THE EFFECT OF USING WEB- BASED INSTRUCTION ON LEARNING OF SPEECH ACT OF COMPLIMENT OF IRANIAN EFL LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT

This study focused on the benefits of using web- based instruction of speech act of compliment over fine- using strategy training for pragmatic use of a foreign language. Sixty out of one hundred students were selected based on an OPT test from Tonekabon Islamic Azad university. The subjects were randomly divided into two groups, one experimental and one control group. A researcher- made tests of speech act of compliment was administered as the pre-test to check their language proficiency. Then the treatment stared for one semester. The control group practiced the speech act of compliment through "Speech Act Strategy Inventory"(Cohen and Ishihara) that are constructed for general use of strategies specifically for learning and using speech acts in a second/foreign language. The experimental group used www.iles.umn.edu/introspeechacts website by Ishihara (2005). Then a post- test of DCT was administered. The results were compared through Paired and Independent Sample T- test to see whether there was any difference. The results show that wed- based instruction is more influential than traditional ways of strategy training.

Keywords: EFL learners, web-based instruction, speech act

INTRODUCTION

The concept of language functions was included as part of the notional-functional syllabus some 30 years ago (Wilkins, 1976). Language learners have been always in challenge of trying to make learners to acquire complex second- or foreign-language (L2) functions. One of the main problems has been that of speech acts, namely, those patterned, routinized phrases used regularly to perform a variety of functions such as "requesting," "refusing," "complimenting," "greeting," "thanking," and "apologizing." Learners of a language not only need to learn the correct words and forms, but also the strategies and ways for learning what to use them for, when to use them, how to use them, and how they may be combined with other speech acts. Speech acts may a be direct, such as the request borrow ("Can I borrow your pen?") as opposed to the more indirect approach between friends ("It's warm here") that you indirectly request someone to open the window. Depending on the language and culture, making a request to borrow a pen may entail knowing the relative age, status, gender, and other information about the interlocutor. Most of the research in the area of compliments has been carried out by Nessa Wolfson (1981, 1983) and Joan Manes (1983). From their findings, we can identify four aspects that are relevant to the speech act of complimenting: topic/object of the compliment, lexical and syntactical patterns, function performed, and participants involved. One of the most confusing areas of language instruction is that of in stilling within learners a sense of appropriate language behavior, and especially speech act behavior. Learners of a language may know all of the grammatical forms and lexical items but fail completely at conveying their message because they lack necessary pragmatic or functional information to communicate their intent (Wolfson, 1989). The present study wants to provide another alternative for EFL learners for improving their pragmatic use of speech act of compliment in EFL settings.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Research in inter language pragmatics has shown how learners' and native speakers' pragmatic use of language may differ. Recently interventional studies have investigated the effects of instruction on the developmental process of learners' pragmatic ability. With increasing evidences regarding the advantages of explicit instruction in pragmatics (Rose & Kasper, 2001), there seems to be some consensus as to the potential effectiveness of formal instruction in pragmatics and practical efforts at teaching L2 pragmatics. (Bardovi- Harlig & Mayhan-Taylor, 2003). It has often been pointed out that teaching pragmatics should be research-based rather than dependent on the native speaker's, instructor's, or curriculum writer's intuition (Kasper, 1997; Kasper & Rose, 2002; Schmidt, 1993). A number of studies in inter language pragmatics have shown that the way individuals speak is sometimes different from the way they believe they do. Even native speakers' intuition about their own pragmatic use of language is not always accurate because language is often used unconsciously and automatically (Bardovi-Harlig, Hartford, Mahan-Taylor, Morgan, & Reynolds, 1991; Boxer & Pickering, 1995; Rose & Kasper, 2001; Schmidt, 1993). Therefore, it is more important to make use of findings from empirical studies in order to better inform instructional input for the learner of the language. But what does it really mean to use empirically-based content in a pragmatics curriculum? In the case of English and Japanese, a series of speech acts (such as requests, refusals, compliments, responses to compliments, apologies, and thanks) have been investigated in a number of cross-cultural and inter language pragmatics studies which have highlighted similarities and differences in speech act realization in the two languages. Complete descriptions and examples of these similarities and differences can be viewed in an on-line database on speech acts (http://www.carla.umn.edu/speechacts/) designed for teachers, researchers, curriculum writers. To illustrate a few of the empirical underpinnings, here are four features of Japanese speech acts in contrast with English: (1) directness/indirectness in requests as being largely dependent on the relative status of the interlocutor (Nakagawa, 1997; Rinnert & Kobayashi, 1999; Rose & Ono, 1995); (2) variation relative to age, status, and familiarity with the interlocutor rather than the intensity of the speech act (e.g., severity of imposition) (Baba & Lian, 1992; Hill, Ide, Ikuta, Kawasaki, & Ogino, 1986; Mizutani, 1985, 1989; Sasaki 1995); (3) the selection of reasons to use in a refusal in light of who the interlocutor is (Ikoma & Shimura, 1993; Kawate-Mierzejewska, 2002; Laohaburanakit, 1995; Moriyama, 1990; Naitou, 1997); and (4) a tendency to deflect or reject a compliment (Barnlund & Araki, 1985; Daikuhara, 1986; Koike, 2000; Terao, 1996; Yokota, 1986

