Kasper, Mui, Tay, & Thananart, 1997). Ellis (2008) suggested that it is the manipulation of input rather than output that is more likely to result in the integration of intake into learners' implicit/declarative knowledge. A review of these limited available attention- and awareness-oriented input-based L2 studies of pragmatics demonstrates that they were largely motivated by the theories and frameworks built for consciousness as attention and awareness in L2 language learning. Thus, the present study is also more motivated by the attention- and awareness-oriented theory and framework and, as such, is interested in investigating whether learners' attention and awareness of sociopragmatic features alone lead them to successfully reach their own generalization for contextually appropriate language use.

Thus far, there have been only a few studies that have explicitly linked classroom resources to the effects of sociopragmatics-focused learning on L2 pragmatic competence. Ohta (2001) examined how two adult learners of Japanese as a foreign language developed the ability to use listener responses in Japanese, in particular

expressions of acknowledgement and alignment. The analysis indicated the variability of the developmental pace of the two learners, but implied that the two learners followed similar developmental paths moving from expressions of acknowledgement to alignment. The results also indicated that natural learning through the interaction activities of the classroom setting is possible. Taguchi (2012) examined, in an immersion setting, how classroom discourse influenced the development of pragmatic comprehension and production of learners of Japanese as a foreign language. She noted that a number of jokes, expressions of sarcasm, and indirect communications assumed shared context and background knowledge between teachers and learners and that these opportunities made a contribution to learners' development of pragmatic comprehension. The studies by Ohta (2001) and Taguchi (2012) may be the only existing studies that explicitly relate classroom resources to sociopragmatics-focused learning of L2 pragmatics through classroom interactions. They disclosed that sociopragmatics-focused output-based learning is effective and that classroom interaction contributes to raising learner consciousness toward sociopragmatic factors first and pragmalinguistic factors of L2 pragmatic features second. While their output-based studies in sociopragmatics-focused learning are noteworthy, the present study goes further and examines whether sociopragmatics-focused input-based learning is effective in developing L2 pragmatic competence.

Among all attention- and awareness-oriented input-based L2 studies of pragmatics, the studies by Takahashi (2001, 2005) are the only studies that explicitly associate classroom instruction with sociopragmatics-focused input-based L2 pragmatics learning outcomes. Takahashi (2001, 2005) examined the effectiveness of four types of input enhancement conditions for Japanese learners regarding the acquisition of polite request strategies and the results of discourse completion tests and self-reports indicated that the explicit group learned all of the request strategies more successfully than the other three groups, but she found that some of the participants in the explicit teaching condition and the form-comparison condition used non-target forms in the discourse completion tests and were inclined to use the phrase *I wonder if you could VP* predominantly across all situations, regardless of degree of imposition. This indicated no clear evidence of developing sociopragmatic competence and attested to the necessity of developing not only pragmalinguistic but also sociopragmatic competence. This leads to the debate as to what sort of input-based approach is most appropriate for allowing learners to quickly and efficiently access and integrate sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic knowledge.

To date, only a small number of studies have compared the effects of the combination of pragmalinguistics- and sociopragmatics-focused input-based instruction with sociopragmatics-focused input-based instruction on recognizing and producing L2 pragmatic features. For this reason, there is no conclusive evidence in the literature as to whether sociopragmatics-focused input-based learning is effective in L2 pragmatics learning. The present study aims to explore the effects of sociopragmatics-focused input-based learning on recognizing and producing English polite requests. The following research question is investigated in the present study:

What are the effects of sociopragmatics-focused input-based instruction on recognizing and producing English polite requests?

