The Pragmatic Instruction Effects on Persian EFL Learners' Noticing and Learning Outcomes in Request Forms

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Abstract: This study investigates the request strategies used by Persian learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), aimed at exploring the pragmatic instruction effects on their noticing constrained by different types of treatment tasks. The subsequent effect of the learners' noticing on their learning outcomes is taken into account as well. Thirty learners were divided into two instructional (treatment) conditions: a form-comparison condition and a form-search condition. Discourse completion tests were used to generate data related to the request strategies used by each group in pre- and posttests. The treatment data were examined regarding the extent to which the learners had noticed the appropriate manner of request realization in English and were further compared with the posttest. The findings revealed that during the treatment, the amount of learners' noticing the target request forms in the form-comparison condition was greater than the form-search condition. Furthermore, learners' higher awareness of the target request forms in the form-comparison condition could lead them to have a better performance in their posttest.

Keywords: Interlanguage Pragmatics, Language Instruction, Noticing Hypothesis, Request Speech Act

1- Introduction

Studies on the development of Foreign Language (FL) knowledge have focused more on the acquisition of phonological, morphological, syntactic and semantic forms than on the acquisition of pragmatic ability, emphasizing the fact that FL learners could gain knowledge of the vocabulary and grammar of the target language without having a considerable control over the pragmatic uses of the language [1,2]. This amounts to saying that having known several ways of thanking, complaining or requesting, FL learners may not yet be sure that under what circumstances it is appropriate to use one form over another, while successful communication includes mastering over grammar and text organization as well as pragmatic aspects of the target language.

Pragmatic ability as a part of learners' communicative competence has received attention in the models of communicative competence. The model proposed by Canale included four components: grammatical competence; sociolinguistic competence; discourse competence; strategic competence, for his part, divided language knowledge into two main categories, organizational knowledge and pragmatic knowledgeand subdivided them into subcategories, grammatical and textual knowledge for the former and lexical, functional

and sociolinguistic knowledge for the latter [3-6]. Included actional competence component in their own model and defined it as "competence in conveying and understanding communicative intent, that is, matching actional intent with linguistic form based on the knowledge of an inventory of verbal schemata that carry illocutionary force" by stressing the closeness of actional competence to interlanguage pragmatics. Thus, pragmatic competence is an essential part of communicative competence in the above models.

Having maintained that noticing is the necessary and sufficient requirement for the conversion of input to intake in terms of conscious processes in second language acquisition, defined it as allocating attentional resources to a stimulus and identifying the level at which perceived events are subjectively experienced [7]. According to Schmidt, the noticing hypothesis states that "what learners notice in input is what becomes intake for learning" (p. 20) and as a result get aware of it [8].

According to Cenoz, in order to make the intercultural speaker competent at the pragmatic level, pragmatic awareness must be developed [9]. He believes that although acquiring pragmatic competence is a demanding task, the intercultural speaker has to become an efficient speaker to avoid any misunderstanding and failure while interacting with native and non-native speakers of the target language. Therefore, it is crucial to make learners aware of the pragmatic conventions so that they become expert-users of the language.

As a result, in performing speech acts, particularly making request which has been defined as "attempts by the speaker to get the hearer to do something.

They may be very modest attempts as when I invite you to do it, or they may be very fierce attempts as when I insist that you do it", not only should learners master linguistic knowledge but also sociocultural and context knowledge [10]. Thus, attention has to be paid not just to the request head act strategies such as target forms in making request, but to its peripheral modifiers such as mitigators, disarmers, and sequences in order to decrease the impositive force of request since learners' suitable use of mitigation devices in making requests could be seen as an instance of appropriate pragmatic behavior due to the impositive nature of requests.

The majority of studies support Schmidt's noticing hypothesis which claims that for further second language development, learners have to notice the L2 features in the input. However, the issue of noticing in second language acquisition has been controversial with regard to the depth of noticing or awareness and its learning outcomes. Also, it is not clear that whether higher levels of awareness are assured by manipulating input conditions [11-14].

