

Teach ability of Pragmatic Competence: The Impact of Explicit Instruction on the Development of Iraqi Freshmen EFL Learners' Pragmatic Competence

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Abstract

Teaching pragmatic competence is one of the neglected aspects in English language teaching in Iraq. This paper is intended to: propose a pragmatic program involving two activities for teaching two speech acts, namely requests and refusals, and to investigate the effectiveness of such program in developing students' pragmatic competence.

A total of twenty freshmen students at the Dept. of English, College of Education, University of Basrah, were chosen randomly to participate in the study as an experimental group. They were explicitly instructed in the pragmatics of the speech acts of requests and refusals. Another group of twenty freshmen students at the Dept. of English, College of Education, University of Basrah, were also chosen randomly to participate in the study as a control group. This group received no instruction in the pragmatics of the speech acts of requests and refusals.

The results of the pre-test showed that both groups (experimental and control) were unable to produce the speech acts of requests and refusals in the same way as native speakers of English do. However, the results of the post-test showed that the experimental group (after having been explicitly instructed in the pragmatics of the speech acts of requests and refusals) generated significantly better responses than the control group.

**إمكانية تدريس القدرة التداولية:
تأثير التدريس المباشر على تطوير القدرة
التداولية لدى متعلمي اللغة
الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية من طلبة
السنة الأولى العراقيين**

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المخلص :

يعد تدريس القدرة التداولية احد الجوانب المهمة في تدريس اللغة الانجليزية في العراق. تهدف هذه الدراسة الى اقتراح برنامج تداولي (براغماتي) يتضمن فعاليتين لتدريس فعلين من افعال الخطاب، هما الطلب والرفض ، والتحقق من فعالية هكذا برنامج في تطوير القدرة التداولية للطلبة. لقد تم اختيار ما مجموعه عشرون طالبا من طلبة السنة الاولى في قسم اللغة الانجليزية بكلية التربية جامعة البصرة للاشتراك في هذه الدراسة كمجموعة تجريبية. لقد درسوا بصورة مباشرة على كيفية تداول افعال الطلب والرفض الخطابية. كما تم اختيار مجموعة اخرى مكونة من عشرين طالبا من طلبة السنة الاولى في قسم اللغة الانجليزية بكلية التربية جامعة البصرة للاشتراك في هذه الدراسة كمجموعة ضابطة. ولم تتلق هذه المجموعة اي نوع من التدريس على كيفية تداول أفعال الطلب والرفض الخطابية.

وأظهرت نتائج الأختبار القبلي أن أفراد كلا المجموعتين (التجريبية والضابطة) لم يكونوا قادرين على إنشاء أفعال الطلب والرفض الخطابية بالطريقة نفسها التي ينشؤها الناطقون الاصليون باللغة الإنجليزية. بينما أظهرت نتائج الأختبار البعدي أن المجموعة التجريبية (بعد أن تلقت تدريسا مباشرا لفعلي الخطاب الطلب والرفض) أنشأت ردودا أفضل من ردود المجموعة الضابطة.

1. Introduction

Teaching English to foreign students should involve not only familiarizing them with the sounds, vocabulary, and grammar of English, but also helping them to use the language effectively through making them acquainted with the pragmatic rules that govern the appropriate combination of utterances and communicative functions.

Although many linguists and specialists in the field of language teaching realize the importance of pragmatic competence, little has been written on the nature of what must be taught or how teachers may go about helping students acquire it. This paper introduces a program for teaching pragmatic competence to foreign students, mainly through explicit instruction, role play and simulation.

Before setting out to talk about the proposed program, it is convenient to shed light on: pragmatics, competence (communicative and pragmatic), the need for teaching pragmatic competence, the goals of teaching pragmatic competence, and the teachability of pragmatic competence, which constitute the core of the present paper.

2. Pragmatics

The study of pragmatics explores the ability of language users to match utterances with contexts in which they are appropriate. This paper is not after reviewing all the definitions that have been put for pragmatics; instead it aims at adopting the definition that best coincides with the core of the research. Thus, the study adopts the definition of pragmatics offered by *Richards, Platt, and Platt (1993:284)*: “the study of the use of language in communication, particularly the relationships between sentences and the contexts and situations in which they are used”.

Pragmatics, in *Yule's* words (1996:3) explores the following four areas of study:

- What people mean by their utterances and what the words or phrases in those utterances might mean by themselves.

