THE EFFECTS OF INSTRUCTION ON CHINESE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' PRODUCTIONS OF COMPLAINT BEHAVIORS IN AMERICAN ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on efficacy of instruction in L2 complaints in an EFL classroom. There were eighty participants in this study, with two native groups (American and Chinese) serving as baseline groups, and two Chinese learner groups (high and low-proficiency) as experimental groups. The learners were asked to engage in pre- and post-DCT tasks, and their performances were then compared to the American and Chinese native-speaker productions to see if there were deviations from the native norm and if such deviations were a result of L1 transfer. The findings show that L1 transfer is closely related to L2 proficiency and that explicit instruction in semantic formulas, semantic content, and linguistic forms is beneficial to learners. We therefore conclude that instruction in L2 pragmatics should be implemented in an EFL classroom to enhance learners' pragmatic competence.

Key Words: complaint, interlanguage pragmatics, discourse completion test

INTRODUCTION

Language is a channel through which its speakers' beliefs and values are communicated. Learning a foreign language involves not only the acquisition of syntax, lexis, and native-like pronunciation, but also the acquisition of the social, cultural, and discourse conventions of the target language. However, the L1-L2 differences may increase the complexity and difficulty of learners' acquisition of situational appropriateness in L2 discourse. The growing interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) research has revealed that learners may have a good command of grammar and lexicon of the target language, but contextualize their interactions by transferring

the rhetorical strategies of their L1. In other words, learners' pragmatic development may not go hand in hand with their linguistic proficiency. Such lack of pragmatic proficiency is especially risky for more proficient learners, who are expected to use pragmatically appropriate language in general (Bardovi-Harlig, Hartford, Mahan-Taylor, Morgan, & Reynolds, 1991).

Therefore, an environment with rich, authentic language samples may help learners in the acquisition of L2 pragmatic conventions, but Schmidt (1993) points out that simple exposure to pragmatically appropriate language is not sufficient for language learners because they may not be able to notice and analyze relevant features inherent in L2 discoursal knowledge. His contention thus leaves considerable room for research on instructional effects in L2 pragmatics. The small body of intervention studies to date has indicated three major findings. First, there is ample evidence documenting the teachability of L2 pragmatic features, which include speech acts, discourse markers and strategies, and the like. Second, learners who receive instruction outperform those who do not. Finally, learners who receive explicit instruction outpace those who receive implicit instruction. To put it another way, the overall outcome of research into the efficacy of instruction has demonstrated that second language pragmatics is amenable to instruction and that without instruction, learners may not achieve native-like pragmatic competence. Nevertheless, these reports also note that certain aspects of the target language are resistant to instruction, which could be attributed to measurement types, length of instruction, relative difficulty of the target features and limitations in control of processing (Rose, 2005).

In an EFL environment like Taiwan, it is not easy for learners to surround themselves with a large amount of L2 input, so instruction in L2 pragmatics is important. Although studies have shown that Taiwanese learners differ from American in a narrow scope of well-defined speech acts like apology, compliment, compliment response, request, refusal and disagreement (cf., Chen & Chen, 2007; Lin & Chen, 2006; Yu, 1999, 2004), only a few studies have examined the efficacy of instruction at the pragmatic level (cf., Hu, 2004), which may be partially ascribed to the fact that L2 pragmatics is generally neglected in the language classroom (Rose, 2005; Yu, 2008). Therefore, a wide-open field for intervention studies exists. Based on the gaps in the existing literature, our study was designed to examine the aspects in which university students in Taiwan differed from the American participants in the US in the speech act of

complaining and the extent to which explicit instruction affected learners' knowledge and ability in employing these strategies. In addition, it was hoped that the findings thus obtained would shed light on suitable pedagogical action to be taken by language teachers.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Native and Non-Native Speakers' Speech Act Productions

The notion of pragmatic competence originated from the pioneering work on communicative competence by Hymes (1972), which describes an individual's ability to convey and interpret messages appropriately in communicative contexts within a given speech community. Following Hymes' notion of communicative competence, Bachman (1990) stated the concept of pragmatic competence, which deals with the function of language. For the past decades, interlanguage pragmatists have been focusing their attention on the extent to which learners' speech act behaviors differ from native speakers' productions under the same circumstances. Four main areas of pragmatic infelicities have been identified, which include choice of speech acts, semantic formulas[1], semantic content and linguistic forms (Bardovi-Harlig & Griffin, 2005).

In the choice of speech acts, learners may perform speech acts different from those produced by native speakers of the target language, or they may choose not to perform any speech act at all. In authentic academic interactions, Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (1993) reported that unlike the American graduate students, the nonnative students used more rejections than suggestions when scheduling their courses with advisors. Another example comes from Cohen and Olshtain's (1993) study, in which an Israeli learner of English did not offer an apology in the context where such an act is called for. Murphy and Neu (1996) also argued that American participants tended to complain to the teacher about an unfairly graded paper, while Korean learners of English tended to place the blame on the professor and make more criticisms. Even if learners use the same speech act as native speakers do in a given situation, they may use different formulas, which refer to the strategies used to represent a given speech act. For example, Olshtain and Cohen (1983) found that Hebrew learners of English did not express an apology or make an offer of repair as much as native speakers of English. Olshtain and Weinbach (1993) also pointed out that American and British learners of Hebrew preferred using

less severe strategies, while the Hebrew speakers preferred using more severe strategies in making complaints. Semantic content refers to the amount and type of information given by the speaker, which is another area where native-non-native differences can be identified. For instance, the Americans seemed to give specific excuses in their refusals, while the Japanese learners tended to provide excuses which are considered vague by American norms (Beebe, Takahashi, & Uliss-Weltz, 1990). In Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford's (1993) study, the non-native graduates were found to provide non-credible content in their rejections of the courses recommended by the advisor. Explanations such as "The course is too difficult" are not acceptable to the native speakers of English. Lastly, previous studies also reveal that it is not easy for non-native learners to use appropriate linguistic forms. Eisenstein and Bodman (1986) indicated extensive syntactic and lexical problems in the ESL learners' productions of gratitude. By examining the apology strategies produced by Danish learners of English, Trosborg (1987) found that the utterances of the learners were not as polite as those of native speakers because they used fewer modality markers.

Pragmatic Transfer

One of the most important reasons why non-native speakers deviate from the native norm is the result of pragmatic transfer (Kasper, 1992), which generally leads to pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic failure. The former are caused by the inappropriate transfer of speech act strategies from L1 to L2, while the latter are caused by the influence of an equivalent L1 context on the social perceptions of learners in their understanding and production of L2 linguistic actions (Thomas, 1983). Kasper (1992) notes two factors which influence pragmatic transfer: learning context and L2 proficiency. In terms of learning context, studies have shown that EFL learners tend to display L1 transfer to a greater extent than ESL learners. For example, Takahashi and Beebe's (1987) study on refusals by Japanese EFL and ESL learners revealed that L1 influence was found more frequent in EFL learners' performances. It may be because ESL learners have more opportunities to be exposed to a large amount of L2 input, while EFL learners are generally constrained by large class sizes, limited contact hours and few opportunities for intercultural communication. Furthermore, although there is a consensus that L2 proficiency is associated with L1 transfer, the relationship between these two has been under debate. Some studies identify either a positive or negative correlation between L2

proficiency and L1 transfer. For example, Takahashi and Beebe (1987) and Koike (1996) found that L1 interference is more likely to occur in cases where the learners are at higher proficiency, while Olshtain and Cohen (1989) and Maeshiba, Yoshinaga, Kasper, and Ross (1996) found that less proficient learners tended to perform L1 transfer. On the other hand, some studies acknowledge that L2 proficiency exerts an effect on L1, but did not identify either a positive or negative tendency (Takahashi, 1996; Trosborg, 1987).