Therefore, following Schmidt noticing hypothesis in relation to processing pragmatic input and exploring the role of awareness in the acquisition of request speech act, this study investigates whether instructors can help Persian EFL learners to focus on request expressions and to learn them through Form-Comparison (FC) and Form-Search (FS) conditions which deal with awareness at the level of noticing [7].

Therefore, the present study aims at providing a quantitative analysis of L2 pragmatic instructional effects by exploring the manner in which Persian EFL learners' noticing or awareness of target English request forms is constrained by different types of treatment tasks and the subsequent effect of the learners' noticing on learning outcomes in target English request forms. The findings of this study could form the basis for hypothesizing the nature of awareness and noticing related to successful acquisition of pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic competences in L2 and the point that in which pragmatic instructional conditions, learners can get a higher degree of awareness and as a result get a greater amount of learning outcome.

The linguistic area of pragmatics in the context of second language (L2) acquisition has been reflected in some research studies aimed at examining learners' pragmatic competence in their interlanguage [15,16]. Having conducted cross-sectional studies on requests in second language contexts, claimed that perceptions of directness and positive politeness in requests were related to length of living in the target community or learners' level of proficiency [17,18]. Similarly, in longitudinal studies, analyzed interlanguage development of making request and pointed out that the forms and

strategies employed for requesting increased over time [19].

In contrast to second language learning environments, in a study conducted in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context reported that large classes, limited contact hours, and little opportunity for intercultural communication are some of the features of the EFL context that hinder pragmatic learning [20].

A finding common to Leow is that, directly or indirectly, awareness plays a crucial role in accounting for SLA [21,22]. found that different levels of awareness contained differences in processing Spanish as L2 and recognized that awareness has facilitative effects on the learning of the target language [21]. observed that aware learners significantly increased their ability to recognize and produce the target forms in L2 Spanish, whereas unaware learners did not [22].

also revealed that higher levels of awareness resulted in stronger effects on the intake of Spanish as L2 and concluded that the level of awareness is a crucial determinant factor for the level of intake of L2 forms and if higher levels of awareness are assured by manipulating input, then learners' intake of target forms could be greatly enhanced, even in implicit input conditions [23].

Request speech acts, during the last decades, have been one of the most commonly researched speech acts in both cross-cultural and interlanguage studies. In Japanese as L2, analyzed head act (main request) strategies used in role-play by twenty intermediate and twelve advanced Chinese learners of Japanese comparing with twelve native speakers of Japanese [24]. Results indicated that there is no clear L1 transfer of requesting strategies. However, with an increase of proficiency, Chinese learners of Japanese used linguistic strategies which are non-existent socioculturally in both Chinese and Japanese.

In addition to that, researches in EFL contexts showed an increase of mitigation devices parallel to the learners' proficiency level. The studies by Kawamura and Sato and Kobayashi and Rinnert can also be named as instances of investigation related to EFL learners' proficiency level and the use of request modifiers [25,26]. analyzed the performance of high and low level Japanese EFL learners using a written DCT [25]. Results showed that both groups responded similarly in terms of external modifiers, while higher-level learners displayed a greater amount of internal modification items. Based on these findings, it seems that the choice of request modifiers is related to the learners' proficiency level, particularly with regard to internal modifiers. Yet, these results are partly confirmed by another study which dealt as well with Japanese EFL learners. through using an oral task, namely a role-play activity, revealed that their subjects' proficiency

level was associated with an increase in the use of both internal and external modifiers [26].

2- Research Methodology
2-1 Design
This study aimed at providing a quantitative analysis of instruction effects on L2 pragmatics by exploring the manner in which Persian EFL learners' noticing of target English request forms is constrained by two types of treatment tasks, i.e., Form-Comparison (FC) and Form-Search (FS) tasks and the subsequent effect of the learners' noticing on their learning outcomes.

The questions of this study are:

1- How do different types of treatment tasks (i.e., FC and FS) affect Persian EFL learners' noticing of pragmatics in terms of target request forms in the treatment input?

2- How do Persian EFL learners' different degrees of noticing of pragmatics in terms of target request forms in the treatment input affect their learning of those forms?

