The Effect of Collaboration Conditions on Learning Requesting Functions

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Abstract

Second language learners' poor knowledge of pragmatics has recently received attention among researchers in language learning classrooms. The current study examined the effect of collaboration conditions on requesting functions. To this purpose, sixty Iranian students were divided into three groups. The proficiency test and a dialogue construction task as a pretest were administrated. Based on the result of the proficiency test, participants were divided to three groups: two experimental groups(homogenous collaborative group, heterogeneous collaborative group) and a control group. The experimental groups received explicit metapragmatic information on request followed by a dialogue construction task in pairs during 6 sessions of treatment. The control group received the same information but completed the task individually. Results of One-way ANOVA of the post-test scores revealed that both experimental groups outperformed the control group in producing request making.

Keywords: requesting functions, collaboration conditionsIntroduction

1.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).

An important part of educational systems is learning a foreign language. One of the problems of language learners is that they cannot use their knowledge of language in real situations. This problem is even worse in EFL setting, where learners have little chance of using language outside the classroom. One possible solutions is using communicative methods in teaching.

Schmidt's (2001) noticing hypothesis and explicit vs. implicit teaching motivated by the hypothesis recently dominates the field of instructed pragmatics. The noticing hypothesis claims that the attention of

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learners to linguistic forms, functions and contextual factors are necessary for pragmatic input to become intake.

Although implicit and explicit teaching have predominated in recent studies, new framework for pragmatic instruction have been added to this field. The concept that is relevant to this study is collaboration conditions. Collaborative dialogue is for the construction of linguistic knowledge, which is often operationalized as language-related episodes (Swain and Lapkin 1998; Swain 2006). Collaborative dialogue is a form of output, but it is an output used for a cognitive function because language mediates learners' process of working together to solve linguistic problems and jointly construct knowledge (Swain and Lapkin 1998). According to Swain and Lapkin (1998), students talk about the language the language they are producing, question their language use, or correct each other. vite, permit, and advise.

 In Searle"s taxonomy (1969), command and order are categorized under request. Request can be defined as attempts by the speakers to get the hearer to do something" or as an illocutionary act whereby a speaker (requester) conveys to a hearer (requestee) that he/she wants the requestee to perform an act, which is for the benefit of the speaker" (Searle 1976). 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".

Although implicit and explicit teaching have predominated in recent studies, new framework for pragmatic instruction have been added to this field. The concept that is relevant to this study is collaboration conditions in the construction of request functions.

The role of instruction and the teachability of specific pragmatic aspects (e.g. comprehension of implicature, complimenting, apologising, and requests) have been investigated by scholars like Billmyer (1990), Bouton (1994), Olshtain and Cohen (1993) and Tateyama (2001). Findings from these studies have highlighted the positive effect of instruction on the learners' use of particular pragmatic items. Many studies have investigated the effect of collaboration conditions on learning pragmatics. In Leeser's (2004) study, twenty one pairs of adult L2 Spanish learners from a content-based course completed collaborative task to see how focus on form can be both effective and appropriate. This article grouping learners on the basis of proficiency (high–high, high–low, or low–low) for investigating the amount, type (lexical or grammatical) and outcome (correct, unresolved, or incorrect) of language related episodes produced during a passage reconstruction task. The findings revealed that the proficiency of the dyad members affected how much the dyads focused on form, the types of forms they focused on as well as how successful they were at resolving the language problems when they encountered problems (Leeser, 2004).

There are some studies about the role of collaboration conditions on learning vocabulary and grammar. But to the best of my knowledge, previous studies have failed to explore the role of collaboration conditions on

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request functions. This study intends to shed some light on the influence of collaborative conditions when learners are heterogeneous or homogenous in learning request making.

The current study seeks to answer the following question:

1. Does collaborative dialogue has any effect on request making?

2.Method

The experimental sequence of the study was carried out over a period of around ten sessions. For the groups to be comparable and for an experiment like this to be meaningful and for being sure that the learners in the experimental and control groups enjoyed the same level of knowledge a proficiency test was administrated in session one. Then based on the results of the proficiency test, participants divided into three groups: two experimental groups (homogenous collaborative group, heterogeneous collaborative group) and a control group. In session two a pre-test was given to all three groups which was a ten item Discourse Completion Task (DCT) designed to elicit the request speech act in different situations and assess the learners' knowledge of these prior to any type of treatment.

Task treatment sessions started with a dialogue. They listened to a short conversation including the requests in focus. Then, they received a scripted version of the conversations in bold. After receiving the direct metapragmatic information, the two treatment groups proceeding to the dialogue construction task, during which learners will be asked to create a request based on given scenarios. 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. The collaborative groups created a request in pairs. The control group did request making individually. After the treatment, immediate posttests with the same procedure and order of test presentations as the pretests were administered to the participating learners.

Results and Discussion

The current study was an attempt to demonstrate whether collaboration conditions had any impact on Iranian EFL learner's production of request functions. In brief, it was denoted that treatment had a positive impact on the production of request functions. Having gained some information about the differences in the performance of the members of the three groups on the post-test to determine whether or not the observed differences were significant at the critical value (Sig.) of $p < 0.05$. Therefore, a one-way between-groups ANOVA was conducted. Table 1 provides the results of the ANOVA

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Table 1

The Results of One–way ANOVA for the Post-test

	SS	Df	MS	F	Sig
Between groups	2036.742	2	1018.371	53.638	.000
Within groups	512.625	27	18.986		
Total 2549.367		24			

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On a closer inspection of Table 1, one can conclude that the three groups differed significantly with respect to their mean scores on the post-test because the significant value is observed to be 0.000, which is less than the critical value (0.05). Although the information presented in Table 7 is very revealing, it does not show where the observed differences lie. The researchers, therefore, had to run a Scheffe Post-hoc test. This post-hoc test indicates where the differences among the three groups occur.

The fact that those who were in the homogenous group did significantly better on the posttest suggests that collaboration conditions in homogenous group were effective in leading learners to produce linguistically accurate and pragmatically appropriate requests. Findings in this study lend further support to those studies on the positive effects of explicit instruction which employed explanation and discussion of rules as their approach to provide learners with metapragmatic information (Kubota, 1995; LoCastro, 1997; Trosborg, 2003; Yoshimi, 2001; Wishnoff, 2000). Another findings contribute to the task-based literature by demonstrating the benefits of collaborative tasks in improving pragmatics knowledge. Takimoto (2012) found that collaborative dialogue in a form of metapragmatic discussion gave learners access to information about pragmatic features, which eventually led to better control of pragmatic knowledge than the condition where learners completed the task alone, with or without verbalization of the target features.

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