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The impact of explicit pragmatic instruction on L2 suggestion-making across task complexity

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Abstract

Pragmatic competence, understood as the ability to use language effectively and appropriately in social interactions, is recognized as a critical component of second/foreign language (L2) development, yet questions remain about how it is shaped by instruction. This study examined the impact of explicit pragmatic instruction on the complexity and accuracy of English L2 learners' production of suggestions, a directive speech act that balances influence and listener autonomy. Thirty-seven secondary school students with intermediate to advanced English completed interactive decision-making tasks of varying cognitive demands (simple vs. complex), accompanied by semi-structured interviews exploring whether they prioritized linguistic form or meaning conveyance, at three time points (pretest, immediate posttest, delayed posttest). Instruction involved three sessions integrating awareness-raising, input presentation, metapragmatic analysis, and interactive practice, which emphasized directness and politeness strategies for suggestion-making in different settings. Linear mixed-effects analyses indicated that instruction enhanced both pragmatic complexity and accuracy, with similar gains for simple and complex tasks. Higher-proficiency

learners maintained more advanced performance, while lower-proficiency learners showed rapid post-instruction increases, particularly in complexity, narrowing the gap with their peers over time. Interviews suggested heightened learner agency, strategic decision-making, and sociopragmatic sensitivity following instruction. These findings underscore the effectiveness of explicit, reflective, socially grounded instruction for fostering context-sensitive pragmatic performance and highlight the importance of proficiency-sensitive approaches and post-instructional reinforcement for sustaining complex pragmatic behaviors across diverse communicative situations.

Keywords: explicit pragmatic instruction; task complexity; speech acts; suggestions

1. Introduction

Developing pragmatic competence, which involves using language appropriately in social contexts, is a central goal in second/foreign language (L2) learning. Yet research remains inconclusive on how best to promote this competence (Martínez-Flor et al., 2023; Taguchi, 2015), with scholars debating the relative effectiveness of implicit, explicit, or integrated instructional approaches. Most agree, however, that pragmatic ability rarely develops fully without targeted instruction (Taguchi, 2019). Building on this, the present study focuses on explicit pragmatic instruction, previously shown to be effective for raising learners' awareness of speech act realization (Plonsky & Zhuang, 2019), and examines its impact on the complexity and accuracy of L2 learners' production of suggestions.

Suggestions are a subtype of directive speech acts (Searle, 1969) intended to encourage the hearer to consider a future action while preserving their autonomy to accept or decline based on their interpretation of the speaker's intent (Bach & Harnish, 1979; Haverkate, 1984). They are pragmatically rich and require speakers to balance directness, politeness, and contextual appropriateness. Despite the growing interest in pragmatic instruction, research specifically addressing suggestions remains limited, likely because suggestions involve socially delicate, face-threatening acts that pose particular challenges in L2 contexts (Sharqawi & Anthony, 2019). Empirical evidence further suggests that L2 learners often underuse suggestion strategies or rely on formulaic expressions, a tendency that reflects limited classroom exposure and a mismatch between instructional activities and real-world interactional environments (Márquez & Barón, 2021). Although explicit pragmatic instruction has been shown to improve speech act performance, an important gap in the literature remains regarding how such instruction affects pragmatic complexity and accuracy, whether these effects persist under varying cognitive task demands, and the extent to which learner proficiency moderates such development.

In this study, learners completed simple and complex communication tasks to elicit suggestions before and after explicit instruction. Tasks were designed to vary in cognitive demands (Robinson, 2001) in order to examine instructional gains in pragmatic complexity and accuracy under different processing conditions. By treating task complexity as an assessment factor and considering learner proficiency as a potential moderator, the study investigates how explicit instruction influences learners' ability to produce socially appropriate and elaborated suggestions.

2. Literature review

2.1. Explicit pragmatic instruction

Explicit instruction has been shown to facilitate the development of L2 pragmatic competence (Reagan & Payant, 2018). By directing learners' attention to how linguistic forms function in context, it promotes the kind of focused awareness that Schmidt's (1993) noticing hypothesis identifies as essential for acquisition. When learners are guided to notice and reflect on pragmatic features, they can link comprehension to production more effectively, transforming input into usable knowledge (Usó-Juan, 2022). Because certain pragmatic aspects, such as politeness and mitigation in directive speech acts, rarely emerge through exposure alone (Cohen & Sykes, 2013), explicit pedagogical intervention is valuable. Within this framework, instruction includes raising awareness of target forms, explaining their social meanings, modeling appropriate use, and providing structured opportunities for practice.

Research has reported advantages of explicit over implicit instructional approaches (Plonsky & Zhuang, 2019). This may be particularly relevant for adult learners, who are cognitively predisposed to process and reflect on metapragmatic information (Cohen, 2003). Through explicit discussion, learners can analyze context, deconstruct language choices, and monitor their progress, thereby reducing the risk of negative pragmatic transfer (Takahashi, 2001). While implicit techniques, such as input enhancement, recasts, and input flooding, have also demonstrated positive effects (Fukuya & Clark, 2001; Hernández, 2011), comparative evidence remains less extensive and less consistent than for explicit instruction (Huang, 2022; Taguchi, 2015). Earlier meta-analytic findings (Jeon & Kaya, 2006) identified inconsistencies across studies stemming from unequal treatment durations, lack of delayed posttests, and limited research on implicit teaching, an issue that remains salient in more recent syntheses emphasizing the role of instructional design and outcome measurement in shaping reported effects (Plonsky & Zhuang, 2019). While explicit and implicit approaches have

been conceptualized as operating along a continuum (Taguchi, 2015; Takahashi, 2010), explicit instruction appears more effective in fostering sociopragmatic awareness through metapragmatic discussion (Hosseinpur & Bagheri Nevisi, 2020).

Pedagogical intervention is central to teaching the speech act of suggestion, given consistent evidence that targeted instruction contributes to learners' development in this area (Rajabi & Farahian, 2013; Toprak, 2020). Empirical studies underscore that explicit metapragmatic instruction improves both learners' deployment of suggestion strategies and linguistic accuracy (Aufa, 2011; Ghavamnia et al., 2014), whereas implicit instruction can yield positive but generally less robust effects (Abolfathiasl & Abdullah, 2015; Chalak & Abbasi, 2015). These findings support the adoption of an explicit instructional approach in the present study, thereby motivating the examination of its effects on learners' ability to produce contextually complex and accurate suggestions.

