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Research Paper

Feasibility of Using a Task-Oriented Focus on Form Instructional Model for the Study of Request Speech Act

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Abstract

Instructed Interlanguage Pragmatics (IILP) is a subset of Interlanguage Pragmatics (ILP) that addresses how classroom language learners acquire pragmatic features in a second language (L2). For this study, 90 university students participated in an experimental study that incorporated a pretest, posttest, and delayed posttest observation to identify the effect of instruction on the acquisition of request speech act. For this purpose, a random sampling was used for the selection and assignment of participants into the experimental (EG) and comparison groups (CG). The two EGs received two types of form-focused instruction (FFI), namely task-oriented focus on form and focus on forms to help identify whether the type of instruction was a significant factor in the acquisition of the selected L2 pragmatic feature. The results of the study indicated an overall increase in the ability of the learners in the instructed group (IG) to produce request speech act. The study also indicated that the effect of instruction was not transient as the observed

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improvement was evident in the delayed posttest observation. The effect of instruction was also evident in the type of strategies that IGs used to make request proper after receiving the experimental treatments.

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1. Introduction

The introduction of pragmatics into the literature of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) was an outcome of the language teachers' interest in the concept of communicative competence. Henceforward, the proponents of this move have tried to rationalize the necessity of integrating pragmatics into the syllabus of English Language Teaching (ELT) programs. Bardovi-Harlig (2001) is among the supporters of this position arguing that second language (L2) learners who do not receive instruction in pragmatics differ significantly from native speakers (NSs) in their L2 pragmatic knowledge. Kasper and Rose (2002) further supported this by maintaining that pragmatic functions are often not salient to learners and not likely to be noticed despite the learners' prolonged exposures to these features. The fact that mere exposure is not sufficient for complete L2 pragmatic development is also endorsed by Jeon and Kaya (2006), who maintained that in foreign language (FL) settings, L2 pragmatics instruction is a crucial response to the scarce opportunities for exposing L2 learners to the target language pragmatic norms.

Considering the fact that the teaching of pragmatics is a subset of instructed SLA, this area does not seem to figure prominently in most surveys of SLA research. One possible explanation for the reluctance of researchers to explore into the depths of the SLA literature for the study of pragmatics may lie in the fact that some leading figures of pragmatics research have cast doubt on the validity of extending SLA theories to the study of pragmatics. This point is well represented in the words of Kasper

and Rose (2002) who argued that it is not always obvious how principles that are proposed for the teaching of language components might translate fully into the teaching of pragmatics. Such words of caution seem to have had impacts on the domain of instructed interlanguage pragmatics (IILP) as there are few attempts in this field that employ various SLA theories in their studies.

One of the major focuses of research in the field of IILP was to identify whether instruction was effective in the acquisition of different pragmatic features. This line of research provided support in favor of the effectiveness of teaching pragmatic features (Eslami-Rasekh, Mirzaei, & Dini, 2015; Taguchi, 2015; Yousefi & Nassaji, 2019). Other researchers tried to identify the types of instruction that were most effective in fostering pragmatic development in L2 learning. As Taguchi and Rover (2017) mentioned, the majority of the studies that address the relative effectiveness of different instructional treatments on the learners' pragmatic development have mainly focused on the dichotomy of implicit and explicit options for instruction. The findings of such studies usually report better results for the explicit instruction (Hernandez & Boero, 2018; Rajabi, Azizifar & Gowhary, 2015; Sadeqi & Ghaemi, 2016; Tajeddin & Hosseinpour, 2014). However, this finding should be interpreted with a degree of skepticism. One reason for this cynicism is that some of the studies that report better results for the explicit instructional treatment often fail to define clearly what counts as implicit instruction in these studies (Jeon & Kaya, 2006).

The call for further clarity in defining the instructional treatments drives the current study and the researchers to try to investigate the validity of this argument and test out whether providing more clear treatment conditions for the explicit and implicit dichotomy of instruction as well as employing well-established theoretical foundation and/or methodological sophistication for

defining what counts as implicit/explicit instruction would provide new perspectives to the study of pragmatics.

2. Review of the Related Literature

IILP is a branch of SLA research that focuses on how nonnative speakers (NNS) understand and carry out linguistic action in a target language and how they acquire L2 pragmatic knowledge. Considering the fact that IILP is a direct descendent of cross-cultural pragmatics, it is easy to find the effects of cross-cultural pragmatics theories and research methodology in the early studies of IILP (Woodfield, 2008). However, SLA has also attracted the attention of the IILP researchers and as Taguchi (2019) highlighted, the noticing hypothesis, the output hypothesis, the interaction hypothesis and the input enhancement hypothesis had been rated as the dominant SLA theories utilized in the IILP research studies.

There are more recent attempts that have tried other SLA theories for the study of pragmatics. For instance, Kim and Taguchi (2015) employed cognition hypothesis to identify the effect of task-complexity on the acquisition of pragmatic features. Li (2012) examined the effect of skill acquisition theory on the pragmatic development of Chinese learners. Takimoto's studies (2008, 2009, 2014) focused on identifying the effect of form-focused instruction based on an adapted version of input-based instruction for the teaching of request speech act to Japanese learners of English. Van Compernelle (2014) provided a framework based on sociocultural theory for the study of pragmatics.

