The Effects of Explicit and Implicit Instruction in English Refusals

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Abstract

This study compares the effects of explicit and implicit instruction in the use of English refusals. Sixty-two participants from two intact groups participated. Thirty-three were in an explicit instruction group (EIG) and 29 in an implicit instruction group (IIG). The teaching targets were refusals to four types of acts: invitations, suggestions, offers and requests, and involved three kinds of status (high, equal and low) in familiar relationships. Pretests and posttests were used to obtain the scores, and the instrument used for testing was a written Discourse Completion Test (DCT). A t-test and effect size were used for analyzing quantitative data. The classification of the responses of the written DCT was adopted for analyzing qualitative data. The quantitative results show that explicit instruction was better than implicit instruction for teaching English refusals. Qualitatively, for teaching refusals to invitations and requests, explicit teaching was better than implicit teaching; for teaching refusals to offers and suggestions there was no difference between the two kinds of instruction; but teaching refusals to offers was effective, and no effect could be found in teaching refusals to suggestions. As to amount of information, strategy choices, and level of formality, the performance of the EIG was better than that of the IIG.

Key words: explicit instruction; implicit instruction; English refusals

1. Introduction

Research into teaching speech acts has aroused great research interest in the field of
interlanguage pragmatics (ILP). According to Kasper & Rose (2001: 3), there is now a large and fast-growing literature on learners’ use and acquisition of L2 pragmatic ability, and many studies have proved that pragmatic ability is teachable (Koike & Pearson, 2005; Takahashi, 2001; Yoshimi, 2001), but the question of how to teach pragmatic competence still remains, including the questions of both how and what to teach. Therefore, studies concerning teaching methods and contents of instruction in the field of ILP are still needed. Refusal is a face-threatening and affectively negative speech act (Brown & Levinson, 1987) and can be characterized as a response to another’s act (e.g., request, invitation, offer, suggestion), rather than as an act initiated by the speaker. Because refusals normally function as second pair parts, they preclude extensive planning on the part of the refuser. And because extensive planning is limited, and the possibilities for response are broader than those for an initiating act, refusals may reveal greater complexity than many other speech acts (Gass & Houck, 1999: 2). Therefore, they are more complicated to teach and learn as an important part of pragmatic competence.

A review of literature shows that only four studies on instruction in English refusals have been conducted, i.e., King & Silver (1993), Morrow (1995), Kondo (2001) and Silva (2003), and only one study compares explicit and implicit teaching. The features of these studies can be described as follows: 1) The number of participants is small and participants are from an intact group. 2) The level of participants is intermediate. 3) The instructional time is relatively short. 4) Teaching methods involve explicit teaching or implicit teaching. King & Silver (1993), Morrow (1995), and Silva (2003) involve only explicit teaching while Kondo (2001) compares the methods. The teaching procedures in these four studies also vary, and such variation may have contributed to different results of the studies. None of the researchers in these four studies considered four types of stimulus acts. Neither was any control group employed in any of the studies. Besides, these four studies either used the Discourse Completion Test (DCT), role plays or self-report, but none of them used more than one method. Finally, as to the teaching effect, King & Silver’s (1993) study found no teaching effect due to shortage of time, whereas the other three studies found an obvious effect because the teaching target was very easy to learn, although the teaching time was very short.

The purpose of the present study was to compare the different teaching effects of explicit and implicit instruction on Chinese EFL students and to investigate the magnitude of the effect. The research question was as follows:

Are there differential effects between explicit and implicit instruction on the teaching of English refusals in a Chinese EFL context? If so, in what aspects do they make a difference?

2. Research Design

2.1 Participants

Sixty-three first year English majors from the College of International Studies at Guizhou University, China, participated in the study. One student who missed the posttest was
excluded from the sample though she had taken part in most of the training and had taken the pretest. Thus 62 sets of valid data were collected. Thirty-three participants were in the explicit instruction group (EIG) and 29 in the implicit instruction group (IIG). The average age in the EIG and IIG was 18.9 and 19.1 respectively. These participants were almost the same as high school students because they had just entered university and the experiment began at the beginning of the first term. The average scores on the National Matriculation English Examination (NMEE) for the EIG and IIG were 116.82 and 116.16 (out of 150) respectively. An independent sample t-test showed no significant difference between two groups in terms of their English (t=.250, p=.803>.05).

