

The Effect of Explicit and Implicit Instruction on Developing Pragmatic Competence of Iranian Intermediate EFL Learners: The Case of the Speech Act of Complaint

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Abstract: This study aims to investigate the effect of explicit and implicit instructions on developing pragmatic competence among Iranian intermediate EFL learners using speech act of complaint. To homogenize participants, Nelson (Fowler & Coe, 1976) test was administered, and a homogeneous sample comprised of 33 males and 9 females were selected from a population of 90 at the intermediate level. Then the homogenized sample was randomly assigned to two experimental groups, A and B. After that, learners were given a Discourse Completion Test (DCT) pre-test. The two groups were under the explicit and implicit instructions of the instructor, separately, at Masjed.I.Soleiman (MIS) Oil Company for 14 sessions. Having been exposed to the treatments, the two groups took a similar post-test to see whether learners learned complain strategies appropriately. The results of three t-tests indicated that there was a significant difference between the performances of both experimental groups on pre and post-test, and finally post-tests. Consequently, the results of the study also confirmed that pragmatic competence could be developed through implicit instruction to some extent and explicit instructions of speech act of complaint to a more extent.

Keywords: Explicit and Implicit Instruction, Pragmatic Competence, Speech Act of Complaint

1- Introduction

The investigation of the role of second language proficiency in second language communications have revealed that even advanced level non-native speakers have problems with comprehending and producing appropriate language, and compared to other aspects of target language, pragmatic plays a main role in communication (Bulut 2009, p.124).

In order for language learners to communicate in a foreign language, they need more than simple grammatical rules of the target language. That is, some linguistically correct sentences may become pragmatically inappropriate in certain contexts. Pragmatic competence, defined as the ability to employ linguistic forms and sociocultural knowledge in an appropriate way for a given context, is what a speaker needs (Brown, 2001, p. 248). For success in communication, the speakers have to employ different but appropriate linguistic choices in different contexts, since both linguistic form and function must match in each specific situation.

Schmidt (1993) argues "during the past decade, the study of interlanguage pragmatics has produced important empirical findings of speech act realization

patterns in various languages based on data from nonnative speakers"(p.21). Kendall (1981, cited in Schmidt, 1993, p. 21) states there are many occasions on which particular care is given to produce appropriate language. Students may worry about how to address the interlocutors of a speech and many aspects of the use of personal address are not unreflecting responses to a determining context but represent strategic and sometimes manipulative choices.

Speech act theory has received much attention by different researchers. According to Jaworski and Coupland (1999), the forerunner of this theory was Austin (1962) who drew the attention of language researchers to performative verbs and then introduced the first classification of speech acts. Later, Searle (1969) developed the theory even further by classifying the speech acts into five groups of representatives, directives, expressives, declaratives, and commissives. Also, Hudson (1996, pp.109-110) states Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) in their speech act theory believe that language is not only used to



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inform or to describe things, it is often used to "do things", to "perform acts".

One type of these speech acts is complaining in which the speaker (S) expresses displeasure or annoyance- censure- as a reaction to a past or ongoing action, the consequences of which are perceived by S as affecting her unfavorably. This complaint is usually addressed to the hearer (H) whom the S holds, at least partially, responsible for the offensive action. For the purpose of this study, censure will be assumed to have been expressed whenever S chooses to verbalize her disapproval of the violation (Olshtain & Weinbach, 1987, p. 108).

To take both aspects of accuracy and appropriacy of language into account, teachers engaged students in speech act tasks and to use contextualized tasks in everyday communicative situations. Thus, the present research intends to examine the effect of explicit and implicit instruction of the speech act of complaint on developing pragmatic competence of Iranian intermediate EFL learners.

Statement of the Problem and the Purpose of the Study

Recently, teaching pragmatic elements as an integral part of language ability has become increasingly important in language teaching programs. Yamagashira (2001) states that if non-native speakers do not know how to make complaints in a second language, it is assumed that they will use their own language strategies and, consequently, misunderstandings occur. Considering the difficulties that EFL learners face, there seems to be the need to do more research in the field of pragmatic production so that we will get a better insight into instruction of complaint strategies.