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Learners of a language can have all of the grammatical forms and lexical items and still fail completely at conveying their message because they lack necessary pragmatic or functional information to communicate their intent (see Wolfson, 1989). The literature on language learning has begun to focus on strategies for teaching speech acts (or more specifically, speech act sets, to emphasize our more discoursal approach) to second language learners (see, for instance, Bardovi-Harlig & Mayhan-Taylor, 2003). While this trend is encouraging, we have seen little parallel focus on the strategies for learning and using speech acts, especially speech act of compliment through data- based instruction and learning. One the most important areas of language instruction are that of in stilling within learners a sense of appropriate language behavior, and especially speech act behavior. The present study wants to provide another alternative for EFL learners for improving their pragmatic use of speech act of compliment in EFL settings by using web- based instruction.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

Participants

The participants in this study were 60 Iranian college students at the Azad University of Tonekabon, who agreed to participate in the study and the majority of whom were females. They were all English students who had been studying English at the university for three and a half years with a mean age of 21. The participants made up two intact classes, taught by the researchers, which were randomly assigned to two groups, namely experimental group (30 students), and a control group (30 students). The participants had different levels of language proficiency.

Design

A quasi-experimental, pretest/posttest design was adopted for the purposes of this study comparing those who studied web-based speech act material with those who did not. Because of the large sample size, discourse completion tests (DCT) were employed to elicit the main data in the pretest and posttest sessions.

Procedures

Six intact classes took part in this study. An Oxford Placement Test (OPT) was administered with 50 questions and scores above 25 were selected for the purpose of this study. Sixty out of one hundred students were selected, randomly assigned to two groups (i.e., one experimental and one control group).The treatment started and lasted for one semester. The control group practiced the speech act of compliment through "Speech Act Strategy Inventory" (Cohen and Ishihara, 1993) that is constructed for general use of strategies specifically for learning and using speech acts in a second/foreign language. The experimental group used www.iles.umn.edu/introspeechacts website by Ishihara (2005). Then a post- test of DCT was administered. The results were compared through Paired and Independent Sample T- test to see whether there was any difference.

