

## Effects of Implicit and Explicit Form-Focused Instruction on the Development of L2 Pragmatic Competence

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### Abstract

The present study attempts to investigate the relative efficacy of explicit and implicit form-focused instruction (FFI) on the performance of some basic speech acts in English, namely responding to advice, making suggestions, complaints, requests and offers, by Turkish EFL learners. A total of 71 elementary-level adult Turkish EFL learners participated in the present study. The participants were randomly assigned to implicit FFI group, explicit FFI group and a control group. The experimental groups received pragmatics instruction for four weeks. Data were collected by using a written Discourse Completion Task (DCT), which consists of 15 situations that the participants were asked to respond to. The results showed that learners who received either type of instruction improved in the post-test over the pre-test. Results also showed that when performing in the post-test, the explicit group significantly outperformed the implicit group. These results indicate that although both types of instruction proved effective in developing learners' pragmatic performance, explicit instruction tended to produce a larger magnitude of effects. These findings are discussed, and implications for classroom practices and suggestions for future research are provided in the end.

### Keywords

Instructed SLA, pragmatics instruction, explicit form-focused instruction, implicit form-focused instruction, teaching speech acts

### Introduction

Adult second language acquisition (SLA) is difficult, varied and often poor in terms of outcome (Doughty, 2003). Second language (L2) instruction aims at solving, or at least ameliorating, these problems. However, the issue of instructed second language acquisition has been contentious among SLA researchers (Doughty, 2003). At one end of the continuum, there is the non-interventionist position by Long and Robinson (1998). According to the non-interventionist position, SLA is driven by the Universal Grammar (UG), and is entirely incidental just like first language acquisition. However, child language acquisition and adult SLA differ in the cognitive processes they involve, and thus adult SLA is likely to be more difficult, slower and less successful without instruction (Doughty, 2003). So, at the other end of the continuum, there is the necessity of L2 instruction in the classroom. In this sense, Doughty and Williams (1998) point out that the crucial question is what would make the most effective and efficient instructional plan considering the normal constraints of SLA in the classroom. As for the overall effectiveness of L2 instruction, Long (1983), having reviewed a handful of empirical studies, stated that L2 learners are likely to benefit from instruction if they are exposed to L2 input only in the classroom.

As to the pragmatics, “analysis of how to say things in appropriate ways and places” (Takkaç Tulgar, 2016, p. 10), instruction is even more necessary to raise the learner’s consciousness of form-function mappings and pertinent contextual variables that may not be salient enough to be noticed (Kasper & Schmidt, 1996). Previous studies have revealed that if L2 learners do not receive instruction in pragmatics, they are likely to differ from native speakers in their pragmatic performance to a great extent (Kasper & Rose, 2002). This is crucially important because above and beyond misunderstandings and communication breakdowns that may be caused by grammatical errors as well, pragmatic idiosyncrasies may also reflect badly on the learner as a person, and have a further adverse effect on his or her communication with native speakers (Thomas, 1983). Previous studies have also revealed that pragmatic knowledge is acquired slowly in naturalistic contexts (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1993). In the foreign language context, where opportunities for input and interaction outside the classroom are often limited and formal instruction serves as the only regular source of L2 knowledge, pragmatic instruction is much more desirable (Nguyen, Pham & Pham, 2012). In this sense, Jeon and Kaya (2006) state that the necessity of pragmatics instruction can be summarized in following two statements:

(a) pragmatics instruction facilitates more efficient acquisition of certain areas of L2 pragmatics which are difficult to learn only through exposure; and (b) in a foreign language setting, L2 pragmatics instruction is a crucial response to scarce opportunities for exposure to target pragmatic norms and an impoverished environment for practice. (p.169)

Apart from the overall effectiveness of L2 instruction and its increasing necessity in pragmatics, another equally important issue is the relative effectiveness of different types and categories of the instruction. In this sense, the main questions are whether explicit or implicit instruction is better, and to what extent and how learner attention should be focused on the pragmatic elements of the second language (Doughty, 2003). Previous studies suggest that explicit instruction may be more effective in L2 pragmatics than implicit instruction. However, Jeon and Kaya (2006) note that further research is needed in order to better understand the relative effectiveness of these two types of pedagogical interventions because implicit instruction has been densely investigated, and such methodological issues as treatment lengths and data collection methods have varied between the two types of instruction in some of these studies. In addition, most of the previous studies have investigated the role of instruction in pragmatic competence among high-proficiency L2 learners or EFL learners majoring in English Language Teaching (ELT), thus ignoring the teachability of L2 pragmatics to less proficient non-English major L2 learners. To iterate, we still do not know the relative effectiveness of implicit and explicit instruction in L2 pragmatics especially among less-proficient non-English major L2 learners.

The current study is an attempt to investigate the relative efficacy of explicit and implicit form-focused instruction (FFI) on the performance of some basic speech acts in English (responding to advice, making suggestions, complaints, requests and offers) by a group of elementary-level non-English major adult Turkish EFL learners. The current study has been conducted both to contribute to furthering our understanding of the roles of implicit and explicit form-focused instruction and to expand the range of learning targets. Therefore, it seeks answers to the following research questions:

1. Does pragmatic instruction work for elementary-level non-English major adult Turkish EFL learners?
2. What are the relative effects of implicit and explicit FFI on learners’ performance of some basic speech acts in English?

Literature review below provides brief information about pragmatic competence and the focus of research on pragmatic competence. Following this, explicit and implicit instruction are defined in a broad sense and specifically in pragmatics, respectively. Next, studies investigating the relative effects of explicit and implicit form-focused instruction on the development of L2 pragmatic competence are mentioned describing the variety of methods used to provide pragmatics instruction and reporting on the effectiveness of given assessment methods.

