

Raising EFL Pragmatic Awareness in Situations which Require the Speech Act: Requests¹

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to explore similarities and differences in the realization of request speech acts before and after the implementation of language learning activities aimed at raising awareness and building knowledge of pragmatic aspects of language use. In other words, the purpose was to identify the effects of explicit formal instruction in some aspects that pertain to the appropriate usage of speech acts of requests with the objective of leading learners to accomplish successful transactions and social interpersonal relations. Results in comparing similarities and differences between the pre-stage and the post stage showed that the performance in some situations was sometimes homogenous, whereas in some other cases, as it was expected, some differences were identified in the post stage because the implementation of activities aimed at motivating students to use alternative and risky forms of requests. These results suggest that during the process of language learning, foreign language schools should consider the viability of reinforcing their students' learning experience by letting them participate in the whole gamut of communicative exchange and social transactions that are more likely to occur in the target language community.

Resumen

El objetivo del presente estudio fue explorar las similitudes y diferencias en la construcción de peticiones o solicitudes antes y después de la de la implementación de actividades de aprendizaje del lenguaje dirigidas a crear conciencia pragmática en la formulación de actos de habla. En otros términos, se buscó explorar los efectos de la instrucción explícita de algunos aspectos relacionados al uso adecuado de los actos de habla de "solicitud" con el fin de dirigir a los estudiantes a realizar transacciones comunicativas exitosas. Resultados en la realización de actos de habla, indican que tanto de manera previa y posterior a la implementación de actividades se reporta que en algunas situaciones, el comportamiento lingüístico de los estudiantes fue homogéneo. Así mismos, como se esperaba también se identificaron algunas diferencias en la etapa posterior a la intervención como consecuencia de la ejecución de actividades destinadas a motivar a los estudiantes a utilizar formas de solicitudes alternas y de mayor riesgo. Estos resultados sugieren que durante el proceso de aprendizaje de lenguas extranjeras, es necesario considerar la viabilidad de reforzar la experiencia de aprendizaje de los estudiantes haciéndolos conscientes de toda la gama de aspectos pragmáticos que intervienen en las transacciones sociales y comunicativas de la cultura o la lengua meta.

Introduction

Within foreign language learning, many studies have addressed the importance of developing pragmatic aspects of language use in the classroom. Such research has shown that, in addition to the linguistic competence related to grammatical, phonological and morphological rules, language users must also possess pragmatic knowledge in order to communicate effectively in the target language (e.g., Thomas, 1983). That is, knowledge is needed of social, cultural, and discourse conventions that have to be followed in various situations of language use, as opposed to the abstract language system (Kasper, 1997). With these concerns in mind, the present article presents the results of an exploratory study conducted with the aim of learning about the effects of explicit formal instruction in the development of pragmatic knowledge in an EFL learning

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environment. Before presenting information and results regarding this study, some notions pertaining to pragmatics and speech acts will be addressed.

Pragmatic Meaning

Pragmatics is the study of how language is produced and interpreted by its users in its linguistic and non-linguistic context (Marmaridou, 2000). According to Deguang (2007), pragmatic knowledge is a socio-cultural related skill of language, the skill of using the appropriate linguistic form conforming to the target language culture and its social context. Under this conceptualization, pragmatic knowledge covers two levels: the first basic level is using the right linguistic form and the second level refers to the ability of using the correct linguistic form to fulfil the communicative purposes appropriately (Thomas, 1983). The lack of these two levels of pragmatic knowledge may result in serious misunderstandings among interlocutors. In some other cases, speakers may be perceived as rude, uncultured or awkward (Thomas, 1983).

Pragmatic Failure

According to Thomas (1983) pragmatic failure could be defined as "the inability to understand what is meant by what is said" (p. 93). Similarly Blum-Kulka (1983) claims that pragmatic failure occurs "whenever two speakers fail to understand each other's intentions" (p. 19). Thomas (1983) points out that there are two types of pragmatic errors: pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic. More in depth, Fernandez (2008) makes reference to Thomas (1983) to define pragmalinguistic failure as a speech event that "takes place when the pragmatic force of a linguistic structure is different from that normally assigned to it by a native speaker" (p. 13). An important aspect to this type of error is when speech act strategies are wrongly transferred from L1 to L2. On the other hand, sociopragmatic failure derives from the different intercultural insights of what constitutes an appropriate speech behaviour. Thomas (1983) suggests that this type of sociopragmatic failure is more difficult to reset since it involves making changes in student's beliefs and value systems.