Materials

These research materials were used in this study:

1. The grammar section of Oxford Placement Test (OPT) (Allan, 2004) for selecting the subjects of the study.
2. DTC test as the pre- test and post- test of the study.
3. The Speech Act Strategy Inventory (Cohen & Ishihara, 2003) was specially constructed for this study and was tailored to investigate learners' general use of strategies specifically for learning and using speech acts in a second/foreign language.
4. Ishihara's Websites for web- based instructions. (http://www.carla.umn.edu/speechacts/.) and (www.iles.umn.edu/introspeechacts)

Statistical analysis

All data collected for this study were analyzed quantitatively and were entered and analyzed using Statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) Version16. Descriptive statistics were calculated for all variables. Numerical variables were summarized as a mean, ±SD, and variance. Inferential statistics were also calculated through paired sample T- test to see whether there was any improvement from pre- test to post- test between groups and Independent sample T-test for investigating the effect of treatment.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Findings

This section is oriented towards the descriptively and inferentially statistical analysis of the quantitative data and findings gathered through two major instruments of the present research study (that is, the pretest and posttest in the two independent groups of the study). The analysis was performed in the light of two different but related branches of statistics: descriptive and inferential statistics. Each will be presented and discussed below.

Descriptive Statistics

The following two SPSS outputs represent the normal distribution of the scores gained on the pretest and posttest for the research groups.

Table1. Descriptive analysis of the pre-test scores of experimental and control group

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
preEx	13.5000	30	1.97833	.36119
preCon	13.1000	30	2.05695	.37555

Table 1 shows the descriptive analysis of pre-test scores of experimental group and control group. In the output presented above, there are 30 participants. The mean, standard deviation and SEM of both groups are shown. As the table says, there is no significant difference between the pre- test scores of both groups.

Table 2. Descriptive analysis of the pre-test scores of experimental and control group

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	preCon	13.2667	30	2.08332	.38036
	Post Ex	14.13	30	2.01	.367

Table 2 shows the descriptive analysis of post- test scores of experimental group and control group. There are 30 participants the mean; standard deviation and SEM of both groups are shown. Both groups seem to have a mean difference to each other. This means that the two groups are at different level of ability after treatment.

Inferential Statistics

Having calculated the descriptive statistics based on the participants' scores on the pretest and posttest, the researcher conducted some other data analysis statistical methods including the Paired Samples T-Te stand the Independent Sample T-Test to answer the research questions. The results of the each method will be presented and described below and discussed in the subsequent part.

Table 3. Paired Samples Correlations between pre- test and post- test scores of experimental group

		N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1	preEx & postEx	30	.658	.000

This table is the second output of the T-Test. The closer the significance value to zero, the more easily the H0 can be rejected. The Sig. value (..000.) is below 0.05 (the level of error the researcher set for the present study, so the H0 (that is, there is a significant correlation between the two variables) should be treated with caution. Therefore, it can safely be claimed that the null hypothesis is rejected; there is no significant correlation between the two variables. The correlation and the significance values in the table above show that there is a low level of correlation between the scores yielded on the pretest to the posttest in the EG. That is to say, the pretest scores are statistically different from or lower, in value, than the posttest scores.

Table 4. Paired Samples Correlations between pre-test and post-test scores of control group

		N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1	preCon & posCon	30	.275	.141

Table 4 is the second output of the T-Test. On the basis of the significance value (Sig. > .05), the H1 is accepted and it can be claimed that there is a significant correlation between the two variables. In other words, there is a strong positive correlation between the pretest and posttest scores. How they performed on the first test was correlated with as their performance on the posttest. They did not exhibit significantly different improvement from the pretest to the posttest of the study. This finding will help answer the third research question.

Table 5. Paired Samples Test of pre-test and post-test scores of control group

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	preCon - postCon	-.63333	1.65015	0.30127	-1.24951	-.01716	-2.102	29	.044

Table 5 represents the results of the T-Test for the CON group of the study. As it is clear, it shows the comparison made between the pretest and the posttest mean scores for the CON. The purpose of this comparison is to find out whether the participants in the CON made changes in their after GO training, and if so, how much change they underwent after the treatment. To the right of the Paired Differences, the T (-2.1), degrees of freedom (29), and significance (.044) are represented. Although the p-value is below 0.05, but the significance value is not statistically significant. There is not a great difference between pre-test and post-test scores.

