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# The Role of Consciousness-Raising Tasks on EFL Learners' Microgenetic Development of Request Pragmatic Knowledge

**Zia Tajeddin** [a]
*Professor of Applied Linguistics, Allameh Tabataba'i University, Iran*

**Rasoul Mohammad Hosseinpur**
*Assistant Professor of TEFL, University of Qom, Iran*

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**Abstract**

An overview of pedagogical interventions in the field of interlanguage pragmatics reveals the under-exploration of the processes in which changes in learners' second language (L2) pragmatic competence are established and that most of these investigations have focused on the product or final outcome of the learners' pragmatic development (Bardovi-Harlig, 1999; Kasper, 1996; Vyatkina & Belz, 2006). This study aimed to provide a qualitative analysis of the microgenetic development of English as a foreign language (EFL) learners' pragmatic knowledge of request speech act. A total of 140 male and female participants received instruction on request strategy types and internal and external modification devices for seven sessions (weeks) through consciousness-raising (C-R) tasks. The data were collected after instructional sessions during the first, third, fifth, and seventh weeks through discourse completion tests (DCTs). The results indicated that, in the course of time, the participants stopped using direct request

[a] *Email address:* zia_tajeddin@yahoo.com

*Corresponding address:* Faculty of Persian Literature and Foreign Languages, Allameh Tabataba'i University, Allameh St., Sa'adatabad, Tehran, Iran

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strategies and employed conventionally indirect strategies more frequently in situations involving high-status interlocutors and high-imposition requests. Moreover, as time progressed, the learners became more preoccupied with pragmatic appropriateness rather than grammatical correctness. The results of the study suggest that C-R instructional tasks offer an effective means of teaching pragmatics. Considering request speech act, learners should become conscious of the significance of concepts such as status and imposition as well as internal and external modification devices in request formulation.

**Key words:** Request head act; Internal modifier; External modifier; Microgenetic development; Consciousness-raising (C-R) task

## Introduction

Since the introduction of the concept communicative competence, its pragmatic aspect has remained a marginal component (Salazar, 2007). This issue is particularly clear in EFL contexts, where great emphasis has been placed on the instruction of linguistic competence and teaching pragmatic aspects has been neglected. Previous studies have shown that EFL learners' pragmatic and grammatical competence do not develop hand in hand and that even grammatically competent EFL learners may use language inappropriately and deviate from target language pragmatic norms in their language use (e.g., Eslami-Rasekh, Eslami-Rasekh, & Fatahi, 2004; Yu, 2008). Therefore, the need for formal instruction of pragmatics, especially in EFL settings, has come to light. Kasper and Roever (2005) assert that most aspects of L2 pragmatics are teachable and instruction could be facilitative for the L2 pragmatic development.

An overview of pedagogical interventions in the field of interlanguage pragmatic*s* reveals that most of these interventional studies have been conducted on an explicit/deductive and implicit/inductive continuum (Ishihara, 2010; Martinez-Flor & Uso-Juan, 2010; Takahashi, 2010). In all these pedagogical intervention studies, the focus has been on the product or final outcome of the development and the very process through which developmental changes are established has been neglected. The microgenetic approach traces the origins and genesis of the developmental changes in the learners' pragmatic knowledge that occur moment by moment over a short time rather than focusing solely on those abilities that have already fully developed. As Ohta (2005) put it, the application of the sociocultural theory and its promising contributions like microgenetic

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approach has been a "productive and exciting bend in the road" for the researchers and practitioners in the field of second language acquisition, and continues to "generate new scholarly activity" (p. 505). Consistent with this line of research, the primary purpose of this article was to document the microgenetic development of EFL learners' pragmatic knowledge of request head act and its internal and external modification devices over the course of a seven-week instruction through consciousness-raising (C-R) tasks.

## Literature Review

### Consciousness-raising Tasks

The consciousness-raising (C-R) approach is rooted in second language acquisition research and is in line with the current developments in the field of language pedagogy (Ellis, 2003). Ellis (2002) made a distinction between explicit and implicit knowledge. Explicit knowledge refers to conscious knowledge about language that is verbalizable, but this knowledge does not contribute to spontaneous language use. Implicit knowledge, on the other hand, deals with intuitive knowledge of language that is used in communicative language use. Ellis suggested that the C-R approach leads to explicit knowledge which subsequently furnishes the ground for learners to acquire implicit knowledge. He emphasizes that the explicit knowledge is not the same as metalinguistic knowledge, and that one of the main purposes of the C-R approach is advocating discovery learning through problem-solving tasks.

Contrary to other types of tasks, C-R tasks make language itself the content and encourage learners to discover how the linguistic features of the target language work. C-R tasks provide an opportunity for learners to be aware of the target linguistic features and notice them in subsequent communicative input, with the purpose of delayed, rather than immediate, mastery (Ellis, 2003). Ellis (2003, p.163) suggested the main characteristics of the C-R tasks as follows: (1) there is an attempt to isolate a specific linguistic feature for focused attention; (2) the learners are provided with data that illustrate the targeted feature and they may also be provided with an explicit rule describing or explaining the feature; (3) the learners are expected to utilize intellectual effort to understand the targeted feature; and (4) learners may be optionally required to verbalize a rule describing the grammatical structure.

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Inductive and deductive tasks are two manifestations of C-R task. In the case of the former, the language learners first encounter various examples in different forms, and they are not presented with grammatical or other types of rules explicitly but are left to discover or induce rules from their experience of using the language. In the latter case, the grammatical rules, patterns, or even metalinguistic information are explicitly presented at the beginning of the learning process and then the learners move into applying these rules when they use the language (Ellis, 2002).

The effectiveness of C-R tasks on the acquisition of request speech act has been investigated by a number of researchers. Alcon-Soler (2005) compared the effects of explicit versus implicit C-R instructional tasks on English requests. Results of the study revealed that both tasks were effective; however, the participants in the explicit C-R group gained better results than their counterparts in the implicit C-R group. Alcon-Soler's (2007) study once again targeted C-R tasks. The focus of the study was on the instruction of the English request speech act through explicit and implicit C-R tasks in the Spanish EFL context. The analysis of the data indicated that the participants in both explicit and implicit C-R groups obviously benefitted from the instruction and that they outperformed the learners in the control group.

Takimoto (2006) evaluated the effectiveness of two types of C-R instruction, namely C-R task only and C-R task with reactive explicit feedback. The study targeted English polite requestive forms and compared the performance of the two treatment groups with that of the control group. The results demonstrated that the instruction was effective for the participants in both instructional groups, and that they outperformed the learners in the control group. Concerning the between-group differences, the findings showed that both instructional approaches were somehow equally effective in improving the participants' English polite requestive forms. Takimoto's (2009) study was set up to compare the effectiveness of C-R tasks, structured-input tasks, and comprehension-based tasks. Takimoto investigated the effects of these three types of input-based tasks on teaching English request forms in the Japanese EFL context. The results showed that all the treatment groups benefited from the instruction, and that they indicated a significantly better performance than the control group. However, the better performance of the participants in the structured-input task group during the posttest was not maintained in the follow-up test.

