The Effect of Different Types of Instruction and Feedback on the Development of Pragmatic Proficiency: The Case of Pragmatic Markers

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Abstract

The necessity of conducting more studies addressing the development of pragmatic profciency and strong pragmatic awareness for English language learners has made the role of instruction and feedback in teaching pragmatic knowledge of utmost importance. The present study evaluates the relative effectiveness of four types of instruction for teaching some pragmatic markers including topic change markers, mitigation markers, interjections and hybrid basic markers to 75 advanced Iranian learners of English: explicit instruction only, explicit instruction with metalinguistic feedback, structured input instruction only, and structured input instruction with metalinguistic feedback. Treatment group performance was compared with control group performance on pre-tests, post-tests and follow-up tests that contained an open-ended discourse completion test and a multiple-choice pragmatic listening comprehension test. The results of the data analysis revealed that students› ability to comprehend and produce pragmatic markers improved significantly in treatment groups and that pragmatic interlanguage is permeable to instruction in EFL settings. However, there were statistically significant differences among the four treatment groups regarding awareness of different pragmatic markers and their appropriate use. These findings give us some useful insight on the teachability of pragmatic markers and the role of instruction and feedback in the classroom to develop pragmatic competence of EFL learners.

Keywords: **Pragmatic proficiency; Pragmatic markers; Explicit instruction; Structured input instruction; Metalinguistic feedback.**

1. Introduction

1.1. Pragmatics and language teaching

The present article explores the role of instruction and feedback in teaching pragmatic knowledge in EFL classrooms. The aim is to see how effective a type of instruction such as structured input instruction is for teaching some pragmatic markers including topic change markers, mitigation markers, interjections and hybrid basic markers. The learners of a foreign language follow what Trillo (2002) call a ‘‘binary track’’ in their linguistic development: the formal vs. the pragmatic track. The formal track relates to the grammatical and semantic rules that

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conform the competent use of a given language; the pragmatic track, on the other hand, relates to the social use of language in different contexts and registers. As a consequence, native speakers follow ‘‘function-to-form developmental process’’, where the need to communicate precedes the use of a form, as Painter (1999) demonstrates; whereas non-native speakers follow a ‘‘form-to-function process’’, based on the learning of certain items which are usually contextualized at different subsequent stages.

Native speakers of a language would develop both tracks simultaneously by means of natural language contact, and thus would establish a mutual relation- ship between both communication tracks. Non-native learners of a language in a nontarget language environment, however, would develop the formal and the pragmatic tracks through formal instruction. The difficulty, therefore, is that the pragmatic track, linked to the cognitive, affective, and socio-cultural meanings expressed by language forms, is difficult to implement in educational syllabuses. In fact, the development of pragmatic competence demands a (pseudo)-natural foreign language context that is often almost impossible to produce in formal education.

It is an extremely difficult task for the L2 learner to comprehend and produce a communicative act or speech act in a concrete speech situation in a second language, i.e. the acquisition of pragmatic competence. Therefore, pragmatic is-sues such as the role of speech acts, conversational implicatures, facework and identity, discourse strategies in speaking and writing as well as pragmatic markers will be explored from a pedagogical perspective (Pütz and Aertselaer, 2008). The necessity of conducting more studies addressing the development of pragmatic profciency and strong pragmatic awareness for English language learners has made the role of instruction and feedback in teaching pragmatic knowledge of utmost importance.

Most studies on the development of pragmatic proficiency have focused on teaching and learning speech acts such as refusals, requests, and apologies. The results of some of these studies show without some form of instruction, many aspects of pragmatic competence may not develop (Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei, 1998). Some other researches scrutinized the pragmalinguistic failure due to reasons such as inappropriate transfer of speech acts strategies from L1 to the second language (Beebe, Takahashi and Uliss-Weltz, 1990). Many of these studies indicate that applying appropriate instruction in teaching L2 pragmatic realization patterns is very important. According to Schmidt (1993), ‘conscious awareness’ plays a crucial role in the acquisition of pragmatic competence and the necessary conditions for pragmatic learning to happen is attention to pragmatic information to be acquired. Limitation of opportunities for learning L2 pragmatics in foreign language settings necessitates instruction in achieving pragmatic ability in foreign language classrooms as well.