Even though these new attempts have contributed positively to the gradual expansion of intervention studies that adopt different theoretical frameworks for the study of pragmatics, there is still room for new efforts to explore other well-founded SLA theories that are applicable to the field. In line with this objective, the researchers of this study examined different SLA

theories to find a robust framework that have been less explored by other ILLP researchers. In this attempt, Norris and Ortega's (2000) meta-analysis was suggestive in that it provided some preliminary insights about the theories that are applicable to the domain of instructed SLA research. This report illustrated a large effect size in favor of focus on form instruction and provided the following pattern for the effectiveness of different instructional methods: explicit focus on form > explicit focus on forms > implicit focus on form > implicit focus on forms. Norris and Ortega's meta-analysis is important for this study for two reasons: first, it is one of the pioneer studies that highlighted focus on form(s) instruction as an effective technique for the teaching of L2 aspects. It also set a precedence for the inclusion of focus on form(s) in the literature of explicit-implicit instructional techniques.

According to Long (2000) focus on forms is considered a traditional approach to language teaching. In this approach, the teacher or textbook writer divides the L2 task into segments of various kinds and presents these segments to the learners in a piecemeal fashion. Eventually, learners synthesize these segments for future use in acts of communication. Focus on forms is mainly realized through synthetic classroom practices like grammar explanation, repetition, memorization, transformation exercise, error correction, and display question.

Focus on form brings together forms and meaning by creating a situation that "overtly draws students' attention to linguistic elements as they arise incidentally in lessons whose overriding focus is on meaning or communication" (Long, 1991, p. 46). This definition has widely been used as the most conservative view of focus on form instruction. However, a closer look at the definition reveals that Long leaves no room for the teaching of preselected linguistic items in his conceptualization of focus on form and, as Ellis, Basturkmen, and Loewen (2001) noted, this definition cannot be

studied experimentally, as such studies necessarily require the pre-selection of a linguistic feature for investigation. A few years later, Long slightly reoriented his earlier conception of focus on form and redefined it as "an occasional shift of attention to linguistic code features- by the teacher and/or one or more students- triggered by perceived problems with comprehension or production" (Long & Robinson, 1998, p. 23). This reorientation in defining the concept of focus on form instruction motivated SLA researchers to use the term in a broader sense so that it would ultimately allow the incorporation of preselected linguistic items into the scope of focus on form instruction.

Long (2015) further extended the concept of focus on form by embedding some elements of Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) to the framework to provide more room for the integration of planned instruction into the focus on form lessons. It is important to note that Long's updated version of focus on form instruction incorporates a number of key constructs that are commonly employed in other SLA theories. For instance, he gives a key role to consciousness raising in his model that has roots in the Noticing Hypothesis. He also employs the key components of output and interaction hypotheses in the sense that the feedback that learners receive guides them to focus on form and the resulting interactional modifications would lead them to produce modified output within the intended language learning activities. The inclusion of the tenets of the TBLT, which is built on Ellis' (2003) notion that focusing on real-life tasks increases the likelihood that attention to features will be synchronized with the learners' internal syllabus, developmental stage, and processing ability.

In light of the above discussion, the present study gains significance as it aims to investigate the feasibility of using the focus on forms and task-oriented focus on form frameworks for the study of pragmatics. An area

which has not been explored widely in Iranian EFL contexts (Azizpour & Alavinia, 2021; Rafieyan, 2016). The study also targets the domain of pragmatics with a primary focus on the request speech act that is investigated less widely using robust SLA theories (Shakki, Naeini, Mazandarani, & Derakhshan, 2020). Although some general aspects of request strategies that Iranian EFL learners employ have previously been investigated by other researchers (Eslami-Rasekh, 1992), there are very few attempts that focus on measuring the impact of instruction on the request strategies that these learners employ in experimental studies. This is an area where the current study contributes the most to the current literature on IILP.

The key constructs of the instructional treatment models for this study are adapted from Norris and Ortega (2000) and Long (2015), which are realized in the following order. Task-oriented focus on form instruction (i.e., implicit instruction) is operationally defined as a teaching technique that tacitly integrates form, function and meaning through: a) meaningful tasks that encourage learners to use the target language for performing clearly outlined outcomes that resemble real-life situations; b) tasks that stimulate learner engagement with meaning prior to form/function analysis; b) unobtrusive instructional techniques that briefly focus on the intended form/function; c) consciousness-raising activities that help learners to notice the intended form/function; d) meaning-focused activities that implicitly push the learners to produce the intended form/function; and e) implicit feedback when learners fail to grasp the intended form/function. Focus on forms instruction (i.e., explicit instruction) is operationally defined based on the following characteristics: a) when none of the aforementioned strategies is utilized; b) when metalinguistic talk and rule explanation are used to direct learners' attention toward the form/function in focus; c) when learners consciously practice the intended forms/function; d) when correction of errors of forms,

function, and meanings are provided explicitly. Based on these operational definitions, this study tries to examine the effect(s) of two types of instruction, namely task-oriented focus on form (implicit) and focus on forms (explicit) on Iranian EFL learners' ability to recognize and produce request speech act. The following research questions are thus addressed in this study:

1. Does instruction affect Iranian EFL learners' ability to recognize and produce request speech act and does that effect last beyond the posttest observation?
2. Does instruction bring about changes in the type of strategies that Iranian EFL learners use to produce request speech act?

