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Teaching L2 pragmatics: The effects of different types of task implementation vs a PPP framework

The present study investigates the effect of different types of task implementation on teaching L2 interactional sequences. 81 EFL learners were randomly assigned to one of three experimental groups. In the first experimental group (T1-EG, *n* = 27), implicit instruction appeared during the pre-task phase, while the post-task phase included an explicit focus on forms. The second group (T2-EG, *n* = 32) received implicit instruction in the target structures and a reactive focus on form during task performance. The third group (PPP-EG, *n* = 27) followed a presentation – practice – production (PPP) lesson framework. Groups' pragmatic production was measured using written discourse completion tasks. Results showed that in the current study, all three groups reported gains, yet the implicit-explicit condition (T1-EG) appeared to be more beneficial for teaching the interactional sequences than the implicit-only (T2-EG) or the PPP (PPP-EG) framework.

Key words: tasks, task-based language teaching, task-supported language teaching, L2 pragmatics, interactional sequences

Słowa kluczowe: zadania, podejście zadaniowe, podejście wsparte zadaniami, nauczanie pragmatyki, sekwencje interakcyjne

1. Introduction

The past four decades have witnessed a growing research interest in L2 pragmatics instruction. Alongside teaching other language subsystems (i.e., vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation), pragmatics has become an important research area for language pedagogy (Barón, Celaya, Watkins, 2023; Cutting, Fordyce, 2021; Halenko, Wang, 2022; Nguyen, Le, 2019; O'Keeffe, Clancy, Adolphs, 2020; Roever, 2022; Taguchi, Roever, 2017). At the same time, task-based language teaching (TBLT) has also received growing research attention, primarily with the publication of Ellis' (2003), Nunan's (2004), and Willis' (1996) guides for teachers. Although pragmatics and TBLT share joint research and pedagogical interests, the two areas have rarely been explored together. Yet there are increasing efforts to bring the two domains together and explore the possibility of employing TBLT for teaching and assessing interlanguage pragmatics (e.g., Márquez, Barón, 2021; Taguchi, Kim, 2018).

The present study explores the efficacy of different types of task implementation and the more traditional "presentation – practice – production" (PPP) framework in developing EFL learners' ability to produce interactional sequences of making recommendations, reaching a decision through negotiation, and defending a decision. Type 1 task implementation (T1-EG) involves a combination of implicit and explicit approaches (the pre-task stage includes an implicit instruction on the target interactional sequences and consciousness-raising activities, the while-task stage includes task performance, and the post-task stage includes explicit language-focused activities, task repetition, and a reactive focus on form). Type 2 (T2-EG) includes implicit teaching with a reactive focus on form and no explicit attention to language (the pre-task stage consists of implicit instruction, the while-task phase includes reactive corrective feedback during task performance, and the post-task stage involves opportunities for task repetition with the provision of more feedback). PPP is essentially based on the traditional structural approach that uses tasks to practice target structures in the production stage of the lesson (Ellis, 2018). The results of the study reported below may inform further research in the field of second language pragmatics and the recommendations may be used by teachers of additional (second or foreign) languages.

2. Literature review

2.1. Tasks in L2 education

Task-based teaching grows out of communicative language teaching, in particular, its strong version that emphasizes the use of communicative tasks as both teaching material, a source of L2 knowledge, and the driving force of L2 acquisition. It sits within a cognitive-interactionist view of language learning (Long, Ahmadian, 2022), and as such, it recognizes that the optimal way to learn a language is through using it. Unlike behaviourism or strongly innate approaches, TBLT favours neither form nor meaning. It accommodates attention to both through a synergy of focus on accuracy and complexity (rich exposure to input, negotiation of meaning, and corrective feedback), as well as on fluency (ample opportunities to use the language).

A distinction to which particular importance is attached in TBLT theory is between focus on forms and focus on form. The former denotes traditional teaching of discrete linguistic items. The latter denotes drawing "learners' attention to linguistic elements as they arise incidentally in lessons whose overriding focus is on meaning or communication" (Long, 1991: 45–46), Pre-emptive focus on form involves creating tasks that might potentially draw learners' attention to specific forms, such as grammar or vocabulary. Reactive focus on form, one of the techniques used in the present study, occurs spontaneously during the lesson, directing attention to form as needed (see Kamiya, 2018 for an in-depth discussion). In this sense, focus on forms is an example of explicit instruction in that it *draws* attention to language form, whereas focus on form can be both explicit and implicit when it *attracts* attention to language forms (De Graaff, Housen, 2009; also see: Pawlak, 2006: 17–29 or Wach, 2019: 127–139 for discussions of the capacious notion of form-focused instruction).

