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Research Paper

Toward Multimodal Pragmatics: Are Video-based Pragmatic Tests (VPTs) the Answer?

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Abstract

Using the multimodal approach, the present study aimed to investigate the effect of video-based pragmatic tests on EFL learners' pragmatic awareness and pragmalinguistic learning. It further tried to find out the washback effect of video-based pragmatic tests on learners' speaking ability. Participants of this study were 38 males and females who studied English. The participants were randomly divided into two control and experimental groups. They were pre-tested by Cambridge Placement Test. In the experimental group, video-based pragmatic tests were used along with the usual instructional materials; while in the control group the material was taught in the conventional method, without using video-based pragmatic tests. The students were pre/post-tested by the means of two Multiple-choice Discourse Completion Tests (MDCTs), taking pragmatic awareness and pragmalinguistic learning into account. The results of the study indicated a high level of pragmatic awareness and pragmalinguistic learning improvement in the experimental group. Further, the findings demonstrated positive washback on learners' speaking proficiency resulting from using video-based pragmatic tests. The qualitative data also demonstrated a positive impact on the speaking ability of the experimental group, confirmed quantitatively. The findings of the study will have theoretical and pedagogical implications.

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1. Introduction

Being able to communicate in a foreign language is an inseparable and crucial part of human beings' life in all times. This is why studying in the field of pedagogy, particularly applied linguistics, day by day approached a more communicative inquiry (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). The importance of pragmatic awareness in communication has always been a crucial aspect in language classes. Until recently, it was theoretically seen as communicative competence among other components and a pre-requisite for the 'good command of English'. Reviewing the literature shows that several studies (Bardovi-Harlig & Mahan-Taylor, 2003; Özyıldırım, 2010; Povolna, 2012) have attempted to theoretically investigate the amount of EFL/ESL familiarity with the cultural norms or to research various teaching methods appropriate for teaching pragmatic structures and its reflection in classroom settings (Ishihara, 2011; Sachtleben & Denny, 2012). However, the recent cognition about pragmatics has led to an interest in including pragmatics in language teaching/training in a practical manner rather than only theory (Sachtleben & Denny, 2012). Most learners do not even know the cultural norms beyond the language. To study the improvement of these norms in language learners, a lot of research has been done to determine such complex elements.

A number of scholars (Rose, 2005; Vasquez & Sharpless, 2009; O'Keeffe et al., 2011) have emphasized the vital role of instructing pragmatics for language learners in the EFL/ESL contexts because

pragmatics is one of the main features in teaching and learning a foreign language and thus, it helps them to understand the context better. According to Yates (2004) learners' information about the norms of pragmatics and pragmalinguistics in any language shows the need for getting familiar with pragmatics. According to Leech (1983) pragmalinguistics has to do with the particular resources that a given language provides for conveying pragmatic illocutions. In other words, pragmalinguistics refers to the resources available such as pragmatic strategies, routines, and linguistic forms to convey an illocutionary meaning. Pragmalinguistic failure takes place as the pragmatically intended meaning by one speaker or interlocutor is different in its foundation of perception from that of utilized by the native speaker of L2. It also occurs when some conversation techniques are insufficiently conveyed from someone's L1 into L2. It can be considered from both sides of the conversation (Thomas, 1983). In other words, pragmalinguistic failure occurs when learners fail to use the particular linguistic resources to formulate a specific type of speech act. According to Searle (1969, p.16) "speech acts [...] are the basic or minimal units of linguistic communication". Consequently, over the years, several researchers have attempted to devise a taxonomy of speech acts that would be commonly accepted (Bach & Harnish, 1979; Leech, 1983; Allan, 1998).