Raising Pragmatic Awareness

Instances of pragmatic failure among non-native speakers have motivated researchers and professors to question whether pragmatic knowledge can be taught in the language classroom. According to Kasper's claim (1997), the answer to the question is negative; she claims that "competence, whether linguistic or pragmatic, is not teachable" (p.175). On the contrary, findings reported by Davies (1986), Fujimori (2004), and Jung (2001) argue that there is some sort of knowledge that language learners can develop, acquire, use, or lose, additional to the learner's existing grammatical knowledge. Following this view, pragmatic competence is developed alongside lexical and grammatical knowledge. Others researchers support the notion that some pragmatic knowledge can be acquired implicitly, while some other pragmatic knowledge is learned explicitly through formal instruction (Deguang, 2007). In other words, certain pragmatic knowledge is universal and can be developed free of direct instruction because the knowledge is shared all across languages, whereas other pragmatic knowledge is new or unknown to an EFL learner and it can be learned through formal instruction. Olshtain and Cohen's (1990) studies of apologies and Deguang's studies (2007) of requests revealed that selected pragmatic features and routines were teachable.

Raising Pragmatic Awareness through Explicit Instruction

In order to make students aware of pragmatic failure, Thomas (1983) suggests that students should be provided with the necessary pragmatic tools. For instance, teachers must develop metapragmatic capacities to help learners analyze language in a conscious way. That is, teachers need to teach the differences between pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic failures, and they need to provide language examples in class to enable students to make pragmatic decisions. Davies (1986) supports this idea when indicating that "Rather than being taught to be polite, learners should be given the possibility of choosing to be either polite or impolite" (p. 121). Davies considers that the task of the teacher is to make sure students know what they are saying.

In addition, the teacher has to take into account that pragmalinguistic failures can be corrected, while sociopragmatic failures are indicated and discussed, since these show the learner's value systems and vision of the world. Learners can be encouraged to observe and learn the cultural norms of the target language that is being studied, but without changing their personality or their own cultural values and beliefs. Similarly, Kasper and Schmidt (1996) support Thomas' (1983) claims in that explicit metapragmatic instruction facilitates the awareness of pragmatic abilities. That is, students must learn that the codification of a certain message is subject to the conventions of use and these may vary from one linguistic community to other. Deguan (2007) suggests that instead of teaching students to analyse the semantic meaning of sentences, professors should help students to make pragmatic analysis through a list of linguistic expressions used to perform the same function, but are used in different contexts. If not appropriately used, they create an unintended effect on the addressee.

Speech Acts

The basics of speech act theory are presented by J L. Austin (1962, as cited in Marmaridou, 2000, pp. 163-222). His insights are based on the assumption that the primary components of human communication are not linguistic expressions, but the performance of certain kinds of speech acts. That is, when speakers of a language perform speech acts, they have the ability "to do things with words" (cited by Marmaridou, p. 211). They produce utterances that have the property of actions. These utterances can express an apology, an order, a warning, a request, an invitation, a compliment, and so on. In general, speech act theory consists of making distinctions among utterances that evoke three types of linguistic acts: the locutionary act (the act of speaking or saying something), the illocutionary act (the act of saying something with some kind of direct or indirect force that satisfies a convention or intention) and the perlocutionary act (the act of producing a certain effect upon the audience or addressee).

Request Speech Acts

The illocutionary act of request speech acts was chosen as the target of this study because requests represent a negative Face-Threatening Act (FTA). According to Brown and Levinson (1978), speech acts of request require an effort from the hearer, which is imposed by the speaker. For instance, an utterance like: "Don't forget to clean the office" is an act which is costly to the hearer and it can be negative face threatening from both the hearer and the speaker because the target's compliance with the request

interferes with the hearer's desires to remain autonomous. Brown and Levinson (1978) propose that when confronted with the need to perform an FTA, the speaker must decide whether to perform a direct and efficient FTA or diminish the effect of the FTA on the listener's positive/negative face. The mitigation strategies are what Brown and Levinson call politeness strategies.

