The effects of instruction on pragmatic awareness

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This study investigates the effects of instruction in developing the pragmatic competence of learners of Japanese as a foreign language (JFL), specifically focusing on their ability to discern pragmatic appropriateness in Japanese requests. Students enrolled in four intermediate Japanese classes at an American university participated in the study. Two classes (N=24) served as the experimental group and the other two (N=22) as the control group. Each group received a different instructional package. Effectiveness of instruction was measured through a rating task in which the participants watched six short video clips and rated the different JFL learner's performances in them on a 7-point likert scale. Results show that both groups made post-instructional improvements but no significant difference was found between the groups. Qualitative analysis of the self-reports shows that students raised their awareness of pragmatic appropriateness in the post-test, as shown by their comments on the interactions.

　本研究では日本語学習者の依頼の場面における語用論的適切さを判断する能力がプラグマティックス授業によりどのように変化するかを調査した。被験者はアメリカの大学に在籍する中級日本語学習者で、24名（二クラス）が実験群、22名（二クラス）が統制群として本研究に参加した。プラグマティックス授業の効果を検証するため、被験者に日本語学習者の依頼のパフォーマンスを映した六つのビデオクリップを見てもらい、発話行為の適切度を7段階リカートスケールで評価してもらった。結果は同グループ内の授業の前後、および実験群と統制群で比較した。計量的分析結果では両グループともに授業後に向上が見られたが、グループ間の相違は見られなかった。被験者がビデオを評価した際に記したコメントを質的に考察した結果、授業後には語用論的適切さに関する意識の高まりが見られた。

Many studies on interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) in the 80's and early 90's examined how non-native speaking learners' speech act realization patterns such as request and apology are different from those of native speakers (NSs) of the target language (TL) through cross-cultural comparisons. Recently more attention has been given to learning and teaching pragmatics in the L2 classroom setting. Kasper (2001) categorize studies in ILP in the classroom setting into two types:

observational and interventional. Observational studies are further divided into two types: nondevelopmental and developmental. Nondevelopmental observational studies focus on the learner or teacher language use (e.g., Falsgraf & Majors, 1995; Poole, 1992), whereas developmental observational studies examine how L2 learners' pragmatic ability changes over time (e.g., Ohta, 1999, 2001). Interventional studies investigate the effects of instruction, including effectiveness of different teaching approaches such as explicit and implicit instructions (e.g., House, 1996;Tateyama, 2001a). The present study falls into this category and examines the effects of instruction in teaching requests to Japanese as foreign language (JFL) learners, specifically focusing on their pragmatic awareness. In the following section, I will review the literature on L2 pragmatic awareness.

Pragmatic Awareness

Studies that examine L2 learners' pragmatic awareness include Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei (1998), which showed learners' different perceptions of pragmatic and grammatical errors, depending on their learning environment. In their study, learners in a second language setting assessed pragmatic errors as more severe than grammatical errors, whereas learners in a foreign language setting assessed grammatical errors as more severe than pragmatic errors. Niezgoda and Röver (2001) is a replication study of Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei (1998). Unlike the previous study, Niezgoda and Röver's study found little effect of the environment on learning outcomes. They argue that an interaction between exposure to pragmatic and grammatical

input and individual learner characteristics might have produced the differential results.

Studies on JFL learners' pragmatic awareness or perceptions of politeness include Cook (2001) on speech style and Tokuda (2001) and Tateyama (2004) on requests. Cook's study investigated low-intermediate JFL learners' perceptions of politeness, focusing on speech style. The majority of the participants in her study focused only on the referential content and failed to recognize impolite speech style in a task in which the participants listened to recorded messages to select the most qualified applicant for a job opening. Speech style was a significant factor in Tokuda (2001) as well, which investigated the pragmalinguistic knowledge of L2 Japanese learners in terms of linguistic politeness in their assessment of non-native speaker (NNS) requests in Japanese. In her study, the intermediate learners perceived little difference in the degree of politeness in the recorded messages they evaluated, whereas the advanced learners showed similar trends to the NSs' in their assessment. Factors such as appropriate use of honorifics, polite speech style, use of donative auxiliary verbs, and formulaic expressions positively influenced the evaluations. These factors were also pointed out by the interlocutors (NSs of Japanese) in Tateyama (2004) during the interview session that followed a role-play where JFL learners made a request of the interlocutors. Tateyama examined how JFL learners at different proficiency levels would make a request in Japanese and how Japanese interlocutors would perceive the JFL learners' performances. It was found that the advanced learners' requests were perceived as more appropriate than the low-proficiency learners' and that speech style was one

of the factors that affected the NSs' positive or negative perceptions.

