The Effect of Task Repetition on Pragmatic
Awareness of Iranian EFL Learners

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ABSTRACT

The new research about task repetition and its effects on language production and language comprehension has motivated researchers to investigate about its effects on second language acquisition and pragmatic awareness. This study was conducted among a number of low intermediate pre-university students. The 120 female subjects, who were selected randomly to participate in this study, took a standardized PET proficiency test. Those whose scores fell within a range of one and a half standard deviation above and below the mean were selected to ensure that they were at the same proficiency level. In sum, 80 students were selected. To make sure of the homogeneity of the participants regarding the pragmatic awareness, 20 standardized pragmatic tasks were administered, and 60 subjects were reselected. They were divided into control and experimental groups to experience the treatment. Task repetition was administered one week after the pre-test. 20 standardized pragmatic tasks were administered as the post-test. The t-test results indicated that task repetition has a significant effect on pragmatic awareness of Iranian EFL learners. Task repetition is suggested as a complementary methodological option for taking care of the situation, where communication is central.

Introduction

Tasks are important in teaching activities. They are meaning based activities which provide a real framework for communication. As stated by Skehan (1998, p. 20) "Tasks are activities which have meaning as their primary focus. Tasks have out comes and real-life language use". Crabbe (2007, p. 117) states that"Underlying every task is a set of learning opportunities – potential activities for learning". A task provides a link between outside, the the classroom reality, and inside, the classroom pedagogy. According to Foster (1998, p. 126) "From the results of experimental studies it is confidently expected that tasks will produce healthy amounts of negotiation of meaning. So, this will produce healthy amounts of the comprehensible input".   As Beglar

and Hunt (2002) in their article state, tasks that generate more negotiation of meaning are more beneficial for inter language development. Larger amounts of pair and group interaction have positive effects on the negotiation of meaning. According to Shehadeh (2005, p. 15) "Task based language teaching proposes the use of tasks as a central component in the language classroom, because they provide better contexts for activating learner acquisition processes and promoting L2 learning". According to Long and Crookes (1992), task- based syllabuses utilize real – world target tasks. These syllabuses reject syntactic syllabuses and use tasks as alternatives. As Willis (2005) states, TBLT (Task Based Language Teaching) is a holistic approach where meaning is central.

Task repetition, has a marked interactive effect. Task repetition improves the production of a task, especially in terms of complexity. It encourages learners to provide more detailed content and to draw more fully attention on their rule-based system. Task repetition also has important effects on reading comprehension, speaking ability, language complexity, and language accuracy. According to Mangubhai (1991), more successful learners use repetition more than do slower learners .As Prabhu points out," students need plenty of opportunities to develop their comprehension abilities before any production is demanded of them."(cited in Long and Crookes,1992, p. 35). According to Bygate (1998), task repetition has effects on noticing about the formulation aspect of the task. When first carrying out the task, the learner would be initially more concerned with planning the content of the message. On the second occasion, the learner would be more concerned with paying attention to the formulation aspect of the task, that is, with the selection of words and phrases, and with their correct grammatical production. It means that, students can pay more attention to pragmatics. In other words, they can pay more attention to the context, and to the situations. As Yule, Powers, and McDonald point out," repeating a task improves communicative efficiency."

(cited in Ellis, 2003, p. 98). As stated by Németh and Kormos (2001, p. 213) "In the repeated version of the task, familiarity with the task structure helps learners pay more attention to the informational content of their message, which is reflected in the higher number of supportive moves they produce". According to Stark (2005, p. 42) "Task repetition can help to free up attention for focus on form, thus leading to greater accuracy and complexity and performance". According to Ahangari Dehkharghani (2007), repetition leads learners to produce more fluent and complicated language. As Celce- Murcia, Dornyei and Thurrell point out, repetition is one of the many communication strategies that constitute part of successful cross-cultural conversations (cited in Sawir, 2004). It is a constructive learner generated and learner-managed device. It enables the EFL learners taking part in a cross-cultural conversation in English with more accomplished speakers, to maintain the momentum of conversation while simultaneously learning, developing and using their emerging language skills.

