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The Effects of Different Instructional Methods on the Acquisition of English Politeness Strategies

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Abstract

Most of the studies in Interlanguage Pragmatics have focused on the performance and acquisition of speech acts by nonnative speakers, considering politeness only as a subsidiary issue. The present study pertains to linguistic politeness and attempts to investigate the effects of different teaching methods on the acquisition of English politeness strategies (PSs). Eight groups of freshman and junior English majors were randomly assigned to three experimental groups (enhanced input, explicit teaching, and role play) and one control group (mere exposure). The participants took a TOEFL test, a pretest, and finally a posttest after a seven-week treatment of a list of PSs. The results indicated that instruction has a significant positive influence on the acquisition of PSs and explicit teaching is significantly the most effective method. Role play and input enhancement were the second and third most effective. Moreover, it was shown that although the level of language proficiency significantly influenced the knowledge of PSs (the ability to recognize

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appropriate PSs for each social context), it did not affect the acquisition of PSs. The findings imply that the instruction of PSs can be started at intermediate level and explicit teaching alongside role play activities will greatly benefit language learners.

Keywords: Politeness strategies; ILP; DCT; Teaching methods; Acquisition

Introduction

Communicative competence is required for effective language use and communication (Johnson & Johnson, 1998, p. 62). Pragmatic competence is an aspect of communicative competence and is included in Canale and Swain's (1980) and Bachman's (1990) model of communicative competence. Ellis (2008) defines pragmatic competence as consisting of the "knowledge of what constitutes appropriate linguistic behavior in a particular situation" (p. 956). Leech (1983) and Thomas (1983) divided pragmatics into pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics. According to Kasper and Rose (2001, p. 2), pragmalinguistics refers to "the resources for conveying communicative acts and relational or interpersonal meanings", which include "pragmatic strategies such as directness and indirectness, routines, and a large range of linguistic forms which can intensify or soften communicative acts", and sociopragmatics refers to "the social perceptions underlying participants' interpretation and performance of communicative action".

However, pragmatic competence is not totally dependent on grammatical competence and does not properly develop as knowledge of grammar increases. Bardovi-Harlig (2001, p. 28) asserts that "it is clear from early work that grammatical competence does not guarantee pragmatic competence" and "even grammatically advanced learners show differences from target language pragmatic norms" (p. 14). Language learners usually do not use pragmatic features, for instance mitigating devices to soften communication acts (e.g., complaints, requests), and their L2 (second language) performance may seem odd, 'direct', 'insensitive' and, at times, 'rude' (Thomas, 1983; Jiang, 2006).

Moreover, most learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) have little interaction with native speakers and their English textbooks, particularly the ones used at universities in EFL contexts, do not present and practice pragmatic features properly and "cannot be counted on as reliable sources of pragmatic input for

classroom language learners" (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001, p. 25). Also language classrooms are far from appropriate for the development of L2 pragmatic rules, as they display a narrower range of speech acts, a lack of politeness marking, shorter and less complex openings and closings, and a limited range of discourse markers (Kasper, 1997, p. 8).

Politeness is an aspect of pragmatics and concerns linguistic forms that language users employ to display respect and consideration for their addressees. According to Holmes (2006), linguistic politeness "is a matter of specific linguistic choices from a range of available ways of saying something" and "has generally been considered the proper concern of pragmatics" (p. 711). However, politeness has not been considered thoroughly in interlanguage pragmatics (ILP), as ILP has mainly focused on what Kasper and Dahl (1991, p. 216) called the "narrow sense" of ILP, that is, "nonnative speakers' comprehension and production of speech acts, and how their L2-related speech act knowledge is acquired".

Language learners need to acquire politeness strategies (PSs) and be able to comprehend and use these strategies for effective communication. Although adult language learners may possess a lot of pragmatic knowledge, some universal and some successfully transferred from their L1 (first language), they do not always use what they know. Kasper (1997) claims that "learners frequently underuse politeness marking in L2 even though they regularly mark their utterances for politeness in L1" (p. 3). And language learners may not differentiate such context variables as social power and social distance in L2, although they are highly context sensitive in selecting pragmatic strategies in their own language (Fukushima, 1990). More importantly, most EFL learners are not familiar with linguistic forms that are used to indicate politeness and respect in L2. This is apparently due to the fact that they do not learn these features in their English courses.

Despite the fact that in many ILP studies politeness has been one of the considerations (Ellis, 2008), there has been a paucity of research on politeness strategies per se, teachability of PSs, and the effect of different teaching methods on learning PSs. The present study attempts to investigate the effect of instruction on the acquisition of English PSs by Iranian EFL learners and to ascertain which instructional methods are more effective.

Literature Review

Previous studies relating to the present research belong in the realm of pragmatics and interlanguage pragmatics, which include contrastive pragmatics, corpus studies on pragmatic features, studies comparing native speakers (NSs) and non-native speakers (NNSs) and language learners at different proficiency levels in terms of their pragmatic behavior, and the effect of instruction and different teaching methods on the acquisition of pragmatic features, including politeness strategies.

There have been a lot of studies comparing and contrasting English and other languages, such as German, Japanese, and Persian, in terms of their pragmatic and politeness features. These studies generally revealed cross-cultural variation in speech act realization and indirectness and culture-specific preferences for different syntactic and lexical downgraders (Blum-Kulka, 1987; Blum-Kulka & House, 1989; Fukushima, 1996; House, 1989; Sifianou, 1992). The most noticeable study is the research by House and Kasper (1981), who in a study of elicited role plays identified eleven politeness strategies in German and English (politeness markers, play-downs, consultative devices, hedges, understaters, downtoners, committers, forewarning, hesitators, scope-stators, and agent avoiders). Akbari (2002), basing her work on Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness model, extracted and categorized the range of politeness strategies (positive politeness, negative politeness and off-record politeness) used by Persian monolingual speakers in certain situations and compared them with those employed in English.