For example, suppose an employee desires to meet with his/her boss to better understand an instruction given at work. The request to meet with the boss threatens the boss' negative face by disrupting his/her desire to be left alone and autonomous. In making the request, the employee can take one of five courses of action, listed in increasing order of politeness:

- (1) The employee can simply state the request *Baldly, On Record* in the interrogative and most direct and efficient way (e.g., "Can we meet?");
- (2) the employee can express solidarity or affinity by phrasing the request using *Positive Politeness* ("Let's meet to clarify a few ideas.");
- (3) the employee may attempt to minimize the imposition by wording the request with restraint or *Negative Politeness* ("Would you be willing to meet with me for just a minute about this concept?");
- (4) the employee can make an *Off-Record* request by hinting or using ambiguous language to minimize the threat and provide deniability ("Usually when I talk through a concept, I can understand it better.");
- (5) or the employee may not make the request at all (Brown & Levinson, 1978, p. 157).

In the realization of requests, the usage of indirect forms is correlated to the type of social relation which is maintained between the speaker and the addressee (Blum-Kulka, 1983). The greater the right of the speaker to ask, the greater the obligation of the hearer to comply, and hence the less the motivation to use indirect forms (Labov, 1972). However, rights and obligations do not always correspond so neatly.

According to Blum-Kulka (1983) the realization of a request speech act usually includes the following two main segmentations: the head act and its categories (alerters and supportive moves). The head act is that part of the sequence which might serve to realize the act independently of other elements. That is, the head act is the minimal unit which realizes a request: the core of the request. For example, in the sentence "**Judith, get me a glass of water, please. I'm terribly thirsty**", the head act is "**Get me a glass of water**" because is the part of the sentence that is essential for conveying the request. The non-essential parts for such realization are "**Judith**" and "**Please, I'm terribly thirsty**". In this case, the alerter is the word "**Judith**" and the supportive moves "**Please, I'm terribly thirsty**".

Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper (1989) make reference to the definition of a supportive move as a linguistic unit used before or after a request, and it is used to create an illocutionary effect on the speech act by either aggravating or mitigating its force. For instance, in the sentence "**Stop bothering me or I will call the police**", the head act is an imperative request that can be identified as "**Stop bothering me**" and its supportive move is "**I will call the police**" which is used to aggravate or emphasize the illocutionary force of the act.

Blum-Kulka (1983) classified head acts in two types: *request perspective* and *request strategy*. In a request perspective, a speech act can be realized from the viewpoint of the hearer, the speaker, or both participants and any other explicit agent who is ignored or purposefully ignored. These request perspectives are identified as hearer dominance, speaker dominance, and speaker and hearer dominance and impersonal. On the other hand, the request strategy is the obligatory choice of the level of directness by which the request is realized. On the other hand, directness is described by Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) as the "degree to which the speaker's illocutionary intent is apparent from the locution" (p. 278). Directness in this sense is a pragmalinguistic category which lends itself to psycholinguistic validation. It is related to, but by no means coexistent with politeness. The request strategies are ordered according to decreasing degree of directness. The request strategies are mutually exclusive; a head act can only be realized through one specific request strategy.

Also, in speech acts of request, syntactic downgraders are used to modify the head act of the speech act request internally by mitigating the negative force by means of syntactic choices. Lexical and phrasal downgraders serve as optional additions to soften the impositive force of the request by modifying the head act internally through specific lexical and phrasal choices. Supportive moves are used by speakers to mitigate or aggravate a request.

The Study

This study explored similarities and differences in the realization of requests before and after the implementation of learning activities aimed at raising pragmatic awareness and knowledge building of speech acts. In other words, explicit formal instruction in some aspects that pertain to the appropriate usage of speech acts of request were addressed with the objective of leading learners to accomplish successful transactions and social interpersonal relations. For this study, a group of EFL learners were exposed to language teaching activities during ten weeks (four hours of weekly intervention or forty hours of practice) in which aspects of pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic knowledge were addressed.

The study consisted of two stages: a pre-stage and a post stage. In the pre-stage, data from students' performance on request speech acts were elicited on the third day of classes before the teaching intervention. In the post stage a second elicitation of students' performance of speech acts was elicited at the end of course and after the teaching intervention.