Pragmatics in Language Teaching

Given the fact that pragmatic transfer is more prevalent in a foreign language context than in a second language context, there is a necessity to teach pragmatic knowledge, which involves both universal and culture-specific components. The universality of pragmatic knowledge such as the Cooperative Principles (Grice, 1975) and Politeness Principles (Brown & Levinson, 1987) is assumed to be adopted successfully, but learners do not always make good use of what is available to them in real time (Kasper, 1997). As for culture-specific knowledge, learners need to realize that the linguistic forms and language functions of a given speech act may not be identical across languages, and that direct transfer from the L1 to the L2 may cause miscommunication. The claim for instruction is supported by Schmidt's (1993) noticing hypothesis, which acknowledges that both conscious and unconscious processes are important to second language learning and that all learning, whether intentional or incidental, requires attention. Input can become intake only when the learner notices it. Implicit learning, which refers to nonconscious generalizations from examples, is effective for the learning of fuzzy patterns. On the other hand, explicit learning, which refers to conscious problem solving, is effective for the learning of rules. To learn pragmatics in a second language, Schmidt contends that it is important for learners to consciously pay attention to the input and analyze relevant features such as linguistic forms, functional meanings and contextual clues. Therefore, the pragmatic information provided by language teachers in the classroom is beneficial since these features residing in the input are sometimes not salient enough for learners. The consciousness-raising approach in classroom teaching can help the learner to accelerate the speed of learning and reorganize what is contained in the input.

Kasper and Schmidt's arguments for pragmatics instruction in the language classroom have led to a number of empirical intervention

studies. It has been demonstrated by these studies that, without exception, learners who receive instruction in pragmatics perform better in that area than those who do not. The most extensively investigated area of instruction at the pragmatic level is speech acts, as compared to discourse markers, implicatures, pragmatic routines, and sociostylistic variations (Rose, 2005). These studies have demonstrated learner progress in the choice of speech acts and linguistic forms, but have not studied improvements in semantic content in particular. In the choice of speech acts, the longitudinal study on academic talk by Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (1993) showed that through the input provided by the advisors, the learners changed toward the native norm over time by using more suggestions and fewer rejections in the later advising sessions. In terms of formulas, most studies have shown learners' post-instructional progress in apologies (Olshtain & Cohen, 1990), compliments (Rose & Ng, 2001), requests (Soler, 2005; Takahashi, 2005), suggestions (Koike & Pearson, 2005; Martinez-Flor & Fukuya, 2005), and apologies and requests (Cohen & Shively, 2007). Instruction is also beneficial to the acquisition of linguistic forms, which refer to the syntactic or lexical use. Olshtain and Cohen (1990) reported that the increase in the number of intensifiers in the apology situations by learners of English was the most successful part of their teaching. Koike and Pearson (2005) noted that instruction promoted overall learner awareness, and in particular, an understanding of the importance of mitigation when expressing suggestions in Spanish. In the qualitative analysis, Cohen and Shively (2007) observed that learners of Spanish who had received instruction in the use of verbal downgraders used them in their requests more frequently than the learners who received no such instruction.

These intervention studies examined not only if instruction in L2 pragmatics is necessary, but also whether an explicit (with metapragmatic information) or implicit (without metapragmatic information) approach is effective. Most of the findings are in favor of explicit teaching (Rose, 2005) since it provides the highest level of awareness to increase learners' ability to recognize and produce the target forms (Takahashi, 2005). However, some of these reports observed resistance to instruction. For Olshtain and Cohen (1990), learners' ratings of apology strategies did not change as a result of instruction. Their explanation was that it takes a long time before learner performances become completely native-like. Soler (2005) pointed out that the recognition of non-conventionally indirect requests (i.e., hints) seemed to remain problematic to learners,

which can be explained in terms of language processing capacity. For direct (e.g., "Pass me the salt, please") and conventionally indirect requests (e.g., "Would you please pass me the salt"), learners can recognize these requests by relying on the encoded linguistic information. On the other hand, non-conventionally indirect requests are not bound by such linguistic conventions, so the learners need to depend on contextual clues to process the expected meaning of utterances, which is cognitively challenging for learners. Although learners of Spanish and French made progress in apology and request performances over a semester's stay in the native countries, Cohen and Shively (2007) found that compared to Spanish speakers, the learners used fewer downgrading devices in requests and also more intensifiers in apologies in their post-test. They attributed such failures to the insufficient treatment information. Overall, then, these results have indicated that some aspects of pragmatic competence can be improved through instruction, but that not all the targets can become native-like over a short period of time as they are constrained by various factors.

Building on previous work, we conducted this study to investigate the extent to which explicit instruction affected the L2 complaints of university students with respect to semantic formulas, semantic content, and linguistic forms. The choice of speech acts, though regarded as one of the major areas of divergence (Bardovi-Harlig & Griffin, 2005), was not our concern since the participants were asked to make complaints in production questionnaires. We also sought to understand if the learners of a different proficiency demonstrated similar or different responses to the instruction. In this study, complaint is seen as an act in which the speaker expresses negative feelings to the hearer who it is believed is responsible for the offense (Murphy & Neu, 1996; Olshtain & Weinbach, 1987, 1993; Trosborg, 1995). Unlike the formulaic nature of apologies, requests and compliments, complaints may be more difficult for learners since the forms and interpretations are often negotiable. For instance, a complaint issued by the speaker may be considered as a simple comment by the hearer, and vice versa. When facing an offense, learners may avoid expressing dissatisfaction and remain frustrated because they do not know how to complain, or they may make an inappropriate complaint which causes the danger of destroying the speaker-hearer relationship (Olshtian & Weinbach, 1993).

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METHODS

Participants

According to Kasper and Dahl (1991), the canonical design of ILP research should include L1, L2, and IL (= the learner) data. Therefore, there were four groups of participants in this study: native speakers of American English (NS-A), native speakers of Chinese (NS-C), Chinese learners of American English at a higher proficiency level (NNS-H) and at a lower proficiency level (NNS-L). Each group was composed of twenty participants, making a total of eighty. Their ages ranged from 16-21 years old.

Participants in the L1 and L2 groups were selected from their native countries, respectively. They provided baseline data, from which the learner deviations and transfer effects were identified. The American participants were undergraduate students from Gonzaga University in the United States. The Chinese participants were undergraduate students from the Department of Business Administration at Ling Tung University in Taiwan. These students were non-English majors and received only two hours of English per week. In this way, possible influences from the target language were expected to be reduced to a minimum.