- How speakers organize what they want to say in accordance with whom they are talking to, where, when, and under what circumstances.
- How listeners can make inferences about what is said in order to arrive at an interpretation of the speaker's intended meaning.
- How does distance/closeness determine the choice of the amount of the said and the unsaid?

3. Competence

Before the study sets out to define what is meant by *pragmatic competence*, it is necessary to define *competence* in the first place. Then to move to define communicative competence, of which pragmatic competence is seen to form a part.

Crystal (1997:74) defines competence as:

“a term used in linguistic theory, and especially in generative grammar, to refer to speakers' knowledge of their language, the system of rules which they have mastered so that they are able to produce and understand an indefinite number of sentences, and to recognize grammatical mistakes and ambiguities.”

So, competence refers to the person's ability to form and understand sentences, including sentences s/he has never heard before. It also includes a person's knowledge of what are and what are not sentences of the language s/he is familiar with.

4. Communicative Competence

Hymes (1977), Coulthard (1985), Richards, Platt, and Platt (1993:65), and Crystal (1997:74) agree that communicative competence is the ability to produce and understand sentences which are appropriate to the context in which they occur. According to *Hymes (Ibid)* communicative competence includes four sectors:

- Knowledge of the grammar and vocabulary of the language.
- Knowledge of the rules of speaking; knowing how to begin and end conversation, knowing which address forms should be used with different persons.....etc.

- Knowledge of how to produce and respond to different speech acts, such as requests, apologies, thanks, compliments....etc.
- Knowledge of the appropriate use of language, that is the language users' awareness of the social and environmental matters, such as the social status of the addressee that accompanies the situation.

5. Pragmatic Competence

One good definition of pragmatic competence is provided by **Barron (2003:10)**: Pragmatic competence . . . is understood as knowledge of the linguistic resources available in a given language for realizing particular illocutions, knowledge of the sequential aspects of speech acts and finally knowledge of the appropriate contextual use of the particular languages' linguistic resources.

Two limbs of pragmatic competence can be discerned in this definition: the linguistic resources of the learner in the target language and the contextual use of those resources.

This definition by **Barron** views pragmatic competence as knowledge: the knowledge of available linguistic resources and the knowledge of the appropriate contextual use of language. **Thomas (1983)**, on the other hand depicts pragmatic competence in terms of ability. **Thomas (1983:92)** writes that pragmatic competence is a speaker's "ability to use language effectively in order to achieve a specific purpose and to understand language in context". He calls the two limbs of pragmatic competence, that is, the linguistic aspect, and the social or contextual aspect, 'pragmalinguistics' and 'sociopragmatics' (*ibid*).

6. The Need for Teaching Pragmatic Competence

As many linguists and educational specialists observed foreign language learners, they emphasized that there is a demonstrated need for instruction in pragmatics. Foreign language learners often show significant differences from native speakers in the area of language use, in executing and comprehending certain speech acts, in conversational functions such as greetings and leave takings, in refusing an offer, declining an invitation, and in conversational

management such as back channeling and short responses (*see Bardovi-Harlig, 1996, 1999; Kasper & Schmidt, 1996; Kasper & Rose, 1999*). Without instruction, differences in pragmatics show up in the English of foreign learners regardless of their language proficiency. That is to say, a learner of high grammatical or linguistic proficiency might not necessarily show equivalent pragmatic development.

The consequences of pragmatic differences, unlike grammatical errors, are often interpreted on a social or personal level rather than a result of the language learning process. Therefore, committing a type of pragmatic mistake may have various consequences: it may hinder good communication between speakers, make the speaker appear abrupt or brusque in social interaction, rude or uncaring.

Kasper (1997) considers the state of incompatibility between linguistic proficiency and pragmatic performance as evidence that instruction in pragmatics is necessary. So, without some kind of instruction, many aspects of pragmatic competence do not develop automatically or sufficiently.

Leech (1983:31) argues that the reasons behind pragmatic failure can be ascribed to:

- Learners' ignorance of the pragmatic rules of the foreign language they are studying, and
- The transfer of the norms of the learners' community to the community of the language they are studying.

