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Learning Pragmatics through Computer-Mediated Communication in Taiwan

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Abstract

This study investigated the effectiveness of explicit pragmatic instruction on the acquisition of requests by college-level English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners in Taiwan. The goal was to determine first whether the use of explicit pragmatic instruction had a positive effect on EFL learners' pragmatic competence. Second, the relative effectiveness of presenting pragmatics through two delivery systems—face-to-face, in-class activities and computer-mediated communication (CMC) via e-mail and WebCT—was compared. One hundred and eighteen Taiwanese undergraduate students completed the entire study. There were 40 students in the control group, 36 students in the experimental/ Teacher Instruction group and 42 students in the experimental/CMC group. The results showed that explicit pragmatic instruction had a positive impact on the EFL learners in both the Teacher Instruction and CMC groups. Learners who received explicit pragmatic instruction performed better on the Discourse Completion Task posttest than those who did not. The findings also indicated that technology can be a valuable tool for delivering pragmatics instruction.

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1. Introduction

One of the challenges in language instruction is teaching the appropriate use of language. The term *pragmatics*, originally used within the philosophy of language (Morris, 1938) and later extended into sociolinguistics and other disciplines, addresses how people comprehend and produce a communicative act or speech act in a speech situation. Studies addressing the realization of speech acts by second- or foreign-language learners (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001; Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1990; Olshtain & Blum-Kulka, 1985) have found that even advanced language learners who know grammar and word meanings still often face difficulties in comprehending a speaker's intention or conveying appropriate politeness values in communicative contexts. In the past decades, language learning has shifted from a grammatical perspective to a communicative perspective that emphasizes understanding and appropriate use of language in communicative contexts. Researchers have tried to formulate models of communicative language proficiency and identify the components of communicative competence (Bachman, 1990; Bachman & Plamer, 1982; Canale & Swain, 1980). For instance, Canale and Swain (1980) proposed the communicative competence model, which consists of three components: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence. Bachman (1990) proposed the language competence model, which consists of two main categories: organizational competence and pragmatic competence.

Despite the plethora of theory and research that supports the need for pragmatics instruction, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction mainly focuses on grammar and ignores the development of pragmatic use of language in language learners. Studies have found that when pragmatics is not offered, opportunities for developing pragmatic competence are quite limited (Kasper, 2000).

The role of instruction in pragmatics becomes even more important in foreign-language classrooms because pedagogical intervention is the main avenue by which most learners explore the target language. Cook (2001) stated that in foreign-language classrooms, the target language tends to be viewed as an object of study instead of a means of socialization and communication. Language class activities in EFL settings often focus on decontextualized language practice, which does not expose learners to the types of sociolinguistic input that facilitate competence.

Even though empirical studies have indicated the positive impact of pragmatics instruction on second- or foreign-language learners, few studies have examined the implementation of pragmatics instruction using computer-mediated communication (CMC) in the classroom. In addition, although scholars have compared learner populations from a variety of linguistic backgrounds, few have studied the effectiveness of teaching pragmatics to adult Chinese-speaking college students. This study intends to investigate the effects of pragmatics instruction to adult EFL learners and to explore the affordability of using CMC interactions with native speakers. The results of this study will further our understanding of the effectiveness of implementing pragmatics instruction in an EFL language learning environment and will help us identify the impact of different delivery systems on the development of pragmatics in EFL learners..

2. Theoretical Framework

The main theoretical framework adopted for this study was Schmidt's research regarding the role of conscious learning in the development of target-language pragmatic competence (Schmidt, 1990, 1993, 1995). Schmidt states that learning requires awareness at the level of "noticing" and addresses the role of consciousness of input in the form of "noticing" makes target-language items more available for acquisition. In Schmidt's opinion,

in order to distill intake from input and make it available for further processing, relevant input has to be noticed—detected while in a state of awareness and attention (Schmidt, 1995, 2001). This study tested whether explicit instruction on pragmatics makes learners notice aspects of the target-language pragmatics and leads to greater language acquisition.

One of the most influential notions in the study of language use is speech acts (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989). Speech acts study originates in the philosophy of language (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989). The basic insights offered by the work of philosophers (Austin, 1962; Grice, 1975; Searle, 1969) are based on the assumptions that the minimal units of human communication are not linguistic expressions, but rather the performance of certain kinds of acts, such as greeting, apologizing, asking questions, and requesting help. Within the framework of human communication theory, specific utterances have been labeled as “speech acts.” Linguistic philosophers Austin (1962, 1965) and Searle (1969, 1975) did much of the research and analysis on speech acts. According to Austin (1962), the performance of a speech act involves the performance of three types of acts: a locutionary act that conveys the literal meaning of the utterance; an illocutionary act that performs a particular social function contained within the utterance or written text; and a perlocutionary act, such as the result the utterance produces within the interlocutor of the message. Continuing Austin’s research, Searle (1969) made a major contribution to speech act theory. He divided speech acts into five categories: *assertives* (e.g., reporting, announcing, claiming, and so on), *directives* (e.g., requesting, ordering, and so on), *commissives* (e.g., refusing, offering, and so on), *expressives* (e.g., apologizing, thanking, and so on), and *declarations* (e.g., sentencing, dismissing, and so on). For a speech to be successful, Austin (1962) and Searle (1962, 1975) suggested that it must meet certain conditions, which they called

“felicity conditions” involving the form and context of an utterance that must be met if the utterance is to do what is intended. The speech acts theory makes it possible for researchers of pragmatics to analyze utterances in terms of specific speech acts such as the act of requesting.

