

In the Name of God

**The Effect of Learner Profiles on Pragmalinguistic Learning by Iranian EFL Learners: Explicit versus Implicit Intervention**

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**1. Introduction**

**1.1. Preliminaries**

This study is an attempt to investigate the effects of motivation, listening proficiency, and ambiguity tolerance as learner profiles on pragma-linguistic learning via explicit and implicit teaching L2 request forms to Iranian EFL learners.

According to Hymes in 1960s, to function successfully in society, an individual must be able to use appropriate language in a given situation and understand the social language hints of others, and also an individual must have the ability to combine one’s own social knowledge with contextual information to understand the intended meaning of someone’s utterance which is known as pragmatic knowledge. Pragmalinguistics that is part of pragmatics, applies to more linguistics features of pragmatics; in other words, it mostly focuses on the way which linguistic forms of a language are used to obtain certain pragmatic purpose (Thomas, 1983).

Communicative competence, as Richards (1985) claimed, includes knowledge of the grammar, vocabulary of the language, rules of speaking, knowing how to use and respond to different types of speech acts and knowing how to use language appropriately. It is believed that the goal of second language teaching should be communicative competence, and it should include the ability to use language appropriately in social contexts in order to perform communicative functions and the ability to combine utterances and communicative functions according to the principles of discourse (Loveday, 1982; Canale & Swain, 1980).

Pragmatic or Discourse Competence denotes the skill of appropriate use of language in different social situations. We can define appropriate use of language in different circumstances. According to Smolcic (2014) differentiate circumstances may be interpreted as follows:

* Communicating purposes, often mention as functions, e.g., requesting, apologizing
* Relative state of those communicating
* Topic area about which individuals are communicating, e.g. general, business
* Situation, physical location, e.g., in a bank, at school, in a restaurant

The grammatical structure of an utterance or sentence may not indicate its function. The same grammatical structure may be used for different functions. A function can also be expressed by a variety of different grammatical structures. The choice of grammatical structure clearly related to the circumstances and is chosen based on its appropriateness in those circumstances. Learners need to realize how to express a variety of functions and choices which are appropriate in different circumstances.

The type of linguistic system learners of a second language use is known as interlanguage. The theory of interlanguage is credited to Selinker (1972). The way learners acquire, comprehend, and use linguistic patterns (or [speech acts](http://grammar.about.com/od/rs/g/speechactterm.htm)) is the focus of interlanguage pragmatics.

Speech acts are part of linguistic competence and can be defined as the basic unit of communication. Schmidt and Richards (1980) define speech acts as the acts we perform while speaking. Interpreting speech acts depends on the context. The development in speech-act theory (Austin 1962; Searle 1976) led to better understanding of speakers’ intention in performing various functions in the act of communication. Since speech act theory has drawn researches’ attention on speech events and speech acts, instructors try to be more aware of the interactions of situational, sociolinguistic, and linguistic types of competency (Cohen & Olshtain, 1993).

The best way of presenting martial to learners is a major question that instructors always face. In that regard, there have been many researches on explicit and implicit instruction. Explicit instruction is explaining skills and information by the instructor. On the other hand, allowing the students to make their own conclusions and create their own conceptual structures after the instructor simply presents an example or a problem is referred to as implicit instruction.

**1.2. Review of Literature**

Kasper and Schmidt (1996) initially inspired the research on the effects of individual differences (ID) factors in interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) and later significantly advanced by Kasper and Rose (2002). Kasper and Rose focused on the growing significance of research on the relationship between IDs and the development of L2 pragmatics as a critical issue in ILP research. Simultaneously, as researches on pragmatic instruction in the framework of pragmatic acquisition increased, research on the effects of ID factors in ILP has been increasingly recognized, especially with regard to the strong implications obtained from results of teaching pragmatic that considered the possible effects of IDs on pragmatic awareness and learning.

The most notable findings focused on the explicit instruction of pragmatic, in which learners faced meta-pragmatic information, indicated that it was highly effective, and evidence to support this has been obtained (Alcon-Soler, 2012; Eslami & Eslami-Rasekh, 2008; Takahashi, 2001). Besides, previous studies supported the positive effects of implicit instruction, which is inductive in nature and metapragmatic information are not supplied to learners; based on learning outcomes degrees of effectiveness in implicit instruction were identified similar to explicit instruction (Takahashi, 2010a, 2010b).

Explicit and implicit instruction differences with regards to learner performance probably relates to the nature of attention and awareness in input processing: Attention to explicit instruction are essentially “other-initiated,” whereas in implicit instruction, they are potentially “self-initiated” (Williams, 1999). Thus, pragmatic learning through implicit instruction is more likely to be dependent on learners' ID status.