Various parts of language can be assessed by a multitude of tests or questionnaires. As pragmatics comes into mind various ways for its assessment are offered (Ishihara and Cohen, 2014). One type of tests useful for assessing pragmatics is Discourse Completion Task (DCT). Although DCTs are fast data collecting instruments and useful for classifying semantic formulas and ideas to be used in a natural context, they are not good indicators of an authentic interaction, not serviceable regarding the authenticity of real life conversations by not considering repetitions or

elaborations, and finally not being considerate regarding the amount of possible speech acts taking place in an authentic context (Beebe & Cummings, 1996). According to Hinkel (1997), a DCT by itself cannot be a consummate source for evaluating students' pragmatic related factors. Furthermore, Nurani (2009) contended that such tests lack an authentic setting as well as authentic responses and interlocutors. According to Eslami-Rasekh (2005, p.202) "the data collected through a discourse completion task does not exactly reflect the richness and complexity of natural data". Accordingly, a combination of DCTs ought to be used with another forms of tests, as Roever (2001,2006) and Tada (2005) did this by amalgamating DCTs and web-based/computer-based frameworks, respectfully (Cited in Brown, 2008). Moradkhan & Jalayer (2010) emphasized the use of real audiovisual and video-enhanced materials in teaching and development of pragmatics. Subsequently, with the impediments and difficulties associated with DCTs testing pragmatics and pragmlinguistics of language, the ultimate goal of this study is to seek the effectiveness of Video-based Pragmatic Tasks (VPTs) on EFL learners' pragmatic awareness.

2. Literature Review

Reviewing different researches in analyzing the impact of explicit and implicit methods of instructing pragmatics, which was earlier stated to be vital in teaching, Rose (2005) concluded that the efficacy of explicit instructions is significantly higher than the gradual implicit teaching method. Cohen (2008) believed that teacher's interests and intentions in choosing the suitable strategy and instruction, either explicit or implicit, can be great criteria to assist them in learning pragmatic knowledge. Pragmatic awareness is one of the inevitable aspects of communicative competence, which sets off hard tasks for learners in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts due

to the limited sources of the target language in contexts. All the efforts spend on pragmatic awareness are to develop the 'pragmatic ability in the target language. It is somehow to be able to negotiate what is beyond the literal meaning addressing the intended meaning, and assumptions (Cohen, 2010). The importance of pragmatic awareness in communication has always been a crucial aspect in language classes. Until recently, it was theoretically seen as communicative competence among other components and a pre-requisite for the 'good command of English'. According to Bardovi-Harlig (1996) the pragmatic awareness must be emphasized more than before and use in the classroom since it has complex nature unlike other segments of language grammar. In other words, learners' information about the norms of pragmatics and pragma-linguistic in any language shows the need for getting familiar with pragmatics (Yates, 2004).

The way students can learn the pragmatic knowledge pass through various methods in different situations, showing the importance of learning the pragmatic structures in the EFL/ESL contexts; a factor that may receive the same attention as the pragmatic awareness and pragmatic competence. Thus, a fundamental review of the programs designed to train is inevitable. The relevant research evaluating the involvement of pragmatics in teacher education programs often focuses on theory rather than holding practical purposes (Eslami- Rasekh, 2005; Ishihara, 2010; Vásquez & Sharpless, 2009).

A large body or research have been done on the explicit teaching of pragmatics. Rosales and Quintero (2015) focused on raising EFL learners' pragmatic awareness by scrutinizing request speech act. Aufa (2016) considered explicit pragmatic instruction fostering learners' pragmatic competence. Garita and Elizondo (2016) utilized videos for building

“connotative meaning of words and phrases” by teaching pragmatics using videos and a qualitative design throughout their study.

As Ishihara and Cohen (2014) stated, the relevant research would examine how prepared language teachers are to provide pragmatics instruction and how we integrate pragmatics into teacher education. Moreover, it should incorporate theoretical knowledge with the practical ones, that is to say, converting pragmatics into instructional or instructed pragmatics. According to the results of Polovna’s study (2012), teachers are eager to share all the theoretical information to increase the pragmatic awareness among the language learners as much as possible because improving the students’ speaking capability will result in the improvement of the final communicative competence.

