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The Effect of Task-Based Language Teaching on EFL Learners' Pragmatic Production, Metapragmatic Awareness, and Pragmatic Self-Assessment

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Abstract

The aim of the present study was to investigate the effect of task-based language teaching (TBLT) on EFL learners' pragmatic production, metapragmatic awareness, and pragmatic self-assessment. To this end, 75 homogeneous

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intermediate EFL learners were randomly assigned to three groups: two experimental groups and one control group. The 27 participants in the pre-task, post-task pragmatic focus group (experimental group one) received pragmatic focus on five speech acts in pre-task and the post-task phases. The 26 participants in the scaffolded while-task group (experimental group two) only received pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic feedback and scaffolding during task completion. However, the 22 participants in the mainstream task-based group (control group) were not provided with any sort of pragmatic focus. The EFL learners' pragmatic production, metapragmatic awareness, and pragmatic self-assessment were measured using a written discourse completion task (WDCT), a metapragmatic awareness questionnaire, and a pragmatic self-assessment questionnaire. The findings showed that the three groups enhanced their pragmatic production to almost the same degree at the end of the treatment. Furthermore, the results revealed the development of metapragmatic awareness among the EFL learners in the two experimental groups only. In addition, the two experimental groups managed to develop their pragmatic self-assessment more than the control group. Therefore, it can be concluded that the use of tasks within the framework of TBLT, with or without pragmatic focus in any of the three phases, helps EFL learners develop pragmatic production, while the development of metapragmatic awareness and pragmatic self-assessment can be attributed to pragmatic focus and feedback.

Keywords: Pragmatic production; Metapragmatic awareness; Pragmatic self-assessment; Speech acts; Task-based language teaching

Introduction

Given the fact that pragmatic competence is an important aspect of communicative competence (Bachman, 1990; Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Alcon, 2000; Uso-Juan & Martinez-Flor, 2006) and that the development of pragmatic competence is necessary for successful second/foreign language learning (Bardovi-Harlig & Dornyei, 1998; Matsumura, 2003; Keshavarz, Eslami-Rasekh, & Ghahraman, 2006), instruction of L2 pragmatics has gained more prominence. Many interventional ILP studies have confirmed that instruction plays a significant role in the development of L2 pragmatics (e.g., Fukuya & Zhang, 2002; Liddicoat & Crozet, 2001; Safont, 2003; Takahashi, 2001; Trosborg, 2003).

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However, most interventional and developmental ILP studies, especially those done in EFL settings, are mainly concerned with explicit or implicit instruction (e.g., Alavi & Dini, 2008; Eslami-Rasekh, Eslami-Rasekh, & Fatahi, 2004; Takahashi, 2001; Tateyama, 2001) and/or inductive or deductive instruction of L2 pragmatics (Decoo, 1996; Rose & Ng, 2001; Takimoto, 2008). It follows that most of the previous ILP studies have dealt with the modes of instruction (explicit vs. implicit and deductive vs. inductive), and did not follow a specific method of language instruction to teach ILP. Thus, in order to fill the research gap and to address the issue of instruction and methodology in ILP, task-based language teaching procedures were used in the present study to see its probable effect on ILP development. The rationale behind the choice of task-based approach (TBLT) was that this method is claimed to develop communicative competence through meaning-focused tasks. It is also based on the principle of language learning through language use, that is, through interaction and meaning negotiation. The advantage of the present study, to the authors' best knowledge, is that no study has ever been conducted on the effect of task-based instruction on ILP development.

Literature Review

Despite the significance of focus on form in the process of second language acquisition, no study has ever investigated the acquisition and development of interlanguage pragmatics through focusing on form. Moreover, no ILP study has ever been conducted based on the framework of task-based language teaching. Instead, a plethora of interventional ILP studies have investigated different modes of ILP instruction: explicit versus implicit and inductive versus deductive. House and Kasper (1981) investigated explicit and implicit instruction of speech acts and conversational routines among German university students and concluded that the participants in the explicit group were more pragmatically fluent. Tateyama (2001) investigated the use of explicit and implicit instruction to teach pragmatic routines. The results indicated no significant difference between explicit and implicit instruction, although he believes some factors like motivation and the amount of contact with Japanese speakers may have intervened. Martinez-Flor and Fukuya (2005) found that both explicit and implicit instruction improved the learners' production of suggestions. Eslami-Rasekh, et al. (2004) examined the effect of explicit metapragmatic instruction on the speech act awareness of advanced EFL students and concluded that EFL learners' speech act comprehension improved as a result of explicit instruction. Alavi and Dini (2008) found that the participants who received explicit instruction were better than the other groups concerning their

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production of the speech act of refusal. Ghobadi and Fahim (2009) investigated explicit and implicit instruction of English thanking formulas among intermediate EFL learners of English. They found that the participants in the explicit group outperformed the participants who received implicit instruction.

As far as deductive vs. inductive instruction is concerned, Rose and Ng (2001) investigated compliment and compliment responses and the possible effect of deductive and inductive instruction on these speech acts. They concluded that instruction had a positive effect in general, and that deductive instruction was more effective for developing sociopragmatic proficiency. Takimoto (2008) made a comparison among three types of input-based instruction: deductive instruction, inductive instruction with problem-solving tasks, and inductive instruction with structured input tasks. The results of the study showed pragmatic improvement in the three experimental groups, indicating the positive effect of instruction on ILP development.