The two learner groups were selected from among 73 students who were enrolled in the Speech and Communication Course at Ling Tung University. All of them were English majors. At the very beginning of the semester, all the students were tested using a sample copy of the intermediate level *General English Proficiency Test* (GEPT) to assess their English ability in listening, reading, writing and speaking. The tests were then graded based on the GEPT scoring criteria, and the four scores obtained by each student were added and averaged. In order to arrive at a more reliable account of the effects of the instruction on proficiency, we only analyzed the pre-instruction and post-instruction strategy uses of the top twenty students based on the results of the test and that of the bottom twenty students. The former group is defined as the high-proficiency group, and the latter as the low-proficiency group. Table 1 summarizes the characteristics of the four groups of participants.

Table 1. Summary Table of the Characteristics of the Four Subject Groups

Characteristics	Baseline Groups		Learner Groups	
	Americans (NS-A)	Chinese (NS-C)	High-proficient learners (NNS-H)	Low-proficient learners (NNS-L)
Number	20	20	20	20
Male	8	10	9	11
Female	12	10	11	9
Average age	19.83	18.41	19.54	19.61
GEPT range	N/A	N/A	73.25-86.25	48.75-62.20
GEPT mean	N/A	N/A	78.11	54.88

Note. Learners (H) refer to the high-proficiency learners, and learners (L) refer to the low-proficiency learners.

Instruments

Pre-test and post-test

The data of this study were collected through two written questionnaires (pre-test and post-test) (see Appendices A and B) in the format of a Discourse Completion Test (DCT), which has been extensively used to examine native/non-native speech act behaviors since the 1980s. Although questions have been raised as to whether the responses gathered in DCTs are valid in their representation of what the participants would actually say in naturalistic settings, there is a consensus that such a format elicits the most critical parts of the speech act under investigation. Since the present study compares the complaint behaviors produced by the American and Chinese participants and the learners, the use of DCT data has an advantage over the use of authentic conversations in that the format of the DCTs allows for control of social variables which then, allow for cross-cultural comparisons (Kasper & Dahl, 1991).

We designed the production questionnaires based on theoretical, cultural, and practical considerations. First, since complaint is a face-threatening act, power and distance are regarded as the most important conditions under which appropriateness can be achieved (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The power variable has two dimensions: whether the speaker or the hearer is higher in status. The distance variable has two dimensions, too: whether the interlocutors know (-distance) or do not know (+distance) each other. The 2x2 dimensions result in four situations: [+distance, high to low], [-distance, high to low], [+distance, low to high] and [-distance, low to

high]. To obtain more reliable data, each situation was composed of two scenarios. Second, we constructed the scenarios with reference to past studies (Murphy & Neu, 1996; Olshtain & Weinbach, 1987, 1993; Trosborg, 1995), and pilot-tested them to avoid cultural bias so that they would be applicable to the American and the Chinese participants and the learners. Finally, since previous research has shown that situational familiarity affects learners' speech act performances (Takahashi, 1996), we tried to approximate to aspects of the daily lives of the participants as much as possible. The domains thus include home/family, work/employment and school/education. To achieve reliability between the tests, five sets of the scenarios (63%) across the pre- and post-tests carried identical interlocutors (customer-waiter, customer-clerk, older sibling-younger sibling, young man-old man, employee-employer) and locations (restaurants, stores, homes, workplaces) to minimize variability. Though the items in the remaining three sets (37%) were not as identical, we believe that there was enough similarity and comparability between them to allow for their inclusion in the DCT. Table 2 summarizes the scenarios.

Table 2.   Scenarios in the Pre- and Post-Test

Situations	Situation 1 (+D, H-L)		Situation 2 (-D, H-L)		Situation 3 (+D, L-H)		Situation 4 (-D, L-H)	
Pre-test								
Topic	Ordering drinks	Returning a T-shirt	Talking on the phone	Tutoring	Buying a movie ticket	Making an appointment	Doing a part-time job	Asking for privacy
Setting	Restaurant	Store	Home	Classroom	Theater	School	Gas station	Home
Interlocutor	Customer vs. waiter	Customer vs. clerk	Older sibling vs. younger sibling	Teacher vs. student	Young man vs. old man	Student vs. teacher	Employee vs. employer	Child vs. mother
Post-test								
Topic	Food ordering	Wrong shoes	Lost pen	Homework	Grand-children	Smoking	Extra pay	Final paper
Setting	Restaurant	Store	Home	Classroom	Neighbor's house	Restaurant	Restaurant	School
Interlocutor	Customer vs. waiter	Customer vs. clerk	Older sibling vs. younger sibling	Class leader vs. classmate	Young man vs. old man	Waiter vs. customer	Employee vs. employer	Student vs. teacher

Treatment materials

The design of the treatment materials followed Bou-Franch and Carces-Conejos' (2003, p. 2) argument that sociopragmaitcs should be introduced prior to pragmalinguistics because "developing L2 sociopragmatic knowledge will result in the improvement of the production and interpretation of L2 pragmalinguistic strategies". Therefore, the composition of the materials was based on two major topics. The first topic introduced the notions of power, distance and degree of imposition as well as the effect of these social parameters on choice of strategy. The second topic addressed a series of decision making procedures after evaluating social context and introduces the corresponding formulas. In addition, Chapter 4 of the textbook *Say It Naturally: Verbal Strategies for Authentic Communication (Level 2)* (Wall, 1988) was used for written and oral activities.

Procedures

The participants took the pre-test at the beginning of the semester. The English version was given to the American participants and the learners, while the Chinese version was given to the Chinese speakers. To achieve equivalence between the English and Chinese versions, the technique of "back translation" proposed by Brislin, Lonner and Thorndike (1973) was employed. The DCT was administered during the participants' normal class hours and took approximately 40 minutes.

The instruction began one week after the pre-test. The first session was devoted to comparing the complaint behaviors in American and Chinese cultures. First, the learners were asked to organize into groups and to discuss the situations under which complaints were most likely to occur based on their contact with Americans and other Chinese. This awareness-raising activity starting with L1 pragmatics attempted to activate the interest of the learners and to make L2 pragmatic knowledge more accessible to them (Rose & Ng, 2001). Next, we dealt with the influences of contextual factors on performing complaints. Attention was drawn to the concepts of power, distance, and severity of offense. The learners were made aware of the fact that the weightiness of these factors is relative from culture to culture. To illustrate the cultural differences, we used address forms as an example. Generally speaking, Americans tend to address each other on a first name basis, even to someone higher in status, but this is not the case in Chinese society. This means that Americans do not attach as much importance to power and distance as Chinese do. The

payoffs based on the evaluation of contextual factors lead to three basic options: *Do not make complaints*, *Make complaints less directly,* and *Make complaints directly*. After the social context was introduced, we presented the native modal dialogues to the learners. We also provided the learners with in-class exercises, which involved the completion of a DCT and role plays. DCT was employed prior to the role plays because the learners were prone to follow sociocultural and sociolinguistic conventions through planning how they would respond in a writing task (Cohen, 1996). After the learners were familiar with the semantic formulas, they were asked to form pairs and role play with each other. Finally, several pairs were selected to perform impromptu open-ended role plays in front of the class. Each pair received feedback from either the teacher or the class. The entire treatment sessions lasted 15 hours, and the learners were asked to complete the post-test one week after the instruction. For more details, please refer to Appendix C.