Based on the responses in the Background Information Survey (see Appendix 1), participants could meet the requirements of the study. There were four questions for participants to answer. Question 1 was about the length of students’ English study before they entered university. The average number of years of English study before entering the university was 6.85 years, and 53.2% of the participants had studied English for six years and 30.6% of them had studied it for seven years. Question 2 asked if students had studied English refusal strategies before, but none of the students said they had. Question 3 asked if they had been to English speaking countries, but again none of the students had. Question 4 asked if they frequently spoke English with native speakers. Only one person (1.6%) said he frequently spoke English with native speakers, but he had never studied English refusal strategies with English native speakers and had never been to an English speaking country. Therefore, he was not excluded from the study. Though 9.7% of the participants had occasionally spoken to English native speakers, they also had never learned English refusal strategies from English native speakers and had never been to English speaking countries, thus, they were included in the study. A majority of the participants (88.7%) declared that they rarely or never spoke English with native speakers.

2.2 Instructional Targets and Time

Many kinds of English refusals have been found in previous studies. They include four types: refusing invitations, refusing suggestions, refusing requests, and refusing offers. Each type includes three different kinds of status, i.e., refusing a person of higher status, refusing a person of equal status, and refusing a person of lower status. The distance between the speakers and refusers was mainly that between acquaintances or familiar persons. The instructional targets in the present study was based mainly on research findings of Beebe et al. (1990), King & Silver (1993), Nelson, Al Batal & El Bakary (2002), Al-Issa (2003), Wannaruk (2004, 2008), in which refusals strategies were classified according to Beebe et al. (1990: 72-73), for example, “negative ability” strategy — “I can’t”, “I won’t”, “I don’t think so.”; “explanation” strategy—“My children will be home that night.”, “I have a headache.”; “regret” strategy — “I’m sorry.”, “I feel terrible.”, “let interlocutor off the hook” strategy — “Don’t worry about it.”; “That’s okay.” etc. The patterns are simply presented as follows, due to the limited space, only American three most frequently used refusals strategies are listed.
Table 1. Instructional Targets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stimulus Types</th>
<th>Refuser Status</th>
<th>Refusals Strategies</th>
<th>Typical Expressions</th>
<th>Situation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Refusals to Invitations</td>
<td>L-H= a lower refuser to a higher interlocutor, E-E= an equal refuser to an equal interlocutor, H-L= a higher refuser to a lower interlocutor (adopted from Wannaruk 2004, 2005, 2008)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Positive feeling</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I’d love to (positive feeling), but I can’t (negative feeling), I have to work (explanation).</td>
<td>Refusing a teacher’s /a boss’s invitation to a party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Negative ability</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No (No), thanks (gratitude), maybe next time (future acceptance), I need to get back and work on my project (explanation).</td>
<td>Refusing a friend’s invitation to see a movie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Explanation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refusals to Suggestions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Negative ability, Pause filler</td>
<td>L-H</td>
<td></td>
<td>Well, Hmm…(pause filler), I would rather not (negative ability). I had planned to take another course next semester (explanation).</td>
<td>Refusing an advisor’s suggestion to study another course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Explanation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I’ll take the stats after that (alternative).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Alternative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refusals to Offers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Positive feeling (Negative ability), Gratitude, Pause filler</td>
<td>L-H</td>
<td></td>
<td>It sounds like a great opportunity (positive feeling), but I’m going to have to pass on it (negative ability). No, Thanks (gratitude). I have a number of other things I want to focus on (explanation).</td>
<td>Refusing a dean’s offer or a boss’s offer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Gratitude</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Explanation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refusals to Requests</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Explanation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I have that doctor’s appointment (explanation). Can’t Carrie (sister) do that for you? (alternative). I’m sorry Mom (regret).</td>
<td>Refusing a mother’s request</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Alternative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Regret</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refusals to Requests</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Regret</td>
<td>E-E</td>
<td></td>
<td>I’m sorry (regret), but I need to be glued to this computer until tomorrow morning (explanation). Perhaps someone else does not have such a tight deadline (alternative).</td>
<td>Refusing a friend’s request to use a computer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Explanation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Alternative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refusals to Requests</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Positive feeling</td>
<td>H-L</td>
<td></td>
<td>I’d really like to help you out (positive feeling) but, sorry, I’m afraid (regret), I’m really strapped for time right now and can’t really afford to (explanation).</td>
<td>Refusing a junior member’s request to interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Regret</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Explanation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The teaching materials for the EIG and IIG were exactly the same and were designed based on the above instructional targets with some modifications. The above four types, including three kinds of status, were assigned to different situations, and then each situation was acted out by two American English native speakers. Their role play was recorded. According to previous studies, teaching one speech act requires at least one class hour (50 minutes) and at most 2 class hours. The present study used only one speech act, but involved four stimulus types for that speech act, and involved three different kinds of status, so, the teaching time in the study had to be prolonged, i.e. two hours for each stimulus type.