Explicit/implicit feedback and its effect on ILP development has also been investigated in ILP literature. Takimoto (2006) compared two types of input-based instructions (consciousness-raising instruction and consciousness-raising instruction with explicit feedback) and concluded that explicit feedback was not always indispensable in the consciousness-raising instruction. In another study, Koike and Pearson (2005) investigated the effect of instruction and feedback on pragmatic competence development. They concluded that instruction and feedback, whether explicit or implicit, had a positive effect on their competence to express suggestions in English.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the efficacy of task-based language teaching in developing L2 pragmatics in the EFL context. The study tried to bridge the gap between theory and L2 methodology as it applies to teaching pragmatics in the L2 classroom. To this end, the acquisition and development of five speech acts of request, refusal, apology, suggestion, and compliment were studied. It was investigated whether teaching pragmalinguistics and sociolinguistics through a task-based approach can develop Iranian EFL learners' pragmatic production. The second aim of the study was to investigate whether implementation of task-based methodology can enhance EFL learners' L2 metapragmatic awareness, with a focus on sociolinguistic variables. The last

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purpose of the study was to investigate the possible effect of task-based pragmatics teaching on EFL learners' self-assessment of their own pragmatic production. Therefore, the following research questions were formulated.

1. Do mainstream task-based language teaching, the pre-task post-task pragmatic focus, and the while-task pragmatic feedback have significant effects on EFL learners' pragmatic production?
2. Do mainstream task-based language teaching, the pre-task post-task pragmatic focus, and the while-task pragmatic feedback have significant effects on EFL learners' metapragmatic production?
3. Do mainstream task-based language teaching, the pre-task post-task pragmatic focus, and while-task pragmatic feedback have significant effects on EFL learners' pragmatic self-assessment?

Methodology

Participants

The participants of the study were 75 university students chosen randomly from among intermediate EFL learners. The participants were homogenized based on their performance on the standardized U-Test, which is conducted in University of Tehran, Kish International Campus, and a structured interview, which was rated based on Brown's (2007) five-component model. The participants' interview scores were calculated out of 100 as well. Then, they were assigned to three levels based on their average scores in the U-Test and the interview. Therefore, the 75 participants were chosen randomly from among the intermediate (Level B) EFL learners (their total scores ranged between 33 and 66) and were randomly assigned to three groups: 27 participants in the pre-task post-task pragmatic focus group (experimental group one), 26 participants in the scaffolded while-task group (experimental group two), and 22 participants in the mainstream task-based group (control group). There were 40 female and 35 male participants and their age range was between 18 and 46, with the average of 27.77.

Instruments

U-Test

U-Test is a standardized test of English language proficiency which is conducted in University of Tehran, Kish International Campus. The organization of the test is similar to TOEFL (PBT). It included 100 multiple-choice items and three sections: grammar section (50 items), vocabulary section (30 items), and reading

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comprehension section (20 items). The score of the test was calculated out of 100. The Cronbach alpha internal consistency reliability of the test was found to be .86.

Written discourse completion task (WDCT)

The written discourse completion task (WDCT) consisted of 25 situations, focusing on five speech acts of request, refusal, apology, suggestion, and compliment. The production of each speech act was measured through five situations. The situations were selected and adapted from previous studies (Beebe, Takahashi, & Uliss-Weltz, 1990; Hudson, Detmer & Brown, 1995; Jianda, 2006; Takahashi, 2001). However, some factors were taken into consideration in the process of selecting the situations, such as the real-life nature of the situations, the frequency of occurrence, and the generalizability of the situations to the other aspects of life. Therefore, topics such as teacher-student interaction, campus life, and even the workplace were abundant among the situations. The situations were written in Standard English using comprehensible vocabulary and structure so that the participants could easily read and comprehend every situation.

The most important criteria for the development, selection, or adoption of the situations were sociolinguistic variables, namely status (social dominance), degree of familiarity (social distance), degree of imposition, and severity. These variables are based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory. Hence, the goal was to create different levels of power, imposition, familiarity, and severity, which have been claimed to affect the speech act performance of interlocutors (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989; as cited in Rose & Kasper, 2001).

Metapragmatic awareness questionnaire

A metapragmatic awareness questionnaire (MPAQ) was used in this study. This questionnaire presented the same situations and scenarios as the WDCT with 25 items, focusing on 5 speech acts of request, refusal, apology, suggestion, and compliment. The MPAQs developed by Rose and Ng (2001) and Jianda (2006) were used as models. The participants had to read every situation and answer three questions. The first question addressed the degree of imposition or severity. That is, the first question for the speech acts of request and suggestion required them to indicate the degree of imposition. However, in situations focusing on the speech acts of refusal, apology, and compliment, the first question addressed the degree of severity. Therefore, the EFL learners had to read every situation and show their response on a five-point Likert scale.

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The second and third questions in the MPAQ were the same in all situations. The second question required the participants to indicate the interlocutor with higher status. Therefore, participants of the study were required to determine whether the "Hearer" had higher status, the speaker had the higher status (presented as "You"), or both interlocutors had the same status (presented as "Equal"). The third question was designed to show the degree of social distance or familiarity (intimacy) between the interlocutors in every situation. Thus, the participants were asked to read the scenario and determine the level of familiarity with the hearer on a five-point Likert scale. The MPAQ was administered after WDCT administration, both at the beginning and at the end of the study (as a pre-test and a post-test).