2.2. L2 pragmatics instruction

Pragmatics is concerned with language use in a social context and with the assumptions that speakers and hearers share (Cutting, Fordyce, 2021). Pragmatic competence is an individual's ability to convey and interpret meanings in different interpersonal interactions or, as Fasold (1990: 119) puts it in a classic definition, it is related to "the use of context to make inferences about meaning." As a research area, pragmatics investigates why people talk differently in different social situations, e.g., during a religious ceremony, at a disco, or during a job interview. The social and socio-cultural dimensions of

interactions add to the difficulty of knowing what and how to say. For successful communication, L2 learners need not only to have a good repertoire of lexico-grammatical items and the ability to pronounce them intelligibly, but they should also possess knowledge of which of these items fulfil which functions in given social situations.

There is ample evidence showing that pragmatics is teachable and that appropriate instruction can enhance pragmatic competence in the learners. Kasper and Rose (2002) argue that pragmatic instruction is necessary for L2 classrooms since pragmatics is not salient enough to be easily noticed by learners, even with massive exposure to the target language. The fact that most learners in foreign language contexts do not have a lot of possibilities to engage with L2 outside classrooms adds to the difficulty of understanding the context for pragmatic acquisition. Several researchers (e.g., Jeon, Kaya, 2006; Plonsky, Zhuang, 2019; Ren, Li, Lü, 2022) pointed out that because of the implicit nature of pragmatics, the best instruction for the teaching of L2 pragmatics should also be implicit. The relationship between the form, the meaning, and the context can guide learners to understand which forms are not only accurate, but also appropriate. However, explicit instruction has been found to be more effective than implicit instruction in teaching pragmatics (Plonsky, Zhuang, 2019; Ren et al., 2022). Since even L1 children are often taught overt pragmatic rules, and because L2 classrooms often lack naturalistic contexts, explicit teaching of pragmatics seems to be the norm (if it is taught at all) (see: Loewen, 2020).

Several studies focused on the effect of focus on form vs focus on forms on L2 pragmatics development. These studies have yielded varied results. Some found no significant impact of either type of instruction, while others identified benefits of both. For instance, Pearson (2001) reported no significant difference between the two methods in acquiring Spanish speech acts, whereas Fukuya and Martinez-Flor (2008) discovered improvements in pragmatically appropriate suggestions from both instruction types. Ulbegi (2009) noted that while both methods aided in learning polite English refusals, focus on form was more effective. Takimoto (2012) observed positive impact of both types of instruction on English request downgraders. Nguyen et al. (2012) found that both instruction types were beneficial for developing and maintaining pragmatic performance, with an advantage found for focus on forms. The same advantage was identified by Rafieyan (2016, 2017) for the teaching of formulaic sequences.

On the whole, research suggests that explicit instruction of L2 pragmatics, involving metapragmatic explanations and explicit corrective feedback, is more beneficial than implicit instruction alone, or mere exposure to L2 input. Since the opportunities for naturalistic communicative contexts

in L2 classrooms are somewhat limited, and the social roles that L2 learners can take on are similarly quite restricted, teachers should strive to create various communicative conditions and use various teaching materials to enhance learners' pragmatic skills.

Teaching L2 pragmatics through tasks has recently become a new area of interest (Taguchi, Kim, 2018). Both TBLT and L2 pragmatics focus on allowing learners to perform meaning-based real-life tasks within various socio-cultural contexts. They have both been influenced by communicative language teaching and its idea of using functional language in social interactions. Many of the instructional features of both TBLT and pragmatics focus on the performance of meaningful tasks simulating the real-life needs of the learners.

Prior interest in the use of tasks has been centered on the development of grammar or vocabulary (Lambert, Robinson, 2014; Levkina, Gilabert, 2014), or focused primarily on task sequencing (Malicka et al., 2017), and investigated the effects of task complexity, pre-task planning, and task repetition (Ellis et al., 2020). Although TBLT and L2 pragmatics are recently becoming central areas of investigation in SLA research (Barón, Ortega, 2018; Gilabert, Barón, 2018; González-Lloret, 2022; González-Lloret, Ortega, 2018), the two domains have rarely been brought together. Thus, the study discussed in the present paper examines how teaching L2 pragmatics can be expanded through the use of tasks. It examines whether and which type of task implementation is conducive to teaching pragmatics and how it compares with the PPP framework.