The second group of studies involves corpus studies working out the most frequent realization forms of some speech acts. Manes and Wolfson (1981) worked on a corpus of 686 naturally occurring compliments by American native speakers and found that 97.2% of the compliments fell into one of the nine syntactic formulas they had worked out and the top three syntactic formulas (*NP is/looks (really) ADJ (PP)*; *I (really) like/love NP*; *PRO is (really) (a) (ADJ) NP*) accounted for 85% of all the compliments. Suzuki (2008) explored a corpus of 'suggestion' sentences provided by American NS undergraduate students and worked out the most frequent syntactic and lexical forms which were used for performing the speech act of suggestion in American English. Finally, Fialova (2010), working on Brown & Levinson's (1987) politeness model, explored a number of American TV programs and worked out the most frequently used negative politeness strategies in TV programs. The results of these studies are of great value for language teachers and materials developers.

The third group of studies compared NNSs and NSs of some languages and indicated that NNSs differ from NSs in their use and recognition of pragmatic rules and politeness strategies (Olshtain & Blum-Kulka, 1985; Eisenstein & Bodma, 1986; Schmidt, 1994). Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (1993) studied the pragmatic performance of NNS and NS students in the context of academic advising sessions and indicated that the NNSs usually did not employ the mitigators used by the NSs to soften their rejection of the advisors' suggestions and they often used aggravators, which were never used by the NS peers. NNSs have also been shown to differ from NSs in the use of routines or "typical expressions", such as "*Could you ……?*" and "*How clumsy of me, ……*", which make the speech act or the semantic formula immediately recognizable to the hearer (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001, p. 19).

The fourth group of studies investigated the effect of proficiency level on language learners' pragmatic competence by comparing the pragmatic performance of higher level and lower level learners. The studies generally indicated that language learners at lower levels possessed little pragmatic competence, displayed a limited range of politeness features, used wrong hedges, and were generally less indirect and tentative in comparison to learners at higher levels of proficiency (Ellis, 2008). Advanced language learners were shown to be more close to native speakers in the use of pragmatic features and politeness strategies, although they behaved differently from native speakers. They were verbose and used more conventionally indirect utterances and longer requests (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1986; Scarcella, 1979; Takahashi & Beebe, 1987; Trosberg, 1995). Trosberg (1995) compared the performance of lower level and higher level language learners on a discourse role-play task and found that higher-proficiency learners approximated more closely to NS pragmatic norms in both their choice of politeness strategies and the use of mitigating devices. However, little difference was observed between intermediate and advanced language learners (Kasper & Schmidt, 1996).

The fifth group of studies explored teachability of pragmatic rules and politeness strategies. Most of the studies indicated that pragmatic features are teachable; that is, language learners who receive instruction on pragmatic features perform better than those who receive no instruction on (or mere exposure to) these features (Billmyer, 1990; Eslami-Rasekh, Eslami-Rasekh & Fatahi, 2004; Lyster, 1994; Yoshimi, 2001). Billmyer (1990) found that the Japanese ESL learners in the

instructed group outperformed the learners in the uninstructed group in producing more compliments and more appropriate responses to American partners' compliments. Eslami-Rasekh et al. (ibid.) explored the effect of explicit metapragmatic instruction on the speech act comprehension of Iranian advanced EFL students and revealed that pragmatic competence is not impervious to instruction. Takahashi's (2010) meta-analysis of 49 pragmatic interventional studies revealed that intervention has the potential to enhance pragmatic knowledge of language learners. However, there have been some studies indicating that instruction has no significant effect on the learning of pragmatic rules (King & Silver, 1993; LoCastro, 1997). In King and Silver's (1993) study on the effect of instruction on NNS' refusal strategies, results from the questionnaire indicated little effect of instruction on the acquisition of pragmatic features and data from the telephone interviews revealed no effect of instruction.

The last group of studies examined the effects of different teaching methods on the acquisition of pragmatic features and most of the studies indicated that explicit instruction of pragmatic features lead to a higher level of acquisition than implicit teaching (House, 1996; Koike & Pearson, 2005; Rose & Kwai-fun, 2001; Salemi, Rabiee & Ketabi, 2012; Takahashi, 2001). In House's (1996) study, the advanced English learners of German in the explicit group outperformed the learners in the implicit group in the areas of speech acts, discourse strategies and gambits. Salemi et al. (ibid.) explored the effects of explicit/implicit instruction and feedback on the development of Persian EFL learners' pragmatic competence in suggestion structures. The results of the study indicated that explicit instruction and explicit feedback have a much better influence on Persian EFL learners than implicit instruction and feedback. Takahashi's (2010) meta-analysis revealed that explicit intervention seems to be more effective than implicit instruction. Nonetheless, some studies have indicated that explicit instruction is not significantly more effective than implicit teaching (Tateyama, 2001; Vahid Dastjerdi & Rezvani, 2010). Tateyama (2001) compared the implicit and explicit instruction of formulaic expressions for some speech acts and found no difference between the two types of instructions and Vahid Dastjerdi & Rezvani (ibid.) indicated no significant difference between the participants who received explicit instruction and those who received implicit instruction in their production of request strategies in English.

The Present Study

Despite ample research in ILP, few studies have investigated linguistic politeness and the use and acquisition of politeness strategies by language learners. In most ILP studies, politeness has been a subsidiary issue rather than the major topic. The present study attempted to investigate the effect of the level of proficiency, instruction, and different teaching methods on the acquisition of English politeness strategies by Iranian EFL learners. Most Iranian learners of English seem to lack the required pragmatic competence to use appropriate PSs to express social distance, role relationship and consideration and respect to their interlocutors. The findings of this research will shed more light on the effect of instruction in general and different teaching methods on the acquisition of English PSs and will indicate how to present and teach English politeness strategies and when to start the instruction. The results of the study will be of great contribution to language teachers and materials developers, as they can enhance the quality of their teaching and instructional materials by taking the findings of the study into account. To do the investigation, the following research questions were put forth and for each question a null hypothesis was assumed.