Data Analysis

Following Olshtain and Weinbach (1987, 1993) and Trosborg (1995), we identified six formulas for the speech act of complaining, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3.   Semantic Formulas of Complaints

Formulas	Functions	Examples
Opting out (OP)	The speaker ignores the offense to avoid conflict.	N/A
Dissatisfaction (DS)	The speaker describes the offense, but avoids explicit mention of the hearer.	My letter was opened.
Interrogation (IN)	The speaker questions the hearer about the offense.	Why did you open my letter?
Accusation (AC)	The speaker accuses the hearer of the offense.	You opened my letter.
Request for repair (RR)	The speaker asks the hearer to make up for the offense or to stop the offense.	Could I have some privacy? Will you please stop opening my letters?
Threat (TH)	The speaker asserts immediate or potential sanctions against the hearer.	If you open my letters again, I'll move out.

These semantic formulas were sequenced from the most indirect (i.e., *opting out*) to the most direct (i.e., *threat*)[2]. We coded the data in terms of every meaning unit[3], each of which was specified or tagged through one formula. To achieve reliability in coding, half of the questionnaires from each group were randomly selected and coded by another trained rater (Cohen, 1960). The English data, produced by the American participants and the learners, were coded by a native speaker of American English; and the Chinese data were coded by a native speaker of Chinese. A correct-for-chance level of kappa of at least 0.85 was regarded as acceptable. Next, to examine the efficacy of the instruction in terms of the semantic formulas, semantic content, and linguistic forms used, we analyzed the coded data in the pre- and post-tests quantitatively and qualitatively. The quantitative analysis dealt with the distributions of the semantic formulas, while the qualitative analysis dealt with the semantic content and linguistic forms.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Our findings showed that before the instruction, the learners deviated from the norm of the American participants in the areas of the semantic formulas, semantic content, and linguistic forms used, which may have been caused by L1 interference or insufficient linguistic competence. After the instruction, the learners made progress in these three areas. In the following, we will present and discuss the results.

Semantic Formulas

Our data shows that the learners differed from the American participants in the number of the semantic formulas used in the pre-test. In the following, we will compare the data of the American participants and the learner data, followed by a discussion.

Before instruction

Figure 1 displays the tendencies in the use of the six semantic formulas used by the American and the Chinese participants and the learners in the pre-test.
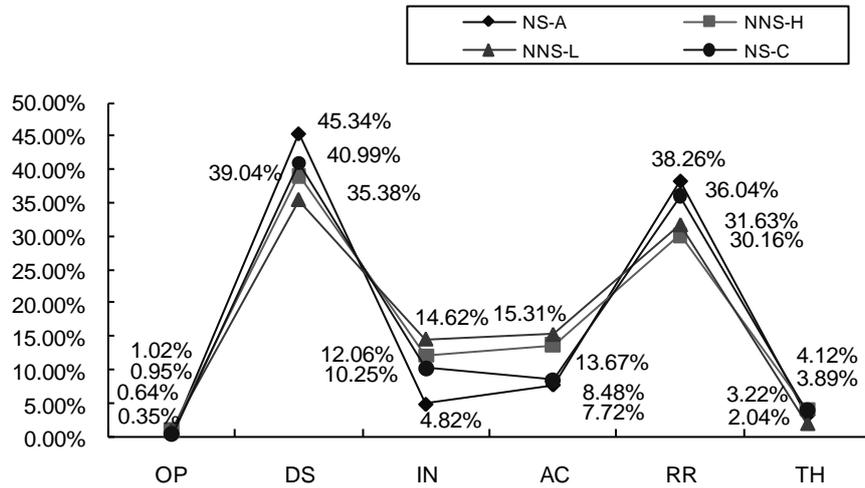
Figure 1.   Distributions of the Six Formulas in the Pre-Test

In Figure 1, the horizontal axis depicts the six formulas, and the vertical axis shows the percentages of use. The values for each formula were plotted on the diagram and connected along the horizontal axis. This line graph shows that there is a similar trend in the use of formulas across the four groups of participants. *Dissatisfaction* and *request for repair* were most frequently used, while *opting out* and *threat* were least frequently used. *Interrogation* and *accusation* were in between. In other words, both the American participants and the learners preferred using less direct formulas when making complaints.

Despite the similar tendency, the chi-square test showed that there was a statistically significant difference among the four groups of participants ($\chi 2 = 37.643$, $p = .001$) in their overall production of these six formulas. Such difference existed in the productions made between the American participants and the high-proficiency learners ($\chi 2 = 19.855$, $p = .001$) and the American participants and the low-proficiency learners ($\chi 2 = 29.431$, $p = .000$). It seems that although the four groups shared a similar trend in the distribution of the formulas, the learners still deviated from the target language norms in the frequencies of their use of individual formulas.

To detect which formula contributed to the statistical differences between the data of the American participants and the learners, we ran further tests and found that compared to the American participants, both the

high- and low-proficiency learners used significantly less *dissatisfaction* (p = .000) and *request for repair* (p = .000), but more *interrogation* (p = .000) and *accusation* (p = .000). This result suggests that the learners tended to use direct formulas more frequently than less direct formulas.

Given the above results, we highlighted *dissatisfaction* and *request for repair* when introducing the semantic formulas in the classroom since these two formulas were used by the Americans in most cases. We also told the learners that *interrogation* and *accusation*, which show more directness, should be used in a careful way, depending on the status of the interlocutor and the severity of the offense. We developed a simple technique to help our learners use more *dissatisfaction* by asking them to practice starting their utterances with *I* or *We*, since *dissatisfaction* is generally expressed in the form of an assertion with the first person pronoun as the subject. We did this because we observed that the learners had the habit of constructing their utterances with the second person pronoun *You*, even when speaking to a higher-status person, which led to inappropriateness in some of the cases.