7. The Goals of Teaching Pragmatic Competence

The goal of instruction in pragmatics is to raise learners' pragmatic awareness and to give them choices for their interactions in the target language, and help them become familiar with the range of pragmatic devices and practices in the target language. With such instruction, learners can maintain their own cultural identities and participate more fully in the target language communicating with more control over both intended force and outcome of their contributions (*Giles, Coupland, and Coup land, 1991*).

To that end, scholars in the research field of interlanguage pragmatics have emphasized the need to integrate pragmatics in both second and foreign language teaching (*Rose and Kasper, 2001; Bardovi-Harlig and Mahan-Taylor, 2003; Martinez-Flor et al., 2003; Alc ́n and Martinez-Flor, 2005; Tatsuki, 2005*).

8. Teachability of Pragmatic Competence

Although many linguists deny the teachability idea of competence; some still talk about the possibility of developing some of its aspects. Here is *Kasper (1997)* arguing that while competence cannot be taught, students should be provided with opportunities to develop their pragmatic competence:

“Competence is a type of knowledge that learners possess, develop, acquire, use or lose. The challenge for foreign or second language teaching is whether we can arrange learning opportunities in such a way that they benefit the development of pragmatic competence in L2.”

Starting from the early eighties of the last century onwards many data-based researches on pragmatic instruction have been conducted. Table 1 below, quoted from (*Kasper, 1997*), summarizes some of these researches.

Table 1: Studies examining the effect of pragmatic instruction

study	teaching goal	proficiency	languages	research goal	design	assessment/ procedure/ instrument
<u>House & Kasper 1981</u>	discourse markers & strategies	advanced	L1 German FL English	explicit vs implicit	pre-test/ post-test control group L2 baseline	Roleplay
<u>Wildner-Bassett 1984,1986</u>	pragmatic routines	intermediate	L1 German FL English	eclectic vs suggestopedia	pre-test/ post-test control group	Roleplay
<u>Billmyer 1990</u>	compliment	high intermediate	L1 Japanese SL English	+/-instruction	pre-test/ post-test control group L2 baseline	elicited conversation

<u>Olshtain & Cohen</u> 1990	Apology	advanced	L1 Hebrew FL English	teachability	pre-test/ post-test L2 baseline	discourse completion question.
<u>Wildner- Bassett</u> 1994	pragmatic routines & strategies	beginning	L1 English SL German	teachability to beginning FL students	pre-test/ post-test	question- naires roleplay
<u>Bouton</u> 1994	implicature	advanced	L1 mixed SL English	+/-instruction	pre-test/ post-test control group	multiple choice question
<u>Kubota</u> 1995	implicature	intermediate	L1 Japanese FL English	deductive vs inductive vs zero	pre-test/ post-test/ delayed post-test control group	multiple choice & sentence combining question
<u>House</u> 1996	pragmatic fluency	advanced	L1 German FL English	explicit vs implicit	pre-test/ post-test control group	Roleplay
<u>Morrow</u> 1996	complaint & refusal	intermediate	L1 mixed SL English	teachability/ explicit	pre-test/ post-test/ delayed post-test L2 baseline	roleplay holistic ratings
<u>Tateyama et al.</u> 1997	pragmatic routines	beginning	L1 English FL Japanese	explicit vs implicit	pre-test/ post-test control group	multi- method

These studies differed in their research goals. *Olshtain and Cohen (1990)*, *Wildner-Bassett (1994)* and *Morrow (1996)* explored whether the features under investigation were teachable at all. *Billmyer (1990)* and *Bouton (1994)* examined whether students who received instruction in complimenting and implicature did better than controls who did not. *House and Kasper (1981)*, *House (1996)*, and *Tateyama et al. (1997)* compared explicit with implicit approaches.

The findings of these studies can be summed up in two points:

- The studies that examined whether the selected pragmatic features were teachable found this indeed to be the case, and comparisons of instructed students with uninstructed controls reported an advantage for the instructed learners.

• The studies comparing the relative effect of explicit and implicit instruction found that students' pragmatic abilities improved regardless of the adopted approach, but the explicitly taught students did better than the implicitly taught groups.

Although many studies emphasize the benefit of instruction in pragmatics, there are some studies that found out that there are certain aspects of the pragmatics of language 2 that resist development through teaching. *Kasper (1997)* provides an example of two studies that denied the perfect effectiveness of instruction in pragmatics; however, they did not totally reject the teachability of certain aspects.