1- Is there any significant difference between upper intermediate and intermediate students (freshman and junior English majors) in terms of their knowledge of English politeness strategies?
2- Does pragmatic instruction have any significant effect on the acquisition of English politeness strategies?
3- Does proficiency level have any significant effect on the acquisition of English politeness strategies when learners are provided with specific instruction on PSs?
4- Are there any significant differences in the effects of the different teaching methods (mere exposure, enhanced input, explicit teaching and role play) on the acquisition of English politeness strategies?
5- Are the effects of the teaching methods on the acquisition of English PSs significant?

Method

Participants

The participants of the study were 165 Iranian university students, majoring in English Translation and English Language and Literature at Hazrat Masoomeh

University, Mofid University and Qom University in Qom City. They were mainly in the 18-25 age range. Twenty one participants were male and the remaining 144 were female. Eighty three of the participants were freshmen (second-semester students) and 82 were juniors (sixth-semester students). The participants were from eight intact classes of 20 to 22 students and two classes (a freshman and a junior class) were randomly assigned to each of the control group (mere exposure method) or the experimental groups (enhanced input, explicit teaching and role play methods).

Instrumentation

The instruments of the study included a general proficiency test (TOEFL test, 2002); two discourse completion task (DCT) tests, one as the pretest and the other as the posttest; and the instructional materials for the treatment of English PSs. The DCT tests and treatment materials were based on a politeness framework developed by the authors.

Politeness framework: Prior to the study, a politeness strategy framework (Appendix A) was developed on the basis of previous studies on politeness. The researchers developed the framework by analyzing and synthesizing politeness models and strategies offered by Brown & Levinson (1987); House & Kasper (1981); Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989); Faerch and Kasper (1989); Beebe, Takahashi and Uliss-Weltz (1990) and Rue and Zhang's (2008) glossary of politeness markers, which was based on Blum-Kulka et al. (1989), Byon (2001), Fukushima (1996), Sifianou (1992), Van Mulken (1996), and Zhang (1995). There were some politeness features that were given different names and categorized differently in the above-mentioned politeness models. The authors gave them single representative names and placed them in faxed suitable categories in the framework. For instance, politeness strategies *Give reason* and *Grounder* refer to the same concept and *Tag questions* and *Appealers* are different labels for the same politeness strategy. The off-record politeness strategies in Brown & Levinson's (1987) politeness model were regarded as different forms of *Hint* strategy, since they are different ways of conveying a message or an intention indirectly: Association clues (e.g., *Are you going to market tomorrow?* [Give me a ride there]); Presuppose *(*e.g., *I washed the car again today.* [You must wash it next time]); Tautology (e.g., *Boys will be boys.)*; Be ironic (e.g., John *is a real genius.* [After John has just done twenty stupid things in a row]); Metaphors (e.g., *Harry is a real fish.* [He is slimy]); Be vague (e.g., *Perhaps someone did something*

naughty.); Over-generalize (e.g., *Mature people sometimes help do the dishes.* [help me do the dishes]); Displace hearer (e.g., *Kate has used my PC without asking me [when Hearer has done it]*). And some PSs in Brown & Levinson's model are basically moral rules of behavior rather than linguistic forms to express politeness and do not pertain to linguistic politeness: Give gifts to Hearer (goods, sympathy, cooperation); Notice/ attend to Hearer (e.g., *You must be hungry. How about some lunch?*); and Offer / promise (e.g., *I'll carry the bag for you.* [To an old woman carrying a heavy bag]); these PSs were not included in the framework. The framework is a very comprehensive model of politeness and contains all the politeness strategies or markers in House & Kasper (1981); Blum-Kulka, et al. (1989); Faerch & Kasper (1989); Beebe, et al. (1990) and Rue & Zhang's (2008) glossary and also Brown & Levinson's (1987) PSs that concern linguistic politeness. These politeness models were based on the analysis of enormous amount of natural and elicited data (e.g., House & Kasper's and Blum-Kluka et al.'s models), which rendered these models and accordingly the developed politeness framework valid and reliable.

The framework contains 45 politeness strategies: 24 positive PSs, which show closeness, intimacy, and rapport between speaker and hearer, and 21 negative PSs, which indicate social distance between interlocutors (Richards & Schmidt, 2002, pp. 416-417). The strategies are at lexical, syntactic and discourse levels; the first two levels make up the internal mitigation devices and the third level the external mitigation devices. Native speakers of English choose from among these strategies, considering social factors, such as age, sex, social distance and power equality between the involved interlocutors, and the imposition of the speech act they are performing (request, complaint, etc.).

The Investigated PSs: Although the developed politeness framework contains 45 PSs, due to practicality considerations (e.g., the limited number of instructional sessions and the limited number of PSs to be presented at each session), 30 PSs were chosen to be involved in the study. The chosen PSs were five discourse level strategies (*Apology*, *Query preparatory*, *Cost minimizer*, *Grounder*, and *Humbling oneself*) and all lexical and syntactic level strategies except *Reciprocity* and *Impersonalizing* strategies. Around four PSs were presented at each session. The pretest, posttest and instructional materials were based on (i.e., tested and taught) these 30 PSs. Like most previous studies, the present study focused on social distance, power equality and the imposition of the act as the factors influencing the

choice of politeness strategies. The DCT scenarios and the dialogues in the instructional materials concerned the realization of one of the four speech acts of *request*, *suggestion*, *apology*, and *complaint*; that is, each dialogue or scenario exemplified one of the mentioned speech acts (See appendixes B and C). The dialogues were not manipulated except for the dialogues in the enhanced input booklet, which presented the PSs in bold font.

Proficiency and DCT Tests: The TOEFL test (2002) was used to measure the participants' general proficiency. The listening and writing sections of the test were excluded due to practicality considerations. The employed test, which was administered at a single session, involved Structure and Written Expressions and Reading Comprehension and Vocabulary sections and included 90 multiple choice item. However, as some participants had not properly answered the questions of the last two reading passages due to tiredness, the last twenty items were not scored. Finally, since the test was truncated, a Cronbach's Alpha analysis was carried out on the participants' TOEFL test scores to estimate the reliability of the test. The result of the analysis (Cronbach's Alpha = .84) revealed that the test was still a reliable measure.