After instruction

After the treatment, the learners showed some improvement in their performance in the post-test, as shown in Figure 2. In this Figure, we can see that the learners in both proficiency levels were closer to the native norm. In the post-instructional productions, there was around a 3-7% increase in the use of *dissatisfaction* and *request for repair*, and around a 3-5% decrease in the use of *interrogation* and *accusation*. A chi-square test yielded no statistically significant difference across the three groups in each of the formulas used ($\chi2$ = 16.807, p = .079). This result shows that the learners made progress in the selection of formulas after the instruction.
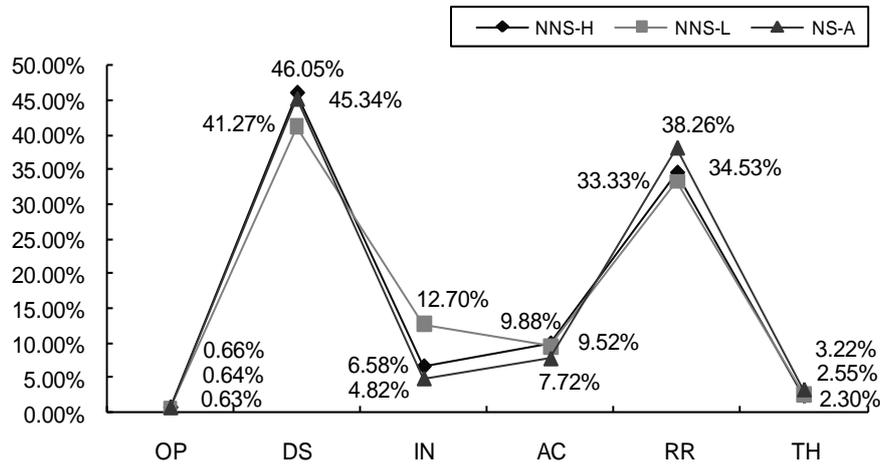
Figure 2.   Distributions of the Formulas in the Post-Test

Discussion

In this section, we reported that before the instruction, the learners and the American participants shared similar formula distributions, which suggests that they may have operated on using the general pragmatic knowledge. Their frequent use of *dissatisfaction* and *request for repair* seems to correspond to the two purposes specified in the act of complaining in most cases: to air the speaker's frustrations and to request the hearer to stop a certain action or to compensate for an offense (Olshtain & Weinbach, 1993; Trosborg, 1995). Despite the general tendency, the learners may have also consulted their IL pragmatic competence (Kasper, 1992) since they used significantly more direct formulas such as *accusation* and *interrogation*, which deviated from the native groups' productions. It might be because direct forms are more accessible to the learners since less direct ones usually call for syntactic complexity (Fukushima, 1990; Takahashi, 2005). Such difference might also be because it was difficult for the learners to assume the roles assigned in the DCT (Golato, 2003), so they responded as if they had talked to friends or family members, persons with whom they had the most contact in real-life situations. After explicit teaching, the learners approximated to the native norm in the choice of semantic formulas, which is in concurrence with the findings of most ILP studies in that learners tend to make progress in terms of the number of the

types of semantic formulas, or strategies used, as a result of instruction (cf., Cohen & Shively, 2007).

Semantic Content

Semantic content refers to the type of information contained in the complaints made by the participants (Bardovi-Harlig & Griffin, 2005). A qualitative analysis shows that the American participants and the learners differed mainly in the semantic content of the *dissatisfaction* formula. Our data shows that 90% of the productions of the American participants tended to state *facts of annoyance*, regardless of the speaker-hearer relationship. Variations, however, were observed among their non-native counterparts, as detailed in the following section.

Before instruction

The analysis of the productions of the American participants showed that they tended to state *facts of annoyance* at all times, even to a higher-status person. For example, in the Part-time Job scenario where the employee complained to the employer about working overtime, 85% of the American participants mentioned the scheduled working hours are 6-10 and put forth a request to go home on time, as shown in (1).

   (1) *My shift is from 6 to 10 and I am always working overtime until 12.* Is there any way that we can change something so I get off work at the appropriate time?

Prior to the instruction, most of the high-proficiency learners expressed facts when speaking to someone lower in status, but 73% of the learners made excuses rather than appealing to facts when speaking to a higher-status person, as shown in (2).

   (2) *I always work until 12:00 and my mother worried very much.* Could you adjust the time a little bit? (NNS-H3)

In (2), the learner did not specifically point out the working hours as the American participants did, but resorted to personal excuses such as family worries. This could be explained in terms of L1 transfer, since we found similar responses in three-fourths of the data of the Chinese participants, as shown in (3).

(3) Wanshang   zhemowan   huijia   tai   weixian
    at night   so late   go home   too   dangerous
    wo   jiaren   butai   fangxin
    my   family   do not   release heart
    wo   xiwang   neng   zaodian   xiaban
    1SG   hope   can   earlier   off duty (NS-C 10)
    'It's too dangerous to go home so late and my family is worried.
    I hope I can get off duty earlier.'

In contrast, 70% of the low-proficiency learners did not transfer such L1 information to the L2, as shown in (4).

(4) *My work at 10:00 have to over, but now is already at 12*. Can I have more money? (NNS-L12)

The above example shows that though grammatically incorrect, the semantic content of the performances of the low-proficiency learners seemed to be comparatively "closer" to the performances of the American participants since they did not include the use of an appeal such as the speaker's personal excuses.

Since semantic content is generally influenced by the sociocultural orientation of the language (Bardovi-Harlig & Griffin, 2005), we adopted Hofstede's (1980) individualism-collectivism construct to explain how different orientations affect L1-L2 complaint behaviors. In this construct, American culture is individualistically oriented, in which the people place great importance on their personal rights and the autonomy of an individual is paramount. According to Hofstede, "self", "privacy" and "independence" are those words which best reflect their attributes. The absolute obligation to the group is in the group's best interest since the individual seeks to be taken care of by the group; and people living in this culture should be loyal to the group to which they belong. Such cultural differences influence the weightiness attributed to the status of an interlocutor, which, in turn, is reflected in the complaint performances by the Americans and Chinese participants. After the cultural schemata was established, we instructed the learners that when using the *dissatisfaction* formula, they needed to state *facts of annoyance* to a higher-status person instead of making excuses, since Americans in general do not attach as much importance to social power as Chinese do.

After instruction

After the instruction, 82% of the learners appeared to have made progress in the semantic content they provided. For example, in a similar post-test scenario in which the employee complained to the employer about being known for having received a raise in salary and asked for a solution, the learners wrote:

(5) *A few days ago, you promised to give me extra pay and now everybody knows.* May I ask you to solve this problem? (NNS-H5)

(6) *You told me don't tell anybody about the pay, but now everybody know.* Can you help me? (NNS-L 9)

As can be seen from (5) and (6), the high-proficiency learners expressed the facts of annoyance instead of beating about the bush. This result shows that after the learners realized the cultural differences between L1 and L2, they were able to provide credible content.

Discussion

This section addresses the semantic content provided by the learners when using the *dissatisfaction* formula. In our analysis, the high-proficiency learners' deviations from the productions of the American participants indicated sociopragmatic transfer, which is caused by learners' inaccurate projections of L1-based contextual factors on an L2 linguistic action (Kasper, 1992). Generally speaking, American society stresses social equality, which is represented by a suppression of asymmetric power relations in day-to-day interactions (Brown & Levinson, 1987). In this culture, politeness incorporates the individual's wants and desires and is not subject to external power relationship or interactional dynamics. Therefore, it was observable that the American participants in our study displayed a tendency to state facts of annoyance or disapproval no matter if they were addressing a higher- or lower-status person. On the other hand, in a culture with a hierarchical class structure such as Chinese society, power is considered as important. Therefore, a person higher in status, such as employer and teacher, is entitled to be accorded respect by an inferior, and the inferior is supposed to save the face of the superior to show respectfulness. Such differences between American and Chinese societal norms provide a good explanation as to why the high-proficiency learners used excuses instead of facts when

speaking to the employer. However, we can also observe that the low-proficiency learners did not reflect such L1 perceptions in their pre-test performances. This is probably because their linguistic competence did not permit sociopragmatic transfer to occur (Kasper, 1992). For the low-proficiency learners, it might be easier for them to express a fact because it was described in the prompt. Providing an excuse in English might be cognitively demanding due to their lack of proficiency. In short, the findings here have demonstrated how L1 sociopragmatic knowledge is carried over to the L2 and the role that proficiency played in performing such transfer. The success of the instruction also shows that although some of the previous studies have reported difficulties in learning sociopragmatics even under the explicit teaching conditions (e.g., Takahashi, 2001), this "sticking to the fact" approach seems to work well with our learners, especially with those of a higher proficiency.

