

The Use of Pragmatics in E-mail Requests Made by Second Language Learners of English

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Abstract

The current paper provides results of a study that investigated the usage of pragmatics by non-native speakers (NNSs) of English when making e-mail requests. Initial data from the study show that NNSs differ from native speakers (NSs) in politeness and perlocution (i.e., the effect that an utterance has on its recipient) of their English e-mail requests. The data also show that NNSs and NSs differ in the specific pragmatic strategies related to structure and content used in their e-mail requests. Additional data from this study indicates that explicit instruction can positively affect the perlocution of NNS e-mail requests and the long-term usage of pragmatic features found in the e-mail messages of NNSs, although the greatest effect is observed in the appropriate usage of structural features. The results of this study support the need for instruction of e-mail pragmatics to second language learners and reveal the possible benefits of such instruction.

1. Introduction

Over the past decade, researchers have become increasingly interested in examining the usage of e-mail by second language learners. Early studies looked at the effective use of e-mail in instructional settings (Warschauer, 1995; St. John & Cash, 1995). Additional studies addressed the use of e-mail in institutional settings, such as business (Inglis, 1998; Gaines, 1999) and academia (Gaines, 1999; Lan, 2000). More recently, researchers have directed their attention to the pragmatics of e-mail messages (Hartford & Bardovi-Harlig, 1996; Weasenforth & Biesenbach-Lucas, 2000; Chen, 2001), although no attention to date has been paid to the instruction of e-mail pragmatics.

This study hopes to contribute to the latter body of research by reporting results of a study that examined the pragmatics of e-mail requests made by non-native speakers (NNSs) of English in an instructional setting. In the ensuing paper, I begin by providing a review of the literature most relevant to the current study. Afterwards, I describe the research methodology used during the project, including the participants, the study design, and data coding. Finally, I present and discuss some of the data gathered over the course of the research period, focusing on pragmatic differences between NNSs and native speakers (NSs) of English, and the

effects of instructing NNSs on the correct usage of e-mail pragmatics in English.

2. Background

2.1 Pragmatic development and ESL

Numerous language researchers have looked into the development of pragmatics in a second language, particularly in English (see for example, Kasper & Blum-Kulka, 1993). A consistent theme across the various studies related to pragmatic development and ESL is that pragmatics can and should be taught: pragmatics *should* be taught because it does not appear to be easily transferable from first language (L1) to second language (L2) (Kasper, 1992); pragmatics *should* be taught because this will raise awareness of appropriate language use, which has been shown to aid in language development (Schmidt, 1993); and pragmatics *can* be taught, as is evidenced by a number of studies of classroom language learning and instruction (see for example, Wishnoff, 2000). Bardovi-Harlig (2001) reached the same conclusions in her extensive review of the empirical evidence from research of L2 pragmatic production, judgment, perception, competence, and proficiency. This theme is essential to the overall conceptualization of my study and constitutes the theoretical foundation of this line of research.

Motivated by the initial research that examined interlanguage development, many in the field of interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) have applied the theories proposed by this previous SLA research to the instruction of pragmatics in the classroom setting (see for example Kasper & Rose, 2001). Several studies (Rose, 1994; House, 1996; Hall, 1999) have focused on developing awareness of pragmatics through explicit instruction. Their results generally support the notion that pragmatic development can be enhanced through explicit awareness-raising techniques. Many other studies have compared implicit and explicit instruction of pragmatics in the ESL setting. Takahashi (2001), Tateyama (2001), and Yoshimi (2001) each found explicit instruction of pragmatic features to have a greater effect on pragmatic competence than implicit instruction. In consideration of such positive findings from previous research, it appears that explicit instruction does in fact assist pragmatic development in second language learners. This conclusion provides further motivation and rationale for my study.

2.2 Requests and ESL

One of the most frequently occurring speech acts across cultures, and one of the most researched as well, is the request. Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper (1989) devoted a large portion of their edited volume to studying the pragmatics of the request speech act. Through their research, they

developed a process for designing appropriate data elicitation tests and created a detailed coding manual to assist in analyzing discourse data.