2.3 Teaching Methods
For the EIG, an explicit instruction method was used in the study. That was the same components as Yoshimi (2001: 225-227) proposed in his study. For the IIG, an implicit instruction method was adopted. The steps in instruction were similar to those used for the EIG, except that no explicit information was provided. The implicit instruction method was used based on the combination of the form-comparison condition and the form-search condition in Takahashi’s (2001: 174) study and implicit feedback procedures in Koike & Pearson’s (2005: 487) study. To avoid bias in the study, the instructor was a native speaker of American English who was a teacher of the intact groups, rather than the researcher, and had been teaching EFL learners for many years. Before instruction, the researcher trained the instructor to follow the teaching procedures of the study. Table 2 shows a brief procedure for every step and the explanations for the core stages are given.

Table 2. Instructional Procedures for EIG and IIG

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Procedures</th>
<th>EIG</th>
<th>IIG</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Presentation of</td>
<td>1) Learners listening to segments for each dialogue</td>
<td>same as EG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Targets</td>
<td>2) Learners answering the questions focusing on refusal realizations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Explaining</td>
<td>1) Teacher explaining explicitly about the function and use of refusal strategies</td>
<td>Form-searching and form-comparison:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Targets</td>
<td>2) Teacher leading a discussion and comparison of Chinese and American English refusals strategies</td>
<td>1) Learners finding any usage containing the English refusals strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Planning</td>
<td>1) Learners planning the production nonformal, extended discourse</td>
<td>2) Learner comparing their own refusal strategies with those native-English refusals in the corresponding situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sessions</td>
<td>2) Learners listening to the dialogues again</td>
<td>3) Teacher providing no comments of learners’ discovery and their discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3) Learners preparing for role play based on the situation in the dialogues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4) Learners working in pairs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5) Teacher offering an explicit use in refusal strategies whenever learners need</td>
<td>1) Learners planning the production nonformal, extended discourse based on what they find</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2) Learners preparing in pairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3) Teacher never giving an explicit use in refusal strategies and encouraging learners to find by themselves</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Effects of Explicit and Implicit Instruction in English Refusals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Procedures</th>
<th>EIG</th>
<th>IIG</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4. Communication</td>
<td>1) Learners having communicative practice of the target items in conjunction with extended discourse</td>
<td>1) same as EG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session</td>
<td>2) Teacher selecting several pairs to act out the dialogue</td>
<td>2) No explicit instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Feedback</td>
<td>1) Corrective feedback: providing feedback on the use of target items and the production of extended discourse</td>
<td>Implicit feedback:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2) Teacher correcting explicitly any inappropriate use</td>
<td>by stating “Yes” or simply nodding or moving on to the next item, by saying “What was that?” or “Mm-I didn’t understand.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

EIG=Explicit Instructional Group, IIG= Implicit Instructional Group, (Adopted from Yoshimi, 2001; Takahashi, 2001; Koike & Pearson, 2005)

The most important stage of the instruction was the second one. In the EIG, the teacher explained explicitly the function and use of refusal strategies and led a discussion and comparison of Chinese and American English refusal strategies; while in the IIG, the focus was on form-searching and form-comparison, i.e., the learners found any usage containing the English refusal strategies and compared their own refusal strategies with the native-English refusals in the corresponding situations and the teacher provided no comments on the learners’ discovery and their discussion.

The second important stage was the feedback stage. In the EIG, corrective feedback was provided: the teacher provided feedback on the use of target items and the production of extended discourse, commented on felicitous/infelicitous realizations of refusals and explicitly corrected any inappropriate use. In the IIG, implicit feedback was provided. The learners were only informed of whether their answer was correct or incorrect: if it was correct, the teacher would say “Yes” or nod the head or move on to the next item; if it was incorrect, the teacher would say “What was that?” or “Mm-I didn’t understand.”

2.4 Data Collection

The present study used a quasi-experimental design. Two experimental groups were taught with two teaching methods, explicit and implicit. The two groups were tested with a pretest and a posttest. In order to eliminate the pretest effect on the treatment, the pretest for the written Discourse Completion Test (DCT) was administered one month prior to the treatment. It aimed at examining the participants’ knowledge of English refusals before treatment. One month after the pretest, the four weeks’ training was carried out. The written DCT posttest was administered the next day after the training, i.e., two months after the pretest.