As Crookes and Schmidt (1991) pointed out, the learning process might be highly affected by motivation since learners' specific motivational factors direct their attention to target features in the L2 input. Furthermore, according to Bialystok's (1993, 1994) claim, more proficient learners are able to give more efficient selective attention to target features than less proficient learners.

Takahashi (2005a) attempted to show the possible links between motivation/proficiency and implicit instructional input. Takahashi examined possible effects of motivation in Japanese EFL learners and their second language reading proficiency on their degree of awareness of English bi-clausal request forms (e.g., “I was wondering if you could VP”) and other pragmalinguistic features (e.g., discourse markers and idiomatic expressions) in implicit intervention. Effect of L2 proficiency on pragmalinguistic awareness was not confirmed, but it was found that motivation, namely learners’ view toward target-language community was effective.

After 2005 study, Takahashi worked on a series of studies regarding the effects of the ID factors as previous research, but instead of reading proficiency, Takahashi focused on listening proficiency in Japanese EFL learners' awareness (Takahashi, 2012) and learning (Takahashi, 2013) of bi-clausal request forms. She also applied structural equation modeling (SEM) to explore the causal relationships between the ID factors, awareness, and learning in her recent studies. The SEM analysis in Takahashi (2012) revealed that two of the four motivation factors “Communicative Interaction” and “Class Enjoyment” and listening proficiency were involved in learners' awareness of target bi-clausal request forms. Specifically, learners who were interested in improving their L2 skills through real communicative interactions (“Communicative Interaction”) demonstrated higher listening proficiency, which directly accounted for pragmalinguistic awareness. Likewise, class-oriented learners who made efforts to improve their L2 skills through classroom activities (“Class Enjoyment”) tended to notice the target request forms.

Expanding on the final structural model of Takahashi (2012), Takahashi (2013) further investigated the links between the ID factors, awareness, and learning. The path analyses indicated that learners' awareness of target forms in the input did not lead to their mastery of bi-clausal request forms, although learning about the usage of internal modification devices (e.g., the softener “just” or intensifiers “really” and “at all”) was confirmed. More importantly, the significant effects of motivation and proficiency, although it was low, were identified for learning internal modifiers.

These findings explain the influence of ID factors on awareness and learning in pragmatics, but they mostly focus on the effects of IDs function independently of each other. Various ID variables have complicated relations and continuously constrain language learning, as it was empirically tested in Kuriscak (2006) and Taguchi (2012) research. Kuriscak in his analysis used hierarchical linear models and he demonstrated that an isolated significant ID effect was reduced or upgraded depending on other ID and situational factors. Taguchi performed a longitudinal study on pragmatic development and showed that various ID factors including motivation, personality, grammatical knowledge, proficiency, sensitivity to politeness, and subjectivity were simultaneously operative, thus, constraining the development of learners' pragmatic competence.

**1.3. Statement of the Problem**

The shift from grammatical to communicative competence in language learning reinforced the need to incorporate pragmatic awareness in TESOL planning. But we should realize learner’s difficulties toward pragmatic aspects of speech act sets include apologies, requests, compliments and complaints. Trying to make sense of when, why, and how to use an appropriate realization patterns is essential. Students often either have difficulties to understand these patterns or face constraints as a result of negative transfer in the recognition of various suitable sentences. Previous researches on the use of pragmatic reported cases in which second language (L2) learners strengthened their pragmatic competence through implicit instruction (Takahashi, 2010a, 2010b). Also, in pragmalinguistic learning, some individual difference (ID) factors may be involved.

Although many researches (Alcon-Soler, 2012; Eslami & Eslami-Rasekh, 2008; Takahashi, 2001) have been performed on the effects of learner’s profile on L2 pragmatic learning, they separately analyzed implicit or explicit instruction and mostly they were performed on explicit instruction. Thus, this is an attempt to include both in one study. There seems to be very few researches on improving learner’s L2 pragmatic knowledge in Iran (e.g. Eslami & Eslami-Rasekh, 2008). Since, having pragmatic knowledge helps students to communicate more properly, we believe that attending to teaching pragmatic efficiently is important.

1.4. Objectives and Significance of the Study

As it was mentioned, pragmatic features will help L2 learners to communicate more efficiently, so they should be taught by instructors either implicitly or implicitly. This study intends to explore, therefore, the effects of teaching pragmatic features when Iranian EFL learners attempt to learn how to realize L2 requests through implicit and explicit instruction, since we believe that it is a big gap in research area in Iran and also teaching pragmatics have been left a side in Iranian teaching environments.