A number of researchers have investigated the performance of English requests by a specific cultural group: Kitao (1990) looked at Japanese learners of EFL, Trosborg (1995) studied Danish learners of EFL, Kim (1995) examined Korean learners of EFL, and Kim (2000) analyzed Korean learners of ESL. Each of these researchers found evidence of negative transfer of L1 pragmatics and concluded with the need for explicit instruction in making English requests. Kasange (1998) had the same findings in a study of ESL students at an English university. Conversely, Suh (1999) investigated Korean ESL learners at an American university and found no evidence of negative L1 transfer of pragmatics with regards to the request speech act.

In quite a different approach to researching the pragmatic development of requesting in English, Li (2000) conducted an ethnographic case study of a female ESL learner in a workplace environment in Canada and found that her pragmatic development came about mainly through language socialization with her coworkers.

An interesting investigation by Schmidt (1994) compared actual request data gathered at service counters to request lessons found in four popular ESL textbooks. Schmidt's results showed that textbooks were deficient in the range of real-world request types and in the explanations of the request types given.

Additional work in this area of pragmatics research has focused on the instruction of requests. Rose (1999) provided a report of the successful instruction of requests to students in Hong Kong using pragmatic consciousness-raising (PCR) techniques. Rose defines PCR as

...an inductive approach to developing awareness of how language forms are used appropriately in context. The aim is not to teach explicitly the various means of... performing a given speech act... but, rather, to expose learners to the pragmatic aspects of language... and provide them with the analytical tools they need to arrive at their own generalizations concerning contextually appropriate language use. (p. 171)

With such a definition, Rose further explains that PCR is a process in which pragmatic awareness is raised first by introducing students to a particular pragmatic feature, then by activating students' L1 knowledge of the pragmatic feature, and finally by analyzing English data for the same pragmatic feature. Through such a process, students will become aware of "both the pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic aspects of English" as they develop "analytic abilities that they can apply to future language learning" (Rose, 1999:180). This approach to raising pragmatic awareness will

influence the treatment design of my study.

2.3 E-mail pragmatics

With the development of the Internet, increased attention has been given to the use of pragmatics in computer-mediated communication (CMC). Since Shea (1994) first presented her principles of business “netiquette” (a blend of the words *network* and *etiquette*), which are basic rules and guidelines for behaving and interacting via CMC, several others (Hambridge, 1995; Rinaldi, 1998) have further developed and applied netiquette principles to the full range of possible CMC purposes, from formal (e.g., business e-mail, academic discussion boards) to informal (e.g., personal e-mail, Internet “fan-club” chat rooms). At this point in time, netiquette guidelines have become conventionalized and are publicized wherever CMC may take place, from office settings to Internet cafés; they have even found their way into ESL textbooks (e.g., Swales and Feak, 1994; Hacker, 2003) and onto university writing web sites (e.g., Hughes, 2002; Essid, 2003).

The line of research most directly relevant to my study are the handful of reports that investigate the pragmatics of e-mail requests in the ESL environment. Of particular interest to my study is the report by Hartford and Bardovi-Harlig (1996), who analyzed for perlocutionary effect e-mail requests sent by NS and NNS graduate students to professors. They concluded that, in general, NNS e-mails did not adequately address imposition, which negatively affected perlocution (i.e., the effect that an utterance has on its recipient). In addition, NNS messages contained fewer downgraders and other mitigating supportive moves such as grounders and apologies, which negatively affected the impact of the requests. Weasenforth and Biesenbach-Lucas (2000) analyzed variation between graduate NSs and NNSs of English in their e-mail requests to faculty. These researchers also found that NNSs employed pragmatic strategies that negatively affected the perlocution of their English e-mail requests. Chen (2001) analyzed and compared e-mail requests sent by Taiwanese and U.S. graduate students to their professors. She concluded that the Taiwanese students used different request strategies than the U.S. students due to culturally different perceptions of power relations, familiarity, and imposition. This study illuminates the possibility of divergent culture-specific pragmatic strategies employed by even advanced-level ESL students when making e-mail requests in the academic setting.

