



The effect of using explicit web-based on learning speech act of thanking of Iranian EFL upper-intermediate level learners

Batoul Sabzalipour and Reza Biria

Department of English Language, Islamic Azad University: Khorasgan Branch, Iran.

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ABSTRACT

The present study set out to explore the effect of an instructional strategies; i.e. explicit web based teaching on developing Iranian upper-intermediate level learners' pragmatic knowledge of the speech act of thanking. To fulfill this objective, 60 freshmen undergraduate students of Tonekabon Islamic Azad university were selected based on an OPT test. Participants in the study were randomly divided into two groups of explicit and implicit instruction. A newly developed DCT was administered to test both groups' pragmatic knowledge of speech act of thanking. the reliability was obtained through the K-R21 reliability formula. Then the treatment started. The explicit group practice learning speech act of thanking through www.iles.umn.edu/introspeechacts website, and the implicit group start learning it through videos and other authentic materials. Another researcher made DCT was given to explore any probable improvements on their pragmatic knowledge. T-test was used to see whether there was a significant difference between two groups regarding these two strategies. The results proved superiority of the explicit web-based teaching over the implicit teaching .

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Introduction

When communicative competence emerged in language teaching, the area of pragmatics captured scholars' imagination and become a potential field of research. Scholars such as Cohen, Bardovi-Harlig, Jianda, and Roever have great influential works in the area of pragmatics. As Bardovi-Harlig & Mahan-Taylor (2003) believe, pragmatic rules are often subconscious and even native speakers are for the most parts unaware of them until they are broken. It is interesting to be mentioned that even a learner of high grammatical proficiency will not necessarily show pragmatic development. Unfortunately, "the consequences of pragmatic differences, unlike the case of grammatical errors, are often interpreted on a social or personal level rather than as a result of the language learning process" (Bardovi-Harlig & Taylor, 2003, p. 38); this claim provides a strong evidence for the inclusion of pragmatic instruction in language learning classes. A large number of research studies have been conducted on the effect of pragmatics teaching such as Bardovi-Harlig & Mahan-Taylor (2003), Alcon (2005), Rose (2005), and Alcon & Martinez (2008). According to Bardovi-Harlig & Taylor (2003), there is a desperate need for teaching of pragmatic rules, so called "secret rules of English". Also Rose (2005) states that without exception learners receiving instruction in pragmatics outperform those who do not. In the area of language testing, there were also developments as of the language teaching. Farhady (1980) focused on functional testing which is in harmony with pragmatic aspects of language. In the same vein, Hudson, Detmer, and Brown (1995), Roever (2005), and Jianda (2006) also attempted to develop tests of pragmatics. Despite a large body of studies in the area of pragmatics, there exists a void regarding Persian learners of English. In Iran, as a typical foreign language context, students have little or no contact with English language and culture outside the classroom. As much as

communication is concerned as a fundamental reason for learning a language, English learners are required to use English speech acts in order to fulfill some basic needs such as thanking a colleague or client for doing a favor, Thanking for a movie they have watched, expressing gratitude to their friends for answering their question. What has been mostly observed in most Iranian English classrooms is the shyness of students, which leaves the students with problems in acquiring and applying these speech acts. Considering all these deficiencies, the present study is designed to investigate the effectiveness of explicit web-based by comparing it with implicit classroom-based instruction of English speech acts of thanking on Iranian EFL upper-intermediate level learners' pragmatic competence.

Review of the related literature

Web-Based Instruction

The World Wide Web can be used for the purpose of instruction and instructional support. Web-based instruction offers learners access to instructional resources that are far the reach of the traditional classroom. It also lead to learning experiences that are open, flexible, and distributed, providing opportunities for engaging, interactive, and efficient instruction (Kahn, 2001). Terms such as "flexible navigation," "richer context," "learner centered," and "social context of learning," are used to describe Web-based instruction. Moreover, cognitive-based theories of learning have extended the design and delivery of Web-based instruction, applying the technical nomenclature to instructional practices (Bonk and Dennen, 1999). Indeed, Dills and Romiszowski (1997) have identified more than 40 instructional paradigms seeking to advance and improve the online learning experience beyond the traditional classroom. Online instruction is considered to be any educational or training program distributed over the Internet or an intranet and conveyed through a browser, such as Internet Explorer TM or Netscape Navigator referred to as Web-based