The written DCT provided both quantitative and qualitative data. The scores in the written DCT administering in the pretest and the posttest were quantitative data. The scores were analyzed by Statistic Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 13.0) and could be used to answer the research question. Calculating the mean score of written DCT could only gain a general picture of the results, a detailed performance of the written DCT data could be found in the qualitative analysis of written DCT. The procedures for the analysis are as follows. Firstly, the classifications were divided according to four stimulus types: refusals to
invitations, refusals to suggestions, refusals to offers and refusals to requests, because these four types were the format of the learning targets for the present study. Secondly, the refusals strategies were clarified in line with classification of refusal strategies proposed by Beebe et al. (1990: 72-73) which were well recognized and cited mostly in the previous studies. The format and examples were presented in the section of “Instructional Targets and Time”. The reason for indicating the strategies is that the learning patterns were mainly the refusal strategies or patterns in the present study. Thirdly, the refusals strategies finding in the written DCT were compared with the learning patterns as described in the Table 1 so as to examine how far the students were away from the learning targets.

The pretest and the posttest used the same written DCT test (see Appendix 1) so as to compare the results of the tests. The only differences were that there was a background information survey for participants to fill out in Chinese in the pretest, and the order of the items was different on the two tests. The time allotted for each test was 30 minutes. The participants did it independently without discussion with each other. They were allowed to ask any questions if they were not clear about the directions.

The rating criteria were based on four categories adopted from Hudson et al. (1992, 1995) and Hudson (2001). The first category was the correct use of expressions from the native speaker’s perspective. The second category was the amount of information given according to the situation. The third category was the correct use of strategies. The fourth category referred to the level of formality expressed through word choice, use of title, and choice of verb form (see Appendix 2). For the written DCT scoring procedures, two English native speaker raters followed the four categories of criteria and marked each case of refusal in the DCT by using analytic Likert 5 scales.

The content of the test paper and the instructional contents of the native speaker model were evaluated and approved by six American native speakers, three males and three females, with an average age of 34. For rating the written DCT in the pretest and the posttest, first, two American native speakers who teach spoken English at Guizhou University were chosen; they had taught English to EFL learners for many years. Second, the researcher discussed the criteria with them; then they marked two test papers together and discussed the reasons for offering scores based on the criteria. Third, they marked the papers independently. Finally, they finished marking within two weeks and the researcher calculated the mean score of the two raters. The full score for each participant was 60. To guarantee reliability between the scales of the two American native raters, a Pearson correlation was used to test whether the scores of the two raters could balance. The r values for pretests and posttests of explicit and implicit groups were very high, for example, the r value of the pretest in EIG was .819, for IIG .905, and they were significantly correlated; the p value was .000 (p<.05). Furthermore, the values of mean and standard deviation between the two raters were similar.

After marking the pretest and posttest papers, a comparison of the pretest scores of the two groups was made. It was assumed that the scores of the participants in the EIG and IIG had no difference in the pretest. According to the independent sample t-test, the mean scores for the written DCT pretests were not significantly different (t= –.428, p=.670>.05). The mean scores of the two groups were 33.03 and 33.31, which were almost the same and very low.
3. Results

A comparison between the EIG and IIG was made in terms of mean scores of the written posttest DCT, effect size, and four aspects of appropriateness. The results are presented both quantitatively and qualitatively.

3.1 A Comparison of the Posttest Results

A general comparison between the EIG and IIG was made using the mean scores and standard deviation of the two groups in the posttest. An independent sample t-test was used, and Cohen’s d value was calculated through Becker’s (1999) effect size calculator with the t-value, mean score and standard deviation. Table 3 shows the results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>d</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EIG</td>
<td>53.58</td>
<td>2.34</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>7.67</td>
<td>.000*</td>
<td>1.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IIG</td>
<td>49.14</td>
<td>2.18</td>
<td>29</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p<0.05

Table 3 shows that the mean scores of the EIG and IIG were significantly different, t=7.67, p=0.000<.05. The mean score of the EIG was 53.58 and was higher than the IIG’s mean score 49.14. This result indicates that the explicit instruction was significantly more effective than the implicit instruction. In other words, it was an effective way of teaching how to refuse in English. Implicit instruction could be used for teaching pragmatic competence as well, but was not as effective a teaching method as explicit instruction. Besides, the effect on the two groups was large, Cohen's d=1.98>.8. From the mean score we can conclude that the effect on the implicit group was smaller than on the explicit group.