2. Methodology

2.1. Participants

Forty-five university students in three intact classes (three sophomore listening comprehension classes) at a university in Japan participated in the present study. The participants were non-English majors, studying in the College of Science and Engineering, who did not know that English hedges were the target features of the study. The participants' English proficiency level was assessed to be at the intermediate level, as defined by a TOEIC score between 500 and 700. The three intact classes were randomly assigned to two treatment groups and one control group. The two treatment groups received the following input-based instructional treatments: a combination of pragmalinguistics- and sociopragmatics-focused instruction (CI) (n = 15: female = 0, male = 15) and sociopragmatics-focused instruction (SI) (n = 15: female = 1, male = 14). The control group consisted of 15 participants (n = 15: female = 3, male = 12). The participants' first language was Japanese, and their average age was 20 years. All participants studied English for eight years at schools in Japan, and the results of a pre-test indicated that they had not learned any target pragmatic features.

2.2. Target Structure

Finding the fact that Japanese EFL learners tended to use the mono-clausal English request forms (e.g., *Would/Could you VP?*) when bi-clausal request forms (e.g., *Would it be possible to VP?*) were more appropriate, Takahashi (1996, 2001, 2005) explained that Japanese EFL learners lack the L2 pragmalinguistic knowledge that an English request can be mitigated by embedding one clause within another clause. In addition, Hill (1997) discovered that even though the proficiency of Japanese EFL learners increased, they continued to under-use clausal hedges, lexical hedges, and syntactic hedges (past tense and progressive form). Hedges belong to the subcategory of mitigation, which is a strategy for softening or reducing the strength of a speech act whose effects are "unwelcome to the hearer" by trying to make the act more palatable (Fraser, 1980).

Hill (1997) concluded that the under-use of those hedges attributed to L1 interference because those structures are not available in the Japanese language. Thus, the focus of the present study is on teaching lexical/clausal hedges and syntactic hedges in English request forms.

Lexical/clausal modal hedges soften the difficulty that the speaker experiences when asking the hearer to perform a request by modifying the request form lexically or clausally, whereas syntactic hedges modify the Head Act syntactically by mitigating the level of difficulty that the speaker experiences when asking the hearer to perform a request through syntactic choices3. Takahashi (1996) argued that there are three types of clausal modal hedges: "(a) mitigated-preparatory questions (the speaker asks a question concerning preparatory conditions or poses a permission question by embedding it within another clause), (b) mitigated-preparatory statements (the speaker states a preparatory condition by embedding it within another clause), and (c) mitigated-want statements (the speaker states his or her want or wish that the hearer will perform the action in a hypothetical situation)" (p. 220). A list of hedges used in the present study is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

List of hedges used in the present study

Syntactic hedges	Examples
Progressive form	I *am wondering* if you could lend me a book.
Past tense	I *was wondering* if you could come.

Lexical and clausal hedges	Examples
Modal adverbs	Could you *possibly* come here?
Mitigated-preparatory questions	*Would it be possible to* come here?
Mitigated-preparatory statements	*I wonder if* you could come here.
Mitigated-want statements here.	*I would appreciate it if* you could come

In the dialogues and situations included in the instructional and testing materials, three variables were carefully controlled: (a) power (the status of the speaker with respect to the hearer), (b) distance between actors (the relationship between the speaker and the hearer), and (c) imposition level of the request (the difficulty that the speaker experiences when asking the hearer to perform the request). These three variables were chosen because in cross-cultural pragmatics, they are viewed as the three independent and culturally sensitive variables that subsume all other variables and play an important role in speech act behavior (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

2.3. Instructional Treatments
Each teaching session for the two treatment groups and the control group lasted 20 minutes, and the instructor presented all directions in Japanese during each teaching session. Teaching sessions were conducted by the same instructor once a week for four weeks in three intact classes at a university in Japan. The instructor was also the researcher.[1] No extra activities or explicit metapragmatic explanations containing the target pragmatic features were given during teaching sessions. Special care was taken to ensure that all groups spent equal amounts of time (20 minutes) on activities and that they received equal amounts of exposure to the target pragmatic features.

2.3.1. *Pragmalinguistics- and sociopragmatics-focused instruction (CI).* The experimental treatment for the CI is composed of three tasks.