All in all, it is concluded that a vast majority of language 2 pragmatic aspects can be enhanced through explicit teaching. To that end, a pragmatic program, involving two activities, is proposed, to expose our students to explicit instruction on the production and understanding of two speech acts: requests and refusals. This program was designed in such a way to apply the pedagogical practices that all teaching styles recommend for teaching pragmatic competence.

9. The Proposed Program

To be able to provide language learners with ample opportunities to develop their pragmatic repertoire of the target language, a developmental program, that is relevant to the pedagogical objectives, is to be devised. In the case of teaching pragmatic competence, the requirements are:

- The need for awareness activities
- The need for authentic language samples, and
- The priority of input to interpretation

Taking the above requirements into consideration, it is hypothesized that the following proposed program would have a good impact on developing students' pragmatic competence. The program included two activities that explicitly provide instruction on two speech acts: requests and refusals. These two activities were introduced in the following sequence:

1. Clarifying to the students when, how, and to whom each speech act is used.
2. Using role play and simulation in students' performances.
3. Using authentic language samples as examples or models.

9.1 The Speech Act of Requesting

9.1.1 Introduction

Brown and Levinson (1978) define requests as face-threatening acts. To make a request is for the speaker to impose on the hearer's claim to freedom of action and freedom of imposition. Since there is a need to manipulate the imposition existing in the act, languages have their own ways to upgrade (make the request more forceful) and downgrade (make the request less threatening) through syntactic and lexical means. Therefore, the request speech act can be realized in a variety of forms depending on the level of directness of the request.

Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) classify the speech act of requesting into three types according to the degree of directness:

1. The most direct and explicit level which is realized by requests syntactically marked as such, such as performatives and hedged performatives.
2. The conventionally indirect level which includes requests that realize the act by referring to contextual preconditions necessary for its performance, as conventionalized in a given language.
3. Non-conventional indirect level which includes the open-ended group of indirect strategies that realize the act by their partial reference to an object or element needed for the implementation of the act.

9.1.2 The Activity: Softening Short Requests

This activity is based on *Yates (2000)*.

9.1.2.1 Goal of the Activity

The chief goal of this activity is to introduce students to a range of different ways in which native speakers soften their requests and to develop their awareness of how these ways are used by different speakers and in different situations within the speech community.

9.1.2.2 Description of the Activity

In this activity students are required to reflect on the ways requests are used in the target community, become acquainted with some of the devices used to soften them. It includes a group of example requests and a number of settings. The example requests can be used in a matching activity that highlights different ways of making requests and how requests vary across speakers in different situations.

9.1.2.3 Procedure

The following points sum up the recommended procedure to be followed in conducting such a kind of activity:

1. In pairs, students are asked to match up the request examples (see 9.1.2.4) with the different settings (see 9.1.2.5).
2. Students are then asked to explain:
 - Why they have chosen a specific setting to match certain request,
 - What they think about the speakers' gender, age, occupation ...etc,
 - What each speaker wants to address to do in each case
 - How each speaker softens his/her request, and
 - Why each chooses to do it that way
3. The teacher gives a feedback on the various ways that native speakers may use to mitigate their requests.
4. In pairs, students are asked to perform mini-dialogues that include one of the mitigation devices already discussed.

9.1.2.4 Request Examples

- a. It'd be cool if you could move up one.
- b. Get us a pie, mate.
- c. If you could just grab a copy of that for a moment.
- d. I was wondering if I could have, um, three weeks annual leave.
- e. Would it be ok if I handed my assignment in next Monday?
- f. Could you just pop that up there for me?
- g. Do you wanna move over?

9.1.2.5 Settings

1. In a secondary school class.
2. In a lecturer's office.
3. at university
4. in a plane, before take off
5. in the audience of a school concert
6. in a car park
7. in an office
8. on a footpath

For the right matching and analysis of the mitigating devices and characteristics of the speakers and the context that may influence the use of mitigation, see appendix 1, p. 24.

9.2 The Speech Act of Refusing

9.2.1 Introduction

The speech act of refusal occurs when a speaker directly or indirectly says no to a request or invitation. Refusal is a face-threatening act to the requester/inviter, because it contradicts his/her expectations, and is often realized through indirect strategies. Thus, it requires a high level of pragmatic competence (*Chen, 1996*).

9.2.2 The Activity: Refusing an Invitation

The activity, which has been chosen, is based on (*Yoshida et al :2000*).

