

## Pragmatics instruction in EFL context: A focus on requests

Anani Sarab, Mohammad Reza

Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences, Department of English Language and Literature,  
Shahid Beheshti University, Iran ([Reza\\_ananisarab@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:Reza_ananisarab@yahoo.co.uk))

Alikhani, Sima ✉

MA Graduate, Department of English Language and Literature, Shahid Beheshti University, Iran  
([s.alikhani85@yahoo.com](mailto:s.alikhani85@yahoo.com))



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### Abstract

The present study aimed at exploring the effect of instruction on Iranian EFL learners' development of the speech act of "request". A Quasi-experimental method of research was adopted at the outset of the study. Learners' recognition and production of the target speech act was measured through MC and WDCTs respectively. Results of the pre-tests were indicative of the groups' parallel performance on the three sub-strategies of direct, conventionally indirect and non-conventionally indirect requests at both levels of awareness and production. Despite the relatively equal performance of learners at both groups in the pre-test, following the instructional phase, participants in the experimental group exhibited a significant improvement in their awareness and production of requests. This finding was apparent in the significant decrease of direct request strategies in their post-test productions; furthermore regarding the notion of "point of view operation" in requests, members of both groups in the pre-test displayed a high frequency in the utilization of "hearer-oriented requests"; however the experimental group in the post-test relied heavily on the "speaker-oriented" request strategies. With regard to internal and external modifications results evinced high proportion of these strategies in participants' responses in the pre-test. Inappropriate application of this strategy was seen in several situations in the DCT responses of both groups. However in the post-test the experimental group displayed a modified request behavior by a significant increase in the variety and appropriate use of these strategies.

**Keywords:** interlanguage pragmatics; pragmatics instruction; discourse completion tasks; requests; direct strategies; conventionally indirect strategies; non-conventionally indirect strategies

## Pragmatics instruction in EFL context: A focus on requests

### 1. Introduction

The emergence of earliest syllabuses on notions and functions evolved from the basic idea that in order to be successful L2 communicators, learners should not only remain aware of the rules of grammar and lexis but they also need to develop a level of sensitivity towards norms of appropriateness. The development of this finding eventually marked a paradigm shift in linguistics and language learning pedagogy of the early 1970s and has proved to be one of the most influential and efficient theories of language to date. This transition from traditional theories of language has manifested itself in various models and theories which are either directly applicable (Bachman, 1990; Canale & Swain, 1980; Savignon, 1983) or compatible with basic tenets of communicative competence. However, despite the wide recognition of this theory incorporation of pragmatics as a component of communicative competence in language curriculum seems minimal if not absent. This in part is attributable to the false assumption made by language teachers that through “positive transfer and universal principles of politeness and communication” learners will “pick up” norms of pragmatics in the process of language learning for free (Kasper & Rose, 2001, p.6). However, despite the aforementioned claim, there is a mass literature on the acquisition of pragmatics which confirms that L2 language learners in various aspects of pragmatics fail to maintain a positive transfer of L1. Learners' deviation of L2 norms appears in different forms including “underuse” of politeness markers (Kasper, 1981) or miscalculations of social variables (Fukushima, 1990).

Literature on ILP also expounds how speech acts despite their universality vary in their conceptualization across diverse cultures (Green, 1975; Wierzbicka, 1985 as cited in Shariati & Chamani, 2010) which eventually make direct transfer of L1 pragmatic norms defacilitative if not obstructive in real flow of communication. Accordingly, instances of pragmatic failure have been reported in various studies of cross-cultural pragmatics (R-Eslami, Eslami-Rasekh & Fatahi, 2004; Al-momani, 2009). Alongside with the relatively dire consequences of pragmatic failure, cross-cultural pragmatic misjudgments can trigger emergence of negative stereotypes and stigmatization of specific communities (Dong, 2009, p. 15). Thus, impelled by the critical role of pragmatic knowledge in successful L2 behavior, practitioners in the field of second language acquisition extended the notion of interlanguage to the field of pragmatics, resulting in the “ascendancy of interlanguage pragmatics” (Mwinyelle, 2005; Al-momani, 2009, p. 4) which was defined by Kasper (1997) as “the study of non-native speakers' comprehension, production and acquisition of linguistic action in L2” (p. 18).