Although there are studies that investigate L2 learners' request strategies in Japanese (e.g., Nakahama, 1999; Ohta, 1997; Tateyama, 2001b), none of these studies examine effects of instruction. They all fall into the nondevelopmental observational studies in the category of Kasper (2001). In line with a recent trend in ILP, the present study examines the effects of instruction in JFL learner's pragmatic development. According to a review of research (Kasper & Rose, 2002; Rose, 2005; Rose & Kasper, 2001), most aspects of L2 pragmatics are teachable and instruction helps in developing L2 learners' pragmatic competence. For the most part, explicit instruction combined with communicative practice has proved superior to other types of instruction. The present study was implemented based on this empirical evidence. It investigates the effects of instruction in developing JFL learners' pragmatic competence, specifically focusing on their pragmatic awareness in making requests in Japanese. The research questions for the present study are as follows:

1. What are the effects of instruction provided in this study to improve JFL learners' pragmatic competence in making requests?

2. Was there any change in learner awareness or perceptions with regard to pragmatic appropriateness?

Method

Participants

Students enrolled in four intact second-year Japanese classes (Japanese 202) at an American university participated in the study. Two classes served as an experimental (Exp) group and the other two as a control (Cont) group. There were 24 students (13 males and 11 females) in the Exp group and 22 students (11 males and 11 females) in the Cont group. They were all NSs of English except for two Korean and one Chinese in the Exp group and one Korean and one Chinese in the Cont group. The average age was 20.8 for the Exp group and 20.2 for the Cont group.

Data collection

The present study is part of a larger study in which the effectiveness of instruction was measured using four instruments: discourse completion tasks (DCTs), telephone message (TM) tasks, role plays (RP), and video clip rating task.

Table 1. Summary of procedure

Week	Instruments
4	Consent Form & Background Information Sheet
5	DCTs (pre-test)
6	TMs (pre-test)
7	RPs (pre-test)
8	Video Rating Task (pre-test)
10 – 12	Treatment
13	DCTs (post-test)
14	TMs (post-test)
15	RPs (post-test)
16	Video Rating Task (post-test)

Table 1 shows a summary of the procedure for the entire study. The present study reports on the result of the video clip rating task, which was administered in Week 8 (pre-test) and Week 16 (post-test). The DCTs, TM tasks and RPs measured the students' production skills, whereas the video clip rating task measured their perceptions or awareness in discerning pragmatic appropriateness of JFL student's request performances that appeared in the video clips they watched.

Treatment

The bulk of the treatment was provided when a lesson on making a request was covered following the course syllabus. Students in the Cont group received regular instruction about making requests, following closely what was presented in the lesson of the textbook. The Exp group engaged in additional consciousness raising activities, which included watching video clips pertinent to making requests, collecting conversations in which requests were made, and examining how those conversations were organized. They also engaged in oral communicative practice with NSs of Japanese focusing on requests. At the end of the lesson there was a one-on-one feedback session with the instructor about their in-class performances on making a request, which was video-recorded earlier. The students were also asked to write a self-reflection about their oral performances.

The Cont group also received explicit instruction about making requests in Japanese, closely following the textbook. Instead of consciousness raising activities, students in the Cont group spent more time on grammar exercises. They also had opportunities for oral communicative practice with NSs of Japanese, but this practice was not directly related to requests. The Cont group also performed an in-class oral performance. But, unlike the Exp group, there was no individual feedback session.