Tele:

E-mail addresses: b.sabzalipor@yahoo.com

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instruction. The use of browsers and the Internet is a relatively new combination in instructional technology. While the effectiveness of traditional CBI has been reviewed thoroughly (Kulik, 1994; Lou, Abrami, and d'Apollonia, 2001), the effectiveness of online instruction has received little analysis.

Grammatical Competence vs. Pragmatic Competence

Bachman (1990) presented two sub-components of language competence, (revised by Bachman and Palmer, 1996), and they subdivide language competence into organizational and pragmatic competence. Neizgoda and Rover (2001, P. 64) stated that "Organizational competence concerns a speaker's control of the formal aspects of language and is further subdivided in grammatical competence and textual competence." These two sub-categories also parallel Canale and Swain's grammatical (vocabulary, syntax, phonology/graphology) and discourse competence (cohesion, rhetorical organization). Bachman says pragmatic competence deals with the relationship between utterances and the acts performed through these utterances, as well as with the features of the context that promote suitable language use (Bachman, 1990). Some other studies (Boxer & Pickering, 1995; Bouton, 1996; Kasper 1997, Bardovi-Harlig, 2001; as cited in Eslami-Rasekh, 2005) have shown that learners of high grammatical proficiency will not necessarily have comparable pragmatic competence. Even the ones who are grammatically advanced learners may use language inappropriately and show differences from target-language pragmatic norms. Based on what Bardovi-Harlig and Taylor state (2003), this imbalance between grammatical and pragmatic development may improve by early attention to pragmatics instruction. They support the early integration of pragmatics into English language curriculum. In addition, regarding the fact that there is no single best approach for teaching pragmatics, they presume activities should share two important pedagogical practices regardless of the method: 1. Authentic language samples and 2. Input precedes interpretation or production by learners.

Speech Acts

Speech act theory is one of the major concepts in pragmatics and was initiated by Austin and improved by Searle (1969). Searle classified speech acts into five distinct categories, namely, representatives, directives, commissives, declarations and expressive. Levinson (1983) gives a definition on each of these types as follows:

1. Representatives: These speech acts commit the speaker to the truth of the expressed proposition, e.g. asserting and concluding.
2. Directives: These are the speech acts which get the listener to do something, e.g. requesting and questioning.
3. Commissives: these speech acts commit the speaker to some future course of action, e.g. promising and threatening.
4. Expressive: these speech acts express a psychological state, such as thanking, apologizing, and welcoming.
5. Declarations: these are speech acts which make immediate changes in the state of affairs and tend to rely on elaborate extralinguistic institutions, such as declaring war or marriage.

Searle also classifies speech acts into two important categories of direct and indirect speech acts. 'Close the door' and 'Could you close the door' are examples of direct and indirect speech acts respectively. As defined by Yule, speech acts are actions performed via utterances. In English, they are commonly given more specific labels, such as apology, complaint, compliment, invitation, promise, or request. These terms for different kinds of speech acts apply to the speaker's communicative intention in producing an utterance. The speaker

normally expects that his or her communicative intention will be recognized by the hearer (Yule, 2000).

Thanking

Gratitude and thanking is defined as "An illocutionary act performed by a speaker which is based on a past act performed by the hearer. This past act benefits the speaker and the speaker believes it to have benefited him or her. The speaker feels grateful and appreciative, and makes a statement which contains an expression of gratitude" (Eisenstein & Bodman, 1986, P. 167). This kind of speech act has been classified as an aspect of polite language. Following Brown and Levinson's politeness model (1987), thanking is face-damaging to the self and it involves acknowledging one's state of indebtedness to the other.

Methodology

Participants

Participants in this study included 60 freshmen undergraduate students of Tonekabon Islamic Azad University in Iran. Their language proficiency was high enough for the purpose of this study. There was no sex limitation and the participants were both male and female.