Most of interventionist studies that examine the effects of a particular instructional treatment on students’ acquisition of the targeted pragmatic features have demonstrated that explicit instruction is more effective than implicit instruction in teaching pragmatic knowledge (e.g. House and Kasper, 1981; Kubota, 1995; Takahashi, 2001). These studies also support that explicit instruction is more effective when combined with input enhancement as any pedagogical technique used to make specific features of input salient as an effort to achieve learners’ noticing to these features (Smith, 1993). In the present study, the effects of any type of input enhancement approach advocated by Ellis (2003), i.e. structured input instruction, are examined.

1.2. Pragmatic markers and second language acquisition

There is a general agreement that pragmatic markers play an important role in the development of the pragmatic competence of the speaker. Crystal (1988) thinks of pragmatic expressions such as you know 'as the oil which helps us perform the complex task of spontaneous speech production and interaction smoothly and effciently'. The necessity of pragmatic competence as an aspect of communicative competence which refers to the ability to communicate appropriately in particular contexts of use highlights the importance of pragmatic markers in SLA. However, most of the studies in this field are restricted to the instruction of speech acts. (Müller, 2005)

Native speakers correct grammatically ill-formed structures produced by foreign language learners. On the other hand, when a learner omits 'well' or 'so', natives cannot pinpoint an error but conclude that he is dogmatic, impolite, boring and awkward to talk to (Svartvik, 1980). The signifcance of pragmatic profciency makes most learners of English aim in at avoiding such judgments of their linguistic behaviors. The main purpose of this paper then is to show how non-native speakers of English can master the use of pragmatic markers. Indeed, the need to investigate the development of pragmatic markers in speech, in order to monitor pragmatic competence and pragmatic fossilization in non-native speakers necessitates conducting this research.

Trillo (2002) in a study concludes that there is a different rate of development for the grammatical and the pragmatic aspects of language in L2. This can be observed in the linguistic production of proficient non-native speakers of English who do not show a competent use of the pragmatic functions needed in casual conversation. This can be due to the method of teaching. The lack of the competent use of discourse markers leads to pragmatic fossilization and, possibly, to communicative failure in many cases. His quantitative analyses of his study indicate that if pragmatic functions were introduced in the teaching process, foreign children might pick up the pragmatic value of linguistic elements in the same way as native children. He believes that non-native speakers are deprived of many pragmatic resources in their L2 learning process. His study demonstrated the urgent need to bring the consistent teaching of pragmatic markers to language instruction (Trillo, 2002).

1.3. Explicit instruction, structured input instruction, and metalinguistic feedback

Explicit instruction within the framework of Focus on FormS is a «synthetic» approach (Wilkins, 1976) in which teachers present linguistic items in a linear and additive fashion and the learners› task is to synthesize them. On the other hand, Focus on Form involves "an occasional shift in attention to linguistic code features —by the teacher and/or one or more students — triggered by perceived problems with comprehension or production» (Long & Robinson, 1998). In other words, it is characterized as learners› engagement in meaning with brief interventions and brief explicit instruction of linguistic codes as needed (Doughty & Williams, 1998).One of the techniques associated with Focus on Form is input processing instruction (VanPatten & Cadierno, 1993a, 1993b) that includes input enhancement.

Sharwood Smith (1981, 1991) introduced the concept of input enhancement, first known as consciousness-raising, a crucial element for the discussion of the role of grammar in L2 instruction. Input enhancement, refers to "a deliberate attempt to make specific features of L2 input more salient in order to draw the learner's attention to these features" (Sharwood Smith, 1991). He redefined the notion of formal grammar instruction by pointing out

that formal instruction has often been associated with giving a list of rules and vocabulary, which is one of the reasons why drawing learners' attention to the formal properties of an L2 has been viewed in a negative light. Smith points out that there are many different and more effective ways to draw learners' attention to the formal properties of language.

In the same vein, Rutherford & Sharwood Smith (1985) present different techniques of input enhancement, which make certain features of the language more salient. Sharwood Smith (1981, 1991) explained that different techniques may vary in degrees of explicitness and elaboration, and explicitness refers to the sophistication and detail of the attention-drawing device. Elaboration refers to the depth and amount of time involved in implementing the enhancement techniques. Input enhancement is based on the assertion that comprehensible input is crucial to second language acquisition, and that only the input that learners notice in same way can have an impact on acquisition. Among the samples that Sharwood Smith (1991) offered as input enhancement techniques in his original discussion are in- put food, typographically enhanced input, and rule explanation.