### **Literature Review**

Bachman (1990) proposed *pragmatic competence* as a separate unit of communicative competence suggesting that general language competence consists of two main parts, namely organizational competence and pragmatic competence. The former includes grammatical competence, which refers to a language user's linguistic knowledge such as vocabulary, morphology and syntax, and textual competence, which is about cohesion and coherence in interaction. The latter, pragmatic competence, consists of illocutionary competence and sociolinguistic competence. Illocutionary competence, involves four main functions: ideational function helps language users express their thoughts and feelings; manipulative function enables people to obtain what they want; heuristic function creates opportunities to learn new things and use language as a problem-solving tool; and imaginative function improves people's creativity (Bachman, 1990). Sociolinguistic competence, on the other hand, is related to the level of sensitivity which is necessary for taking the variations in diverse communicative situations and entails sensitivity towards language variations based on social or regional diversities between interlocutors.

Research on pragmatic competence focuses on the effects of different factors on pragmatic competence. Some studies have investigated the impact of language proficiency on pragmatic competence (Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998; Taguchi, 2011; Takahashi, 2005). Some others have investigated the effects of learning environment (Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998; Schauer, 2006). Still some others have investigated the impacts of length of residence (Bataller, 2010; Ren, 2013; Roever, 2013; Shively, 2011; Taguchi, 2015). Most studies, however, have tried to find out the effects of instruction (Martinez-Flor & Fukuyaka, 2005; Soler, 2005; Koike & Pearson, 2005; Bu, 2012; Nguyen, Pham & Pham, 2012; Ahmadi & Ghaemi, 2016; Hassaskhah & Ebrahimi, 2015), which is also the concern of the present study.

### **Explicit and implicit L2 instruction: In a broad sense**

Prior to defining explicit and implicit instruction, it is first necessary to make a distinction between direct and indirect instruction. Direct instruction is specifying what is learnt beforehand, whereas indirect instruction is creating conditions in which learners can learn experientially through learning how to communicate in L2 (Ellis, 2005). Explicit instruction includes direct intervention, while implicit instruction includes indirect intervention. Explicit approach to instruction refers to explaining rules to learners, or helping learners find rules by drawing their attention to forms. Implicit approach to instruction, on the other hand, indicates making no overt reference to rules or forms. Directing learners' attention to language forms may be in isolation, during meaning processing (explicit instruction) or not at all (implicit instruction), which can be better understood by the tripartite distinction among, focus on form, forms and meaning. Long (1991) notes that focus-on-form refers to "overtly drawing students' attention to linguistic elements as they arise incidentally in lessons whose overriding focus is on meaning or communication." (p.46) Doughty & Williams (1998) point out that "a focus on form entails a focus on formal elements of language, whereas focus on forms is limited to such a focus, and focus on meaning excludes it." (p.4) Based on this distinction, Doughty and Williams (1998) list a number of differences between form-focused instruction and forms-

focused instruction in SLA. To begin with, “form” refers to the general language form, whereas “forms” refers to isolated, specific language forms. Second, in focus-on-form instruction, learners engage in meaning before they explore some linguistic features, and there is an occasional shift of attention to form, whereas in focus-on-forms instruction, the focus is primarily on linguistic features. Moreover, focus-on-form instruction depends on perceived problems in comprehension or production; however, focus-on-forms instruction is pre-selected in the syllabus. Finally, focus-on-form is an analytic approach to SLA, in which linguistic features are explored in contexts, whereas focus-on-forms is a synthetic approach to SLA, in which forms are taught in isolation.

Doughty and Williams (1998) signify that focus-on-form requires presence of form and meaning at the same time so that learners’ attention could be drawn to the linguistic elements of the language in order to get the meaning across, which may be one of the reasons why it is preferred over focus-on-forms and focus-on-meaning alone. Additionally, research studies conducted in immersion programs in Canada have shown that L2 learners are not able to attain target-like levels of some linguistic features if classroom second language learning focuses merely on meaning. Moreover, some kind of pedagogical intervention is necessary for some aspects of the language that learners cannot notice on their own (Doughty, 2003). Furthermore, classroom SLA is limited, which can be overcome with help of pedagogical interventions embedded in communicative activities. Therefore, recently, SLA practitioners have been more interested in focus-on-form approaches that merge formal instruction into communicative language use. There are a variety of research issues on focus-on-form instruction such as whether or not to focus on form, timing for focus on form, contextual factors affecting focus on form, proactive versus reactive focus on form, what forms to focus on, the degree of explicitness, curricular decision and cognitive underpinnings on focus on form (Doughty & Williams, 1998; Doughty, 2001; Long & Robinson, 1998). Ways of focusing on form include conscious reflection, noticing the gap, hypothesis formulation and testing, meta-talk, recasting, visual input enhancement such as utilizing italics, bolding, enlargement, underlining, coloring. Additionally, Gass and Selinker (2008) maintain that metalinguistic training in focusing on form is likely to enable learners to be sensitive to grammatical form as well rather than to lexical form only.

### **Explicit and implicit L2 instruction: Pragmatics**

Jeon and Kaya (2006) point out that despite the dichotomous nature of explicit versus implicit instruction, the actual treatment conditions of instructed pragmatics studies often reflect a point on a continuum between the absolutely explicit and the absolutely implicit extremes. Interventional pragmatics studies featuring techniques on the most explicit end of the continuum are more common than those featuring techniques on the most implicit end. It is typical of such studies to include teacher fronted instruction on pragmalinguistic forms or sociopragmatic rules sanctioned by the target speech community, and to be often characterized by a complete disclosure of the goal of the lesson, frequent use of metalanguage and metapragmatic information, unidirectional information flow from teacher to learners, and structural exercises (Jeon & Kaya, 2006). Studies exploring the effects of explicit FFI constitute a majority in the literature on L2 pragmatics instruction (Jeon & Kaya, 2006). Findings of these studies generally show that explicit FFI is effective in promoting L2 pragmatic ability, emphasizing the role of attention and awareness in L2 learning. For example, Fukuya (1988), Martinez-Flor (2008) and Safont (2003) have found positive effects for awareness-raising combined with meta-pragmatic instruction in teaching request modifiers in L2 English.