Pragmatic self-assessment questionnaire

The pragmatic self-assessment questionnaire (PSAQ) used in this study consisted of 25 situations, focusing on five speech acts of request, refusal, apology, suggestion, and compliment—five situations for every speech act, specifically. These situations were the same situations as those used in the WDCT. The format of the questionnaire was adopted from Hudson et al.'s (1995) questionnaire, that is, the participants were required to read the situations, put themselves in those roles, and then indicate their own ability to respond appropriately in those situations on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "unsatisfactory (1)" to "completely appropriate (5)."

Instructional materials

The instructional materials used in this study were a series of tasks designed on the basis of the five speech acts of request, refusal, apology, suggestion, and compliment. To this end, five units of tasks were designed. Task design was based on Ellis's (2003) framework. First, the goals of the tasks and units in terms of pedagogic focus, pragmatic focus, skill-focus, and language focus were determined. Therefore, one unit of tasks was developed for every speech act. The tasks focused on the four language skills. Then, the types and themes of the tasks were specified. The themes and topics were university, campus life, sports, household chores, shopping, workplace, entertainment, vacation, environment, personal belongings, etc. A variety of task types (from different perspectives), such as listing, ordering, comparing, information-gap, reasoning-gap, opinion-gap, cognitive, interpersonal, role-play, and discussions were developed for this study. Next, factors such as input, conditions, processes, and outcomes were taken into

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consideration for each task. The main mediums of instruction were oral, written, and oral-written. The majority of the tasks had split information configuration and were two-way which required negotiation and convergence. Most of the designed tasks required information exchange. The mode of discourse was dialogic and the medium of the products in nearly all tasks was oral. Regarding the discourse domains or genres, as it was mentioned above, most of the tasks dealt with educational issues at university, professors' lectures, homework assignments, job and workplace conditions, shopping, etc. The scope of the outcomes was open in the majority of the tasks. Finally, the tasks were sequenced based on Ellis's (2003) criteria for grading tasks. As far as cognitive complexity is concerned, the designed tasks required low processing demands, were mostly static, and not abstract, and contained less amount of information to be processed. The presence of illustrations and other textual factors added to task simplicity.

Data collection

Necessary data were collected by one of the authors, who was the participants' instructor. Data collection lasted for one semester at the University of Tehran, Kish International Campus. What follows is a description of data collection procedure in different phases of the study.

Data collection in the mainstream task-based group

The participants in the control group were taught based on the mainstream task-based methodology. They were provided with a series of tasks, already prepared for the purpose of the present study, and were required to complete them. The teacher went through the three phases of task-based methodology (pre-test, while-task, and post- task), but didn't focus on any pragmatic aspect of the tasks. That is, the teacher did not provide any explicit instruction, explanation, or feedback on the mentioned speech acts. In the pre-task phase, the teacher provided the students with the required instruction to perform the tasks. He also elaborated on some lexico-grammatical items. He whetted their appetite and motivated them to perform the tasks by showing an example or a model and doing some linguistic activities. In the while-task phase, the participants were required to complete the tasks and prepare a report of their reflection upon the process of task completion, just as Willis (1996) proposed. Finally, in the post-task phase, the teacher focused on the problematic lexico-grammatical areas. In other words, the teacher didn't emphasize any pragmatic aspect of English, such as speech act and/or speech act realization patterns. There was no provision of pragmatic feedback or the like either.

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Data collection in the pre-task, post-task pragmatic focus group

Like the control group, the teacher followed the three phases of TBLT, as proposed by Willis, (1996); however, he focused on five speech acts of request, refusal, apology, suggestion, and compliment in the pre-task and the post-task phases of instruction. The tasks were the same tasks used in the control group. In the pre-task phase, the teacher introduced the tasks and topics and motivated the participants to complete the tasks. He, then, elaborated on the required lexico-grammatical items with reference to the speech act realization patterns and form-function relationship.

In the while-task phase, there was no focus on any speech act by the teacher. Therefore, completing the tasks collaboratively or individually, planning a report, and presenting it to the class orally or in written form were the main procedures to follow. However, it was in the last phase (post-task phase) that pragmatic focus was the main concern. According to Willis (1996), the main concern of the post-task is linguistic focus, that is, linguistic analysis and practice. This phase is also named the "focus-on-form phase". Instead, the teacher focused on pragmatics in this phase, and focus-on-form was only limited to "focus on form-function relationship". As a result, this phase was called "Pragmatic Focus Phase". The teacher implemented a variety of techniques and tasks in this pragmatic-focus phase. He made use of the students' pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic errors in the previous phases, particularly the while-task phase. Most of the addressed errors were related to speech act realization patterns and their formality levels. Once a report was analyzed and an error was identified by the teacher, the students were asked to correct the error (if they could) and to provide necessary explanation. Finally, the teacher himself elaborated on the point(s) and also introduced some follow-up tasks. Consciousness-raising tasks, more specifically "pragmatic consciousness-raising tasks" to use Rose's (1994) term, were also used in this phase. Therefore, the learners were given a selected corpus of their own utterances during the previous task completions, and were required to identify any type of pragmatic errors, make necessary correction(s), and provide sufficient explanation(s). Pragmatically-oriented exercises and drills were also used in this last phase. The treatment lasted for five sessions; one session for every speech act.