9.2.2.1 Goals of the Activity

The activity is designed to accomplish the following aims:

1. Raising students' awareness about the fact that misunderstanding can be caused by differences in performing speech acts;
2. Making the students aware of what they know already and encourage them to use their universal or transferable L1 pragmatic knowledge in L2 contexts; and
3. Teaching the appropriate linguistic forms that are likely to be encountered in performing speech acts.

9.2.2.2 Description of the Activity

This activity is organized progressively in five phases: feeling, doing, thinking, understanding, and using. These phases help

students to realize that speaking is doing, to think about their own use of the language, and to discover common and different aspects of conducting speech acts between English and Arabic.

Feeling Phase

This phase is designed to help students to get the feeling of the speech act being dealt with. Two different dialogs in a sample hypothetical speech situation will be played and the students will be asked to answer questions about what is happening and how they feel about the dialogs. One of the dialogs represents how Iraqi learners of English typically refuse an invitation and the other one represents the typical English way.

In this activity, students are expected to realize that the speech act of refusing can be realized in different ways. At this phase, students will be asked to show which dialog they preferred, and to give reasons why they chose one or the other. Students won't be told which dialog represents the typical English or Iraqi way of refusing, because that will be their task to find out in the latter part of the lesson.

Doing Phase

The aim of this phase is to see what each learner can do with his/her present knowledge prior to any instruction dealing with cultural differences and linguistic expressions. The students will be presented with a hypothetical speech situation in which they are asked to write responses in a way similar to a discourse completion task, and to role play the situation with their classmates.

Thinking Phase

Here, students will be asked to analyze their own speech act performances. Then, they will be presented with the various ways of performing refusals.

Understanding Phase

In this phase, the learners are encouraged to discover the characteristic differences that exist in Arabic and English when various speech acts are performed. Students will be presented with two groups of refusals and will be asked to compare these groups

and discuss similarities and differences in their way of conducting speech acts.

The important point in this phase is that the task is designed to enable the students to be engaged in active thinking, instead of passive reading descriptions on cultural differences.

Using Phase

The aim of this phase is to provide sufficient oral activity based on the knowledge that the students have acquired up to this point.

In the Using phase, model dialogs are presented for listening and role-playing. This exercise helps students to be able to use appropriate linguistic expressions useful in performing refusals.

9.2.3 Procedure

The following procedure represents the most recommended steps prescribed for doing the aforementioned activity:

1. Feeling phase (can be used as a warm-up activity)

The students will listen to two different dialogs and answer questions

2. Doing phase

The students have to do a discourse completion task and role-play

3. Thinking phase: the students should:

(a) Look at the classification of different types of a given speech act

(b) Listen to dialogs and write down key expressions of each type

(c) Analyze their own speech act performance according to types.

4. Understanding phase: Students will be presented with two groups of refusals and will be asked to: (a) Look at the two sets of refusals and make a comparison of speech act performance by native speakers of English and Iraqi learners of English.

(b) Discuss the two ways (native & Iraqi) of performing this speech act.

5. Using phase

(a) Listening and role-play practice of model dialogs

(b) Discourse Completion and role-play tasks on new situations.

10. The Empirical Study

To be sure of the potential usefulness of the suggested activities in the EFL classroom, an experiment was carried out involving 40 freshmen students in the Department of English, College of Education, University of Basrah. They were enrolled in the academic year 2009-2010. The purpose was to investigate whether the proposed program would have any effect on how Iraqi EFL students perform the speech acts of requests and refusals.

Aiming at ascertaining how the explicit teaching of some aspects of pragmatic competence affected students' performance, students were divided into a treatment (experimental) and a control group (20 students each), and their performance was measured by a pre and post-tests requiring the students to provide written responses. A discourse completion format was used where they have to work individually to provide the missing speech acts in a way that suits the situation in question. The pre and post test discourse completion tasks were printed and the students had to fill them manually.

As part of the analysis, the presence of requests and refusals and their appropriateness were measured. The results show that after completing the activities described above, students in the experimental (treatment) group used more elaborate requests and refusals, which indicates the effectiveness of the program.

10.1 Pre-test Results

Prior to any instruction on the pragmatics of the speech acts of requests and refusals, a pre-test strategy was used to stand at the real pragmatic level of the students involved in the study. The test took the format of a discourse completing task.