The impact of explicit pragmatic instruction on suggestion-making may be modulated by L2 proficiency. Higher-proficiency learners often possess broader linguistic resources and a greater ability to interpret speaker intent and social nuances, which can facilitate noticing, processing, and applying metapragmatic explanations for the speech act (Ekiert et al., 2018; Koike, 1996; Pishghadam & Sharafadini, 2011). However, evidence also shows that input quality and instructional conditions, such as suggestion modeling, guided metapragmatic reflection, and opportunities for speech act performance, can outweigh the role of L2 proficiency itself (Aminifard et al., 2014; Matsumura, 2003; Sharqawi & Anthony, 2019). Framed this way, L2 proficiency is treated here as a factor that could influence how effectively learners respond to explicit instruction.

2.2. Sequential stages in explicit L2 pragmatic instruction

Effective explicit instruction in L2 pragmatics has been shown to benefit from carefully structured, thoughtfully organized activities that raise learners' awareness of speech act realizations and strengthen the connection between input and output (Plonsky & Zhuang, 2019). For suggestion-making, instruction targets both pragmalinguistic forms, such as modals, hedges, and conditional constructions, and sociopragmatic strategies, including appropriate levels of directness and politeness in relation to social context (Martínez-Flor, 2010). Takahashi (2010) emphasizes the value of discussion and reflection in processing sociopragmatic components, while McConachy and Spencer-Oatey (2020) highlight how metapragmatic analysis enables learners to map form and function, interpret social meanings, and internalize cultural conventions.

Martínez-Flor (2005) proposed a sequential model for explicit pragmatic instruction that comprises awareness-raising, input presentation, metapragmatic analysis, and interactive practice. This model has been widely implemented and adapted in subsequent research. Some studies have systematically followed Martínez-Flor's original framework (Martínez-Flor & Alcón-Soler, 2007; Rajabi & Farahian, 2013), whereas others have either emphasized particular components, such as input presentation (Ghavamnia et al., 2014), or expanded the framework by incorporating additional elements, such as feedback (Salemi et al., 2012). This body of research has demonstrated that learners' understanding and use of suggestions can be enhanced through explicit instruction.

Pragmatic awareness-raising guides learners toward recognizing the factors that influence communicative success (Schmidt, 1995). As Martínez-Flor (2005) argues, this instructional stage aims to make learners consciously aware of the pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic features that shape effective suggestion-making. Research shows that learners are better able to produce socially appropriate speech acts when they consider contextual variables (e.g., social distance, power relations, and potential face-threatening consequences), alongside indirect strategies and culturally sensitive utterance options (Takahashi, 2012). Structured learning activities, including interlanguage comparisons, hypothesis generation, and problem-solving around cultural differences, have been reported to activate prior knowledge, deepen pragmatic awareness, and foster critical engagement with language use (Abrams, 2014, 2016).

Input presentation provides learners with exposure to suggestion forms embedded in meaningful contexts (Martínez-Flor, 2005). Studies indicate that comprehensible, relevant, and authentic input (Ellis, 2019) facilitates the processing of both pragmalinguistic forms and sociopragmatic norms (Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor, 2021). Task-supported and task-based approaches can scaffold learning by gradually increasing complexity (Robinson, 2001) and by directing attention to salient pragmatic features (Taguchi & Kim, 2018). Ghavamnia et al. (2014), for instance, found that enhanced input effectively improves suggestion appropriateness and accuracy. As suggested by Martínez-Flor and Alcón-Soler (2007), contextual cues embedded in the input further support the recognition of sociocultural nuances that govern suggestion-making.

Metapragmatic analysis occupies a central role in Martínez-Flor's (2005) framework as it encourages reflection and discussion to help learners interpret how pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic features operate in context. Speech act components are processed more effectively when learners have opportunities to discuss them (Takahashi, 2010) as they "notice phenomena, reflect on their significance, and construct knowledge" (McConachy, 2013, p. 109). Instructional practices facilitate this process by breaking down input into analyzable segments,

classifying forms according to directness and politeness, and promoting both individual and group reflection (Martínez-Flor, 2010). Metapragmatic analysis encourages learners to understand cultural norms, negotiate meaning, and make informed decisions regarding speech act appropriateness (McConachy & Spencer-Oatey, 2020), rather than acquiring static rules in isolation (Taguchi, 2019).

Interactive performance provides opportunities for learners to apply knowledge from previous stages in socially and cognitively engaging activities (Martínez-Flor, 2005). Learners participate in simulated communicative situations, attending to both language use and social context to achieve intended outcomes (Kuiken & Vedder, 2018), while also receiving feedback from teachers and peers. At this stage, tasks can be adapted to learners' needs and proficiency levels to scaffold both cognitive and sociopragmatic demands. It also promotes learner agency by encouraging flexible, contextually appropriate choices and by supporting independent decision-making and effective pragmatic performance (Taguchi, 2019). Through these activities, learners have been found to consolidate pragmatic strategies and be better equipped to transfer their skills to authentic interactions (Cohen & Sykes, 2013).

2.3. Task complexity as an assessment framework

In instructed L2 pragmatics research, task-based performance provides valuable insight into how learners apply pragmatic knowledge under varying cognitive demands (Taguchi & Kim, 2018). Following explicit instruction, learners may differ in their ability to integrate pragmalinguistic forms and sociopragmatic strategies depending on task complexity. Defined as the cognitive resources required to complete a task (González-Lloret, 2019), task complexity offers a principled means of assessing whether instructional gains persist across different processing conditions. Within Robinson's (2001) cognition hypothesis, task complexity can be manipulated through resource-directing variables such as reasoning demands and the number of task elements, which influence how attentional resources are distributed during performance. Increasing these demands tends to promote more accurate and syntactically varied language use as learners allocate greater attention to linguistic encoding. However, greater communicative demands may also reduce structural complexity in interactive tasks as negotiation of meaning naturally competes for attentional resources.

While Robinson's (2001) framework has been extensively applied to the assessment of overall task performance (Sasayama et al., 2025), Márquez and Michel (2026) propose its adaptation for evaluating pragmatic performance. They distinguish between pragmatic complexity and pragmatic accuracy. Pragmatic complexity

refers to the range and elaboration of linguistic realizations and the extent to which learners employ indirectness and mitigation to manage face needs (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Bulté & Housen, 2012). Pragmatic accuracy, in turn, concerns compliance with pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic norms, reflecting how linguistically precise and socially appropriate a suggestion is within the target language community (Youn, 2015). Together, these dimensions capture how learners balance elaboration and contextual appropriateness in speech act production.