3. Current study

The focus of instruction in the study reported below are three interactional sequences: recommending, reaching a decision, and defending a decision. Since they may be carried out differently across cultures, the ability to use them appropriately is an important part of L2 pragmatic competence (Nguyen, Le, 2019). While the first of those is a speech act (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969), the other two may be seen as broader negotiation processes that involve several speech acts (e.g., suggesting, assessing, or stating). For the sake of clarity, the umbrella term of "interactional sequences" is used throughout the paper.

The present study concerns teaching pragmatics in the context of a foreign language classroom. More specifically, it seeks to compare the two ways of implementing tasks with the more traditional PPP lesson format. The research question addressed in the study can therefore be phrased as follows:

RQ: What is the effect of the three types of instruction on teaching L2 interactional sequences?

3.1. Participants

The participants in the study were 81 Polish secondary/high school learners of English as a foreign language in a town in the north of Poland. They were chosen for the study following convenience sampling, i.e., based on their common level of proficiency and because they were all taught by the present author. They were all aged 17 at the time of the study. All participants had already had at least six years of compulsory English instruction in their primary school. Their secondary school offered five hours of English per week, and the study took place while the learners were in the third grade. This means that their teacher (the teacher-researcher) had taught them for over two years, having conducted around 250 classes of 45 minutes each. Their EFL course had followed an eclectic framework before the study took place, based on the *Pioneer* coursebook (Mitchell, Malkogianni, 2016). The participants' level of proficiency at the time of the study can be described as B2+/upper-intermediate (using the CEFR scale) or Advanced Mid (using the ACTFL rating).

3.2. Instrument

Written discourse completion tasks (WDCTs) were chosen as research instruments in the present study. Their main advantage lies in the fact that they allow for easy collection of more data than recordings of learners' performance. They are interactive in nature, in that learners have to respond to a situation presented in the task, but they give learners more time to reflect on what they wish to produce than in spoken interaction. The WDCTs used in the present study consist of 15 items. Each interactional sequence targeted in the instruction (i.e., making a recommendation, reaching an agreement through negotiation, and defending a decision) was elicited through five different situations.

The WDCTs were created for the purpose of this study and validated using pilot testing on a comparable group of learners. Following this, necessary adjustments were introduced (this was mainly rewording scenarios which were unclear or misinterpreted). As the researcher was also the participants' teacher, the 15 items were adjusted to learners' developmental levels and their past learning experiences (following Mackey, Gass,

2022). Intra-rater reliability was ensured by scoring each WDCT twice at an interval of two weeks, to ensure that the results were consistent. The reliability yielded was 93.3%.

WDCTs typically consist of a written scenario to which a respondent has to respond, such as in the following example:

You have been sharing a dormitory room with your friend for over two years. You have an unexpected expense to make. You decide to ask your roommate to lend you money. What do you say?

Your response: ……..

The WDCTs in the present study were created in the second person ("You are a learner who…") to create more investment for the learners by making the WDCTs sound more personal. Each WDCT investigated one interactional sequence with varying social contexts and differentials of power (i.e. whether the respondent interacts with someone in a more or less powerful position), imposition (i.e. the amount of problem the scenario creates for the hearer), and distance (i.e. the degree of closeness between the hearer and the speaker). Each of the three interactional sequences was measured through five situations. The WDCTs were distributed on paper and two minutes per item were allowed in accordance with Roever's (2022) calculations.

A maximum of three points was awarded for a correct response to each scenario. One point was awarded for using a sequence relevant to the task. The WDCTs were analysed in terms of whether the effect of a given utterance on the hearer might bring the intended effect (i.e., recommend, reach a decision, or defend one's view). In other words, the first point was awarded when an utterance "got things done".

Following Brown and Levinson's (1987) criteria which speakers take into account when making a speech act, a second point was awarded for ensuring the interactional sequence is adequate in terms of power differential, imposition, and/or distance. Here, the rating depended on whether a given learner recognised the need to adjust their speech to (1) the position of the hearer (i.e. observed the differences in the status between the speaker and the hearer), (2) the amount of trouble for the hearer (i.e. recognised how much can be asked of the hearer), (3) and the degree of acquaintanceship (i.e. took into account the degree of commonality which might influence the level of politeness).

