Impact of Teacher Motivational Practice on Iranian EFL Learners' Request and Refusal Speech Acts Production

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Abstract
The purpose of the study was to examine how teacher motivational practice might influence Iranian EFL Learners' Request and Refusal Speech Acts Production. To this end, five instruments were used to provide appropriate responses to research questions: (a) Quick Placement Test (b) the Motivational Orientation of Language Teaching classroom observation scheme, (c) the Post-Lesson Teacher Evaluation scale, (d) student motivational state questionnaire and (e) Discourse Completion Task administered to 300 male students from 12 classes (upper intermediate senior high schools of 6 districts in Isfahan, Iran. The research indicates that, there is statistically significant difference between the students in high motivation index teachers' (HMIT) classes and low motivation teachers' (LMIT) classes with respect to their request speech act posttest scores. There was also a statistically significant difference between the students in HMIT and LMIT classes concerning their refusal speech act posttest scores. So it seems a must for the EFL curriculum developers at Iranian ministry of education and training to think about remedies for improving motivation among their EFL teachers for persuading their students to provide more practical and real opportunities to use English in a class and so on.

Keywords: Teacher Motivational Practice, Request Speech Acts, Refusal Speech Acts, DCT

Introduction

Throughout the time, cultures have developed their own rules of appropriateness of verbal behavior particularly regarding politeness and other successful communication devices. Members of every culture tend to interpret communications based on their own pragmatics and sociolinguistic parameters. Therefore, when a cross-cultural communication takes place, people from different cultures decode behavior or utterances according to such rules, and when facing controversies they might miss the key points, interpret such language as inappropriate and consequently, lead to communication breakdowns. In addition, the stereotypical labeling of non-native speakers as rude, insensitive, or inept is possible (Eslami-Rasekh, 2005). Having the knowledge of pragmatics differences among cultures and knowing appropriate ways of production of request and refusal speech acts in other languages may help minimize the negative effects regarding unintentional rudeness and maximize the quality of the communication.

Speech act theory is the study of how language is used and the effects of language use upon hearers. The emphasis is not only what is spoken but also the consideration of the performative utterance in what it does and its resulting effects (Austin 1975:6-7). Speech act theory addresses how we use speech (locutionary act), the performance of an act in saying

something (illocutionary act), and the consequential effect or intended result of saying something (perlocutionary act) (Austin 1975, pp. 98-103). Communication in both first language (L1) and second language (L2) entails the appropriate use of speech acts, and failure to do so, can result in numerous difficulties. As White (1993) notes, 'attempts at being polite can come unstuck through unwitting violation of speech act rules, so that although an utterance is grammatically well formed, it may be functionally confusing or contextually inappropriate' (p. 193).

The theory of speech act (Searl, 1969) and politeness (Leech, 1983) are the two fields of pragmatics affecting second language acquisition. Wolfson notes that 'sociolinguistic rules are subject to considerable variation with respect to region and status' (1983, p. 66). Therefore, communities have linguistic formulas to pinpoint politeness of their members as it is important to keep the harmony in the community. However, second language learners, not familiar with such rules, may have difficulty adjusting (Wolfson, 1983).

As Jalilifar (2009) mentions, requests have become more popular in the last decades in the field of research. Koike (1989) believes that 'speech act of requests are particularly important to beginning L2 learners since most of their future interaction with native speakers of L2, if there is any at all, will probably take place in the form of requests' (p. 280).

Refusal on the other hand is a type of speech act that is projected as a response to another individual's request, invitation, offer or suggestion which means it is not speaker initiative (Hassani, Mardani, & Hossein, 2011). Since refusal is a speech act potentially including a level of rudeness and discourtesy, performing inappropriate refusal strategies may harm the relationship between interlocutors. Thus, proper perception of refusals requires a certain degree of cultural awareness (Hassani, Mardani, & Hossein, 2011).Reviewing the available literature on teacher motivational practice in the Iranian context highlights some important points which deserve further attention. In the majority of cases, teacher motivational practice has been conceptualized as a stable and constant   construct which could be objectively observed, evaluated, and measured   (e.g., Hein, 2012; Mehrpour et al., 2016; Alemi and Khanlarzadeh, 2017, and Mashhadi Heidar et al., 2017).