The speech acts theory is directly related to the issue of politeness (Sifianous, 1992). The theory of politeness proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987) is a comprehensive construct for the analysis of the realization of speech acts and the various factors affecting it. For this reason, researchers from the fields of cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatics have used politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987) to realize and analyze the speech act behaviors of both native and non-native speakers. Politeness theory is built on the concept of *face*, first introduced by Goffman (1967) and redefined by Brown and Levinson as the “public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself” (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 61). Face refers to an individual’s self-respect and the maintenance of self-esteem in public or private situations; such as trying to avoid embarrassing others or making them feel uncomfortable. According to Brown and Levinson, politeness strategies are developed for the purpose of protecting the hearer’s face. Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 69) noted that face-threatening acts (FTAs)—acts that infringe on the hearer’s need to maintain his or her self-esteem and respect from others—are to be avoided or performed only with measures to reduce the possibility of offense.

Brown and Levinson (1987) also identified the factors of distance, power, and ranking imposition that speakers should consider when performing the face-threatening act. Distance (D) refers to “social distance” between the speaker and hearer. It is a relationship that derives from the frequency of contact and types of exchanges made between the interlocutors. Power (P) represents an

asymmetrical relationship that addresses the extent to which hearers can demand acceptance of their desires at the expense of the speaker's desire. With regard to ranking (R), situation and culture determine the rankings of impositions. Brown and Levinson claimed that D, P, and R factors are relevant, independent, and subsume all others (such as status, occupation, authority, ethnic identity, friendship and situational factors) that have a principled effect on the performance of face-threatening acts. The act of requesting was chosen as the focus of the pragmatic instruction in this study because requests are considered face-threatening acts for both the requestee, whose freedom of action can be impeded, and for the requester, who runs the risk of losing face if the requestee does not comply. The three factors of distance, power, and ranking identified by Brown and Levinson are relevant to a situation in which a request is made.

2. 1. Effects of Instruction on Pragmatic Development

Methods of pragmatic instruction can be divided into two categories: *explicit* teaching, and *implicit* teaching (Rose, 1997). Research into the performance of speech acts by second- or foreign-language learners has revealed differences between language learner and native speaker realization patterns (Bardolvi-Harlig, 2001). Since the 1980's, scholars such as Blumka-Kulka, House, and Kasper have recommended including explicit pragmatics instruction in the language-learning curriculum to bridge the gap between language learners and native speakers. Explicit approaches involve direct explanation of target pragmatic features followed by practice (Taguchi, 2011). Under explicit teaching method, learners engage in metapragmatic activities that focus on the features of the target language; the implicit teaching method does not provide this opportunity. However, recently scholars have argued that explicit and implicit conditions

should be seen as a continuum of instruction rather than a dichotomy.

Many studies have examined the effect of instructional intervention in the development of pragmatic knowledge. These studies have covered pragmatic fluency (House, 1996), pragmatic routines (Tateyama, 2001; Tateyama et al., 1997; Wildner-Bassett, 1994), conversation closing (Bardolvi-Harlig & Hartford, 1991), apologies (Eslami-Rasekh, 2005; Olshtain & Cohen, 1990), compliments (Billmyer, 1990; Rose & Kwai-Fun, 2001), conversational implicature (Bouton, 1994; Kubota, 1995) and requests (Eslami-Rasekh, Eslami-Rasekh, & Fatahi, 2004; Fukuya, 1998; Rose, 1994). Most of these studies were amenable to instruction, and found a positive impact on language learners' pragmatic knowledge, which supports the hypothesis that pragmatic ability can be enhanced or developed through systematic planned classroom activities.

Billmyer's (1990) study on the effects of instruction on compliment and compliment responses by adult Japanese females were among the earliest of interventional studies. Billmyer's goal was to address gaps by non-native speakers in communicating appropriately at advanced levels. The study found that learners who received the instruction offered a greater number of compliments and made more spontaneous compliments than members of the control group, who complimented mostly in response to the task or their conversation partner's inducement. In addition, those who received the instruction used a more diverse inventory of adjectives and used more deflection strategies characteristic of native speakers when responding to compliments.

House (1996) examined the teaching of conversational routines in English communication courses for advanced learners. She compared the effects of implicit and explicit teaching techniques on the acquisition of various linguistic devices to manage interactions such as gambits, greetings, and discourse strategies

as a measure of pragmatic proficiency. Participants in the explicit group received metapragmatic information about the conversational routines and their uses. In contrast, participants in the implicit group did not receive explanations of the pragmatic rules. House found that participants in both treatment groups improved their fluency in terms of initiating and changing topics. However, participants in the explicit group demonstrated a wider array of strategies for rejecting a previous request. Despite these gains, both groups continued to have problems responding appropriately during conversations.

Tateyama et al. (1997) examined the teaching of the functions of routines formula—*sumimasen*—and other similar routine expressions in request strategies. Participants were 27 students enrolled in a Japanese 102 class at university level. The students received two treatments—explicit teaching and implicit teaching. The results indicated an advantage for the explicit teaching group. Students who received explicit teaching performed better than those in the implicit teaching group in terms of multiple-choice tests and role-playing exercises.

Eslami-Rasekh et al. (2004) explored the effect of explicit metapragmatic instruction on the comprehension of advanced EFL students of the speech acts of requesting, apologizing, and complaining. Classroom activities included teacher-fronted discussions, cooperative grouping, role-playing, and other pragmatically oriented tasks that promoted learning of the intended speech acts. Participants were Iranian undergraduate students in the field of teaching English as a foreign language, with a group of American students that provided the baseline. This study applied the pre-post control group design. The results indicated that students' speech act comprehension improved significantly, supporting the claim that explicit metapragmatic instruction facilitates interlanguage pragmatic development.

In 2007, an intervention study conducted by Alcon-Soler (2007) compared the impact of explicit and implicit treatment on Spanish EFL learners' acquisition of request forms in English. The explicit group was given metapragmatic information regarding requests, and was asked to identify examples of requests in provided scripts and to justify their choices. The implicit groups received awareness raising tasks that featured input enhancement. They did not receive any metapragmatic explanation. The researchers found that both groups (explicit and implicit) outperformed the control group, however no significant differences were found between the intervention groups. However, results indicated that the explicit group maintained learning even though the posttest was delayed 3 weeks after the treatment (Taguchi, 2011).