3. Method

3.1. Participants and Treatment Procedure

A total of 90 university students participated in this study. The participants were randomly selected from the students of the undergraduate degree program in English Language and Literature at Azad University, Karaj Branch. After the selection process, the participants were randomly assigned into three research groups ($n=30$ per group) of experimental explicit group (EEG), experimental implicit group (EIG), and comparison group (CG). All the participants took Roever's (2001) Test of Pragmatic Proficiency to verify the homogeneity of the groups with respect to their initial pragmatic knowledge. The learners' ability to produce and recognize request speech acts during the experiment was measured using Birjandi & Soleimani's (2013) Request Speech Act Test Battery (RSATB). The RSATB is a validated measurement instrument ($\alpha=.83$) that includes two parallel tests of written discourse completion tests (WDCTs) for measuring the test takers' ability to produce request speech act and two parallel multiple-choice discourse completion tests (MCDCTs) that aimed to measure the test takers' ability to comprehend and recognize the request speech act. For this study,

version A of the WDCTs and MCDCTs of the battery were used for the pretest phase and version B for the posttest phase.

3.1.1 Experimental Explicit Group (EEG)

The experimental explicit group (EEG) received a treatment on request speech act based on the principles of focus on forms. The researchers resorted to such instructional techniques as meta-linguistic discussion of form, meaning and function, comparison of form and function, and explicit practice of form and function to integrate the principles of focus on forms into the EEG treatment. What follows is a snippet of the treatment sessions for the EEG group.

The treatment sessions started off with a PowerPoint presentation that underlined the importance of requests in the daily life of learners and it invited the participants to think about some of the difficulties of performing the speech act. Students also discussed the challenges that occur when interlocutors fail to maintain a balance between socio-pragmatic and pragmalinguistic aspects of requests. To explain the challenges, the status of the interlocutors, the level of imposition posed by the request, and the distance between the interlocutors were highlighted as the main contextual factors that affect the level of directness and politeness in formulating requests. Students were then required to create a list of realization patterns for making requests for the upcoming session. They were also invited to reflect upon the patterns they would use to ask people with various social statures (e.g., a university professor, a neighbor, a stranger, or a classmate) to do different activities (e.g., lend a car, a pen, or a hand with the assignments). When the realization patterns were discussed, some model dialogues were presented to show the participants how the status of the interlocutors and their social distance could affect the request strategies that interlocutors use to communicate.

A complete overview of the realization patterns for making requests based on Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper's (1989), Takahashi's (1995), and Trosborg's (1995) taxonomies was also prepared and presented to the EEG during the third session. The following example might help clarify how these taxonomies were used to introduce the components of request speech acts to the participants. *John, I missed class yesterday, do you think I could borrow your notes? I promise to return them by tomorrow.* This request sequence is made up of alerters (i.e., John), supportive moves (i.e., I missed class yesterday), the head act (i.e., could I borrow your notes), downgraders (i.e., do you think), and post-posed supportive moves (i.e., I promise to return them by tomorrow). Students also discussed possible syntactic and lexical downgraders that NSs customarily use to mitigate the level of imposition in requests. Finally, some model dialogues by NSs and NNSs were handed out to show how NNSs deviate from the NSs' norms when making requests.

For the fourth treatment session, participants received two directness analysis tasks that required the learners to identify the level of directness by ranking requests from the most to the least polite by stating the reasons for each ranking, using the realization patterns that they had learned previously. Later, the students collected five dialogues that focused on making requests in English for the subsequent session and analyzed the dialogues for the following information: a) the role of speaker and addressee; b) interlocutors' social distance; c) interlocutors' dominance; d) degree of imposition involved in the request; e) situation; f) setting; and g) request strategies.

For the last day of the treatment session, the students used the following conversational patterns to make at least three role-play dialogues for each pattern. The dialogue patterns included: 1) casual and short requests that included using the following techniques: a) attention getters, b) supportive moves, c) head act, and d) appreciation. 2) a careful and long conversations

that used: a) attention getters, b) small talk, c) supportive moves, d) head acts, e) appreciation, and f) conversation closure. Once the dialogues were submitted, some of the students modeled their conversations and received corrective feedback on the use of realization patterns and accurate structures.

3.1.2 Experimental Implicit Group

The experimental implicit group (EIG) received its treatment based on Long's (2015) principles of task-oriented focus on form instruction. For the treatment sessions, input flood, visual input enhancement, output enhancement, negotiation of meaning, recast, and consciousness-raising instructional techniques were integrated and presented to learners in the form of real-world task scenarios. In order to add input flood into the EIG treatment, eleven audio/video tracks were compiled from internet /YouTube resources to expose the participants to various request speech act realization patterns. Two other videos were also prepared for initiating and closing the treatment sessions. The introductory video focused on the role of requests in the daily lives of English speakers. It was also used as a means to introduce the character of Percy Ross, a millionaire who gave away his money to needy people who wrote to him. Percy played a central role in the EIG treatment as it provided a platform to integrate the major components of the task-oriented focus on form instruction in this study. It is also important to note that all of the transcripts of the audio/videos that the participants received in this study were visually enhanced to draw their attention to the speech act realization patterns that appeared in the tracks.