Being an area of research which has not been fully considered especially in Iranian context second language teaching the production of request and refusal speech acts strategies performed by Iranian EFL learners need to be elaborated more deeply. Furthermore teacher motivational practice seems influential on the improvement of Iranian EFL learners' request and refusal speech acts production.

Despite the significant contribution of the research which has been reviewed to the understanding of the role of EFL teachers' motivational strategies, the evidence provided seems to be scant and limited to a few aforementioned contexts, it seems that all of these studies have only been based on the perceived, not actual, use and effectiveness of a number of motivational strategies. Consequently, stronger evidence is required to shed light on the nature and role of teachers' motivational practice on improving Iranian EFL learners' request and refusal speech acts production in instructed second language acquisition. Following Guilloteaux and Dörnyei(2008), the objective of the study was to investigate the relationship between L2 teachers' motivational practice and their students' production of request and refusal speech acts. The following research questions were formulated to achieve the objectives of the study:

Q1. Does teacher motivational practice influence Iranian EFL learners′ production of request speech acts?

Q2. To what extent does teacher motivational practice influence Iranian EFL learners′ production of refusal speech acts?

Literature review

Hein (2012) tried to bring together insights from research on teacher motivational behavior related with student's motivation and learning in physical education. Teacher behavior is analyzed in terms of two independent behavior dimensions called teacher interpersonal behavior and teaching styles (methods). The analysis is based on self-determination theory. More specifically, the effect of the autonomy supportive and controlling teacher on student's motivation and learning outcome in physical education context are discussed.Mehrpour et al. (2016) were interested to see whether pragmatic transfer of refusals among three languages spoken by the same person occurs from L1 and L2 to L3, L1 to L2 and then to L3 or from L1 and L1 (if there are more than one L1) to L2. This study aimed to investigate the production of refusals in three languages and to specify the impact of linguistic knowledge on pragmatic transfer of refusals.Elahi Shirvan and Taherian (2016) also investigated the dynamic factors influencing willingness to communicate (WTC) in an English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom in Iran at a private institute, over the period of one semester, from an ecological perspective. Six students (2 males and 4 females) participated in their study allowing intensive, individual-level microanalysis.

Alemi and Khanlarzadeh (2017) aimed to investigate the native and non-native EFL teachers' rating scores and criteria regarding the speech act of request. To this end, 50 American ESL teachers and 50 Iranian EFL teachers participated to rate the EFL learners' responses to video-prompted Discourse Completion Tests (DCTs) regarding the speech act of request. The result proved that there are significant differences between native and non-native EFL teachers' rating pattern. Mahmud (2017) focused on two English classes which employed classroom presentations as the learning strategy. To collect data, the researcher recorded the classroom presentations of the two classes. Deveci and Hmida (2017) investigated how the request speech act set is realized by both native speakers of English and Arab university students in an English-medium university in the UAE, as well as whether or not instruction in formal email writing improves students' pragmatic competence. . It was also found that teaching email conventions in the context of an academic environment has a significant impact on students' pragmatic competence.

Mashhadi Heidar et al. (2017) tried to examine how the social factors influence Iranian teachers' motivation towards English as an international language. To this end, a questionnaire was used as a research instrument. It was administered to 100 Iranian teachers of Islamic Azad University (Qaemshahr Branch), Qaemshahr, Iran. The research indicates that, concerning the notion of English as an international language, participants held different motivation towards different issues of social factors relating to English language learning.The purpose of a study done by Kakar and Pathan (2017) was to investigate motivational strategies which EFL teachers employ to motivate students in learning English language and to determine the significant difference if any across male and female teachers in practicing motivational strategies in an EFL classroom.Regarding refusal strategies Qadoury (2011) dealt with pragmatic transfer of Iraqi EFL learners' refusal strategies compared with Iraqi native speakers of Arabic and American native speakers of English. The DCT consisted of 12 situations including requests, offers, suggestions, and invitations with higher, equal, and lower status interlocutors. Data analyzed according to frequency types of refusal strategies and interlocutor's social status. Findings reveal that the frequency of use of refusals by Iraqi EFL learners is different from that of Americans, however they share some similarities. Iraqi EFL learners prefer to express refusals with caution by using more statements of reason, regret, wish and refusal adjuncts in their responses than Americans. Americans are more sensitive to their interlocutor's higher and equal status, whereas Iraqi EFL