2.4 Instruction of e-mail pragmatics

At this point in time, e-mail pragmatics in the ESL setting remains largely under-researched. While important groundwork has been done to

investigate cross-cultural differences evident in e-mail pragmatics, the effects of instruction in e-mail pragmatics remains virtually untouched.

Consistent with the absence of research into the effects of instruction in e-mail pragmatics, there is also a shortage of pedagogical materials devoted to the systematic instruction of the pragmatics of e-mail communication in the ESL context. Various textbooks of academic writing for ESL students (see for example Swales & Feak, 2000) provide very brief sections on e-mail usage that focus primarily on formal and functional rules for the university setting. Probably the most comprehensive Internet site devoted to English writing, OWL at Purdue University (<http://owl.english.purdue.edu>), devotes minimal attention to e-mail pragmatics, and even then, it is targeted to NSs of English and provides no mention of miscommunications or violations that may arise due to cross-cultural differences in pragmatics (Hughes, 2002). However, on the bright side, Ford (2003), Mach and Ridder (In Press), and Weasenforth (In Press) each have developed lessons and materials devoted to issues of e-mail pragmatics in the ESL environment, particularly in academia.

3. Research Questions

Drawing from the preceding literature review, the following research questions guided the current study:

1. Is there a difference between the perlocution of NS and NNS English e-mail requests?
2. What are the differences between the pragmatic features of NS and NNS English e-mail requests?
3. What are the effects of instruction to NNSs in the usage of appropriate pragmatic features when making e-mail requests?

4. Methodology

4.1 Participants

Over the course of the 2002-2003 academic year, I completed a study in which I investigated the usage of e-mail pragmatics. I conducted this study in my own two sections of ELI 100, the advanced-level writing course for undergraduate ESL students at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa. My particular sections met three days per week in 50-minute class sessions. Qualitatively, there seemed to be no differences between the two sections: they both met during the morning, they both contained approximately the same numbers of students, and they both utilized the same textbook and instructional materials.

Over the two semesters, I gathered complete data sets from a total of 15 NNS students. Data from an additional 10 students were incomplete, missing at least one message each, and were therefore excluded from this

study. Student backgrounds included one Korean, one Mandarin, one Tagalog, three Cantonese, and nine Japanese. However, in the following analysis and discussion section, I do not consider cultural differences in pragmatic usage, for cultural differences do not seem relevant at this stage in my analysis of effects of instruction.

At the beginning of each semester, these students indicated on a general course questionnaire that they frequently used computers and e-mail programs, and that they had never received any formal instruction in either computer or e-mail usage. Each of the students also supplied a valid e-mail address for the purposes of communication outside of classroom instruction time.

In addition to the student e-mail messages, 29 English NSs were asked to complete the same e-mail task as the study pre-test. These messages served as baseline data for comparison of perlocution, politeness, and the use of e-mail pragmatic features between NSs and NNSs.

4.2 Research design

Pre-test. The study relied on a quasi-experimental design that included a pre-test, treatment, immediate post-test, and delayed post-test design. The pre-test was administered during the third week of each semester. It consisted of the following task:

Pretend that I'm a professor, Dr. Ford, one of your teachers of a course within your major. Write me an e-mail message asking me to extend the due date for a paper that's due soon. Provide me an adequate reason, and convince me that I should grant your request. Give me any other information that you think would help me accept your excuse. Use proper form and language throughout your message. Send your message to me the day before our next class.

My students were given this assignment in class and were told to complete the task before the next class meeting. They were provided with no additional instructions about the assignment.

When designing the prompt, I decided to have the students address a professor of a course within their major under the assumption that this may help the students become more personally connected to the prompt, which may result in a serious, well-thought-out message. Furthermore, I specified that the students should provide an adequate reason and additional information, and use proper form and language because I wanted the students to understand that this was a real, serious assignment. The specificity of the prompt was an attempt to ensure that the students would not submit a minimal message written a few minutes before class, but

instead would submit a message written after careful thought and planning, as would be the case in real life if writing a request to a real professor.