The treatment sessions started off with the introductory video about the importance of requests in the lives of English speakers. The participants also received the script of the video along with Percy biography. In the next treatment session, they watched the assigned videos for session two and received the scripts after doing the comprehension check exercises. Once the

listening task was over, students discussed Percy's biography and talked about the major turning points in this millionaire's life and his "Thanks a Million" column which he used to correspond with his column readers who wrote to him about their needs. At this point, the students received samples of Percy's communications with the column readers to read for the next class meeting. These sample letters were reworded so that learners could be exposed to a wide range of realization patterns for making requests. To prepare the handout for the participants, Percy's "Thanks a Million" columns in different newspapers were examined and some of his letters were selected and rewritten to include the following features a) input flood technique was embedded in the letters to expose the students to various request formation patterns, b) visual input enhancement technique was included to draw the students' attention to the intended request realization patterns, c) letters were reproduced so that the sociolinguistic factors of power, social distance, and level of imposition could be added to the content of the letters, and d) a covert connection was created in the letters between the wording and the structure of the request that the writers used and the ultimate positive and/or negative response they received from Percy.

The students watched the assigned videos on the third session and continued to work on the comprehension questions about Percy's letters. The discussion soon turned to Percy's sense of humor and strangeness of some of the letters. At this point, the students were encouraged to find reasons for why some writers managed to get what they asked for while others failed to do so. The purpose of this question was to help the students realize that sociolinguistic factors (i.e., rank, distance, and imposition) and pragmalinguistic factors (i.e., request realization patterns) in the letters directly affected the response that each writer received. The students were then encouraged to send an email to Percy with their requests. In passing, it

should be noted that an email account had been created under Percy's name and a NS who was part of the study reviewed and replied to the emails that the students managed to send to Percy.

For the next session, the students watched the remaining video tracks and the students who managed to get a response from Percy shared their email with their classmates. When the sample emails were handed out, the deadline for writing an email to Percy was extended to push the students who had failed to get a response to revise their emails based on what they had learned from their classmates' work and resubmit their requests. The fifth session focused on asking for recommendation letters. This task was created with the intent to direct the students to one of their course instructors to ask them for a recommendation letter, so they could reinforce what they had learned from Percy's emails while asking their professors for a recommendation letter.

4. Data Analysis and Results

4.1 Sample Homogeneity

Roever's (2001) test of pragmatic proficiency was administered two weeks before the start of the treatment sessions to check the homogeneity of the groups. Distribution of the scores for the three groups turned out to be normal due to the presence of non-significant values in Shapiro-Wilk's test ($p1 = .63$, $p2 = .56$, and $p3 = .80$). The obtained value of the ANOVA test also indicated no significant difference in the initial pragmatic proficiency of the groups [$F(2) = .124$, $p = .88$].

4.2. Impact of Instruction

A one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was run to capture the effect of instruction for the instructed groups (IG) versus the uninstructed group (UIG). Before running the analysis, the data set was screened to ensure that the normality of the sample size, univariate normality, and multivariate

normality were met. Once the validity of assumptions was reviewed, the MANOVA test was performed to capture the effect of instruction on the performance of the learners on production and recognition tests. As Table 1 indicates, the obtained significance value for Wilk's Lambda showed a significant difference between the performance of IG and UIG on these tests.

Table 1

The Results of MANOVA Test for the Performance of the IG vs. UIG

Effect	Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig	Partial Eta Squared	
Instruction	Wilks' Lambda	.713	16.31	2.000	81.0	.000*	.287

The results of the tests of the between-subjects' effects are presented in Table 2 to show where the potential difference between the dependent variables may lie. As the data set indicates, the effect of instruction is evident in the performance of the learners on the production of request speech acts. However, the data does not show any difference between the performance of the IG and UIG on the recognition of request speech acts.

Table 2

Tests of Between-subjects Effects for Production and Recognition Tests

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Instruction	Production	111.956	1	111.956	32.92	.000*	.287
	Recognition	.076	1	.076	.033	.857	.000

Although the data shows that IG and UIG learners performed differently on the production test, it did not indicate which group performed better. Further screening of the results for the estimated marginal means for IG and UIG indicated a total gain score of 2.4 in favor of the IG, indicating that IG

performed better than the UIG on the production test from the pretest to posttest observation.

Table 3
Estimated Marginal Gain Means for IG & UIG on the Production Test

Dependent Variable	Group	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower	Upper
Production	IG	2.405	.251	1.906	2.904
	UIG	-.004	.337	-.674	.665

To further analyze the performance of the IG, namely EIG and EEG when compared to the performance of the CG in producing request speech acts, the groups' gain scores on production tests from the pretest to posttest observation were examined using the analysis of variance (ANOVA). As Table 4 indicates, the results of the Shapiro-Wilk statistic revealed that the normality assumption is not violated in this data set and Levene's test further confirmed the assumption of homogeneity of variance in the data ($p = .25$).

Table 4
Group Performance on the Production Test

	Group	Mean	Std. Error	Shapiro-Wilk (Sig.)
Production	EIG	2.578	.3222	.287*
	EEG	2.232	.3062	.220*
	CG	-.004	.3990	.376*

The ANOVA test indicated a significant difference among the means for the three groups [$F(2) = 16.59, p = .000$]. The result of the post hoc analysis in Table 5 showed that the EIG outperformed the CG in terms of their performance on the production tests ($M = 2.5$ & $p = .000$). The EEG also did better than the CG on the production test ($M = 2.2$ & $p = .000$). However, no significant difference can be found between the performance of the EIG and EEG learners ($p = .79$).