In pragmatic competence, situation and context are very important. As Bachman and Palmer (1996, p. 69) state "Pragmatic knowledge enables us to create or interpret discourse by relating utterances or sentences and texts to their meanings, to the intentions of language users, and to relevant characteristics of the language use setting". According to Hedge (2000, p. 49), "one language form can express a variety of functions, and a function can be expressed in a variety of ways". Hedge (2000, p. 49) continues to state that "One element of pragmatic competence is, knowing how to perform a particular function or express an intention clearly. So, spoken or written messages must be appropriate to the social context in which they are produced". According to Thornbury (1997), there are two kinds of meanings: Semantic meaning and Pragmatic meaning. Semantic meaning is the literal meaning of a text or utterance and pragmatic meaning is the meaning the text /utterance takes on, in its context of use. As Yule (1996, p. 129) states "Pragmatics is the study of intended meaning. It is

the study of invisible meaning. We consider context as, linguistic and physical contexts. Linguistic context is the set of other words used in the same phrase or sentence". As Bachman (1990, p. 94) states "Sociolinguistic competence is the sensitivity to, or the control of the conventions of language use that are determined by the features of the specific language use context: it enables us to perform language functions in ways that are appropriate to that context". According to Smith (1999), in interpreting the meaning of the sentences, we choose the best meaning according to the context and we choose the interpretation which best fits the context. Arriving at the appropriate interpretation in itself is not the end of the story. Smith (1999, p. 37) continues to state that "We have to decide what the speaker intended to convey by uttering it. These implications depend on considerations of what is most relevant. They presuppose knowledge of language, but go beyond it to exploit the inferential resources of the central system".

According to Koike and Pearson (2005) the learners who receive explicit instruction and feedback, perform better in multiple choice items. In contrast, learners who receive implicit instruction and feedback, performed better in open- ended dialogues. So, implicit instructions help students to understand the pragmatic elements better, and implicit instructions and feedback, help them to produce the pragmatic utterances better. As stated by Bardovi-Harlig and Griffin (2005), the results of their article suggest that, at the high intermediate level, learners in a second language environment develop a certain degree of pragmatic awareness about the second language even without specific instruction. Content may be moderated by learner's cultural and personal orientation in speech events. Learners moderate the content according to their cultural and personal orientations. According to Kasper (2001), pragmatic awareness relates to the matter of noticing. It relates to the strategic development and the politeness and recognizing their co-occurrence with elements of context such as social distance, power and level of imposition. As

Eslami Rasekh (2005) states, awareness raising activities are activities designed to develop recognition of how language forms are used appropriately in the context. Through awareness raising activities students acquire information about pragmatic aspects of language: what strategies are used for apologizing in their L1 and L2, and what is considered as offensive in their native culture compared with that in their target culture. According to Hobbs (2005), students should spend less time on mastering grammatical rules to explore the possible sentences of the language. They should spend more time on studying examples of fluent speakers' discourse to discover which utterances are common in a given context.

The present study attempts to answer the following question:

Does using task repetition have a significant impact on the pragmatic awareness of Iranian EFL learners?

II. Methodology
1. Participants

The participants of the study were 120 pre-university female students at Kaboudarahang, Hamedan and aged between 17 and 19.The subjects were at the lower intermediate level. The participants were at EFL situation, and their English learning experiences were limited to the instructional setting. After The selection of the samples randomly, the homogeneity of the samples was determined through a reliable and standardized PET test: that is those subjects whose scores fell within the range of one and a half standard deviation above and below the mean were chosen which totaled 80 participants. Subsequently, pragmatic tasks (pre-test) were administered. The subjects were divided into two groups: one control group and one experimental group.

2. Instrumentation

Four instruments were used in this study: A) a language proficiency test,
B) 20 pragmatic tasks (for pre-test), C) 20 pragmatic tasks (for task repetition), D) and 20 pragmatic tasks

(for post-test).

A) The Language Proficiency Test: A sample PET (Preliminary English Test) test was used in order to homogenize the subjects. The proficiency test PET (Preliminary English Test) is the second level Cambridge ESOL exam for the intermediate level learners. The test consisted of three sections: the first section was a test of reading with 35 items. Part one of the reading section included 5 multiple-choice items with short texts. In part two, the participants had to decide on the most suitable museum for each of the mentioned people based on the information in the reading passages. Part three of the reading section included true-false questions, and finally part four included five multiple-choice items about a single passage. The second section included a test of writing with five items, for which the participants had to complete the second sentence in a way that it would be a paraphrase of the first section. The last section of the test included twenty five listening skill items. For the first part of the listening items, there were three pictures and a short recording. Participants had to choose the correct picture after listening to the recording. For the second part of the listening items, participants had to choose the correct answer from alternatives and for the third part they had to fill in the missing information after listening to the tape recording. Finally the last part of the listening section included true-false questions. The time allowed for each section was 35 minutes, 10 minutes, and 35 minutes respectively.

