An Investigation into EFL Learners' Perception towards L2 Pragmatic Instruction

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Abstract—The present study investigated EFL students' perception toward the pragmatic instruction provided as a part of regular English curricula. A total of 52 university students from various majors participated in the study. The treatment was given for nine weeks during the regular class hours in terms of four speech acts, compliments, apologies, requests, and refusals, with the goal of enhancing the learners' pragmatic awareness as well as pragmatic competence. A questionnaire and the learners' reflection journals were adopted as data collection instruments, and an eclectic design was adopted to analyze their perception. Both the intermediate and low groups showed positive perception in terms of the four major categories—interest, usefulness, importance, and motivation, yet more than half of the learners from the low group found that learning L2 pragmatics was difficult due to the complexity and length of some of the sentence patterns of formulaic expressions. Further, there were significant differences between subjects regarding the category of *difficulty* for each speech act. Nevertheless, the learners expressed that pragmatic instruction facilitated their communication skills, enhanced their pragmatic awareness on intercultural differences, as well as instilled confidence in English interactions. These findings imply learners' motivation and needs for learning L2 pragmatic features.

Index Terms—learner's perception, pragmatic instruction, speech acts, linguistic proficiency

I. INTRODUCTION

According to the public demand for communicative competence around the nation as well as further on the globe, Korean Ministry of Education revised the national curriculum of English for secondary education so as to improve learners' communicative competence in English. However, although one of the goals for English teaching is enhancing communicative competence, the focus of English classes in Korea mostly remains the same due to the washback effect of the College Scholastic Ability Test as the English portion of this exam mainly measures learners' reading and listening comprehension skills. Due to these aspects, formal education for English regularly lays emphasis on learners' internalization of grammar rules and vocabulary, and majorly relies on the grammar translation method. Nevertheless, given that nowadays there are more opportunities for learners to interact with people from diverse cultures and languages, ways to improve the learners' pragmatic competence--which is a subconstituent of communicative competence (Canale & Swain, 1980)--should be considered in English teaching and learning in order to achieve successful English communication. Pragmatic competence is generally referred to as the ability of communicating appropriately according to the situation where the conversation takes place, in consideration of the power and the distance of the interlocutors. As it plays a crucial role in social interaction, more attention should be paid to the learners' development of second language (L2) pragmatics.

Research of interlanguage pragmatics had been in the marginal area of the studies of second language acquisition (SLA) until the 1970s when comparative studies regarding specific speech acts or discourse features started to be conducted. Recently, interlanguage pragmatics has been more popularly researched, directing attention to the teachability of pragmatic features in classroom settings. These studies discovered that not only adult learners with low language proficiency but also adolescent learners could learn pragmatic features (Langer, 2011; Li, 2012; Yang, 2006). In addition, they compared the effects of different pedagogical interventions, such as explicit or implicit instruction in teaching L2 pragmatics (LI, 2012; Rose & Ng, 2001; Takahashi, 2001), and revealed that the learners who received explicit instruction outperformed those with implicit instruction or exposure to the target features (Abrams, 2014; Halenko & Jones, 2011; House, 1996; Kasper & Roever, 2005; Li, 2012; Morrow, 1996; Rose, 2005; Soler, 2005; Takahashi, 2001, 2005; Tateyama, 2001; Yang, 2006).

Nevertheless, a majority of interventional studies of pragmatic instruction have mainly examined the effects of pragmatic instruction on learners' pragmatic competence. Also, there were even fewer studies with EFL learners who have limited access to authentic use of English outside the classroom. Further, as the studies concerning pragmatic instruction started only in the last two decades, the research investigating learners' perception is scarce although the effect of pragmatic instruction is closely linked with learners' perception toward it. Additionally, interventional studies have not yet been widely conducted with Korean learners in particular, thereby resulting in almost no studies examining learners' perception towards learning L2 pragmatic features.

In this regard, the present study aims to account for the previous research gaps mentioned above. It purposes to investigate ELF learners' perception toward pragmatic instruction given in a formal educational setting as well as to

compare the perceptions between intermediate and low language proficiency groups. Further, it also aims to explore how the learners have felt about learning L2 pragmatic features throughout the instruction period with an analysis of their reflection journals. The instruction was provided in terms of four speech acts, complimenting, apologizing, requesting, and refusing as they are considered to be essential in human communication as well as these speech acts display some differences in their realizations across cultures. The findings of this study will offer some insights into L2 language teaching as this study is one of the first works in examining the EFL learners' perception toward pragmatic instruction as related with two levels of language proficiency.