On the other hand, we aim to provide significant insights into the effect of learners' profiles on learning in L2 pragmatics. According to Takahashi (2015), learners with stronger motivation for communication and a higher listening proficiency are more likely to notice the target pragmalinguistic features. Therefore, we believe that learner’s profile including listening proficiency, motivation, and ambiguity tolerance may influence implicit intervention. In that regard, implicit and explicit instruction is going to be compared in this study.

**1.5. Research Questions and Hypotheses**

The following research questions are addressed:

1. Do Iranian EFL learners' profiles (motivation, listening proficiency, and ambiguity tolerance) affect their learning of target bi-clausal English request forms in explicit and implicit instructional inputs?
2. Is there any difference between explicit and implicit intervention effects on learning of target bi-clausal English request forms by Iranian EFL learners? Which one is more effective?
3. What are the relationships between Iranian EFL learners' profiles and their learning of target bi-clausal English request forms in explicit and implicit instructional inputs?

Based on the above research questions, the following hypotheses are formulated:

1. Iranian EFL learners' profiles do not affect their learning of target bi-clausal English request forms in explicit instructional input.
2. Iranian EFL learners' profiles do not affect their learning of target bi-clausal English request forms in implicit instructional input.
3. There is not any difference between explicit and implicit intervention effects on learning of target bi-clausal English request forms by Iranian EFL learners.
4. There is no relationship between Iranian EFL learners' profiles and their learning of target bi-clausal English request forms in explicit instructional input.
5. There is no relationship between Iranian EFL learners' profiles and their learning of target bi-clausal English request forms in implicit instructional input.

**2. Method**

**2.1. Participants**

The study participants will be comprised of 90 Iranian students at Andisheh Sazan Institute. They have successfully passed touchstone level one in 3 semesters, and now they have an intermediate English background. They will be chosen and assigned to two experimental groups. One experimental group is going to learn request forms of English language explicitly, while the other group will be taught implicitly.

2.2. Instruments and Materials

Factors such as learning goals and expectancy of success affect learner’s motivation and when learners have motivation, they pay more attention toward L2 pragmalinguistic features, therefore, we are going to assess learners' L2 motivation in the expectancy-value frameworks. The motivation questionnaire is constructed by adopting the motivation measure of Schmidt, Boraie, and Kassabgy (1996) and also revised based on relevant features to Iranian EFL learners. The questionnaire contains 50 items, and for each, the degree of motivation is assessed using a five-point rating scale (1 totally disagree; 5 totally agree).

Listening proficiency is going to be measured by administering the listening section of the Oxford Placement Test (OPT), comprised of 100 tests. Ambiguity tolerance will be measured by Norton ambiguity tolerance scale (1975) comprised of 61 items measuring ambiguous perceptions such as multiple meanings, vagueness, incompleteness, fragmentation, probability, lack of structure, lack of information, uncertainty, inconsistencies, contradictions, contraries, and lack of clarity. For each item, the degree of ambiguity is assessed using a five-point rating scale (strongly disagree, strongly agree).

Twelve request situations are going to be initially prepared as pre-test, each containing different degrees of formality. Their imposition rates are going to be calculated by applying Takahashi's (1995, 1998) imposition formula.

For post-test, the video DCTs (Discourse Completion Test) are developed specifically for this study. In each DCT situation, participants will orally respond to an English non-native speaker (NS) who initiated the conversation, and their responses are going to be recorded.

2.3. Procedure

After randomly assigning the participants to the explicit-intervention and implicit-intervention groups, within the first three sections, the listening proficiency test, the translated version of the motivation questionnaire and translated version of the ambiguity tolerance questionnaire will be administered to both groups, each in one session. After measuring and checking individual differences (ID) variables, a pre-test which is composed of twelve request situations will be taken from both groups to check their initial knowledge of using bi-clausal requests in English.

During each teaching session, which is an hour and a half, one experimental group will learn 12 request forms explicitly, while the other experimental group will be taught using pre-selected films so that pragmatic features and request forms will be learnt implicitly. There will be 16 teaching sessions. At the end of the semester, a DCT as post-test will be performed and the results for the two groups will be compared.

**2.4. Data Analysis**

The transcribed data from the pre-DCT and post-DCT is going to be coded for the request head acts based on Takahashi's (2001) “categories of request strategies”. For both DCTs, the use of bi-clausal forms (or those along with appropriate mono-clausal forms) will be counted as two points; the use of bi-clausal forms along with inappropriate mono-clausal forms as one point; and the use of mono-clausal forms alone (irrespective of their appropriateness) as zero points. Then, the mean scores will be computed for both DCTs, and the gains (post-DCT and pre-DCT) will be established as the “learning” scores (ranging from -2 to 2). In order to check hypotheses 1, 2, and 3, paired-sample t-test and independent-sample t-test will be run. Further, to check hypotheses 4 and 5, Pearson correlation will be employed.

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