The pretest and posttest were two separate researcher-made multiple choice discourse completion task (MDCT) tests, each containing 12 items. The MDCT items were chosen on the basis of the PSs they required to be realized and recognized by the participants. Each item assessed the knowledge of a certain politeness strategy from the intended list. In the stem of each item there was a short description of a hypothetical situation (i.e., a scenario), which required the realization of an appropriate politeness strategy and the four options displayed different PSs, one of which was the most appropriate (Appendix B). Each scenario concerned the performance of one of the four speech acts of request, suggestion, apology and complaint. The DCT items were developed by the researchers or they were adopted from previous studies and adapted for the present research.

The MDCT tests were developed and validated with the assistance of 22 English native speakers in the 20-30 age range. Three NSs were British and the rest were American NSs. They were attending some centers of Islamic Studies in Qom (Jameat Al Mostafa and AlMahdi Center) and had emigrated from their country to Iran within the past six months. They volunteered to contribute to the project by answering the MDCT items. First, two of the NSs read and revised the first version

of the MDCT test, which contained 30 items, improving the wording and naturalness of the scenario descriptions and options or providing appropriate natural utterances when none of the options of an item were appropriate. For instance, the sentence '*Your car was broken down*' was changed to '*Your car broke down*' and the sentence '*Sorry professor but I thought you were going to give me a ride that one night.'* was offered as a replacement for the less natural sentence '*Sorry but could I ask why you didn't give me a lift as you had promised*.' Then the revised version was administered among the remaining 20 NSs. The options which were chosen by at least 80% of the NSs were considered as the correct responses. For 24 items (out of the 30 items) there was an 80% to perfect agreement among the native speakers on the best option. The 24 items were divided into two similar parts in terms of the used PSs and speech acts to make the pretest and posttest. Almost all the intended politeness strategies were employed in the scenarios and options and a balance was kept between positive and negative PSs and among the PSs at the lexical, syntactic, and discourse levels. Eleven scenarios required positive PSs and 13 scenarios required negative PSs and 15 lexical PSs, 16 syntactic PSs and 13 discourse level PSs were required by the scenarios. The options of the MDCT items involved 71 positive PSs and 67 negative PSs; and 43 lexical PSs, 50 syntactic PSs and 45 discourse level PSs. The reliability analysis which was carried out on the pretest and posttest results assured that the MDCT tests were reliable measures (Cronbach's Alpha for the pretest was .68 and for the posttest .71).

Instructional materials: For the development of the instructional materials, some currently in use English course books were perused to find the dialogues which contained the intended PSs in the four mentioned speech acts. Fifty such dialogues were located and to develop lessons of equal length, the same number of dialogues (7 dialogues) was included in each lesson (the last lesson contained eight dialogues). The dialogues were of different size but the size of the lessons was almost the same. Each dialogue was accompanied by its audio file, which was played for the participants as they were reading the dialogues in their booklets. The booklets were prepared in four versions, each of which was used by one of the control or experimental groups. The booklet versions (mere exposure, role play, explicit teaching, and enhanced input versions) contained the same dialogues, but presented the PSs in different ways, that is, in enhanced versus plain texts and through explicit versus implicit instruction (see Appendix C). The mere exposure version included just the dialogues in regular font. The role play version had the

same dialogues in plain typeface but there was a role play exercise at the end of each lesson. The students were asked to read two hypothetical situations (a formal and an informal situation) and write a dialogue for each and role play them in class in pairs. In the explicit teaching version there was some instructional information on English politeness strategies (sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic points) prior to the dialogues, which were in plain print. And the enhanced input version had the same dialogues but the politeness strategies (e.g., *please*, *Sir*, *Would you mind if …*, etc.) were typographically enhanced (i.e., in bold letters). All the booklet versions asked the students to read the dialogues as they were listening to the audio files.

Procedure

First, the TOEFL test was given to the participants to make sure that the groups at each proficiency level (freshman and junior levels) were homogeneous in terms of their general proficiency. That is, the test was used to ensure that the four freshman groups were homogeneous and the four junior groups were homogeneous too. The second aim of the TOEFL test was to examine the overall superiority of the junior groups over the freshman groups. Then, the participants took the pretest (an MDCT test), which was aimed at making sure that the groups at each level did not significantly differ from each other in their pragmatic competence (competence in politeness strategies), probably due to their different previous instructions. The second aim of the pretest was to investigate whether the junior students had greater knowledge of PSs and thus examine the effect of proficiency level on competence in English PSs. A week after the pretest, the participants started to receive the seven-week instructional treatment. The participants of all groups read and listened to the same dialogues and the teacher explained grammatical and vocabulary points, if necessary, after each dialogue. However, the groups received different kinds of instruction on (including mere exposure to) politeness strategies and different versions of the instructional materials. The control group just read and listened to the dialogues in regular font in their booklets. The participants in the enhanced input group listened to and read the dialogues but the target politeness strategies were in bold font in their booklets. The explicit teaching group received some instruction on politeness strategies before reading and listening to the dialogues. The teacher explained to the participants that a speaker, when speaking with an interlocutor, has to consider the social status and role relationship of the participants and the imposition of the speech act and determine the degree of formality and indirectness required for each situation (sociopragmatic points) and accordingly choose an appropriate politeness strategy. Then the teacher referred to

the PSs listed at each lesson and explained which PSs are appropriate for which situations (pragmalinguistic points). The participants were requested to identify those strategies in the dialogues after reading and listening to the same dialogues. The participants in the role play group read and listened to the dialogues and then were requested to read two scenarios (a formal and an informal) and in pairs make a dialogue for each and role play them in class. Finally, a week after the last treatment session the participants took the posttest (an MDCT test identical to the pretest) to reveal the effect of the different teaching methods on the acquisition of English PSs.