The results of the reviewed studies support the need of pragmatics instruction in language classrooms and provide ample evidence for the benefits of instruction in pragmatics. The findings also suggest that explicit teaching of pragmatics rules to non-native speakers is more effective than mere exposure to the target language. Based on the above literature this researcher seeks to examine the impact of explicit pragmatics instruction on adult EFL learners' pragmatic development.

2. 2. Technology and Language Instruction

Computer-mediated communication (CMC) is interaction via telecommunications (Cifuentes & Shih, 2001), specifically, the exchange of ideas, thoughts, and information among people through networked computers. Over the past two decades, computers have become common instructional tools in English as a Second Language (ESL)/EFL classrooms. Previous research suggests that applying CMC into classrooms can facilitate communication (Cooper & Selfe, 1990), reduce anxiety (Kern, 1995), increase oral discussion (Sullivan & Pratt, 1996), enhance motivation (Warchauer, 1996), improve writing skills (Cononelos &

Oliva, 1993), shape foreign language pragmatics learning and use (Belz, 2002), and develop connections between writing and thinking (Warschauer, Turbee, & Roberts, 1996). One of the most important reasons that CMC has received attention from second language professionals is that it enables students to have meaningful and authentic exchanges in the target language. CMC has become an emphasis in recent language movements also because it promotes equal participation in the classroom (Chun, 1994; Sullivan & Pratt, 1996).

Presently, researchers have examined the use of various forms of computer technologies for promoting L2 pragmatic development. Studies have found several advantages for teaching pragmatics through computer technologies. Computer platform permits the teaching features of pragmatics that are not easily incorporated in traditional settings and provides an authentic learning environment where learners engage in real-life communication (Li, 2012). However, there is still a relative gap in the use of technology and computer mediated communication in promoting the EFL learners pragmatic competence. In an effort to fill this gap, the present study integrates technology as one of the delivery systems to determine whether CMC can serve as a potentially useful channel to deliver pragmatics instruction to EFL learners. The present study also compared the effectiveness of pragmatics instruction through CMC and that through in-class delivery.

After all, the present study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. Does application of the Explicit Approach for Teaching Speech Acts (EATSA) have a positive effect on EFL learners' pragmatic competence in terms of four components: speech act, information, expression, and politeness?
2. Does application of the Explicit Approach for Teaching Speech Acts (EATSA) through computer-mediated communication (CMC) have a positive effect on EFL learners' pragmatic competence in terms of four components: speech acts, information, expression, and politeness?
3. What is the effect of on-line (CMC) EATSA compared to in-classroom (face-to-face) EATSA?

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

The original sample selected to participate in this study was 130 undergraduate students majoring in EFL from Ching-Yun University in Taiwan and 22 graduate students in the field of Teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) at a large, southern university in the United States. However, several participants were absent for part of the treatment or for the pretest or posttest. Therefore, the final sample was 118 Taiwanese undergraduate students and 22 graduate students. The Taiwanese students belonged to three intact classes and were enrolled in the class "English for Tourism". The results from the demographic survey indicated that the Taiwanese participants shared basic demographic characteristics. Their first language was Mandarin, and their field of study was EFL. The students were in their third year of college-level English at the university and ranged from 20 to 25 years in age. As shown in table 1, there were 98 female students and 20 male EFL students. They had received between seven and 12 years of formal English language classroom instruction in Taiwan.

Table 1
Characteristics of the Taiwanese Participants

	Control Group (<i>n</i> = 40)	Experimental-TI Group (<i>n</i> = 36)	Experimental-CMC Group (<i>n</i> = 42)
Gender			
Male	5	8	7
Female	35	28	35
Age			
20	5	15	17
21	18	9	15
22	9	9	7
23	5	1	3
24	1	0	0
25	2	2	0
Average age (years)	21.62	20.97	20.93

3. 2. Instruments

General English Comprehension Test: Because random selection of participants to groups was not possible, the General English Comprehension Test was administered to ensure the comparability of the groups in terms of language equivalence. This standardized test, used to determine the English proficiency of the Taiwanese participants, has sections on writing, reading, listening, and speaking. A reliability coefficient of 0.77 (Cronbach's α) was obtained from the pilot study.

Open-ended Discourse Completion Tests (DCT): Open-ended DCT is a measure of learners' speech act performance that consists of a written speech act discourse completion task. In this study, the open-ended DCT contained 12 requesting situations (See Appendix A) to which participants responded in English. And the DCT pretest and posttest used to measure participants' pragmatic competence in this study were the same. The researcher designed some of the situations and some were adopted from Beebe and Takahashi (1989). For each situation, contextual variables such as relative social status, level of acquaintance (close, somewhat close, or distant), level of social distance, and the intensity of the act (magnitude of imposition) were manipulated. The different levels of power, social distance, and imposition in the 12 situations are shown in Appendix B.

The participants' pragmatic competence was assessed based on the rating system developed by Hudson, Detmer, and Brown (1995), which contain four components: the ability to correctly use the speech acts; expressions; the amount of information used; and the politeness. The learners' performances in each of the 12 situations were rated using a five-point scale. The total DCT score for each learner ranged from 12 to 60. Two native-English speakers from a local middle school in the community where Texas A&M University is located rated the DCT performances. Raters were trained prior to the formal rating process.

3. 3. Procedure

3. 3. 1. Research Design

This research adopted a quasi-experimental, pretest/posttest design (pretest—treatment—posttest). Due to various instructional constraints, it was not possible to assign students randomly to different groups, thus making it necessary to work with three intact groups. However, the treatment types were randomly assigned to the intact classes. The study lasted for ten weeks. Participants in the control group (C, *n* = 40) did not receive any instruction on pragmatics. Participants in the experimental/Teacher Instruction group (TI, *n* = 36) received explicit instruction on pragmatics from their instructor in Taiwan. Participants in the experimental/CMC

group (CMC, $n = 42$) received explicit instruction on pragmatics through their partners in Texas.