Empirical findings on the effects of task complexity on pragmatic performance remain mixed. Gilabert and Barón (2013) reported that higher cognitive demands increased the frequency of speech acts in oral interaction, though the range of realizations did not necessarily expand, suggesting that cognitive load may enhance engagement but limit flexibility. Similarly, Kim and Taguchi (2015) found that greater cognitive demands improved the contextual appropriateness of speech acts without consistently increasing their pragmatic complexity, which indicates that learners may prioritize situational fit over elaboration under conditions of limited attentional capacity. In contrast, Márquez and Barón (2021) observed that tasks with more elements promoted both accuracy and complexity in suggestions without compromising either dimension, highlighting the potential of task design to elicit richer pragmatic performance.

Administering tasks that differ in cognitive complexity before and after instruction enables a controlled analysis of how explicit instruction and task demands jointly shape pragmatic performance, thereby aligning the assessment design with theoretical insights from Robinson's (2001) cognition hypothesis. Empirical research further shows that explicit instruction strengthens learners' ability to produce linguistically accurate and pragmatically appropriate utterances by fostering attention to form-function mappings and promoting deeper cognitive processing (Huang, 2022; McConachy & Spencer-Oatey, 2020). Through metapragmatic engagement, learners become more aware of the contextual factors that influence speech act realization (Hosseinpur & Bagheri Nevisi, 2020). This heightened awareness supports the internalization of pragmatic norms and contributes directly to the development of communicative competence.

3. The present study

The literature reviewed above provides evidence that explicit pragmatic instruction can enhance learners' speech act performance, including suggestion-making. Important gaps remain, however, regarding how such instruction shapes pragmatic complexity and accuracy as distinct dimensions of performance, whether these effects vary across tasks with different cognitive demands, and the extent

to which learner proficiency moderates instructional outcomes. These unresolved issues are especially salient in the case of suggestions, given their interactionally delicate nature and the limited research devoted to this speech act. The present study responds to these gaps through the following research questions:

RQ1: How does explicit pragmatic instruction affect the complexity and accuracy of L2 suggestions across tasks with different cognitive demands?
RQ2: To what extent is this effect moderated by learner proficiency?

4. Method

4.1. Participants

The study involved 37 Czech secondary school students aged 16-18 years (M = 17.2, SD = 0.66) living in Prague who were learning English as an L2. Their proficiency ranged from intermediate (B1-B2) to advanced (C1-C2) according to the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR; Council of Europe, 2020), which later served to categorize the participants as lower- or higher-proficiency learners (see Section 4.2.1.). Participants had studied English since primary school (M = 11.6 years) and received four hours of weekly classroom instruction. None had lived or studied in an English-speaking country. Beyond formal instruction, 62% (N = 23) attended additional English courses or tutoring, and 65% (N = 24) used English in conversation at least weekly. Most learners also engaged with English through media, such as television and newspapers, to gain supplementary exposure outside the classroom.

4.2. Research instruments

4.2.1. L2 proficiency tools

Participants' L2 proficiency was determined through self-assessment, teacher evaluation, and a lexical test. Students reported their level using CEFR descriptors, while teachers independently assigned CEFR levels based on classroom performance. These teacher ratings showed a moderate, statistically significant correlation with self-reports (Spearman's ρ = .582, p < .001). The Lexical Test for Advanced Learners of English (LexTALE; Lemhöfer & Broersma, 2012), an un-speeded lexical decision task validated as a measure of general L2 proficiency, was additionally administered. In cases where self- and teacher ratings differed, LexTALE

results served as the deciding measure. This triangulation produced a final sample of 22 lower-proficiency (B1-B2) and 15 higher-proficiency (C1-C2) learners.

4.2.2. Assessment tasks

Three oral interactive decision-making tasks were designed for data collection. In pairs, participants discussed and agreed on plans for three scenarios (an exchange trip, a fundraising event, and a graduation party) and concluded by orally presenting their final decisions as proposals to a hypothetical school council. These scenarios involved familiar topics and were considered suitable for intermediate to advanced L2 learners to engage in fluent conversation (Council of Europe, 2020).

Each task had a simple and a complex version, following Robinson's (2007) componential framework, with task complexity operationalized through the number of elements and the reasoning demands involved (see Appendix). In the complex versions, participants had to integrate a larger number of elements (e.g., more options for courses, destinations, or event components) and engage in more demanding reasoning operations, such as comparing, contrasting, and justifying alternatives. These manipulations were intended to increase cognitive load and draw on greater working-memory resources, thereby leading to more controlled and elaborate language use.

Participants completed both the simple and complex versions of one decision-making task at each data collection phase. The three task scenarios were counterbalanced across sessions to ensure that all participants completed each task type while avoiding repetition effects. All task performances were audio-recorded and later transcribed for subsequent analysis. Sociopragmatic variables, including interlocutor relationship and status, were held constant across all versions.

Prior to the main study, the assessment tasks were piloted with 24 students whose linguistic profiles matched those of the participants. A semantic differential scale assessed perceived task difficulty to validate the operationalization of task complexity (Révész et al., 2016), in line with the view that cognitively demanding tasks are experienced as more difficult (Robinson, 2007). Wilcoxon signed-ranks tests confirmed that complex versions were significantly more difficult than the simple ones (trip task: $z = 3.09$, $p < .001$, $r = .631$; fundraising task: $z = 3.52$, $p < .001$, $r = .719$; party task: $z = 3.28$, $p < .001$, $r = .670$).

4.2.3. Interview protocol

Eighteen participants were randomly selected to take part in semi-structured interviews conducted in their first language to enhance response clarity and ensure

richer, more reliable data (see Dörnyei & Csizér, 2012). The interviews took place immediately after task performance at each data collection phase. They formed part of a larger interview protocol, but the present report focuses on a single, repeated probe that asked participants whether they prioritize speaking their L2 correctly (i.e., avoiding grammatical or lexical mistakes) or conveying meaning even if errors occur. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and translated into English.

The interview protocol was piloted with three research assistants who role-played the roles of interviewer and interviewee; minor edits were made to question wording and follow-up prompts based on their feedback. Overall interview length ranged from approximately 3 to 10 minutes (median ≈ 4.5 minutes), while the probe on correctness versus meaning conveyance typically required 1-2 minutes of participant response.