Consequently as the notions of intercultural competence and pragmatic awareness became the focus of interest in the field of second language acquisition, a growing body of researches was conducted with the aim of exploring the potential role of pragmatics instruction in enabling learners to become effective communicators in the target language. According to Vellenga (2008), findings of these studies have established the incorporation of pragmatics instruction on various grounds; these include classroom input which has been reported to be inadequate for developing pragmatic competence due to “the teacher-fronted discourse, the roles of teacher and students and the range of communicative activities to which students are exposed” (Alcón, 2000; Nikula, 2002; Trosborg, 1995 as cited in Vellenga, 2008, p. 1). In line with this argument, Lörcher and Schulze (1988) describe EFL context (in terms of opportunities for pragmatic learning) as a setting where “the range of speech acts and realization strategies is quite narrow, and the typical interaction patterns restrict pragmatic input and opportunity for practicing discourse organization strategies” (as cited in Alcón, 2005, p. 418).

#### 1.1 Previous studies on the speech act of request

Requests are defined in literature as 'attempts on the part of a speaker to get the hearer to perform or to stop performing some kind of action in the interests of the speaker' (Ellis, 2008, p. 172). To this date, a considerable number of researches in the area of interlanguage pragmatics have been conducted contributing to the study of

requests. These experiments can be classified according to their purpose of study. A number of these studies have aimed at comparing native and non-native speakers' realization of requests. In a study comparing the performance of native speakers of English with that of Korean ESL learners as the participant groups, Kim (1995) with regard to "requests" observed that the degree of directness in certain situations responded by participants were not identical thus in some situations Korean ESL learners under the influence of their native Korean language implied indirect strategies while native speakers of English used more direct type of requests.

Similar to this study, Suh (1998) investigating the same speech act (on two groups, consisting of American native speakers and Korean ESL learners) regarding the conventionally-indirect strategies discovered that Korean ESL learners used 65% of indirectness while American native speakers applied 78% of the same strategy to their requests. Accordingly, the same pattern was observed in the case of direct strategies. 29 and 21 percent of the total direct requests were observed in Koreans' and Americans' speech act production respectively which is indicative of the negative transfer of pragmatic rules by Korean learners to the target language. The same asymmetry was observed in the "perspective" of the requests produced by the two groups. While 71% of Koreans relied on hearer-oriented requests, only 54% of American native speakers produced hearer-oriented utterances. Furthermore, in Suh's study the so-called "waffle phenomenon" was observed. Accordingly, learners made an "overuse of supportive moves" compared to native speakers' group. In line with these studies, Hill (1997)'s experiment on a group of Japanese EFL learners and native speakers of English revealed that at the initial stages of the study, EFL learners with a low level of language proficiency marked their requests with more directness while as the level of their proficiency increased they tended to use more indirectness in their speech act behavior. The same correlation was also observed in the case of internal and external modifications however they still used fewer modifications compared to the native speakers' group (Chang, 2010).

Another area which has been the concern of pragmatic researchers is the role of instruction on development of language learners' pragmatic competence. Alcón (2005), investigating of the role of instruction on a group of Spanish EFL learners conducted a study which consisted of three groups of explicit, implicit and control group. While adopting a "focus on forms" approach for the explicit group she made use of "focus on form" method for the implicit group. Findings of Alcón's study revealed that although the groups benefited from instruction, a significant difference was observed in the request production of the two groups. The explicit group outperformed their counterparts in the implicit group with a mean score of 6.6 which marked a significant difference with the mean of 3.8 obtained by the implicit group. Takahashi (2001), also concentrating on the interaction of instruction and pragmatic development on language learners conducted a study where he implemented "four input enhancement conditions". These varying conditions as Rose (2005) reports consisted of an explicit group who received metapragmatic explanation on the request forms under the study. While participants in the "form comparison groups" focused on forms in the transcripts subjects in the third group were "required to search for request forms" in the same version of the text (p. 3) and finally participants in the last group were asked to focus on listening-reading comprehension tasks. Results of Takahashi's study were also in line with Alcón's findings which favored the explicit group.

Fukuya et al. (1998) focusing on the speech act of request used "interaction enhancement techniques" where the instructor showed a sad face once students made socio-pragmatic errors. Results of their study were also in line with those of Takahashi (2001) and Alcón (2005) which revealed the superiority of the explicit over the implicit group (Martínez-Flor & Alcón, 2004). Virtually, a considerable number of studies on requests (House, 1989; Lin, 2009; Brown & Hassel, n.d.; Weizman, 1989; Ogiermann, 2009) report that "conventionally-indirect requests remain the safest strategies in English for potentially face-threatening situations" (as cited in Scherbakova, 2010, p. 8). Contrary to this finding as Scherbakova (2010) further indicates "non-conventionally indirect" requests, were found to lack illocutionary transparency and led to a high chance of being denied by the addressee due to a considerable threat to their face. Similarly, findings of Weizmann's study revealed that "conventional indirectness correlates with politeness while non-conventional indirectness does not" (p. 8).