Table 6 is based on the results of the T-Test for the EG of the study showing the comparison between the pretest and the posttest mean scores of the CG of the study. They are compared to determine the change level the participants in the group made achieved after the training. The T (.366), degrees of freedom (30), and significance (.717) help reject the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference between the means of the two variables. Here, it is seen that the significance value is statistically significant. That there is difference between pre-test and post-test scores meaning that the Non-GO training did help those who received it to enhance their performance.

Table 6. Paired Samples Test of pre-test and post-test scores of experimental group

		Paired Differences					*t*	*df*	*Sig.(2-tailed)*
		Mean	*Std. Deviation*	*Std. Error Mean*	*95% Confidence Interval of the Difference*				
					Lower	*Upper*			
Pair 1	preEx-posEx	.16667	2.49252	.45507	-.76405	1.09739	.366	29	.717

Table 7. Group Statistics of post-test scores of experimental and control group

	web	*N*	*Mean*	*Std. Deviation*	*Std. Error Mean*
compliment	+ex	30	14.1333	2.01260	.36745
	2	30	13.1333	2.02967	.37056

Table 8. Independent Samples Test analysis of the post-test scores of experimental and control group of the study

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		*t-test for Equality of Means*						
	F	*Sig.*	*T*	*df*	*Sig. (2-tailed)*	*Mean Difference*	*Std. Error Difference*	*95% Confidence Interval of the Difference*	
								Lower	*Upper*
Equal variances not assumed	.001	.974	1.916	57.996	.060	1.00000	.52186	-.04462	2.04462

As seen in the table above, T value is 1.91. There exists 57.99 degrees of freedom. The Sig. value in the t-value for equality of means equals (..06).The observed T is less than the critical T that is 2. Therefore, the null hypothesis the means of the two groups are not significantly different is rejected and it can safely be stated that there is a significant difference between the experimental and control groups in terms of their performance on the posttest on reading comprehension ability. Students who took the GO training had significantly higher performance than those who took no treatment.

DISCUSSION

This study compared the effect of Web- based Instruction on Learning of speech act of compliment with strategy training for pragmatic use of a foreign language on advanced Iranian EFL. The results of the study show that the group who received web- based instruction did much better than the group received formal strategy training. This indicates that experimental group learned and remembered more compliments than teacher-led groups. The success of the experimental group in terms of compliment achievement might be explained with the following factors .First, learners had control over their learning process

and learned at their own pace during the implementation of study. This individualized learning might have enhanced learners' motivation (Lee, 2000; McGreal ,1998). Thus, students' motivation might have facilitated their learning .Second, one to one interaction between a student and the computer might have facilitated students' achievement. Web-based instruction made the students actively involved in the learning process and the computer program provided kind of feedback and opportunity to correct their mistakes. Students' activities and answers were only seen by them. Hence, students might have had lots of activities without fear of making mistakes. This situation may have contributed to having low affective-filter environment that facilitates language learning (Krashen, 1982) .The other possible reason may be the lively environment and the animation that the program provided the students with. And finally, the findings of the study point to the facilitating effect of web-based instruction on speech act learning. This result is in line with the findings of previous researches that indicate the facilitating effect of web- based instruction on learning the speech act of compliment.

CONCLUSION

The teaching of speech acts so vitally involves both language and culture that interactions using them may have a high impact. In other words, it may be crucial for language learners to be shown that they cannot just transfer their native language and culture approaches to performing a given speech act into the L2 situation. And especially in high-stakes situations, the appropriate use of a compliment may make a difference between obtaining the desired results in that speech community or not. Many learners in this study were most grateful that these differences were pointed out to them and in a most rigorous way. It would remain for a wider spectrum of language teachers to "buy into" this view and to consider accommodating the web- based instruction of such pragmatic information within their course syllabus, and for curriculum writers and technology experts to enhance the delivery of such programs to facilitate their use by learners.

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