4.3. Instructional treatment

Explicit instruction consisted of three sessions of approximately 20 minutes each, delivered between data collection phases. Each lesson followed Martínez-Flor's (2005) instructional sequence, that is, pragmatic awareness-raising, input presentation, metapragmatic analysis, and interactive task performance, targeting strategies for making suggestions across contexts, with particular emphasis on directness and politeness. Although participants had previously encountered some suggestion strategies and mitigation markers in their school curriculum, they had not received explicit pragmatic instruction. Pilot testing with six students informed minor adjustments to the materials (e.g., reducing the number of suggestions in listening tasks) to optimize processing and engagement. To facilitate gradual integration into participants' interlanguage systems, the content was presented in small, thematically organized segments designed to scaffold understanding and promote reflection on language use.

In the first session, awareness-raising activities introduced learners to direct suggestion strategies through short, informal scenarios depicting everyday interactions, such as suggesting a friend about a movie or suggesting how to complete a class assignment. Participants discussed possible utterances for each situation and reflected on how speakers can express suggestions with varying degrees of directness. Building on these insights, input was presented through an audio recording in which two classmates decided how to solve a problem in their physical education class. While listening, learners filled in missing lines in the transcript containing the target speech act. The subsequent metapragmatic analysis focused on identifying direct suggestion strategies (e.g., "I suggest you

. . .," "We could . . .," "Let's . . .," "You should . . .") and examining their grammatical structure and contextual appropriateness. Guided discussion helped learners infer how these strategies differ in strength and directness and under what circumstances each might be preferred. The session concluded with a paired decision-making task in which students planned a class project together, exchanging suggestions on when to meet, what to present, and how to organize it, in order to put the newly analyzed resources into practice.

The second session addressed indirect suggestion strategies and their pragmatic value. Learners began by considering how they might address interlocutors of differing social status, such as a teacher or employer, and how relative power and social distance shape the degree of directness appropriate in a suggestion. Input was presented through a listening activity featuring two classmates deciding which play to perform for a school drama club. Learners completed a transcript by selecting missing suggestions from a list and matching them to the appropriate context. The ensuing metapragmatic analysis focused on distinguishing indirect strategies, including query preparatories (e.g., "Why don't we . . .?"), conditionals (e.g., "If I were you . . ."), impersonal statements (e.g., "It might be a good idea to . . ."), and hints (e.g., "I'm thinking of . . ."). Discussion emphasized how these forms make the speaker's intention less explicit and how contextual factors such as familiarity and power relationships influence the choice of strategy. The session ended with a card-based speaking activity in which pairs alternated drawing situational prompts (e.g., neighborhood conflicts, workplace dilemmas, leisure activities) and taking turns to make and respond to suggestions. This task encouraged learners to adjust their degree of indirectness according to situational demands.

The third session focused on politeness and mitigation in suggestion-making. Awareness-raising began with a reflection on cross-cultural differences in politeness norms, drawing on examples of both impolite and overly formal suggestions to highlight potential sources of misunderstanding. Input was presented through a dialogue among three classmates deciding on a retirement gift for their teacher, in which all suggestions were highlighted and politeness markers explicitly identified. Metapragmatic analysis centered on both internal markers (e.g., "perhaps," "I think," "you know") and external markers (e.g., "May I make a suggestion?," "I'm not sure, but . . .," "I'm sure you'll like it"), focusing on their pragmatic effect in softening directness. Guided discussion led learners to compare English markers with those in their first language and to reflect on their contextual use. The session closed with a two-player board game designed to elicit suggestions across everyday domains, including school, health, and leisure. Players rolled a die, responded to situational prompts, and practiced integrating appropriate degrees of directness and politeness, thereby consolidating the pragmatic distinctions explored throughout instruction.

4.4. Data collection procedure

The study was conducted over nine weeks and comprised a pretest, an immediate posttest, and a delayed posttest, interspersed with an instructional period. During Week 1, participants provided informed consent along with relevant demographic and L2 proficiency information. In Week 2, the pretest phase took place. Participants completed both the simple and complex versions of one interactive decision-making task, with task order counterbalanced across pairs to minimize carryover and practice effects. Due to an odd number of participants, one student performed both tasks twice; however, her second performance was excluded from analyses. After each task, participants rated perceived task difficulty, consistent with the pilot procedure, and semi-structured interviews were conducted.

The instructional treatment occurred in Weeks 3 and 4, with the first session targeting direct suggestion strategies, followed by two sessions addressing indirect suggestions and politeness and mitigation, respectively. The immediate posttest was administered in Week 5 and the delayed posttest in Week 9. Each posttest replicated the pretest procedure, including completion of a simple and a complex task, assessment of perceived difficulty, and participation in the interview.

Across all phases, complex tasks were consistently rated as more difficult than simple ones (trip task: $z = 4.41$, $p < .001$, $r = .725$; fundraising task: $z = 3.36$, $p = .001$, $r = .552$; party task: $z = 3.40$, $p = .001$, $r = .559$), confirming the validity of the task complexity manipulation. Data from only 34 participants were included in the delayed posttest as three learners were absent on the final collection day.

4.5. Data analysis

4.5.1. Task performance: Coding of pragmatic complexity and accuracy

Task performance was evaluated in terms of pragmatic complexity and accuracy. Following Gilabert and Barón (2013), pragmatic complexity was operationalized as the ratio of the total number of types of suggestions to the total number of suggestions made. Two researchers classified suggestions according to the strategy employed, categorizing them as direct or indirect and as including or excluding redressive action (i.e., politeness markers). For example, “We could complete the project on Sunday” is a direct suggestion without redressive action, whereas “I think it might be a good idea to inform the teacher first. What do you think?” is an indirect suggestion with redressive action.

Pragmatic accuracy was calculated as the proportion of inaccurate suggestions relative to the total number of suggestions. Two raters identified inaccuracies

based on five criteria adapted from Youn (2015): content delivery (clarity and completeness of the suggestion), language use (pragmalinguistic appropriateness), sensitivity to context (sociopragmatic appropriateness), interaction engagement (mutual understanding with the interlocutor), and turn organization (coherence and naturalness of turn-taking). For instance, "We make presentation tomorrow and say others to work with us" is less accurate than "We could work on the presentation tomorrow and ask the others to help us." Article use, verb choice, and the lack of modal hedging and other redressive strategies in the first suggestion reduce its pragmalinguistic accuracy. Similarly, "What about tidying up here a little before we go? The classroom was clean when we got here" is more accurate than "You have to clean here before going." While both convey the same intent, the latter breaches sociopragmatic appropriateness by sounding too direct for an equal-status interaction, whereas the former employs an indirect, polite form suitable for peer communication.