The purpose of the study is to investigate the effect of explicit and implicit instruction of the speech act of complaint on developing pragmatic competence of Iranian intermediate EFL learners.

Research Questions

This study addresses the following questions to be explored and answered:

1. Does explicit instruction develop Iranian intermediate EFL learners' pragmatic competence of complaint strategy?
2. Does implicit instruction develop Iranian intermediate EFL learners' pragmatic competence of complaint strategy?
3. Do explicit and implicit instructions differ in developing Iranian intermediate EFL learners' pragmatic competence of complaint strategy?

Research Hypotheses

Based on the above-stated questions, the null

hypotheses are assumed accordingly:

H₀₁: Explicit instruction does not develop Iranian intermediate EFL learners' pragmatic competence of complaint strategy.

H₀₂: Implicit instruction does not develop Iranian intermediate EFL learners' pragmatic competence of complaint strategy.

H₀₃: The explicit and implicit instructions do not differ in developing Iranian intermediate EFL learners' pragmatic competence of complaint strategy.

2-Methodology

Participants

Participants in this study were 90 male and female Iranian clerks of MIS Oil Company. A Nelson Proficiency Test (Fowler and Coe, 1976) was administered to sieve participants in terms of their proficiency levels, and those intermediate learners whose scores fell within the scope of one standard deviation above and below the mean were selected. Then, based on that criterion the 42 intermediate learners were chosen and divided into two classes of 21 who were randomly assigned to two experimental groups. One of the experimental groups was taught explicitly and the other one was implicitly.

Instruments

A proficiency test adopted from Nelson (Fowler and Coe, 1976) consisted of 50 items; each item valued 1 point, was administered to determine the clerks' level and to homogenize the sample (see Appendix A). The reliability of the test was calculated through KR-21 formula was found to be 0.76. After that, learners were given a Discourse Completion Test (DCT) pre-test. The reliability of DCT test was calculated through KR-21 formula was found to be 0.69. DCT, which is one of the most frequently used means of data collection in Interlanguage pragmatics (ILP), is a written questionnaire including a number of brief contextual descriptions followed by a short dialogue with an empty space for the speech act under study. Participants were then asked to write a response that they thought would fit the given context. A benefit to employing this technique was that it collected a great amount of data within a short time. In this study, the DCT was adopted from Moon (2001) and one situation from Tank (2002) in light of the 5 complaint situations to estimate the clerks' initial proficiency before having treatment. As a flow of the research during treatment sessions, the learners of the first experimental group were instructed explicitly and the other group implicitly by the use of the complaint strategies based on Olshtain and Weinbach (1987). At the end of 10 sessions of treatment were allocated to two experimental groups there was a DCT post-test examination in order to check learners' progress (see Appendix B). Hudson's (1995) checklist was used to

analyze the learners' responses and score them (see Appendix C).

Procedures

From among all 90 Iranian clerks; working in MIS Oil Company, who were heterogeneous with respect to such factors as gender and educational background participating in the experiment, 42 of them whose performance scores on the Nelson Proficiency Test (Fowler and Coe, 1976) fell one standard deviation above and below the mean were selected as the research sample to be called intermediate proficiency level. Then, the homogenized sample was randomly divided into two groups, A and B, to be assigned to two experimental groups. The two groups were under the instruction of the instructor, separately, at the mentioned company for 14 sessions. All in all, two sessions for pre-test and ten 1-hour sessions for treatment and two sessions for post-test. During the instructional sessions, the two experimental groups (i.e., explicit and implicit) received two different types of instructional treatment accompanied by specific material elaborated for each treatment. Seven sessions were allocated to the experimental group taught explicitly and the other seven sessions to the other one taught implicitly via more repetitions and changing tone of the instructor, which is a technique of storytelling.

Specific Procedure for each Group:

Explicit instruction: The session started with an introductory along with an explanation to the students which strategy would be taught and who were the interlocutors of each situation. After this short introductory, a printed copy of the complaint situations was given to each student so that they could follow the instructor more easily. The strategies and related examples were also written on the blackboard for their reference. The scenarios were read by the instructor a few times by putting the emphasis on complaint speech acts, were followed by an explicit explanation of them involved, and given some examples in relation to the intended strategy.