Instrument

Six short video clips were prepared for the present study. In the first three video clips (A1-A3), a JFL learner requested that his or her friend lend them their notes from the class they had missed. In the other three video clips (B1-B3), a JFL learner asked his or her former Japanese teacher to write a letter of recommendation for a study abroad program. The JFL learners in these video clips were not the participants of the present study, and their Japanese proficiency varied. A1 and B1 were enrolled in the second year Japanese class, the same level as the students who rated the video clips. A2 and B3 were advanced learners of Japanese with extensive living experience in Japan. A3 and B2 enrolled in the fourth-year Japanese class. The participants viewed these six video clips and rated the JFL learner's performance in each video clip, on a scale of 1 through 7, 1 being "awful" or "unacceptable" and 7 being "wonderful" or "native-like." The students were asked to provide written comments as to what influenced their rating scores.

Results

Quantitative Analysis

Table 2. Experimental & Control groups mean video rating scores

	A1	A2	A3	B1	B2	B3
Exp Pre	6.33	5.38	3.63	6.38	3.35	5.29
Exp Post	6.25	5.88	3.79	6.44	3.63	5.00
Cont Pre	5.79	5.43	3.61	6.07	3.02	4.73
Cont Post	5.82	5.77	3.61	6.09	3.50	4.98
NS	3.67	6.33	2.67	3.33	4.33	6.67

Note: Exp=Experimental Group, Cont=Control Group, Pre=Pre-test, Post=Post-test, NS=native speakers of Japanese

Table 2 shows the mean rating scores of the video clips rated by the participants in the pre- and post-tests. In order to obtain a baseline rating score, the same video clips were shown to three NSs of Japanese. The baseline data was used to see how well students' rating scores match rating scores from NSs and if they had made any improvements in the post-test.

In the Exp group, the largest change in the rating score was observed in Video Clip A2 (0.5 point increase from the pre-test rating score of 5.38 to the post-test rating score of 5.88) followed by Video Clip B2 (0.28 point increase from the pre-test rating score of 3.35 to the post-test rating score of 3.63). These were positive changes because both post-test rating scores were closer to the scores provided by the NSs. In Video Clip B3, there was a decrease of 0.29 point from the pre-test rating score of 5.29 to the post rating score of 5.00. This change was not positive because it moved further away from the NS rating score of 6.67. In Video Clip A3, there was a 0.16 point increase of the rating score (pre 3.63,

post 3.79) and this was not a positive change either. The differences in the pre-and post-tests rating scores in Video Clips A1 and B1 were less than 0.1 point.

In the Cont group, the largest change in the mean rating scores was observed in Video Clip B2 (0.48 point increase from the pre-test rating score of 3.02 to the post-test rating score of 3.50) followed by Video Clip A2 (0.34 point increase from the pre-test rating score of 5.43 to the post-test rating score of 5.77). There was a 0.25 point increase in Video Clip B3 from the pre-test rating score of 4.73 to the post-test rating score of 4.98. These changes were positive because all these post-test rating scores became a little closer to the ones provided by the NSs. In the remaining video clips (A1, A3, B1), there were hardly any changes between the pre- and post-test rating scores.

Table 3. Video clip rating. ANOVA for learning condition

Source	SS	df	MS	F	P	EtaSq	Obs. Power
Tests of Between-Subjects Effects							
Group (A)	8.053	1	8.053	4.592	.038	.094	.437
Error	77.165	44	1.754				
Tests of Within-Subjects Effects							
Time (B)	2.891	1	2.891	5.759	.021*	.116	.536
(A)x(B)	.228	1	.228	.455	.504	.010	.058
Error (B)	22.091	44	.502				
Video (C)	684.447	5	136.889	204.965	.000*	.823	1.000
(A)x(C)	3.186	5	.637	.954	.447	.021	.240
Error (C)	146.931	220	.668				
(B) x (C)	4.611	5	.922	3.762	.003*	.079	.887
(A) x(B)x(C)	2.078	5	.416	1.695	.137	.037	.467
Error(B)x(C)	53.937	220	.245				

Note: Eta Sq=Partial Eta Squared; Obs. Power=Observed Power $p < .025$

In order to see if there was any statistically significant difference between the Exp and Cont groups, as well as between the pre- and post-test rating scores and between the six video clips, a three-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed, with repeated measures. The design involved two within factors "Time" (2 levels: pre-test and post-test), "Video" (6 levels: six video clips), and one between factor, "Group" (2 levels: Exp and Cont), as the independent variables. The dependent variable was the rating score.

