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## Research Paper

# A Comparative Study of the Effects of Structured Input and Production-Based Tasks in the Development of Request Modifiers

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## Abstract

This study investigated the differential impacts of the structured input (SI) and output-based instruction (OI) tasks on the improvement of the receptive and productive knowledge of request modifiers. Eighty-three EFL learners were randomly assigned to the SI, OI, and control groups through a quasi-experimental research design. Over a 5-week course, the explicit metapragmatic instruction on the target structures was delivered to all the groups; however, whereas the SI group was exposed to the SI tasks, the OI group was engaged in the dialogue-reconstruction task. Results of ANCOVA and paired comparisons showed the effectiveness of both instructions on L2 pragmatic knowledge. Whereas the SI was more effective in fostering the receptive knowledge of the target structures, the OI better improved the productive knowledge. Moreover, the comprehension gains were not retained in the follow-up test, but the production gains appeared to be durable between the posttest and the follow-up test.

**Keywords:** L2 Pragmatics; Output-Based Instruction; Request Modifiers; Structured Input

## 1. Introduction

Pragmatics concerns using language appropriately in accordance with the social context. It involves pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic competences, with the first one referring to the linguistic resources needed to perform the communicative functions, and the latter one involving the knowledge of the social and cultural rules underlying the L2 socially appropriate linguistic behavior (Kim & Taguchi, 2015). Research in the realm of interlanguage pragmatics has shown that pragmatic features are amenable to instruction (Moradian Asadi, & Azadbakht, 2019; Sydorenko, 2015; Takimoto, 2007, 2009). Where L2 learners have limited exposure to an authentic input or opportunities for output practice, instruction remains the prime source of developing the knowledge of form-function-mapping (Eslami-Rasekh, Mirzaei, & Dini, 2014). It is assumed that, similar to other aspects of pragmatics competence, modification devices are also teachable. Modification devices are the linguistic devices (e.g., *a bit*, *just*, and *somehow*) that go before or after the speech act in order to diminish the impositive force of the head act. Whereas a wealth of studies on instructional pragmatics has been conducted on a variety of head acts, few studies (e.g., Economidou-Kogetsidis, & Woodfield, 2012; Zheng & Xu, 2019) have investigated the modifiers associated with these head acts. This study, thus, aimed to contribute to the existing literature on the development of modification devices by exploring how two instructional types, structured input (hereafter, SI) and output-based instruction (hereafter, OI), may differentially foster the knowledge of request modification devices.

## 2. Background

SI tasks originated from VanPatten's (2004) input processing model. VanPatten has often emphasized the primacy of input and argued that the instruction that changes the way input is processed is likely to become intake. He assigned the peripheral function of enhancing the fluency for the output. Ellis (1995) argued that the SI texts should be manipulated in a way that the target forms are frequent, the meaning is clear, and the comprehension of the target features



is vital for comprehending the entire text. He proposed two approaches for structuring the input: input flooding and interpretation tasks. He argued that the interpretation tasks (the focus of this study) involve the following features:

- A spoken or written stimulus to which learners should make a nonverbal or minimally verbal response (e.g., true/false, check a box, select the correct picture).
- The activities being arranged in a way to, first, draw attention to the meaning, then, form and, subsequently, to error identification.
- The tasks should elicit a referential (often having right or wrong answers) and/or an affective response (requiring L2 learners' opinions and beliefs).

Adopting a different set of principles and practices than those supported by an input-based approach, OI has also received attention from some EFL scholars (e.g., Swain, 2000; Swain & Lapkin, 1995). Swain (2000) did not reject the role of input in language acquisition, but argued that it is insufficient and production practice is needed to help learners move from meaning-oriented less complex semantic to form-oriented more demanding syntactic processing. She argued that output production (a) assists L2 learners to test their less refined hypotheses about the language and to attest, modify, or reject their hypotheses, (b) draws L2 learners' attention to notice the gaps in their developing interlanguage system, and (c) engages them in metalinguistic reflection, where they can consciously reflect on what they produced.

So far, the contribution of both of the input and output form-focused approaches to SLA has received considerable attention, and a long-standing debate has been established on the efficacy of the input, as compared to the output in constructing the L2 knowledge. This debate entailed the emergence of different perspectives and the corresponding empirical studies. These studies largely addressed morphosyntactic features, and whereas reaching a consensus on the benefits of both form-focused approaches over traditional instruction, they arrived at mixed findings in terms of the relative contribution of either input- or output-based techniques. Some studies (e.g., Benati, 2017; Benati & Batziou, 2017; Moradi & Farvardin, 2016; VanPatten, 2001; VanPatten & Cadierno, 1993) claimed a pivotal role for the input and only a less fundamental role for the output and claim that the acquisition is not dependent on the output. Those advocating the output (e.g., Izumi, 2002; Swain, 1995; Swain & Lapkin, 1995), whereas not rejecting a role for input, argue that the output practice facilitates the acquisition of language and fosters the fluency as well as the accuracy of the production. Yet, some other studies (e.g., Baleghizadeh & Saharkhiz, 2014; DeKeyser & Sokalski, 1996; Roohani, Forootanfar, & Hashemian, 2017) assume roles for both the input and the output and argue that both are essential in developing the corresponding comprehension and production skills.