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Ahmadi, Ghafar Samar, and Yazdanimoghaddam (2011) set out to conduct a study to explore the effectiveness of the C-R as an input-based task and the dictogloss as an output-based task on the instruction of English requestive downgraders in the Iranian EFL context. The results of the immediate and delayed posttest on the production and perception measures revealed that both tasks had a significantly positive effect on the participants' use of English requestive downgraders. In a recent study, Barekat and Mehri (2013) made an attempt to investigate the effect of pedagogical intervention on the development of the Iranian EFL learners' pragmatic competence in requestive downgrades. The study especially compared the effectiveness of C-R activities and C-R with feedback activities. The obtained results demonstrated that the instruction was beneficial for both experimental groups, and that both groups outperformed the control group. However, the participants in the C-R with the feedback group showed a more successful performance than the learners in the C-R group. The results of all these studies demonstrate that C-R tasks provide useful means to merge formal instruction of pragmatic features within a communicative language teaching framework.

**The Speech Act of Requesting**

Requests are one of the subcategories of speech acts. They are considered as one of the most face-threatening acts since they express the speaker's intention to get the hearer to perform some action and put imposition on the hearer (Uso-Juan, 2010). Both the requester and requestee's faces are threatened in the performance of requests. Furthermore, as Uso-Juan (2010) put it, requests could be used for both non-verbal or verbal goods and services. Engaging the requestee in some future action considering the requester's goal is the purpose of a request. Therefore, requesting is a pre-event act because the desired result will takes place after the request is performed. Inappropriate request strategies can easily cause breakdown in cross-cultural communication. Research on the use of request speech act suggests that many learners use requests inappropriately and deviate from target norms because it requires considerable cultural and linguistic expertise on the part of the speaker (Uso-Juan, 2010).

The degree of imposition associated with the request act, the relative power of the hearer, and the social distance between the speaker and the hearer are three variables that speakers should consider in performing request speech act (Brown &

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Levinson**,** 1987). Due to the high frequency of request speech act in our daily interactions and the importance of this speech act for language learners, researchers, and practitioners in the field of interlanguage pragmatics have paid a great deal of attention to it (e.g., Codina, 2008; Takimoto, 2009; Uso-Juan, 2010).

According to Trosborg (1995) and Sifianou (1999), requesting is made up of two main components. The first component is the request head act or the core request, which is the main utterance and has the function of requesting and can stand by itself. The second one includes modification devices or optional elements which can follow and/or precede the request head act and which are employed to modify or soften the illocutionary force of the utterance. These elements can be classified into two major groups: (1) internal modifiers, which appear within the same request head act, and (2) external modifiers, which appear in the immediate linguistic context surrounding the request head act and can precede or follow it. These modification devices cannot change the propositional meaning of the requests but can mitigate or intensify the requestive pragmatic force.

**Microgenetic Development**

Sociocultural Theory is a theory of mental development that draws extensively on the work of Vygotsky (1987). Developmental or genetic analysis of mental functions, significance of social interaction in individual mental functioning, and mediated nature of human action are three key concepts in Vygotsky-inspired sociocultural theory (Ellis, 2008). In the genetic study of the psychological processes, Vygotsky (1987) distinguishes four domains: (1) phylogenesis, which concerns evolution of the human species; (2) sociocultural history, which relates to development of humans and a particular culture throughout history; (3) ontogenesis, which refers to development of an individual in the course of his/her life; and (4) microgenesis, which focuses on cognitive changes that occur over a relatively short time in a particular interaction and in a specific sociocultural setting.

Many important contributions of Vygotsky-inspired sociocultural theory have found their way into second language learning and teaching (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). The microgenetic approach is one of these promising contributions that has the potential to deepen SLA researchers and practitioners' appreciation of L2 acquisition and is applicable to both laboratory and classroom contexts (Siegler, 2006).

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Vygotsky (1978) believes that learners' cognitive development could be traced and suggests that both the completed development or the product (outcome) of development and the very process through which higher mental forms are established should be the focus of attention. The microgenetic approach explores change as it occurs and attempts to identify and explain its underlying principles. Vygotsky asserted that under certain conditions we can trace our learners' moment-to-moment (qualitative) changes or developments, (microgenetic development). The whole point of analyzing microgenetic development, as Vygotsky (1978) put it, is to "grasp the process in flight" (p. 68). Microgenesis is the study of the origin and history of a particular event and refers to both the method and the object of study. Microgenetic analysis enables researchers to observe instances of learning as it happens during activity and to notice the developments leading to independent mental functioning (Van Compernolle & Williams, 2012).

Ellis (2008) states that the microgenetic method "… seeks to uncover the stages through which a learner passes en route to achieve SELF-REGULATION" (p. 522). Lavelli, Pantoja, Hsu, Messinger, and Fogel (2004) suggest four key features of the microgenetic method: (1) learners are carefully observed during the period of developmental change, (2) observations are conducted before, during, and after the period of developmental change, (3) observations are conducted regularly and frequently during the transition period, and (4) both quantitative and qualitative methods are employed for the intensive analysis of data in order to shed light on the processes that give rise to the developmental change.

A number of studies have focused on the learners' microgenetic development in the field of interlanguage pragmatics. Van Compernolle (2011), for example, in a case study, investigated the microgenetic development of L2 sociopragmatic knowledge in a one-hour concept-based instruction. The results of the microgenetic analysis of the cognitive functioning (i.e., conceptual knowledge) of an intermediate-level US university learner of French in collaboration with an expert tutor revealed the positive potential of a concept-based approach to teaching L2 French sociopragmatics. In another study, Kinginger and Belz (2005) explored the effect of telecollaborative partnership and residence abroad on the pragmatic knowledge development. An American learner of German in the United States participated in a variety of interactive intercultural discourses and electronically mediated partnership with expert speakers of German for eight weeks. The results

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of a corpus-assisted microgenetic analysis suggested that the learner's awareness and use of the address form choice in German improved.

## Purpose of the Study

The microgenetic approach involves taking repeated measurements from the same participants over the course of transition in the domain of interest. This contrasts with the cross-sectional and longitudinal studies. Cross-sectional approaches do not provide us with information about how change occurs, or what mechanisms underlie change. In the same vein, longitudinal approaches show that a change has occurred, but reveal little concerning how this happens. Both these traditional research designs, cross-sectional and longitudinal, allow researchers to observe only the products and not the processes associated with developmental change (Calais, 2008). The present study, however, examines the process of developmental change or microgenetic development of EFL learners' pragmatic knowledge of request speech act. More specifically, this study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What microgenetic changes do EFL learners' request strategies undergo at different points in time during instruction?
2. What microgenetic changes do EFL learners' use of internal and external request modification devices undergo at different points in time during instruction?
3. Do C-R instructional tasks improve EFL learners' pragmatic production of the request speech act?

## Methodology

### Participants

The participants of the study were 140 undergraduate Iranian university EFL learners making up six intact classes of the third or fourth semester. They were 67 male and 73 female English language and literature students and ranged from 19 to 28 years in age. The learners were mainly at upper-intermediate level, and they had studied English between 7 to 10 years in secondary school and different English language institutes in Iran. The participants declared that they had little or no contact with the English language and culture outside the classroom.