Pragmalinguistics according to Leech (1983) refers to the consideration of utilizing divergent forms-functions on basis of interlocutors’ linguistic desires. Holmes (2013) uses terms ‘social factors’ and ‘social dimensions’ to refer to critical elements determining one’s linguistic choices sociolinguistically. Pragmalinguistic failure refers to non-native speakers’ misinterpretation of a specifically-intended pragmatic force within a specific linguistic token (Thomas, 1983). Generally, she defined pragmatic failure as “the inability to understand what is meant by what is said” (Thomas, 1983, p.91). Hence, it is worthwhile to be able to enrich ESL/EFL students with pragmatically-related concepts by comparing L1 and L2, in order to avoid the aforementioned failures in the real context.

Washback research has shown that testing, especially if it makes winner-loser, success-failure, and rejection-acceptance, precedes the teaching and learning process (Cheng, 1997; Shohamy, 2001) and test content directly influences the quality and sort of L2 teaching-learning practices in language classrooms at schools (Chapman & Snyder, 2000; Wall, 2005). Washback

effect can be valued as positive or negative (Watanabe, 1997, Cited in Watanabe, 2004). One important aspect that requires grave attention in EFL/ESL classrooms is avoiding teaching to the test. According to Popham (2001), it is to set a classroom instruction on basis of the real high-stakes exam items or items similar to them called "clone items" (P.16).

The distinction between a high-stakes and a low-stakes test has to be mentioned. Cole and Osterlind (2008) make a pure distinction between the two defining "a low-stakes exam as any exam that has no meaningful consequence to the test taker. Conversely, a high-stakes test has at least some academic or other meaningful consequence to the student" (P.120).

Popham (2001) uses the term "item-teaching" to refer to teachers' adapted instructions toward the main items or those of clone items, and the term "curriculum-teaching" to refer to teachers' adapted instructions "toward a specific body of content knowledge or a specific set of cognitive skills represented by a given test" (P.16). The initial term is corresponding to what each researcher has as a primary concern in regards to educating to a test, yet the subsequent term is a broader thought the sets showing guidelines towards an entirety, by knowing which learners would be able to get everything needed for replying a test, e.g. a high-stake test.

According to Popham (2001) curriculum-teaching is fruitful as it serves students in high-stake tests and upgrades their proficiency with regard to the knowledge being tested within an exam. It should be emphasized that teaching items and manipulating cloned items is a different concept from the practice of standardized regular / taught tests and diagnostic tests. In summary, when comparing the high stakes test with the teacher's test, the greater the difference, the more you can avoid post-test instruction, or item instruction, and ensure that the teacher provides reliable curriculum instruction.

Wiggins (2011) asserts tests should be a central learning experience. He puts emphasis on students' performance in whatever they are competent or qualified. In this regard he defines authentic assessment as a vice versa procedure compared to a conventionalized teach, then test manner contending "a reversal of the current practice of test design" (P.83). According to Eslami-Rasekh (2005), the use of DCTs may be useful in the early stages of learning. She emphasized that the use of DCTs is suitable for the early stages of learning the communication functions of a language. It provides us with a language that is more complex and less variable than natural data, but it is quite similar to a real language. However, as students improve their pragmatic abilities and become more and more proficient, the DCTs appears to lack the proper context and credibility to be considered proper input.

Providing authentic material for a better understanding of L2 context has always been crucial in ESL/EFL teaching. A number of pragmatically-related studies (e.g. Moradkhan & Jalayer, 2010; Garita & Elizondo, 2016) have tried to provide videos as such and to expose learners to this sort of material.

A large number of studies (e.g. Clennell, 1999; Eslami-Rasekh, 2005; Schauer, 2006; Soler & Pitrach, 2010), have been done on pragmatic awareness, yet none of them focused mainly on video-based materials, as influential tools that can enrich students with authentic contexts. Furthermore, few studies have considered the washback effect related to tests of this inquiry (Mirzaei et. al, 2014; Tajeddin & Dabbagh, 2015). Inadequacy of pragmatic tests namely; DCTs by themselves to learners and teachers or test takers is one major reason that this study took place.