learners to lower status. Kuhi and Jadidi (2012) attempted to investigate Iranian EFL learners' perception and production of politeness in three basic speech acts: request, refusal, and apology. The participants involved 63 MA ELT students. A multiple-choice Discourse Completion Test (DCT) and a politeness rating questionnaire were used to generate participant's data. The data analysis revealed that the participants had enough knowledge about speech act and politeness strategies.

In a quasi-experimental study, Tamimi Sa'd and Gholami (2017) adopted a pretest/posttest design to investigate the effect of instructional intervention in teaching polite refusal strategies explicitly on Iranian EFL learners' performance of the speech act of refusing. The participants, consisting of 24 male elementary EFL learners aged 12-18, responded to a discourse completion task (DCT) prior to and after they had been provided with explicit instruction concerning the polite performance of refusals in English. The participants' responses to the DCT in the posttest showed a high level of appropriacy in the semantic content of refusal utterances compared to their responses in the pretest. It is worth to mention here that all the studies mentioned above have investigated the influence of teacher motivational practice on different skills of second/foreign language learning, but what seems untouched is its impact on the production of request and refusal strategies, especially in the context of Iran.

Methodology

Participants

A total number of 300 male students from 12 classes (upper intermediate senior high schools of 6 districts in Isfahan) which their language proficiency level was identified by running the quick placement test (QPT) among the prospective students that were supposed to be at upper intermediate level from among all Iranian EFL learners in six districts of Isfahan training and education department were selected through convenience sampling and were taught by 12 experienced teachers took part in the study. The participating students' age ranged from 15 to 17.

Instruments

Five instruments were used to provide appropriate responses to the research questions: (a) Quick Placement Test (QPT-the original version which is used in this study and its reliability and validity has already been measured by Oxford University Press and University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate) to distinguish the participants language proficiency level, (b) the Motivational Orientation of Language Teaching classroom observation scheme (MOLT which was in English as it was used by the researcher, developed by Guilloteaux and D¨ornyei (2008)), (c) the Post-Lesson Teacher Evaluation scale, (both were used to study teacher motivational behavior in class), (d) student motivational state questionnaire (SMS was in English as it was used by the researcher, developed by Guilloteaux and D¨ornyei (2008)) used to measure motivational intensity of the participants, and (e) the Discourse Completion Task (DCT which was developed and validated by Jalilifar (2009), translated into Persian to ascertain ease of understanding) for the measurement of the participants' request and refusal speech acts production. In this regard three colleagues of the researcher who themselves are EFL instructors and had obtained their MA or PhD qualifications in TEFL from Iranian universities checked the Persian translation to cope with any probable pitfall.

Procedure

Teacher Motivational Practice Index which was used to observe teacher motivational behavior during class is the sum of two measures: (a) the observational data based on the minute-by-minute record of the teachers' behaviors during class time obtained through the MOLT and

(b) the retrospective evaluation of the teachers' professional qualities, performed right after each observed session obtained with the Post-Lesson Teacher Evaluation scale. The teachers were notified that the study aimed to investigate their students' behaviors during class activities regardless of what the activities were and how they were performed. It was emphasized that teachers' behavior was not the focus of the study and that the researcher was interested in the students' actions. The researcher assured them that they did not need to worry about their teaching quality and he was encouraged to observe what they normally do in their classes. The questionnaires were administered at the end of the classes after completing the observation sheets by the researcher. The completion of the questionnaires lasted about 10 minutes and the standard class time was 90 minutes. Finally, the observer individually completed the Post-Lesson Teacher Evaluation scale right after each teaching session.