Treatment. The very next class session was held in a campus computer lab. The students were presented with a lecture based on rules of netiquette via my personal web site (<http://www2.hawaii.edu/~sford>) with the goal of understanding how netiquette guidelines will help to make e-mail messages more acceptable and effective. After a brief introduction to netiquette principles, we talked about how these principles could be applied to different CMC situations, particularly ones that the students could encounter in their academic careers. Next, the students examined examples of poorly constructed e-mail requests. We discussed the elements that made the e-mail messages poor and ways to improve them, while reflecting of the netiquette guidelines. In doing so, aspects of perlocution and politeness were discussed rather cursorily. Lastly, students viewed additional web sites on the Internet devoted to netiquette, specifically Shea's (1994) "Netiquette" page, Rinaldi's (1998) "The Net: User Guidelines and Netiquette" page, and Hambridge's (1995) "RFC 1855: Netiquette Guidelines" page. This was done to raise further awareness of e-mail pragmatics as an issue that extends far beyond the classroom and computer lab and applies to the entire Internet community. This lesson filled the full 50-minute class period and constituted the entire treatment.

Post-tests. As their homework assignment due before the next class session, students were required to resubmit their previous e-mail requests based on what they had learned from the netiquette lesson. This comprised the immediate post-test portion of the study. During the remainder of each semester, no classroom time or otherwise was spent on issues related to e-mail pragmatics. The delayed post-test was administered during finals week, a full 12 weeks after treatment. The task of the delayed post-test was a very similar assignment used for the pre- and immediate post-tests, also administered as a homework assignment. The assignment differed from the previous prompt only in that it asked students to request an extension of the due date of the final course paper. This change was made in an attempt to make the assignment more realistic, since the delayed post-test was administered during finals week, when the students were actually thinking about these matters in their school lives.

Data coding. After data was gathered, I coded each e-mail message onto a separate coding form that I developed, based on Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper (1989) and Shea (1994) (see Appendix A). Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper (1989) provide an elaborate coding scheme developed for the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP) for analyzing requests. Following the CCSARP coding manual, analysis of requests includes three distinct stages: 1) identification of the *head act*, which is the

minimum segment that constitutes the actual request; 2) identification of non-essential elements that modify the head act internally; and 3) identification of non-essential elements relevant yet external to the head act. Together these parts contribute to a thorough analysis of a given request. For purposes of my study, I combine the coding scheme of the CCSARP with required aspects of formal e-mail messages as discussed by Shea (1994) to develop an original coding scheme for formal e-mail requests.

Additionally, the scope of the coding scheme was adjusted for the lengthier stream of discourse of the e-mail messages that were gathered by the task-based performance assessment in the current study instead of the single utterances gathered by discourse completion tasks (DCTs), for which the CCSARP was originally designed. Therefore, the coding form has separate sections for recording the tracking number of the e-mail message, the number of requests found in the message, the specific request head act(s) of the message, the length of the message, the formal features of netiquette found in the message and the acceptability-level of each feature used, the pragmatic features of the request(s) found in the message, and overall ratings for perlocutionary effect and politeness level of the message.

The rating for perlocutionary effect is based on a 5-point scale ranging from least acceptable to most acceptable, and concerns the likelihood that the receiver would accept the request:

Rating-	Perlocutionary Effect-
1	Least Acceptable
2	Less Acceptable
3	Acceptable
4	More Acceptable
5	Most Acceptable

This 5-point scale was decided due to its ability to allow for comparisons and slight differences in ratings across messages, while at the same time allowing for manageable analysis. The scale requires the rater to make a holistic judgment about the acceptability of a message based on experience and pragmatic intuition. Factors affecting judgment include an adequately formed request, an appropriate level of politeness, and an adequate use of downgraders and positive supportive moves. At one end of the scale, a rating of "Least Acceptable" would indicate a high likelihood that the recipient of the message would not accept the request. At the center of the scale, a rating of "Acceptable" would indicate that the request in the message would probably be accepted by the recipient. At the other end of the scale, a rating of "Most Acceptable" would indicate a high likelihood that the recipient of the message would accept the request. As with the politeness rating scale, points 2 and 4 allow for slight differences in

perlocutionary effect, depending on specific strategies employed in individual messages.