Implicit pragmatic instruction, on the other hand, employs consciousness-raising activities. It is largely characterized by learners' induction or self-discovery of target features from given input, which may be through film, analysis of native speaker output in a spoken or written form or via directions. Consciousness-raising activities may also be realized by encouraging learners to participate in collaborative activities such as group discussion or pair work, which intend to facilitate their focal attention to the target of instruction and to foster the discovery of language use patterns through interaction (Jeon & Kaya, 2006). Implicit FFI seems to have received less attention in L2 pragmatics research than explicit FFI. For example, in a meta-analysis conducted by Jeon and Kaya (2006) thirteen studies with quantitative data were reviewed. While twelve of them included explicit treatment, only seven of them included implicit treatment.

### **The relative effects of explicit and implicit form-focused instruction on the development of L2 pragmatic competence**

Some studies have investigated the independent effects of explicit and implicit instruction on pragmatic development without comparing the two types of instruction. Martinez-Flor and Fukuyaka (2005), for example, examined the effects of explicit and implicit pragmatic instruction on learning head acts and downgraders in suggestions among intermediate-level Spanish learners of English. The results demonstrated that both the explicit group and the implicit group significantly improved in the post-test over the pre-test, and significantly outperformed the control group in the post-test. Qari (2021) tested only whether explicit instruction of various L2 request forms can be a useful measure in developing Saudi learners' linguistic and pragmatic competences through three phases of instruction, namely pre-test, instruction/intervention, and post-test. The pre- and post-tests consisted of written questionnaires which were distributed right before and after the instruction phase. The results showed that the students demonstrated great progress in their understanding of request forms in L2. Their improvement was manifested by the learners' acknowledgement of these forms as proper employment of request strategies in English, recognition of request function names, ability to assign correct functions to linguistic realizations and their overall understanding of the appropriate use of these forms dictated by the weightiness of different request situations.

Most of the previous studies, on the other hand, have investigated the relative efficacy of explicit and implicit form-focused instruction on L2 learners' pragmatic development, and most obtained findings in favor of the explicit instruction. Soler (2005), for example, attempted to examine the efficacy of instruction at the pragmatic level with the purpose of investigating to what extent two instructional paradigms, namely explicit versus implicit instruction, affected learners' knowledge and ability to use request strategies. The participants, who were in the last year of their secondary education in a state high school in Spain, were randomly assigned to implicit, explicit and control groups. The explicit group was provided with a focus-on-forms instruction based on the use of explicit awareness-raising tasks on requests, and provision of meta-pragmatic feedback. The implicit group, on the other hand, received a focus-on-form instruction by means of input enhancement on pragma-linguistic and socio-pragmatic factors involved in requesting, and made use of implicit awareness-raising tasks. The control group did not receive any instruction on the use of requests. Results of this study indicate that awareness of request realization strategies increased over time, and the explicit group outperformed the implicit one. However, this difference was not statistically significant. On the other hand, the gains in production were significantly different in favor of the explicit group over the implicit group, suggesting that explicit instruction benefits learners' production of requests more than implicit instruction.

Koike and Pearson (2005) examined the effectiveness of teaching pragmatic information through the use of explicit or implicit pre-instruction, and explicit or implicit feedback, to English-speaking learners of third-semester Spanish. In this study, there were five different groups, namely EPEF (Explicit pre-instruction + explicit feedback), EPIF (Explicit pre-instruction + implicit feedback), IPEF (Implicit pre-instruction + explicit feedback), IPIF (Implicit pre-instruction + implicit feedback) and control group (No pre-instruction + no feedback), and two different data collection instruments, namely a multiple-choice test and open-ended dialogues. With regard to the multiple-choice test, it was found that the effect of instruction was not sustained over the four-week period, but that the learners who received both explicit pre-instruction and explicit feedback retained more of an effect of this pragmatic instruction for a week after finishing the last lesson. As to the open-ended dialogues, however, the mean scores were not significantly different among the groups. Bu (2012) aimed to show whether Chinese EFL learners' pragmatic competence of 'suggesting speech act' improves after pragmatic language teaching, and to indicate what type of pragmatic language teaching (i.e. explicit or implicit) is more effective in developing learners' pragmatic competence of suggesting speech act. For the explicit teaching group, two types of treatment materials were prepared for each session. One is hand-outs in which detailed meta-pragmatic information on the preselected target suggestion forms was provided, and the other is a translation exercise packet, in which Chinese-English translation exercises using these preselected target suggestion forms were given. For the implicit teaching group, two types of treatment materials were designed for each session. One is open-ended role-plays which were required to be filled in by the subjects in this group. After the subjects had filled in the open-ended role-plays, they were given the transcripts of the NS-NS role-plays in the corresponding situations. The subjects were then asked to compare their own English suggestion expressions in their completed role-plays with those in the NS-NS role-play transcripts and were required to discover any differences in suggestion realization patterns between their suggestion forms and the NS suggestion forms. The control group did not receive any pragmatic language teaching treatment of suggesting speech act. Results revealed that the explicit teaching group and the implicit teaching group improved their pragmatic competence of suggesting speech act after the treatment. In addition, explicit pragmatic language teaching was found to be more effective than implicit pragmatic language teaching in developing Chinese EFL learners' pragmatic competence of suggesting speech act.