To date, the literature on input processing has typically addressed the target morphosyntactic forms and features (Chan, 2019; Farahian & Avarzamani, 2019; Roohani et al., 2017), and other aspects of SLA have remained untouched or rarely touched, amongst them L2 pragmatics. Few studies (Li, 2011; Sydorenko, 2015; Takimoto, 2007; 2009) have addressed the effectiveness of the SI tasks alone and/or as compared to output-based tasks on establishing the knowledge of form-function-context mapping. Takimoto (2007) studied the effects of (a) structured input tasks with explicit information, (b) problem-solving tasks, and (c) structured input tasks without explicit information on the development of Japanese EFL learners' polite request forms. Whereas both of the problem-solving and SI tasks raised the learners' awareness of the target forms, the first one was less overt compared with the latter one. The results indicated that the three types of treatment had similar effects on the development of the Japanese learners' pragmatic proficiency as measured by three of the four test components: discourse completion, role-play, and acceptability judgment tests. However, with regard to the listening test, although all the three treatment conditions showed pragmatic gains on the posttest, the SI tasks with explicit information group performed at a significantly lower level than the other two conditions on the follow-up test.

In a follow-up study, Takimoto (2009) investigated the acquisition of requestive downgraders among Japanese L1 learners of English exposed to three types of input-based instruction: (a) comprehension-based (CB) instruction, including teacher explanation of requests followed by structured input tasks; (b) consciousness-raising (CR) instruction, including activities like form comparison and answering analysis questions; and (c) SI instruction, which engaged the learners in the same structured input tasks as the first group. The participants' performances after the treatment were assessed using four tests: the listening test (LT), accuracy judgment test (AJT), discourse completion test (DCT), and the role play (RP). Significant effects of the input-based instruction on the development of pragmatic proficiency were found. An interaction was also found between the instruction type and the assessment method. Three types of instruction were found to have roughly similar effects on pragmatic gains, as measured by the DCT, the RP, and the AJT. However, with

respect to LT, all the three groups revealed an improvement in the posttest, whereas the CR and SI groups improved in the follow-up test and the CB group did not.

Whereas earlier studies have largely documented the instructional effects on the development of pragmatic performance accuracy, Li (2011) studied the effects of computerized SI activities on the accuracy and speed of pragmatic recognition and production among Chinese intermediate-level EFL learners exposed to intensive training (IT) and regular training (RT) instruction. The measures of speed demonstrated that the IT group increased the response time from the pretest to the posttest and the delayed posttest, but there was no significant difference between the three groups (i.e., two experimental and one control) in this regard. The effect of practice on speeding up the response time was, thus, weak. With regard to the accuracy of productions, both groups found to outperform in the posttest and the delayed posttest, as revealed by their scores in an oral DCT. However, whereas the IT group was superior to the control group, the RT group failed to outperform its control counterparts. This suggests that varying amounts of input practice differentially affects production accuracy.

Finally, Sydorenko (2015) compared the effects of input received via computerized structured tasks (CASTs) with native speaker (NS) models and open-ended role-play tasks without NS input on the development of Chinese EFL learners' request speech act. The learners' talk was recorded, transcribed, and common trends within and across the groups were identified. Qualitative analysis of the data showed that the participants exposed to the CASTs produced more native-like expressions than the other group. The CASTs drew the learners' attention to the target forms, rendering them to use acceptable native-like requests and to take unfamiliar roles, whereas the RPs with peers entailed more humorous, communicative, and creative use of the language. It is suggested to adopt structured input tasks when the goal is to develop pragmatic appropriateness and to focus learners' attention on form.

In the context of Iran, although there have been few pragmatic studies comparing input-based and output-based tasks, the types of tasks used were not deliberately organized in a structured manner and/or characterized the requirements of referential and affective activities. Ahmadi, Ghaemi, and Birjandi (2016), for instance, examined the effects of different output-based task repetition, including explicit task-repetition (ETR), implicit task-repetition (ITR), and no-input task repetition (NTR) conditions, on EFL learners' speech act production. During the treatment, the ETR group received the input coupled with metapragmatic information, the ITR group received visually enhanced input and a consciousness raising task and the NTR group received no input. The results showed the superiority of ETR followed by ITR, and NTR, suggesting that output alone is insufficient and must be accompanied by comprehensible input in order to reach a desirable speech act production. Along similar lines, Tajeddin and Khodarahmi (2018) compared the effect of using corpus-driven input-based and OI on the defossilization of some common pragmatic routines. Whereas both conditions led to significant improvement in comprehension and using the targets, the output-based treatment led to better production outcomes.

A glance at the above studies suggests that the findings of research comparing input/output-oriented approaches are mixed and inconclusive, and the superiority of each one in L2 learning still remains a matter of debate. Moreover, most existing input-based studies operationalized input-based instruction as input enrichment and input enhancement (Moradi & Farvardin, 2016; Namaziandost et al., 2020; Shintani, 2011) and, to a lesser degree, SI (Chan, 2019; Farahian & Avarzamani, 2019; Roohani et al., 2017). This is even more evident in the realm of L2 pragmatics, which calls for even more research to arrive at a clearer picture of the efficacy of either instructional option. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, almost no study has so far investigated the relative effectiveness of SI and output-based tasks on L2 pragmatics development. Apparently, further contributions in this area will offer a broader insight and deepen our understanding of the efficacy of each of these approaches. Given this backdrop, the purpose of this study was to contribute to the existing input/output literature and fill the existing gaps in the literature by investigating the relative effectiveness of SI tasks (i.e., referential and affective) and meaningful (as opposed to mechanical) output-based tasks (i.e., dialogue reconstruction) on intermediate EFL learners' comprehension and production of request modifiers. The speech act of request was chosen because of its frequency in daily spoken and written discourse. Moreover, as documented in earlier studies (Chen, 2015; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2011), most L2 learners, even at advanced levels of language proficiency, tend to produce infelicitous requests with high levels of directness, overuse, or underuse of lexical/syntactic downgraders, and no acknowledgment of imposition level and, thus, further instructional intervention on the request speech act seems necessary.