The rating for politeness is based on a 5-point scale ranging from impolite to overly polite, and concerns the level of overall formality perceived by the receiver:

Rating-	Politeness Level-
1	Very Impolite
2	Slightly Impolite
3	Polite
4	Too Polite
5	Overly Polite

This 5-point scale was decided for the same reasons as the perlocutionary effect rating scale discussed previously. At one end of the scale, “Very Impolite” messages would be ones that are very brief and terse, are demanding, are insulting, or are otherwise perceived as rude. At the other end of the scale, “Overly Polite” messages would be ones that contain inappropriate uses of politeness markers, complements, or expressions of gratitude. At the center of the scale, “Polite” messages would be those that follow netiquette guidelines by briefly stating a purpose, asking a request, providing only necessary details, and thanking the recipient, without discussing personal issues or qualities (Shea, 1994; Rinaldi, 1998). Points 2 and 4 allow for slight differences in politeness, depending on specific strategies employed in individual messages.

After collecting all of the study data, I coded and rated each message, using the data coding form discussed previously (see Appendix A). Additionally, 20% of the data, selected at random, was coded by a colleague from my same department, who was experienced with teaching students in the same course. This same colleague also rated 100% of the study data for perlocution and politeness. Regarding data coding, the reliability between the two codings was 73%, which is rather low; however, considering that the coding form includes 43 separate categories, the data messages averaged 122 words in length, and the colleague received very little training, this reliability is acceptable for my purposes in this study. Regarding data rating reliability, the results were much better, with 86% reliability for perlocution ratings and 89% reliability for politeness ratings. In the following data analysis, I focus on my coding and ratings of the data only.

5. Results and Discussion

Throughout the course of the research project, I gathered a total of 74 e-mail requests for data analysis: 45 from the 15 NNSs in the form of pre-,

immediate post-, and delayed post-tests, and 29 from the NSs as baseline data. Due to limited space, I will focus on my research questions.

Is there a difference between the perlocution of NS and NNS English e-mail requests?

Across the data set, NSs were rated on average just slightly above “acceptable” for perlocution, while NNSs were rated a full point below NSs, in the “unacceptable” range, on their pre-test e-mail messages. Table 1 below shows descriptive statistics of the e-mail perlocution ratings.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Perlocution

	N	M	SD	MIN	MAX
NS	29	3.14	0.74	2.00	4.00
NNS	15	2.20	0.68	1.00	3.00

This initial analysis shows that the NNSs tend to produce less acceptable English e-mail requests, and it also confirms previous work by Hartford and Bardovi-Harlig (1996) and Chen (2001) who had the same findings.

Examples 1 and 2 below are provided as representative of NS and NNS e-mail requests gathered for this study.

Example 1: NS e-mail request

From Native Speaker <ns@hawaii.edu>
To sford@hawaii.edu
Subject From a student in your 550 class

Hi Professor Ford,
this is from Native Speaker, a student in your History 550 class. I am writing to you in regard to the paper due next Monday. I would like to be given an extension until Wednesday if possible. On Sunday, I had to take my younger brother to the emergency room after he was injured playing tennis. We were at the hospital all day, and I wasn’t able to finish my paper. I know your policy is not to grant extensions, but I was hoping you’d understand my circumstances. I couldn’t foresee this emergency. I’d gladly supply you with supporting documentaion. I understand you might not be able to do this, but if you could, I’d greatly appreciate it.
Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,
Native Speaker

Example 2: NNS e-mail request

From Nonnas Peaker <nns@hawaii.edu>
To sford@hawaii.edu
Subject

Dear Prof.Ford,

I have a request on the homework assignment that you assigned to us which must due on Monday. One of my close relative has gotten into a car accident yesterday night and she's in a critical condition. I was the only close relative that she has in Hawaii. Since I have to take care of her until she gets better, I have not enough of time to do the assignment. Thus, could you extend the due date of that assignment, please? I have to apologize that I have such as unreasonable request; however, she really needs my help at this time. Please give me time to finish up.