According to the qualitative analysis of the written DCT between EIG and IIG in the posttest, results seem to be a mixed picture and support partly the quantitative data, because only the explicit teaching in teaching refusals to invitations and requests was better than the implicit teaching. In refusals to invitations, with regard to Low-to-High (L-H) status, students in both the EIG and IIG could use the same strategies as the learning targets; for Equal-to-Equal (E-E) status, few students in the IIG used the “gratitude” strategy, but many EIG students used it; for High-to-Low (H-L) status, no IIG students used the “regret” strategy, but many EIG students used it appropriately. In refusals to requests, for the L-H status and E-E status, many EIG students appropriately used the “regret” and “alternative” strategies, but few IIG students could do so; for the H-L status, many EIG students used the “positive feeling” strategy, but not IIG students. The analysis indicates that the EIG could achieve better results than the IIG in refusals to invitations and requests.

Whereas in the performance in refusals to offers, there was no difference between the EIG and IIG, because both EIG and IIG students could use English refusal strategies correctly. In refusals to offers, both groups adopted the strategies like those of the learning
targets. For the L-H status, the students in both groups could use strategies such as “positive feeling”, “gratitude” and “explanation”; for the E-E status, almost all the students in both groups could use target strategies such as “no”, “gratitude” and “explanation”; for the H-L status, 100% of the students in both groups used the “giving comfort” and “letting the interlocutor off the hook” strategies, which were exactly same as the learning targets. The analysis shows that the teaching effect in refusals to offers was good, but there was no obvious difference between the EIG and IIG.

However, in the performance in refusals to suggestions, there was no difference between the EIG and IIG as well; neither EIG nor IIG students could use English refusal strategies to the level of the learning targets, and teaching was unsuccessful. For the L-H status, except for the “explanation” strategy, no students in either group used the learning targets such as the “negative ability” and “alternative” strategies. Rather, the students adopted the “future acceptance” and “positive feeling” strategies, which deviated from the learning targets. For the E-E status, students in both groups tended to use “no” and “gratitude” strategies rather than “pause filler” and “positive feeling” strategies. For the H-L status, the students used “positive feeling” and “gratitude” strategies instead of “negative” and “alternative” strategies. The analysis indicates that teaching refusals to suggestions was not very effective and that explicit and implicit instruction were equally ineffective.

### 3.2 A Comparison in the Four Aspects of Appropriateness

The EIG and IIG were further compared with regard to four aspects of appropriateness, i.e., correct expression, amount of information, strategy choices and level of formality.

#### Table 4. A Comparison of the Four Aspects of Appropriateness in the Posttest

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appropriateness</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Range of Mean</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amount of Information</td>
<td>EG</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>57.03</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>10.75*</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IG</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>50.03</td>
<td>2.52</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy Choices</td>
<td>EG</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>53.03</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>5.97</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>8.96*</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IG</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>47.24</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Formality</td>
<td>EG</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>57.55</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>5.72</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>11.88*</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IG</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>51.83</td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correct Expressions</td>
<td>EG</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>50.42</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>2.21</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>2.67*</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IG</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>48.21</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<0.05

Table 4 compares the posttest results of the EIG and IIG with regard to the four aspects of appropriateness. The mean scores for four aspects were significantly different between the two groups (p<.05). The mean scores of the EIG were more than 50 and the highest score was 57.55. They were much higher than the scores of the IIG, only two of which were above 50.

Specifically, the order of the four aspects of appropriateness was ranked according to the degree of range of the mean scores of the EIG and IIG. The amount of information was
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put in the first rank, because the mean score of the EIG was 57.03, and the range of the IIG was exactly 7. This shows that the students in the EIG could offer appropriate information much better than the IIG students. The second rank was strategy choices, because the range of the EIG and IIG in this aspect was 5.97. The third rank was level of formality, where the range of the two groups was 5.72. The lowest rank was correct expressions, where the range between the two groups was only 2.21. The low ranking for correct expressions reflected that the students in both groups were not good at using appropriate English refusal expressions, though the statistics show there was a significant difference.

The qualitative data showed the difference from a different angle. Take EIG 20 and IIG 25, who gained the highest scores in the EIG and IIG respectively, as examples. The situation was the test-taker turning down a friend’s dinner invitation because he or she had something important to do and could not accept the invitation. It was a refusal to an invitation from equal status. The following are their answers and their average scores marked by the two raters are listed in the bracket:

Friend: How about coming over for dinner Sunday night? We’re having a small dinner party.
EIG 20: No (no), thanks (gratitude). I’ve had another appointment (explanation). Maybe next time (future acceptance). (The average score was 5, 5, 5, 5=5.)
IIG 25: Oh, no (no), you know I have a meeting to attend Sunday night (explanation). (The average score is 5, 4, 3, 4=4.)