Within input enhancement there is another type of instruction that organizes the input to meet a particular goal: this type of input is called structured input. Lee & VanPatten (1995, 2003) call activities that use this type of input, input activities. The goal of structured input activities is not just to get learners to notice the target forms, but also to alter any incorrect strategies they may be using to process input so that they can make form-meaning connections correctly and more efficiently.

Structured input activities are based on information about how learners make form-meaning connections. In VanPatten's (1996) model of input processing, when learners focus on or notice input and comprehend the message, a form- meaning connection is made. Form, in this case, refers to surface features of language such as verbal and nominal morphology and functional items of language like prepositions, articles and pronouns. Meaning refers to referential real-world meaning. A form-meaning connection consists of the relationship between referential meaning and the way it is encoded linguistically. It is important to point out here that in order to make form-meaning connections, learners must notice meaning more than just the form. Noticing a form is a start, but in order to make more efficient form-meaning connections, they also need to comprehend the meaning that the form encodes.

Form-meaning connections have the potential to be internalized. Input processing is the process that involves some input becoming intake, a filtered subset of the input that is available for further processing. Acquisition always begins with exposure to any kind of input: when learners attend to input and begin to make form-meaning connections that input can become intake. Not all the input that a learner is exposed to becomes intake; only a subset of input becomes intake. This intake is held in working memory and has the potential to be internalized, when this happens, the developing linguistic system must accommodate this new linguistic data and reorganize the existing data. Once a new form-meaning connection has been accommodated, the developing system changes and is restructured. This restructuring may be partial or total. Finally, the linguistic data that has been incorporated into the developing system may be eventually accessed by the learner for output (production). This process is called output processing. Structured input activities organize the input so that the learner notices form and subsequently processes it. These activities take into

account how learners make form- meaning connections and certain tendencies they unconsciously employ to process a particular targeted form.

VanPatten's (1996, 2004) model contains a set of principles and sub-principles to describe the strategies that learners use to make form-meaning connections from input. This model and the corresponding principles provide instructions with guidelines for creating authentic structured input activities.

There are two ways to draw learners' attention to target features during tasks. Ellis (2003) has explained that implicit techniques involve providing feedback on learners' use of a target feature in a way that keeps the primary focus on meaning. In contrast, explicit techniques involve providing learners with explicit information relating to the target feature during the performance of the task. Carroll and Swain (1993) investigated the effects of providing different kinds of feedback on learners' responses and found that all the experimental groups that received either implicit feedback or explicit feedback outperformed a control group that did not. The group receiving explicit feedback in the form of metalinguistic information outperformed the other experimental groups. Furthermore, Samuda (2001) has argued that a teacher may be able to guide learners' attention towards form–meaning relationships using either implicit or explicit techniques. She found that explicit feedback involving metalinguistic comments and elicitation was required to prompt learners into using the target features. The results of most studies show that providing learners with explicit instruction during the performance of the task can be very effective. Thus, explicit feedback is provided in the present study. This can be defined as an explicit focus on the target structure given responsively by means of immediate and explicit metalinguistic information on the correctness of the learners' responses.

2. The present study

The following research questions are investigated in this study:

1. To what extent does structured input instruction promote Iranian learners? pragmatic proficiency? To what extent if accompanied with metalinguistic feedback?
2. To what extent does explicit instruction promote Iranian learners? pragmatic proficiency? To what extent if accompanied with metalinguistic feedback?

Participants

The participants of this study were learners of advanced English proficiency level who studied English as a Foreign Language in a language institute. Seventy-five participants, all female, were randomly assigned to one of the five groups consisting of the four treatment groups and the control group (N=15). The four treatment groups were the structured input instruction (SI) (N=15), the structured input instruction with feedback (SF) (N=15), the explicit instruction (EI) (N=15), and the explicit instruction with feedback (EF) (N=15). The participants' L1 was Persian and their ages ranged from 18 to 30 years old. The participants had studied English from five to 15 years.