Results

The employed statistical measures revealed the homogeneity of the groups at each level in general proficiency and pragmatic competence and the superiority of the junior groups at the start of the study. Subsequently, the measures disclosed the effect of instruction and the different teaching methods on the acquisition of English PSs.

TOEFL Test Results

The one-way ANOVA analysis of the TOEFL test results indicated that the four freshman groups were significantly homogeneous and there were no significant differences among the four junior groups. Therefore, the uniformity of the groups at each proficiency level was confirmed (Table 1). As Table 1 displays, the p value for both freshman and junior groups exceeded .05 (freshman groups, p = .907; junior groups, p = .722), which revealed no significant differences among the groups and assured the homogeneity of groups at each level.

Table 1

ANOVA analyses of the TOEFL test results of the freshman and junior groups

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Freshman groups	Between Groups	14.86	3	4.95	.184	**.907**
	Within group	2122.98	79	26.87		
	Total	2137.85	82			
Junior groups	Between Groups	40.47	3	13.49	.445	**.722**
	Within group	2356.77	78	30.33		
	Total	2406.24	81			

However, the independent samples t-test comparing the TOEFL test scores of the freshman and junior groups indicated a significant difference between the groups at the two proficiency levels (Table 2). The results of the independent samples t-test (t observed = 7.85, df = 163, p = .00) revealed that the freshman and junior groups were significantly different and the descriptive statistics of the two groups proved that the junior groups had a significantly greater general proficiency than the freshman groups.

Table 2
Descriptive statistics of the freshman and junior groups' TOEFL scores

Levels	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Freshman	83	35.68	5.10	.56
Junior	82	42.14	5.45	.60

Although at each proficiency level the performance of the participants were not the same (i.e., the freshman participants got different scores from each other and the scores of the junior participants were different) and even some freshman participants got higher scores than some junior participants, the mean scores of the junior groups were higher than those of the freshman groups and so the junior groups were considered as generally more proficient. Moreover, around 80% of the scores at each level (junior and freshman) were within one standard deviation below or above the mean of their level. Therefore, on the basis of the participants' length of study at university and their TOEFL test scores (means of 35.68 and 42.14), and for the purpose of generalizing the research findings, the freshman groups were considered as intermediate language learners and the junior groups as upper intermediate learners.

Pretest Results

Some extremely low scores were observed in some groups' pretest scores (four scores of 1 and 2, which were more than three standard deviations below the group's mean), which were excluded as outliners before the analysis. Then, some one-way ANOVA analyses were performed on the pretest results of the groups at the two levels (freshman groups: F [3, 79] = 1.41, p = .244; junior groups: F [3, 78] = .601, p = .616), which revealed that there were no significant differences among the groups at each proficiency level in terms of their competence in English PSs

prior to the study (Table 3). This confirmed the homogeneity of the groups in pragmatic competence at the outset of the study.

Table 3
ANOVA analyses of the pretest results of the freshman and junior groups

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Freshman groups	Between Groups	8.33	3	2.77	1.41	**.244**
	Within group	154.84	79	1.96		
	Total	163.18	82			
Junior groups	Between Groups	3.34	3	1.11	.601	**.616**
	Within group	144.75	78	1.85		
	Total	148.09	81			

However, the independent samples t-test analysis comparing the pretest results of the upper intermediate and intermediate groups (t observed = 2.304, df = 163, p = .022) indicated a significant difference between the groups at the two levels and the larger mean of the upper intermediate groups (6.26), compared to the mean of the intermediate groups (5.78), manifested the significant superiority of the upper intermediate groups.

Finally, the correlation analysis of the TOEFL test and MDCT pretest results (r = .39, p = 00) indicated a significantly positive correlation between general English proficiency and pragmatic competence and revealed that more proficient language learners generally possess a greater competence in English politeness strategies. However, the correlation coefficient value was not so high, which implied that other factors, such as length of study at university and exposure to more university courses, may influence students' competence in English PSs too.

Posttest Results

Table 4 displays the descriptive statistics of the posttest results of the groups. As it is evident, there are some differences between the posttest results of the intermediate and upper intermediate groups and among the different groups at each proficiency level, but independent samples t-test and ANOVA measures are required to indicate if these differences are statistically significant.

First, to investigate the effect of pragmatic intervention on the acquisition of English politeness strategies, an independent samples t-test was carried out to compare the control group's and the experimental groups' posttest scores. The results of the analysis (observed t = 5.58, df = 163, p = .00), the p value of which is much smaller than the critical .05, indicated that there was a significant difference between the control group and the experimental groups. And the descriptive statistics of the groups' posttest results (Table 4) manifested the superiority of the experimental groups over the control group and hence the greater effect of pragmatic intervention (compared to mere exposure) on the learning of English PSs.

Table 4
Descriptive statistics of the groups' posttest results

Groups		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Freshman	Enhanced input	20	5.60	1.75	.39	4.77	6.42
	Explicit teaching	20	8.10	1.07	.23	7.59	8.60
	Mere exposure	21	4.61	1.11	.24	4.11	5.12
	Role play	22	7.36	1.70	.36	6.60	8.11
	Total	83	6.42	1.98	.21	5.98	6.85
Junior	Enhanced input	20	6.55	1.57	.35	5.81	7.28
	Explicit teaching	20	7.40	1.35	.30	6.76	8.03
	Mere exposure	20	5.75	1.61	.36	4.99	6.50
	Role play	22	6.54	1.33	.28	5.95	7.13
	Total	82	6.56	1.55	.17	6.21	6.90
Total		165	6.49	1.78	.13	6.21	6.76

Table 5
Descriptive statistics of the control and experimental groups' posttest results

Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Experimental	124	6.92	1.65	.14
Control	41	5.31	1.40	.21

To investigate the effect of proficiency on the acquisition of PSs, an independent samples t-test was performed on the intermediate and upper intermediate groups' gain scores (rather than their posttest scores), as there was a

significant difference between their pretest results. The analysis yielded the following results: observed t = .246, df = 163, p = .806. The p value considerably exceeded .05 and indicated no significant difference between the intermediate and upper intermediate group's gain scores and accordingly no difference in their acquisition of English politeness strategies. The mean score of the intermediate groups (6.49) and the upper intermediate groups (6.56) on the posttest were not so different, although the upper intermediate groups had significantly outperformed the intermediate groups on the pretest. This further confirms the notion that beyond the intermediate level, proficiency does not considerably influence learning of pragmatic features; that is, when intermediate and upper intermediate (and probably advanced) learners are provided with specific instruction on pragmatic features (e.g. politeness strategies), their acquisition of pragmatic features is comparable.