Task 1: Pragmalinguistics-focused activities (5 minutes). The participants read each situation and dialogue in their handouts and then listened to them. The target pragmatic features were highlighted and boldfaced. The participants were asked to copy the underlined requests in two dialogues and compare the underlined request forms in the two dialogues. They were then required to find the differences between the two requests.

Task 2: Sociopragmatics-focused activities (10 minutes). The participants were instructed to rate the closeness between the two characters and the difficulty level of the request in the two dialogues.

Task 3: Pragmalinguistics-sociopragmatics connection activity 1(5 minutes). The participants were asked to rate the level of politeness of the requests in the two dialogues and write a list of ways the requests could be made more polite.

2.3.2. *Sociopragmatics-focused instruction (SI).* The experimental treatment for the SI consists of two tasks.

Task 1: Reading and processing for meaning activities (10 minutes). The participants read the same situation and dialogue for general understanding in their handouts as the ones included in the handouts for the CI, and they then listened to them. The target pragmatic features were neither highlighted nor boldfaced.

Task 2: Sociopragmatics-focused activities (10 minutes). The participants were instructed to rate the closeness between the two characters and the difficulty level of the requests in the two dialogues.

2.3.3. *Control group.* Lessons for the control group were designed to help participants learn new English words and phrases. The participants in the control group watched a short English video for 10 minutes and were taught about words and phrases used in the video by the instructor. The participants were not exposed to any target pragmatic features through the video and were not taught about any target pragmatic features during the lessons.

2.4. Testing Instruments and Procedures
The present study adopts a pre-test, post-test, and delayed post-test methodology to evaluate the effectiveness of the instructional treatments. The pre-test was administered a week prior to the first instructional treatments, the post-test was given a week after the treatments, and the delayed post-test was administered four weeks after the treatments to determine the long-term effects of the treatments. Each test was composed of a discourse completion test (an unplanned output-based test) and an acceptability judgment test (an unplanned input-based test) because Hudson, Detmer, and Brown (1995) suggested the necessity of multiple modalities in the testing instruments in order to investigate variability of learners performance based on data collection methods. The DCT is adopted because Kasper (2000) argued that the DCT is an effective data collection strategy when the purpose of the study is to inform about learners' pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic knowledge of the target pragmatic expressions studied in class, even though the DCT does not produce naturally occurring conversational data. The test items do not overlap with the treatment materials.

The study targeted situations with a high level of imposition combined with power and distance because English request hedges tend to be used in situations with a high level of Imposition (Hill, 1997; Hudson, Detmer, & Brown, 1995; Takahashi, 2001).

The situations with high levels of imposition were modified from those validated by Hill (1997), Hudson, Detmer, and Brown (1995) and Takahashi (2001). Three

versions of the discourse completion test and the acceptability judgment test were developed and employed to minimize test-learning effect. [2]

2.4.1. *Discourse completion test (DCT).* The discourse completion test was an unplanned written-production test that required the participants to read short descriptions of each situation in English and write what they would say in each situation in English. The appropriateness of the request forms was evaluated on a 1- to 5-point Likert scale. A request that reflected the most appropriate use of request hedges was awarded five points. For example, for a high imposition item, one point was awarded for *Please ~,* two points for *Can you ~,* three points for *Could you ~,* four points for *Is it possible for you ~* , and five points for *I was just wondering if it would be possible for you to ~.* The more appropriate the syntactic and lexical hedges the participants used in their requests, the higher the scores they obtained. As there were 10 high imposition items on the test, the maximum score was 50 points.

2.4.2. *Acceptability judgment test (AJT).* The acceptability judgment test was an unplanned written-judgment test that required the participants to read written descriptions of each situation in English and then evaluate three isolated requests on an 11-point scale[3], one at a time, in a 10-minute period. The participants who evaluated the three requests in accordance with the acceptability judgment of native English speakers[4] were awarded five points. The participants who did not assess all three requests consistent with native English speakers were awarded zero points. As there were 10 high imposition items on the test, the maximum score was 50 points.

3. Results

With respect to internal consistency, average Cronbach alpha reliability estimates for the discourse completion test and acceptability judgment test were calculated to be .841 and .837, respectively, indicating fairly high internal consistency for the two tests.