Four raters with expertise in pragmatic assessment independently evaluated an initial set of 104 tasks drawn from all three phases. Weekly review meetings were held to discuss interpretations, resolve disagreements, and ensure consistent application of the coding scheme. Consensus was reached on all discrepancies, and satisfactory inter-rater reliability was established (Krippendorff's $\alpha = .837$). The remaining 112 tasks were then evenly assigned to the raters for independent evaluation.

4.5.2. Interview data: Coding of communicative focus

A qualitative content analysis was conducted to examine participants' interview responses across testing phases. The analysis followed a deductive coding approach based on the research questions guiding this study. The codebook comprised five categories: (i) awareness of pragmatic accuracy (recognition of linguistic and sociopragmatic norms that guide appropriate suggestions), (ii) awareness of pragmatic complexity (references to the use of indirectness, mitigation, or elaborated linguistic forms), (iii) focus on correctness versus communication (learners' stated orientation toward linguistic precision or message conveyance during interaction), (iv) effect of instruction (perceptions of lesson novelty, usefulness, or engagement), and (v) proficiency-related confidence (self-perceived ability to use English pragmatically and its influence on task performance). All transcripts were initially coded by one researcher and subsequently reviewed by a second researcher. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion until full consensus was reached.

4.6. Statistical analysis

Changes in pragmatic complexity and pragmatic accuracy were analyzed using linear mixed-effects models to account for repeated measures, with participant included as a random intercept. Fixed effects included time (pretest, immediate posttest, delayed posttest), task type (simple, complex), proficiency level (lower, higher), and their interactions. Model assumptions were verified through residual diagnostics, and post-hoc pairwise comparisons were performed using estimated marginal means with Bonferroni correction. All tests were two-tailed with $\alpha = .05$.

Interview data were analyzed alongside task performance to provide an integrated perspective on learners' orientation toward accuracy, complexity, and communicative effectiveness. Following deductive coding, interview responses were examined in relation to observed performance patterns across testing phases to explore correspondences between learners' reported priorities and changes in pragmatic behavior, thereby supporting triangulation between interview data and task performance findings. Representative excerpts were selected to illustrate typical or salient patterns, with particular attention to how learners' focus and self-perceptions evolved from the pretest to the immediate and delayed posttests.

5. Results

5.1. Effect of instruction on the complexity and accuracy of suggestions

Descriptive statistics indicate that participants' pragmatic complexity increased from pretest to immediate posttest for both simple and complex tasks, with a slight decrease from immediate to delayed posttest (see Table 1). A linear mixed-effects model confirmed that complexity increased significantly right after instruction ($\beta = 0.16$, $p < .001$), while the change from immediate to delayed posttest was not significant ($\beta = 0.03$, $p = .424$). There was no significant main effect of task type ($\beta = 0.05$, $p = .144$) or time-by-task interaction (all $p > .05$), indicating that the pattern of improvement over time was similar for simple and complex tasks.

Table 1 Pragmatic complexity of suggestions

Task complexity	Pretest *M* (*SD*)	Immediate posttest *M* (*SD*)	Delayed posttest *M* (*SD*)
Simple	0.76 (0.11)	0.86 (0.11)	0.80 (0.13)
Complex	0.81 (0.14)	0.88 (0.08)	0.84 (0.13)

As can be seen in Table 2, participants' inaccuracy scores decreased from pretest to immediate posttest for both tasks and remained largely stable at the delayed posttest. A linear mixed-effects model confirmed a significant reduction in inaccuracies immediately after instruction (β = -0.43, p = .009). Accuracy remained high at the delayed posttest, with no significant change from immediate posttest (β = -0.02, p = .932). A significant main effect of task was observed, with fewer inaccuracies in the complex task compared to the simple task (β = -0.36, p = .026). The time-by-task interaction was not significant (all p > .05). This indicates that both tasks followed a similar trajectory of improvement.

Table 2 Pragmatic accuracy of suggestions

Task complexity	Pretest *M* (*SD*)	Immediate posttest *M* (*SD*)	Delayed posttest *M* (*SD*)
Simple	2.15 (0.80)	1.79 (0.64)	1.69 (0.68)
Complex	1.79 (0.63)	1.59 (0.54)	1.57 (0.57)

Note. Lower scores indicate fewer inaccuracies (i.e., higher pragmatic accuracy)

5.2. Effect of L2 proficiency on the impact of instruction

Higher-proficiency learners generally produced more complex suggestions than their lower-proficiency peers across time and tasks (see Table 3). A linear mixed-effects model confirmed a significant main effect of proficiency (β = 0.08, p = .030). A time-by-proficiency interaction at immediate posttest (β = -0.13, p = .008) showed that lower-proficiency learners experienced larger immediate gains from pretest to posttest, partially reducing the difference in complexity. By the delayed posttest, higher-proficiency learners descriptively regained higher complexity scores, but this difference was not statistically significant (β = 0.05, p = .345). No significant three-way interaction with task type was observed (β = -0.04, p = .559), which suggests that these patterns were consistent across simple and complex tasks.

Table 3 Pragmatic complexity of suggestions by L2 proficiency level

Task complexity	L2 proficiency	Pretest *M* (*SD*)	Immediate posttest *M* (*SD*)	Delayed posttest *M* (*SD*)
Simple	Lower	0.73 (0.12)	0.88 (0.12)	0.75 (0.14)
	Higher	0.80 (0.08)	0.83 (0.09)	0.88 (0.06)
Complex	Lower	0.77 (0.15)	0.90 (0.08)	0.79 (0.14)
	Higher	0.87 (0.08)	0.86 (0.08)	0.90 (0.07)

Regarding pragmatic accuracy, higher-proficiency learners consistently produced fewer inaccuracies than lower-proficiency learners at all time points (see Table 4). A linear mixed-effects model confirmed a significant main effect of proficiency (β = -0.58, p = .004), indicating that higher-proficiency learners were more

accurate overall. There were no significant time-by-proficiency (β = 0.07, p = .795) or task-by-proficiency (β = 0.02, p = .937) interactions. This suggests that both proficiency groups followed a similar pattern of improvement: They reduced inaccuracies immediately after instruction and maintained high accuracy at delayed posttest. No significant three-way interaction with task type was observed (β = -0.02, p = .948), which confirms that these trends were similar for simple and complex tasks.