Concerning the differences between high-motivation and low-motivation EFL learners in terms of their motivation levels and their influence on Iranian EFL Learners′ production of request and refusal speech acts, the classes were ordered from the highest to the lowest motivation groups based on their level of motivated/demotivated behavior obtained through the MOLT and student motivational state questionnaire (SMS). The top one third (4 classes), the middle one third (4 classes), and the bottom one third (4 classes) groups were distinguished and labeled the high-motivation, moderate-motivation, and low-motivation groups, respectively. Then they were non-randomly assigned to three groups of high-motivation, moderate-motivation, and low-motivation groups.Regarding the measurement of request speech acts production the aforementioned discourse completion task was used. In this process the DCT data was typed up, processed and classified into files based on the DCT combinations. Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper (1989b) cited in Jalilifar (2009) classify requests into three major levels of directness: direct (Mood derivable, Performative, Hedged performative, Obligation statement, Want statements), conventionally indirect (Suggestory formula, Query preparatories) and non-conventionally indirect (Strong hint, and Mild hint).Beebe et al. (1990) cited in Phuong classified refusal strategies as: direct (Performative, Non-performative statement (NO), Non-performative Negative willingness ability), indirect (Statement of regret, Statement of wish, Excuse/reason/explanation, Statement of alternative, Set condition for future or past acceptance, Promise of future acceptance, Statement of principle, Rhetorical question, Threat/statement of negative consequences, Restatement, Unwillingness/insistence, Postponement), and Adjuncts to Refusals (Statement of positive opinion/feeling or agreement, Statement of empathy, Addressing terms). Then during a 10 session teaching period request and refusal speech acts were taught to the participants in the three groups. Finally the same questionnaire was run as the post test. The results of post tests are presented in the next section.

Results

Results for Research Question One

The first research question of the study was: Does teacher motivational practice influence Iranian EFL Learners′ production of request speech acts? To answer this research question, the request speech act posttest scores of the students in the high motivation index teachers' (HMIT) classes were compared with those of the students in the low motivation teachers' (LMIT) classes through a one-way ANCOVA, which could control for any possible differences in the pretest scores of the two groups of students and compare their posttest scores. The results of the ANCOCA analysis are presented below:

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics for Comparing the Request Speech Act Posttest Scores of the HMITs and LMIT's Students*

Groups	Mean	*Std.* Deviation	*N*
HMITs' Students	7.13	1.22	146
LMITs' Students	5.24	.91	154
Total	6.16	1.43	300

Such descriptive statistics as mean and standard deviation are shown for both HMITs and LMITs' students in Table 1. The request speech act posttest mean score of the students in HMITs' classes ($M = 7.13$) was found to be greater than those of students in LMITs' classes ($M = 5.24$). To determine whether this difference was a statistically significant one or not, the researcher had to look down the *Sig* (2-tailed) column in the ANCOVA table below:

Table 2. *Results of One-Way ANCOVA for Comparing the Request Speech Act Posttest Scores of the HMITs and LMIT's Students*

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	*df*	Mean Square	*F*	*Sig.*	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	270.47	2	135.23	116.35	.00	.43
Intercept	1854.44	1	1854.44	1595.53	.00	.84
Pretest	2.68	1	2.68	2.31	.12	.008
Groups	264.93	1	264.93	227.94	.00	.43
Error	345.19	297	1.16			
Total	12024.00	300				
Corrected Total	615.66	299				

In Table 2, if you find Groups in the leftmost column and read across this row, under the *Sig.* column, you can find the *p* value, which should be compared with the pre-set significance level (which is .05). The *p* value here was smaller than the specified level of significance (.00 < .05), indicating that there was a statistically significant difference between the students in HMITs and LMITs' classes with respect to their request speech act posttest scores. Under Partial Eta Squared, the relevant value across the Groups row was .43, which shows that being in either HMITs or LMITs' classes accounted for 43% of the variance in the request speech act posttest scores of the students. Another noteworthy piece of information in Table 4.2 concerns the influence of the covariate (i.e. the pretest scores). If you find the line in the table that corresponds to the covariate (i.e. the Pretest), and read across to the *Sig.* level, you can see that the *p* value here was .12, which was greater than the significance level, meaning that the covariate was not significant. In fact, it could barely explain around 1% of the variance in the request speech act posttest scores of the participants.