The following research questions were specifically addressed:

1. Do SI and meaningful OI differ significantly in developing the EFL learners' receptive knowledge of request modifiers?
2. Do SI and meaningful OI differ significantly in developing the EFL learners' productive knowledge of request modifiers?
3. Do SI and meaningful OI lead to different effects on different types of modification devices?
4. Do the effects of SI and meaningful OI hold over time?

### 3. Method

#### 3.1. Design

The purpose of this study was to examine the relative effectiveness of input-based and output-based instructional approaches on the comprehension and production of request modifiers. The study was a quasi-experimental design with three intact classes. The independent variables included input- and output-based instructional approaches: The first one was operationalized by SI activities and the latter one by dialogue reconstruction tasks. The dependent variables were the participants' comprehension and production of request modifiers, measured via pragmatic acceptability judgment test (AJT) and DCT, respectively. To assess the treatment effect, pretest, immediate, and follow-up tests were conducted, and the obtained data were subjected to within- and between-group comparisons.

#### 3.2. Participants

Eighty-nine first-semester undergraduate EFL students participated in this study. They were enrolled in a general English language course—an obligatory course for all undergraduate students in Iran. From the original pool of the participants, some ( $n = 6$ ) failed to attend all the treatment sessions or did not take the pre/posttest. The final number of the participants was, thus, 83 (34 men and 49 women aged 18-26 [ $M = 19.02$ ,  $SD = 2.3$ ]). Their L1 backgrounds were Azari-Turkish and Farsi. They had previously undergone 7 years of formal English instruction prior to being accepted in the university.

The results of an ANOVA run on reading comprehension and structure portions of a TOEFL test showed that, regarding their general English proficiency level (i.e., preintermediate), the participants were homogeneous ( $M = 28$ ,  $SD = 4.73$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). They were randomly assigned to one of the three conditions (i.e., groups): SI with 11 males and 18 females, OI with 12 males and 13 females, and control (CO) with 11 males and 18 females.

#### 3.3. Target Structures

The speech act of request, according to Brown and Levinson (1987), is defined as a face-threatening act that involves face-saving both on the part of the speaker and the hearer. Requests are inherently imposing and call for a considerable face-work. Three possible strategies for requesting include direct strategy (e.g., *Give me some water.*), indirect strategy (e.g., *Could you give me some water?*), and conventionally indirect strategy (e.g., *You have left the kitchen in a right mess.*).

As the head act, a request may be accompanied by internal and external modification devices, which mitigate the impositive force of the act (Cunnigham, 2017). Internal modifiers are internal, involving lexical/phrasal and syntactic choices (e.g., *a bit*, *somehow*, and *could you*), whereas the external modifiers (i.e., supportive moves) are external to the head, providing the reasons and preparing the listener for the request (e.g., *I'm afraid I'm busy this weekend. Could we meet another day?*). A list of internal and external modifiers appeared in a taxonomy proposed by Blum-Kulka et al. (1989).

#### 3.4. Assessment Measures

Receptive Test: An AJT was used to assess the participants' receptive knowledge of the target structure. The AJT pretest and the posttest items were selected from previous studies (Spinner & Gass, 2019; Takahashi, 2001) and required the participants to read written English descriptions (Farsi translation was also available) of 15 situations and to judge the (in)appropriateness of the request forms for each situation on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (*very inappropriate*)

to 5 (*very appropriate*). It took 30 min for the students to complete the test. For each request rated appropriately, 6 points were awarded. Given that there were 15 items on the test, the possible maximum score was 90 (15 items × 6 scores) for each of the pretest and the posttest. A sample AJT item follows:

✓ **Sample AJT Test:**

*You overslept and missed the final exam for Professor Jackson's course. You are not so familiar with Professor Jackson and you know that Professor Jackson has to hand in students' grades in a few days and does not like to offer students a make-up exam. However, you need to pass the final exam to graduate and you have decided to go and ask Professor Jackson to give you a make-up exam. What would you ask Professor Jackson?* (Adapted from Takahashi, 2001)

- You: I want you to give me a make-up exam.
- Very inappropriate 1---2---3---4---5---completely appropriate

**Production Test:** A DCT was used as a measure to assess the participants' productive knowledge of the target structures. From the original pool of 45 DCT situations selected from previous studies (e.g., Kim & Taguchi, 2016; Zheng & Xu, 2019; Zhu, 2012), 30 situations were chosen based on the situation likelihood investigation and metapragmatic assessment. Fifteen students similar to the target population assessed the given situations, based on the likelihood of each situation's occurrence in their daily life, on a 6-point Likert scale with 1 (*least likely to occur*) and 6 (*most likely to occur*). The 30 situations with the highest ranking in terms of the likelihood of occurrence were chosen and, then, were assessed based on the social variables of power, social distance, and the degree of imposition (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Based on the 1-5 ranking points, 20 situations (10 for each of the pretest and the posttest) with the highest rank in terms of the hearer's power, social distance, and the request's degree of imposition were selected. The DCTs were, then, piloted with 10 students, and the results showed that the items tended to elicit the expected responses. Following Takimoto (2009), 5 items depicting the hearer's higher power and unequal distance but a request of a lower level of imposition were added as distractors to the test items. The final number of the items was, thus, 15 for each of the pretest and the posttest:

✓ **Sample DCT Item:**

*Suppose you write a paper, which is not demanded by the module, to be submitted for publication. You write an e-mail to your teacher, Joseph Walker (male, doctor) to ask him to help proofread it.* (Adapted from Zhu, 2012)

The DCT items required the participants to read the descriptions of each situation and to write what they would say in similar situations. The Farsi translation was also available for the participants to consult with if they wished so. It took about 40 min to complete the test. The responses to the DCTs were rated based on the pragmalinguistic accuracy and sociopragmatic appropriateness. For the pragmalinguistic accuracy, 1 point was awarded for lexicogrammatical accuracy, 0.5 point for lexical or grammatical errors, and 0 point if there were both of lexical and grammatical errors. Sociopragmatic appropriateness was rated from 1 (*very inappropriate*) to 5 (*very appropriate*). Considering that there were 15 items, the possible maximum score was 90 (15×5 [maximum sociopragmatic score] +15 [maximum pragmalinguistic score]). The DCT responses were cross-checked by the researcher and an English native speaker who was professional in EFL field. The interrater reliability of .81 suggested an acceptable agreement rate.