In an effort to determine English language proficiency equivalence in the three groups, the General English Comprehension Test was given to the 118 participants. The results showed that there was no statistically significant difference among the three groups

in the performance of the General English Comprehension Test ($F = 0.91$, $df = 2$, $p = .89$). In addition, chi-square tests were conducted for the comparison among the groups in terms of gender, age, and years of formal English language instruction. The results showed no statistically significant differences among the three groups in any of these variables.

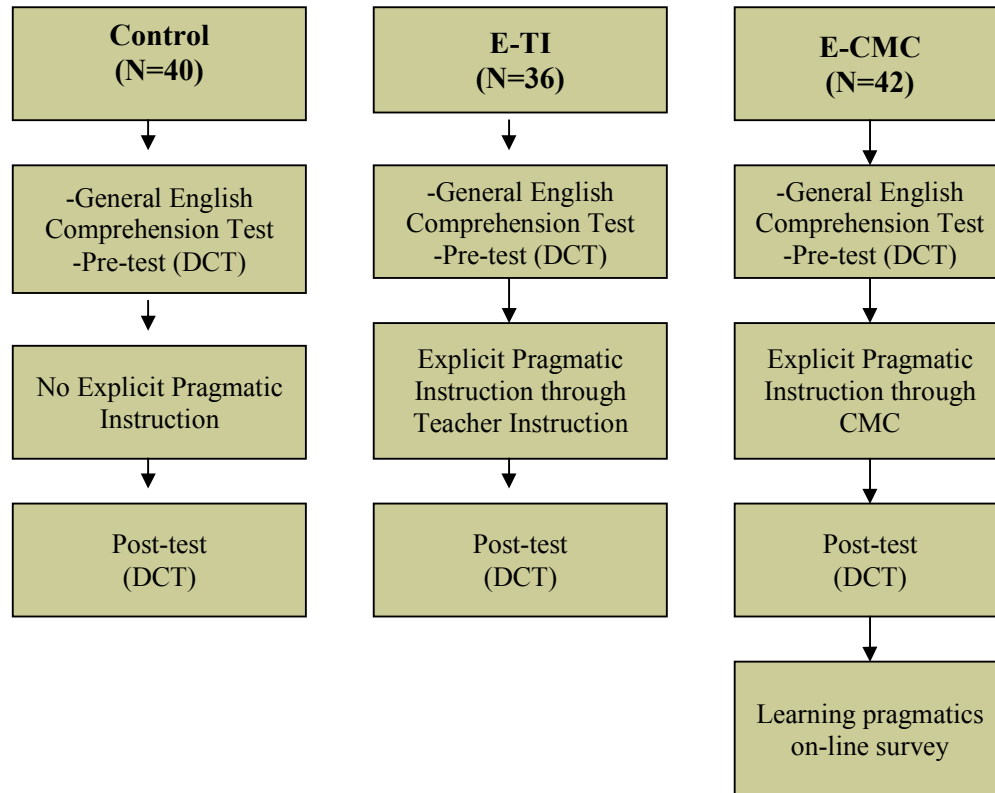


Figure 1
Research Design

3.3.2. Treatment Procedures

Prior to the treatment, the researcher met with the instructor of the Taiwanese participants to make sure that treatment materials and the research procedure were clear and feasible in the classroom setting. All participants in the experimental groups received the treatment as part of their curricular activity during regular class periods.

The 42 Taiwanese participants in the experimental/CMC group received a WebCT workshop during their first meeting to become familiar with this software. They were each given a username and were informed that they had a partner in Texas with whom they would be required to have weekly on-line communication.

During the ten-week duration of this study, all 118 Taiwanese participants met once a week

for 100 minutes. At the beginning of each class, the professor in Taiwan spent 15 minutes addressing class management and student affairs issues. Since the 118 Taiwanese participants were enrolled in an “English for Tourism” class, participants in all three groups were engaged in the warm-up tasks of watching a short English-language film about tourism for about 15 minutes, followed by the instructors’ 20-minute explanation of the film. Each week, the instructor taught one unit from the textbook *At Your Service: English for the Travel and Tourist Industry*.

During the remaining 50 minutes of class, participants in the control group did not engage in any explicit pragmatics activities. Instead the instructor lectured for about 30 minutes on learning tourism in English using the teacher’s manual as a guide, followed by 20 minutes of summary and discussion. During the 30 minutes of lecture, students interacted with the instructor through questions and answers. Additionally, students had small group conversations with their peers during the 20 minutes of summary and discussion.

The participants in the experimental groups (TI and CMC) were given explicit instruction on pragmatics during the remaining 50 minutes of each class session, with a focus on learning “request” features. Each group used identical Web-based lesson plans that the researcher had developed for the ten-week period. Interested readers can obtain these lesson plans from this researcher. The five components used in this study were explicitly taught to those in the experimental/Teacher Instruction group and experimental/CMC group:

(1) *Motivation*, in which teachers tried to impel the learners to focus on the activities. For instance, teachers provided examples of miscommunication to motivate students to learn pragmatics and concentrate on the activities that followed.

(2) *Form search*, in which teachers provided examples that addressed the intended speech act of requesting and asked learners to find examples from the available resources of textbooks, movies, videotapes, conversations, dialogues, and so on. The goal was to help learners become aware of contexts where “requesting” occurred.

(3) *Form comparison*, in which learners compared their own pragmatic production to that of native English speakers. The goal was to illustrate how speech acts are realized by language learners, how cultural norms dictate the use of speech acts, and why it could be challenging for second-language learners to appropriately use speech acts in different cultural contexts.

(4) *Form analysis*, in which teachers explained various uses of the speech act of requesting and identified the forms used in different communicative contexts. Learners were asked to identify social variables in these contexts and judge the appropriateness of usage. The goal was to provide learners the opportunity to identify the use of “requesting” in different contexts and to learn how to use the speech act appropriately.

(5) *The use of speech act*, in which teachers provided examples of DCT situations to which learners responded. The goal was to help learners reflect on what they had learned from the classroom activities.