Table 5
Post Hoc Analysis Results for the Comparison of Group Performances

		Group	Mean Difference	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower	Upper
Scheffe	EIG	EEG	.3457	.791	-.910	1.601
		CG	2.5822*	.000	1.358	3.806
	EEG	EIG	-.3457	.791	-1.601	.910
		CG	2.2365*	.000	1.013	3.460
	CG	EIG	-2.5822*	.000	-3.806	-1.358
		EEG	-2.2365*	.000	-3.460	-1.013

4.3. Impact of Instruction over Time

In retrospect, it should be mentioned that in this study the experimental groups received two types of treatments (implicit or explicit) and the designated treatments were preceded by a pretest and were followed by an immediate and a delayed posttest, with an interval of four months between the posttest and delayed posttest. For the analysis of the findings, a repeated measures ANOVA test with a 3x2 design was used to examine whether the effect of instruction on request speech act was sustained beyond the posttest observation. The Leven's test confirmed the assumption of homogeneity of variances in the data (i.e., pretest $p = 0.95$, posttest $p = 0.76$, and delayed posttest $p = 0.98$). The value of Wilk's Lambda in Table 6 showed a statistically significant effect for the time variable ($F = 58.12$, $p = .000$) in this study. This finding pointed to a significant change in the learners' score related to the production of request speech acts across three different observation periods.

Table 6
The Result of Multivariate Test for the Impact of Instruction over Time

Effect	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Time Wilks' Lambda	58.125	2.000	51.000	.000*	.695

The examination of the between-subjects' effects also showed a slight difference between the EIG and EEG in their performance on the production of request speech acts over time ($F = 9.26, p = .004$). The partial eta squared value for the effect size of the between-subjects also showed a large value of 0.151. The following figure supports this finding by showing that the effect of instruction lasted beyond the posttest observation for both the EIG and EEG. The figure also shows that the performance of the EIG members seems to be a little better than the performance of the EEG members over time.

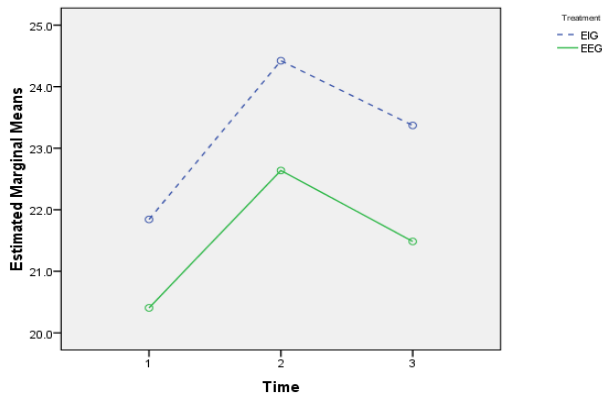


Figure 1. Performance of EEG and EIG on Pretest, and Immediate and Delayed Posttests

4.4 Impact of Instruction on Request Strategies

The WDCT section of the Request Speech Act Test Battery was used in this study for identifying the participants' ability to produce request speech act. Version A and B of the WDCT were used for the pretest and posttest, respectively. These parallel tests each came with eight test items/scenarios that were developed so that they would incorporate the sociolinguistic variables of power (P), distance (D), and imposition (I) into the structure of the test items. For this test, the relative powered (P) was defined as the power

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of speaker with respect to the hearer, and social distance (D) was defined as the degree of familiarity and solidarity between the speaker and hearer. The absolute ranking of imposition (R) was defined as the potential imposition of carrying out the speech act, in terms of the expenditure of goods and/or services by the hearer, or the obligation of the speaker to perform the act. To construct the test items, the abovementioned sociolinguistic variables were inserted into the structure of the scenarios. For this purpose, each of the selected sociolinguistic variables was given plus and minus values. Consequently, these three sociolinguistic variables were turned into six variants with plus and minus values. For instance, one of the scenarios was constructed using plus values (i.e., +P, +D, and +R). This combination of sociolinguistic variables resulted in a hypothetical scenario in which the speaker had the power to ask for a great favor from someone he did not know well. Yet, in another scenario the following combination of sociolinguistic variables (+P), (+D), and (-R) was used to depict the speaker as someone who enjoyed a high status, who asked a hearer, whom he did not know well, for something of little value. Table 7 illustrates the distribution of the sociolinguistic variables in the test items.

Table 7
Distribution of Sociolinguistic Variables in the Test Items of RSATB

Sociolinguistic Variables	PDI +++	PDI ++-	PDI +-+	PDI +--	PDI -++	PDI -+-	PDI --+	PDI ---
Pretest Items (Version A)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Posttest Items (Version B)	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16

For this study, the responses of 24 NSs who answered all the sixteen scenarios were collected as the baseline data and the responses of the IG who took version A (items 1-8) for the pretest and version B (items 9-16) for the posttest were also collected and used as the comparison data. Once the

responses were collected, Blum-Kulka et.al. (1989), Takahashi's (1995), and Trosborg's (1995) taxonomies were used to identify the request strategies that NSs and IGs employed to answer each of the 16 test items.