Content validity rather than criterion and construct validity was assessed because of the small number of cases. To ensure content validity, situations of the two tests were carefully planned and matched to a theoretical framework based on imposition, power and distance variables as follows:

Table 2

Distribution of Variables (Version A for the DCT and AJT)

	S4	S6	S10	S18	S2	S8	S12	S14	S16	S20	S1	S3	S5	S11	S13	S7	S9	S15	S17	S19
I	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	−	−	−	−	−	−	−	−	−	−
P	±	±	±	±	−	−	−	−	−	−	±	±	±	±	±	+	+	+	+	+
D	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	−	−	−	−	−	−	−	−	−	−

Note: S = Situation; I = Imposition; P = Power; D = Distance
+ = More; − = Less; ± = Equal

The normality assumption was verified through SPSS, which did not show a violation of the normality assumption. The following section summarizes the results for the discourse completion test and the acceptability judgment test. The overall alpha level was set at .05.

Results from the discourse completion test. The results of a two-way ANOVA with repeated-measures showed a significant main effect for instruction (the CI, SI, and control), F (2, 42) = 18.46, p = .000 < .05, Eta2 = .976 and a significant main effect for time (the pre-test, post-test, and delayed post-test), F (2, 42) = 3.19, p = .046 < .05, Eta2 = .071. However, no significant interaction effect between instruction and time was found, F (4, 42) = 3.49, p = .142 < .05, Eta2 = .142. The post-hoc Scheffé tests for the main effect of treatment indicate the following contrasts: (a) the pragmalinguistics- and sociopragmatics-focused instruction (CI) group performed significantly better than the sociopragmatics-focused instruction (SI) group and the control group; (b) there were no statistically significant differences between the sociopragmatics-focused instruction (SI) group and the control group. Results of the one-way ANOVA analysis in Figure 1 and Table 2 disclose that, although there were no statistically significant differences between the three groups on the pre-test scores [F (2, 42) = 1.54, p = .226 > .05, Eta2 = .068], the two treatment groups indicated gains from the pre-test to the post-test, and the pragmalinguistics- and sociopragmatics-focused instruction (CI) group demonstrated further gains from the time of the post-test to the delayed post-test test, whereas the sociopragmatics-focused instruction (SI) group demonstrated losses from the time of the post-test to the delayed post-test.
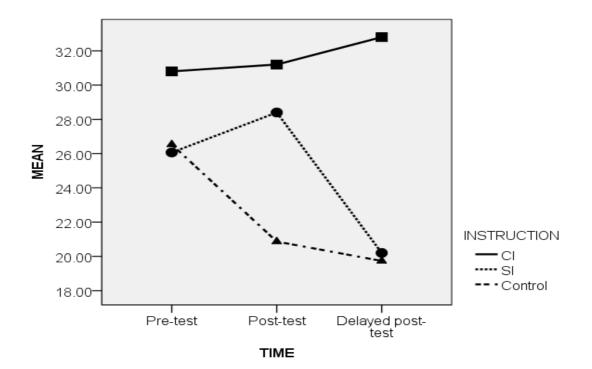
***Figure 1.* Interaction plot for DCT**

Note: CI= Pragmalinguistics- and Sociopragmatics-focused instruction; SI= Sociopragmatics-focused instruction.

Table 3

Descriptive statistics for DCT

	Treatment	Score	Mean	*SD*
Pre-test	CI	50	30.80	10.80
	SI	50	26.07	7.45
	Control	50	26.53	5.18
Post-test	CI	50	31.20	12.27
	SI	50	28.40	5.88
	Control	50	20.87	1.19
Delayed post-test	CI	50	32.80	7.99
	SI	50	20.20	0.86
	Control	50	19.73	1.33

Note: CI= Pragmalinguistics- and Sociopragmatics-focused instruction; SI= Sociopragmatics-focused instruction.