To achieve this, the present study will posit two research questions:

1) What are EFL learners' perceptions toward pragmatic instruction in terms of five categories—interest, usefulness, importance, motivation, and difficulty? Are there any differences in the learners' perception between the intermediate and the low groups?

2) What are EFL learners' perceptions toward learning pragmatic features of the four speech acts?

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

A. The Definition of Pragmatic Competence

Pragmatic competence is considered to be a construct of communicative competence, and generally covers a narrower scope than communicative competence does. As Roever (2011) highlighted, it is included as a part of major models of communicative competence (Bachman, 1990; Canale, 1983; Canale & Swain, 1980). For instance, in Canale and Swain's (1980) model, the construct of sociolinguistic competence displays similar properties with pragmatic competence, in that it is concerned with the sociocultural rules of language use and discourse. According to Canale and Swain, knowing these rules would be crucial in interpreting utterances for social meaning as well as the speaker's intention. Likewise, Savignon (1983) underscored the understanding of the social context of the conversation, and noted that it is essential to grasp the roles of the interlocutors, the messages they share, and the functions of the interaction in achieving appropriateness in language use.

Along this line, Bachman and Palmer (1996) presented two major components of language competence: organizational knowledge and pragmatic knowledge. Under the category of pragmatic knowledge were more concrete aspects, functional knowledge and sociolinguistic knowledge, which were distinguished from Canale and Swain's (1980) model. To delineate these types of knowledge specifically, functional knowledge enables us to interpret relationships between utterances and the intentions of the speaker, also called illocutionary competence. On the other hand, sociolinguistic knowledge is required to produce or interpret language which is appropriate to a particular context (Bachman & Palmer, 1996), incorporating knowledge of dialects/varieties, registers, natural or idiomatic, expressions, cultural references, and figures of speech.

As shown in the explanation about pragmatic competence through the examination of the influential models of communicative competence, pragmatic competence is mainly concerned with appropriate language uses in each social context where conversation occurs. In relation to this aspect, Mey (1993) referred to pragmatics as a study of language use in human communication which is determined by the social norms. In a similar vein, Crystal (1997) noted:

Pragmatics is the study of language from the point of view of users, especially of the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction and the effects their use of language has on other participants in the act of communication (p. 301).

Considering Mey's (1993) and Crystal's (1997) arguments, pragmatics mostly covers a range of the social aspects of language. However, as seen in two subfields of pragmatics, sociopragmatics and pragmalinguistics, it also focuses on linguistic structures of utterances since various language functions cannot be achieved without appropriate linguistic formations.

B. Previous Studies of Learners' Perception towards Learning L2 Pragmatic Features

L2 pragmatics has not received much attention in the field of second language acquisition despite its increasing significance in communication. It has been only a few decades since SLA scholars more extensively started to research interlanguage pragmatics including conversation routines, pragmatic formulae, and speech acts. Furthermore, research concerning the effects of pragmatic instruction is still in its infancy, and thereby the studies investigating the learners' perceptions toward L2 pragmatic instruction are conspicuously absent in the literature of interlanguage pragmatics. However, as Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei (1998) argued, high grammatical competence does not equate to concomitant pragmatic competence. Also, Olshtain and Cohen (1991) similarly noted that in successful speaking, using the appropriate words and forms in the given situation are crucial, rather than knowing grammatically correct ones. Although it is highly challenging for L2 learners to acquire pragmatic knowledge appropriate to a variety of situations in the target culture, pragmatic instruction, particularly explicit instruction provided with metapragmatic explanation, could facilitate L2 learners' pragmatic competence as the previous studies have shown (Abrams, 2014; Halenko & Jones, 2011; House, 1996; Kasper & Roever, 2005; Li, 2012; Morrow, 1996; Rose, 2005; Soler, 2005; Takahashi, 2001, 2005; Tateyama, 2001; Yang, 2006). Therefore, it is crucial to investigate the learners' perception towards pragmatic instruction to identify the most effective means of instruction.

A few studies have demonstrated that L2 learners showed a positive attitude towards pragmatic instruction provided (Chen, 2009; Liu, 2007). Liu (2007) investigated the effectiveness of explicit pragmatic instruction on the acquisition of requests. Liu examined Taiwanese learners' perceptions toward pragmatic instruction by dividing participants into three groups--(1) the control group, (2) teacher Instruction (TI) group who were given explicit pragmatic instruction in a classroom setting from an instructor; and (3) computer-mediated communication (CMC) group that learned pragmatics explicitly through e-mail and Web CT discussion with English native speaking partners--and examined. The two experimental groups indicated that pragmatic instruction in general was "practical and essential for their learning of English" (p. 89). In addition, most of the participants believed that learning pragmatics helped them communicate in English and that they gained more knowledge concerning L2 pragmatics after receiving instruction.