1- There is no difference between different types of target request treatment tasks (i.e., FC and FS) and Persian EFL learners' noticing of pragmatics in terms of target request forms in the treatment input.

2- There is no difference between Persian EFL learners' different degrees of noticing of pragmatics in terms of target request forms and their learning of those forms.

2-2 Participants
The participants in the study included 30 female Persian learners of English who had been considered to be at the intermediate level based on the proficiency standards in an English as a foreign language institute. They were divided into two English classes taught by the researcher and were assigned to the two instructional (treatment) conditions: 15 learners in a Form-Comparison (FC) condition in one class and 15learners in a Form-Search (FS) condition in another class.

2-3 Materials
Three conversational dialogues, chosen from Richards New Interchange book series, on making requests in English between English native speakers in certain situations and three between English non-native speakers in corresponding situations were used as treatment materials [27]. The situations were selected based on their social power and social distance, and the degree of imposition. Besides, Discourse Completion Tests (DCTs) were used for

administering the pretest and the posttest in six different target request situations, three for each (Appendices A and B). The situations were selected based on the same criteria against which dialogues were selected. Reliability of the DCTs was assessed through Cronbach's α (r = 0.871, P = .000) and the validity was proved by three professors who had experience in teaching English for more than 10 years.

2-4 Data Collection Procedure
In the first session, the participants in both FC and FS classes took the pretest in which they were assigned to fill out DCTs in a way that after each situation they wrote a note in the format of a conversation and through which made their related requests and mentioned why they needed those things by imagining the responses that they might get on the part of the hearers. Then, the treatment sessions in both classes began in the span of six sessions – 3 for each – that each of them lasted 90 minutes.

In the FC treatment sessions, participants were instructed on the concept of request in brief and were asked to compare their own English request expressions in the DCTs with those provided by the native speakers in the dialogues in corresponding situations and to write any difference in request realization strategies.

Also, the FS treatment sessions began like FC condition with a brief instruction on making request in English and then, participants were asked to compare the English native speakers' ways of making requests in the dialogues with those of the other English non-native speakers in corresponding situations and to list the distinct expressions used by them. Following the treatment and in the last session, the posttest was administered to the participants in both FC and FS classes through which they had to fill out the DCTs by writing their requests in the format of a conversation with imagining the possible responses on the part of the hearers.

2-5 Data Analysis Procedure
The data obtained from the treatment analysis tasks and that available from the request forms provided in the pretest and posttest were analyzed to reveal whether we have any difference in noticing and learning outcomes between the FC and FS groups. Then, the frequency analysis and Chi-Square test were calculated and tabulated to establish the percentage of request strategies used by the subjects and whether the differences in the frequency of strategies were statistically significant.

3- Results and Discussion

3-1 The Influence of Treatment Tasks on Learners' Noticing

For the first research question, in the framework of ''FC versus FS'', the findings of this study provided some evidence of correlation between target request treatment tasks and learners' noticing. As Tables 1 and 3 indicate, there were major differences in noticing between the FC and FS groups in the following four respects: target request forms, mitigating devices, levels of directness, and sequence in making request:

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics for Noticing of FC Group

Feature	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Target Forms	15	1	.00	.00	1.00
Mitigating	15	1	.00	.00	1.00
Directness	15	1	.00	.00	1.00
Sequence	15	.80	.414	.00	1.00

Table 2 Chi-Square for Noticing of FC Group

No.	$\chi^2_{(4-15)}$	df	Sig.
15	9.00	3	.029

Table 3 Descriptive Statistics for Noticing of FS Group

Feature	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Target Forms	15	.67	.488	.00	1.00
Mitigating	15	.33	.488	.00	1.00
Directness	15	.33	.488	.00	1.00
Sequence	15	.47	.516	.00	1.00

Table 4 Chi-Square for Noticing of FS Group

No.	$\chi^2_{(4-15)}$	df	Sig.
15	11.824	3	.008

As Tables 1 and 3 show, in terms of noticing target forms, the 15 FC participants with the percentage of 100 had noticed the target request forms and mitigating devices in softening the forces of request imposition in the treatment input, whereas 67% of the FS participants (10 out of 15) noticed the target forms and just five participants (33%) noticed mitigating devices particularly the modals.