To compare the effects of the four teaching methods (mere exposure, enhanced input, explicit teaching, and role play) on the learning of English PSs, a one-way ANOVA analysis, followed by a post hoc Schceffe test, was carried out on the posttest results of the groups (Table 6). The results of the analysis (F [3,161] = 20.22, p = .00) revealed a significant difference among the groups' performance on the posttest. As the groups were shown to be homogeneous on the pretest, any differences on the posttest are attributable to the different treatments (i.e., instructional methods).

Table 6
ANOVA analysis of the posttest results

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	14.86	3	4.95	.184	**.907**
Within group	2122.98	79	26.87		
Total	2137.85	82			

The results of the Scheffe test pinpointed the significant differences among the groups (Table 7). The explicit teaching group significantly outperformed the enhanced input group (p = .00) and the mere exposure group (p = .00) on the posttest and performed considerably, though not significantly, better than the role play group (their mean difference was .795). The role play group significantly outperformed the mere exposure group (p = .000) and performed substantially (but not significantly) better than the enhanced input group (their mean difference was

.879). Finally, the enhanced input group's performance on the posttest was markedly, though insignificantly, better than that of the mere exposure group (their mean difference was .757).

Table 7

The results of Scheffe test on the four groups' posttest scores

(I) Method	(J) Method	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Enhanced input	Explicit teaching	-1.675*	.334	**.000**
	Role play	-.879	.327	**.069**
	Mere exposure	.757	.332	**.163**
Explicit teaching	Enhanced input	1.675*	.334	**.000**
	Role play	.795	.327	**.121**
	Mere exposure	2.432*	.332	**.000**
Role play	Enhanced input	.879	.327	**.069**
	Explicit teaching	-.795	.327	**.121**
	Mere exposure	1.637*	.325	**.000**
Mere exposure	Enhanced input	-.757	.332	**.163**
	Explicit teaching	-2.432*	.332	**.000**
	Role play	-1.637*	.325	**.000**

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level

Finally, to investigate the significance of the effects of the four teaching methods on the acquisition of English politeness strategies, some paired samples t-test analyses were carried out to compare each group's pretest and posttest results. Table 8 exhibits the results of the paired samples t-test analyses comparing the four instructional groups' pretest and posttest results. The analyses indicated that the effects of the explicit teaching ($p = .00$) and role play ($p = .038$) methods were statistically significant and the effect of enhanced input method ($p = .121$) was fairly positive but not statistically significant. However, mere exposure method had a negative effect on the acquisition of English PSs, as the group's mean score had decreased from pretest to posttest, but the effect was not statistically significant ($p = .059$).

Table 8
Paired samples t-test analyses of the pretest and posttest results

Groups	Observed t	df	Sig. (two-tailed)
Enhanced input	1.58	39	.121
Explicit teaching	5.79	39	.000
Role play	2.14	43	.038
Mere exposure	-1.94	40	.059

Discussion

The independent samples t-test comparing the performance of the freshman and junior students on the pretest revealed that the junior students did significantly better than the freshman students and proved to have a greater knowledge of PSs before receiving any specific instruction on English politeness strategies. However, as there was not a high correlation between the proficiency test and the DCT pretest results (r = .39), some part of this greater competence can be attributed to a higher general proficiency and the other part may be attributable to the greater length of study at university and exposure to more university courses. Thus, the upper intermediate participants outperformed the intermediate participants on the pretest and the first research question was answered by rejecting the first null hypothesis that there is no significant difference between upper intermediate and intermediate students in terms of their competence in English PSs. This result is in line with previous findings which have shown that learners at higher proficiency levels have greater competence in pragmatic features than lower-level students (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1986; Scarcella, 1979; Rose, 2000).

The comparison of the control group's and the experimental groups' posttest scores provided the answer to the second research question. The analysis revealed that the experimental groups significantly outperformed the control group, which indicates that instruction on politeness strategies is more effective than no instruction (mere exposure to PSs) and language learners can benefit from pedagogical intervention to develop their competence in PSs. Also this finding in line with previous research results and further confirms the notion that pragmatic features, including politeness strategies, are teachable (Billmyer, 1990; Eslami-Rasekh, et al. 2004; Lyster, 1994).

However, the comparison of the gain scores of the upper intermediate and intermediate groups confirmed the third null hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the two groups' acquisition of politeness strategies. It revealed that proficiency level has no significant effect on the learning of PSs when learners are provided with specific instruction on English PSs. This suggests that intermediate students can acquire English PSs as efficiently as upper intermediate students, partly as their grammatical competence has sufficiently developed and does not limit the value of instructional input on pragmatic rules and politeness strategies. Thus, the instruction of politeness strategies to EFL learners can be started at intermediate level or in the freshman year of English majors. The instruction of PSs to learners at lower levels may be beneficial but these learners' incompetence in certain complex grammatical features (e.g., conditionals, modals) may limit the value of pragmatic instruction.