In another study aiming to explore the efficacy of pragmatically-oriented instruction on EFL learners' gains of 'requests', Abdollahzadeh et al. (2014), implemented teacher-fronted discussions, role plays, cooperative

grouping and other pragmatically-focused tasks. The results of their study also revealed a significant increase in the request awareness of the experimental group in the post-test. Xiao-le (2011) investigated the effect of two instructional methods (implicit and explicit) on Chinese EFL learners' development of request strategies as well as on their pragmatic appropriateness in on-line communication. The treatment for the explicit group in his study included five phases of request authentic exposure phase, strategy identification phase, metapragmatic information transmission phase, metapragmatic judgment phase and production practice phase. Findings of his study also lent support to previous literature on the positive effect of instruction on learners' pragmatics gain. Similarly, in this study the explicit group outperformed their counterparts in the implicit group. The explicit group's progress was more transparent in the 'appropriate level of formality, directness, and politeness realized through the syntactic patterns, internal and external modifications, and sequence of request components' (p. 119).

In a similar study by Rezvani et al. (2014), which focused on the speech acts of request and suggestion, the explicit group was exposed to a focus on forms paradigm with a range of drills while the implicit group experienced a focus on form paradigm characterized by input and enhancement and recasts. The results of their study was in line with previous literature on the efficacy of pragmatic instruction on development of learners' pragmatic knowledge however contrary to Xiao-le's (2011) study no statistically significant difference was observed between the two instructional methods. Similar to the above-mentioned studies which explored the effect of pedagogical intervention on ESL/EFL learners' pragmatic development, Derakhshan and Eslami (2015) also investigated the effectiveness of consciousness-raising video-driven prompts on Persian EFL learners' development of two-commonly used speech acts of request and apology. In their study the results of the multiple choice discourse completion test was suggestive of the equal improvement of learners' in all three types of instruction however the "results of the Scheffe test illustrated that the discussion group outperformed the other two groups [namely the role play group and the interactive translation group]" (pp. 14-15).

Much recently, a growing number of studies have aimed to investigate the interrelatedness of different teaching approaches with EFL/ESL learners' development on various features of their pragmatic knowledge. However, due to the fact that "it is still controversial which are more conducive to learning" (Derakhshan & Eslami, 2015, p. 1) and with regard to the scanty portion of studies exploring the efficacy of various teaching approaches in enhancing Persian EFL learners' pragmatic-building, the researchers conducted the present study. They aimed to shed light on the incorporation of pragmatics teaching and its outcome on this less-studied group's recognition and production of pragmatic features with a focus on requests. To this end, the following research questions were formed:

- Does instruction benefit Iranian EFL learners in their development of recognition of requests?
- Does instruction benefit Iranian EFL learners in their development of production of requests?
- In what way can instruction enhance Iranian EFL learners' choice of appropriate request strategies?

## **2. Research design**

### *2.1 Participants*

Overall, 62 subjects participated in the present study. They formed two groups in two intact classes. One class was used for the treatment group and the remaining one formed the control group. Prior to the study, subjects had been homogenized based on the results of the institute TOFEL placement test. All participants possessed identical language background and spoke Farsi as their first language. They were all female and their age ranged between 20 to 34 years old. They were advanced learners of English and had been studying conversational English for virtually 3-4 years in the same institute and had no experience of living in any English-speaking countries. The instructor for both classes was identical. She had nearly 10 years of experience in language teaching and was a graduate of TESOL; yet in order to ascertain that she was thoroughly conversant with the treatment considered for the experimental group as well as with the ultimate goal of the study, the

researchers provided her with a reasonable number of papers on the concept of pragmatics, ILP and enhancement of pragmatic competence in EFL contexts.

## 2.2 Instruments

To date at least six types of pragmatic assessment measures have been developed internationally; Of all these assessment measures, written and multiple choice DCTs, respectively symbolized as 'WDCT' and 'MCDCT' have been widely used in a growing body of research.