Data collection in the scaffolded while-task pragmatic focus group

There was no focus on any pragmatic aspect in the pre-task and post-task phases in the while-task group. However, it was in the while-task phase that the students could receive pragmatic feedback on the speech acts, pragmalinguistic and

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sociopragmatic features of speech acts during task completion. In the while-task phase and during task completion, the teacher provided implicit interactional feedback to the participants who were in pairs or groups. He assisted and scaffolded their performance by using six types of interactional feedback: (1) confirmation check, (2) clarification request, (3) comprehension check, (4) recast, (5) repetition, and (6) prompting. This group was actually feedback-oriented. Teacher feedback was also provided when the participants were presenting their oral/written report of task completion. The reports were analyzed by the teacher from a pragmatic point of view, and the probable pragmatic and speech-act errors were specified. Then the learners were provided with interactional feedback (the above-mentioned six types) and were assisted in terms of their pragmatic performance.

Data analysis

The situations in the WDCTs were rated using a six-point rating scale developed by Taguchi (2006). In this rating scale, appropriacy is scored from 0 to 5. The scale considers EFL learners' appropriate use of linguistic expressions, proper level of directness, proper level of politeness, grammatical competence, discourse competence, and the sociopragmatic aspects of their performance, and then assigns a score to their performance. Appropriateness deals with the appropriate performance of speech act in a social context, which includes pragmalinguistcs and sociopragmatics (Kasper, 1992; Leech, 1983; Thomas, 1983; as cited in Jianda, 2006).

In order to have a record of the participants' metapragmatic awareness (MPA) both at the beginning and at the end of the study, the participants were required to answer three questions under the same 25 situations, which were also used to elicit pragmatic production in the written discourse completion tasks (WDCT). Questions one and three were on a five-point Likert scale, whereas the second question had three choices (A, B & C), one of which was the right answer. To be able to compare EFL learners' awareness of L2 metapragmatics with the other variables and to make the values of the three questions the same, seven native speakers of English answered the same questions. Then, having calculated the frequencies of the native speakers' responses for every question below each situation, the researchers considered the frequencies as the native speakers' norms for each question. Therefore, those EFL learners' responses which were the same as the native speakers' norms were given the score of 1, and the other different

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responses were given the score of zero (0). Consequently, every situation was given a score of zero (1) to three (3) on a three-point Likert scale.

As far as the rating of the participants' pragmatic self-assessment is concerned, they assigned a score to each of the situations from one to five, that is, based on a five-point Likert scale.

Results

Pragmatic production

To address the first research question, the participants' performance on a written discourse completion task (WDCT) at the beginning of the study (in the pre-test) was compared with their performance on the same WDCT at the end of the study (in the post-test). This comparison was made within the three groups, i.e. between the pre-test and the post-test in the pre-task, post-task pragmatic focus group (experimental group 1), in the scaffolded while-task group (experimental group 2), and in the mainstream task-based group with no pragmatic focus (control group).

As far as the pre-task post-task pragmatic focus group is concerned, the participants' scores in both the pre-test and the post-test were compared. Descriptive statistics showed a mean of 2.62 and a standard deviation of .57 for their pragmatic production in the pre-test. However, the mean and the standard deviation in the post-test were observed to be 3.72 and .59 respectively, displaying that the mean score in the post-test was larger than that of the pre-test. To investigate the significance of the difference between the mean scores in the pre-test and post-test, a paired-samples *t*-test was run. As Table 1 presents, the *t*-observed with its 26 degrees of freedom was 9.21, which is larger than the *t*-critical at .05 level of significance. Concerning the effect size, the magnitude of the difference was also computed and was observed to be large (eta squared=.38). Thus, it can be concluded that there was a significant difference between the participants' pragmatic production in the pre-test and post-test within the first experimental group. This confirms the positive effect of teaching the pragmatic features of L2 (the treatment), which enhanced the acquisition and development of interlanguage pragmatics.

The scores of the participants of the scaffolded while-task group in the pre-test and post-test were also compared. The mean score in the pre-test was 2.45, and the standard deviation was .62. However, the mean score of the learners in the post-test was observed to be 3.52, with a standard deviation of .65. A comparison of the two

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means displayed that the mean score in the post-test was larger than that of the pre-test (mean difference= 1.07). To ensure the significance of the difference, a paired-samples *t*-test was carried out (Table 1), the results of which illustrated that the *t*-observed with 25 degrees of freedom was 9.25, which was more than the *t*-critical at .05 level of significance. Therefore, the difference between the mean of the pre-test and that of the post-test in the second experimental group was significant. The magnitude of the difference was also computed as large (eta squared=.63). Like the previous analysis, this investigation also confirmed that the participants in the second experimental group improved their pragmatic production due to the teacher's pragmatic feedback and scaffolding in the while-task phase.

In the mainstream task-based group, the mean of the production in the pre-test was 2.02, and the standard deviation was .82, whereas in the post-test the mean was calculated as 2.89 with a standard deviation of .65. Thus, a paired-samples *t*-test was run to investigate the significance of the difference (Table 1). It was discovered that the *t*-observed with 21 degrees of freedom was 7.33, which was larger than the *t*-critical at .05 level of significance. This indicates that there was a statistically significant difference between the participants' pragmatic production at the beginning and at the end of the study. The magnitude of the difference was also calculated as large (eta squared=.66).