Table 1. *Characteristics of five groups of the study*

Group	Characteristics	N
SI	Structured input instruction	15
SF	Structured input instruction+ metalinguistic feedback	15
EI	Explicit instruction	15
EF	Explicit instruction+ metalinguistic feedback	15
Control	No instruction+ no feedback	15

2.1. Target pragmatic markers

In the present study, the Fraser's framework (1996) for classification of pragmatic markers is used. He introduces four main

types of pragmatic markers as basic markers, discourse markers, commentary markers and parallel markers. Each type includes its own sub-types. So because of the large number subtypes for each main pragmatic marker some of the markers are selected. Those used in the instructional material of the study are as follow:

a. Topic change markers

Topic change markers as a type of discourse markers signal that the utterance fol- lowing constitutes, in the speaker's opinion, a departure from the current topic. Topic change markers include back to my original point, before I forget, by the way, incidentally, just to update you, on a different note, parenthetically, put an- other way, returning to my point, speaking of X, that reminds me.

b. Mitigation Markers

Markers of mitigation as a type of commentary pragmatic markers signal the speaker's desire to reduce the face loss associated with the basic message (cf. Brown & Levinson, 1988; Fraser, 1991). Here we consider two varieties of mitigation markers. The first are the pseudo-conditionals, i.e. despite their appear- ance, these are not conditional sentences. Rather, they constitute a basic message with a mitigating comment on it as in the following sentences:

- If I may interrupt, where is the library?
- If it›s not too much trouble, could you help me?
- If you don't? mind, keep an eye on my purse.
- Unless I misunderstood you/Unless I›m hearing it incorrectly, he has gone. The second variety of mitigating markers includes the following expressions, all ending with but:

I don›t mean to pressure you but, I see your point but, I›m no expert but, I›m sorry to have to ask you this but, That may be true but, You have a point but, You›re entitled to your opinion but, which occur in sentences like:

- That may be true, but you still have to make your bed.
- You are entitled to your own opinion, but I don't think that is a good idea.

c. Hybrid Basic Markers

Hybrid basic markers as a type of basic markers involve a specific structure in combination with certain lexical conditions and are of three general types: declarative-based, interrogative-based, and imperative-based.

Declarative-Based Hybrids consist of a declarative sentence followed by a brief tag. In this group there are two similar structures. The first is the so-called Tag Question, a declarative followed by a sentence final interrogative tag which consists of the declarative tense-carrying element with a change of polarity followed by the sentence subject in pronominal form as:

- You saw him, didn›t you?
- You didn't see him, did you?

The second structure, the so-called Positive Tag Question, consists of a declarative sentence followed by a tag with the same polarity.

- John met Peter, did he?
- You wanted it, did you?
- He won›t leave, won›t he?

A well known group of interrogative-based hybrids as another type of hybrid basic markers are simply interrogative sentences in which the speaker is expressing a desire for a yes/no response. However, these forms have become standardized and such sentences are characteristically heard directly as a speaker request for action and are illustrated by the following sentences:

- Can (could/can›t/couldn›t) you do that?
- Will (would/won›t/wouldn›t) you do that?
- Do that, can (could/can›t/couldn›t) you?
- Do that, will (would/won›t/wouldn›t) you?

This study also includes another kind of interrogative-based forms that involves reduced why-questions. They have the standardized force of a suggestion to do the opposite of the action denoted.

- Why take an aspirin now? (Interpretation: I suggest that you do not take an aspirin now.)

- Why not take an aspirin now? (Interpretation: I suggest you take an aspirin now.)

Imperative-based hybrids include two forms. The first structure signals an initial speaker directive sometimes heard as a suggestion, mostly as a threat, followed by a declarative stating the consequences for not complying with the directive as in

- Talk, or I'll shoot. (If you don't talk, I'll shoot.)
- Either talk or else I›ll shoot.

In contrast to the or case, in the second imperative-based basic pragmatic marker the imperative here does not signal speaker desire but signals that a conditional interpretation is required and takes on the force of a strong claim, which may or may not be adversely interpreted.