Research Questions

The following research questions were proposed:

1. What are the differences in the usage of pragmatic strategies employed by EFL learners before and after they are exposed to teaching activities aimed to develop pragmatic awareness in requests speech acts?
2. What are the similarities in the usage of pragmatic strategies employed by EFL learners before and after they are exposed to teaching activities aimed to develop pragmatic awareness in requests speech acts?

Participants and Context

The participants for this study were fifteen undergraduate students from a low intermediate English language course offered as an extracurricular program at a major university in Mexico. The goal of this language program is to help undergraduate students to develop the necessary linguistic tools needed to obtain better job opportunities and improve possibilities for applying to graduate programs abroad.

Data Collection and Analysis

A discourse completion questionnaire was designed to elicit samples of request speech acts at both the pre-stage and post stage (see Appendix 1). The samples were elicited through five situations. Each sample situation was preceded by a written description of the situation, specifying the setting, the age and the social distance between the participants. Respondents were asked to complete the speech act by writing the words the speaker would use to accomplish the request in this situation. The researchers aimed to identify pragmatic strategies employed. The pragmatic strategies were identified and coded using the *Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization (CCSAR)* scheme identified and employed by Blum-Kulka (1983) in a cross-cultural project on speech acts. Frequency counts were made of the instances of the 47 different CCSAR strategies for each request situation. The frequencies of the selection patterns of the CCSAR were compared to identify similarities and differences in the usage and selection of requests speech act strategies at the pre-stage and post stage. The coding schemes used for analysis are described in the following:

Coding Schemes for Requests

REQUEST PERSPECTIVE

1. Alerter (AL): **Excuse me / Hi / Good Morning / Dr. Fitzpatrick / Mary / Honey**, etc.
2. Supportive moves (SM): Get me that beer. **I'm terribly thirsty.**

REQUEST STRATEGIES

3. Mood derivable (MD): **Leave** me alone / **Clean up** the kitchen.
4. Explicit (EX): I am **asking** you to **move your car**.
5. Hedging (HG): I **wanted** to ask **if I could** present my paper a week later.
6. Wanted statement (WS): I'd **like** to borrow your notes.
7. Suggestory (SG): **How about** cleaning up the kitchen.
8. Preparative (P): I **was wondering** if you could give me a ride.
9. Locution derivable (LD): Mary you will **have to / should / must** move your car.
10. Preparatory (PRE): **Can** I borrow your car? / **Could** I possibly get a ride?
11. Strong hint (SH): Will you **be going to have** lunch now?
12. Mild hint (MH): **You've been busy here, haven't you?** The intent is to have the hearer achieve a task like cleaning the kitchen.

Syntactic Downgraders

13. Interrogative (I): **Can I** borrow your car? / **Could you** give me a ride home?
14. Negation of preparatory condition (NPC): **Can't you / I don't** suppose you would like to? / **You couldn't** give me a ride, **could you?**
15. Subjunctive (S): It might be better if you **were to leave now**.
16. Conditional (C): **I suggest** you leave now.
17. Aspect (A): I was **wondering / I wonder** if I could get a ride home with you.
18. Tense (T): I **wanted** to present your paper a week earlier.
19. Conditional clause (CC): I was wondering **if you could** present your paper a week earlier than planned.

Lexical and Phrasal Downgraders

20. Politeness markers (PM): Clean the kitchen, **please**.
21. Understater (U): Could you tidy up a **bit**?

22. Hedge (H): It would fit much better **somehow** if you did your paper next week.
23. Subjectivizer (SJ): **I am afraid** you are going to have to move your car.
24. Downtoner (DWT): **Could you possibly / perhaps** look after my kid for two hours while I go to the market?
25. Cajoler (CJ): **You know**, I'd really like you to present your report next month.
26. Appealer (A): Clean up your room, honey, **will you? /okay?**