From the average scores of the two students, EIG 20 is better than IGG 25. In terms of correct expressions, both EIG 20 and IIG 25 obtained a full score, because the expressions were appropriate and there were no grammatical mistakes. In amount of information, the information expressed by EIG 20 was more than that by IIG 25. That was why EIG 20 obtained full marks, while IIG 25 got a score which was lower than EIG 20’s. EIG 20 also used more strategy choices than IIG 25. EIG 20 used four strategies, which were quite similar to the learning targets; whereas IIG 25 only selected two strategies, which was far from the learning targets. The score for EIG 20 was 5, while that for IIG 25 was only 3. Since EIG 20’s strategy choices were marked well, the level of formality was high. The score was 5. The score for IIG 25 was 4 because the performances in strategy choices were not as good as that of EIG 20. Based on the analysis, in general, EIG 20 was better than IIG 25.

4. Discussion

The quantitative data of the posttest showed that the EIG outperformed the IIG. In general, the explicit instruction was salient and targeted at what the learners want, i.e., strategy instruction or strategy-building intervention. As noted in Cohen (2008) and Cohen & Shively (2007), strategy instruction can be an important component in pragmatics instruction, because such instruction is salient and explicit.

From the perspective of the noticing hypothesis (Schmidt, 1993), this improvement may be due to the degree of noticing. The teacher’s explicit explanation and explicit feedback
could enhance the students’ awareness. In contrast, implicit comparison and feedback might mislead the students so that their noticing was not very concentrated. As a result, the attention of the students in the EIG was better directed to the target forms than that of the students in the IIG. A high degree of noticing can be effective in teaching pragmatic competence. This is as previous studies have showed: higher levels of awareness are associated with more explicit conditions and learners with greater awareness have an increased ability to recognize and produce target forms than those with less awareness (Leow, 2000).

Furthermore, corrective feedback in the course of explicit instruction can enhance the degree of noticing. Feedback was the last stage of the explicit and implicit instruction in the present study. For the explicit instruction, the correction was direct and obvious; for the implicit instruction the feedback was implicit. Just as Yoshimi (2001) notes, communicative practice and corrective feedback may enhance the “noticing” afforded by explicit instruction. Therefore, feedback on a learner’s production can be expected to have a beneficial effect on his or her learning.

In addition, various forms of input lead to noticing, that is, the four different stimulus types: refusals to invitations, suggestions, offers and requests, and the three different kinds of situations—high, equal and low status differences—made the students notice the different English refusal patterns related to these types and situations. Therefore, the students could have the awareness to notice the different forms and various kinds of input. Koike & Pearson (2005) argue that it was not easy to determine the form of the input in the classroom that most effectively aided noticing by the learners. Therefore, it should be explicit, so that learners could deduce the information from explanations and rules, rather than implicit, by which learners induce it by observation, intuition, and analogy. In regard to the nature of input, selective input may well benefit EFL students. The same statement can be found in the discussion about availability of pragmatic input in Cohen & Shively’s (2007) study.

Despite the fact that the quantitative data in the present study generally supported the value of explicit instruction, the qualitative data show a mixed result, for the four stimulus types some aspects showed no difference between the explicit and implicit instruction, for instance, both explicit and implicit instruction could produce an improving result in learning refusals to offers, but no difference between the two for which was better. The reason may be that American and Chinese cultures in refusals to offers were similar and both EG and IG students could easily adopt the strategies in the tests.

Another case is that there were no differences between the two methods and there were no good teaching effects as well. The typical example was teaching refusals to suggestions in any situations. One of the reasons was that the complexity of the strategies involved. On the one hand, American strategies tend to be complex and flexible and are not easy to master. On the other hand, Chinese refusal strategies tend to show “positive feeling” first, and the learners were heavily influenced by the Chinese practice. Both factors confused the students. Another reason was that with implicit instruction, the learners had to find patterns themselves, but since the patterns were not certain, they often failed to find them. These two factors can also be found, more or less, in previous studies. Fukuya et al. (1998) and Fukuya & Clark’s (2001) studies show inconclusive results. The reasons may
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result from a complex relationship between length of instruction, learners’ proficiency level, and difficulty of learning targets, all of which must be considered in assessing the effects of length of instruction on pragmatic learning (Rose, 2005: 395).