Results for Research Question Two

The penultimate research question of the study asked: Does teacher motivational practice influence Iranian EFL Learners′ production of refusal speech acts? To answer this research question, the procedure adopted for the preceding research question was adopted again. That is,

the refusal speech act posttest scores of the students in the HMITs' classes were compared with those of the students in the LMITs' classes using one-way ANCOVA:

Table 3. *Descriptive Statistics for Comparing the Refusal Speech Act Posttest Scores of the HMITs and LMIT's Students*

Groups	Mean	*Std.* Deviation	N
HMITs' Students	7.31	1.12	146
LMITs' Students	5.28	.98	154
Total	6.27	1.43	300

Table 3 shows that the refusal speech act posttest mean score of the students in HMITs' classes ($M = 7.31$) was found to be greater than those of students in LMITs' classes ($M = 5.28$). To find out whether this difference was a statistically significant one or not, the researcher had to take a glance down the *Sig* (2-tailed) column in the ANCOVA table below (Table 4):

Table 4. *Results of One-Way ANCOVA for Comparing the Refusal Speech Act Posttest Scores of the HMITs and LMIT's Students*

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	*df*	Mean Square	*F*	*Sig.*	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	309.28	2	154.64	149.94	.00	.50
Intercept	1815.96	1	1815.96	1760.79	.00	.85
Pretest	.62	1	.62	.61	.43	.002
Groups	306.98	1	306.98	297.65	.00	.50
Error	306.30	297	1.03			
Total	12422.00	300				
Corrected Total	615.58	299				

The *p* value in front of Groups in Table 4 was smaller than the specified level of significance ($.00 < .05$), which means that there was a statistically significant difference between the students in HMITs and LMITs' classes concerning their refusal speech act posttest scores. Under Partial Eta Squared, the value across the Groups row was .50, which indicates that being in either HMITs or LMITs' classes accounted for 50% of the variance in the refusal speech act posttest scores of the students. Moreover, the influence of the covariate (i.e. the pretest scores) was not significant since the *p* value was found to be .43, which was greater than the significance level.

Discussion

This study was in fact an attempt to shed light on the point whether teacher motivational practice could bear any influence on the request and refusal speech acts production of Iranian EFL students or not. Rose (2000) held that studying pragmatic development requires cross-sectional studies with participants at various stages of development. Accordingly, the present study was designed as a cross-sectional research which involved language learners at upper intermediate level. The results of data analysis for the first research and second questions showed that that the students who were in high-motivation-index teachers' classes had developed a sharper sense of recognizing the speech act of requests and refusals which means teacher motivational practice does influence Iranian EFL Learners′ production of request and refusal speech acts. This conclusion is in line with Teven and McCroskey, (1997) and Frymier and

Houser, (2000) which believe that a good interpersonal relationship between the teacher and the learners poses direct and indirect influences on learning processes on the bases that affective learning is shaped by learners' behavior toward the teachers' impact on learners' cognitive orientations (Ellis, 2000). In the same direction of belief, MacIntyre, (1999) and Young, (1999) believe that a supportive classroom climate also helps to encourage students to learn a language when they feel they are protected. In the same vein OKO (2014) also examined the impact of teacher motivation on academic performance of students. It proceeded by defining teacher motivation as a general term applying to the entire class of drives, desires, needs, wishes and similar forces initiated for teachers, in order to induce students to act in desirable academically productive manner.

Conclusion

As it was illuminated, the findings of the study revealed that, there is statistically significant difference between the students in HMITs and LMITs' classes with respect to their request speech act posttest scores. Based on the results obtained through the statistical analysis on the collected data for the second research question, it can be safely claimed that there is a statistically significant difference between the students in HMITs and LMITs' classes concerning their refusal speech act posttest scores. So it seems a must for the EFL curriculum developers at ministry of education and training, Isfahan, Iran to think about remedies for improving motivation among their EFL teachers for persuading their students to: realize the importance of English, recognize English as an international language , recognize English as a fundamental skill of educated people, find English as an easy language, make EFL them more interested and excited, and they themselves focus on communicative activities, provide more practical and real opportunities to use English in a class and so on.

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