The results show that the majority of the participants are, to some extent, able to produce the speech acts of requests and refusals, yet the quality of the components of these speech acts differ from the standard quality that native speakers usually produce. In general,

participants' responses are linguistically correct, but often lack the pragmatic elements that allow these face-threatening acts to be well received by the interlocutor.

10.1.1 Refusal Speech Act Pre-test Results

As it has already been notified, the refusal speech act pre-test was put in a discourse completion task format. It involved the following three dialog situations:

Situation 1:

You are the owner of a bookstore. One of your best workers asks to speak to you in private.

Worker: *As you know. I've been here just over a year now, and I know you've been pleased with my work. I really enjoy working here, but to be quite honest, I really need an increase in pay.*

You:.....

Worker: *Then, I guess I'll have to look for another job.*

Situation 2

You are a junior in college. You attend classes regularly and take good notes. Your classmate often misses classes and asks you for the lecture notes.

Classmate: *Oh God! We have an exam tomorrow but I don't have notes from last week. I am sorry to ask you this, but could you please lend me your notes once again.*

You:.....

Classmate: *Ok, then I guess I'll have to ask somebody else.*

Situation 3

You have been working in an advertising agency now for some time. The boss offers you a raise and promotion, but it involves moving. You don't want to go. Today, the boss calls you into his office.

Boss: *I'd like to offer you an executive position in our new offices in Hicktown. It's a great town only 3 hours from here by plane. And, a nice raise comes with the position.*

You:

.....

Boss: Well, may be you should give it some more thought before turning it down.

The results show that all forty students who participated in this study could not provide except the direct way of refusing by saying “No”, “No, I can’t”, “No, I won’t” ...etc. They weren’t able to provide such elaborate refusals that native speakers usually produce. They did not show regret, or give an excuse, or even offer an alternative.

To sum up, the results clearly show that the students are pragmatically incompetent. They do not think of their interlocutor’s face, and they violate politeness strategies.

10.1.2 Request Speech Act Pre-test Results

The same discourse completion task format was also used to test participants’ execution of the speech acts of requests and refusals. The following three situations were used in the test:

Situation 1

You walk in a lecture half an hour late and interrupt the teacher. Everyone stares at you. You want to know if you can stay.

How would you ask the teacher?

Situation 2

One of the secretaries of the English Dept. has to leave work an hour early. However, she still has many things to do. She has no time and needs to finish her work.

How would she ask her workmate?

Situation 3

You work at a library and see someone using her mobile. Mobiles are not allowed in the library. You ask her.

The results show that ten of the students who participated in the test were not able to generate requests for two of the three situations. Instead, they provided such sentences like “mobiles are not allowed”, “You can’t use your mobile here”etc. The other thirty students could generate requests that did not meet the requirements of being polite. They did not take into consideration such things like social hierarchy and solidarity. Their requests were too direct and involved no elaboration that might help in softening them.

Again the results emphasize the pragmatic incompetency that our students suffer from.

10.2 Post-test Results

After having been explicitly instructed on the pragmatics of the speech acts of requests and refusals for three weeks, the post-test results revealed that the experimental (treatment) group showed a good mastery over the use of these speech acts. The kind of requests/refusals they produced appeared to be more elaborate and very close to the typical ones usually produced by native speakers. In general, participants' responses were both linguistically correct and pragmatically appropriate.

10.2.1 Refusal Speech Act Post-test Results

A discourse completion task format was used in the post-test. It included eight dialog situations (see appendix 2, p.27).

The analysis of the experimental (treatment) group's responses shows that all participants of this group are able to produce elaborate refusals that include such components like: showing regret, giving an excuse, and offering an alternative and that they are pragmatically appropriate. Table (2) below sums up the performance of the experimental group in the refusal post- test.

Table (2) Refusal Post-test

Situation	Components	Frequency of Use in Responses
1	Expression of regret	35%
	Excuse	50%
	Offering alternative	15%
2	Expression of regret	40%
	Excuse	60%
	Offering alternative	0%
3	Expression of regret	10%
	Excuse	80%
	Offering alternative	10%
4	Expression of regret	0%
	Excuse	100% find excuses for the lady
	Offering alternative	0%

5	Expression of regret	95%
	Excuse	5%
	Offering alternative	0%
6	Expression of regret	0%
	Excuse	90%
	Offering alternative	10%
7	Expression of regret	50%
	Excuse	30%
	Offering alternative	20%
8	Expression of regret	50%
	Excuse	50%
	Offering alternative	0%

10.2.2 Requests Speech Act Post- test Results

A discourse completion task format was used in the post-test. It included eight situations (see appendix 3, p. 29).