B) Pragmatic tasks for pre-test: These tasks were about using different forms of language in different situations. Students had to read a short passage and choose the correct answer according to the context. Students had to answer them collaboratively.

C) Pragmatic tasks for Task Repetition: These tasks were similar to the pre-test tasks; they were about using different forms of language in different situations.

D) Pragmatic tasks for post-test: These tasks were also similar to the pre-test tasks and task repetition.

3. Procedure

The procedure in the present study has been followed in a number of steps:

3.1. Before any instruction and grouping there was a general English proficiency test (PET) and twenty pragmatic tasks as a pre-test for a population to select homogenized participants. The proficiency test included 65 items, containing a reading comprehension subsection of 35 items, writing part of 5 items, and listening part of 25 items. Prior to the administration of the test, the researcher had to get confidence in the validity and reliability of the proficiency test. To do this, 30 students who were similar to those in the target group took the proficiency test. Based on item analyses conducted on the results taken from the first piloting, the deficient items were omitted from the test and were substituted by similar items from another PET test. The second piloting of the test was administered on the same subjects and it rendered satisfactory results. Having gone through the revision and pre testing, eight items showing poor facility and discrimination indexes were substituted by similar items from another sample PET test. Since a test should have high reliability in addition to good items, the reliability of the second piloting was estimated by using KR-21 method .The final test used in this study included 65 items with item facility and item discrimination within the range of 0.37 to 0.63 and the reliability of 0.7. Administration of the whole part took 80 minutes. The subjects whose scores fell within the range of one and a half standard deviation above and below the mean were chosen which totaled to 80 participants.

3.2. To make sure that there are no dissimilarities among the participants in the control and experimental groups regarding the dependent variable under investigation, i.e. the pragmatic awareness, the pre-test was administered. Those, whose scores on language proficiency test fell within the range of one and a half standard deviation above and below the mean, took twenty pragmatic tasks as a pre-test. The pragmatic tasks were validated by the researcher. To do this, 30 students who were similar to those in the target group took the pragmatic tasks.

The data were analyzed and items showing poor facility and discrimination indexes were discarded and substituted by similar items. The scores obtained in the pre-test assisted the researcher to select the homogenized subjects. In this way, any future change in their performance might be attributed to the treatment. 60 people who obtained the higher scores were selected and divided into two groups of 30.

3.3. The treatment itself included the use of task repetition for experimental group. For task repetition, 20 pragmatic tasks which were similar to the tasks of the pre-test, were selected. Before performing the task repetition, subjects did not know about the activity. After one week they repeated the tasks. The instructions were clear. The teacher did not give any explanation about pragmatics. There was peer assistance among the participants.

3.4. As the course drew to the end, the participants in the control and experimental groups took part in a post-test. The post-test consisted of twenty pragmatic tasks. These tasks were also validated by the researcher. They were piloted among a group comparable to the subjects of the study.

4. Design

To study the effect of task repetition on pragmatic awareness of the subjects, the researcher employed a true-experimental design. This study included experimental group, control group, pre-test and post-test. The experimental group performed the task repetition. There was one dependent variable; student's pragmatic awareness. There were two independent variables. The first one was task repetition. The second independent variable was test factor, which was divided into two pre-tests and post-tests.

III. Analyses and Results

The first stage of statistical procedure of this investigation was validating the proficiency test (PET), which was the language proficiency test of English to be used in the study for the purpose of homogenizing the subjects. For validating, the sample PET test was piloted twice. In the first piloting of the sample PET test on 30 subjects, the deficient items were detected and replaced by similar items from another sample PET test. Thus, the second piloting of the test was required on the same participants. Subsequent to the administration of the second test after a two-week interval, item analysis procedure was conducted and reliability was measured.

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance	reliability
PET 1	30	52.70	3.888	15.114	0.45
PET 2	30	53.51	2.343	5.492	0.73

Table 1. Reliability Statistics of the first and second administrations of the language proficiency test (PET)

Through the use of KR-21 method, the reliabilities of the two pilotings were estimated, The first filoting considerable increase in the reliability of the test compared with the first pilot study.

Language Proficiency Test: Following the pilot administration to 30 pre-university female students in which eight items showing poor facility and discrimination indexes were substituted by similar items from another sample PET test, the 65- item Language proficiency test was administered to a group of 120 students. Table 2 and table 3 display the descriptive statistics pertaining to this administration of the proficiency test.