The WDCTs were designed to include exchanges with different hearers, such as teachers, friends, parents, classmates, bosses, or officials. A point was therefore awarded to a learner for using the appropriate register in these different contexts.

A third point was awarded for linguistic accuracy. Since most of the L2 targets were formulaic expressions or expressions which could have

been easily "unpacked" to include variation, this point was given for adhering to linguistic norms.

To illustrate how the points were awarded in practice, in the scenario "You want to convince your local council to build more bicycle lanes. How do you start?" if a learner responded, "Please, build more paths for the bicycles," two points were awarded (for adequate interactional sequence and linguistic accuracy, but no point was given for keeping adequate distance to the interlocutor, as the scenario requires a higher degree of formality).

Due to the nature of the task, some WDCTs could possibly be realised by several interactional sequences. For example: "You want to start a discussion with your classmates about the destination for a class trip. You know people have different expectations. What do you say?" might elicit not only a sequence of reaching a decision through negotiation, but also a suggestion, a refusal, or an agreement. Again, it needs to be stressed that achieving a particular goal in the L2, rather than strictly adhering to a particular interactional sequence, was of importance to the current study.

3.3. Procedure

In the study, 81 homogenous upper-intermediate EFL learners were randomly assigned to three experimental groups (T1-EG, *n* = 27, T2-EG, *n* = 27, and PPP-EG, *n* = 27). Care was taken to ensure an even number of participants. The participants received a series of 4 lessons focused on three interactional sequences. The lessons were primarily meaning-focused. In all three groups (T1-EG, T2-EG, and PPP-EG), each of the first three lessons targeted one interactional sequence, while the fourth lesson aimed to consolidate the three sequences through productive practice activities.

The T1-EG followed a TBLT-like task cycle, in which each interactional sequence was first implicitly modelled through receptive tasks of listening and/or reading. A given interactional sequence was presented as a listening or reading text with supporting comprehension questions. This took about 15 minutes of the 45-minute lesson. Then the learners' attention was drawn (for about 5 minutes) to the target items, through consciousness-raising activities of input enhancement and receptive practice. Input enhancement involved typological alterations to the text to enhance the saliency of target structures, whereas receptive practice involved question-and-answer sessions in which learners were exposed to the target structures in the teacher's questions. In the while-task phase, learners worked in pairs, or groups of three, and performed a focused task that elicited the use of the target item. This stage took no longer than 10 minutes to complete. The

groups were formed either by the teacher, or the learners themselves. No language-focused feedback from the teacher was given at this point, so that the learners were oriented towards expressing meaning. The teacher circulated among the groups, listened to their performance, and joined in some of the conversations as naturally as possible. This was done solely to encourage meaning-based output. Once the task had been performed, learners were given explicit language-focused activities that allowed further practice of the target interactional sequence. At the end of the cycle, the learners were given the opportunity for task repetition with different interlocutors. The post-task stage took about 15 minutes to complete.

T2-EG followed a cycle in which no form-focused instruction was provided before task performance. The pre-task phase required the learners to listen to, or read texts with the targeted interactional sequence, and answer comprehension questions, similarly to the first activity in the T1-EG (about 15 minutes). The main task phase (10 minutes) involved task performance, during which the learners received reactive corrective feedback (i.e., focus on form) from the teacher. This included recasts, prompts, comprehension checks, and explicit metalinguistic comments. The post-task phase allowed for two task repetitions with different interlocutors (about 20 minutes spent on the task).

PPP-EG followed their regular coursebook lessons. In the initial phases of the lesson, an interactional sequence was presented to the learners through explicit metapragmatic instruction. The learners were informed about the different ways of expressing a given sequence (e.g., "We have selected this option because…" or "The reason for choosing this is that…"). This part of the lesson took between 5 and 10 minutes. The learners then performed various language-focused exercises (e.g., gap-fill, paraphrasing, multiple choice) to practice the target interactional sequence (about 20 minutes of practice). In the last stage, the learners performed the same tasks as T1-EG and T2-EG in the while-task phase of the lesson. The teacher provided focus on form. Such procedure ensured that:

- T1-EG and T2-EG had the same amount of exposure to the models of the three interactional sequences as measured by time on task (about 10 minutes)
- T1-EG performed each task twice (about 20 minutes spent on task performance, but no focus on form in the while-task stage)
- T2-EG performed each task three times (about 30 minutes of task performance, but no explicit instruction)
- PPP-EG performed the task once (about 10 minutes spent on the task) but received explicit instruction and completed more language-focused activities before task performance

– focus on form provided in all three groups had followed either implicit or explicit procedures.