Thank you very much!

Sincerely,

Your Student,

Nonnas Peaker

Each of these examples was judged the same by the two raters, hence their inclusion as representative data (note that the NNS message is from the pre-test). Example 1 was rated “4- More Acceptable” for perlocution and “3- Polite” for politeness. Example 2 was rated “3- Acceptable” for perlocution and “4- Too Polite” for politeness. Although their ratings were similar, it is obvious that the pragmatic strategies employed in forming these two messages are quite different. To begin with, whereas the NS includes a subject in the subject field of the message, the NNS does not, which is a violation of netiquette guidelines. Secondly, whereas the NS provides identification, the NNS does not. This is also a violation of netiquette guidelines. Additionally, whereas the NS forms the request in a ‘preparator – request statement – grounder’ fashion, the NNS forms the request in a ‘preparator – grounder – request question’ fashion. This NS request pattern is the prototypical NS pattern found in the data set. Lastly, the NNS message contains politeness and upgrader features discussed in the following section, whereas the NS message does not. Altogether, these differences in pragmatic strategies contribute to the differences in ratings between the NS and NNS messages.

What are the differences between the pragmatic features of NS and NNS e-mail requests?

One of the most noticeable differences between the pragmatic features of NS and NNS e-mail requests has to do with level of politeness. Table 2 below shows descriptive statistics of the e-mail politeness ratings.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Politeness

	N	M	SD	MIN	MAX
NS	29	3.07	0.65	2.00	4.00
NNS	45	3.42	0.78	2.00	5.00

NSs were rated just average overall for politeness – not impolite and not too polite. However, across all of the NNS messages (pre-test, post-test, and delayed post-test), they were rated above average for politeness by nearly a half of a point. This may not seem like much of a difference, but it does show that NNSs tend to produce e-mail requests that may be interpreted as too polite, a feature which may affect the perlocution of the message. Specific pragmatic features employed by the NNSs and not by the NSs, which may affect politeness, include complements, expressions of gratitude, and repeated uses of politeness markers (e.g., “please”). This finding is consistent with the research by Chen (2001) discussed previously, who, as a result, concluded that NNS over-politeness in e-mail requests is due to cultural transfer. This point should be considered for future instructional designs of e-mail pragmatics materials and lessons.

Another interesting finding regarding the differences between the pragmatic features of NS and NNS e-mail requests has to do with the use of upgraders in the e-mail messages. Upgraders are negative pragmatic devices that serve to increase the impact of the request and, therefore, may reduce the perlocution of the message. Following Netiquette guidelines (Shea, 1994; Hambridge, 1995; Rinaldi, 1998; Hughes, 2002), use of expletives, repetitions, exclamation points, time intensifiers, and all-capital letters are considered inappropriate features of formal e-mail messages and should be avoided. Within the entire NS data set, not one upgrader is used. On the other hand, NNSs make use of orthographic upgraders (exclamation points and all-capital letters) 11 times, three of them used in one message alone. Examples of orthographic upgraders used by NNSs are “EMERGENCY!” found in the subject heading of one message, “Hi!” found in the introductions of several messages, as well as “Thank you!” found in the closings of several more messages. Additionally, several NNSs use time intensifiers such as “ASAP”, and the repetition-of-request strategy, which also serve as message upgraders.

What are the effects of instruction in the usage of appropriate pragmatic features when making e-mail requests?

By analyzing the NNS pre-, immediate-post, and delayed-post-test

messages, it is evident that there were positive effects of instruction maintained over time. Regarding perlocution of the e-mail requests, a one-way repeated-measures ANOVA was performed to test for significant treatment effect, and a Scheffe post-hoc test was done to locate the significance (see Table 3 and Figure 1). Results of this analysis indicate that NNS messages increase significantly by a half of a point in their perlocution on the immediate-post-test, approaching “acceptable” on average. On the delayed-post-test, NNS messages maintain an increase in perlocution, although down from the immediate-post-test level and with no significance to the pre-test level.