**Written discourse completion tests (WDCT)** - "WDCTs are written questionnaires including a number of brief situational descriptions, followed by a short dialogue with an empty slot for the speech act under study" (Jianda, 2006, p. 4). WDCTs have been widely used as the elicitation instrument in various studies of pragmatics. Lin (2009) suggests that "thus far, DCTs have been recognized as the best instrument to collect a consistent body of data with the contextual factors well controlled" (p. 3). Similarly, Bardovi-Harlig and Griffin (2005) reported that DCTs provide the researcher with "data of high comparability, hence, due to the controlled nature of the task" (p. 11).

As the current study explored the effect of instruction on productive skills as well as on the awareness of the participants, a detailed and precise account of all strategy types as well as "formulaic structures" of the target speech act was required. As such, WDCT was regarded to best serve the aim of the study. The WDCT adopted for the purpose of the present study had been originally developed by Hudson et al. (1995). However, minor modifications were made to the original form. This made the test culturally appropriate for Persian EFL learners participating in the study. This modified version of the test was administered to a group of language learners who were identical with the participant groups in the study. The process of pilot-testing allowed the researchers to find the potential sources of error in the given measure. The three variables of interest including social distance, power and imposition were reflected throughout all test items.

**Multiple choice discourse completion tests (MCDCT)** - Jianda (2006), comments "MCDCTs consist of test items where the test-taker is required to choose the appropriate response (the key) from normally three given options" (p. 4). Unlike multiple-choice questions in other tests where options may be judged based on the criterion of correctness, choices provided on the MCDCTs, are based on the concept of appropriateness. Similar to WDCT, multiple-choice DCT used in the present study was a replication of Hudson et al.'s (1995) study, however, specific situations and distracters were modified to fit the cultural and social norms of Persian participants in the study. The MCDCT in the present study was pilot-tested with a similar group to ensure an acceptable level of reliability. It consisted of 15 items. Similar to WDCT, items specified for MC version represented various social contexts. Three features of power, social distance and imposition were considered in the selection of the situations.

## 2.3 Procedure and Materials

The treatment procedure of the present study was adopted from Martínez-Flor and Alcón (2004). The study followed a sequential method for the experimental group which involved a sequence of activities ranging from awareness-raising tasks, through explicit meta-pragmatic explanations by the teacher to role-plays. The study benefited from six 45-minute sessions distributed over two weeks of instruction. While the experimental group experienced various types of activities, the control group did not receive any instruction on the target speech act and was solely exposed to the movie excerpts prepared for the study. The procedure adopted for the treatment group involved the presentation of the excerpts of "The Game" which contained the speech act of request. The movie excerpts varied in terms of the status of the relationships between the characters thus familiarizing students with appropriate forms of requests with regard to various statuses of interlocutors in a natural context.

The awareness-raising activities adopted in the present study mostly concentrated on the socio-pragmatic as well as pragmalinguistic aspects of the movie excerpts presented to learners. This phase was followed by explicit

meta-pragmatic instruction by the teacher who was asked to present a general description of the notion of speech acts to learners and to further focus on different levels of directness and types of contextual, social and cultural variables involved in the realization of requests. The study also benefited from the implementation of role-plays. The rationale behind the provision of these activities in the study is established by the findings of previous studies which assert role plays provide learners with a golden opportunity to experience a verity of "social roles and events" and consequently develop corresponding communicative and pragmatic abilities they will require in their future encounters in the target language (Kasper, 1997). While students in pairs were preparing for their roles, the instructor walked through pairs and provided them with feedback on socio-pragmatic and pragmalinguistic aspects of their utterances. This was followed by the performance of the roles by each pair and the teacher's modification of the students' infelicitous utterances.

### 3. Data Coding

In order to analyze the data obtained through the WDCTs regarding the speech act of "request" the coding scheme applied in CCSARP (developed by Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989) was adopted in this study. However, aiming to reflect a detailed account of learners' requestive behavior (at the qualitative level) the study benefited from a modified version of CCSARP presented by Al-momani (2009). The analysis of responses initiated with identification of the 'head act' defined as "that part of the sequence which might serve to realize the act independently of other elements" (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989, p. 17). Strategies alongside sub-strategies to code the request responses in this study are reflected in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*The coding scheme for the realization of request speech act in the present study*