Table 3 shows that there was no statistically significant difference between the two groups in their rating scores, $F(1, 44)=4.592$, $p>.025$. This indicates that the effect of the treatment that each group received was not significantly different with regard to students' performances in rating the video clips. Figure 1 shows that the two groups performed in a similar manner in rating each video clip. In almost all video clips, the Exp group's mean rating scores were slightly higher than that of the Cont group. The biggest difference was observed in Video Clip A1 with an approximately 0.5 point difference. In the remaining video clips, the difference between the two groups was much smaller, and no interaction effect was observed.

Regarding the Tests of Within Subjects Effects, a statistically significant difference was observed in Time, $F (1, 44)=5.759$, $p=. 021$. That is, the rating scores that the participants provided in the pre- and post-tests were significantly different. As shown by the partial eta-squared value of .116 in Table 3, 11.6% of the within-subjects variance was accounted for by Time. No interaction effect was observed between Time and Group, $F(1, 44)= .455$, $p>.025$.
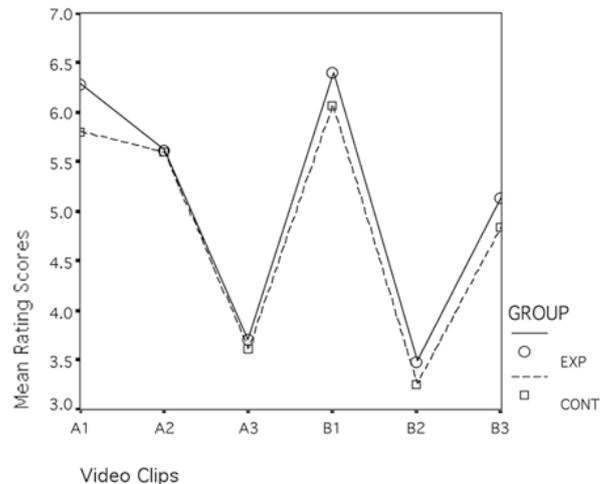

Figure 1. Mean rating scores of each video clip by Group

A significant difference was observed in Video, $F(1, 5)=204.965$, $p<.025$. This result shows that the students' rating scores were significantly different from each other when they rated six different video clips. As shown in Figure 2, the students' rating scores for Video Clips A1 and B1 were considerably higher than that of Video Clips A3 and B2 in both pre- and post-tests. The rating scores for Video Clips A2 and B3 fell in between. An interaction effect was observed between Video and Time, $F(1, 5)= 3.762$, $p=.003$. As shown in Figure 2, the students' mean rating scores for Video Clips A2 and B2 increased in the post-test, although for the remaining video clips the pre- and post-test mean rating

scores stayed almost the same. No interaction effect was observed between Video and Group, $F(1, 5)= 954, p>.025$, which was also shown in Figure 1 above.
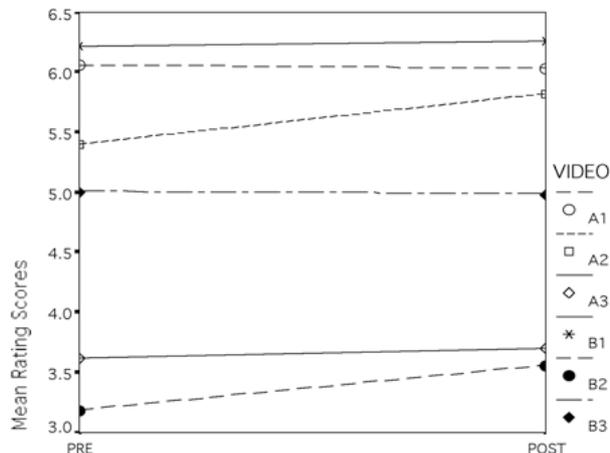