Table 3. Results of One-Way Repeated-Measures ANOVA: Effect of Instructional Treatment on Perlocution

<i>Source</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>
Between Tests	2.311	2	1.156	3.753*
Within Tests	12.933	42	.308	

Note: * $p < .05$

As can be seen in Figure 1, although NNSs e-mail requests increase in perlocution, by the delayed-post-test they are still below average acceptability and below the NS average of 3.14. This finding suggests the need for more instruction on pragmatic strategies to increase the perlocution of e-mail requests and to maintain it over time. One suggestion for doing this is to include CMC pragmatics as a competency in the academic writing curriculum and to provide a more comprehensive pragmatic analysis to include several different types of speech acts, such as apology and information exchange, in addition to requests. By doing so, instructional time for e-mail pragmatics would be extended throughout the semester, giving students many opportunities to practice writing strategies that are becoming more useful, and even necessary, in academic settings.

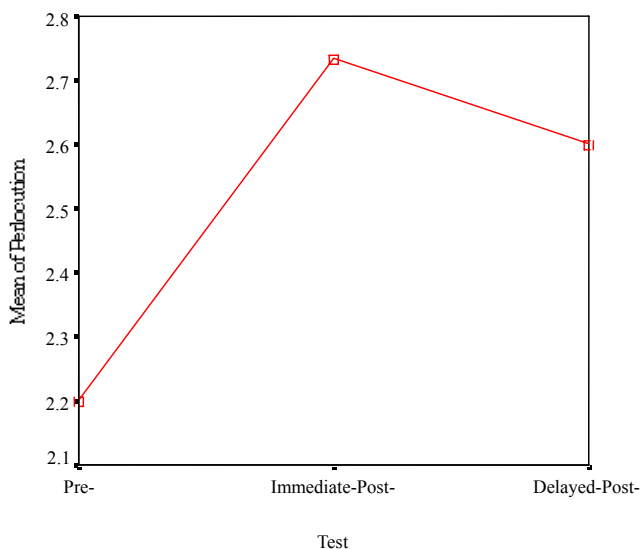


Figure 1. Effect of instruction on perlocution

A further point to note regarding effects of instruction has to do with politeness. Rather than the NNSs lowering their level of politeness to a more average acceptability level, they actually increase their politeness after treatment and maintain it over time, although not at the level of the immediate post-test. Figure 2 below graphically represents this finding. In the treatment, politeness was not explicitly addressed as an issue to consider when making e-mail requests; however, NNSs use more politeness devices (e.g., “please”, “thank you”, “I am grateful”) after treatment than before. As found by previous researchers examining the acquisition of pragmatic forms (see for example Rose and Kasper, 2001), these politeness devices are generally the most explicit pragmatic forms taught and the earliest ones learned, and are rather salient in both spoken and written discourse, which may lead to their frequent use and, sometimes, overuse. It is possible that the students noticed politeness features of the poor e-mail messages analyzed during the treatment and concluded that these features were preferred since they were not discussed explicitly as incorrect or inappropriate. I tentatively suggest that the increase in use of politeness devices after treatment is due to an assumption by these NNSs that more politeness will lead to a greater likelihood of acceptance of the request.

Future research in this area should seek to confirm this hypothesis.