### 3.5. Data Collection Procedure

Three intact classes were randomly assigned to one of the three conditions: SI, OI, and CO. The instruction was delivered to all the classes by the same teacher, who was female, aged 35, with more than 10 years of experience in teaching English. The treatment lasted for 5 weeks, 9 sessions of 45 min. The first and last sessions were allocated to the pretest and the posttest, and the remaining sessions were allotted to the instruction of request downgraders, with sessions 2-7 being assigned to each of the lexical downgraders, syntactic downgraders, and external modifiers (i.e., supportive moves). Session 8 was allotted for reviewing the previous sessions. Both experimental groups were matched for the amount of the time they received the instruction. All the groups received the explicit metapragmatic instruction on the target structures, but the input-based and output-based groups (i.e., experimental), based on their group assignment, were engaged in the structured input and output-based activities. Table 1 shows the procedure of the experiment:

Table 1. *Procedure of the Experiment*

Week/Session	Treatment	Ex. Groups	Co. Group
1 <sup>st</sup> Week, Session 1	Pretest	✓	✓
2 <sup>nd</sup> Week, Sessions 2 and 3	Explicit Metapragmatic Instruction Focus on Lexical Downgraders	✓	×
3 <sup>rd</sup> Week, Sessions 4 and 5	Explicit Metapragmatic Instruction Focus on Syntactic Downgraders	✓	×
4 <sup>th</sup> Week, Sessions 6 and 7	Explicit Metapragmatic Instruction Focus on External Modifiers	✓	×
5 <sup>th</sup> Week Sessions 8 and 9	Review Sessions 2-5 Posttest	✓	✓

The explicit metapragmatic instruction was delivered by the teacher raising the students' awareness via some questions focusing on the request act. Sample examples of the requests made in different social contexts were presented by the teacher, and further examples were elicited from the students using different types of lexical/syntactic modifiers. This was followed by discussing the social variables and a detailed description of semantic formulas, politeness techniques, and types and factors of variability in realization of requests. The explicit instruction lasted 15 min. Following this, each group was engaged in different types of activities, which lasted about 30 min.

SI Group: During each of the instructional sessions, after the explicit instruction, the participants in the SI group were given handouts with four dialogues. The dialogues were chosen from *Interchange* (Richards et al., 2006) and *New Headway* (Soars & Soars, 2002) series. Each dialogue was followed by some referential and affective activities. As argued by VanPatten (1996), referential activities are the activities for which there is a right or wrong response, and affective activities are those which elicit the participants' opinion or agreement about a set of events. Each dialogue reflected a high-imposition request made to an interlocutor of high power and unequal social distance. As for the referential activities, the participants were required to read the dialogues, and from among the alternatives provided, they chose the one that was pragmatically appropriate in accordance with the situation. The affective activities, on the other hand, required them to read each dialogue and judge the acceptability of the request on a 5-point Likert scale with the levels ranging from 1 (*very inappropriate*) to 5 (*completely appropriate*). (See Appendix for sample referential and affective activities). After accomplishing the tasks, the responses were shared and discussed with the whole class.

OI Group: Having received the explicit metapragmatic instruction in each treatment session, the OI group listened to the same dialogues in the SI group's handout. The dialogues depicted high-imposition requests made to an interlocutor of high power and unequal social distance. The participants were given a response sheet and were required to reconstruct each dialogue as similar to what they had heard. While the participants were accomplishing the task, the instructor monitored the class to ensure that the learners understood the scenarios and provided them with any assistance they required about lexicogrammatical aspects, but not pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic ones. After the dialogue reconstruction task, the instructor collected the response sheets and replayed the dialogue and displayed its transcript on a projector. At this stage, the participants were engaged in a form-comparison activity, comparing their own productions with the original text and reflecting on the differences and the areas in need of amendments.

CO Group: Similar to the experimental groups, the CO group received explicit metapragmatic instruction. Whereas the experimental groups were engaged in accomplishing the given tasks, the CO group completed their textbook activities on the target pragmatic functions followed by some comprehension questions. The posttest and the follow-up test were administered the day after the last instructional session and 1 month after the treatment, respectively. The structure of the posttest and the follow-up was similar to that of the pretest, but the items were slightly different.

#### 4. Data Analysis

This study followed a pretest-treatment-posttest design involving three intact classes (i.e., groups). Prior to and after the treatment, a pretest, a posttest, and a follow-up test were administered. Based on the insights from the pilot test,

45 min were allocated to completing each of the AJT and DCT tests. The data gathered from the tests were submitted to analysis by running a series of ANCOVA and paired comparisons to gauge the improvement of each group from the pretest to the posttest and the difference between the treatment effects of each group across the receptive (i.e., AJT) and production (i.e., DCT) tests. Moreover, the scores in the posttest and the follow-up test were compared to assess whether the treatment effects were durable over time. Finally, the request data gathered from the DCT pretest and the posttest were submitted to frequency analysis to compare the frequency of using each of the internal and external modification devices by each group in the pretest and the posttest.