- Wash, and I'll dry. (If you wash, I'll dry.)

d. Interjections

Norrick (2009) considers interjections to be sensibly listed among the specific classes of pragmatic markers due to their complexity and multifunctional nature. Accordingly, interjections represent a large, potentially infinitely extendable class of items, unlike the relatively circumscribed, closed classes of other pragmatic markers, and their pragmatic marker functions follow from their general status as expressions of shifts in cognitive states of various kinds. He concludes that the open-ended nature of the classes of primary and secondary interjections makes it impossible to list them in a specific type of pragmatic markers such as discourse markers or parallel pragmatic markers. Therefore, in this study I consider them as a separate type of pragmatic markers, initiating utterances and relating them to the foregoing interaction and they include yeah, oh, and, well, okay, so, but, mhm, y'know, mm, um, uh, (be)cause, I mean, like, huh, or, hey, hm, uh-huh, wow, ah, ooh, anyway, boy, god, man, shit, damn, whoa, gosh, gee, jesus , hell ,jeez, yuck, golly, dammit.

2.2. Procedures

2.2.1. Assessment

The present study examines the variability resulting from different instruction through the pretests, the posttests, and the follow-up tests. Each test consists of an input-based test, the listening test (LT) and an output-based test, the open-ended discourse completion test (OPDCT). The OPDCT and LT consist of 20 situations which centered on a student›s family, social, and academic life. The pre-test was administered two to three days prior to the instructional treatment, which lasted for three weeks. The post-test was completed eight to nine days after the treatments. The follow-up test was completed in the fourth week following instruction. The pre-tests, the post-tests and the follow-up tests were administered in the following order: the OPDCT, and LT. The input-based test was administered last because of concern that it might provide participants with models that could be used in the production. The participants were instructed to complete the OPDCT within two hours, and the LT had a timing constraint. Three versions (A, B and C) of the two tests (the OPDCT, and LT), were developed and they were counterbalanced for order of presentation of the same situations across the pre-tests, the posttests and the follow-up tests. Three versions were used so that any test learning effect or test order effect would be minimized. The LT consisted of 20 situations. It required participants to listen to a dialogue and then select the appropriate response or interpretation presented in the form of multiple-choice test. As there were 20 items on the LT and OPCDT, the maximum score was 100.

2.2.2. Instruction

Each teaching session for the four treatment groups and the control group lasted for 90 minutes. The teaching sessions were conducted twice weekly for three weeks by the same instructor, who was also the researcher. The four instructional treatments were matched for target items

and all five groups were matched for the amount of instructional time. In each session the target pragmatic markers were instructed for 20 minutes in treatment groups. For all groups the book 'Summit 1A' was used and the main aim of the program is to make them ready for final term exam which is based on this book. The control group was not exposed to the target structures at all.

In the EI group lexi cal and syntactic information concerning target pragmatic markers were taught. Two types of SI activities were used in SI group: referential and affective. Referential activities require learners to pay attention to form in order to get meaning and have a right or wrong answer so the instructor can check whether or not the learner has actually made the proper form-meaning connection. Affective activities, on the other hand, do not have right or wrong answers. Instead, they require learners to express an opinion, belief or some other affective response as they are engaged in processing information about the real world. Because referential activities allow instructors to make sure that learners are focusing on the relevant grammatical information to derive meaning, instruction should begin with these activities. The purpose of affective activities is to reinforce those connections by providing them with more opportunities to see or hear the form used in a meaningful context. Furthermore, by requiring learners to express an opinion or some other kind of personal response, we can keep instruction in line with an important tenet of communicative language teaching: a focus on the learner (Takimoto, 2006).

The present study examines to what extent reactive explicit feedback would be effective during the performance of the structured input task and explicit instruction. Therefore, during the structured input tasks and explicit instruction, immediate and explicit feedback on the correctness of the participants' responses was pro-vided. Some participants were called upon to answer questions in class and when they answered them incorrectly, immediate and explicit feedback was provided on the spot. A number of studies have demonstrated that providing learners with immediate feedback has a positive effect on acquisition. Spada and Lightbown (1993) have identified three types of explicit feedback: metalinguistic feedback, repetition of incorrect production and focus on error. Among the three types, the present study chose metalinguistic feedback because Carroll and Swain's (1993) study has shown that this type of feedback is the most effective.

2.3. Data Analysis

Two-way ANOVAs with repeated-measures were performed on the raw scores of the OPDCT, and LT on the pretests, the post-tests, and the follow-up tests to examine whether the differences in test scores resulting from the two instructional methods and presence of explicit feedback were statistically significant.