Upgraders

27. Intensifier (IN): The store is in a **terrible / frightening** mess.
28. Commitment indicator (CI): **I'm sure / certain / surely** you won't mind lending me a dress for the party.
29. Expletive (EP): Why don't you clean that **bloody / damn** mess up?
30. Time intensifier (TIN): You better make your bed **right now / immediately!**
31. Lexical uptoner (LU): Clean up that **mess!**
32. Determination marker (DM): I've explained myself and **that's that!**
33. Repetition of request (RR): **Get lost! / Leave me alone!**
34. Orthographic (O): (i.e., underlining, using exclamation marks, or in spoken mode, using marked pause, stress, intonation) Cooking dinner is your business!
35. Emphatic addition (EA): **Go and wash** those dishes!
36. Pejorative determiner (PD): Clean up that mess **(there)!**

Supportive Moves

Mitigating Supportive Moves

37. Preparator (PR): **I'd like to ask you something... / Don't you live on the same street as me...? / May I ask a question...?**
38. Getting a precommitment (GP): **Could you do me a favor?** Would you lend me your notes from yesterday's class?
39. Grounder (G): Mary, **I got sick yesterday** and missed class. Can I borrow your notes?
40. Disarmer (D): **I know you don't like lending notes**, but could you make an exception this time?
41. Promise of reward (PRW): Could you help me with my essay? **I'll take you to dinner afterwards.**
42. Imposition minimizer (IM): Could you give me a ride home, **but only if you are going my way?**

Aggravating Supporting Moves

43. Insult (INSL): **You dirty pig!** You never clean your room.
44. Threat (THR): Clean your room if you don't want to **get grounded.**
45. Moralizing (MOR): **If we are living under the same roof, we should share bill expenses.**
46. Mode (MD): Could I **humbly beg to scrounge** a ride home?
47. Type of modal (MOD): **will, would** or **could.** (Blum-Kulka 1983, p. 275-289)

Implementation of Learning Activities

This course was conducted by using language samples obtained from EFL textbooks and authentic material, such as e-mail letters, and the collaboration of an English native speaker. The design of the teaching activities incorporated the aspects listed below:

1. Help learners identify different combinations of linguistic strategies employed to convey a certain pragmatic force, meaning or intention.
2. Teach politeness strategies that depend on social variables such as power, social distance or degree of imposition.
3. Raise awareness of the different intercultural norms, rules, rites or conventions of the target language community.
4. Instruct in the ability to use and identify discourse markers and phatic utterances.
5. Help interpret literal and non-literal meaning.
6. Promote contrastive analysis between L1 and L2 language forms.

7. Encourage students to observe, analyze, infer, predict and learn foreign speech behavior (metapragmatic capacity).
8. Enhance cross-cultural understanding and tolerance.

Results

Instances of speech acts of request found in the pre-stage and the post stage are explained in the following paragraphs (see Appendix 1 for the coding samples of a discourse completion text).

Pre-Stage

Situation number 1: You missed a lecture yesterday and would like to borrow Joel's notes and you are not friends.

The most popular request strategy identified in situation number 1 was the usage of requestive perspective expressions such as: "Excuse me", "Excuse me, Joel", or "Joel". The second most popular realization was a syntactic downgrader with the usage of interrogative strategies. The third most frequent realization was a mitigating support move. The least most popular were the strategies such as polite markers, conditionals, downtoners and mode. No instances of upgraders and aggravating supporting moves were found.

Situation number 2: You missed a lecture yesterday and would like to borrow Joel's notes and you are friends.

As in situation number 1, the most salient linguistic strategy in situation number 2 was the AL feature. The second most frequent was the use of syntactic downgrades in interrogative realizations. The third trendiest strategy was the use of strong hints. Some preparatory strategies were also identified as other example of requests. Strategies such as polite markers, lexical uptoners and appealers were only used once.

Situation number 3: A police officer asks you to move your car.

The usage of polite markers and alerters were the most frequent request strategies used in situation number 3. The use of interrogative realizations were the ones identified in second place, while the lexical uptoner and the mode were used as the third most popular strategy, while conditionals and repetition of request formulas were only used once. Zero instances of mitigating and aggravating support moves were found.

Situation number 4: An applicant calls for information on a job advertised in a paper.

The most accepted linguistic realization used in situation number 4 was the use of preparatory request strategies. Second place was the use of alerters and wanted statements with a similar frequency usage. Third place was the use of interrogative strategies with a frequency usage of six instances. Finally, the usage of polite markers and conditional strategies were only used once. No instances of lexical and phrasal downgraders and supportive moves were identified.