Results from Acceptability Judgment Test (AJT). The results of a two-way repeated-measures ANOVA for the acceptability judgment test revealed a significant main effect for instruction, (the CI, SI, and control), $F_{(2, 42)} = 6.78$, $p = .003 < .05$, Eta2 = .244, a significant main effect for time (the pre-test, post-test, and delayed post-test), $F_{(2, 42)} = 21.56$, $p = .000 < .05$, Eta2 = .339, and a significant interaction effect between instruction and time, $F_{(4, 42)} = 7.12$, $p = .000 < .05$, Eta2 = .253. The post-hoc Scheffé tests for the main effect of treatment show the following contrasts: (a) the pragmalinguistics- and sociopragmatics-focused (CI) and the sociopragmatics-focused instruction (SI) groups performed significantly better than the control group on the post-test and delayed post-test test; (b) there were no statistically significant differences between the pragmalinguistics- and sociopragmatics-focused instruction (CI) and the sociopragmatics-focused instruction (SI) groups on the post-test and the delayed post-test. The results displayed in Figure 2 and Table 3 demonstrate that although there were no statistically significant differences between the three groups in a one-way ANOVA analysis of the pre-test scores, [$F_{(2, 42)} = .17$, $p = .847 > .05$, Eta2 = .008], the two treatment groups made significant gains from the pre-test to the post-test, $F_{(1, 28)} = 44.92$, $p = .000 < .05$, Eta2 = .616, and the positive effects for the two treatments between the post-test and the delayed post-test were maintained, $F_{(1, 28)} = 2.29$, $p = .141 > .05$, Eta2 = .076, as evidenced by results from a two-way ANOVA with repeated-measures.
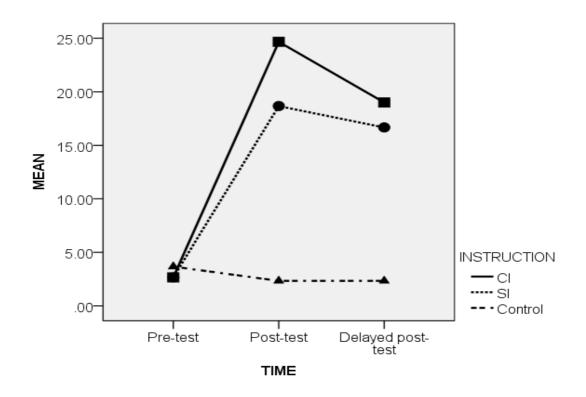
Figure 2. **Interaction plot for AJT**

Note: CI= Pragmalinguistics- and Sociopragmatics-focused instruction; SI= Sociopragmatics-focused instruction.

Table 4

Descriptive statistics for AJT

	Treatment	Score	Mean	*SD*
Pre-test	CI	50	2.67	7.76
	SI	50	2.67	3.72
	Control	50	3.67	3.99
Post-test	CI	50	24.67	18.27
	SI	50	18.67	15.06
	Control	50	2.33	3.72
Delayed post-test	CI	50	19.00	16.71
	SI	50	16.67	21.10
	Control	50	2.33	3.72

Note: CI= Pragmalinguistics- and Sociopragmatics-focused instruction; SI= Sociopragmatics-focused instruction.

4. Discussion

The results indicate that the two treatment groups performed significantly better than the control group as measured by the acceptability judgment test. However, the results also demonstrate that the CI group exhibited more statistically significant improvement than the SI group in the discourse completion test, whereas no difference was evident on the acceptability judgment test.