Table 2
Instructional Activities

Week	Date	Activity Type	
1	9/26-10/02	Motivation	WebCT discussions
2	10/03-10/09	Form Search	
3	10/10-10/16	Form Comparison	Web connection 1
4	10/17-10/23	Form Analysis	
5	10/24-10/30	Use of Speech Acts	
6	10/31-11/06	Form Search/Form Analysis	
7	11/07-11/13	Motivation/Form Comparison	Web connection 2
8	11/14-11/20	Form Search/Use of Speech Acts	
9	11/21-11/27	Motivation/Form Analysis	
10	11/28-12/04	Form Comparison/Use of Speech Acts	

The graduate students at Texas A&M University delivered ten weeks of lesson plans to their partners in Taiwan through e-mail correspondence and WebCT discussions. Participants in the CMC group, including the graduate students at Texas A&M University, were required to submit at least two e-mails to their partners per week and to participate in the WebCT discussion when questions were posted. Each week, the researcher communicated via e-mail with the 22 graduate students at Texas A&M University regarding their correspondences to ensure that the

instruction and communication were sustained.

3.3.3. Data Analysis

Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) with the type of treatment as between-subject variable and the pretest as a covariate was conducted to answer the three research questions. Post-hoc tests were performed to identify pairwise differences of the three treatment conditions (C/TI/CMC). Effect sizes as measured by Cohen's *d* were calculated to determine the magnitude of the differences.

Table 3
Descriptive Statistical Results of the DCT Pretest Scores by Group

Rating Components	Groups					
	Control (N=40)		TI (N=36)		CMC (N=42)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Speech Act	44.43	5.09	45.50	5.93	41.38	4.15
Information	41.60	4.75	42.75	6.56	39.96	4.23
Expression	43.80	4.63	43.86	5.84	42.12	4.03
Politeness	42.95	4.90	44.89	5.32	41.12	3.95

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive Statistics and ANCOVA

The descriptive statistical results of the DCT pretest scores by group are reported in Table 1. Each student received four scores based on his or her ability to use correct speech acts, the amount of information given, the quality of expressions, and the level of politeness. There was no statistically significant difference

among the three groups for the DCT pretest ($F = 2.13$, $df = 2$, $p = 0.13$). The descriptive statistical results of the DCT posttest scores are reported in Table 2. The analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) results indicated a statistically significant main effect on the types of treatment for each of the components of the DCT: $F = 30.77$ ($df = (2, 114)$, $p < .001$) for speech act, $F = 15.31$ ($df = (2, 114)$, $p < .001$) for information, $F = 4.71$ ($df = (2, 114)$, $p < .001$) for expression, and $F = 9.18$ ($df = (2,$

114), $p < .001$) for politeness. The results of ANCOVA are summarized in Table 3.

Table 4
Descriptive Statistical Results of the DCT Posttest Scores by Group

Rating Components	Groups					
	Control (N=40)		TI (N=36)		CMC (N=42)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Speech Act	44.55	3.52	50.25	4.06	47.79	3.72
Information	44.63	3.38	48.75	4.54	47.62	3.92
Expression	44.48	4.03	49.03	4.43	48.29	3.84
Politeness	43.90	4.07	48.87	4.07	47.70	4.05

4. 2. Post Hoc Pairwise Comparisons

Bonferroni post hoc tests were conducted to identify pairwise group differences. The Bonferroni tests revealed that there were two pairs of groups whose means differed statistically from each other at the .05 level. The experimental/Teacher Instruction and the experimental/CMC groups scored significantly

higher than the control group in terms of the four rating scores (speech act, information, expression, politeness). The posttest scores of the experimental/Teacher Instruction group were the highest of the three groups; however, there is no statistically significant difference between the experimental/Teacher Instruction and experimental/CMC groups on the means of the DCT posttest.

Table 5
ANCOVA Summary Table for the Effects of the Type of Treatment on the DCT Posttest

Components	Sum of square	df	Mean Square	F	p
Speech Act					
Covariate	451.70	1	451.70	45.85	<.001
Between	606.20	2	303.10	30.77	<.001
Within	1123.07	114	9.85		
Total	2108.96	117			
Information					
Covariate	366.72	1	366.72	29.25	<.001
Between	383.96	2	191.98	15.31	<.001
Within	1429.31	114	12.54		
Total	2179.99	117			
Expression					
Covariate	591.62	1	591.62	50.36	<.001
Between	110.72	2	55.36	4.71	=.001
Within	1316.64	114	11.55		
Total	2018.98	117			
Politeness					
Covariate	402.68	1	402.68	32.42	<.001
Between	228.13	2	114.06	9.18	<.001
Within	1391.36	114	12.21		
Total	2022.18	117			

Effect sizes (Cohen's d) were calculated in order to determine the magnitudes of the aforementioned between-group differences. The differences between the control group and the experimental/Teacher Instruction group were the largest on all the four components of the DCT, specifically, $d = 1.50$ for *speech act*, $d = 1.04$ for *information*, $d = 1.08$ for *expression*, and $d = 1.22$ for *level of politeness*. The differences between the control group and experimental/CMC group were the second largest on all the four components of the DCT, in particular, $d = .90$ for *speech act*, $d = .82$ for *information*, $d = .97$ for *expression*, and $d = .94$ for *level of politeness*. The differences between the two experimental groups were the

smallest ranging from 0.18 for *expression* to 0.36 for *speech act* in favor of the Teacher Instruction group.

4.3. Comparisons between the Pretest and the Posttest

After 10 weeks, members of the control group did not show statistically significant improvement in their DCT posttest in terms of speech act, information, expression, or politeness ($F = 8.257$, $df = 7$, $p = .216$). This indicates that students who did not receive explicit instruction on pragmatics did not increase their pragmatic competence.