The one-way analysis of variance of the groups' posttest scores provided the answer to the fourth research question by rejecting the null hypothesis that there are no significant differences in the effects of the four teaching methods (mere exposure, enhanced input, role play, and explicit teaching) on the acquisition of English PSs. The Scheffe post hoc test pinpointed the differences among the mean scores of the groups. The explicit teaching group had the highest mean score and the role play and enhanced input groups had the second and third highest mean scores respectively. This finding corroborates previous research results which indicated that the more explicit a pragmatic instructional method is, the more effective it will be (Alcón, 2005; Koike & Pearson, 2005; Takahashi, 2001). It appears that since pragmatic incompetence does not impede communication as much as grammatical and lexical incompetence do and learners may assume that pragmatic rules do not differ across languages and cultures, language learners may not notice pragmatic rules as much and need more explicit and direct teaching of pragmatic features before they can learn them. That is, pragmatic features are required to be brought to learners' attention if they are to be learned effectively and the more highlighted and noticeable these features are, the better they are learned. As it was shown in this study, explicit teaching, which presented PSs in the most noticeable way, was the most effective and mere exposure, which presented PSs in the least noticeable way, was the least effective.

Finally, the answer to the fifth research question was provided by paired samples t-test analyses of each group' pretest and posttest results, which supplied

the following findings: the explicit teaching method had a significant and highly positive effect on the learning of English PSs; the effect of role play method was significantly positive; the enhanced input method had a fairly positive but insignificant effect; however, the mere exposure method negatively affected the acquisition of PS, though the effect was not statistically significant.

Pedagogical Implications and Further Research

The findings of the study imply that politeness strategies, like other pragmatic features, are teachable, and their instruction can be started at intermediate level or in freshman year of English majors; learners at this level seem to have developed the grammatical competence that is necessary for the acquisition of English PSs (e.g., modals, interrogative structures, conditionals, etc.). Moreover, in the present study the teacher-researcher observed that the freshman students seemed to be more motivated to learn English PSs than the junior students. It appears that starting the instruction of PSs in freshman year would be more beneficial. Another implication of the study is that when politeness strategies are explicitly presented and directly instructed, they are more effectively learned. English teachers and instructional materials should expose learners to politeness strategies as noticeably as possible. Moreover, the study revealed that the role play method was the second most effective, which suggests that communicative activities like writing and role playing dialogues in class can efficiently help learners to develop their competence in PSs. In short, if learners receive explicit instruction on politeness strategies and practice them in communicative activities like role pays, they will learn a greater portion of instructed PSs.

The results of the study imply that materials developers should include more information on politeness strategies in their course books and supplementary materials, as language learners, even upper intermediate learners, appear to lack sufficient competence in PSs. This is especially the case in EFL contexts, such as Iran, where most language learners have little or no interaction with native speakers and their English textbooks and classrooms do not provide sufficient input on pragmatic features, such as politeness strategies and speech acts (Kasper, 1997; Martinez-Flor & Fukuya, 2005). Also, more pragmatic information on English PSs should be involved in teacher training courses and textbooks to make teachers more cognizant of and willing to teach politeness strategies.

There are some textbooks focusing on language functions and pragmatic features, for example *Communicating in English* (Matreyek, 1990) and *Functions of American English* (Jones, 1983), which are good sources for introducing, instructing and practicing pragmatic rules, especially speech acts and politeness strategies. Language teachers can add their own supplementary materials to these textbooks and use them in their classes. Moreover, teachers can develop their own materials for teaching politeness strategies. There are many sources for collecting materials, including English course books and conversation books, TV programs, movies, and natural and authentic corpora (e.g., British National Corpus).

Finally, the present research, like any other study, has some limitations and does not cover all the related variables; therefore, the generalization of the research findings should be done with caution and further research is required to obviate these limitations and cover other relevant variables. First, the study was limited to tow proficiency levels (intermediate and upper intermediate), so the findings apply to learners at these levels and further research is required to investigate the effect of other proficiency levels (e.g., advanced learners and beginners) on the knowledge and acquisition of PSs. Second, due to practicality issues, the present study investigated the knowledge and learning of 30 politeness strategies, which were mainly at lexical and syntactic levels. Further research can focus on the PSs excluded in the present study, which were mainly discourse level PSs. Third, the present study utilized MDCT tests to elicit information from the participants. Some scholars in the field of pragmatics have questioned the validity of studies using unnatural elicitation tools like tests and questionnaires. Interested researchers can employ natural data collection devises (e.g., natural observation) to investigate the knowledge and learning of PSs. Furthermore, interested researchers can examine the effect of other teaching methods or instructional mediums, such as video excerpts containing the realization of certain PSs, class discussion of PSs in first or second language, or searching for PSs in authentic data, like emails. Last but not least, as there is a paucity of research on the effect of instruction and different teaching methods on the acquisition of English politeness strategies, replication of the present research is required to provide evidence to corroborate or challenge the findings of the present study.

Conclusion

The study revealed that instruction on politeness strategies is significantly more effective than mere exposure to PSs and explicit teaching is more effective than

implicit teaching of PSs. Furthermore, the study revealed that explicit teaching and role play activities have significantly positive effects on the acquisition of politeness strategies. Finally, the study indicated that although upper intermediate EFL learners may have a significantly greater knowledge of PSs, intermediate learners can acquire PSs as efficiently as upper intermediate learners if they are provided with specific instruction on PSs. The research findings suggest that the instruction of PSs is effectual and can be started at intermediate level or in freshman year of English majors. Moreover, the findings suggest that explicit teaching and role play activities are far preferable to more implicit instructional methods, such as mere exposure and input enhancement.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Politeness Strategies Framework

Table 1: Positive Politeness Strategies

Mitigation level	Linguistic levels	Politeness Strategy	Linguistic form	Examples
Internal mitigation	Lexical-phrasal	1-Term of address (in-group markers) 2- cajolers 3- appealers (tag questions) 4-include both speaker & hearer 5- exaggerate	First name, diminutive You know Tag questions Let's , we Extremely , fantastic	Come here, mate / honey / buddy. Please pass the salt, will you? Let's get on with dinner, eh? What a fantastic garden you have!
	Syntactic	1- mood derivable (imperative mood) 2- obligation 3- performative 4- hedged performative 5- want statement 6- need statement 7- reciprocity	Imperative Should, must Say, order I would say I want you You need to	Open the windows! You must leave now. I order you to do it. I would say you should I want you to do the job. You need to go now. If you help me, I'll help you too.
External mitigation	Discourse	1- asking the hearer's opinion 2- begging 3- cost minimizer 4- disarmer 5- grounder 6- humbling oneself 7- promise of reward 8- sweetener 9- give sympathy, cooperation 10- give advice 11- joke 12- offer, promise		…… What do you think? I beg you, please … It won't take much time. I know you're busy but I have to do it today. I'm poor at cars If you help me, I'll give you a candy … you're an expert OK if I tackle those cookies now?