Figure 2. Mean rating scores of each video clip in the pre- and post-tests

Qualitative Analysis

In both Exp and Cont groups, the largest discrepancy between the students' mean rating score of the video clips and that of NSs was observed in Video Clips A1 and B1. The self-reports that the participants provided immediately after rating each video clip were examined to see what might

have influenced the rating scores. Many students who gave high rating scores in these video clips commented that the JFL students in Video Clips A1 and B1 spoke Japanese very fluently and that they were polite towards their interlocutors. For instance, Exp group student E12, who gave the rating score of 6 (very good) in the pre-test, commented as follows: "The speaker spoke well, clear and to the point. She had no trouble in asking what she wanted. Good use of grammatical structures and I liked that it flowed, no pauses in the dialogue." E9, who gave the rating score of 7 (wonderful), commented that she noticed the speaker was a little hesitant at the beginning but other than that the speaker was excellent in speaking and her speech was very natural. Several students commented that having no pauses in the interaction, in particular when asking the friend for the notes, positively influenced their rating scores. In addition to fluency, other factors that contributed to high rating scores included high confidence levels indicated by the way the students spoke, good use of *aizuchi* or backchannels, taking initiatives in the talk, and incorporation of Japanese mannerism such as bowing into the speech.

Regarding Video Clips A1 and B1, the NS raters commented that the sudden shift of speech style between plain and polite, problems with sentence structures, and inappropriate use of the sentence final particle *ne* negatively affected their rating scores. For instance, in Video Clips A1 and B1 a permission form, verb –*te mo ii desu ka* [May I verb?], as shown in the following utterance "*motte kite mo ii n desu ka* [Is it all right if I bring it?]," was used as a request. None of the students who rated the video clips commented on this problem. Because the interlocutor in the video

clip did not explicitly acknowledge that the utterance was problematic, it appears that the student raters thought the interaction went smoothly. Another factor that contributed to the participants' high rating scores of Video Clips A1 and B1 was that the student's speech in these video clips was easy to understand for the student raters. Several students pointed this out, including Cont group student C10, who commented as follows: "A1 was easier to understand because she used structures we knew." Being able to understand the interaction and seeing no apparent communication problems between the interlocutors contributed to high rating scores. It should be noted that Video Clips A2 and B3, which were performed by advanced learners, were rated highly by the NS raters but not so highly by the students. As some students commented, the interactions in these video clips were fast, and that made it difficult for them to comprehend exactly what the interlocutors were talking about. Not being able to understand the interaction completely resulted in lower rating scores.

With regard to the student-teacher interactions (Video Clips B1-B3), the NS raters commented that inappropriate use of the sentence final particle *ne*, mixture of speech styles, structural problems, in particular pertaining to the head act of request (e.g., Use of a permission form, V-*te mo ii desu ka*, instead of a conventional request form, V-*te itadakemasen ka*, as mentioned above), and a lack of honorifics negatively affected their rating scores. Because of these problems, one NS rater gave the rating score of 2 (very poor) for Video Clip B1. The same rater gave a rating score of 6 (very good) for Video Clip B2. The speaker in Video Clip B2 was rather slow in his speech and he sometimes had a hard time finding the exact words that he wanted to say. Despite this, he used the appropriate request form towards the teacher and incorporated routine expressions commonly used in student-teacher interactions such as *shitsuree shimasu* [Excuse me] and *yoroshiku onegai shimasu* [I wish you will help me]. The NS raters commented that these factors positively influenced their rating scores. For the majority of the student raters, however, a lack of fluency was the main reason for the low rating scores in Video Clip B2. An extreme rating score was observed in C9 who gave the rating score of 1 (awful) to this video clip in both pre- and post-tests. On both ratings, C9 commented that there were too many pauses and that sometimes it took too long for the speaker to complete a sentence. Those who gave higher rating scores in the post-test rating of Video Clip B2 than the pre-test rating commented that they noticed the appropriate use of request forms that should be used toward a higher-status person (i.e., verb –*te itadakemasen ka*) as well as the appropriate opening and closing. On the other hand, those who had considered fluency as the most important factor in the interaction did not even notice or pay attention to these pragmatically important elements in the speech. Many student raters regarded fluency as an important factor in interaction, and this was also exhibited in their rating of Video Clip B3. Here again the NS raters' rating scores were higher than that of the student raters. Actually, one NS rater gave a perfect rating score 7 (wonderful) to this video clip, which was attributed to a very appropriate use of honorifics. The NS raters also commented that the speaker's apologetic delivery was appropriate in teacher-student interaction. For several student raters, however, a hesitant manner of speaking was regarded as a lack of confidence, as shown in E10's comments, "She looked unsure of herself."