### Instruments and Treatment Materials

Data were collected during the first, third, fifth, and seventh sessions of instruction. Having received the instruction during these four sessions, the learners were

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presented with written DCTs (Appendix A), each containing four situations. In total, the DCTs consisted of 16 request scenarios (four scenarios for each session) and varied in the contextual factors of interlocutor's social status and request imposition. Social status refers to social power of a speaker over a hearer, or vice-versa. Following Schauer's (2009) study, two values of social status, high and equal or low, were considered in this study. In the same vein, the language we use when requesting also depends on the type or imposition of the task we want the other person to do. When we are asking for a big favor, we need to be more formal. Imposition also has two values, high and low. A systematic combination of two values of imposition with two values of social status yielded four categories, which resulted in four scenarios (high-status and high-imposition, high-status and low-imposition, equal or low-status and high-imposition, and equal or low-status and low-imposition). These scenarios were mainly adopted from Jalilifar (2009) and Schauer (2009).

As to the treatment, the deductive and inductive C-R pragmatic tasks (Appendix B) were employed as treatment materials for seven sessions. The participants in all six classes were instructed through both the deductive and inductive pragmatic C-R tasks. Instructional materials contained activities about imperatives as the most direct forms of requests and interactions between higher status and lower status interlocutors, formal and polite requests to a higher-status hearer, high-imposition and low-imposition requests, the least direct category of request utterances or hints, and internal and external request modification devices. All the instructional materials were in line with the purpose of the research and the DCTs in that they intended to call the participants' attention to target forms and were an attempt to raise their consciousness of the concepts of social status and imposition as well as internal and external request modification devices in making requests.

Deductive and inductive pragmatic C-R tasks focusing on different aspects of request speech act were designed for the purpose of the treatment. The contents of materials for the C-R tasks were selected from General English textbooks and previous research findings. In the deductive C-R tasks, the learners were first provided with explicit sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic information about how to make request in English. Afterwards, they were presented with some appropriate and inappropriate requests illustrating the same metapragmatic information. Then, they were asked to do some exercises on the presented information. Finally, by

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using the metapragmatic awareness provided, they were asked to make an appropriate request of their own to a specified situation.

Contrary to the deductive C-R tasks which were designed to be performed individually, the inductive C-R tasks were developed to be performed in pairs. In the inductive C-R tasks, the learners were not presented with any explicit language rule or structure. Rather, they worked with a partner on different acceptable/unacceptable, appropriate/inappropriate, or polite/impolite utterances illustrated through various activities such as DCTs and dialogs. All the activities in each task concentrated on a specific feature of making requests. Then, the learners made up a rule to explain why some requests were acceptable and some unacceptable. Next, they did some exercises focused on the target feature. Finally, considering the target features, they made an appropriate request of their own to a specified situation.

**Data Collection Procedure**

During the seven-week span of this study, the participants, who had been selected randomly, met once a week for 100 minutes. It was planned that the real instruction would be conducted at the end of the participants' regular class so as not to affect their regular learning. The learners were taught Simple Prose Texts, Paragraph Development, and Essay Writing courses by the second researcher of this study. About 30-40 minutes in every session were dedicated to the instructional treatment.

Before the instruction, the participants were given an outline of what would be done regarding the teaching of the target speech act. The outline included the introduction of the speech acts in general and request speech act in particular, the function of speech acts, their utility, and the importance of accurate and appropriate language use. After the preparatory movement, the participants were presented with pragmatic C-R tasks for seven weeks. C-R tasks can be either inductive or deductive. Both approaches offer useful and effective means for the instruction of formal linguistic features (Ellis, 2002). The participants were instructed through both the deductive and inductive pragmatic C-R tasks. The deductive C-R tasks were developed to be performed individually, while the participants worked on the inductive C-R tasks in pairs. The main rationale for this act was that, in the deductive C-R tasks, the participants were presented with explicit metapragmatic information about how to make request in English. However, in the case of the inductive C-R task, they were supposed to go through different examples and

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discover a rule. Care was taken to remove the researcher from the process so that the students could have the opportunity to discover how the pragmatic rules worked on their own. However, whenever the participants bumped into any ambiguous point or raised questions that could be useful for other students, the researcher called the other participants' attention to that point and elaborated on it.

Data were collected through four written DCTs after the treatment during the first, third, fifth, and seventh sessions of the instruction. The participants' written responses to the situations in the four DCTs, which were administered during the first, third, fifth, and seventh sessions of instruction, were analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively. In the qualitative phase, the number of the strategy types and internal and external modification devices were considered, while in the quantitative part, the learners' performance on the same four DCTs were rated by Taguchi's (2006) 6-point rating scale of pragmatic knowledge.

**Data Analysis**

**Coding of request strategy types (qualitative phase).** The coding scheme developed by Schauer (2009) was used for the analysis of the written DCT data (Table 1). The first step in analyzing DCT data was to identify a head act from a written response to each one of the 16 scenarios. A few participants had employed combined request strategies to answer DCTs. In categorizing these request utterances, the first request strategy was considered for data analysis and the second request strategy was ignored. Once head acts were identified, they were further analyzed in terms of strategy type. The three categories of request strategy types (direct, conventionally indirect, non-conventionally indirect) were subdivided into imperatives, performatives, want statements, locution derivables, suggestory formula, availability, prediction, permission, willingness, ability, and hints (Schauer, 2009).

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**Table 1**
Request Strategies (Schauer, 2009)

| | |
|---|---|
| **Direct Requests** | |
| Imperatives | Tell me the way to X! |
| Performatives | |
| unhedged | I'm asking you to tell me the way to X. |
| hedged | I want to ask you the way to X. |
| Want statements | I wish you'd tell me the way to X. |
| Locution derivable | Where is X? |
| **Conventionally Indirect requests** | |
| Suggestory formula | How about telling me the way to X? |
| Availability | Have you got time to tell me the way to X? |
| Prediction | Is there any chance to tell me the way to X? |
| Permission | Could I ask you about the way to X? |
| Willingness | Would you mind telling me the way to X? |
| Ability | Could you tell me the way to X? |
| **Non-Conventionally Indirect Requests** | |
| Hints | I have to meet someone in X. |

After coding was completed, descriptive analytical procedures were undertaken. First, the total number of strategy types employed by the participants during four sessions and across four situations of DCT administration was determined by counting the number of strategy types used in each DCT situation and session by the participants. Second, the frequency of use and percentage of responses containing a given strategy type in each DCT situation and across sessions were calculated by finding out how many times each strategy type was used by the learners in each situation and session.