Nguyen, Pham and Pham (2012) aimed to address the need for better understanding the relative efficacy of explicit and implicit FFI in the pragmatic realm among high-intermediate EFL learners. The instructional procedure for the explicit group comprised of consciousness-raising, meta-pragmatic explanation following each consciousness-raising activity, follow-up class discussion of socio-pragmatic and pragma-linguistic aspects of giving constructive criticism in both L1 and L2, productive activities such as providing softeners for unmitigated constructive criticism, plus providing oral feedback on peer's written assignments, reflection on output and working to improve it, and explicit correction of both pragmatic and grammatical errors in both teacher-fronted and pair-work activities. The instructional procedure for the implicit group consisted of input enhancement, communicative tasks comprising of a discourse completion task and oral peer-feedback tasks, reflection on output and working to improve it, and recast of both pragmatic and grammatical errors which arise out of communicative tasks. Data were collected through a written discourse completion task (DCT), role-plays (RP), and oral peer feedback (OPF) on the written works. Regarding the DCT, while the two treatment groups displayed improvement from the pre-test to the immediate post-test, the control group did not. The explicit group performed significantly better than the control group and the implicit group. As for the RP, the two treatment groups made gains from the pre-test to the immediate post-

test, but the control group did not. Both treatment groups performed significantly better than the control group, and the explicit group also significantly outperformed the implicit group. With regard to the OPF, the two treatment groups improved from the pre-test to the immediate post-test, but the control group did not. Both treatment groups performed significantly better than the control group, and the explicit group also significantly outperformed the implicit group. In addition, it was found that both experimental groups scored significantly higher in the delayed post-test than in the pre-test, which indicates that the positive effects for the two types of treatments were maintained beyond immediate post-experimental observation. Results of the delayed post-test also showed that the explicit group significantly outperformed the implicit group in all three tasks.

Ahmadi and Ghaemi (2016) investigated the effect of output-based task repetition on Iranian EFL learners' ability to produce the speech acts of thanking, apologizing, and refusing under explicit and implicit task repetition conditions. Results revealed that explicit task repetition and implicit task repetition groups made statistically significant improvement from the pre-test to the post-test in terms of their ability to produce the speech acts after the treatment. Additionally, the explicit task repetition group performed significantly better than the implicit task repetition group. These findings suggest that output-based task repetition can be effective if it is accompanied by input plus meta-pragmatic information or visually enhanced input plus consciousness raising tasks (explicit task repetition). In other words, repetition of output generation tasks accompanied by only learners' reflection and meta-talk, without exposing the learners to any input (implicit task repetition), seems not to be effective in enhancing learners' speech act production ability.

More recently, Hang (2019) examined whether there were any significant variations at the production of apology strategies among advanced EFL Vietnamese students of English when they were instructed with explicit and implicit training methods and which teaching method would generate more benefits for the learners. The explicit group underwent four different stages in each lesson including presentation, explanation, practice, and feedback. The implicit training group was also instructed with the same phases and received exposure to similar authentic input, but they experienced enhancement of input through extra activities outside the classroom. Tests relevant to written discourse completion tasks were delivered to the participants before and after the training period with a pre-test, post-test, and delayed-test. The results indicated that both training groups showed significant differences and improvements at their production of the speech act after the treatment. However, the explicit training method generated more benefits to learners than the implicit training approach. Shark (2019) also explored the effects of explicit and implicit instructions on the development of advanced Iraqi Kurdish EFL learners' pragmatic knowledge in terms of apology speech act, employing a Multiple-choice Discourse Completion Test (MDCT) as a pre-test and a post-test. The findings revealed that the results of the explicit group (EG) and the implicit group (IG) were significant and they showed improvements after the treatment, and the EG outperformed the IG in post-test and delayed-test.

There are studies in which there was not a significant difference between two treatment conditions on post-intervention scores, though. Hassaskhah and Ebrahimi (2015), for example, compared the impact of two types of teaching conditions: explicit teacher explanation and implicit foreign film watching, on the process of (meta) pragmatic learning, (compliments) of Iranian elementary EFL learners. Results revealed that both groups made significant improvements from the pre-test to the post-test. Thus the results indicate that both explicit and implicit teaching of English compliments had a significant effect on raising Iranian elementary

EFL learners' (meta) pragmatic information in the specified situations. Neither group outperformed the other, and both raised learners' (meta) pragmatic ability. In other words, both groups greatly benefited from the medium-based instruction (explicit/implicit) and both types of treatment increased EFL learners' (meta) pragmatic awareness and ability to use grammatically correct and culturally appropriate English compliments.

To our knowledge, Kubota (1995) is the only study that found superior effects for implicit instruction over explicit instruction. This research was intended to investigate whether it may be effective to teach 'conversational implicature' to Japanese EFL learners. Both explicit group and implicit group performed significantly better than the control group, whereas the implicit group, in which consciousness-raising tasks were used, made significant progress from the pre-test to the post-test. However, these initial differences vanished by the time a delayed post-test was conducted.