## 5. Results

### 5.1. AJT Results

The descriptive statistics of the AJT results is shown in Table 2. In order to analyze the data, the normality of distribution of the data was, first, checked using Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. The obtained  $p$  values for the pretest ( $p = .078$ ), the posttest ( $p = .067$ ), and the delayed posttest ( $p = .071$ ) were greater than the confidence level of 0.05, so the statistical variations were not significant and the assumption of the normality of the data was met:

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for AJT Results

Group	Test	$M$	Min.	Max.	$SD$
SI ( $n = 29$ )	Pre.	29.34	15	43	5.21
	Post.	67.24	21	83	4.56
OI ( $n = 25$ )	Pre.	28.93	17	49	5.42
	Post.	62.35	26	81	5.67
CO ( $n = 29$ )	Pre.	29.03	16	40	4.97
	Post.	37.53	17	53	5.28

Note. SI = Structured Input; OI = Output-Based; CO = Control

Table 3. Test of Normality for Pretest, Posttest, and Delayed Posttest

Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test	Statistics	$df$	$Sig.$
Pretest	.124	34	.078
Posttest	.137	37	.067
Delayed Posttest	.129	23	.071

To assess the effect of the instruction on the AJT results, an ANCOVA was run (see Table 3). The independent variable was the type of tasks (i.e., SI and OI) and the dependent variable was the participants' AJT scores. To control for the students' homogeneity in terms of their preintervention pragmatic knowledge, their pretest scores were used as the covariate. The ANCOVA preliminary assumptions of homogeneity and linearity of the variances were also checked:

Table 4. ANCOVA Results for AJT Performances

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	$df$	Mean Square	$F$	$Sig.$	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	9875.32 <sup>a</sup>	7	4563.87	74.23	.000	.71
Intercept	1762.83	1	1762.83	43.06	.000	.64
Pre	1327.09	1	1327.09	37.12	.000	.38
Group	8651.31	8	12.03	72.64	.000	.74
Error	2149	33				
Total	213,871	37				
Corrected Total	11,762,43	35				

Note. The  $F$ -ratio is significant at the 0.05 level.

As shown in Table 4, there was a statistically significant difference between the three groups in terms of their receptive knowledge of L2 pragmatics following instruction ( $F[8, 33] = 72.64, p < 0.05$ ). The effect size was also found to be high (partial  $\eta^2 = .74$ ). Following Cohen (1988), a partial eta squared value of .74 statistically represents quite a large effect size (Cohen's criterion = .14), which shows that .74% of the variance in the AJT means of the posttest can be

explained by the type of instruction. To locate the exact differences between the groups, post-hoc pairwise comparisons using the Scheffe test were run on AJT scores (see Table 5):

Table 5. *Post-Hoc Pairwise Comparisons for AJT Results*

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SEM</i>	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig.</i> (2-tailed)
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound			
SI CO	29.70*	4.46	2.11	22.11	31.25	3.87	12	0.00
OI CO	24.82*	4.54	2.23	19.04	26.97	2.23	9	0.00
SI OI	4.88*	3.28	2.08	2.12	8.73	4.02	32	0.03

Note. SI = Structured Input; OI = Output-Based; CO = Control

Paired comparisons suggest the advantage of the SI ( $p < 0.05$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .78$ ) and OI ( $p < 0.05$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .74$ ) groups over the control group. The AJT results across the two experimental groups were also found to be statistically different, with the SI group outperforming the OI group ( $p < 0.05$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .64$ ). It can be concluded that both the SI and OI groups fostered the receptive pragmatic knowledge over time. But the participants who engaged in the SI activities revealed more gains in receptive knowledge of pragmatics compared with those exposed to the production-based tasks.

## 5.2. DCT Results

To gauge the effect of the pedagogical intervention on productive knowledge of pragmatics (as measured through the DCT), descriptive statistics were calculated (see Table 6). Because the skewness and kurtosis values are within the acceptable range, the assumption of the normality of the data was not violated:

Table 6. *Descriptive Statistics for DCT Results*

Group	Test	<i>M</i>	Min.	Max.	<i>SD</i>
SI ( $n = 29$ )	Pre.	25.3	14	39	4.36
	Post.	61.29	21	83	4.87
OI ( $n = 25$ )	Pre.	25.80	13	40	4.54
	Post.	65.83	23	86	5.03
CO ( $n = 29$ )	Pre.	24.39	14	43	5.12
	Post.	31.24	17	49	4.73

Note. Pre. = Pretest; Post. = Posttest

Table 7. *ANCOVA Results for DCT Performances*

Source	Type III sum of Squares	<i>df</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	7632.56 <sup>a</sup>	12	6534.28	71.34	.000	.61
Intercept	2341.23	5	2341.23	27.61	.000	.32
pre	2071.4	5	2071.4	56.43	.000	.43
Group	5006	8	6520.43	47.81	.000	.74
Error	4531.21	64	45.71			
Total	213,542.01	68				
Corrected Total	31,423.54	62				

Note. The *F*-ratio is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 7 shows the results of an ANCOVA run on the DCT posttests scores to assess the effect of the instructional types on the productive knowledge of pragmatics. This table shows a statistically significant difference between the three groups ( $F[8, 64] = 47.81$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) with a large effect size (partial  $\eta^2 = .74$ ). The value of .74 for the effect size is regarded as high and indicates that .74% of variance in DCT means of the posttest is attributable to the type of instruction delivered.



Table 8. *Post-Hoc Pairwise Comparisons for DCT Results*

(I)Group (J)Group	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SEM</i>	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig.</i> (2-tailed)
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound			
SI CO	30.05*	4.23	2.17	25.87	33.23	3.45	61	0.00
OI CO	34.59*	4.07	2.09	30.08	37.71	2.67	23	0.00
SI OI	-4.53*	4.52	2.37	-6.72	-1.43	3.78	34	0.02

The results of the Scheffe test run on the DCT posttest scores (see Table 8) show that the SI group outperformed the control group ( $p < 0.05$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .83$ ). Similarly, the OI group was superior to the CO group ( $p < 0.05$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .89$ ). A comparison of the DCT scores across the SI and OI groups reveals the better performance of the OI group ( $p < 0.05$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .71$ ). Thus, productive knowledge of pragmatics was better fostered through output-based tasks than the structured input activities.