Table 1
Pragmatic production: paired-samples t-test

	Paired Differences							
				95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
PP/Pre-test/Ex G1 PP/Post-test/Ex G1	-1.09	.61	.11	-1.33	-.84	-9.21	26	.00
PP/Pre-test/Ex G2 PP/Post-test/Ex G2	-1.06	.58	.11	-1.30	-.83	-9.25	25	.00
PP/Pre-test/CG PP/Post-test/CG	.86	.55	.11	1.11	-.62	-7.33	21	.00

Note: [PP=Pragmatic Production] & [CG=Control Group]

To compare the three groups' gains of the task-based instruction of pragmatics, every participant's gain score was calculated due to the fact that the three groups

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were only homogeneous in terms of their linguistic knowledge, rather than pragmatic knowledge. Thus, every participant's pre-test score on the WDCT was subtracted from his/her post-test score on the same WDCT. It was found that there was a tiny difference among the means of the gain scores in the three groups of the study. Thus, a one-way between groups ANOVA was run. The result indicated that there was no significant difference among the three groups of the study concerning their gain scores. That is, there was no difference amongst pre-task post-task pragmatic focus group (M=1.09, SD=.61), while-task pragmatic focus group (M=1.06, SD=.58), and the mainstream task-based group (M=.89, SD=.55); the F value was seen to be 1.03 [F(2, 72)=1.03, P=.36]. The result showed an improvement in the EFL learners' pragmatic production even in the control group, though they didn't receive any special treatment. In other words, the pragmatic production of the participants in the control group developed due to the use of tasks and task-based instruction.

Metapragmatic awareness

To address the second research question, the participants' performance on a metapragmatic awareness questionnaire (MPAQ) at the beginning of the study (in the pre-test) was compared with their performance on the same MPAQ at the end of the study (in the post-test). This comparison was made within the three groups, i.e. between the pre-test and the post-test in the pre-task, post-task pragmatic focus group (experimental group 1), in the scaffolded while-task group (experimental group 2), and in the mainstream task-based group with no pragmatic focus (control group).

As far as metapragmatic awareness in the first experimental group is concerned, the descriptive statistics were calculated first. Descriptive statistics showed a mean of 1.32 and a standard deviation of .29 for their metapragmatic awareness in the pre-test. However, the mean and the standard deviation in the post-test were observed to be 1.47 and .25 respectively, displaying that the mean score in the post-test was larger than that of the pre-test. That is, the mean difference was .15. The t-observed with its 26 degrees of freedom was found to be -3.44 (Table 2). Although the post-test mean seemed only a little larger than that of the pre-test, the difference was observed to be significant at .05 level of significance. The magnitude of the difference was also computed and the effect size was observed as large (eta squared=.19). Thus, it can be concluded that there was a significant difference between EFL learners' metapragmatic awareness in the pre-test and their

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metapragmatic awareness in the post-test within the first experimental group. This confirms that the treatment (pre-task, post-task pragmatic focus) did have a positive effect on the participants' metapragmatic awareness.

Concerning the scaffolded while-task group, the researchers compared the mean scores of the pre-test with those of the post-test. The mean score of the metapragmatic awareness in the pre-test was 1.43, and the standard deviation was .31. On the other hand, the mean score in the metapragmatic awareness in the post-test was observed to be 1.56 with a standard deviation of .31. A comparison of the two means displayed that the mean difference between the pre-test and the post-test was .13. To compare the two means statistically to see whether the difference is significant, a paired-samples *t*-test was carried out (Table 2). The result of the *t*-test represented that the *t*-observed with 25 degrees of freedom was -2.33. Since the *t*-observed was more than the *t*-critical at .05 level of significance, the difference between the mean of the pre-test and that of the post-test in the second experimental group was concluded to be significant statistically. The magnitude of the difference was also computed, and the effect size was observed as moderate (eta squared=.09). Like the previous analysis, this investigation confirmed that the participants of the second experimental group improved their awareness of L2 metapragmatics during the course.

In the mainstream task-based group, the mean of the metapragmatic awareness in the pre-test was 1.16 and the standard deviation was .25. In the post-test, however, the mean and the standard deviation were a bit different (*M*=.89 & *SD*=.22). To ensure that there is no statistically significant difference between the pre-test and the post-test, a paired-samples t-test was run (Table 2). The *t*-observed with 21 degrees of freedom was -.12. This indicated that there was not a statistically significant difference between the control group participants' metapragmatic awareness at the beginning and at the end of the study.

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Table 2
Metapragmatic awareness: paired-samples t-test

	Paired Differences							
				95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
MPA/Pre-T/Ex G 1 MPA/Post-T/Ex G 1	-.15	.23	.04	-.24	-.06	-3.44	26	.00
MPA/Pre-T/Ex G2 MPA/Post-T/Ex G 2	-.12	.28	.05	-.24	-.01	-2.33	25	.02
MPA/Pre-T/CG MPA/Post-T/CG	-.27	.22	.02	-.08	.07	-.12	21	.88

Note: [MPA=Metapragmatic Awareness] & [CG=Control Group]

Since the three groups of the study were not homogeneous in terms of their metapragmatic awareness from the very beginning of the study [$F(2, 72)=5.16$, $P<.05$], their gain scores of the task-based instruction of pragmatics were calculated, i.e., every participant's pre-test score on the metapragmatic awareness questionnaire was subtracted from his/her post-test score on the same test. To determine the significance of the difference among the gain scores, a one-way between groups ANOVA was run. The analysis of variance indicated that there was a significant difference among the three groups of the study concerning their gain scores in metapragmatic awareness. That is, there was a difference amongst the pre-task, post-task pragmatic focus group (M=.15, SD=.23), the while-task pragmatic focus group (M=.12, SD=.28), and the mainstream task-based group (M= -.27, SD=.2); the F value was seen to be 2.01 [$F(2, 72)=2.01$], with P=.049. Then, to determine which of the three groups differed significantly from others, a Post-hoc test was conducted. The Post-hoc comparisons using Scheffe test indicated that the gain scores in both pre-task post-task pragmatic focus and while-task pragmatic focus groups were statistically greater than that of the control group. Put it another way, the result showed that the mainstream task-based approach was not successful in improving EFL learners' meatpragmatic awareness.