Strategy	Definition	Examples
Direct		
Mood derivable	The grammatical mood of the locution conventionally determines its illocutionary force as a request. The prototypical form is imperative.	"Please play football away from my window."
Explicit performatives	The illocutionary intent is explicitly named by the speaker by using a relevant illocutionary verb.	"Post this on the classroom door."
Hedged performatives	The illocutionary verb denoting the requestive intent is modified by modal verbs or verbs expressing intention.	"I'd like to ask you to give me an extension on my paper."
Locution derivable	The illocutionary intent is directly derivable from the semantic meaning of the locution.	"I have to cancel our class."
Want statement	The utterance expresses the speakers' desire that the event denoted in the preposition is realized.	"I need to use your computer real quick."
Conventionally-indirect strategies		
Suggestory formula	The illocutionary intent is phrased as suggestions by means of a framing routine formula.	"How about Wednesday?"
Query preparatory	The utterance contains reference to preparatory condition for the feasibility of the request, typically one of ability, willingness, or possibility, as conventionalized in the given language.	"Is it possible to write me a letter of recommendation?"
Non-conventionally indirect		
Strong hint	The illocutionary intent is not immediately derivable from the locution; however, the locution refers to relevant elements of the intended illocutionary or propositional act. Unlike preparatory strategies, hints are not conventionalized and thus require more inference activity on the part of the hearer.	"Are you using a computer?"
Mild hint	The locution contains no element of immediate relevance to the intended locution or proposition, thus putting increased demand for contextual analysis and knowledge activation on the interlocutor.	"I'll be really busy with some of my work this week."

Source: Al-momani, H. S. (2009). *Caught between two cultures: The realization of requests by Jordanian EFL learners*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, United States of America.

Following R-Eslami and Eslami-Rasekh, (2008), the process of data scoring benefited from Hudson et al.'s (1995) rating scale. This rating consisted of six variables including the ability to use correct speech acts, expressions, amount of information, levels of formality, directness and politeness. Two native Canadian teachers

of English who had nearly six years of experience in teaching English to students of other languages were asked by the researchers to score students' performance on pre- and post-tests. They were asked to rate students' performance on a five-point rating scale ranging from 1 (not appropriate) to 5 (highly appropriate). Furthermore, Following R-Eslami and Eslami-Rasekh (2008) raters were informed of the "conceptual meaning" of variables on the rating scale. They were familiarized with different strategies used by native speakers of English in their daily communications and were notified of contextual and social variables of P, D, and I which are significant in the realization of speech acts. The observers were given clear and concise instructions about how to rate or estimate students' performance. Next, the two set of ratings provided by the raters were compared and calibrated and a satisfactory level of inter-observer reliability ( $r > .92$ ) was established.

#### 4. Results

In the present study the process of data analysis on the target speech act of "request" was computed at two levels of descriptive and inferential statistics. The results of the descriptive statistics on multiple-choice version of DCTs prior and after instruction are provided below.

**Table 2**

*Groups' performance on the speech act of request based on descriptive measures- awareness*

Group	Test	M	SD
Experimental	Pre-test recognition	34.82	2.68
	Post-test recognition	37.76	2.51
Control	Pre-test recognition	34.26	2.76
	Post-test recognition	34.38	2.34

As Table 2 suggests experimental and control group obtained relatively similar mean values in the pre-test phase which indicates their equal achievements regarding their "awareness" of pragmalinguistically and socio-pragmatically appropriate requests. However learners in the experimental group demonstrated a considerable change in their mean score after the instructional period. Although the statistics reflected in Table 2 are indicative of the experimental group's superiority with regard to the variable of "awareness" in the post-test, in order to ascertain the validity of this assumption the computation of the data through a two-tailed t-test of statistical analysis was run. The results obtained through the t-test are provided below.

**Table 3**

*Experimental vs. control group post-test – awareness*

t	df	Sig.(2-tailed)	Mean difference
4.133	34	.000	.80908

The value of significance as reflected in Table 3 is lower than the alpha level set prior to the data analysis which is indicative of a significant level of difference between the two groups regarding their awareness of appropriate "requests". In other words, the significant difference observed in the performance of the experimental group in the post-test over the pre-test as well as their significant gains compared to the control group's further indicates the superiority of the members of this group over their counterparts in the control group after the instructional phase.

In the second phase of data analysis learners' responses to WDCT items were coded and computed based on descriptive and inferential statistics as well. The mean scores, the median and standard deviation of learners' responses to WDCTs across groups were calculated. The results obtained based on these measures in the pre and post-tests are presented below.

**Table 4***Groups' performance on the speech act of request based on descriptive measures-production*

Group	Test	M	SD
Experimental	Pre-test production	25.29	2.86
	Post-test production	29.70	1.86
Control	Pre-test production	25.15	2.77
	post-test production	25.36	3.65

A comparison of the tables above indicates the parallel performance of learners prior to instruction and superiority of the experimental group in the post-test; however in order to test the null hypothesis a two-tailed t-test of statistical analysis was run. Table 5 demonstrates learners' performance on appropriate "production" of requests in the post-test. As the value of "p" is lower than the probability level (0.05) set prior to instruction, it indicates a significant difference at a probability level of 0.000 ( $p < 0.05$ ).