The analysis of the experimental (treatment) group's responses shows that all participants of this group effectively produced mitigated requests that are pragmatically appropriate. Table (3) below sums up the performance of the experimental group in the request post- test.

Table (3) Requests Post-test

Situation	Type of Requesting Strategy	Frequency of Use in Responses
1	Impositive	30%
	Indirect	65%
	Hints	5%
2	Impositive	50%
	Indirect	40%
	Hints	10%
3	Impositive	30%
	Indirect	60%
	Hints	10%
4	Impositive	70%
	Indirect	30%
	Hints	0%

5	Impositive	100%
	Indirect	0%
	Hints	0%
6	Impositive	30%
	Indirect	50%
	Hints	20%
7	Impositive	0%
	Indirect	90%
	Hints	10%
8	Impositive	80%
	Indirect	20%
	Hints	0%

11. Conclusion

Pragmatic competence can be developed in the EFL classroom through explicit teaching with a range of situations and activities. Pragmatic rules that are different from or nonexistent in the students' native language need to be given emphasis. Finally, however promising the results of our three- week program were, we believe that a more thorough and long- term program would be needed to produce even more beneficial effects.

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Appendix 1

The right matching, analysis of the mitigating devices and characteristics of the speakers and the context that may influence the use of mitigation

a) It'd be cool if you could move up one.

It would be ___ if you could...." is a useful formula for polite requests and cool as a popular word between teenagers indicates solidarity, thereby reducing the social distance assumed between speaker and addressee.

This request example matches setting No. 5 the audience of a school concert. It is said by a female teenager to another female teenager.

b) Get us a pie, mate.

Us and mate are two vernacular English address forms indicating solidarity and social closeness and used to soften the force of the request.

This request example matches setting No.6 a car park. It is said by one fisherman to another fisherman.

c) If you could just grab a copy of that for a moment.

If you could.... is a polite request form often used by high-power speakers when the likelihood of compliance is high. Just is a very common term used to tone down a request. Grab is an informal, vague word used in preference to a more formal word to signal solidarity and social closeness and thereby soften the force of the

request. For a moment is a phrase that understates what is to be done, similar to other common understates such as "for a while" and "for a little."

This request example matches setting No.1 a secondary school class. It is said by a male teacher to mixed gender class.

d) I was wondering if I could have, um, 3 weeks annual leave.

I was wondering if... is a common formula used in polite requests; note use of progressive wondering to further soften the request. With could, the use of the past tense form in English signals greater distance from the requested act. Um is a hesitator used to make the speaker sound more tentative and thus reduce the force of the request.

This request example matches setting No.7. in an office. It is said by a female employee to female boss.

e) Would it be OK if I handed my assignment in next Monday?

Would it be... makes use of a question to enquire as to the willingness of the interlocutor to comply. Also, note use of the impersonal construction to give the interlocutor a way out of taking full responsibility for any refusal, that is, the person can imply that it is the "system" rather than his/herself that cannot allow the requested extension. With OK, the formality of the formulaic request strategy would it be is offset by the use of the informality of OK. Note that this has the effect of minimizing the seriousness of what is being asked for and signaling some kind of social closeness between the speaker and interlocutor.

This request example matches setting No.2 in a lecturer's office. It is said by a female adult student to female lecturer.

f) Could you just pop that up there for me?

Could you.... is a common polite request formula. Just is a very common down toner. Pop is a phrase that understates what is to be done; note other common understates, such as for a while and for a little.... For me is a personal phrase that softens the force by emphasizing the interpersonal link between the interlocutors.

This request example matches setting No.4 a plane, before take-off. It is said by a female flight attendant to female passenger.

g) Do you wanna move over?

Do you wanna is a less formal version of the request strategy used in e. in which the interlocutor is asked if she is willing to comply, rather than being asked to do something. Note that this may be considered patronizing in some communities, but perfectly acceptable in others. The uses of the informal wanna rather than want to soften the request by signaling social closeness.

This request example matches setting No. 1 in a secondary school class. It is said by a male teacher to mixed gender class.