Pragmatic self-assessment

To address the third research question, the participants' self-assessment of their own performance in the 25 situations (five speech acts) at the beginning of the study was compared with their self-assessment of their production in the same

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situations at the end of the study. This comparison was made within the three groups, i.e. between the pre-test and the post-test in the pre-task, post-task pragmatic focus group (experimental group 1), in the scaffolded while-task group (experimental group 2), and in the mainstream task-based group with no pragmatic focus (control group).

As far as pragmatic self-assessment (PSA) in the first experimental group is concerned, descriptive statistics showed a mean of 3.13 and a standard deviation of .60 in the pre-test, while the mean and the standard deviation in the post-test were 3.97 and .60 respectively. The t-observed with its 26 degrees of freedom was -7.80 at .05 level of significance (Table 3). The effect size was also observed as large (eta squared=.53). Thus, a statistically significant difference was observed between EFL learners' PSA in the pre-test and their PSA in the post-test within the first experimental group, indicating the positive effect of the treatment on their own assessment of pragmatic production.

Similarly, in the second experimental group, the participants' PSA in the pre-test was compared with their PSA in the post-test; their mean score in the pre-test was observed to be 2.92 with a standard deviation of .82. However, their mean score and standard deviation in the post-test were 3.73 and .73 respectively. Thus, to determine the significance of the difference, a paired-samples t-test was carried out. As Table 3 shows, the t-observed with 25 degrees of freedom and at .05 level of significance was -3.86, showing a statistically significant difference between the participants' pre-test and their post-test. The effect size was also observed as large (eta squared=.22). Therefore, it was confirmed that the participants in the scaffolded while-task group improved their pragmatic self-assessment during the study.

As far as PSA in the mainstream task-based group is concerned, the mean of the participants in the pre-test was 3.15 and the standard deviation was seen to be .42. However, the mean and the standard deviation in the post-test were 3.40 and .30 respectively. Thus, to ensure the difference, a paired-samples t-test was run (table 3). The t-observed with 21 degrees of freedom was seen to be 2.99 at .05 level of significance, indicating a significant difference between the participants' PSA at the beginning and at the end of the study. The effect size was also observed as large (eta squared=.17).

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Table 3
Pragmatic self-assessment: paired-samples t-test

	Paired Differences							
				95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
PSA/Pre-T/Ex G 1 PSA/Post-T/Ex G 1	-.84	.56	.10	-1.06	-.62	-7.80	26	.00
PSA/Pre-T/Ex G 2 PSA/Post-T/Ex G 2	-.81	1.07	.21	-1.24	-.37	-3.86	25	.00
PSA/Pre-T/CG PSA/Post-T/CG	-.24	.39	.08	-.42	-.07	-2.99	21	.00

Note: [PSA=Pragmatic Self-Assessment] & [CG=Control Group]

However, to ensure the difference among the three groups regarding their pragmatic self-assessment, the mean scores of the three groups in the post-test were compared due to the fact that the three groups were observed to be homogeneous at the beginning of the study concerning their PSA. To determine the significance of the difference, a one-way between-groups ANOVA was run. The analysis indicated that there was a significant difference in pragmatic self-assessment amongst pre-task post-task pragmatic focus group (M=3.97, SD=.60), while-task pragmatic focus group (M=3.73, SD=.73), and the mainstream task-based group (M=3.40, SD=.80). The F value was seen to be 5.68 [$F(2, 72)=5.68$] at .05 level of significance [$p<.05$]. The effect size was also observed to be almost large (eta squared=.13), displaying the large magnitude of the difference. Then, to determine which contrasts are significant, that is, to see which of the three groups differed significantly from the others, a post hoc test was conducted. The post-hoc comparisons using the Scheffe test indicated that the mean score for the first experimental group (M=3.97, SD=.60) was significantly different from the control group (M=3.40, SD=.80), indicating the difference among the three groups of the study concerning the pragmatic self-assessment. In fact, the two experimental groups could develop their PSA more than the control group.

Discussion

Task-based language teaching and pragmatic production

The most important goal of the present study was to fill a frequently-reported gap in the ILP literature, i.e., to find an appropriate methodology for the instruction of

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L2 pragmatics, given the effectiveness of instruction in developing pragmatic competence (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig, 2001; Rose, 2005; Rose & Ng, 2001; Takahashi, 2001). The major finding of the present study was the development of pragmatic production among the three groups of the study, which can be attributed to the following factors.

First, it can be claimed that the tasks used in the present study provided the participants in the three groups with comprehensible pragmatic input. As Swain (2005) claims, "task-based instruction favors authentic but comprehensible material…" (p. 392). Thus, it can be concluded that the tasks facilitated the processing of pragmatic input among all the participants of the study. In other words, the participants were able to process both the pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic features of the speech acts as a result of exposure to real-life instances of L2 use as provided through tasks. This is in line with Takimoto (2007, p. 22), who believes that "effective learning occurs when the tasks provide learners with opportunities for processing both pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic features of the target structures".