Implicit instruction: Every session started with a quick introductory. As soon as the students got their printed copy consisting of different situations, the instructor started reading while the students were all ears but this time, no explicit explanation, complaint strategies and examples were not written on the blackboard and it was tried to convey the strategies by means of more repetitions and changing tone of the instructor, which is a technique of storytelling. Next, the students were given a chance to read the situation and practice it with their fellow partners. When the learners were ready, they participated in received role-play activity and the instructor helped them whenever needed. After the instruction, the score of each learner was collected by means of a

post-test.

Statistical Analysis

Result of the Proficiency Test

To begin with this section, the data obtained through Nelson language test (Fowler and Coe, 1976) as homogeneity test (Table 4.1) were analyzed, using SPSS 18 software in different steps. The early step used in analyzing the data was determining the homogeneity of the groups regarding their levels of second language proficiency. Therefore, the students' overall scores on Nelson language proficiency test (see Appendix A) were collected from their records. To present the descriptive statistics of the data, means, standard deviations and variances of the participants in Nelson language proficiency test are presented in Table 4.1.

Group	N	Mean	SD.	V.
Clerks	90	28.82	8.14	66.25

Results of the Pre- & Post-Test of Explicit Instruction

This section includes descriptive statistics followed by t-test analysis to compare the effect of explicit and implicit instruction of the speech act of complaint on developing pragmatic competence of Iranian intermediate EFL learners. The t-test result of the first null hypothesis of this study, pre-test and post-test means, and significant differences of the two phases of the experimental group were instructed explicitly is shown in Table 4.2.

Group	N	Mean	SD.	T	DF	Sig.
pretest	21	13	1.02	18.8	19	0.001
posttest	21	17.9	1.25			

The descriptive statistics for the 21 participants participating in the study are shown in above table. A t-test was used to see if there was any significant difference between the performances of the experimental group, who had been exposed to explicit instruction, on the pre-test and post-test. The observed value of the t was calculated (18.8), with the degrees of freedom (19) and the significance level of ($P < 0.001$), statistically significant difference between the two concerned means of pre- and post-tests of explicit instruction of pragmatic competence of complaint strategy at the P value was 0.001 (See Table 4.2). Therefore, the results indicated that explicit instruction had a meaningful and significant effect on developing of learners' pragmatic competence of complaint. This made the researcher claim that the meaningful differences could be attributed to the treatment of the study. So, the first null hypothesis was rejected, because the explicit instruction exerted significant effects on the learners'

pragmatic competence level. The mean of the pre-test on the learners' pragmatic competence of complaint was 13, whereas that of the post-test was found to be 17.9. The mean difference (4.9) and a significant increase in the post-test result confirm this change, so it can be concluded that the explicit instruction of complaint speech act has been significantly able to develop the learners' pragmatic competence.

Results of the Pre- and Post-Test of Implicit Instruction

The t-test results of the second null hypothesis of this study includes the pre-test and post-test means and significant differences of the two phases of the experimental group who were exposed to implicit instruction of pragmatic competence of complaint strategy are shown in Table 4.3.

Group	N	Mean	SD.	T	DF	Sig.
pretest	21	12.65	1.42	14.20	19	0.001
posttest	21	16.85	1.22			

The descriptive statistics for the 21 participants participating in the study are shown in above table. A t-test was used to see if any significant difference between the pre-test and post-test of implicit instruction could be found. The data in the table above shows that the observed t-value was greater than the t-critical value ($t_o=14.20 > t_c=1.96$) which denotes to the fact that there exists a significant difference between the two groups; in other words the mean difference across the two pre and post-test was significant at ($P<0.001$) (See table 4.3). This made the researcher claim that the meaningful differences could be attributed to the treatment of the study. So, the second null hypothesis was also rejected, because the implicit instruction exerted significant effects on the learners' pragmatic competence. The mean of pre-test on the learners' pragmatic competence of complaint was 12.65 and the mean of post-test was 16.85. The mean difference (4.2) and a significant increase in the post-test result confirm this change, so we can conclude that the implicit instruction of complaint speech act has also been significantly able to improve the learners' pragmatic competence.