The general aim of this study is to institutionalize Video-based Pragmatic Tests (VPTs) in applied linguistics field. Taking the concept of pragmatics into account, however, saliency and prominence of authentic videos,

specifically, can be taken into action in this study, for the washback effect of speaking ability is one crucial aspect of it. Taking second/foreign language teaching and testing into account, of course, such authentic video-based tests can cope with the problem of lacking accessibility to native speakers of that language. The study crystallizes around the following research questions:

- 1) Do video-based pragmatic tests have a significant effect on pre-intermediate EFL learners' pragmatic awareness and incidental pragmalinguistic learning?
- 2) Do video-based pragmatic tests have any washback effect on pre-intermediate EFL learners' speaking ability?

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

Participants of this study were 38 pre-intermediate Iranian EFL learners, consisting of 19 males and 19 females, randomly sampled from Daneshgah high-school in Zahedan, Iran. Participants of this study were divided into two groups namely, experimental and control, and their proficiency level was pre-intermediate, utilizing a Cambridge Placement Test.

3.2 Instrumentation

The following instruments were used in the present study.

1. Cambridge placement test- version 2, consisting of 60 questions including multiple-choice and cloze tests.
2. MDCT (multiple choice pragmatic Discourse Completion Tests) for investigating pragmatic awareness of the students designed by Çetinavci and Öztürk (2017). The test consisted of 33 items in which fillers, pope questions, indirect criticism, topic change, indirect advice, (verbal) irony, indirect

refusals, disclosure, indirect requests, etc., had been implemented for making a thorough pragmatic awareness. The Cronbach alpha for the test was estimated to be .88.

3. An MDCT for investigating pragmalinguistic learning of apology and requesting speech acts (Birjandi & Rezaei 2010) was used to test the participants' incidental pragmalinguistic awareness. The test consisted of 20 situations for which the students had to choose the best option according to request and apology speech acts. The reliability of the test was estimated to be .81.

4. A teacher's rubric questionnaire (Başak, 2019) with regard to speaking ability and investigating any washback effect during the course was utilized to measure the participants speaking ability (See Appendix B).

3.3 Data Collection Procedure

Pre-testing participants by the means of a Cambridge Placement Test, the researcher assured the homogeneity of the learners' proficiency level. Then, the learners in both control and experimental groups were pre-/post- tested by two MDCTs, one focusing on Pragmatic Awareness (P.A) of learners and the other on their Incidental Pragmalinguistic learning (I.P.L). In the experimental group, speech acts were taught and related video-based pragmatic tests were practiced in the classroom (See Appendix A). While in the control group no video-based pragmatic tests were used. The set of videos extracted from various sources like *Four-corners series* by Richards and Bohlke (2012), *Top-Notch series* by Saslow and Ascher (2006), and *Interchange series* by Richards, Hull and Proctor (2005). Each series of videos focused on a specific speech act. A standardized teacher's rubric was used as a pre/post questionnaire in the experimental group to measure the

learners' speaking ability. A picture description pre-/post activity was implemented in this regard. The questionnaire consisted of 6 parts investigating grammar accuracy and range, vocabulary, content, fluency, pronunciation, and the students' overall grade by the teacher, respectively. Since this study has employed a mixed method, a sample of 15 learners was taken randomly from the experimental group to take part in the interview to check any improvement in the learners' speaking ability due to the washback effect of the video-based pragmatic tests.

4. Results and Discussion

Table 4.1. presents the means and standard deviations of pragmatic awareness of the control and experimental groups during pre- and post-test.

Table 4.1

Descriptive Statistics for the Variable of Pragmatic Awareness (PA) in the Experimental and Control

Groups

group		N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Control	Pre test	19	7.33	24.33	12.44	5.48
	Post test	19	4.33	23.33	12.55	5.74
	Valid N	19				
Experimental	Pre test	19	2.33	18.33	11.88	4.29
	Post test	19	9.33	25.33	17.53	4.26
	Valid N	19				

According to the results, the average PA scores of the control group during post-test has increased to 17.53 while average PA scores of the control group shows no huge increase compared to pre-test. To determine the significance level of the aforementioned increase and to determine whether the intervention has any significant effect on PA, a multivariate ANCOVA was

run. The results revealed that the differences between the two groups were significant at 0.001. The results are shown in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2