Situation number 5: Ask your father why he is not working at the factory anymore.

Interestingly in situation number 5 only two types of linguistic realizations were identified as the ones used to express a request in this context. These were the use of alerters with a frequency selection of a 50% and the use of expletives with a frequency usage of a 100%.

Post stage

Situation number 1: You missed a lecture yesterday and would like to borrow Joel's notes and you are not friends.

The most used request strategies identified in situation number 1 were the requestive perspective expressions identified as alerters and the usage of polite markers such as "Please" with a frequency selection of a 100%. The second most popular realization of request strategies was the lexical downtoners. The third most frequent realization was the usage of sentences aimed to get a precommitment. Finally, the least common strategy with only three realizations was the usage of conditional clauses.

Situation number 2: You missed a lecture yesterday and would like to borrow Joel's notes and you are friends.

Unlike situation number 1, the most frequent strategy in situation number 2 was the want statement feature. The second most frequent was the usage of syntactic downgrades in interrogative realizations. Zero instances of lexical and phrasal downgraders, upgraders, mitigating and aggravating supportive moves were identified.

Situation number 3: A police officer asks you to move your car.

The use of alerters was the most popular strategy implemented to request in situation number three. The utilization of polite markers was the one identified in second place. The third most popular strategies were the locution derivable formulas and syntactic downgraders with the use of tense. Lastly, in fourth place an example of a preparatory sentence. There were no samples of upgraders, mitigating and aggravating supportive moves used by the participants.

Situation number 4: An applicant calls for information on a job advertised in a paper.

The most accepted linguistic realization in situation number 4 was the use of alerters. The second most popular was the use of preparatory (PR) realizations. Next, the use of downtoners and lastly, the use of syntactic downgraders with interrogative request forms.

Situation number 5: Ask your father why he is not working at the factory anymore.

In this situation the use of alerters occupied the most common strategy chosen by the participants, then followed in second place the use of interrogatives and in last place the use of expletive realizations.

*Pre-Stage and Post Stage Analysis and Discussion*Differences and Similarities*Situation number 1*

Both the pre-stage and the post stage display the frequent usage of alerters and downtoners. These results may suggest that these linguistic categories were considered essential in situation number one. Also results showed that students' realizations of request were more diverse in the pre-stage than in the post stage. More in-depth examples of mood derivable sentences, interrogatives, conditionals, polite markers, and grounders were not identified in the post stage. This may suggest that students in the pre-stage were more influenced by their native's perception of requests. This possible

correlation can be supported with the high incorporation of downgraders identified in the pre-stage with the intention of trying to minimize the imposition. As it was reported by Matsura (1998), the most common misconceptions that EFL learners have towards the realization of requests rests on the correspondence they attach to the length of utterance to politeness. In other words, it is commonly believed that the longer the sentence the more polite it is.

Situation number 2

The most common strategies utilized in the pre-stage were more wide-ranging with examples of alerters, preparatory statements, strong hints, interrogatives, polite markers, etc. This tendency does not only indicate that foreign language realizations of request speech acts tend to be what Matsura (1998) called "more verbose" than native speaker realizations, with the use of more supportive moves. Backed by this research, our teaching intervention activities of request followed Jung's (2001) recommendations aimed to help students recognize cultural knowledge. In this particular case, it can be observed from the post stage results that there was an omission of alerters and the incorporation of the want statement strategy. This may have resulted from the recognition that English is a language that is more oriented towards negative politeness. Brown and Levinson (1978) suggest that negative politeness leans towards the hearer's negative face and tries to underline avoidance of imposition on the addressee. Negative face is related to the desire of maintaining autonomy, through distance and a higher avoidance to use expressions that denote the high usage of supportive moves.

Situation number 3

Variations between the pre-stage and the post stage were found in situation number 3. For instance, within the post stage, learners showed preference for the usage of alerters, supportive moves, politeness markers, locution derivable and preparatory statements. These findings suggest that the students learned to use more indirect forms of request, which corresponds to the notion of imposition, right and obligation (Labov, 1972). In this particular case, the highest degree of imposition corresponds to the police officer's requests. The hearer's obligation to comply corresponds to the speaker's right to make the request. This is a clear example of what can be called a social contract among participants. However, since Spanish is a language which is correlated to the notion of positive politeness, speakers seek for membership and solidarity (Brown & Levinson, 1978). Evidence of this observation is the high frequency usage of polite markers as a strategy used to compensate or mitigate the usage of more direct forms.