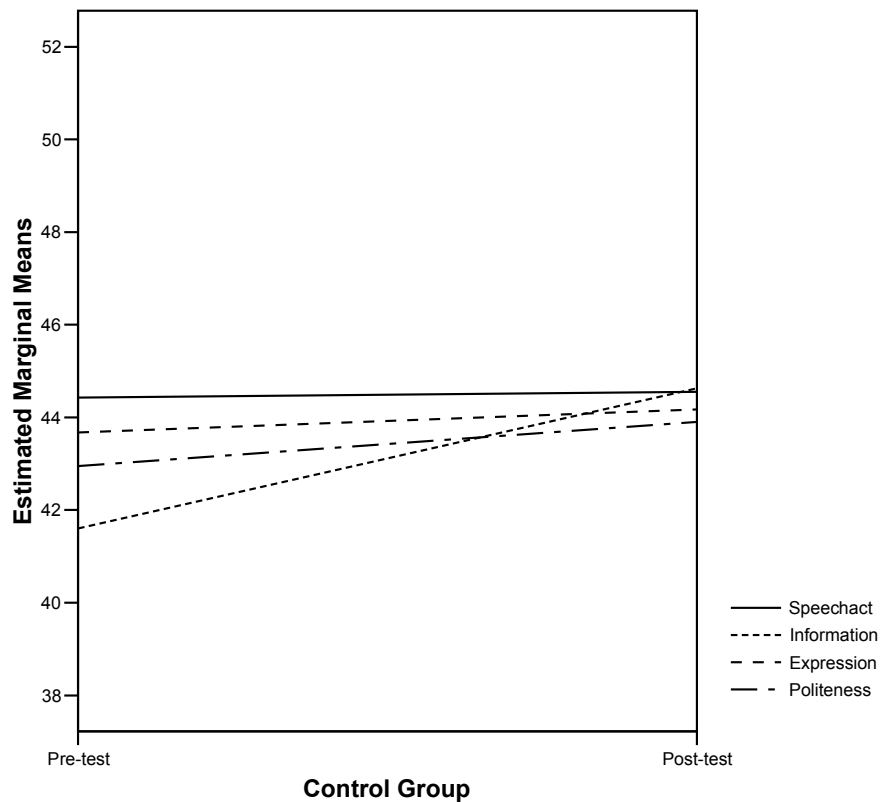


Figure 2

DCT Pretest and Posttest Scores by the Four Rating Elements for the Control Group

On the other hand, after ten weeks of explicit teaching on pragmatics, the experimental/Teacher Instruction group showed statistically

significant improvement in the DCT posttest. Overall, the experimental/Teacher Instruction group achieved significantly higher scores on

the DCT posttest than the DCT pretest ($F = 11.156$, $df = 7$, $p < .05$), and the means for each rating component on the DCT posttest demonstrated an observable increase that ranged from 3.98 to 6.0 points. Furthermore, as shown in Table 1 and 2, the scores on *information* yielded by the experimental/Teacher Instruction group students remained the lowest on both the DCT pretest and posttest. However,

the mean scores on *information* displayed the greatest improvement from the DCT pretest to the DCT posttest (from 42.75 to 48.75). The members of this group were found to have the highest mean scores on *speech act*; meanwhile, the mean scores on *expressions*, *the amount of information*, and *levels of politeness* also improved moderately after the treatment.

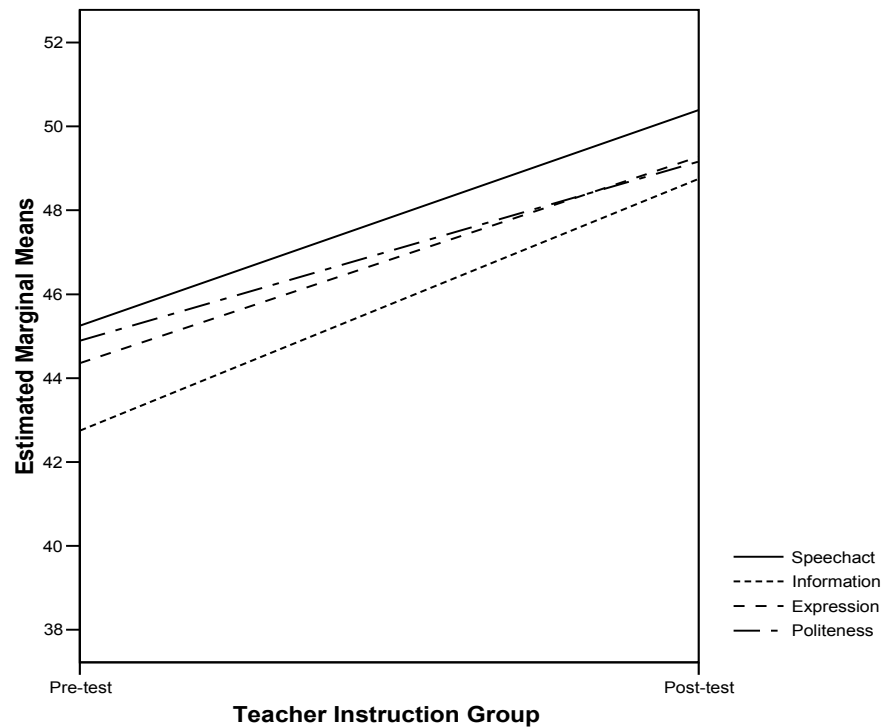


Figure 3

DCT Pretest and Posttest Scores by the Four Rating Elements for the Experimental/Teacher Instruction Group

The students in the experimental/CMC group who learned pragmatics through e-mail and on-online discussions also showed a

statistically significant improvement in the DCT posttest from the pretest ($F = 47.897$, $df = 7$, $p < .05$).