Likewise, Chen (2009) examined learner perceptions of instruction in L2 pragmatics. The learners in this study were provided with instruction on the speech act of complaints with the use of a chapter in a conversation book as well as metapragmatic instruction through handouts. 40 participants wrote self-reports which revealed their positive attitude toward pragmatic instruction.

Although both of the studies examined above included a few of participants who thought that instruction was not very beneficial, the studies imply that pragmatic instruction is essentially necessary and helpful for L2 learners to communicate more successfully.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Participants

The participants for the present study were 56 students from several different majors in a large university in South Korea ranging in age from 20 to 27. The students were selected from two intact classes taught by the researcher of this study, and they had received formal English education in South Korea for 10 years. Before providing pragmatic instruction, the students were divided into two groups depending on their English proficiency levels, intermediate and low levels, based on the evaluation of oral interviews. Two questions (e.g. *What do you like to do in your free time?; Tell me about the best trip that you've had*) were asked at random in the interview with some follow-up questions and their answers were scored by two raters who completed a workshop for evaluation of oral interview. Interrater reliability between the two raters indicated fairly high reliability (Pearson's $r=.737$). In addition, a demographic questionnaire asking the participants' basic information was also administered, and four participants who had an experience of living in a foreign country were excluded from the data analyses in order to achieve homogeneity of the participants. Among the 52 students, 27 were assigned to the intermediate level and 25 to the low proficiency level.

B. The Procedure of the Treatment

Pragmatic instruction was given as the treatment in the current study was designed to facilitate both pragmatic awareness and competence of the students in terms of the four speech acts of complimenting, apologizing, requesting, and refusing. Pragmatic instruction was delivered as a part of the curriculum for a language course, *English 1*—the major goal of the course is to help students improve productive skills, such as speaking and writing—throughout the academic semester. The treatment was provided for a total of nine weeks, two weeks for each speech act, and one week of review was assigned to the end of the treatment.

The instruction was comprised of four sessions, each of which was allotted for 30 minutes, twice a week for two weeks. The treatment for this study was developed based on the previous studies regarding pragmatic instruction (Bardovi-Harlig & Griffin, 2005; Halenko & Jones, 2011; Mart ńez-Flor & Soler, 2007; Olshtain & Cohen, 1991) and included a range of input-providing and output-prompting activities to help the students better notice the pragmatic features throughout the instruction as well as produce grammatically and pragmatically appropriate expressions. Among the four sessions, the first two sessions centered on enhancing the students' pragmatic awareness, and the other two sessions were assigned to focus on the improvement of their pragmatic competence, based on the PPP (Presentation-Practice-Production) methodology (McCarthy, 1998).

To delineate the treatment procedures in more detail, the first session was planned to offer metapragmatic information concerning how social variables, such as social status and power distance between interlocutors, might influence the conversation. Then, they watched several movie clips entailing the related speech acts and were given some time to complete a hand-out about dialogic assessment and evaluation of a situation. The second session was designed to demonstrate the exemplary expressions for the speech act and explain the lexico-grammatical aspects of the expressions. Further, the pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic aspects of the expressions were examined with regard to the influence of social variables on the expressions with the exploration of contextual information. They were also asked to write a reflection journal about their experience of learning pragmatic features. In the third session, the students were given opportunities to practice performing the speech act in a few situations embedded with different social variables and received teacher's feedback on their responses in terms of both grammatical and pragmatic rules. The last session provided the students opportunities for communicative practice, based on real-life situations. They wrote a short dialogue including the speech act and then role-played it, followed by the teacher's feedback on pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics in order to raise the students' pragmatic awareness as well as enhance their

competence. They were requested to write a reflection journal concerning what they learned and how they felt about learning pragmatic features. Table 2 shows a brief explanation of the treatment provided in this study.

TABLE 2.
SUMMARY OF THE PROCEDURES OF THE TREATMENT

Session1 Focusing on Pragmatic Awareness	• Providing metapragmatic instruction (T) • Watching video clips about the speech act (S) • Answering questions regarding pragmatic features on a hand-out given (S) • Discussing the answers in pairs and in class (ST)
Session 2 Focusing on Pragmatic Awareness	• Demonstrating a few exemplary expressions for the speech act (T) • Explaining lexico-grammatical and contextual aspects of the expressions (T) • Watching video clips about the speech act and discussing the pragmatic features employed in them (S) • Giving an assignment to write a reflection journal (S)
Session 3 Focusing on Pragmatic Competence	• Providing a few different situations requiring to perform the speech act (T) • Giving feedback on students' responses (T) • Practicing performing the speech act in pairs (S)
Session 4 Focusing on Pragmatic Competence	• Requesting to write a short dialogue with inclusion of the speech act for a role-play in groups of four people (T) • Practicing their script (S) • Role-play in front of the class (S) • Giving feedback on the realization of the speech act discussing pragmatic features employed (ST) • Giving an assignment to write a reflection journal (T)

* The capital letters S and T represent students and the teacher, respectively, who conducted the presented tasks in class.