The scope of comparing the strategies in this study remained limited to the head acts because the head act or request proper is the main part of the request sequence that can realize the request act independently of other elements. In addition, the inclusion of all components of request structure (e.g., alerters, supportive moves, head acts, downgraders, and upgraders) distorts the assumption of independence of observations, which is the main prerequisite for using Chi-square for the analysis of data. For these reasons, the head act strategies that IGs and NSs used were compared using a two-way group independence Chi-square analysis. The interpretation of the results in this section is based on the following assumptions: first, the effects of instruction will surface in the type of head act strategies that learners use to answer the posttest items. Second, the instruction that IG learners receive helps them to use more native-like head act strategies in the posttest observation. Therefore, if instruction is effective, the IGs' posttest head act strategies will resemble the strategies that NSs use to perform similar scenarios. The following tables show the head act strategies that IGs and NSs used for answering the parallel items in the pretest and posttests scenarios.

Table 8 shows the head act strategies that IGs and NSs used to make requests in response to test item one and nine. The result of the Chi-square indicated that NSs and IGs employed different head act strategies for the first scenario [$\chi^2 (7) = 28.2, p = .000$]. A similar result was also obtained for the head act strategies for scenario number nine [$\chi^2 (7) = 16.5, p = .02$]. The result of analyses indicated that IGs still deviated from the NSs' norms after receiving instruction as long as these two test items were concerned.

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Table 8

The Use of Head Act Strategies by NSs and IG Learners for Scenarios 1 & 9

		Groups(%)	
		IGs	NSs
Head Act Strategies (Item # 1)	Mood	11.5%	8.3%
	Performative	.0%	25.0%
	Locution	1.9%	.0%
	Want	1.9%	12.5%
	Query	80.8%	41.7%
	Mitigated prep statement	3.8%	.0%
	Mitigated prep question	.0%	8.3%
Head Act Strategies (Item # 9)	Hint	.0%	4.2%
	Performative	.0%	8.3%
	Want	3.8%	.0%
	Query	32.7%	25.0%
	Mitigated want	1.9%	.0%
	Mitigated prep statement	11.5%	.0%
	Mitigated prep question	17.3%	4.2%
	Fact/hope	28.8%	62.5%
Others	3.8%	.0%	

Table 9 displays the head act strategies that IGs and NSs used to make requests in response to test item number two and ten. The result of the Chi-square test indicated that NSs and IGs employed different head act strategies for scenario number two [$\chi^2 (7) = 22.6, p = .002$]. However, the data for scenario number ten indicated that NSs and IGs used similar head act strategies to respond to this scenario [$\chi^2 (5) = 3.4, p = .62$]. This finding indicates that instruction was effective as IG learners produced more native-like head act strategies in the posttest observation.

Table 9

The Use of Head Act Strategies by NSs and IG Learners for Scenario 2 & 10

		Groups (%)	
		IG	NSs
Head Act Strategies (Item # 2)	Mood	57.7%	12.5%
	Performative	3.8%	29.2%
	Locution	1.9%	4.2%
	Want	1.9%	4.2%
	Query	23.1%	45.8%
	Mitigated prep stat	1.9%	.0%
	Hint	7.7%	.0%
Head Act Strategies (Item # 10)	Others	1.9%	4.2%
	Mood	11.5%	16.7%
	Performative	1.9%	.0%
	Want	26.9%	12.5%
	Query	51.9%	66.7%
	Mitigated prep state	5.8%	4.2%
Others	1.9%	.0%	

Table 10 shows the head act strategies that IGs and NSs used to make requests in response to test items number three and eleven. The result of the Chi-square test indicated that NSs and IGs employed similar head act strategies to respond to scenario number three [$\chi^2 (9) = 16.1, p = .06$]. A similar result was also obtained for the head act strategies that the NSs and IGs used for scenario number eleven [$\chi^2 (7) = 5.8, p = .55$]. The result of the analyses indicated that IGs did not deviate from the NSs' norms in pretest and post-test observations on these test items.

Table 10.
The Use of Head Act Strategies by NSs and IG Learners for Scenario 3 & 11

		Groups (%)	
		IG	NSs
Head Act Strategies (Item # 3)	Mood	1.9%	.0%
	Want	5.8%	.0%
	Suggestory	.0%	4.2%
	Query	65.4%	41.7%
	Mitigated want	.0%	8.3%
	Mitigated prep statement	11.5%	16.7%
	Mitigated prep question	7.7%	16.7%
	Hint	.0%	4.2%
	Negation of preparatory	.0%	4.2%
	Others	7.7%	4.2%
Head Act Strategies (Item # 11)	Performative	1.9%	.0%
	Want	3.8%	.0%
	Query	40.4%	54.2%
	Mitigated want	3.8%	12.5%
	Mitigated prep statement	26.9%	16.7%
	Mitigated prep question	19.2%	12.5%
	Fact/hope	1.9%	.0%
	Others	1.9%	4.2%

Table 11 shows the head act strategies that IGs and NSs used to make requests in response to test items number four and twelve. The result of the Chi-square test indicated that NSs and IGs employed similar head act strategies to respond to scenario number four [$\chi^2 (11) = 10.8, p = .45$]. A similar result is also obtained for the head act strategies the NSs and IGs used

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for scenario twelve [$\chi^2 (6) = 10.3, p = .11$]. The result of analyses indicated that IGs did not deviate from the NSs' norms for these scenarios in the pretest and posttest observations.