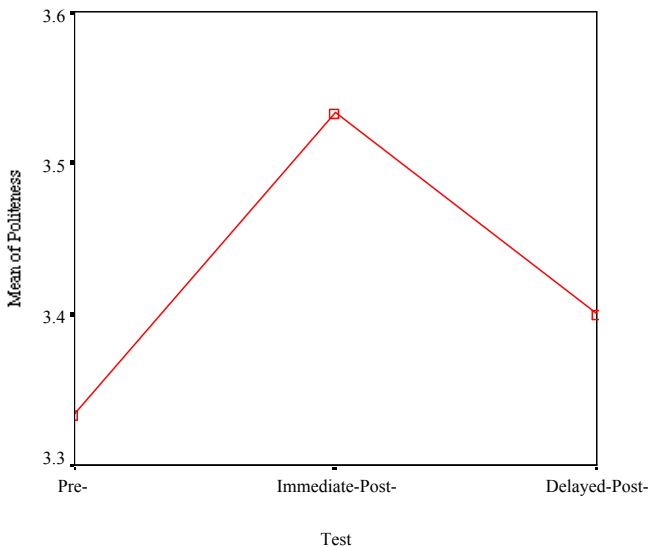


Figure 2. Effect of instruction on politeness

Additional effects of instruction found in the data are associated with structural and content features of the e-mail requests. NNSs increase their acceptable usage of structural features such as greeting, introduction, closing, and signature in their messages, which are all considered to be required e-mail message features under netiquette guidelines. Also, NNSs use more downgraders (e.g., downtoners) and supportive moves (e.g., preparators, grounders, disarmers) in their e-mail requests after treatment. These pragmatic devices are typically employed by speakers as additional content to support their requests and can positively impact the perlocution and politeness of requests when used appropriately. Overall, the usage of these structural and content features decreases just slightly on the delayed-post test from the levels found on the immediate-post test, remaining well above the pre-test levels. As a result, the use of these features seems to directly and positively affect the perlocution and politeness ratings of NNS e-mail messages after instruction.

6. Conclusion

This study investigated the usage of pragmatics by NNSs of English

when making e-mail requests. The study contributes to the body of research into e-mail pragmatics by showing first that NSs and NNSs of English differ greatly in the pragmatic strategies that they use when making e-mail requests, and second that e-mail pragmatic features are teachable to NNSs. Findings from the study indicate that NNSs tend to produce messages that are rated as too polite, and at the same time are judged to have low perlocutionary effect. Additional findings suggest that explicit instruction in e-mail pragmatics has a positive effect on the perlocution of e-mail messages, including the use of certain structural features and content pragmatic features. However, these same findings indicate that explicit instruction may result in the overuse of politeness features in e-mail messages.

This study was very limited in scope, containing a small number of participants, and examining only a few of the e-mail pragmatics features possible. However, it confirms in an instructional setting that e-mail pragmatics can and should be taught. In consideration of these findings, additional research should be done looking into the e-mail pragmatics of different types of speech acts, and instructors should consider ways to include the instruction of e-mail pragmatics in their curricula.

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Appendix A: Data Coding Form

DATA:	#	A	B	C	LENGTH OF MESSAGE				
					REQUESTS PER MESSAGE				
HEAD ACT(S):									
Primary-									
Secondary-									
EMAIL FEATURES	NA	LA	A	MA	PRAGMATIC FEATURES				
Subject heading					Alerters	Freq	Upgraders	Freq	Downgraders:
Salutation- greeting					title/role		expletive		Syntactic
recipient's title					surname		time intensifier		interrogative
recipient's name					first name		lexical uptoner		negation of prep.
punctuation					nickname		determination		subjunctive
Intro- sender's name					endearment		repetition of req.		conditional
affiliation					offensive		orthographic		aspect
Closing					pronoun		emphatic addition		tense
Signature					attention getter		pejorative determ.		conditional clause
Emoticons					Strategy	Freq	Supportive Mo	Freq	Downgraders:
Spelling					mood derivable		preparator		Lexical & Phra
Grammar					explicit perform		precommitment		politeness marker
OVERALL RATING					hedged perform		grounder		understater
Politeness	Perlocution		locution derivable		disarmer		hedge		
1. Very impolite	1. Least acceptable		want statement		promise of reward		subjectivizer		
2. Slightly impolite	2. Less acceptable		suggest. formula		imposition minim		downtoner		
3. Appropriate	3. Acceptable		preparatory		insult		cajoler		
4. Too polite	4. More acceptable		strong hint		threat		appealer		
5. Overly polite	5. Most acceptable		mild hint		moralizing				