Second, as in each unit of the designed task-based materials every speech act was frequently emphasized through various types of tasks, it can be claimed that pragmatic input was enhanced. This is in line with Ellis's (2003) view that input enhancement can be considered in task design by making the target point frequent and salient. Thus, it can be argued that input was enhanced through a variety of task types in which speech act features were frequent and salient. This led to the appropriate pragmatic output by the members of the three groups. Hence, like the majority of interventional ILP studies (Martinez-Flor & Fukuya, 2005; Rose & Ng, 2001; Takahashi, 2001), the present study was an input-based interventional ILP study, supporting the significant effect of input enhancement on ILP development.

Third, closely related to the previous reason, it can be argued that tasks provided opportunities for the participants in the three groups to notice the pragmalinguistic as well as sociopragmatic features of the target speech acts. As Schmidt (1993) believes, noticing the features of the input is necessary for the acquisition of a second language. This means that while the participants were actively completing the tasks by focusing on meaning, they could gain an awareness of L2 pragmatic features in two levels of noticing and understanding, as suggested by Schmidt (1990). That is, not only did the participants notice the

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speech act production features, but they also gained the ability to formulate the speech act realization patterns easily. The fact that noticing contributed to the participants' pragmatic production has also been confirmed by Takimoto (2008) and Takahashi (2005).

The fourth reason that can be claimed to have contributed to the development of pragmatic production in the three groups of the study was the interaction produced as a result of authentic communicative tasks and task-based methodology among the participants. A plethora of studies have shown that tasks lead to learners' interaction in the second language acquisition process (e.g., Duff, 1986; Ellis, 2000; Long, 1981; Murphy, 2003; Pica, 1994; Shayer, 2002). This is what Long (1983) has referred to as interaction hypothesis. In other words, interaction and meaning negotiation among the participants lead to interactional modification which results in the provision of comprehensible input. Long believes that interaction relates input, noticing, and output to each other, which will facilitate language acquisition. This claim that the tasks in the present study could provide opportunities for meaning negotiation and interaction among the participants can be supported on the following grounds.

The majority of tasks, 25 tasks, were information-gap tasks through which the participants were required to exchange meaning. This is in line with many studies supporting that information-gap tasks bring about interactions (Ellis, 2003; Pica & Doughty, 1985; Pica, Kang, & Sauro, 2006). Among the 41 tasks in the present study, 32 tasks required a two-way interactant relationship. This confirms Foster and Ohta's (2005) belief that two-way tasks provide more negotiations. Moreover, most of the tasks in this study were dialogic tasks which required more convergence and collaboration. All these reasons support the fact that tasks stimulate learners to participate in meaning negotiation through language use. This reveals that, in the present study, tasks required learners to focus on the pragmatic aspects of the second/foreign language. It can be mentioned that the tasks best provided opportunities for language use and meaning negotiation which led to the noticing of the pragmalinguisti and sociopragmatic features of the speech acts.

As far as the interaction among the participants is concerned, it can be argued that the participants could receive "interactional feedback", in Oliver and Mackey's (2003) term, while struggling for meaning negotiation through task completion. As Lightbown and Spada (2002) believe, interactional feedback is "an indication to the

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learner that his or her use of the target language is incorrect" (p. 172). Seedhouse (1999) believes that provision of feedback is one of the characteristics of task-based instruction. Therefore, it can be claimed that the interactions initiated by the tasks in the three groups of the study provided interactional feedback to the participants. In other words, even in the pre-task/post-task pragmatic focus group (experimental group 1) and the mainstream task-based group (control group), in which there was no explicit or implicit feedback by the teacher, tasks provided interactional feedback to the learners which led them to notice the pragmatic aspects of the second language, and resulted in the development of pragmatic production.

The interaction among the three groups of the study can also be justified from a sociocultural point of view. Sociocultural theory (SCT) considers social interaction and collaboration as two important aspects of second/foreign language learning. Followers of SCT believe that mediation and scaffolding result in L2 acquisition. Similarly, the tasks in the present study provided opportunities for interaction among the members of the three groups. This is in line with Ellis (2000) who postulates that the interaction between the learners while completing the tasks can scaffold the process of L2 acquisition. Shayer (2002) adds that the collaboration among the learners while completing the tasks leads to scaffolding. The results of the present study showed that language learners were able to have interaction and collaborative dialogs while completing the tasks. This is in line with Donato's (1994) finding that learners improved their L2 pragmatics through peer-interaction while completing the tasks.

Task-based language teaching and metapragmatic awareness

As far as metapragmatic awareness is concerned, it was found that EFL learners' metapragmatic awareness increased in both experimental groups. However, the participants in the control group did not improve their metapragmatic awareness.

With regard to the pre-task post-task experimental group, it can be argued that it is the task-based pragmatic focus in the pre-task, post-task phases that contributed to this development. In other words, the use of communicative tasks and task-based methodology with a pragmatic focus in the pre-task and post-task phases led to the development of L2 pragmatic knowledge. This development occurred because the learners were consciously noticing the pragmatic aspects of language, especially sociolinguistic variables, while struggling to communicate through task

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completion. It can be mentioned that the use of tasks, especially consciousness-raising tasks in the post-task phase, to teach ILP made learners notice different aspects of language use. Therefore, it was the participants' noticing of these subtle L2 metapragmatic features that developed their metapragmatic awareness.