Table 2: Negative Politeness Strategies

Mitigation level	**Linguistic levels**	**Politeness Strategy**		**Words or structure**	**Examples**
Internal mitigation	Lexical-phrasal	1- Term of address (deference) 2- politeness markers 3- downtoners 4- understaters 5- hedges 6- hesitators		Sir, Mr. Last name Please, kindly Just, perhaps, A bit, a little Kind of, somehow R, uh , mmm	Excuse me *sir*, but *Please* open the *Perhaps* you should I'm *a bit* tired It is *kind of* cold
	Syntactic	Conventionally Indirect	7- introgative 8- suggestory formula 9- consultative devices	Could/ will you ….? How about …..? Would you mind if	Could you carry this? How about eating out? Would you mind if I sit here?
		Hedges	10- subjectivvisers 11- pseudoconditionals 12- but-clause		I think you should If you don't mind Thank you but
		Hints	13- mild hints 14- strong hints		It's cold in here. There is a match tomorrow, (take me there)
		15- Tense			I wanted to ask
		16- Impersonalizing			One shouldn't leave his things everywhere (you)
External mitigation	Discourse	17- apology 18- confirmation of request 19- gratitude 20- query preparatory 21- general rule			I am sorry, I … Are you all clear? I'd be grateful if Can I ask something? The audience will please refrain from …

Appendix B: Example DCT items

Pretest examples

1- You go to the library to return a lot of books, and your hands are full. As you stand near the door, a man who looks like a professor walks up to the door of the library. You want to ask him to open the door, what would you say?

a. My hands are full.
b. Please open the door.
c. Would you open the door?
d. Excuse me sir, but would you mind opening the door?

2- Spending an evening at a friend's apartment, you accidentally break a small vase belonging to him/her. What would you say to apologize?
a. I didn't mean it. I'm sorry.
b. Never mind, buddy. I will buy you a better one.
c. I am ashamed. I really have to apologize. Let me pay for it.
d. I am really sorry, it was clumsy of me. I'll buy a vase to replace it.

Posttest examples

3- For the fourth time in a row, a colleague of yours is late for an important meeting. This time you lose an important deal because of him. You decide to speak to him about it, so you say:
a. Why the hell are you always late?
b. You know, your late coming is getting on my nerve.
c. I wonder if you could tell me why you are always late.
d. We need to talk about something. Can you tell me why you are always late?

4- You and your family are at table having you dinner together. You can't reach the salt and want to ask your mother to pass you the salt.
a. Mom, I want you to pass me the salt.
b. Mom, please pass me the salt. Will you?
c. Mom, would it be possible for you to pass me the salt?
d. Mom, this food is bland.

Appendix C: Example Dialogues

1- Mere exposure

Dialogue

Sharon comes late to work again and speaks with her boss Mary.
Sharon: Oh! Good morning, Mary Ann.

Mary: Good afternoon, Sharon. Late again I see.
Sharon: (sigh) yes. I'm sorry. Oh I couldn't find a parking space.
Mary: Maybe you should have left home earlier.
Sharon: Yes, I know. It won't happen again, Mary Ann.
Mary: It'd better not, Sharon. This is the third time this week.

2- Enhanced input

Dialogue

A man and a woman are talking on the telephone.
Man: **June**, I **really want to apologize** to you.
Woman: what for?
Man: I'm **really sorry** about what I said to you the other night.
Woman: Oh, forget it.
Man: I can't. It was a terrible thing to say. **Please forgive** me.
Woman: O.K O.K. Enough is enough. I accept your apologies.

3- Explicit teaching

Metapragmatic instruction: When speaker and hearer have the same power (or when the speaker has more power than hearer), a close relationship (two intimate friends, a brother and sister), and when the degree of imposition on the hearer is low (asking to borrow a pen compared to asking for a car), they normally use positive politeness strategies.

1- Informal words, expressions, and address terms: *Nick names, first names, honey, dear, buddy, come on, gonna, wanna, hop in* (rather than get in the car). (e.g. *Hop in buddy, we're gonna be late*).
2- Imperative sentences. (Peter, open the windows.)
3- Tag questions after imperatives: ok? , will you? (Lend me 50 cents, will you?)
4- Reasons: Providing reasons for their requests, apology, etc. (Give me a dollar, I've left my purse at home.)

Dialogue

A woman is talking on the telephone at home but her husband's watching TV and it is very loud.

Wife: Just a minute, Patty. I can't hear you. Bill's watching football game on TV. Bill.... turn
down the TV a little, will you?
Husband: What?
Wife: Can you turn down the volume on the TV a little?
Husband: Yeah, yeah..... O.K. Is this better?
Wife: A little ... Can you turn it down a little more? I'm on the phone...
Husband: Oh, sure. Sorry.

* Identify the PSs employed in the dialogue.

4- Role play

Dialogue

Stan Walter and Ann Green are outside a movie theater and have just noticed their tickets were for Saturday not Sunday.
Ann: Take it easy Stan, there's nothing we could do now.
Stan: I can't help it. It's all because of me.
Ann: Come on, we all make mistakes. Don't blame yourself.
Stan: If I had written it down, I wouldn't have forgotten the date.
Ann: It's not your fault. I didn't remember either.
Stan: Let's not make it a big thing. Just forget it.
Ann: Tell you what? How about eating out tonight?
Stan: Ok with me. I hear there's a good pizza area on Maple Street.

Role play Exercise: With a partner, write and role play a dialogue for the following situation.
You and your brother, who is around your age, are going to buy something for your mother on Mother's Day. You think that it is better to buy jewelry for her.