Table 4 Pragmatic accuracy of suggestions by L2 proficiency level

Task complexity	L2 proficiency	Pretest *M* (*SD*)	Immediate posttest *M* (*SD*)	Delayed posttest *M* (*SD*)
Simple	Lower	2.38 (0.82)	1.95 (0.61)	1.90 (0.74)
	Higher	1.80 (0.64)	1.55 (0.62)	1.39 (0.46)
Complex	Lower	2.02 (0.56)	1.74 (0.54)	1.78 (0.64)
	Higher	1.46 (0.59)	1.36 (0.48)	1.27 (0.26)

Note. Lower scores indicate fewer inaccuracies (i.e., higher pragmatic accuracy)

5.3. Interview data: Communicative focus

As shown in Excerpt 1, participants at the pretest demonstrated a strong orientation toward pragmatic accuracy, with seventeen of the eighteen interviewees (94%) emphasizing the importance of using contextually appropriate and polite language. Most learners associated "speaking correctly" with appropriateness and respect rather than grammatical perfection, acknowledging that they adjust tone and formality depending on interlocutor or situation (Student 129). Awareness of pragmatic complexity, such as the use of indirectness, mitigation, or elaborated linguistic forms, was less common, with a minority reporting deliberate attempts to adopt more sophisticated language for refinement (Student 105). Learners' communicative focus varied: Roughly two-thirds prioritized getting their message across (Student 118), while the remaining participants concentrated on producing precise language, even if it meant speaking more cautiously (Student 109). Finally, confidence closely mirrored perceived proficiency. Lower-proficiency learners described feeling restricted in expressing politeness or elaboration (Student 130), whereas higher-proficiency learners reported greater flexibility, simultaneously linking correctness to confidence and social comfort (Student 122).

Excerpt 1

(1) Definitely, when I'm talking informally, I don't think about what I'm saying. On the other hand, when speaking formally, especially with people I don't know, I concentrate on the words I'm using. (Student 129)

(2) I feel a lot better when I use those, like, elite phrases. So, I try to use them. (Student 105)

(3) I just try to make the things I want to say understandable, and grammatical correctness is just secondary. (Student 118)
(4) I try to speak as correctly as possible, although I don't say much. (Student 109)
(5) I mostly try to say everything correctly and sound nice, and it then kind of ruins it. (Student 130)
(6) It depends on the person I'm talking to. When someone is better than me, then I get a little nervous and try to speak correctly. (Student 122)

Interview data from the immediate posttest (see Excerpt 2) revealed clear instructional effects and growth in both accuracy and complexity awareness. Approximately 70% of participants commented on the novelty or usefulness of the lessons, highlighting enhanced sensitivity to how linguistic choices, tone, and mitigation affect appropriateness (Student 107). Learners also reported experimenting with more indirect or elaborated formulations, which suggests that instruction supported their ability to manage pragmatic complexity (Student 125). Participants' communicative focus became more balanced: Roughly one-third of those who had previously prioritized communication indicated that they were now paying greater attention to correctness without sacrificing message conveyance (Student 128). Other salient instructional effects included frequent references to the lessons as engaging and personally relevant, often connecting enjoyment with perceived learning gains (Student 129). Finally, proficiency-related confidence increased across nearly all learners (83%), often being associated with satisfaction in noticing progress or in gaining a clearer understanding of pragmatic rules (Student 136).

Excerpt 2

(7) It's always good to know how to suggest something correctly as well as to express yourself politely. And to show in the way you're speaking that you're speaking to different people, so you have to adapt. (Student 107)
(8) I've learned that I can lead a conversation in a much more interesting way if I use more sophisticated language. (Student 125)
(9) The essential thing in the language is to transfer information. And the more polished the speech is, the better for me. (Student 128)
(10) Even the most boring topic can be taught in a very engaging way if the teacher is enthusiastic and believes in you. He [the teacher-researcher] did it in an entertaining way, so I enjoyed it. (Student 129)
(11) I acquired knowledge of topics I hadn't previously considered important. Now I know where I need to become better and where I'm good enough. (Student 136)

At the delayed posttest (Excerpt 3), awareness of pragmatic accuracy remained high for nearly all participants (89%), reflecting sustained understanding of pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic norms (Student 130). Gains in complexity were less stable as only about one-third of learners continued to report conscious variation or

elaboration in their pragmatic use (Student 136). Learners' focus orientations largely reverted to pre-instructional tendencies, with those who had previously prioritized message conveyance continuing to emphasize efficiency (Student 123), whereas accuracy-oriented learners retained their concern for linguistic form, now framed in relation to contextual appropriateness rather than mere correctness (Student 122). Comments referring to the influence of instruction decreased over time, though a minority (25%) explicitly linked their pragmatic attention to ongoing academic or professional goals (Student 129). Confidence when communicating in English varied among participants: Some described stable or improved self-assurance (Student 128), while others reverted to habitual speech patterns once external feedback and structured practice opportunities ceased to be provided (Student 141).

Excerpt 3

(12) I try to speak correctly. It doesn't always go the way I want, but I try, particularly with certain people. (Student 130)
(13) In the beginning, it all sounded the same way, now it's more varied, colorful. (Student 136)
(14) For me it's more important to be understood in spite of the mistakes. The language should serve for communication. (Student 123)
(15) I think it's about the person you speak with. It also depends on the situation. (Student 122)
(16) Now, I'm preparing myself for a certificate, so yes, this is important. (Student 129)
(17) I would say today it was better. Maybe I started using some of the suggestions when I remembered something. That's because at the beginning it wouldn't occur to me to use them. They weren't part of my active vocabulary. (Student 128)
(18) I just wasn't able to say complex sentences as I wanted, and I cut them in the process or simplified them. I couldn't include what we learned in class, so I sounded primitive. My English is not good enough. (Student 141)

6. Discussion

This study examined whether explicit pragmatic instruction enhanced the complexity and accuracy of L2 suggestion-making across tasks with differing cognitive demands, and whether these effects were moderated by learner proficiency. By integrating performance-based findings with learners' interview reflections, it provides insight into instructed pragmatic development and the factors shaping it. The discussion first considers the effects of instruction, including the role of task complexity and the stability of gains over time, before turning to the moderating influence of L2 proficiency on learners' developmental trajectories.

6.1. Effects of instruction on the use of L2 suggestions

The first research question asked whether instruction influenced pragmatic complexity and accuracy, and whether task complexity moderated these effects. The analysis showed that learners increased complexity immediately after instruction, with a slight decline at delayed posttest, and enhanced accuracy, which remained high over time. These effects occurred across both simple and complex tasks, suggesting that instructional effects were comparable regardless of task demands. Complexity gains encompassed a broader range of suggestion strategies, including both direct and indirect forms and more effective use of politeness markers. At the same time, accuracy reflected greater pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic appropriateness. Overall, learners' post-instruction performance exhibited both more elaborated language and improved alignment with the social and interactional demands of suggestion-making.