Concerning the scaffolded while-task group, the participants' metapragmatic awareness developed, though there was no pragmatic focus in the pre-task and post-task phases. This success can be attributed to the teacher's provision of pragmatic feedback and scaffolding in the while-task phase, as well as the use of tasks and task-based methodology. As it was observed, the participants of this group developed both pragmatic production and metapragmatic awareness, although they only received teacher's pragmatic feedback and no instruction in the while-task phase. This confirms that comprehensible output, as proposed by Swain (1985), enhances second language acquisition, including interlanguage pragmatics. This finding is also in line with Jernigan's (2007) study which proved that the "+ output" instructional group developed their pragmatic performance.

However, the participants in the control group did not show any development in their metapragmatic awareness from the pre-test to the post-test although they developed their pragmatic production. This may mean that lack of pragmatic focus and feedback was the main reason EFL learners did not notice the sociolinguistic variables in their language use.

Task-based language teaching and pragmatic self-assessment

As far as the participants' assessment of their own pragmatic knowledge is concerned, every group was able to develop assessment of its own pragmatic ability. That is, an improvement was observed from the pre-test to the post-test in all groups, including the control group. This confirms the above-reported findings that the use of tasks through the framework of task-based language teaching did increase the EFL learners' awareness of their own L2 pragmatic knowledge. This finding can be justified in terms of noticing hypothesis, particularly the second type of noticing as proposed by Schmidt and Frota (1986). In this second type of noticing, also referred to as "notice the gap" or "cognitive comparison" by Ellis (1995), learners compare their output or their current state of proficiency with the target language system. Thus, it can be claimed that, through task completion, the participants of the present study could notice the gap and compare their own pragmatic production with the pragmalinguistic forms and sociopragmatic norms

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of the English language embedded in the tasks and task-based syllabus; as a result, they gained an awareness of English pragmatic features which led to the development of pragmatic self-assessment among the three groups. In other words, the participants, as a result of receiving task-based instruction and noticing, gained an awareness of their own pragmatic ability in L2. It also led the learners to feel more confident and assess their own pragmatic production as high at the end of the study.

By comparing the learners' pragmatic self-assessment with the researcher's assessment of their pragmatic production, it can be claimed that the EFL learners were able to assess their L2 pragmatic ability almost precisely. This supports the fact that applying communicative tasks through task-based language teaching provided the learners with pragmatic knowledge as well as pragmatic awareness.

The last issue to be considered is that among the three groups, the participants in the mainstream task-based group did not develop their pragmatic self-assessment to the same degree as the two experimental groups; the control group developed its PSA less than the experimental groups. This fact, like metapragmatic awareness, confirms the significant role of pragmatic focus and feedback, alongside task-based pragmatic instruction and syllabus, in the development of pragmatic self-awareness.

Conclusion and Implications

Several conclusions can be drawn from the present study. Tasks are devices in teachers' hands to provide comprehensible pragmatic input. Tasks expose EFL learners to necessary input required for their noticing of L2 pragmatic features. This means that tasks and task completion contribute to EFL learners' awareness of interlanguage pragmatics. It can be concluded that tasks can develop L2 pragmatic competence among EFL learners. Tasks provide opportunities for language learners to struggle for meaning negotiation, interaction, and language use. This leads to improvement in EFL learners' pragmatic production. Besides, learners' task completion, within the framework of task-based language teaching, provides interactional feedback for them to make necessary modifications to their L2 pragmatic ability even if there is no explicit feedback or scaffolding by the teacher. Accordingly, task completion brings about opportunities for learners to receive scaffolding and support by the teacher and other experts. Thus, it can be concluded that the use of tasks in EFL classes, with or without teacher's pragmatic focus or

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feedback, can lead to the acquisition and development of L2 speech acts. While the use of tasks can develop pragmatic production, additional teacher pragmatic focus and/or feedback can also improve metapragmatic awareness and pragmatic self-assessment, i.e. both teacher's pragmatic focus and scaffolding will lead EFL learners to notice the sociolinguistic variables embedded in language use. Thus, TBLT can be considered as a method that can develop L2 functions, L2 speech act production, metapragmatic awareness, and pragmatic self-assessment among the EFL learners.

This study offers a new perspective to the teaching of interlanguage pragmatics in EFL contexts, and has several implications for language teachers and materials developers. EFL teachers should be aware of the fact that task-based pragmatics instruction can be implemented as an effective approach to the teaching of interlanguage pragmatics, besides the commonly practiced modes of ILP instruction, such as explicit/implicit and inductive/deductive. Teachers should know that tasks such as information-gap tasks which require a two-way interactant relationship, negotiation, and convergence provide more opportunities for interaction, collaboration, and scaffolding which will result in ILP development. Teacher should also know that the teacher's scaffolding and feedback in the while-task phase is as effective as pragmatic focus in the pre-task and post-task concerning the development of metapragmatic awareness. Thus, pragmatic focus and feedback should always be added to mainstream task-based instruction of L2 pragmatics. Moreover, syllabus designers can base all types of input on communicative tasks requiring information exchange, interaction, negotiation, and convergence. Similarly, materials developers can design or select authentic tasks that may contribute to the development of pragmatic competence. Textbooks can be designed based on tasks for EFL learners to develop their pragmatic competence. Likewise, task-based supplementary materials can be developed for the available ESL or EFL packages to focus on interlanguage pragmatics.

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