The analysis of the characteristics of the speakers and the context that may influence the use of mitigation shows that:

i) Females may be less direct and use more mitigation than males (e.g., a. compared with f.).

ii) Males in an informal, sporting context are often direct and signal solidarity through the use of colloquialisms and special terms of address (e.g., b.).

iii) In formal situations, mitigating devices associated with formal politeness may be used more often (e.g., f. compared with b.).

iv) Some less formal contexts may express relationships in a less hierarchical way in the target culture than in the learner's own culture (e.g., in the secondary classroom and in university c. and g., and e.).

v) In addition to devices usually associated with mitigation, such as "if you could" (a. and c.), or "would it be..." (e.), speakers use devices that signal solidarity and in-group membership as a way of softening a directive (e.g., "cool" in a., "us" and "mate" in b., and "grab" in c.).

vi) Even speakers in high power positions relative to the addressee use indirectness and high levels of mitigation (e.g., c. and g.).

Appendix 2

Refusal Speech Act Post-test (Discourse Completion Task)

Please read the following 8 situations. After each situation you will be asked to write a response in the blank after “You”.

Respond as you would in actual conversation.

1. You are the president of a printing company. A salesman from a printing machine company invites you to one of the most expensive restaurants in New York.

Salesman: We have met several times to discuss your purchase of my company’s products. I was wondering if you would like to be my guest at Lutes in order to firm up a contract.

You:.....

2. You are a top executive at a very large accounting firm. One day the boss calls you into his office.

Boss: Next Sunday my wife and I are having a little party. I know it’s short notice but I am hoping all my top executives will be there with their wives. What do you say?

You:.....

3. You’re at a friend’s house watching T.V. S/he offers you a snack.

You: Thanks. I’ve been eating like a pig and I feel just terrible. My clothes don’t even fit me.

Your friend: Hey, why don’t you try this new diet I have been telling you about?

You:.....

4. You arrive home and notice that your cleaning lady is extremely upset. She comes rushing up to you.

Cleaning Lady: Oh God! I’m so sorry! I had an awful accident. While I was cleaning I bumped into the table and your China vase fell and broke. I feel just terrible about it. I’ll pay for it.

You: (knowing that she is supporting three children)

You:.....

Cleaning Lady: No, I’d feel better if I paid for it.

5. You are a language teacher at a university. It is just the middle of the term now and one of your students asks to speak to you.

Student: Ah, excuse me, some of the students were talking after class recently and we kind of feel that the class would be better if

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you could give us more practice in conversation and less on grammar.

You:.....

Student: Ok it was only a suggestion.

6. You are at a friend's house for lunch.

Friend: How about another piece of cake?

You:.....

Friend: Come one, just a little piece.

You:.....

7. A friend invites you to dinner, but you really can't stand this friend's brother/sister.

Friend: How about coming over for dinner Sunday night? We're having a small dinner party.

You:.....

Friend: Ok may be another time.

8. You are at the office in a meeting with your boss. It is getting close to the end of the day and you want to leave work.

Boss: If you don't mind, I'd like you to spend an extra hour or two tonight so that we can finish up this work.

You:.....

Boss: That's too bad. I was hoping you could stay.

Appendix 3

Request Speech Act Post-test (Discourse Completion Task)

Please read the following 8 situations. After each situation you will be asked to write a response in the blank after the question. Respond as you would in actual conversation.

1. You work at a bank. A lady just walked in asking for a big amount of money. You need to see some sort of identification. How would you ask her?

2. It's your first day as a cleaner at a big institution and you don't know where to go. How would you ask the security guard?

3. You work as a hairdresser and you are dyeing the hair of a woman. She has been trying to tell you something about her hair for a while but you don't understand her. How would you tell her that?

4. You are at your university and have a problem with your laptop. You take it to one of the IT people. He has a lot of work and needs some time to take a look at it. How would he tell you?
5. A friend of yours borrowed your notes a long time ago. You need them for the exams. How would you ask her?
6. You are refurbishing your kitchen at home. It's quite late at night but you remember that not long ago your neighbor refurbished hers. You want to see how it looks like. How would you ask her?
7. You don't understand something from your book. However, you know your teacher had already explained that in his last lesson. You go to his office anyway and ask him. How would you do this?
8. You work as a doctor and cannot find one of your patient's blood tests results. You phone the nurse and ask her. How would you do this?