Situation number 4

The high usage of preparatory requests, want statement, interrogatives and alerters identified in the pre-stage was substituted for the incorporation of preparators and alerters in the post stage such as: "Excuse me, sir. I would like to know if you have any job vacancies available?" in response to the lower level of imposition assigned to the speaker. In this particular case, the hearer does not hold the right or the obligation to request for information. Thus, the speaker should be expected to use less direct forms of request to be polite, and hence maintain positive face.

Situation number 5

Results in situation number 5 do not exhibit significant differences in the usage of request speech acts. In both the pre-stage and the post stage, the most common realization was the use of alerters and expletive strategies; this can be attributed to the fact that in situation number 5 the type of social relation between the speaker and the addressee is not predictable. It is possible to assume that in the pre-stage, students responded to this situation based on the type of relation they maintain with their father. Therefore, the results in the post-stage with the use of interrogative strategies only represent another possible realization, because of the limited number of social variables which can be attributed to this situation.

Conclusions

In correspondence to Fujimori's (2004) suggestions, the frequency of the strategies employed by the students in the pre-stage helped to identify what the students already knew about the realization of requests speech acts. Also, data from the pre-stage helped to determine the type of teaching content and activity instruction used in class to lead to the development of pragmatic awareness in the production of speech acts.

Outcomes from each of the main strategies and sub strategies in request speech acts were found to slightly vary from the pre-stage to the post stage and from situation to situation, suggesting that speech acts are realizations that are strongly influenced by social, cultural and contextual parameters. Alerters and interrogative forms were the most common realizations of requests among others. These results suggest that students recognized and identified modal verbs as the most conventional and obligatory forms of requests.

In comparing similarities in the pre-stage and the post stage, it was observed that the performance in some situations was sometimes homogenous. The similarities are perhaps due to the natural tendency that most second language learners have for transferring their native rules of language use into the second language. A good example of this was the resistance to substitute titles of address form like "Teacher or Joel" instead of "Professor or Mr. Barragan" that are commonly used in the native culture. Alternatively, some similarities may have reflected the correspondence between the native and the target language perceptions in the realization of requests. For instance, situations as in the ones referred to the teacher, the police officer and the father denote some sort of convention in which the speaker needs to comply with certain social rules and obligations.

On the other hand, differences found in the post stage may be attributed to the type of teaching instructions activities, which motivated students to use alternative and risky forms of requests. Examples of this are the omission and the substitution alerters in certain situations and indirect forms of request. Also, it was observed that students managed to develop some sort of new pragmatic knowledge through the modification of forms that were used in the native language and transferred into the target language. Moreover, realizations from the post stage also indicate, the great effort made from the students in trying to incorporate all the cultural and linguistic recommendations made during the teaching intervention session.

Taken as a whole, the results observed in this study provide useful implications for language teaching since they provide evidence for the great benefits that explicit instruction may have in helping language learners develop aspects of pragmatic competence. These results also suggest that during the process of language learning, foreign language schools should consider the viability to reinforce their students' learning experience by letting them participate in the whole gamut of communicative exchange and social transactions that are more likely to occur in the target language community.

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Appendix 1. Discourse Completion Text

Coding Sample (see abbreviations)

REQUESTS

1. You missed a lecture yesterday and would like to borrow Joel's notes and you are not friends.

You: I'm sorry (AL). I didn't come to class last week (GR). I was wondering, if you could lend me your notes from last class (C).

2. You missed a lecture yesterday and would like to borrow Joel's notes. You are friends.

You: Can I have your notes (EX)?

3. A police officer asks you to move your car.

Police: Sir (AL), you must move your car (LD), please (PL).

4. An applicant calls for information on a job advertised in a paper.

Applicant. I am calling about the job ad (PR). Could you give me some information (I)?

5. Pete asks his father why he doesn't work at the factory anymore.

Pete: Dad (AL), What happened with your job (EX)?

Adapted from: Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989).