Literature having been reviewed so far reveals that explicit form-focused instruction turns out to be more effective than implicit form-focused instruction in L2 pragmatics. However, we should keep in mind that implicit instruction is densely investigated as compared to explicit instruction. In addition, methodological issues such as treatment lengths, data collection methods and the target population vary among these studies and they significantly affect the findings. Therefore, further research is still required to enable us to gain better insights into the problem that the current study is also concerned with.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

The present study adopts a quasi-experimental, pre-test/post-test design with a control group. A total of 71 EFL learners participated in this study. They were randomly assigned to three groups, namely explicit form-focused instruction group (EFFI) (N=25), implicit form-focused instruction group (IFFI) (N=22) and control group (N=24). They were studying at Anadolu University School of Foreign Languages (AUSFL) while the present study was being conducted. They had been learning English for 22 hours in a week, and they were following a textbook (Speakout Elementary Student's Book), in which the four skills, grammar and vocabulary are presented in an integrated way, along with a supplementary pack, prepared by the instructors at their school. The participants were at C level as a result of a placement test prepared by the AUSFL<sup>1</sup> according to the Global Scale of English (GSE) learning objectives<sup>2</sup>. The participants were between 18 and 21 years old. Their majors included Engineering, Statistics, Economics, Civil Aviation, Chemistry, Public Relations, and Cinema and Television. They were all monolinguals with their native language being Turkish, and none had had an extended stay in an English-speaking country. It is worth noting that the participants had had almost no contact with native speakers in authentic situations before the current study was conducted.

Prior to data collection, the participants were administered a listening comprehension test (LCT), prepared by the researcher. The purpose of the LCT was to confirm that the participants in three different groups did not differ from each other in terms of their listening comprehension. LCT consisted of three parts and six tasks. In other words, the participants listened to three different recordings and carried out six different tasks. The three parts were a conversation between a teacher and a student, a news report and a lecture, respectively. The question types included numbering statements, true/false, multiple-choice questions and marking the sentences that were mentioned in the recording. It took 20 minutes to complete the LCT. It was found that there were no statistically significant differences across the IFFI group



( $M=21.41$ ,  $SD=2.63$ ), EFFI group ( $M=21.08$ ,  $SD=2.46$ ) and control group ( $M=21.25$ ,  $SD=2.30$ ),  $p=.901$ . In other words, it was confirmed that the participants in the three different groups were indeed similar to each other as far as their L2 listening comprehension was concerned. This finding is important because the participants' L2 listening comprehension is an integral part of the pragmatics instruction in the present study.

### Instruments

Data were collected by using a written discourse completion task (WDCT) (attached at the end). The WDCT consists of 15 situations, which the participants were asked to respond to. The situations were constructed upon a small-scale interview with a group of Erasmus students who had come back to Turkey recently. They were asked about a variety of daily problems they encountered, and how they solved those problems. As a result, three situations were created for each of the following functions: making suggestions, responding to advice, making a complaint, making requests and offering help (See table 1 below). Later, two native speakers of English were asked for their opinion of the grammatical accuracy and authenticity of the situations in the WDCT. Finally, two experienced instructors working at AUSFL Testing Unit at C level were asked for their opinion on the comprehensibility of the situations in terms of grammar and vocabulary considering the GSE learning outcomes falling at C level. It is worth noting that L1 translations were provided for the vocabulary items that were assumed to be unfamiliar to the participants.

Table 1  
*Target Forms*

Making suggestions	How about ...? Why don't you/we ...? Shall we ...? Let's ...
Responding to advice	That's a good idea. I suppose so. You're right. I'm not sure that's a good idea.
Complaining	I'm afraid I have a complaint. There's a problem with ... Could you help me? Excuse me, could I speak to ...?
Making requests	I'd like to ... Would it be possible to + V1 ...? Would you be able to + V1...? Could you recommend a ...?
Offering help	Would you like me to ...? Do you want me to ...? Shall I ...?

The WDCT was piloted with a group of EFL learners ( $N=18$ ), who were also studying at C level at AUSFL, in order to confirm that the situations were comprehensible and did test what they were designed to test. The participants in the pilot study were asked to read and write their responses to the situations in English. They reported that they comprehended the situations, but had difficulty in responding because they had not learnt the structures they were expected to use yet. After that, they were asked to orally respond to the situations in Turkish, which showed that the situations in the WDCT worked. After the pilot study, it became clear that the situations

were comprehensible for C-level students, and the actual participants of the current study would be able to respond to these situations by making suggestions, responding to advice, making complaints, making requests and offering help once they learned how to do so.

The WDCT was used as both a pre-test and a post-test, but the order of the situations was changed for each test.

### **Instructional procedures**

This study was conducted as a part of the participants' regular studies at AUSFL. Four different lesson plans were prepared for each group. The lessons were adapted from *Speakout Pre-Intermediate Student's Book*. In each lesson, both of the experimental groups, namely EFFI and IFFI, first listened to a conversation(s) and answered one or two questions about the main idea. They listened to the conversation(s) again and answered more comprehension questions. In this sense, for both classes, the instruction focused on meaning at first. The length of this part of the lessons varied depending on the length of the listening texts, yet it was the same for both classes. Prior to this meaning-focused instruction, however, the IFFI group were given one or two discussion questions about the topic of the listening as a pre-listening exercise. For example, the first instruction was about making suggestions, and the participants in the IFFI group talked about whether they like being alone or with their friends at the weekend, and what they like doing with their friends at the weekend. After listening to the conversation(s) and answering the first comprehension questions, the participants in the IFFI group were provided with the transcript of the conversation(s), in which the target forms were in bold and underlined. They read the transcript and did more meaning-focused comprehension exercises such as marking some statements as true or false. They checked their answers all together with the teacher. After that, they answered some discussion questions again as a post-listening exercise this time.

The participants in the EFFI group were provided with explicit instruction on grammatical accuracy and meta-pragmatic information on the appropriate use of the target forms. The teacher explained the grammatical and pragmatic features of these forms to the participants and wrote them on the board along with some examples. After that, the participants did some form-focused exercises such as putting the words given in a box in the correct places in a conversation and putting the words in the correct order to make sentences. They checked their answers all together with the teacher. Finally, the participants in both of the experimental groups did a production exercise, in which they were expected to produce the target forms in writing. The production exercises consisted of a role-play (week 1), dialogue completion based on visual input (week 2) and discourse completion tasks (week 3 and 4). The purpose of these production exercises was to provide the participants with an opportunity to try out the newly learned forms and receive feedback from the teacher.