Results of the Post-Test of Implicit & Explicit Instructions

Another T-test was carried out between the scores collected from the two experimental explicit vs. implicit groups' performances on the post-test to put the third null hypothesis to test. The results of the t-test concerning the third null hypothesis post-test are shown in Table 4.4.

Group	N	Mean	SD.	T	DF	Sig.
Explicit	21	17.9	1.25	2.68	38	0.01

Implicit	21	16.85	1.22
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The descriptive statistics for the 21 participants participating in the study are shown in above table. A t-test was used to see if any significant difference between the post-test of explicit and implicit instruction could be found. The data in the table above shows that the observed t-value was greater than the t-critical value ($t_o=2.68 > t_c=2.02$) which denotes to the fact that there exists a significance difference between the two groups; in other words the mean difference across the two post-tests was significant at ($P<0.01$). This made the researcher claim that the meaningful differences could be attributed to the treatment of the study. The mean of post-test on the learners' complaint pragmatic competence of the explicit instruction was 17.9, while the mean of post-test on the learners' complaint pragmatic competence of the implicit instruction was 16.85. This made the researcher claim that the meaningful differences could be attributed to the treatment of the study. So, the third null hypothesis was rejected, because the explicit instruction imposed significant effects on the learners' pragmatic competence than implicit one; in other words, comparison of the two raw observed means (Explicit instruction 16.85 and implicit instruction 17.9) implies though not scientifically that the experimental group participating in explicit instruction had significantly higher performance.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study began with the assumption that applying explicit and implicit instructions could develop pragmatic competence of the complaint strategies of Iranian intermediate EFL learners. The instruction and evaluation of the researcher lasted at the previously mentioned company for 7 sessions, one session for administering the pre-test and five 1-hour sessions for the research treatments and one session for evaluation during research processes. In the course of the study, the researcher employed complaint strategies to see how developing pragmatic competence takes place through implicit and explicit instructions of experimental groups (A and B) of the study.

Having administered the post-test, the results indicated that both explicit and implicit instructions affect the language learners' pragmatic competence of complaint. Namely, development of pragmatic competence of the first experimental group (A) surpassed that of the second experimental group (B).

The purpose of this study was, in fact, to investigate the effect of explicit and implicit instruction of the speech act of complaint on developing pragmatic competence of Iranian intermediate EFL learners.

When the treatment was over, after a short interval of time from the end of the treatment, the experimental groups (A and B) were administered a Discourse Competition Test (DCT) and the results of the test were compared to find the effect of the instruction. The results of the study also confirmed that pragmatic competence could be developed through implicit instruction to some extent and explicit instructions of speech act of complaint to a more extent. By means of such instructions, learners could be made aware of the fact that, in order to make an appropriate use of the different linguistic forms available for complaints, several factors need to be considered, such as the situations where the complaint is elicited, the contextual features involved in those situations, and the relationship between different participants that may appear in them. The study mentioned above revealed the fact that instruction of speech act of complaint for intermediate Iranian EFL learners was pedagogically effective and also indicated that participants of the first experimental group (A) in this study performed almost better than the participants' of second experimental group (B) on the posttest, regarding development of pragmatic competence.

Significant of the Study

Reviewing the literature, many studies have been done on the different types of speech acts examined from various aspects (e.g. pragmatic and meta-pragmatic awareness) in Iran and other countries, but this study conducted on the investigation of the effect of explicit and implicit instruction of the speech act of complaint on developing pragmatic competence of Iranian intermediate EFL learners. Due to what was mentioned, the motivation for the present study is: (1) the need to investigate the effect of explicit and implicit instruction on developing pragmatic competence; (2) the motivation to focus on less-attended pragmatic target, which is complaints; (3) the need to take into consideration the element of the learners' pragmatic competence; (4) the need to take the proficiency level of the subjects into consideration in teaching pragmatic strategies.

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