**Table 5***Experimental vs. Control Group post-test – production*

t	df	Sig.(2-tailed)	Mean difference
4.404	34	.000	4.337

The statistics seen above, lend support to the superiority of the experimental group (which benefited from the authentic audio-video input followed by awareness-raising, meta-pragmatic explanation/discussion, writing and role-plays) in the post-test over the control group. These statistics further reject the hypothesis set at the outset of the study. However in order to scrutinize the performance of the learners across both groups on the variable of "production" a more detailed level of analysis was required. Thus with regard to this issue, the frequency of learners' request strategies across both groups in both pre and post-tests are provided below.

**Table 6***Direct vs. indirect request strategies used by the control group (pre-test)*

Strategy	Items											Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	
Mood derivable	-	1	-	3	-	1	-	5	-	4	-	14
Explicit performatives	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0
Hedged performatives	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
Obligation statements	1	-	-	2	-	-	-	6	-	5	-	14
Want statements	-	2	1	8	9	-	-	-	-	-	-	20
Suggestory formula	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	2
Query preparatory	12	10	17	4	10	17	19	11	19	9	19	147
Strong hint	-	-	1	-	-	2	-	1	-	-	-	4

**Table 7***Direct vs. indirect request strategies used by the control group (post-test)*

Strategy	Items											Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	
Mood derivable	-	1	-	3	-	1	-	5	-	4	-	14
Explicit performatives	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0
Hedged performatives	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0
Obligation statements	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	8	-	5	-	13
Want statements	2	3	-	9	8	-	-	2	-	-	-	24
Suggestory formula	2	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3
Query preparatory	14	14	17	7	11	18	19	4	16	10	19	149
Strong hint	1	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	3	-	-	6
Mild hint	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0



**Table 8***Direct vs. indirect request strategies used by the explicit group (pre-test)*

Strategy	Items											Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	
Mood derivable	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	3	-	2	-	10
Explicit performatives	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	1
Hedged performatives	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0
Obligation statements	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	3	-	-	-	5
Want statements	5	2	-	5	3	-	-	-	-	-	1	16
Suggestory formula	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	2
Query preparatory	11	15	13	14	14	17	13	10	15	14	16	152
Strong hint	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	2	-	-	3
Mild hint	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0

**Table 9***Direct vs. indirect request strategies used by the explicit group (post-test)*

Strategy	Items											Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	
Mood derivable	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
Explicit performatives	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0
Hedged performatives	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0
Obligation statements	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0
Want statements	-	-	-	2	4	-	-	2	-	-	-	8
Suggestory formula	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
Query preparatory	11	17	17	11	13	14	14	15	17	14	16	159
Strong hint	4	-	-	1	-	3	3	-	-	2	1	14
Mild hint	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0

The distribution of strategies realized for the speech act of request in the pre-test (as presented in Tables 6 and 8) indicates “query preparatory” formula as the most frequent strategy used by members of both groups. With regard to direct type of strategies applied by members of both groups in the pre-test phase, results display learners’ tendency to use this strategy frequently in situation 4 (airplane) (where the addressee is of a lower rank to the respondent); however the occurrence of this strategy in items where the speaker possess a lower rank and high distance (-P, +D) to the addressee are also observed in the pre-test. This finding is relevant to situations 10 (shop); 5 (job application); and 1 (restaurant). Although learners in the experimental group displayed a significant decrease in using direct requests, in the post-test the occurrence of this strategy was still observed in specific situations in their responses to post-test DCT items. This was more apparent with regard to “want statement” in which the requestor expresses his wishes and desires for the fulfillment of the request by the addressee. Results concerning the performance of their counterparts in post-test were suggestive of their resistance to utilization of direct request strategies specifically in the form of “mood derivable” and “want statements”. This finding is suggestive of the control group’s neglect of social and contextual variables (power, distance and imposition) in their request responses.

Nonetheless, as stated above, conventionally indirect requests appeared as the dominant form of requests in the pre- and post-tests responses of learners in the experimental and control group alike. In the same vein, non-conventionally indirect strategies, although few in number, were observed in learners’ requests in the two test phases. However, the occurrence of this strategy which was expected to appear in a high ratio in the experimental group post-test responses following the instructional phase saw only a marginal increase; the same pattern was also observed in the control group’s performance across the two tests.