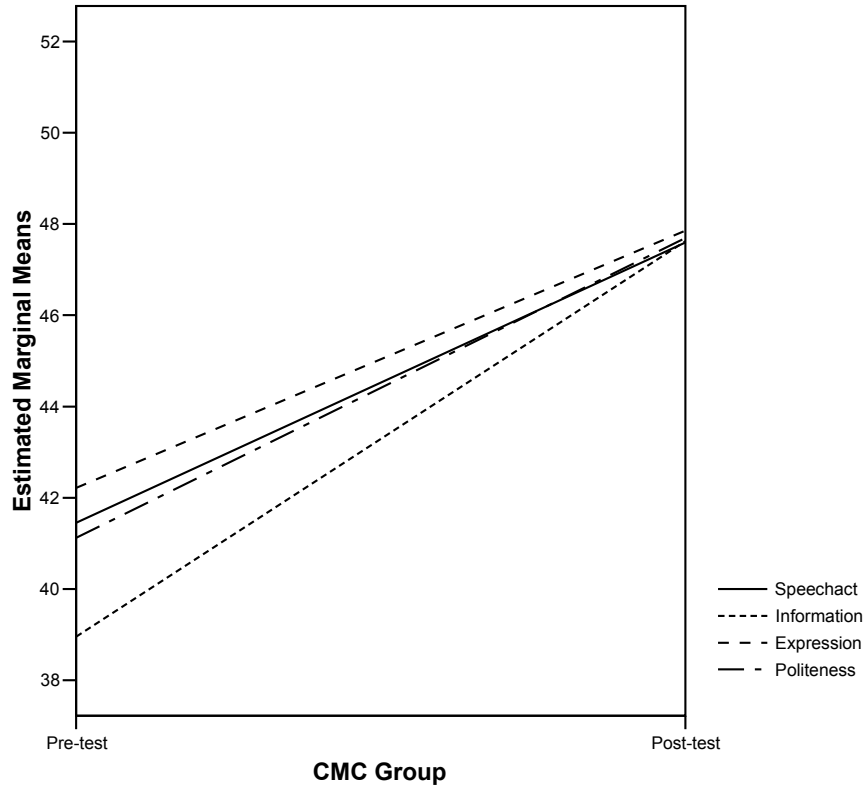


Figure 4
DCT Pretest and Posttest Scores by the Four Rating Elements for the Experimental/CMC Group

CMC group generated significantly higher scores on the DCT posttest than the DCT pretest; the means for each rating component on the DCT posttest increased ranged from 6.17 to 7.66 points. Like the results from the experimental/Teacher Instruction group, the scores on *information* yielded by the experimental/CMC group remained the lowest on both the DCT pretest and posttest. However, the mean scores on *information* displayed the greatest improvement from the pretest to the posttest (from 39.96 to 47.62). Overall, the mean scores of *speech act*, *expressions*, and *levels of politeness* also improved moderately after the treatment.

5. Discussion

Schmidt notes that learning requires awareness at the level of “noticing” and addresses the role of conscious processing in second

language acquisition (Schmidt, 1990, 1993, 1995). This study tested whether explicit instruction on pragmatics makes learners notice aspects of the target language pragmatics and leads to greater language acquisition. Results of this study show that learners who were given explicit pragmatic instruction performed better than those in the control group. This finding supports Schmidt’s noticing hypothesis that “noticing” facilitates the acquisition of target-language features. In other words, explicit instruction on pragmatics has a positive impact on language learners’ pragmatic competence.

The results of this study make clear the role of pedagogical intervention in helping language learners recognize their existing pragmatic knowledge in first language and apply it to the second language contexts. The findings of this study are consistent with those from the

previous research (Billmyer, 1990; Bouton, 1994; Eslami-Rasekh, 2005; House & Kasper, 1987; Lyster, 1994; Olshtain & Cohen, 1990; Rose, 1997; Takahasi, 2001; Tateyama, 2001). Specifically, the pedagogical intervention enabled participants to practice specific pragmatic features in the target language, made them aware of what they already knew, and encouraged them to use their existing pragmatic knowledge.

Furthermore, the results of the present study show the importance of explicit instruction on pragmatics for learners' development of target language pragmatic competence. This suggests that modifications to language curricula are needed to increase the teaching of pragmatic features and reduce the current emphasis on grammatical forms. Studies have indicated that advanced learners with high level second language competence still have gaps in their pragmatic knowledge. Therefore, pragmatic competence should not be viewed as a mechanism that is activated automatically as linguistic competence increases. The role of instruction in pragmatics becomes even more important in foreign-language classrooms; because pedagogical intervention is the primary means by which foreign-language learners gain proficiency in a target language.

The previous research indicates that using CMC in a language-learning environment has numerous benefits, including promoting meaningful human interactions (Salaberry, 1996), cultivating social relationships within or across classrooms (Cifuentes & Shih, 2001; Salaberry, 1996; Warschauer, 1996; Warschauer, Turbee, & Roberts, 1996), and providing an environment for equal participation (Chun, 1994; Sullivan & Pratt, 1996). In addition, in a CMC environment, a learner can proceed at his or her own pace, which helps reduce anxiety (Kern, 1995) and gives time for the learner to make connections between thinking and writing (Warschauer, Turbee, & Roberts, 1996). However, there is a lack of research on the use of technology in teaching pragmatics.

The results of the present investigation show that CMC is a potentially beneficial channel for helping learners recognize the pragmatic features of the target language and "noticing" the appropriate linguistic forms. As reported earlier, learners in the CMC group performed significantly better on the DCT posttest than those in the control group.

From the results, we suggested that CMC can be a valuable tool for delivering pragmatic instruction, even though, the researchers did not find statistically significant differences between the students in the Teacher Instruction group and those in the CMC group on the posttest. This suggests that more research in comparing the effects of these two delivery systems on the teaching of pragmatics is needed. If future research cannot find statistically significant differences between these two delivery systems, cost and benefit analysis and learner preferences may help determine which one to choose.

This study has several limitations. The findings of this study were based on the EFL students from one college in Taiwan. The findings may vary if applied to other groups of participants. The majority of the 118 Taiwanese participants were female. Although no statistically significant difference was found across the three groups in terms of the proportions of male and female students, it is more ideal for future studies to have a more balanced gender ratio. In addition, the lesson plans and activities used in this study were designed by the investigator and delivered by one Taiwanese instructor and the graduate students from one university in the United States. The design of the materials and the quality of instruction may vary in other contexts. Furthermore, using written DCT to collect data and focusing on only one speech act, "requesting", may also cause biases in the results.