In sum, for both groups the instruction was both meaning-focused and form-focused and output-based. However, in the EFFI group, the form-focused instruction was explicit through instruction on grammatical accuracy and meta-pragmatic information on the appropriate use of the target forms, whereas in the IFFI group, the form-focused instruction was implicit through input-enhancement. First, the participants in the explicit FFI group and implicit FFI group were made to attend the input through awareness raising and input enhancement respectively. SLA research points out that making learners attend to input is an important condition for acquisition to take place (Gass, 1988; Schmidt, 1993, 1995; Sharwood Smith, 1981). Second, the participants in both experimental groups were also made to process the input further in production activities at the end of each lesson, and thus had an opportunity not only to try out

newly learned forms but also to receive feedback from the teacher. In other words, apart from an opportunity for input noticing, learners in both groups also benefited from an opportunity to use language in a meaningful way to develop fluency and to receive evidence about the appropriateness and accuracy of the speech acts targeted in the present study (Swain, 1985; 1995).

Table 2 below shows a summary of the instructional procedures for the IFFI and EFFI groups.

Table 2  
*A Summary of the Instructional Procedures.*

	<b>Meaning-Focused Instruction + Implicit Instruction (IFFI)</b>	<b>Form-Focused Instruction + Discussion</b>	<b>Meaning-Focused Instruction + Explicit Instruction (EFFI)</b>
<b>Week 1: Making suggestions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pre-listening: questions</li> <li>• Listening to a conversation between a man and a woman about doing something new at the weekend</li> <li>• Completing a table about the event and what people do at that event.</li> <li>• Reading the transcript and answering comprehension questions (True/False statements)</li> <li>• Post-listening: questions</li> <li>• Production</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion</li> <li>• (True/False)</li> <li>• Discussion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listening to a conversation between a man and a woman about doing something new at the weekend.</li> <li>• Completing a table about the event and what people do at that event.</li> <li>• Instruction on grammatical accuracy and meta-pragmatic information on the appropriate use of the target forms.</li> <li>• Practice: Putting the words given in a box in the correct places in a conversation.</li> <li>• Production</li> </ul>
<b>Week 2: Responding to advice</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pre-listening: questions</li> <li>• Listening to two teachers discussing language learning.</li> <li>• Noting the problems they mention (gap-filling activity)</li> <li>• Reading the transcript and answering comprehension questions (True/False statements)</li> <li>• Post-listening: questions</li> <li>• Production</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion</li> <li>• (True/False)</li> <li>• Discussion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listening to two teachers discussing language learning.</li> <li>• Noting the problems they mention (gap-filling activity)</li> <li>• Instruction on grammatical accuracy and meta-pragmatic information on the appropriate use of the target forms.</li> <li>• Practice: Putting the words in the correct order to make sentences</li> <li>• Production</li> </ul>
<b>Week 3: Complaining</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pre-listening: questions</li> <li>• Listening to three people complaining at different places.</li> <li>• Answering two comprehension questions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listening to three people complaining at different places.</li> <li>• Answering two comprehension questions.</li> <li>• Instruction on grammatical accuracy and meta-pragmatic</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading the transcript and answering more comprehension questions (Multiple Choice questions, True/false statements)</li> <li>• Post-listening: Discussion questions</li> <li>• Production</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• information on the appropriate use of the target forms.</li> <li>• Practice: Putting the words in the correct order to make conversations</li> <li>• Production</li> </ul>
<b>Week 4: Making requests and offering help</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pre-listening: Discussion questions</li> <li>• Listening to four conversations with a hotel concierge.</li> <li>• Completing the sentences from the conversations to find out what each person wants.</li> <li>• Reading the transcript and answering more comprehension questions (Multiple Choice questions, True/False statements)</li> <li>• Post-listening: Discussion questions</li> <li>• Production</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listening to four conversations with a hotel concierge.</li> <li>• Completing the sentences from the conversations to find out what each person wants.</li> <li>• Instruction on grammatical accuracy and meta-pragmatic information on the appropriate use of the target forms.</li> <li>• Practice: Putting the words given in a box in the correct places in a conversation.</li> <li>• Production</li> </ul>

### Data collection procedures

The data were collected in a total of seven weeks. In the first week, the pre-test and the listening comprehension test (LCT) were administered. One week later, the instruction began, and it lasted 45 minutes every week for four weeks. Two weeks later, the post-test was administered. It is worth noting that no immediate post-test was conducted in the current study in order not to constitute additional exposure to the target structures.

### Data Analysis

The participants' responses to the situations in the DCT were scored by the researcher and a co-rater. The co-rater was an experienced English instructor at the same institution. There was no disagreement between the two raters.

The participants' responses were scored considering the target structures in the present study and grammatical accuracy. It is worth noting that only the responses that contained the target structures were analyzed. In other words, the participants' responses that were grammatically accurate and pragmatically appropriate but not formed with the target structures in the present study were ignored. All in all, 22 answers (that were grammatically accurate and pragmatically appropriate but not formed with the target structures in the present study) were ignored (CG=5, IFFI=8 and EFFI=9), and a total of 295 answers were considered for data analysis (CG=11, IFFI=77 and EFFI=207). The answers that were considered for data analysis comprised 26,810 words in total (CG=990, IFFI=6,776 and EFFI=19,044).