Instrumentation

Two types of instruments were employed in this study: a DCT and a proficiency test. The 20-item DCT which entails 20 situations of gratitude speech act was developed by the researchers in four steps, namely exemplar generation, situation pilot study, and pilot testing the MDCT. As for the proficiency test, OPT test was employed. The tests have been developed by the "Languages and Linguistic Faculty" members and therefore, enjoy the construct validity crucial to any developed test via the expert judgments. Worth mentioning is that, the reliability was obtained through the K-R21 reliability formula.

In addition to the assessment devices, videos containing situations concerning thanking speech act, interviews and meetings with celebrities were employed for the instruction in both explicit and implicit groups. Regarding the explicit group, additional metapragmatic materials were also used.

Procedure

Regarding development of the DCT on the speech acts of thanking, this study followed similar previous studies on two different speech acts of apology and request in Chinese (Jianda, 2007) and also in Persian (Birjandi & Rezaei, 2010, Salehi, 2011). Exemplar generation was used. EFL learners were asked to write, in either English or Persian, a maximum of five situations in which they were required to use thanking expressions. After analyzing all the papers, 50 thanking situations were elicited. The researchers reviewed the 50 selected situations in the previous step and selected a total of 20 most likely situations, regarding their frequency in participants' responses. The items were piloted through questionnaire. Two DCTs were prepared, one for pre-test and one as the post-test of the study. First an OPT test was administered and 60 students were chosen as the participants of this study. They were randomly divided into two homogenous groups, one considered as the experimental group which enjoyed the explicit web-based instruction of thanking and the other regarded as the control group and was taught implicitly. Then the Pre-test was administered to test their primary amount of knowledge in speech act of thanking. Afterward, the researchers embarked on the treatment. The instruction for both groups took eight sessions of about 15 minutes. Videos selected from famous talk shows in America were employed for the instruction. Those parts including speech acts of thanking were cut and played in

both classes and the researchers noticed any speech acts used in the dialogues to students. The only difference between the two groups was that there was no direct instruction on the type and usage of the speech act in the control group and they just learn speech act of thanking implicitly as they were used in the real contexts. The experimental group practice using speech act of thanking explicitly by using www.iles.umn.edu/introspeechacts website Furthermore, in the first two sessions of instruction in the experimental group, a power point and various videos containing meta-pragmatics of thanking were shown and explicated. After the eight-session instruction, students were given the newly developed pragmatic test as a post-test in order to perceive whether there have been any improvements on their pragmatic knowledge

Results and Discussions

This section is oriented towards the descriptively and inferentially statistical analysis of the quantitative data and findings gathered through two major instruments of the present research study (that is, the pretest and posttest in the two independent groups of the study). The analysis was performed in the light of two different but related branches of statistics: descriptive and inferential statistics. Each will be presented and discussed below.

Descriptive Statistics

The following two SPSS outputs represent the normal distribution of the scores gained on the pretest and posttest for the research groups.

Table 1. Descriptive analysis of the pre-test and post-test scores control group

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
control1	13.8333	30	2.37927	.43439
control2	13.8333	30	2.36473	.43174

Table1. shows the descriptive analysis of pre-test scores of control group . In the output presented above, there are 30 participants. The mean, standard deviation and SEM of both groups are shown. As the table says, there is no significant difference between the pre- test scores of both groups.

Table 2. Descriptive analysis of the pre- test and post- test scores of experimental group

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1 posexp	16.4483	29	2.32358	.43148
preexp	14.5862	29	2.13001	.39553

Table 2 Presents the descriptive analysis of pre- test scores of experimental group and control group. There are 30 participants. The mean, standard deviation and SEM of both groups are shown. Both groups seem to have a mean difference to each other. This means that the two groups are at different level of ability after treatment.