**Coding of internal and external modification devices (qualitative phase).** After head acts were coded in terms of strategy type, internal and external modifications were coded and classified. According to Schauer (2009), internal modifiers mitigate the impositive force of a request through lexical and syntactic choices. Lexical downgraders (Appendix C) include downtoner, politeness marker, understater, past tense modals, consultative device, hedge, aspect, and marked modality. Syntactic downgraders (Appendix D) include conditional clause, appreciative embedding, tentative embedding, tag question, and negation. External

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modifiers (Appendix E) include alerter, preparator, grounder, disarmer, imposition minimizer, sweetener, promise of reward, small talk, appreciator, and considerator. Presence or absence of internal and external modifiers and number of them in a strategy can determine the degree of politeness of a request.

For the classification of internal and external modifiers in this study, Schauer's (2009) coding scheme was used. For the analysis, the instances with which the different internal and external downgraders were employed by the participants were divided by the number of the participants (140). This was done to achieve comparability of the data Thus, the higher the score for a particular modifier, the higher the number of instances with which the modifier was used by the learners in that particular situation/session.

**Statistical procedures for DCT (quantitative phase).** Taguchi's (2006) rating scale of pragmatic knowledge was used by two nonnative professionals to rate the participants' performance on the four DCTs on a 6-point rating scale ranging from "no performance" (0) to "excellent" (5) in each situation. The scale evaluated the learners on the basis of appropriate and correct production of the speech act situations. Interrater reliability was estimated by using the Pearson correlation. Interrater correlations yielded an acceptable level of agreement for interrater reliability ($r = .90$). The final scores of the participants were the average scores of the two raters. Moreover, repeated measures ANOVA and post-hoc comparison tests were used to probe the progress of the learners during the four tests.

## Results

### Request Strategy Use

The first research question of the study was aimed at investigating the microgenetic development of the EFL learners' request strategy type at four different points in time during the instruction. Table 2 illustrates the total number and the percentage of the strategy types employed by the participants across the four data collection sessions.

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**Table 2**
The Use of Request Strategies across Sessions

| | First session | Second session | Third session | Fourth session |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Imperative | 120 (21.5%) | 82 (14.5%) | 19 (3.5%) | 30 (5%) |
| Performative | 4 (1%) | | | |
| Want statement | 5 (1%) | 9 (1.5%) | 1 (0.25%) | |
| Locution derivable | | | 84 (15%) | |
| Suggestory formulae | | 1 (0.25%) | 3 (0.5%) | 10 (2%) |
| Availability | | | 26 (4.75%) | 22 (4%) |
| Prediction | | 8 (1.5%) | 58 (10%) | 56 (10%) |
| Permission | 12 (2%) | 98 (17.5%) | 73 (13%) | 95 (17%) |
| Willingness | 115 (20.5%) | 131 (23.5%) | 111 (20%) | 120 (21.5%) |
| Ability | 304 (54%) | 231 (41.25%) | 181 (32%) | 214 (38%) |
| Hints | | | 4 (1%) | 13 (2.5%) |
| Total | 560 (100%) | 560 (100%) | 560 (100%) | 560 (100%) |

Table 2 reveals four aspects of the microgenetic development of the participants' request strategies repertoire. First, the learners' use of imperative request strategy decreased over time, from (21.5%) in session one to (14.5%) in session two, (3.5%) in session three, and (5%) in the last session. Second, the results show that the learners' overall request strategy repertoire improved over time and they came to use a wider range of request strategy types. While they relied mainly on imperative (21.5%), willingness (20.5%), and ability (54%) request strategies in the first data collection session, they used more strategy types in subsequent session. They used imperative (14.5%), permission (17.5%), willingness (23.5%), and ability (41.25%) in the second session. Strategy use followed an upward trajectory in the third session: imperative (3.5%), locution derivable (15%), availability (4.75%), prediction (10%), permission (13%), willingness (20%), and ability (32%). In the fourth session, the same trend was observed: imperative (5%), availability (4%), prediction (10%), permission (17%), willingness (21.5%), ability (38%), and hints (2.5%) in the last data elicitation session.

Third, apart from imperative, locution derivable (15%) was the only direct request strategy type used by the learners with high frequency in the third data

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collection session for a situation related to asking a friend for directions. Other direct request strategy types, like performative, want statement, and suggestory formulae, were employed by a small number of the participants. Fourth, willingness as a conventionally indirect request strategy type was employed almost equally by the learners during the four data collection sessions: (20.5%), (23.5%), (20%), and (21.5%), respectively. Prediction, another conventionally indirect request strategy type, was observed from the second session in the learners' data (1.5%) and increased in the third and fourth sessions (10%). However, conventionally indirect request strategy type of availability and non-conventionally indirect request strategy type of hint appeared from the third session in the participants' data. Finally, the learners' use of ability as a request strategy type showed a relative decrease over time, (54%) in session one, (41.25%) in session two, (32%) in session three, and (38%) in the last session.

**Internal and External Request Modification**

The second purpose of the study was to depict the EFL learners' microgenetic development in the use of internal and external modifiers. Internal modifiers can be subcategorized as lexical and syntactic devices that are employed by speakers to soften the illocutionary force of their request. Table 3 depicts the learners' use of internal request modifiers across four sessions.

**Table 3**

The Learners' Use of Internal Modifiers across Sessions

| | First session | Second session | Third session | Fourth session |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Downtoner | | | 0.28 | 0.76 |
| Politeness marker | 2.71 | 2.59 | 2.66 | 2.77 |
| Understater | 0.40 | 0.23 | 0.19 | 0.05 |
| Past tense modals | 1.65 | 2.06 | 2.20 | 2.27 |
| Consultative device | 0.59 | 0.55 | 0.95 | 0.66 |
| Hedge | | | 0.29 | 0.26 |
| Aspect | | 0.01 | 0.65 | 0.89 |
| Marked modality | 0.24 | 0.10 | 0.19 | 0.10 |
| Conditional clause | | 0.08 | 0.16 | 0.24 |
| Appreciative embedding | | | 0.22 | 0.45 |
| Tentative embedding | | | 0.13 | 0.17 |
| Tag question | | | | |
| Negation | | | | |

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As Table 3 shows, the learners' overall internal modifier repertoire improved over time. For instance, downtoner, hedge, aspect, and syntactic internal modifiers appeared almost from the third session in the learners' data. However, the participants did not make use of tag question and negation during all four data collection sessions. The politeness marker "please" and past tense modals were employed by most of the learners in all data elicitation sessions. However, the learners' use of past tense modals increased over time from 1.65 in session one to 2.06 in session two, 2.20 in session three, and finally 2.27 in the last session. Contrary to past tense modals, the learners' use of understater decreased over time: 0.40, 0.23, 0.19, and 0.05, respectively. The syntactic downgraders were mainly used in the third and fourth data elicitation sessions by a small number of the learners. Conditional clause appeared in the second session in the learners' data (0.08), and its use increased over time to 0.16 in session three and to 0.24 in the last session. The participants started making use of appreciative embedding (0.22) and tentative embedding (0.13) from the third session to formulate request, and this use increased to 0.45 and 0.17, respectively, in the last session.

External modifiers are elements that appear in the immediate linguistic context surrounding the request head act and can precede or follow it. Table 4 shows microgenetic changes and developments of the participants' external request modifiers at four different points in time during instruction.