The results of a two-way ANOVA with repeated-measures performed on the raw scores of the LT revealed a significant main effect for Instruction (the SI, SF, EI, EF, and control groups). As shown in Table 2, the pre-treatment ANOVA results indicate that the groups are not significantly different in their responses ($p = 0.807$). In the posttest and follow-up test, however, the mean scores of the learners show an overall effect of the pragmatic instruction, and the groups are significantly different (respectively, $p = 0.002$, $p = 0.005$). The Control group scores are lower than those of the treatment groups. It is noted, however, that the mean score of the SF learners is higher than that of the other four groups. The significant interaction effect between Instruction and Time in the LT in Figure 1 clearly shows the effects of Instruction on pragmatic proficiency. These results suggest that the learners who receive both structured input instruction and explicit feedback retain more of an effect of this pragmatic instruction.

Table 2. *ANOVA results for LT*

	Pretest		Posttest		Follow-uptest	
	Mean	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**
SI	24.2	16.2	44.4	13.1	48.2	13.7
SF	22.4	17.2	57.6	11.6	62.2	11.4
EI	20.5	16.8	25.4	19.3	26.3	22.2
EF	25.1	20.9	30.0	18.1	34.8	20.3
Control	21.9	19.0	25	20.6	23.2	20.8

Pretest: F = 0.5602, df = 4, p= 0.807.
Posttest: F = 5.236, df = 4, p = 0.002.
Follow-up test: F = 4.875, df = 4, p = 0.005.
Note: SI = structured input instruction; SF = structured input instruction with feedback; EI = explicit instruction; EF = explicit instruction with feedback

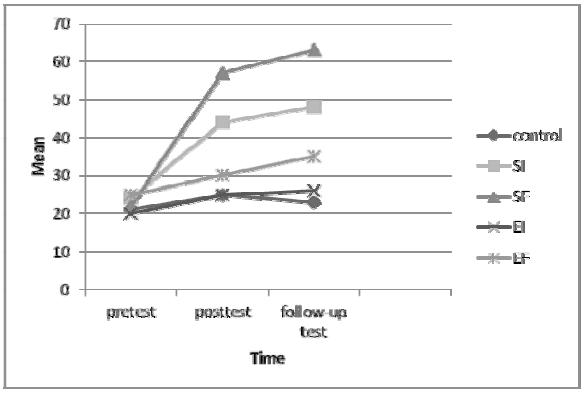

Figure 1 Interaction plot for listening test
Note: SI = structured input instruction; SF = structured input instruction with feedback; EI = explicit instruction; EF = explicit instruction with feedback

The treatment groups performed significantly better than the control group. In addition, the positive effects of the instruction two kinds of treatment were maintained from the post-tests to thefollow-up tests. Therefore, the effects ofinstruction were greater on the post-test and follow-up test than on the pretest and the interaction plot showed a relatively large superiority of the four treatment groups over the control group. The IS group's performance after applying the treatment is significantly better than the other groups. It also can be concluded that the explicit feedback could affect the performance of EF and IF groups and made their performance significantly different from other groups.

The scores for the open-ended discourse completion test (OPDCT) show similar results. As seen in Table 3, in the pretest results, the mean scores among the five groups are not significantly different once again (p = 0.42). The posttest results, however, indicate a difference among the groups (p = 0.003). The mean score for the SF learners is higher (97.9) than any of the others, but close to that of the SI group (90.9). In the follow-up test, the mean scores are also significantly different among the groups (p = 0.004); here the SF learners performed significantly better (98.0) than the other groups in mean scores, which may again support the effectivenessof structured input instruction and metalinguistic feedback. In addition, the positive effects of the two kinds oftreatment were maintained from the post-tests to the follow-up tests. A post hoc analysis for the pre- and posttest for all groups yielded significant results except for

control group. The control group's scores held fairly steady across all three tests, providing evidence that the instruction, explicit or structured input, helped learners improve in their pragmatic competence over a lack of pragmatic instruction, especially when combined with explicit feedback.