Linguistic Forms

Our data also shows that the responses of the learners differed from those of the American participants with regard to the specific linguistic forms of the questions and requests in the pre-test. In the following, we will compare the learners' data with that of the American participants to identify the deviations, and discuss the findings afterwards.

Before instruction

With regard to the forms of the questions used by the complainer, we observed that 85% of the American respondents employed wh-questions. For example, in the Asking for Privacy Scenario where the teenager asked the mother about the opened letter, one of the native speakers wrote:

(7) Why did you open my letter? (NS-A12)

However, when we compared the pre-test performances of the high-proficiency learners with those of the American participants, it was observable that 72% of the learners used yes-no questions, as shown in (8).

(8) Did you open my letter? (NNS-H1)

The frequent use of yes-no questions may have been a result of L1 transfer, since we found similar use in 83% of the data of the Chinese

participants, as shown in (9).

(9) Ni   kai   wode   xin   Ma
    2SG   open   my   letter (NS-C8)
    'Did you open my letter?'

Unlike the high-proficiency learners, more than two-thirds of the low-proficiency learners used wh-questions, but the forms were ungrammatical in most cases. For example,

(10) Why you open my letter today? (NNS-L5)

The learners also differed from the American participants in the use of the request forms in their pre-test performances. In addition to the use of "Will/would/Can/Could you VP?", most of the remaining requests in the productions of the American participants were in the form of "I'd like to…". For example,

(11) I'd like to ask you to give me extra pay. (NS-A4)

However, only 10-15% of the learners in both proficiency groups used this form, and they expressed a similar function by using either "I hope…" or "I want…" in their pre-instructional productions. For example,

(12) I want to change a new T-shirt and I want to change the new color.
     (NNS-H15)

(13) I want return the T-shirt. (NNS-L6)

We attributed such phenomenon to L1 transfer since 65% of the Chinese participants tended to adopt subjectivizers such as "wo xiwang" ("I hope…") and "wo xiangyao" ("I want…"). For example,

(14) Wo   xiangyao   huan   yijian   xinde   chenshan
     1SG   want to   exchange   a   new   shirt (NS-C15)
     'I want to exchange a new shirt.'

Given the differences mentioned above, we taught the learners the correct question forms in our instruction. We also told them that American

participants tended to use wh-questions, which are more direct than yes-no questions since they presuppose the hearer guilty of the action which would give rise to the complaint. As for request forms, we pointed out to the learners that when conveying one's desires, the formulaic expression "I'd like to…" is more appropriate than "I hope…" or "I want to…" in American English.

After instruction

After the instruction, both proficiency groups learned to use wh-questions in the right way. For example,

(15) *Why did you give me the wrong color*? I asked for the red shoes! (NNS-H3)

(16) *Why did you give me the wrong color?* I want the red ones. (NNS-L5)

For the request forms, however, we were surprised to find that even though the learners decreased the use of "I hope…" and "I want to…" to less than 5% of their responses, they did not increase the use of "I'd like to…", either. Instead, they used "Can/Could you VP?" more frequently in the post-test than in the pre-test. For example,

(17) Could you hand in the homework right now? (NNS-H7)

(18) Can you give me your homework? (NNS-L3)

Such avoidance may be partly due to the fact that "Can/Could you VP?" has a Chinese equivalence "Ni neng-bu-neng" and was easier for the learners to produce. In other words, the learners may need more time before they can apply "I'd like to…" in their productions.

Discussion

In this section, we reported that prior to the instruction, the learners performed pragmalinguistic transfer, which refers to the forms by which a linguistic action is implemented (Kasper, 1992). Such transfer can be operative at the level of directness, as shown in the question forms used by the participants. In our analysis, the American participants tended to employ wh-questions, which are more direct since they presuppose that the complainee is guilty of the deplorable act. On the other hand, the

high-proficiency learners, like the Chinese participants, tended to use yes-no questions, which are less direct since they leave open as to whether the person to the complaint is being made responsible for the offensive act. The learners' choice of yes-no questions may reflect the underlying orientation of subtleness, as valued by the hierarchical Chinese society.

Pragmalinguistic transfer may also reflect the L1-L2 politeness value of the utterances (Kasper, 1992), as shown in the request forms in our study. The "I'd like to…" of the American participants and the "I hope…" or "I want to…" of the Chinese participants share the same illocutionary force because all of them are statements of desires concerning the speaker's wish or want that the hearer will carry out the act. As Blum-Kulka (1983, p. 43) put it, the equivalence of any two request forms in different languages can be achieved when the forms "share a similar potential illocutionary force relative to the contexts in which they are conventionally used". What is different is the politeness value ascribed by the American and Chinese participants. For the American participants, the expression of the speaker's wants is considered as impolite or rude, so the requestive intention is usually modified by the modal verb "would". On the other hand, the Chinese participants tended to select expressions which are seen as soft, tentative and polite such as "I hope…" and "I want to…" (Zhang, 1995).

In addition, our data shows the relationship between transfer and proficiency at the pragmalinguistic level. Take question forms as an example. The high-proficiency learners, like the Chinese participants, employed yes-no questions more frequently; whereas the low-proficiency learners used wh-questions as the American participants did. Such non-performance of L1 transfer could be explained in terms of the six stages of question formations proposed by Lightbown and Spada (2006) based on Pienemann, Johnston, and Brindley's (1988) study. A look at the low-proficiency learner data finds that the learners seemed to be at Stage 3, which is described as the ability to front wh-words and auxiliary verbs without subject-verb inversion. Since accurate subject-verb inversions in yes-no questions are not expected to appear until Stage 4, it seems that their current linguistic abilities prohibited them from performing L1 transfer. This result seems to suggest that there is a positive correlation between proficiency and transfer. That is, the more proficient a learner is, the more likely he or she is to perform pragmalinguistic transfer.