The necessary data were collected three times: before the intervention (pre-test), within two days after the fourth lesson (post-test), and three weeks later (a delayed post-test). The WDCTs used in the study were put in a different order each time to avoid the power of practice effect (Mackey, Gass, 2022).

3.4. Statistical analysis

The distribution of the accrued data was verified using the Shapiro-Wilk test of normality. This test indicated that the data were not normally distributed ($p < .001$), meaning that the use of non-parametric methods was necessary for the analysis of the differences both within and between groups. The Kruskal-Wallis test was chosen for the assessment of differences between groups, since it can compare the central tendencies of more than two groups, without the need for normally distributed data. For the analysis of differences within the same subjects over various measurements, Friedman's test was used, as it identifies differences in repeated measures.

4. Results

Table 1 provides the descriptive statistics for the three tests conducted: pre-test, post-test, and delayed post-test. The statistics are presented for all three experimental groups. Overall, the descriptive statistics indicate that both T1-EG and T2-EG experienced marked improvements from the pre-test to the post-test and managed to retain most of these gains in the delayed post-test, outperforming the PPP-EG. This suggests the effectiveness of the interventions, with T1-EG showing slightly better retention compared to T2-EG.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics

	Group	Mean	SD
pre-test	T1-EG	27.37	3.10
post-test	T1-EG	33.03	2.50
delayed post-test	T1-EG	31.22	2.51
pre-test	T2-EG	29.22	3.19
post-test	T2-EG	32.7	3.04

Table 1 – cont.

	Group	Mean	SD
delayed post-test	T2-EG	30.25	2.87
pre-test	PPP-EG	28.25	3.25
post-test	PPP-EG	30.03	3.15
delayed post-test	PPP-EG	29.18	2.88

4.1. Within-group comparisons

A Friedman test was conducted to examine the differences between the three tests (pre-, post, and delayed post-test) within each group. The results indicated a statistically significant effect of the intervention on the test ($\chi^2(2) = 143.843$, $p < .001$). The effect size, measured by Kendall's W, was found to be very large (W = .888), suggesting the groups achieved different results across the different testing times.

Pairwise comparisons using Conover's test were performed to delineate which specific tests differed. Significant improvements were observed from the pre-test (M = 28.28) to the post-test (M = 31.92), t(160) = 11.988, p < .001, and from the pre-test to the delayed post-test (M = 30.22), t(160) = 5.498, p < .001. No improvement was reported between the post- and the delayed post-test [t(160) = 6.490, p < .001].

Subsequent post-hoc analysis, detailed in Table 2, showed that all the groups, except PPP-EG, demonstrated significant differences between consecutive measurements, with no differences found for PPP-EG when the pre- and the post-tests were compared with the delayed post-test. Standard error was.302.

Table 2. Post-hoc comparison group * test result

		Mean difference	t	*p*
T1-EG (pre-test)	T1-EG (post-test)	–5.667	–18.739	< .001
	T1-EG (delayed post-test)	–3.852	–12.737	< .001
T1-EG (post-test)	T1-EG (delayed post-test)	1.815	6.001	< .001
T2-EG (pre-test)	T2-EG (post-test)	–3.481	–11.513	< .001
	T2-EG (delayed post-test)	–1.037	–3.429	.016
T2-EG (post-test)	T2-EG (delayed post-test)	2.444	8.083	< .001
PPP-EG (pre-test)	PPP-EG (post-test)	–1.178	–5.879	< .001
	PPP-EG (delayed post-test)	–.926	–3.062	.044
PPP-EG post-test	PPP-EG (delayed post-test)	.852	2.817	.088

4.2. Between-group comparisons

The Kruskal-Wallis test revealed there was a statistically significant effect of the group on the results of the post-test [χ^2 (2) = 16.781, p < .001, η^2 = .18] and the delayed post-test [χ^2 (2) = 8.562, p = .014, η^2 = .086] but no effect was reported for the pre-test [χ^2 (2) = 6.004, p = .05, η^2 = .05], although the effect was at the threshold for statistical significance. Dunn's post-hoc tests (with Bonferroni correction) showed significant differences between T1-EG and T2-EG (p = .046) on the post-test, indicating a difference between these two groups. There was also a significant difference between T1-EG and PPP-EG (p < .001) and between T2-EG and PPP-EG (p = .003) on the post-test, suggesting that T1-EG and T2-EG outperformed PPP-EG. Additionally, on the delayed post-test, a significant difference was found between T1-EG and PPP-EG (p = .011), indicating that the T1-EG's improvements were sustained over time compared to the PPP-EG.