Table 3. *ANOVA results for OPDCT*

	Pretest		Posttest		Follow-uptest	
	Mean	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**
SI	50.0	20.6	90.9	17.1	91.0	18.2
SF	48.0	16.5	97.9	14.8	98.0	16.2
EI	45.9	18.0	66.8	19.2	66.5	21.1
EF	52.5	19.6	78.6	14.3	77.8	16.1
Control	49.9	18.7	55.0	23.7	55.5	22.0

Pretest: F = 2.890, df = 4, p = 0.42.
Posttest: F = 4.532, df = 4, p = 0.003.
Follow-up test: F = 3.559, df = 4, p = 0.004.
Note: SI = structured input instruction; SF = structured input instruction with feedback; EI = explicit instruction; EF = explicit instruction with feedback

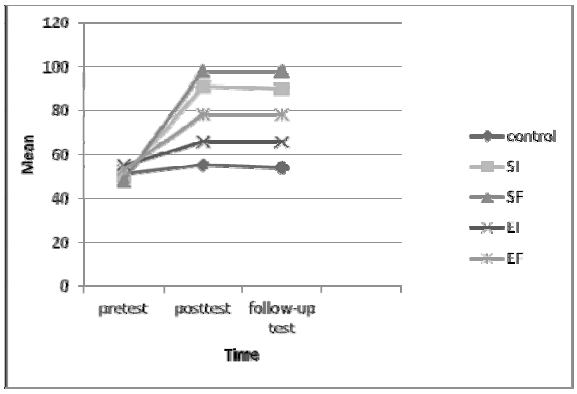

Figure 2 Interaction plot for OPDCT
Note: SI = structured input instruction; SF = structured input instruction with feedback; EI = explicit instruction; EF = explicit instruction with feedback

Figure 2 indicated that the effect of Instruction was moderated by Time. Although all four groups had similar means on the pre-tests, F = 2.890, df = 4, p = 0.42., there was a sharp increase in scores from the pre-tests to the post-tests for the two treatment groups and a significant main effect for Instruction on the post- tests and the follow-up tests, F = 4.532, df = 4, p = 0.003. Post hoc Scheffé tests performed on the post-test and follow-up test scores indicated the following con- trasts: the SF group performed significantly better than all other groups.

3. Conclusion

The results of the data analysis revealed that students› ability to comprehend and produce pragmatic markers improved significantly in treatment groups and that pragmatic interlanguage is permeable to instruction in EFL settings. However, there were statistically significant differences among the four treatment groups regarding awareness of different pragmatic markers and their appropriate use. These findings give us some useful insight on the teachability of pragmatic markers and the role of instruction and feedback in the classroom to develop pragmatic competence

of EFL learners. This study can be considered to be of practical use, especially in a foreign language context where learning English pragmatics rather than English grammar has become one of the most signifcant areas of focus, and where exposure to English is limited and where only limited class time is avail- able for teaching English.

The results of the study have indicated that learners learn pragmatic material, in this case, the pragmatic markers such as topic change markers, mitigation markers, interjections and hybrid basic markers, and develop their pragmatic competence more effectively when they experience instruction and feedback on the pragmatic markers. The structured input tasks and metalinguistic feedback led to an effect in helping learners to understand the meaning of pragmatic markers in listening comprehension tests and to select the appropriate pragmatic choices in the multiple choice OPDCT tests. By contrast, the explicit instruction in teaching pragmatic markers does not have the effect that structured input instruction has. On the other hand, metalinguistic feedback can enhance the effect of the instruction, especially structured input instruction. It appears that explicit instruction and feedback are effective in helping learners understand pragmatic elements and contexts by calling their attention to pragmatic form. But structured input activities, especially together with the metalinguistic feedback, can help learners produce appropriate pragmatic utterances. The present study highlights the significance and effectiveness of structured input tasks within the framework of Focus on Form instruction. In this respect, teachers may need to examine the kinds of task they use in their English lessons to see to what extent they provide learners with the opportunity for processing both the form and meaning of target features. To interpret the findings, the limitations of the methodology employed should be taken into account. For example, the period of treatment and testing was relatively short, which precluded observation of the further development of the learners' pragmatic competence with more measurable results. It is also suggested to de- sign different types of input-based tasks and examine their effects on pragmatic proficiency. It would be also more insightful to investigate the effects of different types of feedback (e.g. implicit feedback) as well.

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