Table 9. *Paired Samples *t* Test for AJT and DCT Performances in Posttest and Follow-Up Test*

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SEM</i>	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig.</i> (2-tailed)
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound			
SI, AJT Post. - Follow.	3.72	2.12	.53	1.23	5.21	2.43	8	.00
OI, AJT Post. - Follow.	4.31	3.03	.42	2.03	7.35	2.65	12	.00
SI, DCT Post. - Follow.	3.11	2.54	.75	1.10	5.76	3.11	62	.03
OI, DCT Post. - Follow.	0.25	3.12	.72	0.02	3.28	2.75	29	.07

Note. Post. = Posttest; Follow. = Follow-up test

A comparison of the posttest and follow-up test scores (see Table 9) shows that the SI group did not retain its comprehension ( $t[8] = 2.43$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) nor the production gains ( $t[62] = 3.11$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) in the long run (1 month). However, the production treatment delivered to the OI group was found to have lasting effects on production ( $p > 0.05$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .018$ ), but not on the comprehension ( $t[12] = 2.65$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ).

### 5.3. Analysis of Request Data

A corpus of the requests made in the DCT pretest, the posttest, and the delayed posttest was compiled and went under two rounds of analysis by the researcher and a native English speaker professional in EFL. The raters drew upon the classification scheme proposed by Blum-Kulka and his colleagues (1989). In the first round, the requests were analyzed in terms of the strategies (i.e., direct, conventionally indirect, and indirect; see Table 10). Sample excerpts of each strategy type from the data are followed:

- Please check your email. I've sent my project.
- Could you please extend the quiz time?
- I would like to know your telephone number.

In the second round, the requests were analyzed in terms of the performance of the internal and external modification devices (see Table 11). Internal modifiers include the lexical/phrasal and syntactic devices, which soften the requests. Sample excerpts of lexical and syntactic modifiers from the data are as follow:

✓ **Lexical Modifiers:**

- Please (e.g., *Please*, allow me to leave the class early.)
- Openers (e.g., *Would you mind* sending me the class notes?)
- Softeners (e.g., *Could you possibly* send me presentation topics until tomorrow?)
- Intensifiers (e.g., *I really* need your kind assistance.)
- Subjectivizers (e.g., *I wonder* if you could improve my test score).

✓ **Syntactic Modifiers:**

- Conditional clauses (e.g., *If it's possible* to have an extension?)
- Tense (e.g., Is it OK if I *arranged* an appointment?)
- Aspect (e.g., *I was wondering whether* you introduce some recent sources for study.)
- Negation (e.g., I wonder if you *wouldn't mind* borrowing your book?)
- Multiple syntactic combinations (e.g., *I was wondering if you could* raise my test score?)

Finally, the external modification devices (i.e., supportive moves) are coded (see Table 12). Sample DCT data follow:

✓ **External Modifiers:**

- Preparators (e.g., *May I ask you a favor?*)
- Grounders (e.g., *I'm really confused.* Could you elaborate on the topic?)
- Disarmers (e.g., *I hate bothering you, but* could you send me the PowerPoint slides?)
- Promises (e.g., *If you extend the project's due time, I promise* to deliver it as soon as possible.)
- Minimizers (e.g., *Could I see you just for 5 min?*)
- Apologies (e.g., *I'm very sorry, but may I deliver my project next week*) were coded (Table 11).

Table 10. *Request Strategies Used Across Three Groups*

Strategy	Direct (%)	Conventionally Indirect (%)	Indirect (%)	Total (%)
SI (Pretest)	36	35	29	100
SI (Posttest)	25	50	25	100
OI (Pretest)	38	37	25	100
OI (Posttest)	11	61	28	100
CO (Pretest)	40	35	25	100
CO (Posttest)	34	39	27	100

As shown in Table 11, the most frequently-used strategy by both groups was the conventionally indirect strategy (50% and 61% for the SI and OI groups, respectively). The direct strategy was the least frequently used strategy (25% and 11% for the SI and OI groups, respectively). Thus, both the SI and OI groups tended to use the indirect strategies more frequently in the posttest (75% and 89% for the pretest) in comparison with the pretest (64% and 62%, respectively). The OI group also relied on indirect strategies more frequently (89%) than the SI group (75%):

Table 11. *Frequency of Internal Modifiers Used in DCTs*

Lexical/Phrasal Modifiers					
	Please	Openers	Softeners	Intensifiers	Subjectivizers
SI	90%	34%	42%	39%	12%
OI	93%	28%	51%	25%	14%
CO	75%	21%	15%	17%	3%
Syntactic Modifiers					
	Conditional	Tense	Aspect	Negation	Multiple Syntactic Combination
SI	28%	12%	5%	23%	11%
OI	32%	24%	21%	19%	25%
CO	10%	10%	3%	0%	9%

Table 11 shows that both of the experimental groups used the softener *please* with a high frequency (90% and 93%). This is consistent with the argument by Faerch and Kasper (1989) that L2 learners' overuse of *please* to mitigate the request force relates to its double function of acting simultaneously as illocutionary force indicator and transparent softener, assisting them to adhere to Grice's (1989) principle of clarity by making an unambiguous request using the marker *please*. The other mitigators were used at different levels of frequency by each group. Whereas the SI group opted for openers (34%) and intensifiers (39%), the OI group favored softeners (42%). The subjectivizers were not frequently used by each of the SI and OI groups (12% and 14%, respectively).