As no information regarding the psycholinguistic processing involved in either the two types of treatments or the testing instruments are available, any explanations to the research question must be speculative and explanatory in nature. During the CI and SI treatments, the participants in both treatment groups seem to have noticed by themselves the target pragmatic features by paying attention to and becoming aware of not only the relationship between the forms and meanings of the target features but also the sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic features of English request hedges, a finding that is consistent with Hyland's (1998) argument that learners must identify hedging items and appreciate the circumstances under which they can be used appropriately for the purpose of being able to use hedges appropriately. With respect to the CI treatment group, the participants engaged in the three types of activities - the pragmalinguistics-focused activities, sociopragmatics-focused activities, and the pragmalinguistics-sociopragmatics connection activities. Craik (2002) claimed that the quality of a memory trace relies on the level or depth of perceptual and mental processing where meanings and forms are linked. Meaning, in this case, encompasses both pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic meaning. In other words, when the participants focused more on the pragmalinguistic-sociopragmatic connections of the target features, they are inclined to heighten their consciousness of pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic meaning. The pragmalinguistics-sociopragmatics connection activities in the CI treatment were designed to require the participants to access and integrate their pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic factors of English request hedges. Thus, it is likely that the pragmalinguistics-sociopragmatics connection activities raised greater consciousness of processing pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic meaning, thereby resulting in improved pragmatic competence.

On the other hand, the participants in the SI group engaged in the two types of activity - the reading and processing for meaning activities and the sociopragmatics-focused activities. However, they did not work on the pragmalinguistics-focused and pragmalinguistics-sociopragmatics connection activities. Nonetheless, the participants in the SI group performed as well as the CI group in the acceptability judgment test. This suggests that the sociopragmatics-focused activities in the SI treatment focused the attention of the participants on the sociopragmatic features of the target pragmatic expressions directly, and the participants perhaps then transferred their interests and attention to the pragmalinguistic features, thereby guiding them to connect the pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic features. Accordingly, in view of the results of the acceptability judgment test, the sociopragmatics-focused activities alone within the SI treatment appear to be effective. Furthermore, the treatments in the two treatment groups were repeated in view of Sharwood Smith's (1993) suggestion that initial enhancement becomes more effective through repeated exposure as it guides the participants to have more opportunities to analyze discrete features and derive rules, thus internalizing the features in their systems.

The question now arises as to why the SI group did not perform as well as the CI group on the discourse completion test while no difference was observed in the acceptability judgment test. First, this is likely owing to the different types of activities. The participants in the CI group engaged in the pragmalinguistics- and sociopragmatics-focused activities, whereas their counterparts in the SI group engaged in only the sociopragmatics-focused activities. It is natural to think that the pragmalinguistics- and sociopragmatics-focused activities in the CI treatment directed the participants' attention to and made them more aware of the specific relevant linguistic forms, functional meanings, and relevant contextual features. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the participants in the CI group attended to the pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic resources of English request hedges more intensively than their counterparts in the SI group, thereby developing explicit knowledge that was more firmly embedded and thus more easily and rapidly accessed on the discourse completion test.

Second, the present study speculates that the disadvantage of the SI treatment may be related to how strongly established the participants' explicit knowledge is. The participants in the SI group were able to address the acceptability judgment test, an unplanned written-judgment test because the test required only judgment and relatively lower demands than a production test. However, the SI group was not able to cope with the discourse completion test, an unplanned written-production test to the same extent as the CI group because their working memories were weighted down with the higher demands of the test, which made it difficult for them to access their more weakly entrenched explicit knowledge. Ellis (2008) suggested that the terms explicit/implicit label the type of knowledge learners have according to whether it is conscious or intuitive, whereas the terms declarative/procedural address the degree of control the learners have over their explicit knowledge and implicit knowledge. Ellis (2008) further explained that procedural explicit knowledge refers to the conscious knowledge or explicit knowledge of L2 items that can be accessed relatively easily and rapidly and which can be used for production, whereas the declarative explicit knowledge refers to the conscious knowledge or explicit knowledge of L2 items that are accessed more slowly. Therefore, it can be surmised that explicit knowledge formed through the CI treatment is procedural, whereas explicit knowledge established through the SI treatment is declarative.