**Table 4**
The Learners' Use of External Modifiers across Sessions

| | First session | Second session | Third session | Fourth session |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Alerter | 2.88 | 2.32 | 2.01 | 1.90 |
| Preparator | 0.12 | 0.71 | 0.63 | 0.73 |
| Grounder | 1.86 | 1.96 | 1.74 | 1.94 |
| Disarmer | 0.32 | 1.09 | 0.56 | 0.51 |
| Appreciator | 0.15 | 0.72 | 0.42 | 0.42 |
| Sweetener | | 0.24 | 0.04 | 0.06 |
| Imposition minimizer | 0.14 | 0.05 | | 0.18 |
| Small talk | | | 0.14 | 0.15 |
| Considerator | 0.11 | 0.57 | 0.43 | 0.13 |
| Promise of reward | | | 0.05 | 0.04 |

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Table 4 sheds light on different aspects of external modifier use. The learners' overall external downgrader repertoire increased over time and they came to use a wider range of external modification devices. For example, sweetener, small talk, and promise of reward appeared almost from the second and third session in the learners' data. The learners generally employed more external modifiers than internal modifiers in the first data collection session. Furthermore, the data revealed that alerters and grounders in the first place and preparator, disarmer, appreciator, and considerator in the second place were used by the learners with high frequency in all data collection sessions. However, the learners' reliance on alerter decreased over time from 2.88 in session one to 2.32 in session two, 2.01 in session three, and 1.90 in the last session.

**Impact of CR Tasks on Request Production**

The purpose of the third research question was to probe whether C-R instructional tasks would improve EFL learners' pragmatic knowledge of the request speech act. As displayed in Table 5, the overall mean scores of the participants throughout the four tests, i.e. DCTs, show a gradual improvement in request production. Their mean scores increased from 2.65 on test 1 to 3.70 on test 2, 3.94 on test 3, and to 4.48 on test 4.

**Table 5**
Descriptive Statistics for Improvement in Request Production

| Tests | Mean | Std. Error | 95% Confidence Interval | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Lower Bound | Upper Bound |
| 1 | 2.65 | .02 | 2.60 | 2.70 |
| 2 | 3.70 | .02 | 3.64 | 3.75 |
| 3 | 3.94 | .02 | 3.88 | 4.00 |
| 4 | 4.48 | .02 | 4.43 | 4.52 |

The results of the repeated measures ANOVA indicate that there are significant differences between the overall mean scores of the participants on the four tests. That is to say, the four tests manifest significant differences form test 1 to test 4 ($F (3, 411) = 866.88$, $p = < .05$).

To examine differences during the four tests, exploratory comparisons were used to compare the tests two by two (Table 6). The results of the post-hoc comparison tests indicate that the progress from test 1 ($M = 2.65$) to test 2 ($M = 3.70$) was statistically significant ($MD = 1.04$, $p = < .05$). The post-hoc test results

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also show that the progress from test 2 (M = 3.70) to test 3 (M = 3.94) was statistically significant (MD = .24, $p = < .05$). It also came to light that the progress from test 3 (M = 3.94) to test 4 (M = 4.48) was statistically significant (MD = .53, $p = < .05$).

**Table 6**

Post-Hoc Comparison Tests for the Four Tests

| Measure: MEASURE_1 | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (I) tests | (J) tests | Mean Difference (I-J) | Std. Error | Sig.[b] | 95% Confidence Interval for Difference[b] | |
| | | | | | Lower Bound | Upper Bound |
| 1 | 2 | 1.04* | .036 | .00 | .94 | 1.14 |
| 2 | 3 | .24* | .040 | .00 | .13 | .35 |
| 3 | 4 | .53* | .032 | .00 | .45 | .62 |
| *. The mean difference is significant at the .05 level. | | | | | | |

## Discussion

This study was designed to probe the impact of instruction through C-R tasks on the microgenetic development of EFL learners' pragmatic knowledge of request. The overall results of this study, in line with the results of previous studies (e.g., Felix-Brasdefer, 2012; Martinez-Flor, 2012; Woodfield, 2012), highlight the importance of sociopragmatic instruction, suggesting that the participants' overall request strategy repertoire and internal and external downgrader knowledge improved over time and they came to use a wider range of request strategy types and internal and external modification devices.

Parallel to Felix-Brasdefer's (2012) study, the data reflected a strong preference for the imperative as a type of direct request strategy type during the first data collection session. However, the results revealed that the learners' use of imperative request strategy even in low-imposition, equal-status scenarios decreased over time. This suggests that the students, in the course of instruction, became familiar with the concepts of imposition and status in request making and came to know that the use of imperatives is only appropriate in a rather limited number of circumstances. Therefore, they might have felt more at ease with using other conventionally indirect strategies even in low-imposition, equal-status scenarios. In the third data collection session, locution derivable was a direct request strategy used by the learners with a high frequency for a situation which involved asking a friend for directions. The possible explanation for this exceptional overuse of this

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strategy could be the transfer of learners' L1 strategies to their L2 because locution derivables are frequently used in Persian for asking for directions.

In accordance with the findings in previous researches (e.g., Hendriks, 2008; Sasaki, 1998; Trosborg, 1995; Woodfield, 2008), the present study found a learner preference for conventionally indirect request strategies. The heavy reliance of the learners on ability strategy in formulating request in English indicates that they consider it a safe and unmarked option in a wide variety of circumstances. However, results demonstrate that, in the process of instruction and over time, this heavy reliance decreased and the learners' use of other conventionally indirect strategies increased. In spite of this decrease, ability strategy is still learners' first option in formulating requests in all interactions regardless of the status and the degree of imposition involved and is followed by willingness, permission, prediction, and availability.

The reason for the frequency with which ability strategy was used by the learners could be the transfer of learners' L1 strategies to their L2 because ability strategy are frequently used in Persian for making formal and informal requests. The justification for the frequency of willingness strategy by the learners could be their preference for two request formulae, namely *"Would you mind ... "* and *"Would you be so kind as to..."* as appropriate for high-status, high-imposition situations.

Contrary to Biesenbach-Lucas's (2007) study which noted hints as an almost frequent request strategy type, the results of the present study, in line with Felix-Brasdefer's (2012) study, suggests that hints were infrequent and were mainly employed in high-imposition, high status requests.

Concerning the internal modifiers, it came to light that the learners' overall internal modifier repertoire improved over time. Results revealed that the politeness marker "please" and past tense modals were employed by most of the learners in all the situations. The high use of the politeness marker "please" by learners supports previous research (e.g., Barron, 2003; Safont-Jorda & Alcon-Soler, 2012). The politeness marker "please" is highly conventionalized and learners can simply add it to the beginning or the end of an utterance with the intention to sound polite. Another possible explanation for this high frequency could be the simplicity of these structures that are acquired early by language

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learners in language classrooms. Finally, the overuse of politeness marker *please* may stem from textbooks which are designed to teach request forms formally. Most textbooks employ the politeness marker *please* for formal instruction of request speech act. The frequent use of *can* or *could* may be justified by the fact that these two modal verbs are significant grammatical structures attended in learners' syllabi at High School and, as a result, learners have previous knowledge of them (Martinez-Flor, 2012).