As the FC participants had noticed the mitigating devices, they (100%) were managed to recognize the levels of directness exemplified in the NS request realization in the treatment input, indicating that NSs are ''indirect'' in making requests with the use of various devices to mitigate the request imposition. Contrarily, ten FS participants (67%) just referred to the levels of directness by mentioning that NS requests are overall indirect, without stating the exact difference and just five learners (33%) referred to directness by pointing to mitigators since the learners had noticed them.

Regarding the request sequence, that is, providing reasons and justifications before making request, 12 out of 15 FC participants (80%) focused on it comparing to FS participants who less tended to refer to this feature (7 out of 15, 47%). However, it does not imply that FS participants who did not refer to this pragmatic feature tended to ignore it; they might have recognized it but merely chosen not to list it in their treatment task since the task in the FS condition required the participants to focus on expressions that were distinct from the NSs and not on sequence and noticed to other features like discourse markers and idiomatic expressions.

Moreover, as indicated in Chi-Square Tables 2 and 4, the effect of treatment tasks on learners' noticing was found significant at the level of .029 in the FC condition and at the level of .008 in the FS condition. Therefore, FC and FS treatment tasks affected differently on the learners' noticing of the target request forms and other features in the treatment input and since the treatment task for the FC condition allowed the learners to notice the features of making requests in more depth than the FS one, it can be said that the FC task is definitely more effective than the FS one with regard to increasing the learners' awareness of English NS request realization strategies and thus the first hypothesis was rejected since there was a drastic difference between the different types of target request treatment tasks and Persian EFL learners' noticing.

3-2 The Influence of Learners' Noticing on their Learning Outcomes

For the second research question, the data available from both groups were analyzed based on the degree of noticing of the target request forms and whether they provided them in the posttest along with the Chi-Square test to find the relationship between different types of treatment tasks and the amount of learning:

Table 5 Descriptive Statistics for Learning of FC Group

Feature	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Target Forms	15	.80	.414	.00	1.00
Mitigating	15	.47	.516	.00	1.00
Directness	15	.47	.516	.00	1.00
Sequence	15	.67	.488	.00	1.00

Table 6 Chi-Square for Learning of FC Group

No.	$\chi^2_{(4-15)}$	df	Sig.
15	12.00	3	.007

Table 7 Descriptive Statistics for Learning of FS Group

Feature	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Target Forms	15	.33	.488	.00	1.00
Mitigating	15	.67	.488	.00	1.00
Directness	15	.67	.488	.00	1.00
Sequence	15	.80	.414	.00	1.00

Table 8 Chi-Square for Learning of FS Group

No.	$\chi^2_{(4-15)}$	df	Sig.
15	15.286	3	.002

As Tables 5 and 7 show, the 80% of FC participants (12 out of 15) provided the target request forms and their function in the posttest along with using the request sequence by 67% of the participants (10 out of 15) since they had a high awareness of target request forms and request sequence and consequently used them in the posttest. Therefore, the FC participants were able to process the target forms and sequence more efficiently than the other features in the treatment which ensured learning and using them in the posttest.

In contrast, 67% of FS participants appeared to allocate their attention to various features in the treatment input such as mitigating devices, discourse markers, directness, and request sequence (80%) while just 33% of them learned the target forms. It is fair to say that the learners' divided attention which decreased the possibility of learning the target forms completely might have resulted in increasing the likelihood of learning other input features, yielding to the learning outcomes in which they could not entirely incorporate the form-function relationships manifested in target request expressions into their L2 repertoires for practical use. Instead, further processing has been allocated to mitigators, discourse markers, idiomatic expressions, and request sequence as new targets for learning in the treatment.