The scoring was as follow:

Table 3  
*Scoring of the WDCT*

<b>Use of one of the appropriate target structures</b>	1 point
<b>Grammatical Accuracy</b>	1 point
<b>Total</b>	2 points

According to the scoring table above, if the participants provided one or more of the appropriate target structures in their responses, they obtained 1 point. If the structure they provided was grammatically correct, they obtained 1 more point, making 2 points total. If the structure they provided was grammatically incorrect or incomplete, they obtained 1 point total. The participants' scores were calculated and computed. Descriptive statistics were calculated, and a one-way ANOVA and a mixed model between-within subjects ANOVA were conducted.

### Results

As to the WDCT pre-test, Table 4 below displays that the mean scores for the IFFI group, EFFI group and the control group were  $M=.36$ ,  $M=.24$  and  $M=.29$ , respectively. Table 4 and Figure 1 below also show that the mean scores for each group increased to  $M=7.09$ ,  $M=16.56$  and  $M=.79$ , respectively in the WDCT post-test.

Table 4  
*Descriptive Statistics*

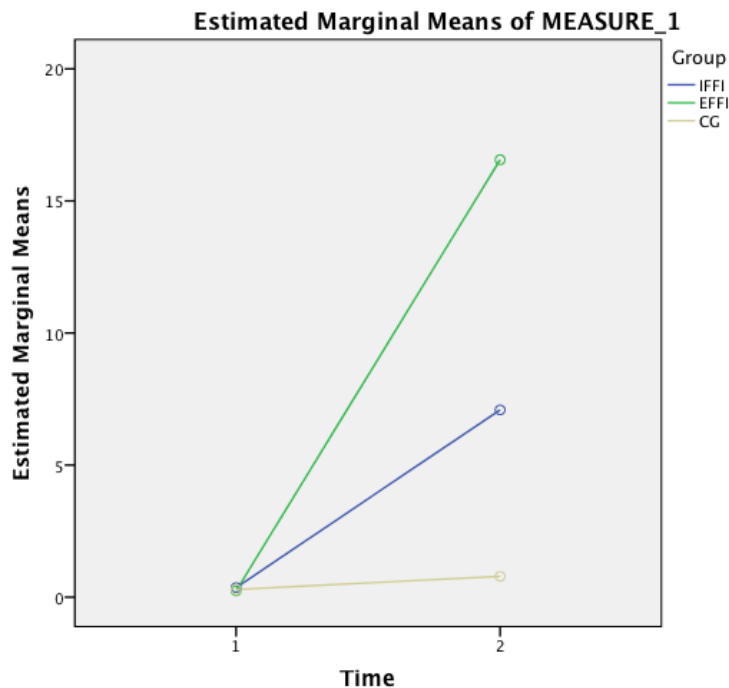
	<b>Group</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>N</b>
<b>Pre-test</b>	<b>IFFI</b>	.36	.72	22
	<b>EFFI</b>	.24	.59	25
	<b>CG</b>	.29	.69	24
	<b>Total</b>	.30	.66	71
<b>Post-test</b>	<b>IFFI</b>	7.09	2.42	22
	<b>EFFI</b>	16.56	3.89	25
	<b>CG</b>	.79	1.02	24
	<b>Total</b>	8.30	7.17	71

A one-way ANOVA revealed that there were no significant differences across the three groups (IFFI, EFFI and CG) in the pre-test,  $F(2, 68)=.199$ ,  $p>.05$ . As to the post-test; on the other hand, significant differences were found across the three groups,  $F(2, 68)=205.277$ ,  $p>.001$ . Furthermore, a  $2_{(Time)} \times 3_{(Group)}$  mixed model between-within subjects ANOVA, with the first variable as a repeated measure, was utilized to explore the effects of implicit form-focused pragmatics instruction, explicit form-focused pragmatics instruction and no instruction on pragmatic competence of elementary-level adult Turkish EFL learners across the pre-test and post-test. Results revealed a significant main effect for Time across the pre-test and post-test,  $F(1, 68)=605.550$ ,  $p<.001$ . A significant main effect for Group for the two treatment groups and control group was also found,  $F(2, 68) = 175.108$ ,  $p < .001$ . In addition, the results revealed a significant interaction effect between Group and Time,  $F(2, 68) = 216.313$ ,  $p < .001$ .

LSD Post-hoc test revealed that the significant differences in the post-test occurred between EFFI and CG, IFFI and CG and EFFI and IFFI. The participants in the EFFI group ( $M=16.56$ ,  $SD=3.89$ ) performed significantly better than the participants in the IFFI group ( $M=7.09$ ,  $SD=2.42$ ),  $p<.001$ , and the participants in the control group  $M=.79$ ,  $SD=1.02$ ,  $p<.001$ . Additionally, the participants in the IFFI group significantly outperformed the participants in the control group,  $p<.001$ .

Figure 1

*Increases in the Mean Scores for the IFFI, EFFI and Control Groups from the Pre-test to the Post-test*



## Discussion

The aim of the present study was to investigate the relative efficacy of two types of pedagogical interventions, explicit and implicit FFI, on a group of elementary-level Turkish adult EFL learners' performance of some basic speech acts such as making suggestions, responding to advice, complaining, making requests and offering help. The results of the DCT pre-test suggested that the participants were similar to each other in terms of their pragmatic competence prior to the instructional procedures conducted in the present study. The low scores they obtained in the pre-test further revealed that the participants' pragmatic competence was rather low with regard to making suggestions, responding to advice, complaining, making requests and offering help. The results of the DCT pre-test also suggested that the participants were not familiar with the target structures in the present study prior to the instructional procedures, which means that the participants' gains from the pre-test to the post-test concerning the target structures may be attributed to the pragmatics instruction in the present study.