Statistics		
	Valid	120
	Missing	0
Mean		53.12
Std. Deviation		2.12
Variance		4.51

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the Language proficiency test

Number of items	Mean	Variance	Reliability
65	53.12	4.51	0.71

Table 3.Reliability of the Language Proficiency Test

Statistics on Validating the Pragmatic Tasks: For validating the pragmatic tasks, these tasks were piloted. The researcher administered them to 30 subjects similar to the subjects of the target group.

Item analyses were conducted in order to identify the item features and the reliability was measured. According to the reliability statistics, there was a considerable increase in the reliability of the second set of tasks compared with the first pilot study.

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance	reliability
Tasks 1	30	47.16	2.784	7.753	.437
Tasks 2	30	50.533	2.263	5.122	.705

Table 4 Reliability Statistics of the first and second administrations of the pragmatic tasks

The Pragmatic Tasks: Following the administration of the first pre-test in which 80 subjects scored one and a half above and below the mean, the second pretest ,which was a set of pragmatic tasks (also piloted and validated beforehand), was administered among the subjects. The descriptive data of scores obtained by these 80 subjects is presented in table 5.

Statistics		
	Valid	80
	Missing	0
Mean		15.7875
Median		16.0000
Std. Deviation		2.33137
Variance		5.435
Range		8.00

Table 5. Descriptive statistics of the pragmatic tasks

Comparing the means of the scores of the two groups: By using the T- test, the researcher compared the means of the scores of the two groups. (Control and Experimental groups).According to table 6 and table 7, T-test indicates that there is no significant difference between the means of the two groups.

t-test for equality of means							Levenes test for equality of variance	
95%confidence interval of the difference								
upper	lower							
.876	.676	.388	.100	.797	58	.258	.442	.600
.876	.676	.388	.100	.797	56.24	.258		

Table 6. Independent samples test

T critical	Alpha level	Degree of freedom	T observed
2.000	0.05	58	.25

Table 7   T-test of experimental and control groups

Testing the hypothesis: Following the descriptive statistics of the study- discussed thoroughly above- the hypothesis has to be put to test to confirm the relationship between the variables. The descriptive statistics of the control group and the experimental group are elaborated as well below.

N	Valid	30
	Missing	0
Mean		15.5667
Median		15.5000
Mode		18.00
Std. Deviation		2.04574
Variance		4.185
Range		8.00
Minimum		12.00
Maximum		20.00
Sum		467.00

Table 8. Descriptive statistics of the Experimental group's scores in the post-test

N	Valid	30
	Missing	0
Mean		17.7000
Median		18.0000
Mode		18.00
Std. Deviation		1.51202
Variance		2.286
Range		6.00
Minimum		14.00
Maximum		20.00
Sum		531.00

Table 9. Descriptive statistics of the Control group's scores in the post-test

The data of the post-test administration was subsequently put into T- test and the obtained t value was 4.59 meaning that it was greater than the t critical value for the 0.05 level of significance and 58 degree of freedom which is 2.000.

t-test for equality of means							Levenes test for equality of variance		
95% confidence interval of the difference									
upper	lower								
3.063	1.203	.4644	2.133	.000	58	4.593	.056	3.765	Equal variance assumed
3.064	1.201	.4644	2.133	.000	53.402	4.593			Equal variance not assumed

Table 10. Independent samples Test

T critical	Alpha level	Degree of freedom	T observed
2.000	0.05	58	4.59

Table 11   T-test of experimental and control groups

Therefore the null hypothesis is totally rejected. In other words, task repetition has significant effect on pragmatic awareness of Iranian EFL learners.

IV. Discussion

Task repetition has important effects on reading comprehension, speaking ability, language complexity, and language accuracy. Ellis (2003) states that, rehearsal improves the performance of a task, especially in terms of complexity. But, what about other areas, such as pragmatics? In dealing with pragmatic awareness, the researcher means using the appropriate language, according to the context. The presupposition behind this research is that, by repeating the task, the content of the task becomes familiar for the students. So, the students can pay more attention to the form of the language which they use in specific situations. In other words, they can pay more attention to the pragmatic aspect of the language. According to the results, task repetition has a significant effect on pragmatic awareness of Iranian EFL learners. In other words, by using task repetition, students become aware of pragmatic aspects of language. Learners will gain more knowledge about using language in a society and using different functions of language. In terms of pedagogical practice, the findings of this study suggest that repetition can promote an optimal balance of attention between the planning of meaning and planning of form. For language learners, the first encounter with the task is a creative encounter: the learner has to respond to the new demand. She/he has to decide how to do the task. In comparison, on repeating a task, the learner has valuable experience to draw on. The learner has already thought about the message. She/he has the meaning ready in the mind. So, repetition leads learners to relate their previous experience of the task with their present attempt in language production. If learners are provided with frequent opportunities to recycle the various, difficult, and complex tasks with using the same materials, they will manage to automatize their production and even their learning.