C. Data Collection

A combination of qualitative and quantitative data collection instruments were employed to obtain data for this study. A questionnaire asking the students' perceptions toward learning L2 pragmatic features was constructed based on the preliminary interview with the students who received pragmatic instruction in a pilot study. It consisted of 29 questions which asked the degree of interest, motivation, helpfulness, importance, and difficulty of learning the speech acts for each of the four speech acts on a four-point Likert scale with different semantic differential (e.g. 4.Very interested; 3.Fairly interested; 2.Not much interested; 1.Not interested), mixed with several open-ended questions asking the reason of their choices (See Appendix A). The major categories of the questionnaire were constructed based on the pilot study, and the questionnaire was administered after the last session of the pragmatic instruction. Additionally, as for the qualitative data, the students were requested to write a reflection journal every week concerning what they had learned or thought with regard to pragmatic instruction, and their reflection journals were employed for the in-depth analysis of the learners' perception.

D. Data Analysis

In order to identify the difference in the learners' perception according to their language proficiency level, a one-way MANOVA was conducted. In addition, independent sample *t*-tests were also employed to find the difference in the learners' perception in terms of each major category of the questionnaire. Finally, descriptive statistics using crosstabulation were conducted using SPSS 19 in order to indentify and compare the frequency distribution of the variables according to the language proficiency levels.

Further, the content of the students' reflection journals were analyzed qualitatively to obtain triangulation of data from the questionnaire and providing more in-depth description of the emerging themes from the questionnaire. In order to discover the themes, their journals were repeatedly examined through three phases of coding--open coding, axial coding, and selective coding--following Dörnyei (2007)'s suggestion. Through these processes, several major themes were discovered, and this study investigated the learners' perception, based on the themes, which were helpfulness of learning polite expressions, usefulness of learning a variety of expressions, and enhancing intercultural communication skills as well as their motivation for learning them.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

A. Differences in Learners' Perception toward Pragmatic Instruction

A one-way MANOVA was conducted to examine the main effect on learners' perception toward pragmatic instruction between the intermediate and low groups. However, the results showed that there was no significant effect found between two groups (Wilks' Λ=0.27, $p > 0.05$). In addition, independent sample *t*-tests were performed separately on dependent variables like *interesting, useful, motivating, important,* and *difficult* for the examination between subjects. The results also revealed that there were no statistically significant differences between subjects ($p=.814$ for *interest, p=.829* for *usefulness, p=.152* for *motivation, p=.705* for *importance,* and $p=.088$ for *difficulty*). It is estimated that the reason that there were no significant differences in the perceptions between the intermediate and low groups highlights the learners' positive attitudes towards pragmatic instruction which is supported by the fact that both groups showed high ratings on each category concerning the instruction.

In order to examine the data more specifically according to the learners' levels, a crosstabulation was conducted do display counts and percentages of the categories. It was found that learners in the study demonstrated positive perceptions toward pragmatic instruction on the whole. Also, they showed a similar tendency in their perceptions to the three categories, *interest, usefulness,* and *importance.* 75% of the learners responded that learning L2 pragmatic features was interesting, about 98% of the learners responded that the instruction was useful, and 96.2% noted that it was important to learn L2 pragmatics.

Interestingly, the learners in both the intermediate and low groups displayed an almost identical distribution of responses for the three categories. About 74% and 76% of the learners from the intermediate group and the low group, respectively, expressed that learning L2 pragmatics was interesting. As for the category of the usefulness of the instruction, only one learner from the intermediate group displayed any negative perception. Also, approximately 96% of the learners in each group responded that learning L2 pragmatics was important. Table 3 shows the detailed information of descriptive statistics.