Taken together, the mean frequency of the use of the lexical devices was 43.4 % for the SI group and 42.2% for the OI group. With regard to the syntactic devices, these values were 15.8 and 24.2 for each of the SI and OI groups, respectively. Whereas the SI group relied on conditionals (28%) and negations (23%), largely underusing the tense (12 %), aspect (5%), and multiple syntactic combinations (11%), the OI group showed preference for the use of a varied range of syntactic softeners, using all of them at roughly similar levels of frequency (see Table 11).

Table 12. *Frequency of External Modifiers (Supportive Moves) Used in DCTs*

	Preparator	Grounder	Disarmer	Expander	Promise	Minimizers	Apologies
SI	23 (%)	36 %	12 %	4 %	10 %	13 %	19 %
OI	32 (%)	26 %	8 %	11 %	15 %	23 %	8 %
CO	11 (%)	5 %	2 %	0 %	8 %	10 %	7 %

As shown in Table 12, both of the experimental groups used the external modifiers at various extents. Whereas both groups used the supportive moves at rather similar levels of frequency (16.71% and 17.57%, respectively), each group opted for the use of each subcategory at varying degrees. Overall, the request data suggest that whereas both the SI and OI groups employed roughly similar frequencies of lexical modifiers and supportive moves, though using each subcategory at varying degrees, the SI group used more syntactic devices.

## 6. Discussion

The aim of this study was to investigate the differential effects of SI and OI on receptive and productive knowledge of request modifiers. The findings suggest that both of the pedagogical approaches promoted the receptive and productive knowledge of request modification devices compared with the traditional explicit metapragmatic instruction. Whereas the receptive knowledge of the request modifiers was found to be better enhanced through SI tasks (i.e., referential and affective), the productive knowledge was optimally improved through output-based activities (i.e., dialogue reconstruction). Both groups failed to retain their comprehension gains in the long run, but the production group maintained the production gains in the time interval between the posttest and the follow-up test.

The improvement of the SI group from the pretest to the posttest and the follow-up test concurs with the results of some previous studies on the effectiveness of SI (Baleghizadeh & Saharkhiz, 2014; VanPatten, 1996, 2015; VanPatten, & Cadierno, 1993). According to VanPatten (2015), SI activities push L2 learners to focus on linguistic forms and increase the likelihood of the target structures being attended to. These activities assist L2 learners to notice the target form-function mappings and, then, to internalize the intake better. That the participants revealed gains in comprehension as well as in production test suggests that the effectiveness of SI goes far beyond the comprehension skills and it has the potentiality to alter the developing system and what learners may access for production. According to Buck (2006), the mechanisms involved in processing the input include making some form-meaning connections which are, then, accommodated partially or completely into L2 learners' interlanguage system and, finally, become available for production purposes.

The improved performance of the OI group in the posttest and the follow-up test lends support to the premises of the output hypothesis (Swain, 2000). One may conclude that the production practice realized the three functions of output: including hypothesis testing, noticing, and metalinguistic function. During the dialogue reconstruction task, the participants had opportunities to form and test their hypotheses about the target form-function-context mappings and to assess the well-formedness of their requests. In so doing, they were likely to notice the gaps in their existing knowledge and strived for alternative pragmalinguistically and sociopragmatically appropriate forms. Finally, the production practice enabled the learners to compare their constructed dialogues with the original text, consciously assessing and reflecting on what they had produced. Although the outperformance of the OI group compared with its SI counterparts is in line with

the findings of some studies (e.g., Ellis & He, 1999; Izumi, 2002), it is inconsistent with some other studies (Benati, 2017; Benati, & Batziou, 2017; Moradi, & Farvardin, 2016). This may be explained by the types of the output tasks in these studies which were skewed toward mechanical drill-based, rather than meaningful tasks. The dialogue reconstruction task in this study, however, was a meaning-based activity requiring the students' comprehension for generating the response, as opposed to mechanical output practice where understanding is not required for the production of an accurate response (Richards & Schmidt, 2003).

A further explanation for the better performance of the experimental groups might be the metapragmatic talk the learners were engaged following their task performance. To ascertain their responses, they discussed and negotiated the answers with the whole class, reflecting on and evaluating their answers. Throughout, they engaged in producing the pragmatic-related episodes (Kim & Taguchi, 2016) and talked about the pragmalinguistic forms they produced and the sociopragmatic factors they attended to. Theoretically, this may be supported by Long's (1996) interaction hypothesis which states that language acquisition may be promoted once L2 learners are given opportunities for interaction. As an affordance that was not available for the control group, the interactional discourse might have contributed to the pragmatic gains of the experimental groups.

The differential achievements of the experimental groups in the comprehension and production measures may be attributable to the type of treatment and the assessment tasks they were exposed to. According to DeKeyser (1996), input practice and output practice develop corresponding comprehension and production skills. The structured input activities the SI group engaged in largely targeted the comprehension skills, whereas the dialogue reconstruction tasks the OI group engaged in typically fostered the production skills. Although the referential and affective activities may help with fluency and accuracy in production (VanPatten, 2015) and the output-based activities in our treatment were not entirely input-free, the treatment tasks each group received were largely corresponded with what they were assessed for. This might also explain why the SI group opted for more indirect request strategies and a varied range of syntactic modification devices compared with the OI group, who, by the nature of the tasks they were exposed to, were not engaged in producing a wide range of requests softened by modifiers.