In terms of the four aspects of appropriateness, the EIG was better than the IIG. However, the use of correct expressions of the EIG was not as much greater than that of the IIG as for the other three aspects. One possible reason was that the target patterns in terms of proper information, strategies and formality were the focus of the learning and teaching while not much attention was given to the use of correct expression.

5. Conclusions

A major finding of this study is that explicit instruction is better than implicit instruction for teaching English refusals. Implicit instruction was also effective, but it was not as good as explicit instruction. Qualitatively, in teaching refusals to invitations and requests, explicit teaching was better than implicit teaching; in teaching refusals to offers and suggestions there was no difference between the two kinds of instruction, but teaching refusals to offers was effective, and no effect could be found in teaching refusals to suggestions. Due to the salient features in the explicit instruction, the performances in the amount of information, strategy choices and level of formality in the EIG were better than those in the IIG. Because of heavy influence from Chinese culture and inadequate presentation of features in implicit instruction, strategy choices were not good enough.

In regard to pedagogical implications, first, when teaching English refusals teachers can adopt the four stimulus types for instruction rather than just general patterns like “I’d love to, but I can’t.” Second, when English refusal patterns are taught to EFL learners, English culture and learners’ native culture need to be included in instruction so as to give the learners a very clear picture of the differences between the two cultures. As the present study indicated, teaching English refusals to offer and requests is comparatively easy, because Chinese and English refusals share lots of similarities. But English refusals to invitations and especially refusals to suggestions are tricky to teach, because there are some variations among English and Chinese refusals. Third, among the four aspects of appropriateness, teaching correct expressions and strategy choices is comparatively hard due to the complexity of the patterns or strategies, refusals to suggestions and invitations in particular. Hence, teachers need to pay special attention to the differences of the patterns, expressions and strategies; otherwise, the students may be confused by the patterns offered by the teachers’ input.

However, there are some limitations of the present study. The participants were all university students, and the number of them was relatively small. This means that full-scale results cannot be generalized from the study. Extraneous effects cannot be avoided because the study cannot guarantee that the effects of instruction are only from the treatment. Learners may have partially learned about the learning targets from other channels during the instruction, e.g., through e-mail or chat on line, though those who acknowledged that they had learned English refusals were excluded in the study at the very beginning of the treatment. The teaching targets were focused on American English refusals which may not be
generalized to other refusals used in other English varieties like British English or Australian English. Due to the focus of previous studies on American English patterns of refusals, the present study also had to be confined mainly to American English refusals. And the leaning targets are complicated and hard to clarify clearly. The teaching time was comparatively short for many refusal forms as the teaching targets. Four stimulus types were taught and the study could not guarantee that all learners digested the targets in such a short time. In addition, the written DCT is a controversial method of data collection and is often challenged by other researchers due to its lack of authenticity. The rating criteria for the written DCT are not so justifiable like many other large-scale oral tests, e.g. TOEFL oral test. However, these weak points are not avoidable and cannot be solved now in the field.

References


The Effects of Explicit and Implicit Instruction in English Refusals


**Appendix 1  Written DCT**

**Part I  Background Information Survey**

Name _______  Class _______  Age _______

Score of National Matriculation English Examination _______

1. How long have you learned English before you enter this university?

2. Have you ever learned American English refusal strategies?

   Yes _______  No _______
If yes, Where ____________
How long ____________
How many hours per week ____________

3. Have you ever been to English –speaking countries?
   Yes ______  No ______
   If yes, where ____________
   How long ____________

4. How frequently do you speak English with native speakers?
   Frequently ______  Occasionally ______  Rarely ______  Never ______

Part II  Written DCT

In this questionnaire, you will find several communication situations in which you interact with someone. Pretend you are the person in the situation. You must refuse all requests, suggestions, invitations, and offers. Write down your response. Respond as you would in an actual situation.

1. You are in your professor’s office talking about your final paper which is due in two weeks. Your professor indicates that he has a guest speaker coming to his next class and invites you to attend that lecture but you cannot. (Invitation: refusing to higher status)
   Your professor: By the way, I have a guest speaker in my next class who will be discussing issues which are relevant to your paper. Would you like to attend?
   You refuse by saying:

2. A friend invites you to dinner, but you really can’t stand this friend’s husband/wife. (Invitation: refusing to equal status)
   Friend: How about coming over for dinner Sunday night? We’re having a small dinner party. You refuse by saying:

3. You are a senior student in your department. A freshman, whom you met a few times before, invites you to lunch in the university cafeteria but you do not want to go. (Invitation: refusing to lower status)
   Freshman: I haven’t had my lunch yet. Would you like to join me?
   You refuse by saying:

4. You are at your desk trying to find a report that your boss just asked for. While you are searching through the mess on your desk, your boss walks over. (suggestions: refusing to higher status)
   Boss: You know, maybe you should try and organize yourself better. I always write myself little notes to remind me of things. Perhaps you should give it a try!
   You refuse by saying:

5. You are at a friend’s house watching TV. The friend recommends a snack to you. You turn it down, saying that you have gained weight and don’t feel comfortable in your new clothes.
   Friend: Hey, why don’t you try this new diet I’ve been telling you about? It can make you lose weight. (suggestions: refusing to equal status)
   You refuse by saying:

6. You are a language teacher at a university. It is just about the middle of the term now and one of your students asks to speak to you.
   Student: Ah, excuse me, some of the students were talking after class recently and we kind of feel
that the class would be better if you could give us more practice in conversation and less on grammar. (suggestion: refusing to lower status)

You refuse by saying:

7. You’ve been working in an advertising agency now for some time. The boss offers you a raise and promotion, but it involves moving. You don’t want to go. Today, the boss calls you into his office. (offer: refusing to higher status)

Boss: I’d like to offer you an executive position in our new office in Hicktown. It’s a great town—only 3 hours from here by plane. And, a nice raise comes with the position.

You refuse by saying:

8. You are going through some financial difficulties. One of your friends offers you some money but you do not want to accept it. (offer: refusing to equal status)

Your friend: I know you are having some financial difficulties these days. You always help me whenever I need something. I can lend you $20. Would you accept it from me?

You refuse by saying:

9. You are at your home with your friend. You are admiring the expensive new pen that your father gave you. Your friend sets the pen down on a low table. At this time, your nanny goes past the low table, the pen falls on the floor and it is ruined. (offer: refusing to lower status)

Nanny: Oh, I am so sorry. I’ll buy you a new one.

You refuse by saying (Knowing she is only a teenager):

10. Your professor wants you to help plan a class party, but you are very busy this week. (request: refusing to high status)

Professor: We need some people to plan the class party. Do you think you can help?

You refuse by saying:

11. A classmate, who frequently misses classes, asks to borrow your class notes, but you do not want to give them to him. (request: refusing to equal status)

Your classmate: You know I missed the last class. Could I please borrow your notes from that class?

You refuse by saying:

12. You only have one day left before taking a final exam. While you are studying for the exam, one of your junior relatives, who is in high school, asks if you would help him with his homework but you cannot. (request: refusing to lower status)

Your relative: I’m having problems with some of my homework assignments. Would you please help me with some of my homework tonight?

You refuse by saying:

Appendix 2 Instruction and Criteria for Rating and Assessing Students’ Answers to Written DCT

A. Instruction for Rating

You are to rate the appropriateness of the responses of EFL learners to the written DCT items on the four aspects: correct expressions, amount of information, strategy choices, level of formality. Explanations of these aspects are provided below.
1. Correct Expressions
This category includes the typical expressions used for refusals in different refuser status. You may depend on your native speaker’s intuition to judge the correctness. The question to ask is: How appropriate is the wording/are the expressions? You may rely on the expressions sample provided in “Criteria for Rating”.

Linguistic accuracy, however, is not the focus of the study. Do not let some minor errors to influence your rating.

2. Amount of Information
A lengthy explanation for refusal is needed for some native speakers. But non-native speakers of low proficiency might use very direct and thus shorter-than-native-speakers utterance. If a refusal begins with “I can’t” without any reason or explanation may be judged as inappropriate. The question is: How appropriate is the amount of information?

3. Strategy Choices
This category refers to refusal strategies like explanation, positive feeling, gratitude etc. used by native speakers. Those who can choose the strategies provided in “Criteria for Rating” can be regarded as the holder of scale of 5. You may judge according to your intuition. The question is: How appropriate is the strategy choice?

4. Level of Formality
Formality can be expressed through word choice, phrasing, use of title, choice of verb forms. Use of colloquial speech can be appropriate in American English when the situation is informal and between friends, families and co-workers. Yet a degree of appropriateness can be applied. You are the judge. The question is: How appropriate is the level of formality?

B. Criteria for Rating
The following criteria are just for your reference. You are to use your native speaker intuitions and reactions and compare them to what your native speaker norm might be. Do not use what you think might say as the sole criteria for your rating.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Correct Expression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Completely appropriate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Mostly appropriate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Generally appropriate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Not very appropriate but acceptable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Not appropriate and not acceptable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Adopted from Hudson et al., 1992, 1995; Hudson, 2001)

(Copy editing: Don Snow)