Multivariate Variance Analysis for Pragmatic Awareness

Variable	source	Type III Sum of Squares	DF	F	Sig	Partial Eta Squared	Observed Power
PA	Pre test	226.510	1	14.287	0.001	0.296	0.956
	Group	274.454	1	17.311	0.001	0.337	0.981
	Error total	539.037 9888.378	34 38	15.854			
	Pre test	137.231	1	19.757	0.001	0.368	0.991
	Group	120.766	1	17.386	0.001	0.338	0.982
	Error Total	236.165 5453.720	34 38	6.946			

Table 4.3. presents the means and standard deviations of incidental pragmalinguistic learning of the control and experimental groups during pre- and post-test.

Table 4.3

Descriptive Statistics Related to the Incidental Pragmalinguistic Learning (IPL) Variable in the Control and Experimental Groups

Group		N	Minimum	Maximu m	Mean	Std. Deviation
Control	Pre test	19	3.20	14.20	9.03	3.46
	Post test	19	1.20	14.20	9.64	3.46

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	Valid N (listwise)	19				
Experimental	Pre test	19	4.20	14.20	8.60	3.03
	Post test	19	7.20	19.20	12.85	3.78
	Valid N (listwise)	19				

A Univariate Co-Variance Analysis was run to determine the significance level of the difference and to study whether or not the intervention has been effective on IPL. Table 4.4 presents the results.

Table 4.4
Univariate Co-variance Analysis for Testing Incidental Pragmalinguistic Learning

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Observed Power
Corrected Model	322.34	2	22.38	.000	.561	1.000
Intercept	85.86	1	11.92	.001	.254	.919
Pre test	224.99	1	31.25	.000	.472	1.000
Group	118.12	1	16.40	.000	.319	.976
Error	251.99	35				
Total	5453.72	38				
Corrected Total	574.34	37				

The results showed that the difference between the two groups is significant at $F=16.9, p=0.001$.

Table 4.5

Descriptive Statistics for learners' Speaking Ability

Group		N	Minimu m	Maximu m	Mean	Std. Deviation
Experimental	Pretest	19	1.00	3.00	2.40	.75
	Posttest	19	3.00	5.00	3.55	.68
	Valid N (listwise)	19				

Table 4.5. presents the descriptive statistics for the teachers' assessment of the participants of the experimental group in pre- and post-test. The following table shows the results of paired samples *t*-test in the experimental group during pre- and post-test.

Table 4.6

Paired Samples T-Test for Learners' Speaking Ability

Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
			Lower	Upper			
1.15	1.03	.23	.66	1.63	4.94	19	.000

As Table 4.6 suggests, the obtained *t*-value is significant at $t=4.94$, $p=0.0001$. Therefore, it could be concluded that the intervention has led to an increase in the students' speaking skills.

The findings of the study are congruent with Moradkhan and Jalayer (2010) who found out that video-taped materials comparing to audio-taped materials were of more value. The prominence of video-based pragmatic materials, for the sake of their native-like and authentic milieu and setting, have been the key for students' better performance with regard to improving their pragmatic competence. Being in the heart of pragmatic competence, pragmatic awareness was improved vastly throughout the process of implementing VPTs in experimental classroom setting, more than that of the control group- having no access to such materials. The findings are also compatible with those of Eslami-Rasekh (2005) and Reddy (2011) in that awareness raising activities are of profit when considering teaching pragmatics, even via using VPT, and the learners did sensitize to miscellaneous pragmatically related factors which improved their use of linguistic forms in real contexts. Moreover, the findings are in congruent with Rosales and Barragán (2015) who came to the conclusion that in schools where foreign languages are included within the school curriculum, the opportunities for communication in a real-life simulated context which develops the whole institutionalization of linguistic structures utilized in L2 community should be taken serious. More modern forms of testing along with teaching pragmatics are what have sought a better performance in learners of the experimental group.