V. Conclusion

As a result, there is a significant effect of task repetition on learner's pragmatic awareness, it is beneficial for students, teachers, and material developers. For instance, teachers can offer more task repetition, for improving independency among their students, and for increasing their concentration on the pragmatic features. In addition, learners could be directed to the best ways of retention of information and ways of subconsciously knowing the pragmatic features. Based on the results of the present study, task repetition and rehearsals are suggested as complementary methodological options. When meaning negotiation is central, task repetition and rehearsal are complementary methodological options for taking care of language form. Task repetition can help learners to integrate what they already know into what they do.

V. References

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Appendix A

Some sample tasks of pre-test

1- You are at the airport checking in. The airline steward says something about your flight being delayed, but you do not understand her. What could you say?
   a) Sorry, could you repeat?
   b) What did you say?
   c) Could you say that again please?
   _____

2- You are staying at a hotel, and you have to get up at 7.15 the next morning. What do you say to the receptionist?
   a) Wake me up at 7.15 tomorrow, please.
   b) Call me at 7.15 tomorrow.
   c) Can you call me tomorrow at 7.15, please?
   _____

3- You bought some jeans yesterday but when you got home you saw the zip was broken. You take them back the next day. What do you say to the shop assistant?
   a) Give me back my money.
   b) I'd like my money back, please.
   c) Could I have back my money please?
   _____

4- You are on holiday and you are trying to find the station but you have got lost. You stop someone in the street. What could you say?
   a) Could you tell me the way to the station?
   b) How do I get the station?
   c) You! Tell me where the station is.
   _____

5- You're in a friend's house and you need to make a phone call. What could you say?
   a) Do you mind if I use your phone?
   b) May I use your phone?
   c) I want to make a phone call, Ok?
   Some sample tasks of task repetition
   1- You are at a restaurant .You order a special food. The servant says something, but you do not understand her. What could you say?
   a) Sorry, could you repeat?
   b) What did you say?
   c) Could you say that again please?
   _____

2- Mary asks Shinya to go camping with her next weekend, but Shinya does not feel like going. So, she will answer:
   a) Sorry, but I am busy next weekend. Sorry.
   b) No, I can not. Sorry.
   c) Oh, I'd like to, but I can't go. I have a match test next week.
   _____

3- You bought some books yesterday but when you got home you saw some pages were torn. You take them back the next day. What do you say to the shop assistant?
   a) Give me back my money.
   b) I'd like my money back, please.
   c) Could I have back my money please?
   _____

4- A teacher talks to a student:

The teacher: your English is excellent
The student:

a) Yes, but I have a lot of problems.

b) Thank you.

c) No, no! My English is very poor, and it is far from being perfect.

_____

5- You have forgotten your wallet, and you need some photocopies for next class. Ask your classmate to lend you some money:

a) Lend me some money, please.

b) I am asking you to lend me some money.

c) Would you be so kind as to lend me some money?

Some sample tasks of post-test

1- One of your friends asks you to go on a ski trip next weekend, but you don't want to because you don't like some of the people who are going. So, you will answer:

a) Sorry, but I am busy next weekend. Thank you for invitation.

b) No, I can not go. Sorry.

c) Oh, I'd like to, but I can't go. I have a chemistry test next week. Thank you for invitation.

_____

2- You have forgotten your pencil, and you need to write something at class. So, you will say to your classmate:

a) Lend me your pencil.

b) I want you to lend me your pencil.

c) Would you lend me your pencil?

_____

3- You are at the train checking in. The train steward says something about your train being delayed, but you do not understand him. What could you say?

a) Sorry, could you repeat?

b) What did you say?

c) Could you say that again please?

_____

4- You are on vacation and you are trying to find the station but you have got lost. You stop someone in the street. What could you say?

Excuse me,

a) Could you tell me the way to the station?

b) How do I get the station?

c) You! Tell me where the station is.

_____

5- You're in your sister's house and you need to make a phone call. What could you say?

a) Do you mind if I use your phone?

b) May I use your phone?

c) I want to make a phone call, Ok?

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