These various limitations of this study point to the directions of future research. First, the

data analysis for the present study was based heavily on answers to a written DCT questionnaire. The DCT format is constructed for eliciting pair responses, so multiple turns of interaction cannot be examined. As research has suggested, studying speech act communication in more than one conversational turn can provide researchers with additional information about how the speaker and hearer negotiate meaning (Wolfson, 1989). Hence, future studies may use an ethnographic approach to determine if the findings of this study can be corroborated with qualitative data.

Second, only one speech act, “requesting”, was examined in this study. Additional studies need to be done to examine different speech acts to obtain further insights into the behavioral patterns in regard to pragmatic competence. In addition, the contextual variables used in this study were “power,” “social distance,” and “imposition of the task”. Future studies can be designed to examine other contextual factors, such as age and gender.

Third, the CMC group only experienced asynchronous communication in this study, which means that learners did not have the chance to communicate with each other simultaneously. Future studies may use synchronous communication in addition to asynchronous communication.

Fourth, in-depth cross-cultural research on socio-cultural values relevant to request performance is needed. Future studies on different cultural values can help us gain deeper knowledge of a speech act. Cross-cultural studies also can provide insights about how to adapt or integrate research findings into pedagogical materials so that foreign-language instructors can more efficiently aid second- and foreign-language learners in developing communicative competence in performing request and other acts.

Fifth, additional studies involving the teaching of pragmatics to language learners at various

proficiency levels are needed in order to provide further support for pragmatics instruction to be incorporated into the second language curriculum. Studies of language learners at various proficiency levels can help instructors find the type of pragmatics instruction that is the most beneficial for the learners at a specific proficiency level.

Lastly, the design of this study was cross-sectional rather than longitudinal. Data from longitudinal studies may provide more information on how pragmatic competence develops and how proficiency and pragmatics instruction interact over time.

Future studies on the instruction of pragmatics may replicate this study with language learners at a different proficiency level, assess pragmatic proficiency using multiple methods, and explore more than one speech act and/or more contextual variables.

More cross-cultural studies of socio-cultural values and longitudinal studies of the development of pragmatic competency are also valuable for understanding and improving pragmatics instruction. Finally, more studies comparing the effects of various face-to-face and computer-mediated environments in delivering pragmatics instruction are needed for choosing the appropriate media through which pragmatics can be taught.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Discourse Completion Tests

Name

Gender

Major

Age

Discourse Completion Tests

Please read the following situations. Write what you would say in each situation. It is expected that you would say something in **English** in each of the situation.

Situation 1

The mid-term examination is approaching, and you have missed some classes. You like to borrow the class notes from one of your classmates who has attended class regularly. What would you say to him/her?

You: _____

Situation 2

You are applying for a new job in a small company and already set up the date and time for interview. However, you missed the time and would like to reschedule the appointment. What would you say to the manager?

You: _____

Situation 3

Your friend's birthday is coming and you are shopping for him/her. You see something in a display case that is appropriate as a gift. You want to look at it more closely. What would you say to the salesperson?

You: _____

Situation 4

You are going to your friend's new house. You thought you knew the direction to his/her house, but it seems that you are lost. You see a police officer and like to ask for direction.. What would you say to him/her?

You: _____

Situation 5

You are supposed to hand in an assignment to your professor today. You have not been able to finish it. You would like to ask for an extension. What would you say to your professor?

You: _____

Situation 6

You have arrived a new place and would like to open an account at the bank. You go to the bank and find the bank teller. What would you say to him/her?

You: _____

Situation 7

You are a freshman in university. Today, you go to school for orientation for new comers. But you cannot find the building where you are supposed to go. Two students are approaching you, and you want to ask them for direction. What would you say to them?

You: _____

Situation 8

You are in a meeting with your boss. However, you forgot to bring a pen with you. You would like to borrow a pen from him/her. What would you say to your boss?

You: _____

Situation 9

You have worked in a company for more than 3 years. You would like to ask for a raise. You go to your supervisor's office. What would you say to him/her?

You: _____

Situation 10

You have arrived at a hotel. It is time for you to check in. What would you say to the hotel representatives?

You: _____

Situation 11

You ask your classmate to pass a pencil to another classmate. What would you say to him/her?

You: _____

Situation 12

It is raining now. You need a ride home. You call your brother for help. What would you say to him?

You: _____

Appendix B*12 DCT Situations Displayed in Terms of Power, Social Distance, and Imposition*

Situation	Power+	Power-	<u>SD</u> +	<u>SD</u> -	Imposition+	Imposition-
1		X		X	X	
2		X	X		X	
3	X		X			X
4		X	X			X
5		X		X	X	
6	X		X		X	
7	X		X			X
8		X		X		X
9		X		X	X	
10	X		X			X
11	X			X		X
12	X			X	X	

Power+: Speaker has a higher rank, title or social position, or is in control of the assets in the situation. Examples would be a supervisor, manager, or customer.

Power-: Speaker has a lower rank, title or social position, or is not in control of the assets in the situation. Examples would be a subordinate worker, member of an organization with less status, or salesperson serving a customer.

SD+: Speaker and hearer do not know or identify each other. They are strangers interacting in a social/life circumstance.

SD- : Speaker and hearer know and/or identify each other. Examples are co-workers or people who belong to the same organization.

Imposition+: The hearer must expend a large amount of goods, services, or energy to carry out the request.

Imposition- : The hearer must expend a relatively small amount of goods, services, or energy to carry out the request.

(These definitions were adopted from Hudson, T., Detmer, E., & Brown, J. D. (1995). Developing prototypic measures of cross-cultural pragmatics Honolulu, HI: Second Language Teaching & Curriculum Center, University of Hawaii)