Furthermore, the results indicated that VPTs have significant effects on the students' IPL. In other words, the students' awareness in IPL was increased to a colossal amount. Karatepe (2001) found that the trainees were successful in recognizing appropriate forms in multiple-choice questions. However, if they were asked to make their own forms, they tended to improvise. So, to choose the appropriate forms in MDCTs will be easy for the learners. However, the findings of this study revealed the learners'

improvement in the appropriate use of forms-functions, i.e. pragmalinguistical aspect.

Like Fukuya and Zhang (2002). The findings indicated not only the learners' pragmalinguistic awareness but also their level of confidence with regard to making requests. The findings are also in agreement with Garita and Elizondo's (2016) finding which proved that connotative meanings of words are best understood by utilizing videos. The data are projecting a convergence between using VPTs and students' increase in pragmalinguistic competence/learning. Conversely, the findings of this study do not agree with that of Takahashi (2015) who found that listening proficiency and the grammatical knowledge of the learners hinder pragmalinguistic learning.

Moreover, the findings of the study proved that VPTs do have a major impact on speaking ability of the students. The findings put an emphasis on what Siegel (2016) demands at the end of his article when elaborating on some important activities to be implemented for the sake of improving speaking ability along with consideration of pragmatics aspects. The same findings can be found in Norbekova (2020), who proved that classroom-based speaking tests do have a positive washback effect. He concluded that learners do enjoy the pair-work or group work activities, in which they can have the support of their fellow classmates. However, the finding of this study are not in harmony with Razavipour, et al. (2020) who, during a speaking course for IELTS preparation, found that washback effect has been negative and the student's involvement has been decreased.

Moreover, the qualitative data obtained through the interview supported the students' more involvement in the determined tasks. Hence, the students in the experimental group showed major improvements in their speaking ability. In other words, a significant improvement was observed in the learners' oral performance due to the use of video-based pragmatic tests.

5. Conclusion and Implications

The findings of the study revealed that using video-based pragmatic tests in the classroom caused the experimental group to acquire a high level of pragmatic awareness and to improve their pragmalinguistic learning. Furthermore, the data showed that using video-based pragmatic tests resulted in favorable washback on learners' speaking proficiency. The qualitative data also demonstrated a positive impact on the experimental group's speaking abilities, which was corroborated objectively.

Eventually, it is of value to pay close attention to facilitative roles of technology that day by day are making mammoth impacts on every aspect of human life, two of which being language teaching and language testing. Such video-based tests are proposed to be utilized in various academic curricula, as they simulate a natural communicative and/or authentic milieu to both teachers/testers and students. Previously emphasized, such tests can be of an amalgamation of traditional and modern ways of assessment, bringing a new era into language testing, curriculum design, and teaching. Taking these new achievements into account, language learning, language teaching, and language testing can be enormously optimized. Natural native-like language use is the first and foremost priority of classes in which pragmatics is of consideration, and due to a lack of native L2 speakers in different countries, studies such as this lead to solutions that can open new doors to language studies. Furthermore, this study can be fruitful for teachers who intensively seek for newer ways of institutionalizing L2 pragmatics in their classrooms both when teaching and testing, other than the commonly designed MDCTs, WDCTs, ODCTs and other pragmatically based ways of testing, since pragmatic awareness, pragmalinguistic learning and washback effect of

speaking ability were vastly developed in a natural and contextualized medium.

One must not make the mistake of taking VPTs as only criterion-referenced tests, for they have the capability of being used in norm-referenced tests as well, nonetheless the main emphasis being on authenticity, as such tests have an amalgamation of traditional and modern ways of assessment. In addition, the scope selected here practices pragmatics teaching and testing, and despite the fact that teaching and evaluation of FL/L2 pragmatics is of paramount importance, there is still a long path ahead. It may be interesting for researchers and practitioners who pursue pragmatics instruction to continue to discover creative ways to prevent cross-cultural pragmatic failure.

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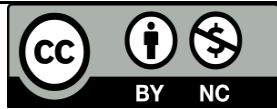
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