Regarding the internal and external modifications applied in the production of learners’ requests, significant results were also observed in the experimental group’s post-test performance. That is while learners in this group resorted to these strategies in restricted proportion prior to the instruction; they applied these strategies in a

significantly higher variation in the post-test. Hence internal and external modifications which encompassed “interrogatives”, “embedded if clause”, “understates” and “downtoners” alongside “supportive moves” (external modifications) in the form of “getting pre-commitment” and “sweeteners” in the pre-test, saw a considerable increase both in number and variety in the post-test phase and included the occurrence of “disarmers”, “imposition minimizers”, “preparators” and “grounders”. However participants in the control group did not experience a parallel performance over the same measure in the post-test and resorted to the same strategies they implemented at the outset of the study. This in turn influenced the level of appropriateness of their requestive productions in terms of socio-pragmatics and politeness norms. Overall, the preference order of request strategies in both groups in the post-test phase resembled the following CID<D<NCID<sup>1</sup> which is in with Lin’s (2009) finding regarding the requestive behavior of his participant groups namely native speakers of English, Chinese as well as Chinese learners of English.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed at exploring the effect of instruction on Persian EFL learners' development of pragmatic features. The researchers decided to choose "requests" as the target speech act under study in that requests are of significant importance in social life and their realizations differ cross-linguistically (Ellis, 2008). Subjects' recognition and production of requests were measured through MCDCTs and WDCTs respectively. Learners in both experimental and control group demonstrated moderately parallel performance on both measures, however, the results of the post-test performance of the learners revealed that the experimental group outperformed the control group at both levels of awareness and production. Based on this finding, the first two research questions posed at the outset of the study concerning the efficacy of pragmatics instruction in enhancing EFL learners' pragmatic competence are answered positively. Accordingly, findings of this study revealed second language pragmatics is not only impervious to learning it can benefit from input-rich pragmatics instruction in facilitating learners' identification and realization of appropriate pragmatic features as well as in the production of the correct pragmatic function with regard to contextual and social limitations of the setting. Accordingly, findings of this study confirm previous research findings (Billmyer, 1990; Olshtain & Cohen, 1990; Takahashi, 2001; Bardovi-Harlig, 2001; Rose & Kasper, 2001, 2002; Tateyama, 2001; Kasper & Rose, 2002; Martinez-Flor & Alcón-Soler, 2004; Alcón-Soler, 2005; Rose, 2005; Eslami-Rasekh & Rasekh, 2008) on the positive effect of pragmatics instruction on the development of learners' pragmatic gains. This finding may necessitate the inclusion of pragmatically-oriented materials, specifically in EFL settings where learners' opportunity for the realization of appropriate language functions in various contexts is minimal. In line with this assumption, Rose's (1997) study revealed how awareness of pragmatic system alongside its appropriate use is the key factor in learners' development of pragmatic competence.

In order to answer the third research question concerning the effect of instruction on learners' choice of request strategies the frequency of request strategies on WDCT in both pre- and post-test phase were computed and tallied. The results obtained in the qualitative phase of the study demonstrated the dominant preference for conventionally-indirect requests across the groups prior to instruction. This finding in one way could be explained by the influence of learners' background language, Farsi, which makes a strong case for the "minimization of the imposition" involved in requests and concern about the addressee's face (Shariati & Chamani, 2010). Hence as to the fact that requests are inherently "face-threatening" acts indirect requests account for a high percentage of the strategies in Persians' interpersonal communications. Accordingly, participants in this study as native speakers of Farsi displayed a uniform tendency towards this formula even prior to instruction in the pre-test phase. Another explanation which seems to pertain to this finding concerns the occurrence of "query preparatory" strategy as a fixed linguistic form for the realization of requests in the English textbooks Iranian EFL learners are exposed to. Hence the frequent exposure of learners to this form has probably triggered the presence of this feature in their repertoire of L2 requests.

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<sup>1</sup> Where CID stands for conventionally indirect. D and NCID for direct and non-conventionally indirect strategies respectively.