Table 11

The Use of Head Act Strategies by NSs and IG Learners for Scenario 4 & 12

		Groups (%)	
		IG	NSs
Head Act Strategies (Item # 4)	Mood	30.8%	20.8%
	Performative	.0%	4.2%
	Locution	1.9%	.0%
	Want	3.8%	4.2%
	Suggestory	1.9%	.0%
	Query	42.3%	54.2%
	Mitigated want	.0%	8.3%
	Mitigated prep statement	3.8%	.0%
	Mitigated prep question	1.9%	.0%
	Fact/hope	1.9%	.0%
	Hint	9.6%	8.3%
Others	1.9%	.0%	
Head Act Strategies (Item # 12)	Mood	44.2%	16.7%
	Performative	.0%	4.2%
	Locution	1.9%	4.2%
	Want	3.8%	.0%
	Query	46.2%	75.0%
	Mitigated prep statement	1.9%	.0%
Mitigated prep question	1.9%	.0%	

Table 12 shows the head act strategies that IGs and NSs used to make their requests in response to test items number five and thirteen. The result of the Chi-square test indicated that NSs and IGs employed different head act strategies to respond to scenario number five [$\chi^2 (8) = 25.8, p = .001$]. A similar result was also obtained for the head act strategies that NSs and IGs used for scenario number thirteen [$\chi^2 (6) = 23.7, p = .001$]. The results of

analyses indicated that IGs still deviated from the NSs' norms after receiving instruction.

Table 12
The Use of Head Act Strategies by NSs and IG Learners for Scenario 5 & 13

		Groups (%)	
		IGs	NSs
Head Act Strategies (Item # 5)	Performative	1.9%	.0%
	Want	1.9%	.0%
	Query	71.2%	37.5%
	Mitigated want	.0%	20.8%
	Mitigated prep statement	17.3%	25.0%
	Mitigated prep question	.0%	8.3%
	Fact/hope	.0%	8.3%
	Hint	3.8%	.0%
	Others	3.8%	.0%
Head Act Strategies (Item # 13)	Performative	1.9%	.0%
	Query	32.7%	41.7%
	Mitigated want	5.8%	25.0%
	Mitigated prep statement	40.4%	.0%
	Mitigated prep question	11.5%	25.0%
	Hint	.0%	8.3%
	Others	7.7%	.0%

Table 13 shows the head act strategies that IGs and NSs used to make requests in response to test items number six and fourteen. The result of the Chi-square test indicates that NSs and IGs employed different head act strategies to respond to scenario number six [$\chi^2 (5) = 12.6, p = .02$]. However, the result of Chi-square test for the parallel item indicated that NSs and IGs used similar strategies to respond to scenario number fourteen [$\chi^2 (4) = 4.03, p = .40$]. This finding indicated that instruction was effective in that the IG learners produced more native-like head act strategies in the posttest observation.

Table 13

The Use of Head Act Strategies by NSs and IG Learners for Scenario 6 & 14

		Groups (%)	
		IGs	NSs
Head Act Strategies (Item # 6)	Query	90.4%	75.0%
	Mitigated want	1.9%	.0%
	Mitigated prep statement	.0%	8.3%
	Mitigated prep question	1.9%	8.3%
	Negation	.0%	8.3%
	Others	5.8%	.0%
Head Act Strategies (Item # 14)	Mood	3.8%	.0%
	Query	92.3%	95.8%
	Mitigated prep statement	1.9%	.0%
	Negation	.0%	4.2%
	Others	1.9%	.0%

Table 14 shows the head act strategies that IGs and NSs used to make requests in response to test items number seven and fifteen. The result of the Chi-square test indicated that NSs and IGs employed different head act strategies to respond to scenario number seven [$\chi^2 (9) = 25.2, p = .003$]. However, the result of Chi-square test for scenario fifteen indicated that NSs and IGs used similar strategies to respond to this scenario [$\chi^2 (8) = 11.2, p = .18$]. This finding indicated that instruction was effective in bring about more native-like head act strategies from the IG learners in the posttest observation.

Table 14

The Use of Head Act Strategies by NSs and IG Learners for Scenario 7 & 15

		Groups (%)	
		IG	NSs
Head Act Strategies (Item # 7)	Mood	7.7%	.0%
	Performative	3.8%	12.5%
	Want	3.8%	.0%
	Query	65.4%	29.2%
	Mitigated want	.0%	8.3%
	Mitigated prep state	11.5%	16.7%
	Mitigated prep question	3.8%	29.2%
	Fact/hope	1.9%	.0%
	Hint	.0%	4.2%

Head Act Strategies (Item #15)	Others	1.9%	.0%
	Mood	1.9%	.0%
	Performative	3.8%	.0%
	Want	3.8%	.0%
	Query	53.8%	83.3%
	Mitigated want	3.8%	.0%
	Mitigated prep state	7.7%	.0%
	Mitigated prep question	17.3%	4.2%
	Hint	1.9%	8.3%
Others	5.8%	4.2%	

Table 15 shows the head act strategies that IGs and NSs used to make requests in response to test items number eight and sixteen. The results of Chi-square analysis indicated that NSs and IGs employed similar head act strategies to respond to scenario number eight [$\chi^2 (5) = 7.6, p = .17$]. A similar result was also obtained for the head act strategies that NSs and IGs used for scenario sixteen [$\chi^2 (5) = 4.93, p = .42$]. The results of analyses indicated that IGs did not deviate from the NSs' norms for these scenarios.