Another factor that the NS raters commented on was an appropriate response behavior to the preceding utterance by the interlocutor. For instance, the speaker in Video Clip A2 promptly acknowledged to his interlocutor that she should not have apologized when she did so for not returning his earlier phone call. Not responding appropriately to the interlocutor's preceding utterance resulted in low rating scores, as shown in the rating of Video Clip A3. In this video clip, many student raters also noticed the awkward conversation in which communication was not proceeding smoothly, and this resulted in low rating scores by the participants.

Quantitative analysis showed that there was a significant difference in the students' rating scores in the pre- and post-tests, in particular as shown in the improved rating scores in Video Clips A2 and B2. The self-reports that the participants provided immediately after rating each video clip seem to reflect the treatment that they had received. For instance, in the pre-test none of the participants commented whether or not the students in the video clips were following proper steps for making a request, but in the post-test at least some did. In particular, this was observed more among the Exp group students. Comments on proper opening and closing were also noted in the post-test self-reports. This finding is interpreted as indication that the students were beginning to look at the video clips from a more holistic point of view. Some students also commented on delivery and inappropriate use of routine expressions. For instance, E3 pointed out that *doomo arigatoo* should be replaced with an apologetic thanking expression, *doomo sumimasen,* in Video Clip A3. Further, in the pre-test none of the participants

commented on the speech style shift, whereas in the post-test some noticed it and commented that it negatively affected their rating scores. For example, E3 gave a rating score of 6 (very good) in the pre-test but in the post-test she gave a rating score of 5 (good) for Video Clip A1 because of the sudden style shift from the polite style to the casual style when the interlocutor kept speaking in the polite style.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study examined the effects of instruction on JFL learners' pragmatic awareness in making requests in Japanese. Statistical analysis showed a significant difference between pre- and post-tests with regard to tests of within-subjects effects. This finding suggests that both treatments provided as an instructional package were effective in raising the students' awareness of pragmatic appropriateness. This finding was substantiated by a qualitative analysis of self-reports. That is, the treatments the participants received contributed to raising their awareness of pragmatic appropriateness in various aspects, including the organization of the talk, speech style shift, manner of speaking, appropriate request strategies, and appropriate response behavior. In particular, comments on these issues were more frequent in the post-test self-reports among the Exp group students. This suggests that incorporating consciousness raising activities (Bardovi-Harlig et al., 1991; Hall, 1999; Kasper and Schmidt, 1996; Rose, 1994) and a discourse-based approach (Hughes & McCarthy, 1998) into the instructional package was a significant factor in raising student awareness.

As discussed in the quantitative analysis section, the rating scores that the participants provided did not show a significant difference between the two groups. This might be explained by the length of time between the two tests. Even though the students began to notice different aspects of conversational interaction by the time they took the post-test, as shown in their self-reports, the time was not long enough for them to improve their proficiency to the point where they could fully comprehend the interactions performed by the advanced learners. The participants felt more comfortable with the speech that they were able to understand well, even though it contained pragmatic problems, as shown in the high rating scores of Video Clips A1 and B1, both performed by the students who enrolled in the same level course as the student raters. This suggests that with more time to improve their overall Japanese language proficiency, the participants will be able to discern appropriate and inappropriate pragmatic behavior. However, the results of the present study should be further tested with a larger group of subjects. Lastly, as a pedagogical recommendation, teachers need to understand L2 learners' perspectives when teaching pragmatics. In the present study, many students considered being "fluent" or being able to carry on a conversation without pauses as very important. Some even commented that a hesitant manner of speaking showed a lack of confidence, despite the fact that it is actually preferred in the TL community. These findings all suggest that both the pragmalinguistic and the sociopragmatic aspects (Kasper, 1997; Leech, 1983; Thomas, 1983) of the TL use need to be taught.

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