The findings could imply that despite learners' noticing the target request forms in the input, insufficient processing did not ensure a higher awareness of those forms, yielding to the learners' failure to incorporate them into their L2 system which made it difficult for them to express themselves while making requests in English. Moreover, as shown in Chi-Square Tables 6 and 8, the effect of noticing on learning outcomes was significant at the level of .007 in the FC group and at the level of .002 in the FS group which provides: the sufficiently high degree of noticing or awareness of the target forms in the treatment input, as shown by FC learners, could lead to learning of the target forms and with a decrease in the degree of noticing or awareness of the target forms in the treatment input, learners' attention, as shown by FS learners, was paid to mitigators, discourse markers, and request sequence and therefore, the second hypothesis was rejected as well due to the stark contrast between Persian EFL learners' different degrees of noticing target request forms and their learning outcomes.

4- Conclusion

Having aimed at contributing to SLA theory construction in the framework of the Schmidt Noticing Hypothesis, this study was designed to address the important issue of pragmatic development of request strategies in Persian EFL learners in order to determine whether and to what extent the learners' noticing or awareness of target English request forms is constrained by different types of treatment tasks and the subsequent effect of the learners' noticing on learning outcomes in target English request forms [7].

Two types of treatment tasks named as Form-Comparison (FC) and Form-Search (FS) tasks were used in the study which revealed that the FC treatment task allowed learners to notice the target request forms to a greater extent than did the FS one. Also, in harmony with that the task demands can have an influence on how L2 input is processed and the different tasks can require the learners to process the input differently, FC learners' high degree of awareness of target request forms could lead them to the learning of those forms and a low degree of awareness of target request forms, as shown by FS learners, could lead them to other features such as mitigators, discourse markers, idiomatic expressions, and request sequence [22,23].

Moreover, given the fact that the FC and FS learners did not achieve absolute proficiency in making target request forms, in line with, there are other crucial factors such as learners' individual interests that restrict them from processing the targets sufficiently [28,29]. Therefore, researches in the field of Interlanguage Pragmatics (ILP) should ultimately seek to explore such crucial factors.

By raising our understanding of the interlanguage features of the Persian EFL learners in English speech act of request, this study contributes to the field of interlanguage pragmatics. Also, this research seeks not only to improve our understanding of pragmatic development in speech act realization but also to enable us to incorporate effective methods of teaching pragmatics – making requests in particular

– in the EFL classrooms through putting learners in the context of target language so that learners can develop appropriate request behaviors similar to those of native speakers, making them to acquire the sociopragmatic knowledge necessary to perform appropriate request type which is contextually proper under different social power and social distance.

As the participants of the present study were female, there should be a further ILP study that investigates the male data in order to detect the gender effect, comparing its results with this study. And, given the intermediate level as the focus of this study, another study on noticing target request forms and subsequent learning outcomes by Persian EFL learners at other levels could be worth pursuing.

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Appendices

A. Situations of Pretest DCT for FC and FS conditions

Situation 1: You have just moved into a new apartment and your neighbor which is strange to you happens to be a noisy one. You've decided to tell him to be a little quiet and get a guide for a good restaurant. How would you make your requests?

Situation 2: You are writing your thesis and need to interview the president of a university whom you don't know. You know the president is very busy, but still want to ask him to spare half an hour for your interview. How would you say?

Situation 3: You're going to go to your friend's wedding ceremony while you've got no car, a good suitcase and a digital camera for taking some pictures. You decide to ask your friends whether you can borrow their car, suitcase, and digital camera. How would you say to get them to do those favors for you?

B. Situations of Posttest DCT for FC and FS conditions

Situation 1: A friend of yours from out of the town is paying you a visit. Both of you would like to take a photo together to remember this happy moment. You decide to ask a nearby person who is stranger to you, to do this favor. How would you say?

Situation 2: You are writing a difficult paper for Professor Hill. You need some help with the paper but Professor Hill is away for a month. A friend of yours has suggested you go and see Professor Watson. Although you do not know Professor Watson and Professor Watson is extremely busy, you have decided to ask Professor Watson to look through your long paper before you hand it in the next day. How would you ask Professor Watson?

Situation 3: You were absent last Friday history class that you are enrolled in. So you decide to borrow your friend's notes to catch up with the rest of the class. How would you say to get this friend to lend you the notes?