These improvements are consistent with Taguchi's (2019) conceptualization of L2 pragmatic competence, which emphasizes that competence involves not only pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic knowledge but also interactional adaptability and learner agency. In this view, pragmatic competence entails adjusting language to contextual demands, strategically negotiating meaning, and managing communicative goals. The concurrent gains in complexity and accuracy observed in this study therefore suggest that learners developed more than new linguistic forms; they demonstrated a more flexible, socially attuned, and agentive approach to suggestion-making. Interview data support this interpretation, as learners reported increased sensitivity to tone, directness, and politeness markers, and described intentionally experimenting with more elaborated utterances.

Several components of the instructional sequence likely contributed to these gains. First, the awareness-raising activities introduced learners to sociopragmatic factors, such as face-threatening potential, promoting the mapping of pragmatic forms onto social functions and more contextually appropriate production (see McConachy & Spencer-Oatey, 2020; Takahashi, 2010). Second, the input presentation and metapragmatic analysis stages exposed learners to examples of suggestion strategies varying in directness, mitigation, and strength. This combination of guided reflection and cognitively rich input appears to have fostered deeper engagement and supported the integration of complex pragmatic structures into learners' interlanguage systems (see Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor, 2021). Third, the interactive performance stage offered scaffolded, socially realistic tasks, allowing learners to experiment with diverse suggestion strategies, negotiate mitigation, and refine sociopragmatic appropriateness while managing cognitive load. Repeated cycles of noticing, application, and reflection likely facilitated consolidation of linguistic and sociopragmatic skills and reinforced gains

in both accuracy and complexity. The scaffolded design may have also mitigated extraneous cognitive load (Sweller, 1994), thereby optimizing working memory and enabling focused attention on nuanced form-function mappings.

Contrary to findings in previous studies (Gilabert & Barón, 2013; Kim & Taguchi, 2015; Márquez & Barón, 2021), task complexity did not significantly moderate the effects of instruction, with learners demonstrating comparable gains on both simple and complex tasks. One plausible explanation is that the instructional design fostered transferable pragmatic strategies. Because the instruction explicitly highlighted how social context shapes suggestion-making and guided repeated metapragmatic analysis, learners may have internalized a flexible repertoire of sociopragmatic principles that could be deployed across tasks, irrespective of cognitive demand. With repeated practice, this process likely facilitated the proceduralization of declarative knowledge, enabling more efficient and stable application of sociopragmatic rules (Li, 2013). A second contributing factor may be the scaffolded pedagogical progression: The sequence from direct strategies to indirect ones, culminating in mitigation and politeness, gradually introduced complexity while enabling learners to allocate cognitive resources efficiently and navigate increasing pragmatic demands. A third factor concerns learner agency and metapragmatic reflection. Participants reported actively selecting forms based on contextual cues, balancing directness with politeness, and self-regulating their choices, which demonstrates adaptive, strategic behavior. This aligns with Ishihara's (2019) conceptualization of agency, which emphasizes learners' capacity to adjust language use to sociocultural norms. These factors, as illustrated in participants' comments, suggest that the instruction cultivated learners' flexibility, strategic responsiveness, and socially attuned pragmatic performance across varied interactional contexts.

Turning to stability over time, while pragmatic accuracy gains were generally maintained at the delayed posttest, pragmatic complexity gains proved more fragile. Theoretically, this is expected: Under conditions of limited attentional capacity, learners can more readily prioritize accuracy, drawing on established forms (Skehan & Foster, 2001), which makes it more salient and easier to monitor. In contrast, complexity entails experimenting with novel or less stabilized structures, integrating indirectness or mitigation, and negotiating sociocultural meaning, processes that require sustained cognitive engagement and careful control over emerging forms. Such risk-taking reflects the trade-off dynamics proposed in task-based models, where striving for complexity can temporarily compromise control and stability, whereas a focus on accuracy fosters more conservative, error-free output (Skehan, 1998). To sustain complexity gains, instructional designs should therefore provide extended opportunities for reflection, varied social contexts, and scaffolded risk-taking, enabling learners to gradually consolidate control and develop more automatic, elaborated pragmatic forms.

6.2. The role of L2 proficiency in pragmatic performance

The second research question investigated the extent to which L2 proficiency moderated learners' performance in producing suggestions. Consistent with recent research (e.g., Tai & Chen, 2021; Xiao et al., 2019; Zhang & Aubrey, 2024), proficiency influenced both the initial level of pragmatic performance and the trajectory of subsequent development. Higher-proficiency learners consistently exhibited greater pragmatic complexity and accuracy, reflecting the advantage that broader linguistic resources and more automatized processing confer when integrating new pragmatic strategies. In contrast, lower-proficiency learners demonstrated rapid, short-term gains in complexity following instruction. This temporarily narrowed the performance gap with higher-proficiency learners and underscored the potential for structured instruction to accelerate pragmatic development among less advanced learners.

These patterns can be interpreted in light of the four-stage instructional sequence implemented in the study. For lower-proficiency learners, the awareness-raising stage proved particularly influential: By explicitly highlighting contextual factors such as power relations, social distance, face-threat, and mitigation options, this stage may have reduced sociopragmatic uncertainty and equipped learners with more limited linguistic resources to engage more confidently in suggestion-making. During the input presentation stage, exposure to comprehensible, context-rich models likely supported lower-proficiency learners in noticing how suggestion forms vary across situations, an important pedagogical scaffold, given that conventional classroom materials often provide limited opportunities to encounter elaborated suggestion strategies (Jiang, 2006; Yildiz Ekin, 2013). Higher-proficiency learners likewise benefited from these stages, though their broader linguistic resources and more automatized processing may have allowed them to integrate new pragmatic forms with greater ease. At both proficiency levels, learners appear to have drawn on guided reflection and interactive tasks to fine-tune strategic choices and consolidate newly acquired pragmatic forms.