The results of the present study are different from those of Takahashi (2001, 2005) with regard to the fact that the present study found evidence of learners acquiring sociopragmatic competence. The most apparent causal factor for this distinction may be attributable to the focus of activities in which the participants in the present study engaged. Both studies examined instructional approaches for Japanese learners acquiring English polite request strategies from the input-based perspective. However, the instructional approach in Takahashi's studies focused more on pragmalinguistics, whereas the sociopragmatics-focused activities in the present study emphasized sociopragmatics. Takahashi (2001, 2005) reported no clear evidence of developing sociopragmatic competence among some participants and attested to the essentiality of encouraging learners to engage in not only pragmalinguistics-focused activities but also sociopragmatics-focused activities. Rose (2005) suggested that sociopragmatics is frequently an area of difficulty for language learners. Thus, it could be hypothesized that the sociopragmatics-focused activities rather than the

pragmalinguistics-focused activities may have helped the participants grasp difficult sociopragmatic features and then directed their attentions to pragmalinguistic features.

5. Conclusion

The present study investigated the relative effects of two types of input-based approaches on recognizing and producing English request hedges. The results show that the pragmalinguistics- and sociopragmatics-focused instruction involving the processing of English request hedges through pragmalinguistic-sociopragmatic connections has a stronger impact on the recognition and production of English request hedges. In addition, the results also indicate that sociopragmatics-focused instruction is effective on the unplanned written-judgment test only if learners are able to attend to and become aware of both pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic resources of English request hedges.

One pedagogical implication for teachers, then, is that teachers should be aware that effective input-based instruction can occur when the tasks provide learners with opportunities for processing both pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic features of the target structures. Furthermore, it is advisable for the task to be repeated so that the connections between pragmalinguistic-sociopragmatic factors of target features are significantly reinforced. Such tasks may prove of great value in improving learners' L2 pragmatic competence.

One major limitation of the present study, which involves the selection of testing instruments, should be taken into consideration in future research. The present study adopted the discourse completion test, which is a non-interactive instrument that does not produce natural conversational data. Accordingly, as the discourse completion test is limited as a testing instrument for assessing the participants' pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic knowledge for English request hedges, the data from the discourse completion test in the present study led us to discover only what the participants noticed. A natural interactive testing instrument would have allowed us to better determine more about what the participants are actually capable of doing. In addition, the evaluation questionnaire or interview should be administered to supplement the present study qualitatively to consider whether the aims of the instructional treatments had been achieved and how the instructions could be improved for future use.

Despite the shortcoming, the present study contributes to our understanding of the effectiveness and usefulness of the sociopragmatics-focused activities in teaching English request hedges. However, more research is needed to confirm the outcome of the present study, especially the effects of teaching sociopragmatics in L2 pragmatics. Issues regarding the effectiveness of teaching sociopragmatics in L2 pragmatics have generated more questions than answers in terms of optimal instructional approaches for pragmatic development. Nevertheless, going through the unique challenges and opportunities to determine the real nature of effectiveness and usefulness of teaching sociopragmatics in L2 pragmatics will definitely be rewarding and certainly serve to expand future scholarship not only in the area of interlanguage pragmatics but also in the wider field of applied linguistics.

Notes

[1]In behavioral research, researcher expectancy can be a problem when the researcher teaches and selects experimental groups. The researcher followed the instructional guidelines rigidly controlled for the effect with the double-blind technique after the data were collected to minimize any researcher expectancy effect during the treatments.

[2]If the study begins with the pre-test, the test with the same items can influence performance on the post-test and follow-up tests. To minimize the influence, three versions of the instruments were developed.

[3]The acceptability judgment test used an 11-point Likert scale. According to Hatch and Lazarton (1991), a broader range in scale encourages more precision in respondents' judgments.

[4]Ten native speakers provided three isolated requests in each situation. Ten native speakers of English were required to read written English descriptions of 20 situations. They were asked to write what they would say in each situation, and they were then presented with a series of isolated requests and instructed to score the first request on an 11-point scale and then to score subsequent responses proportionally higher or lower in accordance with the degree of perceived acceptability. The native speakers' data were relatively uniform and consistent (SD = .82 ~ 1.08, range = 2.00 ~ 4.00). These data were used as the baseline data for the DCT and AJT.

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