The results indicated that the participants used impressively fewer syntactic modifiers compared with their use of lexical ones supporting the findings in Otcu and Zeyrek (2006), Schauer (2009), and Woodfield (2012). The considerably low number of syntactic modifiers employed by the learners could be attributed to the complexity of the pragmalinguistic structure of these modifiers. It seems that lexical modifiers were less demanding and less complex for most of the learners. These low numbers of the syntactic downgraders were observed in situations two, three, and four. This shows that learners may first acquire and employ lexical devices before learning the more complex syntactic modification devices. Another possible reason might be the nature of EFL learners, who usually assess grammatical errors as more severe than pragmatic errors (Niezgoda & Rover, 2001). Therefore, they preferred to watch grammar by using simple lexical downgraders rather than using more complex syntactic downgraders during the first two sessions. However, when later the significance of pragmatics came to light in the course of the instruction, they started using them. Another point regarding syntactic downgraders is that they were mainly used in situations involving a high-status interlocutor or a high-imposition request. One possible explanation for this result might be the length of these structures. Apparently, learners tried to display their deferential attitude through longer structures.

Instances of zero internal modification use were documented, for example in *tag question* and *negation*. This suggests that even after being engaged in an instructional treatment, the participants were reluctant to employ them to modify their requests. Previous studies (e.g., Barron, 2003; Goy et al., 2012; Schauer, 2009) note that negation was similarly not used by learners suggesting that this internal modification device is demanding and may take time to acquire.

As with external modifiers, the results demonstrated that the learners' overall external downgrader repertoire increased over time and that, similar to Martinez-

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Flor (2012) and Safont-Jorda (2003), they generally employed more external modifiers than internal modifiers in the first data collection session. This finding suggests that the learners had already possessed a broader repertoire of external modifiers. Another possible reason could be the fact that external modifiers are usually syntactically less demanding and pragmalinguistically less complex than internal modifiers and consequently simply require the learners to construct a new simple clause to soften the illocutionary force of their request (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2009).

The data also revealed that alerters and grounders were used by most of the learners in most situations and in all data collection sessions. As alerter is used for attracting interlocutor's attention and grounder is employed for providing an explanation for the request being made, these two external modifiers are regarded as very basic elements of a request (Schauer, 2009). The reason for the high frequency of the alerters in the participants' request could be transfer of the learners' L1 strategies to their L2 because endearment terms and solidarity particles are frequently used in Persian to attract interlocutor's attention. The high use of grounders on the part of the learners compared with other external modification devices seems to be in line with previous studies that illustrated learners' overall preference for this type of external modifier (e.g., Achiba, 2003; Kobayashi & Rinnert, 2003; Safont-Jorda & Alcon-Soler, 2012). This may be due to the lack of confidence in learners' pragmalinguistic ability to produce appropriate requests. Therefore, through using lengthy utterances and providing reasons and explanations for the request they wanted to make sure that they produced appropriate requests (Woodfield, 2012).

Moreover, it was revealed that grounder, disarmer, preparator, appreciator, and considerator were used with the highest frequency in a high-imposition, high-status situation (situation 4). One possible explanation might be that through providing lengthy utterances or an explanation for the request, the learners tried to show deference to their interlocutor. This could be again due to the influence of the learners' L1, since Iranian native speakers usually provide lengthy utterances or an explanation for their request while encountering a high-status interlocutor. It seems that the formality of the situation made these learners feel greatly compelled to justify their requests by prolonging them.

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Concerning the third research question, the results of this study revealed that instruction was beneficial for the learners because their pragmatic production of request speech act considerably improved over the time and during the four data collection sessions. These results can be justified by Schmidt's (1995) noticing hypothesis, asserting that noticing the L2 features of input is necessary for language development. The target forms were made salient and the participants' awareness was raised, leading to improved pragmatic production. These findings are in line with previous research on the positive effects of instruction on second and foreign language learning in general, and the benefits of instruction on the development of learners' pragmatic competence in requests in particular (Doughty, 2003; Norris & Ortega, 2000).

## Conclusion and Implications

The research study presented here was focused on the investigation of a group of EFL learners' microgenetic development and the changes and developments that their request production underwent at given points in time during the instruction through C-R tasks. The results revealed that instruction generally had a positive effect on the learners' request production in all DCT situations. They employed some request strategy types and internal or external modifiers that they had not used in the first or second data collection sessions. These findings highlight the significant role of pragmatic input in English language teaching. These results bring once again to the fore the benefits of instruction especially in EFL context and suggest that sociopragmatics instruction facilitates noticing, raises learners' awareness of English pragmatic knowledge, and thus helps in converting input to intake (Schmidt, 1995). However, it came to light that the acquisition of certain pragmatic elements like syntactic internal modifiers by EFL language learners remains problematic. It seems that syntactic internal modifiers are pragmalinguistically more complex and demand higher processing capacity.

Even though the participants of the present study had received between 7 to 10 years of formal English-language classroom instruction in secondary school and different English language institutes and were regarded as upper-intermediate level language learners, they lacked the required pragmatic knowledge. The participants were mainly preoccupied with grammatical correctness rather than pragmatic concerns before the instruction. This gap in the participants' knowledge suggests that usually learners in EFL contexts are primarily exposed to traditional teaching methods which highlight grammar rather than communication and pragmatic

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competence. This fact supports previous research findings that EFL learners usually assess grammatical errors as more severe than pragmatic errors (Niezgoda & Rover, 2001). However, as time progressed and when the significance of pragmatics was noticed in the course of the instruction, the participants started appreciating pragmatics and the balance was redressed.

In light of the results of this study, some pedagogical implications can be suggested. One significant implication of the findings is that, concerning the impoverished environment of the language classroom context and the lack of appropriate input, feedback, and opportunities for contextualised practice for the acquisition of pragmatics (Kasper & Roever, 2005), learners in EFL contexts should be made aware of the rules and conventions of the language. The results of this study also showed that EFL learners were mainly preoccupied with grammatical correctness rather than pragmatic concerns. However, as they became aware of the significance of pragmatics, they started to welcome it. Therefore, considering request speech act, learners should be aware of the significance of concepts such as status and imposition as well as internal and external modification devices in request formulation. Pragmatic competence, especially in EFL context, should be presented in more teachable and explicit terms with explicit metapragmatic information and C-R activities. That is to say, teachers should provide learners with opportunities to develop their awareness of appropriate language use, and then propose structural practice to transform pragmatic awareness into pragmatic performance.

The results of this study suggest that some request strategy types and internal and external modification devices such as *politeness marker*, *past tense modals*, and *grounder* are acquired and used easily at early stages of learning a second/foreign language. However, some other request strategy types or modification devices such as *negation* and *tag question* seem to be more demanding and complex and take an extended period of time to acquire. The findings from the present study and other relevant findings could shed light on the acquisitional difficulty of pragmatic features. Such findings, as Pan (2012) put it, could inform teachers and learners with respect to the acquisitional sequence of pragmatic features.