The pronounced gains among lower-proficiency learners may have arisen during the metapragmatic analysis and interactive performance stages. Guided reflection seems to have facilitated the decomposition of linguistic forms into interpretable units and promoted understanding of the rationale underlying indirectness and mitigation choices (Taguchi, 2015; Usó-Juan, 2022), thereby enabling experimentation with forms previously beyond their active repertoire. This heightened experimentation coincided with increased confidence as learners reported feeling more capable of employing indirect or elaborated suggestion strategies, in contrast to pretest accounts that emphasized constrained expressive ability and cautious language use. The subsequent interactive tasks provided a

supportive, task-based environment in which learners could apply these strategies without the communicative pressures inherent in authentic interaction, mitigating anxiety and fostering risk-taking (Souzandehfar & Ahmed Abdel-Al Ibrahim, 2023). These stages may have played a role in allowing lower-proficiency learners to extend their interlanguage systems and produce more complex, contextually appropriate suggestion patterns immediately after instruction.

By the delayed posttest, differences in complexity between proficiency groups had converged, while both groups sustained high accuracy. The durability of complexity gains, however, varied by proficiency: Higher-proficiency learners tended to exhibit more stable consolidation, whereas some lower-proficiency learners reverted to simpler patterns once structured support was removed. Lower-proficiency learners, in particular, may struggle to maintain elaborated pragmatic forms due to more limited linguistic resources and working memory constraints (see Skehan, 1998; Skehan & Foster, 2001), which can impede the proceduralization and transfer of pragmatic knowledge into communicative practice (Li, 2013). Sustaining gains in complexity thus likely requires not only continued opportunities for guided reflection but also ongoing exposure to varied, context-rich input and repeated practice to support automatization (Ellis, 2019).

7. Conclusion, limitations, and pedagogical implications

This study demonstrates that sequenced, explicit instruction leads to improvements in L2 suggestion-making and strengthens learners' ability to produce socially appropriate language and to employ a broader range of strategies across task types. While pragmatic accuracy gains remained stable, pragmatic complexity developed more dynamically, showing substantial immediate growth but more variable retention over time. These gains were comparable for both simple and complex tasks. The findings also indicate that proficiency shaped the initial sophistication of task performance as well as the consolidation of learning, with higher-proficiency learners maintaining more advanced pragmatic performance overall. These results therefore support targeted, ongoing instruction to help learners consolidate emerging complex pragmatic behaviors while preserving accuracy.

Some limitations of the study warrant consideration. First, the relatively small sample size constrains the generalizability of the findings, even though participants were controlled for linguistic background and educational context. Second, the brevity of the instructional treatment potentially reduced the depth and durability of pragmatic development, especially regarding pragmatic complexity. Third, the stages of the instructional sequence functioned as an integrated whole, which means that their individual contributions cannot be empirically isolated

within the present design. Fourth, the focus on a single speech act and a limited set of decision-making tasks captures only part of the pragmatic and task-based demands learners encounter in real communicative contexts; different speech acts or task characteristics may elicit distinct developmental trajectories, and future research could explore the applicability of this instructional model to other pragmatic targets. Finally, although interview data offered valuable insights into learners' perceptions and reasoning, such reports may have been influenced by reactivity, with participants responding in ways they believed the researcher expected. In addition, learners' interpretations of gains in sensitivity and confidence may not perfectly align with actual change, and task performance may not fully correspond to authentic communicative behavior.

Despite these limitations, the findings suggest several pedagogical implications for L2 pragmatics instruction. A central implication concerns the sequencing of instruction. Rather than presenting suggestion-making through isolated formulas or brief communicative practice, teachers may benefit from organizing instruction as a staged progression moving from awareness-raising to contextualized input, guided metapragmatic reflection, and interactive application. In practice, this might involve first asking learners to compare how they would make a suggestion to a close friend versus a teacher, employer, or unfamiliar interlocutor, thereby drawing attention to factors such as power relations, social distance, and face sensitivity. Teachers might then present dialogues containing alternative suggestion forms and prompt learners to analyze differences in directness, mitigation, and contextual appropriateness before engaging them in communicative tasks requiring adaptation to varied interlocutors and situational demands.

A further implication concerns task design. Because learners demonstrated comparable instructional gains across both simple and more cognitively demanding tasks, pragmatic instruction need not be confined to low-complexity communicative practice. Teachers can incorporate cognitively richer tasks that place greater demands on decision-making and the management of multiple communicative variables, provided that learners have first developed familiarity with relevant pragmatic forms and strategies. Such activities can serve not only as assessment tools but also as meaningful sites for pragmatic development.

The findings also highlight the importance of proficiency-sensitive pedagogy. Less advanced learners may benefit from more explicit linguistic support, such as sentence starters, structured comparison of alternative formulations, collaborative planning, or model-based rehearsal before freer interaction. More advanced learners, by contrast, can be challenged through tasks involving greater ambiguity and pragmatic nuance, such as evaluating competing suggestions in academic or workplace scenarios, reformulating overly direct utterances, or discussing how the same suggestion may be interpreted differently depending on

the context. Teaching practices should likewise move beyond correction of grammatical form to include discussion of appropriateness, tone, mitigation, and interpersonal impact, thus helping learners understand why certain formulations may be pragmatically more effective than others.

The fragility of gains in pragmatic complexity further suggests that pragmatic instruction should not be treated as a one-off intervention. Teachers may need to revisit suggestion-making cyclically across the curriculum through recurring task sequences, reflective post-task discussions, analysis of authentic spoken interactions, or follow-up reformulation activities in which learners return to earlier productions and refine them for new contexts. Encouraging transfer beyond the classroom may also be valuable, for instance by asking learners to observe suggestion-making in films, workplace interactions, online exchanges, or other authentic communicative environments. Taken together, these implications suggest that pragmatic development may be best supported not through isolated speech act instruction, but through sustained, explicitly scaffolded, and contextually varied pedagogical practice.

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APPENDIX

Operationalization of task complexity

Sample task – Fundraising event

Item	Simple version		Complex version	
	Student 1	Student 2	Student 1	Student 2
Facilities:	park near the school	metro station near the school	forest on the city outskirts	farmhouse in the suburbs
Activity:	market to sell local food	market to sell local art	athletic festival for children with Down syndrome	garden fair to adopt and plant a tree
Advertisement:	Facebook + printed brochure	school newspaper + Facebook	door-to-door printed notice + YouTube video or TV commercial	radio message + billboard in the city center or stand in two shopping malls
Special guests:	Czech pop singer (€200) + university band (€100)	Czech traditional band (€150) + school band (€100)	expert speaker (€95) + magician (€135) or dancing company (€205)	story teller (€75) + Czech actor (€225) or city mayor (€165)
Gift:	shopping bag made of recycled materials	homemade lemonade	artwork made by the students	crochet toys made by the elderly