Finally, our instruction succeeded in helping the learners produce correct question forms, but failed to help them use the expression "I'd like

to…" In fact, instruction is a process where declarative knowledge (knowing that) gradually becomes procedural knowledge (knowing how) (Ellis, 1990). The learners may have recognized the expression of "I'd like to…", but it may take time for them to use it in actual productions. As Bardovi-Harlig and Griffin's (2005) put it, pragmatic improvements are not necessarily target-like. Parts of pragmatic competence may appear right after instruction, but parts of it may emerge in later stages.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

On the whole, the analysis of the learners' pre- and post-instructional productions here has shed light on two issues here: pragmatic transfer and instructional effectiveness. Although there is a consensus that pragmatic transfer relates to L2 proficiency (Kasper, 1992), the empirical studies that followed have yet to have reached an agreement as to whether the correlation between these two is positive or negative (cf. Koike, 1996; Maeshiba et al., 1996; Olshtain & Cohen, 1989; Takahashi & Beebe, 1987). Our findings concur with the studies conducted by Takahashi and Beebe (1987) that learners of a higher proficiency are more likely to conduct pragmatic transfer than learners of a lower proficiency because the former have sufficient linguistic control of the L2. In our study, at the sociopragmatic level, the more proficient learners varied their semantic content carried by the *dissatisfaction* formula along the social power parameter as native speakers of Chinese. The American native speakers of English, however, expressed *facts of annoyance*, irrespective of the power relationship between the interlocutors. At the pragmalinguistic level, the high-proficiency learners used yes-no questions to show less directness, as opposed to the American participants who used wh-questions to show more directness. In general, the learners at the different proficiency levels may have had the intention to perform L1 transfer covertly, but whether their overt L2 productions revealed such transfer is largely contingent upon their linguistic development.

In addition, the improvements in the scores of the post-test over the pre-test in the semantic formulas, semantic content and linguistic forms again support Schmidt's (1993) noticing hypothesis and Bialystok's (1993) model of language processing. When it comes to the acquisition of L2 pragmatics, Schmidt contends that simple exposure to L2 input is insufficient because pragmatic knowledge may be opaque to language learners. For successful learning, they should not only notice what is

contained in the input in general, but also understand the mechanism operating among linguistic forms, functional meanings, and social contexts for appropriateness. He further suggests that explicit instruction is efficient provided that the information supplied by the teacher is accurate and not intuition-based. Most of the empirical evidence on L2 acquisition supports Schmidt's theoretical justification, with just a few exceptions (Rose, 2005). Unlike earlier intervention studies which focused on more formulaic speech acts such as apology, request, compliment and compliment response, this study widens the scope of ILP research by demonstrating that the act of complaining, which manifests higher degree of complexities due to the nature of its implicitness in the illocutionary force, is amenable to instruction.

While Schmidt's noticing hypothesis provides a theoretical construct for the necessity of teaching L2 pragmatics, Bialystok's (1993) model of language processing explains how instructional procedures help learners improve their pragmatic competence. In her model, she posited two cognitive components: *analysis of knowledge* and *control of processing*. *Analysis of knowledge* facilitates L2 learners in changing their mental representations from formal representations, in which they focus only on the linguistic forms, to symbolic representations, in which they are able to establish the relationship between linguistic forms and intended meanings in a specific context. During the instruction, we first engaged in establishing the learners' L2 sociopragmatic framework by contrasting it with the performance of the American and Chinese participants in their L1. After that, we turned to analyze each formula in correspondence with the linguistic, functional and contextual information. Through the analysis of knowledge, we hoped to draw the learners' attention from the linguistic forms to a deeper generalization of L2 discourse rules and patterns.

As with control of processing, it is essential for learners to develop the ability to notice relevant sociolinguistic features residing in the input and to select the most appropriate response from an array of possibilities. Bialystok (1993, p. 54) argues that for adult language learners, pragmatic competence cannot be achieved until "control of processing is mastered for a richly analyzed representation of the language". Adult second language learners make pragmatic errors not only because of their misunderstanding of forms and structures or inadequate amount of vocabulary, but also because they fail to make a choice that is appropriate for the given situation or for the listener at the time. We therefore asked the learners to respond to different scenarios in the DCT and role play

tasks in order to develop their capabilities in the control of processing, and then gave corrective feedback upon their completion.

PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Our research carries pedagogical implications. According to Kasper (1996), there are three conditions for the acquisition of pragmatics to occur: existence of pertinent input, acknowledgement of the input, and lots of opportunities to achieve a high level of processing control to retrieve pragmatic knowledge effectively in various communicative contexts. In Taiwan, the language classroom seems to be the best place to meet the three conditions and instruction therefore plays a crucial role in the increase of learners' pragmatic proficiency. We would like to provide three suggestions for teaching suggestions which are based on the findings of the present study. First, it is important to place the teaching of sociopragmatics prior to pragmalinguistics since the former can serve as a scaffolding to teach learners what counts as acceptable content in a given speech community and why and how certain linguistic forms of a given speech act behavior are realized in the L2. In other words, the L1-L2 cultural differences should be highlighted before the instruction of linguistic forms. Second, the teacher needs to be aware of the fact that learners at different proficiency levels may be influenced by their L1 in different ways. A more advanced learner may present L1 information to a greater extent than a less proficient learner because the former has sufficient linguistic control. In other words, high levels of grammatical competence do not always guarantee high levels of pragmatic competence. What differentiates proficient and less proficient learners is that the former are expected to have a better understanding of situational appropriateness in their L2 discourse. If these more advanced learners do not use pragmatically appropriate language, they may "run the risk of appearing uncooperative at the least, or, more seriously, rude or insulting" (Bardovi-Harlig et al., 1991, p. 4). Finally, according to Cohen and Olshtain (1993), learners who use minimal planning tend to make pragmatic errors in their speech act performances. Therefore, DCTs seem to be a good tool for learners in the earlier stage of instruction to become familiar with newly- learned knowledge and to allow them more time to plan and monitor what they intend to say. After learners have achieved mastery, the teacher can provide them with the opportunity to perform open-ended role plays. We also suggest that role play tasks, if possible, can be carried out

with native speakers, who can provide both positive and negative evidence of appropriateness in L2.

Another implication does not directly come from our findings, but relates to our experience in carrying out this study, which we think is useful to language instructors when teaching this particular speech act. It is true that the provision of examples of natural, authentic discourse such as that found in movies, soap operas or commercials in language classrooms gives the learners a much better understanding of cultural and linguistic norms of the target language, but it may pose problems for language teachers who intend to teach the speech act of complaining. It is difficult to capture what counts as complaints since, as discussed in the literature, there are no stereotypical linguistic forms for complaints. Therefore, we suggest that the better option for language teachers may be to produce audio-visual materials with tailor-made complaint scenarios. As long as efforts are made to preserve naturalness, these audio-visual materials may meet the learners' needs and achieve teaching outcomes more efficiently than spending the time to find natural film segments, soap operas or movies.