The last pedagogical implication concerns the use of appropriate instructional tasks. Tasks hold a central position in current second language acquisition research

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and pedagogy (Ellis, 2003). Instructional C-R tasks provide a useful opportunity for processing both the form and meaning of target features. Thus, teachers, materials developers, and researchers can welcome this opportunity to design tasks that can help learners process both sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic resources in depth.

***Notes on Contributors:***

***Zia Tajeddin*** is Professor of Applied Linguistics at Allameh Tabataba'i University, Iran. He is Editor of TELL Journal and Issues in Language Teaching. His research interests include interlanguage pragmatics, conversation analysis, (im)politeness, teacher/learner identity, and EIL/ELF. He has published papers in journals such as The Language Learning Journal, RELC, The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher, TESL-EJ, and TESL Canada Journal.

***Rasoul Mohammad Hosseinpur*** is Assistant Professor of TEFL at the University of Qom. He holds a Ph.D. in TEFL from Allameh Tabataba'i University and an M.A. in TEFL from the University of Tehran. He has published articles in ELT-related journals. His research areas include second language writing pedagogy, interlanguage pragmatics, and teaching methods.

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## Appendix A

**Discourse Completion Tests**

**Microgenetic Development Test 1**

*Please read the following 4 situations. After each situation, you are asked to write a response in the blank after "you say." Respond as you would in actual conversation. Please be natural and write what you would actually say, not what you think would be the best thing to say.*

1. You and some of your friends are having a snack in the cafeteria. One of your friends is telling you something about new university regulations for your course. But you cannot hear her very well, as it is quite noisy. You ask her to speak louder.

You say:

2. You are having difficulties finding articles and books for one of your essays. You hardly found anything in the library and fear that you will not be able to write the essay. A friend of yours is in the middle of writing an essay on a similar topic and has bought several books on this topic. The library does not have these books. You and your friend are standing in the corridor of your department. You turn to her and ask her to lend you the books and bring them in for you the next day.

You say:

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3. You are attending a seminar. The professor is explaining a new concept, but you cannot hear her very well. You ask her to speak louder.

You say:

4. You arranged a meeting with a visiting professor, who is always very busy. On the morning of the meeting you wake up with a fever and a terrible cold. You attend his seminar, but feel too ill to meet him afterwards. You go to him during a short break and ask him for another appointment.

You say:

**Microgenetic Development Test 2**

*Please read the following 4 situations. After each situation, you are asked to write a response in the blank after "you say." Respond as you would in actual conversation. Please be natural and write what you would actually say, not what you think would be the best thing to say.*

1. You are attending a seminar. The sun is shining into the classroom and it is very hot. A friend of yours is sitting next to the window. You turn to your friend and ask him to open it.

You say:

2. It is the last day before the university holidays. You are staying in Nottingham during the holidays to prepare for your exams, but you are having difficulties with one of the concepts that is essential for the exams. Your friend understands the concept, but is flying home in two days and is quite busy. You turn to him after the seminar is over and ask him to meet you and explain the concept to you.

You say:

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3. You have to hand in an essay to the secretary. The secretary's office is closing soon and you are already running late. When you get to her office, two professors are standing in front of it. You ask them to let you through.

You say:

4. You are in your professor's office. It is the last day before the university holidays. You are staying in Nottingham during the holidays to finish your essays. You are having difficulties with your topic and fear that you will need some more help. You ask your professor for a meeting during the holidays.

You say:

**Microgenetic Development Test 3**

*Please read the following 4 situations. After each situation, you are asked to write a response in the blank after "you say." Respond as you would in actual conversation. Please be natural and write what you would actually say, not what you think would be the best thing to say.*

1. You are standing in front of the library. Your next seminar is taking place in the Portland Building, but you don't know where the Portland Building is. A friend of yours is walking towards you. You ask him for directions to the Portland Building.

You say:

2. You arranged to meet a friend of yours at 4 p.m. to help you with your essay. However, on the morning of your meeting, you wake up with a terrible toothache and the dentist can only see you at 4 p.m. Your friend has cancelled another meeting to see you this afternoon and is very busy, because he has to hand in his essays soon. You wait for him after his seminar and ask him to meet you tomorrow instead.

You say:

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3. A friend of yours from out of the town is paying you a visit. Both of you would like to take a photo together to remember this happy moment. You decide to ask your old landlord to do this favor.

You say:

4. You are writing your thesis and need to interview the president of a university whom you don't know. You know the president is very busy, but still want to ask her/him to spare one or two hours for your interview.

You say:

**Microgenetic Development Test 4**

*Please read the following 4 situations. After each situation, you are asked to write a response in the blank after "you say." Respond as you would in actual conversation. Please be natural and write what you would actually say, not what you think would be the best thing to say.*

1. You have an appointment with a professor. When you arrive at her door, two of your friends are looking at her timetable and are blocking the door. You ask them to move aside.

You say:

2. You were absent last Friday history class that you are enrolled in. So you decide to borrow your friend's notes to catch up with the rest of the class. You know that he needs the notes himself.

You say:

3. You are applying for a scholarship, and you decide to ask a professor, who knows you very well as your academic advisor, to write a recommendation letter for you. What would you say to ask her/him to do this favor for you?

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You say:

4. You really have to take this course in order to graduate, but you found that the course is already closed. So, you decide to ask the professor, whom you don't know, to allow you to take this course. What would you say to get this professor to permit you to participate in this course?

You say:

## Appendix B

### Sample Deductive Consciousness-Raising (C-R) Task
(Imposition)

***A. Read the following information about making requests***

I. The language you use when requesting also depends on the type of tasks you want the other person to do (Imposition). When you are asking for a big favor, you need to be more formal.

II. High-imposition situations normally require the requestors to use more polite and mitigated request forms as a face supportive activity. Therefore, usually the more syntactically complex requests are more appropriate for the high-imposition contexts.

**Situation 1:** You are attending a seminar. It is a very sunny day and the classroom is hot. The professor is standing near the window. You ask him to open it. (Low-imposition)

**You say:** *Could I ask you to open the window?* (Acceptable)

**Situation 2:** You are running a project for which you would like your professor to complete a lengthy questionnaire. She is a very busy person, but the questionnaire is essential for your project. At the end of class, you go up to the professor's desk and ask her to complete the questionnaire for you. (High-imposition)

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**You say:** *Could I ask you to complete this questionnaire for me*? (Unacceptable)

**Situation 3:** A college student asks his professor to correct a few grading mistakes on the exam. (Low-imposition)

**S/he says:** *Could I ask you to help me with these mistakes?* (Acceptable)

**Situation 4:** A college student asks his professor to return a term paper that the student wants to expand into a thesis. (Low-imposition)

**S/he says:** *Do you mind returning my term paper*. (Acceptable)

**Situation 5:** A college student asks his professor to reschedule an appointment. (High-imposition)

**S/he says:** *Could you reschedule my appointment.* (Unacceptable)

**Situation 6:** A college student asks his professor to extend the due date of a term paper. (High-imposition)

**S/he says:** *I was wondering if you could possibly extend the due date of my term paper. I've been very busy these days.* (Acceptable)

**B.** ***Which of these favors would bother you the most? Which would bother you the least? Why?***

1. Let me stay at your place for a while
2. Lend me your pen
3. Help me move into my new apartment
4. Let me look at your newspaper
5. Let me use your car

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***C. Write an appropriate request for the specified situation***

You are talking with your teacher in her office. Your test is next Friday but you have your friend's wedding on the same day. You want to ask her if you can take the test at some other time.