Table 15

The Use of Head Act Strategies by NSs and IGs Learners for Scenario 8 & 16

		Groups (%)	
		IGs	NSs
Head Act Strategies (Item #8)	Want	1.9%	.0%
	Query	80.8%	70.8%
	Mitigated want	.0%	4.2%
	Mitigated prep statement	7.7%	8.3%
	Mitigated prep question	3.8%	16.7%
	Others	5.8%	.0%
Head Act Strategies (Item #16)	Mood	7.7%	4.2%
	Want	3.8%	.0%
	Query	82.7%	91.7%
	Mitigated prep question	3.8%	.0%
	Hint	.0%	4.2%
	Others	1.9%	.0%

5. Discussions and Conclusion

The findings of this study showed that there is no significant difference between the IG and CG in their performance on recognition tests. This finding is not aligned with the results of studies that endorse the positive impact of instruction (Badjadi, 2016; Taguchi, 2015). The following reasons can be provided to explain this finding. The first reason relates to the instrument that was used in this study to measure the ability of the participants to recognize requests. Although the employed MCDCT was a validated tool, Brown (2001) argues that MCDCTs are generally considered less reliable means for measuring the pragmatic knowledge of L2. The other reason might relate to the characteristics of the test takers in this study. Because multiple-choice method is the preferred format of testing in the Iranian educational system, the Iranian university students become highly skilled in taking MC tests; therefore, it can be that the CG members could have benefited from their test-taking skills than their knowledge of pragmatics when they took the MCDCT test. This speculation can be tested when other testing methods are utilized to compare the performance of the IG and CG. It is interesting to note that the results of this study showed a change when a WDCT was used to compare the performance of the IG and UIG. This finding shows that the test method can indeed affect the outcome of a study (Plonsky & Zhuang, 2019).

Studies that have addressed the relative effectiveness of different teaching techniques have mainly indicated that explicit instruction is more effective than implicit instruction. The findings of this study showed that the learners who received explicit and implicit instruction performed better than the learners who did not receive instruction in producing request speech act. The data, however, showed a slight difference between the performance of the EIG and EEG learners, indicating that implicit instruction can be as

effective as the explicit instruction. This finding is matched with the results of the studies that have reported an apparent advantage for the explicit instructional techniques (Halenko & Jones, 2017; Martinez-Flor & Fukuya, 2005) and more in line with those that have reported some significant impacts for implicit instruction (Taguchi, 2015; Takahashi, 2010). This finding can be explained by stating that a number of researchers who reported better results for the explicit instruction include various types of learning activities in their treatment that ranged from the truly explicit metalinguistic talk to the less explicit awareness-raising tasks that makes it difficult to detect which aspect of the treatment in these studies contributed the most to the obtained results. Nonetheless, the result of this study is more in line with the findings of the studies that focus exclusively on request speech act and provide more clear accounts of the difference between implicit and explicit instructions (Ahmadi, Ghafar Samar, Yazdanimoghadam, 2011, Rezvani, Eslami & Dastjerdi, 2014; Salehi, 2011; Takimoto 2006, 2008, 2009, 2014).

This study also examined the durability of the instructional effects. Some researchers believe that the length of the treatment can positively affect the robustness and the durability of the instructional effects (Alcon, 2015; Ortega & Iberri-Shea, 2005). However, the literature on IILP fails to provide a clear picture of the possible relationship between the length of instruction and the effectiveness of instruction. These mixed results indicate that the strength of instructional effectiveness primarily depends on the quality of instruction than its length. One way of testing the quality of instruction is to see whether the effects of instruction last beyond the immediate observation of the effects in the posttest stage. It should be acknowledged that few researchers have included delayed posttests in their empirical research studies and those who have included delayed posttests usually address different pragmatic features (Ghafar-Samar & Ahmadi, 2014; Fordyce, 2014; Takimoto, 2006). It is

interesting to note that the majority of the studies that have addressed this topic provide convincing evidence in support of the durability of the effects of instruction. The results of this study also clearly indicated that the effects of instruction last beyond the posttest observation for both the explicit and implicit groups. This study also provided support for the durability of the effects of implicit instruction.

Finally, this study set out to identify the effects of instruction on the request strategies that IG utilized. On the whole, the findings showed that learners deviate from NSs' norm in at least five of the pretest scenarios. The deviations were more prominent in the following distribution of sociolinguistic variables: test item number one (i.e., +P, +D, +I), test item number two (i.e., +P, +D, -I), test item number five (i.e., -P, +D, +I), test item number six (i.e., -P, +D, -I), and test item number seven (i.e., -P, -D, +I). However, this picture changed in the posttest observation as learners deviated from NSs' norm in only two of the scenarios, namely test item number nine (i.e., +P, +D, +I), and test item number thirteen (i.e., -P, +D, +I). This indicates a notable improvement in the performance of the IG in the posttest observations due to the observed change in the realization patterns that IG learners employed to produce requests. In short, it can be concluded that instruction was effective and it positively affected the head act strategies that learners used to make request strategies in this study. The findings also showed that the test items that contain (+P, +D, +I) and (-P, +D, +I) distributions of sociolinguistic variables remained more resilient to instruction.

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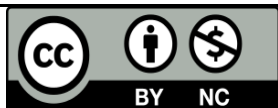
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