An intriguing point in relation to this finding is the accretion of the level of indirectness in post-test responses of the experimental group to DCT items. This resulted in learners' tendency for the strongest conventionally-indirect request "I was wondering if you would+ VP" for high imposition situations. This increase in the frequency of indirect strategies as well as in the level of indirectness is explained by the impact of instructional intervention in enhancing learners' increased awareness of the phenomenon of "Polite Pessimism" which triggered 'the restriction on the use of imperatives and the preference for indirect requests in interrogative or interrogative-conditional forms' (Dong, 2009, p. 19). Compelling evidence for the efficacy of instruction in the present study was further traced in the notion of "point of view of operation". In the pre-test phase learners in both groups displayed a high frequency in the utilization of "hearer-oriented requests" which marked their productions pragmatically infelicitous. This is due to the fact that requests are face-threatening and inherently imposing thus avoiding to directly name the hearer as the doer of the requested task can reduce the degree of force coerciveness born from the requests uttered' (Lin, 2009, pp. 15-16). Following the treatment the experimental group held a speaker-oriented perspective where the restrictions of situations demanded. Consequently in the post-test the following strings "could you lend me your notes?" were replaced with speaker-oriented utterances of "could I borrow your notes?"

One further prominent observation in this study related to non-conventional request strategies. This is the area where instruction did not seem to be facilitative. The occurrence of this strategy which was expected to appear in a high ratio in the explicit group post-test responses after the treatment phase saw only a marginal increase. The infrequent occurrence of this strategy could pertain to the demanding nature of non-conventionally indirect strategies at a linguistic and contextual level. Similar to the findings of this study, Alcón (2005) asserts:

*As the level of indirectness increases, it demands a processing capacity that is sufficient to activate both linguistic and contextual knowledge.....on the contrary in the case of non-conventionally indirect requests, where the speaker's request is not made explicit in the utterance, either by using a direct or conventionally indirect request, learners cannot rely on pragmalinguistic conventions, but they need to rely mainly on contextual clues to decode and produce the expected meaning of the utterance. This capacity to process linguistic rules and contextual knowledge when there is no conventional representation between forms and their functions as requests seem even more demanding as far as production is concerned (p. 426).*

Presumably since learners despite the instructional intervention did not gain access to 'fixed linguistic conventions' they relied heavily on strategies they could express through their pragmalinguistic repertoire of conventionally indirect strategies.

Overall, this study lends support to the positive effect of instruction on development of pragmatic features. This finding is based on two theoretical grounds. The first concerns the Noticing Hypothesis (Schmidt, 1990, 2001, 2010). According to the proponents of this hypothesis, in the absence of attention input does not become intake. 'In the simplest terms, people learn about the things that they attend to and do not learn much about the things they do not attend to' (Schmidt, 2010, p. 2). Similarly, in the present study 'attention' to the target speech act of request alongside contextual and social variables crucial in the realization of requests was provided for learners through explicit meta-pragmatic discussion on video excerpts, consciousness-raising activities, whole-class discussions as well as role-plays. This efficacy of instruction in promoting learners' language is further justified on the grounds of Output Hypothesis proposed by Swain (1985) which postulates output pushes learners to process the language more deeply. It helps them to notice the gaps in their interlanguage system. It further provides learners with hypothesis testing which is another way through which production serves learners in the process of knowledge-building. In the present study, production of the target pragmatic feature was provided for learners through role-play and writing task phase where learners used the opportunity to test their hypotheses regarding the way requests are realized. Likewise, the feedback provided by the instructor paved the way for learners to notice the gaps in their ILP. This in turn triggered an attempt on the part of the learners to modify their output and to be enlightened as to the cross-culturally dominant norms in the production of

requests.

For the most part, the novelty of the present study lies in the mixed form of research undergone to analysis learners' performance on the target speech act of 'request' which to the best of the researchers' knowledge, studies exploring the effect of instruction on development of learners' gains of 'requests' at both quantitative and qualitative levels are minimal if not nonexistent. The qualitative analysis of learners' requestive responses in the present study introduced new insights into the way Persian EFL learners process pragmatic features and into the extent to which their requestive behavior in the target language varies from cross-culturally dominant norms. Consequently findings of this study could be of help to curriculum designers in Iran in the sense that it could add to their awareness in recognizing the gaps Iranian EFL learners experience in their interlanguage pragmatic system which necessitate the incorporation of pragmatically-oriented materials in the curriculum of language pedagogy. Language teachers in Iran may also benefit from the results of the present and similar SLA-oriented experimental studies in that they could help learners recognize pragmalinguistic and socio-pragmatic conventions which are of crucial importance in the realization and production of speech acts. Findings of this study, however, should be viewed with caution in that learners with different proficiency levels and varying motivation may not benefit equally from the same instructional methodology. Hence, future research is needed to explore the effect of different methodological interventions in relation to gains of learners with different proficiency levels.

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