……
…….

It's 7:00 PM. You are in the school library studying for tomorrow's English test. A good friend of yours is also studying in the library. Your pen just quit so you want to ask her to lend you a pen

.....
. .....

**Sample Inductive Consciousness-Raising (C-R) Task**

**I.** ***Work on these requests carefully with a partner. Some of these requests are more polite.***

1. Could you lend me your jacket?
   May I ask you a favor? Could you lend me your jacket? (More polite)

2. Could you open the window?
   It seems it is quite hot here. Could you open the window? (More polite)

3. Could you pick it up on Friday night?
   I hate bothering you but could you pick it up on Friday night? (More polite)

4. Could you fill in my questionnaire?
   Could you fill in my questionnaire? I would fill in yours [the questionnaire] as well, if you need one, one day. (More polite)

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5. Could you lend me your laptop?
   Could you lend me your laptop? I will return it immediately, the next day. (More polite)

6. Could you help me with my essay?
   Could you help me with my essay? I think you are the perfect person to do it. (More polite)

7. Could I ask you to help me with my homework?
   Could I ask you to help me with my homework? Only if you've got the time of course. (More polite)

**II.** ***Make up a rule, with your partner, to explain why the second requests in each number are more polite.***

**III.** ***Specify the external modifiers used in the following requests.***

1. Could you do a favor for me? Could you make a copy of the transfer order?
2. Call my parents; I'd like them to have dinner with me tonight.
3. Susan, if it's not too much trouble, I'd like a cup of coffee.
4. Would you mind being quiet? If you keep quiet, I promise to bring you to the cinema.
5. Please, turn the volume down.

**IV.** ***Specify the external modifiers in the following conversation***

*[Bill and Joe go together to Bill's company. Bill has an important meeting with the rest of his board. When they arrive, he addresses his secretary]*

Bill: And, call my family, I'd like them to have dinner with me tonight.

Secretary: Didn't the family get together last night?

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Bill: Jennifer

[with a rising tone]

Secretary: Of course, Mr. Parrish, right away.

[Then Bill addresses Joe]

Bill: Uh, perhaps you'd like to wait in my office.

Joe: No.

Bill: What I'm trying to say is this is a board meeting and

you're not a member.

Joe: [interrupting]

I'm sure you'll find a way to make it all right.

[Then Joe addresses the secretary]

Joe: Nice to meet you.

**V.** ***Work with your partner. Rewrite these requests to make them more formal. Use the cues you've learnt in this lesson.***

1. Could you lend me some money?
2. Can you close the window?
3. Take these letters to the post office for me.
4. Let me wear your leather jacket to the party this weekend.
5. Take care of my pet rabbit while I'm on vacation.

**VI.** ***Write an appropriate request for the following situation***

**Situation:** You have to ask a student to complete a questionnaire for one of your projects. You decide to ask Lucy, a friend of yours. You know that she is very busy with her own projects at the moment, but you feel that she is the best person for your assignment. At the end of

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the seminar, you turn to her and (using external modifier) ask her to complete the questionnaire for you.

**You say:**

## Appendix C

**Taxonomy of Internal Modifiers: Lexical Downgraders (Schauer, 2009)**

| Name | Function | Example |
|---|---|---|
| Downtoner | sentence adverbial that is used to reduce the force of the request | Could I *maybe* have some of them or could you bring a copy or something? |
| Politeness marker | employed by the speakers to bid for their interlocutors' cooperation | Could you open the window a little bit, *please?* |
| Understater | adverbial modifier that is employed to decrease the imposition of the request by underrepresenting the proposition of the request | Can you speak up *a bit*, please? |
| Past Tense Modals | past tense forms such as *could* instead of *can* make the request appear more polite | Professor Jones, *could* you show me the direction to the Trent Building? |
| Consultative Device | used to consult the interlocutor's opinion on the proposition of the request | Erm, Lucy, *would you mind* filling in this questionnaire for me? |
| Hedge | adverbial that is used by the speaker to make the request more vague | Is it possible if we can arrange a meeting during the holidays *somehow?* |
| Aspect | progressive form of verb that is used deliberately by the speaker | I was wonder*ing* if maybe you could give them to me |

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|---|---|---|
| | | tomorrow? |
| Marked Modality | *might* and *may* make the request appear more tentative. | Excuse me, *may* I just pass? |

## Appendix D

**Taxonomy of Internal Modifiers: Syntactic Downgraders (Schauer, 2009)**

| Name | Function | Example |
|---|---|---|
| Conditional Clause | employed by speakers to distance themselves from the request | I would like to ask, *if* you could maybe fill in the questionnaire? |
| Appreciative Embedding | used by the speakers to positively reinforce the request internally by stating their hopes and positive feelings | Excuse me, *it would be really nice* if you would fill out this, that questionnaire. |
| Tentative Embedding | employed by the speaker to make the utterance appear less direct and to show hesitation | Sorry, Lucy, erm, I really got problems with this questionnaire and *I wondered* if you might find some time to help me filling it in? |
| Tag question | used to downtone the impact of the request by appealing to the interlocutor's consent | I don't suppose you could point me in the direction of some suitable ones, *could you?* |
| Negation | employed by speakers to downtone the force of the request by indicating their lowered expectations of the request being met | Phil, you couldn't open the window for me, please? |

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## Appendix E

**Taxonomy of External Modifiers (Schauer, 2009)**

| Name | Function | Example |
|---|---|---|
| Alerter | linguistic device that is used to get the interlocutor's attention; precedes the Head | *Er; excuse me; hello; Peter* |
| Preparator | short utterance that intends to prepare the interlocutor for the request; can follow or substitute the Alerter | *May I ask you a favor?* |
| Head | the actual request | *Do you know where the Portland Building is?* |
| Grounder | provides an explanation for the request | *Erm, unfortunately, I really don't understand this topic here* |
| Disarmer | used to pre-empt the *maybe* interlocutor's potential objections | *I know you are really busy but you've got some minutes for me.* |
| Imposition Minimizer | employed to decrease the imposition of the request | *I will return them immediately, the next day.* |
| Sweetener into a positive mood | employed to flatter the interlocutor and to put them | *I think you are the perfect person to do it.* |
| Promise of Reward | the requester offers the interlocutor a reward for fulfilling the request | *I would fill in yours [the questionnaire] as well, if you need one, one day.* |
| Small talk | short utterance at the beginning of the request that is intended to establish a positive atmosphere | *Good to see you* |
| Appreciator | usually employed at the end of the request | *That would be very nice* |

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|---|---|---|
| | to positively reinforce it | |
| Considerator | employed at the end of the request; intends to show consideration towards the interlocutor's situation | *Only if you've got the time of course* |

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