The finding that the OI group retained their production gains in the follow-up test indicates that while accomplishing the treatment tasks, their knowledge of pragmalinguistic forms and sociopragmatic functions was strongly established compared to the SI group, who neither maintained their comprehension nor the production gains over 1 month. The superiority of the OI group may be explained by their repeated engagement in tasks which required the production of the targets every session. Thus, they seemed to have more effectively learned how to use these constructions. This is in line with Swain's (2000) output hypothesis, which posits that output-based tasks require reflection on and, hence, noticing of the form and function of the target feature which, in turn, leads to a successful use of these features in future occurrences. Because the OI group needed to subsequently produce the target structures, they attended to the forms and intended functions more deeply, and the corresponding constructed knowledge was, thus, deeper and easily accessible. It is argued that the production tasks require a deeper level of processing ( Craik & Lockhart, 1972) and stronger mental connections, rendering the knowledge to be retained in the working memory for a longer run. This finding concurs with the findings of studies documenting the durability of output instructional effects (e.g., Rassaei, 2007; Sun, 2017).

## 7. Conclusion

This study investigated the comparative effects of input-based and production-based instruction on the development of request modifiers. The results contribute to the theoretical debate on the role of input/output in L2 development. Corroborating the findings of some earlier studies (e.g., Ahmadi et al., 2016; Sydorenko, 2015; Tajeddin & Khodarahmi, 2018), it was found that both input-based (operationalized as SI tasks) and output-based (operationalized as dictogloss tasks) instructional approaches contributed to learning request modifiers among EFL learners. However, in line with some previous studies (DeKeyser, 1996; Yunesi & Tajeddin, 2014), the instructional tasks employed in this study seemed to have differential effects on the different aspects of the learners' pragmatic competence. Whereas SI tasks better improved the receptive knowledge of the request modifiers, production tasks were more effective in fostering the learners' ability to produce pragmatically appropriate requests.

Pedagogically, this study adds evidence to the teachability of pragmatics. The teachability of pragmatics has been supported by earlier studies (Moradian et al., 2019; Sydorenko, 2015; Takimoto, 2007, 2009, 2020); as a component

of L2 pragmatics, request modifiers were also shown to be prone to instruction. This is especially important in Asian contexts where exposure to authentic L2 discourse is restricted and limited class time is allocated to pragmatics instruction. Also, the findings support the feasibility and potentiality of both input-based and output-based focus-on-form techniques for L2 pragmatics instruction. The better potentiality of input-based activities for enhancing the receptive knowledge of request modifiers and more efficacy of dictogloss tasks for boosting the productive knowledge suggest that different approaches to instruction differentially affect the comprehension and production of request modification devices. That is, different types of tasks entail varied degrees of cognitive engagement and, hence, different levels of learning (Philp & Duchesne, 2016). Input-based tasks like SI input tasks draw L2 learners' attention to the target form-function mapping, which may foster comprehension. These tasks, however, may not deliver parallel gains in the production of target features. In contrast, production activities like dictogloss involves reflection on and noticing the targets, which might prove more advantageous for production gains.

Overall, the findings recommend that material designers, educators, and teachers design instructional activities based on the objectives/goals of the course. Different levels of input/output practice may be adopted to cater for varied needs of learners and requirements of the course. Apparently, to ensure the maximum effectiveness, as stated by Ellis (2006), it is suggested to incorporate both input and output practices at varying levels coupled with metapragmatic explicit instruction in the educational curricula. Input offered to L2 learners should include ample frequency of the target features and should be contrived in a way to draw their attention to target form-function mappings. At the same time, L2 learners should be pushed into generating comprehensible output which encodes target structures.

Given that this study yielded outcomes different from some earlier studies (e.g., Benati, 2017; Benati, & Batziou, 2017; Moradi, & Farvardin, 2016), further research is needed to strengthen this line of enquiry and to offer generalizable results. Due to time and logistic restrictions, pragmatics instruction was delivered as an extracurricular module within the participants' regular course and, hence, the experimentation was confined to limited target structures within a short run, which remains a limitation of this study. Replications of this study may be conducted by investigating the effect of SI and OI on a variety of speech acts and by integrating these approaches into long-term pragmatics instruction to maximize their benefits. Nonetheless, it is hoped that this study extends insights on SI and OI approaches as valuable pedagogical interventions that clearly and consistently yield positive effects.

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## Appendix

### Sample Structured Input Activities

#### ✓ Sample Referential Activity

**Directions:** Read the following situation and dialogue and choose the more appropriate request from among the two request forms provided by checking (a) or (b).

**Situation:** Jack is a student enrolled in a sociology course taught by Dr. Brown, whom he knows well. He was sick for the last two weeks, and so he couldn't deliver his project on time. He goes to Dr. Brown's office to ask him for an extension.

Jack: Hello Dr. Brown?

Dr. Brown: Hello

Jack: I'm Jack Taylor, a student in your Sociology course.

Dr. Brown: Ah, yes. Taylor. That's fine. Come in. Sit down.

Jack: Thank you, sir.

Dr. Brown: Now- what can I do for you, Taylor?

Jack: Well, uh...Actually I was sick the past two weeks and I couldn't finish the sociology project. **(a) Can I deliver my project later? (b) I was wondering if it would be possible for me to deliver my project a bit later.**

#### ✓ Sample Affective Activity

**Directions:** Read the following situation and dialogue and answer the questions.

**Situation:** Tom has enrolled in Dr. Schmidt's class, and failed to get the minimum score for passing. If he fails this course, he will not graduate this semester. He goes to Dr. Schmidt's office to ask him for extra credit.

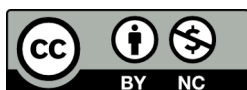
S: Good morning Mr. Schmidt.

T: Good morning. May I help you?

S: Yes, sir. I'm Thomas Brooks, and I'm going to be graduated at the end of this semester. I've got 63, and I need a 75 to pass this class. **Can I rewrite one of my papers so I won't fail.**

**Directions:** Please rate the appropriateness of the underlined request according to the following rating scale.

1. Very Inappropriate 2. Inappropriate 3. Somewhat Appropriate 4. Appropriate 5. Completely Appropriate



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