Two main findings emerged from the current study. First, the significant increases in the IFFI and EFFI groups' mean scores from the pre-test to the post-test indicate that pragmatic instruction seems to work for elementary-level non-English major adult Turkish EFL learners. Second, the findings of the present study point out that explicit form-focused instruction seems to lead to better learning although both types of instruction proved effective in developing learners' pragmatic performance. These results are consistent with findings of previous research in both grammar instruction and pragmatics instruction (Soler, 2005; Koike & Pearson, 2005; Bu, 2012; Nguyen, Pham & Pham, 2012; Ahmadi & Ghaemi, 2016; Hang, 2019; Shark, 2019) and might be explained in light of a number of second language acquisition theories.

The fact the students who received explicit instruction outperformed those that received implicit instruction indicates that meta-pragmatic explanation seems more successful than input enhancement. This may be because input enhancement may induce noticing of pragmatic forms only, whereas meta-pragmatic explanation may also promote understanding of socio-pragmatic rules governing the target structures (Nguyen, Pham and Pham, 2012). In this sense, Schmidt (2001) points out that noticing is a phenomenon that happens at the surface level, but understanding concerns a deeper level of abstraction that involves the learning of rules. Gass (1988) also maintains that input may not be comprehended, internalized and integrated into the learner's interlanguage system even though it is noticed. Therefore, it is likely that some of the participants in the implicit FFI group did not understand and internalize the target structures, and thus failed to integrate them into their interlanguage system. Most of the participants in the explicit FFI group, on the other hand, seemed to be able to do so.

### **Conclusion**

Research has revealed that L2 instruction is necessary because it is likely to solve or at least ameliorate the problems caused because of the fact that adult SLA is difficult, varied and often poor in terms of outcome. When it comes to pragmatics, instruction is even more necessary because pragmatic knowledge is acquired slowly in naturalistic contexts. The nature of EFL context, where opportunities for input and interaction outside the classroom are often limited and formal instruction serves as the only regular source of L2 knowledge, also adds to the significance of pragmatics instruction. In this sense, further research is needed to better understand the relative effectiveness of explicit and implicit pragmatics instruction because implicit instruction has been densely investigated, and such methodological issues as treatment lengths and data collection methods have varied between the two types of instruction in some of these studies. In addition, most of the previous studies have investigated the role of instruction in pragmatic competence among high-proficiency L2 learners or EFL learners majoring in English Language Teaching (ELT), thus ignoring the teachability of L2 pragmatics to less proficient non-English major L2 learners. Therefore, the present study is an attempt to investigate the relative efficacy of explicit and implicit form-focused instruction (FFI) on the performance of some basic speech acts in English, namely responding to advice, making suggestions, complaints, requests and offers, by Turkish EFL learners.

The results showed that learners who received either type of instruction improved in the post-test over the pre-test, and the explicit group significantly outperformed the implicit group when performing in the post-test. These results indicate that although both types of instruction proved effective in developing learners' pragmatic performance, explicit instruction tended to produce a larger magnitude of effects. Within the light of these findings, some pedagogical implications can be suggested. First, materials developers and instructors should integrate pragmatics into their second and foreign language instruction to better develop learners' pragmatic competence. In so doing, real-life situations could be created for learners so that they can be motivated to the input given. Student exchange programs, which provide EFL learners with the rare opportunity to stay abroad for a long time and practice a foreign language (mainly English), set a good example to increase learners' motivation to improve their pragmatic competence. In other words, prior to the teaching of L2 pragmatics, learners may be warmed up by imagining that they are students in a foreign country and will need to use the target structures appropriately. Second, awareness-raising tasks and input enhancement techniques should be operationalized and implemented by language instructors to equip learners with a better knowledge of pragmatics. For example, authentic audio-visual materials can be used in class so that learners can be provided with opportunities to become aware of language use in particular settings. Meta-pragmatic explanations shouldn't be neglected, on the other hand.

Third, pragmatic instruction should be output based. In other words, once learners become aware of the target structures either implicitly or explicitly, they should be made to process the input further in production activities so that they can try out newly learned forms.

The present study is not free from limitations, though. First, the small sample size impedes us from generalizing the findings to a larger extent. In other words, a larger sample size could have been better in order to reach more generalizable findings. In this sense, it is worth noting that the sample size shrank because the participants who did not attend all steps of the present study were excluded from the final data set. Second, the instruction consisted of the teaching of five different speech acts, namely making suggestions, responding to request, complaining, making requests and offering help. One single speech act could have been chosen and taught in detail for more than one week with different activities each week. However, the participants' L2 proficiency level (elementary) and the target structures (very basic ones) would not have made it possible, or at least plausible. Also, the findings would have been more reliable and enduring if the instruction had lasted for a longer period of time. In addition, the data were collected by means of a discourse completion task only, which is a single outcome measure and is not very naturalistic at all. If the L2 proficiency of the participants had been higher, other data collections instruments such as role-plays could have been considered. Lastly, the quantitative data gathered by means of the DCTs could have been supported with qualitative data. For example, focus group interviews could have been conducted with the participants regarding how they felt during the instructional sessions. Alternatively, the participants could have been asked to keep learning logs. Finally, it was not possible to conduct a delayed post-test because of the dense syllabus and time restrictions. The target structures were very basic speech acts and social distance and power were not included in the present study. Considering the limitations of the present study, further research may focus on a specific speech act with target structures of varying social distance and power. Further research may also make use of data triangulation in order to gain better insights into the relative efficacy of explicit and implicit form-focused instruction among EFL learners. Alternatively, audiovisual input may be provided in further research.

### Notes

1. The placement test consisted of thirty vocabulary, forty grammar and thirty reading comprehension multiple-choice questions.
2. The GSE extends the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) to include more learning objectives (or Can Do statements) that support learning English at all levels of proficiency, across all skills and for different purposes. The GSE learning objectives describe what a learner should be able to do at every point on the Global Scale of English for reading, writing, speaking and listening.

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