5. Discussion

The main finding of the study indicates that all three types of instruction helped the learners produce the interactional sequences as measured by WDCTs. All learners showed improvements, not only from the pre-test to the post-test but also from the pre- to the delayed post-test. The learning results were therefore not only immediate but also sustained. A within-group analysis showed that all three groups made progress directly after the intervention. It was found that T1-EG improved on average by 5.6 points, while T2-EG improved by 3.48 points and PPP-EG showed an improvement of 1.75 points. This suggests, somewhat predictably (see Rafieyan, 2016, 2017; Ren, 2022), that intervention, whether implicit or explicit, works. When the pre-test results were compared with the delayed post-test results (three weeks after the intervention), T1-EG improved by 3.85 points, T2-EG improved by 1.3 points, and PPP-EG1 by 0.93 point. This may indicate that for the participants in the present study, both Type 1 and Type 2 task implementation brought more gains than the PPP framework.

These findings suggest 1) (perhaps unsurprisingly) that instruction works, be it knowledge- (PPP-EG) or exemplar-based (T1-EG, T2-EG), and that 2) the Type 1 (a combination of implicit and explicit instruction) appeared to be more beneficial for the learners, which is evidenced in it showing the most significant progress and highest results achieved by learners in T1-EG. At the same time, it has to be borne in mind that T1-EG engaged with the three interactional sequences in a more explicit form than T2-EG.

Perhaps, if the T2-EG group had incorporated several pedagogic tasks that targeted pragmatics (for the same amount of time as the students employed in T1-EG), the results would have been quite different.

These findings support the general benefits of using tasks over the PPP paradigm (in line with de la Fuente, 2006; Ellis, Shintani, 2014; Long, Ahmadian, 2022; Shintani, 2013, 2015). The T1-EG group, which was involved with language-focused instruction in the post-task stage achieved the most gains. Similarly to Nguyen (2008), this study also found that task-based instruction was more effective than purely grammar-based language teaching in helping learners develop their second language pragmatic competence. This is also partially in line with skill acquisition theory (DeKeyser, 1998), as the learners were given declarative knowledge and opportunities to proceduralise it after initial task performance. Thus, in the context of this study, it can be said that the type of intervention plays a prominent role in acquiring L2 pragmatics.

One of the key questions in TBLT is whether explicit instruction in the pre-task phase yields better learning results than task performance only, or task performance coupled with reactive focus on form (Li, Ellis, Zhu, 2016). According to theories premised on separate neural systems for implicit and explicit knowledge (e.g. Reber, Squire, 1998), explicit instruction may help form initial representations, but is not necessary for this to happen. In the case of a single, integrated model of memory, explicit instruction is suggested to have a more important role to play, as the explicit representation it provides will be available for use by learners throughout the learning process (e.g., DeKeyser's skills acquisition theory of 1998). In the present study, explicit instruction was offered to T1-EG in the post-task phase, but seems to have influenced the success of this group. When the results were compared between groups, a significant improvement in performance from the pre-test to the post-test was found between T1-EG and T2-EG and between T1-EG and PPP-EG. This finding supports the advantage of different task implementation types over the PPP framework.

There seems to have been no statistical difference in the teaching of interactional sequences between T2-EG and PPP-EG, and the magnitude of difference between these groups was observed to be small (d = .09 for the delayed post-test). Both interventions were equally effective in the present study, although it has to be noted that the results of T2-EG were slightly better in the delayed post-test than those of PPP-EG. Following González-Lloret, Nielson (2015), when comparing task-based with language-focused methodology, one should be careful to remember that the learners in T2-EG might have made other types of gains (such as improved fluency or enhanced