CONCLUSION

Our study set out to answer the question: To what extent did the learners of high- and low-proficiency improve in their ability to express L2 complaints after explicit teaching? The findings show that before the instruction, the learners transferred L1 pragmatic knowledge to the L2, but that they made improvements in the use of semantic formulas, semantic content and linguistic forms after instruction. This suggests that explicit instruction is beneficial to EFL learners. However, we would also like to point out the limitations of this study and suggest directions for future research. In our study, we reduced the power and distance variables to only two dimensions (+P/-P, +D/-D) to limit the number of scenarios for the convenience in the design of the research, but human relationships are not dichotomous, but should be represented in a continuum. Therefore, we suggest that in the future research, the power between the speaker and hearer can be presented in terms of high to low, equal, and low to high, while the distance can range from strangers, acquaintances, friends and family (Olshtain & Weinbach, 1987). In addition, it would be very interesting to know if Americans, Chinese and learners perceive power, distance and even severity of offense differently, so that questions

concerning participants' perceptions could be added to the questionnaire. Finally, due to time constraints, we did not conduct a delayed post-test, so it is questionable whether the effects observed over the 15 hours of instruction were sustained in the longer term. The literature on L2 pragmatics to date shows that Koike and Pearson's (2005) experiment is probably one of the few studies which include a delayed post-test. Their study revealed that the explicit group performed significantly better than the control and implicit groups in the learning of Spanish suggestions, but that the instructional effects were not retained in the delayed post-test. Therefore, we suggest that future studies of this kind include delayed post-tests to examine the sustainability of instructional gains.

NOTES

1. In this study, formulas and strategies are sometimes used interchangeably.
2. Trosborg (1995, p. 315) pointed out three factors which determine the directness level of a complaint: the complainer, the complainable, and the complainee. The least direct complaint occurs when the complainable is or is not expressed directly in the propositional content, whereas the most direct complaint occurs when the complainer's negative evaluation of the complainee as a person is implicitly or explicitly expressed. Therefore, to judge the level of directness of the formulas in this study lies in the existence of the offense and the hearer. For example, *dissatisfaction* is less direct than *threat* because the former states only the offense, while the latter addresses both the offense and the hearer.
3. Each meaning unit generally corresponds syntactically to an independent clause.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A. DCT Scenarios in the Pre-Test

1. You ordered a drink at a restaurant. When the waiter brings you the drink, he spills it all over you. Your new shirt got wet.

   Waiter: Oh, I'm really sorry about that!!
   You:

2. You work part time at a gas station from 6:00 to 10:00 every night. But you usually cannot go home until 12:00. You discuss this situation with your employer, Mr. Brown.

   You: Mr. Brown, may I talk to you now?
   Mr. Brown: Yes, of course.
   You:

3. You are talking on the phone to your classmate. Your 10-year-old younger brother Peter is playing and making a loud noise around the house. You can hardly hear your classmate.

   You: Peter! Peter!
   Peter: Yeah?
   You:

4. You are waiting in line to buy movie tickets. You have been waiting for a long time. Suddenly, an old man cuts in line in front of you.

   You: Excuse me!
   Old man: Yes?
   You:

5. You bought a T-shirt at a store. When you got home, you found that there was a small hole in it. You go to the store the next day. You want to return the T-shirt.

   Clerk: May I help you?
   You:

6. You teach your neighbor's child English every Wednesday night. You have caught the child not paying attention several times. Now, the child has not been paying attention again and has just misspelled the word you just taught.

   You: Now let's spell the word "book". B-O-O-K.
   Child: B-O-C-K
   You:

7. You have an appointment with the chairperson of your department, whom you've never talked to before. You've been waiting for over an hour. The chairperson finally shows up, but seems to have forgotten about the appointment.

    You: Excuse me. May I talk to you now?
    Chairperson: Sure. What can I do for you?
    You:

8. You think you are old enough to have some privacy. Therefore, you told your mother not to open your letters and she agreed. Coming back from school one Friday night, you find that a letter from your friend has been opened.

    You: Mom! Mom!
    Mom: What's the matter?
    You:

Appendix B. DCT Scenarios in the Post-Test

1. You bought a pair of red shoes at a store. When you got home and opened the shoe box, you found that the clerk had given you black shoes instead. You went back to the store and told the clerk that she had given you the wrong shoes.

    Clerk: Oh, I'm really sorry about that!!
    You:

2. You are at a restaurant. You have been waiting for over twenty minutes but no one has come to take your order. Now a waiter is coming your way.

    You: Waiter
    Waiter: Yes. May I help you?
    You:

3. You are the class leader. Your teacher wants you to collect the homework on time every Monday morning. But one classmate is always late handing in the homework. You decide to talk to the classmate.

    You: Can I talk to you now?
    Peter: Sure. What is it?
    You:

4. You work part-time at a restaurant. A customer sitting in the non-smoking section is smoking. You'd like him to stop smoking.

You: Excuse me, sir.
Customer: Yes?
You:

5. You work part-time at a fast food restaurant. Several days ago, your manager Mr. White promised to give you extra pay for your hard work. He asked you not to tell anyone else. But this afternoon, you found that almost everybody working at the restaurant has heard about your extra pay. This causes a lot of trouble for you. You decide to talk to the manager.

    You: Mr. White, may I talk to you now?
    Mr. White: Yes, of course.

6. An old couple just moved into the apartment building above you a week ago. They have three young grandchildren who always run around the house and make lots of noise late at night. You decide to talk to the old couple. You ring the bell and the old man opens the door.

    You: Excuse me. I live below you. May I talk to you now?
    Old man: Yes?
    You:

7. Your younger brother John borrowed your favorite pen a few days ago, and he promised to take care of it. But he lost the pen yesterday at school and can't find it.

    John: I'm sorry I lost your pen.
    You:

8. You worked very hard on your final exam, but you got a D on it. You think it was unfair. You decide to talk to the teacher.

    You: Excuse me, sir. May I talk to you now?
    Teacher: Yes, of course.
    You:

Appendix C. Steps to Teach Complaints in American English

Step 1: Awareness-raising session
The teacher asked the learners to organize into groups and asked them to discuss the possible similarities and differences in the way that Americans and Chinese would make complaints. The learners were given 15 minutes to discuss the question. After the discussion, each group selected a representative to report their conclusions.

Step 2: Social context session

The teacher outlined the concept of social power and social distance. Social power refers to the power relationship between interlocutors (e.g., student-teacher, employee-employer). Social distance refers to the distance in relationships varying from the most intimate (family) to the least intimate (stranger). And then the teacher pointed out that Americans prefer small power distances and to minimize the role of social or class equality, On the other hand, Chinese prefer larger power distances and clarity in the position of each individual in relation to others. Such a cultural difference has influence on the behaviors used in making complaints.

Step 3: Strategy session

The teacher told the learners that they were faced with three basic choices after evaluating the social contexts: *Do not make a complaint*, *Make a complaint indirectly* and *Make a complaint directly*. The teacher also analyzed the payoffs of each option for the learners.

Step 4: Practice session

The teacher asked the learners to practice the DCT scenarios in the textbook. The learners read the scenario, evaluated the social contexts and then wrote down the responses to the scenario within one conversational turn.

Step 5: Role play session

The teacher asked the students to perform the role play tasks in the textbook. The teacher then asked the learners to work in pairs, to take on the imaginary roles and to respond to the scenarios orally. The purpose was to train the students to carry out impromptu planning.

Step 6: Feedback session

The teacher nominated several pairs to come to the front to perform the role plays. The whole class watched the role play performances. After each role play, feedback was given either by the teacher or by the class.

Step 7: Wrap up

The teacher asked the learners to think of five situations in which they could make complaints in American English as homework assignments. These situations could be imaginary or real-life situations, and some of them were selected by the teacher and shared with the class.