Inferential Statistics

Having calculated the descriptive statistics based on the participants' scores on the pretest and posttest, the researcher conducted some other data analysis statistical methods including the Paired Samples T-Test and the Independent Sample T-Test to answer the research questions. The results of the each method will be presented and described below and discussed in the subsequent part

Table 3. Paired Samples Correlations between pre- test and post-test scores of control group

	N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1 control1 & control2	30	.976	.000

This table is the first output of the T-Test. The closer the significance value to zero, the more easily the H0 can be rejected. The Sig. value (.000.) is below 0.05 (the level of error the researcher set for the present study, so the H0 (that is, there is a significant correlation between the two variables).

Table 5. Paired Samples Test of pre-test and post-test scores of control group

	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 control1 - control2	.00000	.52523	.09589	-.19612	.19612	.000	29	1.000

Table5. represents the results of the T-Test for the CON group of the study. As it is clear, it shows the comparison made between the pretest and the posttest mean scores for the CON. The purpose of this comparison is to find out whether the participants in the CON made changes in their after GO training, and if so, how much change they underwent after the treatment. To the right of the Paired Differences, the T (.000), degrees of freedom (29), and significance (.01) are represented. It shows that there is on significant difference from pre- test to post-test.

Table 3. Paired Samples Correlations between pre- test and post-test scores of experimental group

	N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1 posexp & preexp	29	.515	.004

This table is the second output of the T-Test for correlation. The closer the significance value to zero, the more easily the H0 can be rejected. The Sig. value (.004.) is below 0.05 (the level of error the researcher set for the present study, so there not is a significant correlation between the two variables).

Table 5. Paired Samples Test of pre-test and post-test scores of experimental group

	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 posexp - preexp	1.86207	2.19942	.40842	1.02546	2.69868	4.559	28	.000

Table 5 represents the results of the T-Test for the experimental group of the study. As it is clear, it shows the comparison made between the pretest and the posttest mean scores. The purpose of this comparison is to find out whether the participants in the experimental group made changes in their after GO training, and if so, how much change they underwent after the treatment. To the right of the Paired Differences, the T (4.55), degrees of freedom (29), and significance (.000) are represented. The observed -t is more than the critical -t. So there is a significant difference between the means from pre- test to post-test.

Table 8. Independent Samples Test analysis of the post-test scores of experimental and control group of the study

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
posexp Equal variances assumed	.143	.706	4.004	58	.000	2.46667	.61601	1.23360	3.69974

As seen in the table above, T value is 4. There exists 58 degrees of freedom. The Sig. value in the t-value for equality of means equals (.00). The observed T is greater than the critical T that is 2. Therefore, the null hypothesis of the means of the two groups are not significantly different is rejected and it can safely be stated that there is a significant difference between the experimental and control groups in terms of their performance on the posttest on using explicit web-based instruction. Students who took the web-based treatment had significantly higher performance than those who took no treatment or explicit treatment.

The present study compared the effect of Web-based of Instruction on Learning of speech act of thinking with strategy training of using web for improving this pragmatic. The results of the study showed that the group who received web-based instruction did much more better than the group received implicit training. This reveals that experimental group learned and remembered more compliments than implicitly trained groups. The success of the experimental group in terms of thanking achievement might be explained with the following factors. First, It lead to learning experiences that are open, flexible, and distributed, providing opportunities for engaging, interactive, and efficient instruction (Kahn, 2001). Learners also had control over their learning process and learned at their own pace during the implementations. This individualized learning might have promoted learners' motivation (Lee, 2000; McGreal, 1998). Thus, this motivation might have facilitated students' learning. Second, there is a one to one interaction between a student and the computer that might have facilitated students' achievement. Web-based instruction made the student's actively in the learning process. The computer program provided an instant feedback and opportunity to correct their mistakes. Students' activities and answers were only seen by them. Hence, students might have had lots of activities without fear of making mistakes. This situation may have contributed to having low affective-filter environment that facilitates language learning (Krashen, 1982). The other possible reason may be the lively environment and the animation that the program provided the students with. The findings of the study point to the facilitating effect of web-based instruction on speech act learning. This result is in line with the findings of previous researches that indicate facilitating effect of web-based instruction on learning the speech act of compliment.

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