interactional skills). It seems that when learners are provided with models of L2 performance and are led to detect target structures through consciousness-raising activities, it activates their inner learning mechanisms (as suggested by Schmidt's noticing hypothesis of 1990). This might have helped them perform the main task, since they had already been exposed to how a similar task had been performed by someone else. The performance of the task, in turn, might have helped them notice gaps in their knowledge, but also provided opportunities for negotiation of form and meaning (in line with Swain's output hypothesis of 1985 and Long's interaction hypothesis of 1996). Moreover, the provision of explicit language-focused exercises after the learners had had the chance to perform the main task might have helped to fill gaps in their knowledge and provide more learning opportunities. The subsequent task repetition allowed them to refine their production and provided further practice opportunities. The effects of task repetition have been widely reported to be conducive to language acquisition (e.g., Bygate, 2018; Kim, Tracy-Ventura, 2013; Róg, 2021a,b). It needs to be stressed, however, that these results might have been different if the participants in T2-EG were provided with a sequence of pedagogic tasks in the pre-task stage.

These results are somewhat in line with the findings of Jeon and Kaya (2006) and Plonsky and Zhuang (2019), i.e., explicit instruction was found to be more effective for teaching L2 pragmatics than implicit instruction. Learners in T1-EG had some explicit training in expressing the interactional sequences after the first task performance, unlike learners in T2-EG, who received models of the sequences without explicit instruction. However, it has to be noted that learners in PPP-EG were explicitly pre-taught the interactional sequences and received form-focused exercises, yet their progress was smaller than that of T1-EG. Previous research into L2 acquisition orders shows that L2 learning is gradual and largely impervious to teaching (Ellis, Shintani 2014). Van den Branden (2022) explains that in PPP, for instance, learners usually fall back on their explicit L2 knowledge, which is more difficult to access than implicit knowledge. In spontaneous production, however, people usually rely on their implicit knowledge, which is what should be mainly targeted in instruction. In Shintani's study (2016), TBLT was equally effective as PPP in developing receptive knowledge of nouns, but better than PPP for receptive and productive use of adjectives. The advantage of T2-EG in the present study lies probably in the fact that it offered learners not only valuable opportunities for comprehensible input, interaction, negotiation of meaning, and chances to develop implicit L2 knowledge through incidental learning, but also entailed a focus on form, resulting in the synergy of explicit and implicit approaches. The first task performance allowed

the learners to notice gaps in their L2 knowledge, and increased the noticing of target forms in the instruction that followed.

Some limitations of the study should be considered before conclusions can be reached. Firstly, since random sampling was not feasible in the present study, readers should judge whether the findings could apply in the case of learners of lower levels of proficiency or in second language contexts. It should be recognized that the study participants were upper-intermediate English learners. The findings of Jeon and Kaya (2006), Plonsky and Zhuang (2019), and Ren et al. (2022) meta-analyses show that learners with a higher proficiency level benefit more from pragmatic instruction. Perhaps future research should focus on less advanced learners. Secondly, the study took place within the context of teaching English as a foreign language, which is one of the more often investigated classroom contexts. Future research may focus on the teaching of other languages. Also, the study followed a short intervention of 4 lessons. A longitudinal study of the effects of the three types of instruction might shed more light on their effectiveness. What is more, the instrument used in the study may not have been able to elicit more implicit learning from the T2-EG. Also, the real-world performance of the learners might be distant from how they reacted to the WDCTs. The scoring system took into account not only the accurate use of the interactional sequences, but also linguistic accuracy. Perhaps fine-tuning the scoring system in future studies (e.g., by awarding separate points to the constructs of power, distance, and imposition) might shed more light on gains that relate solely to the adequate use of the interactional sequences.

6. Conclusions

The present study took a pedagogical rationale for studying L2 pragmatics instruction. With a growing interest in teaching L2 pragmatics and the use of task-based methodologies, it seems relevant to find points of convergence between the two areas. The purpose of this study was therefore to extend the research on TBLT to pragmatic production and in so doing to contribute to the scant literature on L2 pragmatics instruction through the use of tasks. The findings suggest that all three types of classroom intervention proved beneficial in teaching L2 pragmatics. The main finding, however, is that in the present study, the participants in T1-EG made the biggest improvements and therefore were most successful in learning the target linguistic forms. It seems that the type of task implementation that offers the learners a combination of implicit and explicit instruction is most conducive to L2 acquisition. L2 pragmatic instruction should therefore be a mixture of

meaningful, communicative tasks that allow learners to negotiate form and meaning and language-focused activities that allow learners to consolidate targeted structures and gain automaticity in their later retrieval.

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