TABLE 3
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR THREE CATEGORIES

Variables	Level		Not at all	Not very	Fairly	Very	Total
Interesting	Inter	Count	0	7	15	5	27
		% within level	.0%	25.9%	55.6%	18.5%	100%
		%within interesting	.0%	58.3%	50.0%	55.6%	51.9%
		% of otal	.0%	13.5%	28.8%	9.6%	51.9%
	Low	Count	1	5	15	4	25
		% within level	4.0%	20.0%	60.0%	16.0%	100%
		%within interesting	100%	41.7%	50.0%	44.4%	48.1%
		% of Total	1.9%	9.6%	28.8%	7.7%	48.1%
		Count	1	12	30	9	52
Total		% of Total	1.9%	23.1%	57.7%	17.3%	100%
Useful	Inter	Count	0	1	14	12	27
		% within level	.0%	3.7%	51.9%	44.4%	100%
		% within useful	.0%	100%	50.0%	52.2%	51.9%
		% of Total	0%	1.9%	26.9%	23.1%	51.9%
	Low	Count	0	0	14	11	25
		% within level	.0%	.0%	56.0%	44.0%	100%
		% within useful	.0%	.0%	50.0%	47.8%	48.1%
		% of Total	.0%	.0%	26.9%	21.2%	48.1%
		Count	0	1	28	23	52
Total		% of Total	0%	1.9%	53.8%	44.2%	100%
Important	Inter	Count	0	1	17	9	27
		% within level	.0%	3.7%	63.0%	33.3%	100%
		%within important	.0%	50.0%	50.0%	56.3%	51.9%
		% of Total	.0%	1.9%	32.7%	17.3%	51.9%
	Low	Count	0	1	17	7	25
		% within level	.0%	4.0%	68.0%	28.0%	100%
		% within important	.0%	50.0%	50.0%	43.8%	48.1%
		% of Total	.0%	1.9%	32.7%	13.5%	48.1%
		Count	0	2	34	16	52
Total		% of Total	.0%	3.8%	65.4%	30.8%	100%

In addition, the responses of the open-ended questions were examined in terms of the three categories—*interest, usefulness,* and *importance*. It was inferred that the learners expressed their perception positively on account of the frequent use of the expressions as well as interpersonal properties embedded in the expressions. The learners who responded positively with regard to the category of *interest* commonly answered as follows:

1. *Learning L2 pragmatics is very practical and different from what we have learned in our language classes so far.*[1] *(from S 12)*

2. *It is interesting to learn them because I can learn the polite way of talking in English. (from S 22)*

The statements above were extremely similar with the students' reports in Chen's (2009) study which investigated students' perceptions toward learning complaint strategies. They wrote that the instruction was a fresh experience and helped them to make complaints more appropriately, using polite language. Additionally, as for asking the usefulness of the instruction, a majority of learners underscored the frequent use of the expressions and responded, as seen in the examples below.

3. *They are everyday expressions, so I can use them often. (from S 9)*

4. *It helps us to improve intercultural communication skills. (from S 12)*

5. *I think I will be able to use them often in the future. (from S 17)*

The learners also commented on sociolinguistic qualities of the expressions in terms of the category of *important*, as presented in the following examples.

6. *These expressions are very important in human relationships. (from S 15)*

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[1] Student's responses were written in Korean then translated to English.

7. *These expressions are the basic elements of communication with others. (from S 21)*

8. *It is important to learn because we will use these expressions often. (from S 33)*

Nevertheless, there were also some negative responses about the pragmatic instruction although they were marginal. It was reported by the learners that the instruction was not very interesting because they had already learned those expressions before. Also, learning L2 pragmatics was not very useful or important as they do not usually have contact with native English speakers in their regular lives.

The learners' negative comments regarding the EFL context was closely linked with the results regarding the category of motivation for learning L2 pragmatics. As shown in Table 4, about a quarter of the learners answered that L2 pragmatic features were not very motivating to learn due to limited opportunities to speak English. Nonetheless, congruent with the results concerning the three categories examined above, more than two thirds of the learners responded positively and noted that it was motivating for the exactly opposite reason from those who responded negatively. The positive responders wrote that learning L2 pragmatics was motivating as these expressions would be used regularly in their future.

TABLE 4
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR THE CATEGORY OF MOTIVATION

Variables	Level		Not at all	Not very	Fairly	Very	Total
Motivating	Inter	Count	0	8	15	4	27
		% within level	.0%	29.6%	55.6%	14.8%	100%
		% within motivating	.0%	66.7%	51.7%	36.4%	51.9%
		% of Total	.0%	15.4%	28.8%	7.7%	51.9%
	Low	Count	0	4	14	7	25
		% within level	.0%	16.0%	56.0%	28.0%	100%
		% within motivating	.0%	33.3%	48.3%	63.6%	48.1%
		% of Total	.0%	7.7%	26.9%	13.5%	48.1%
		Count	0	12	29	11	52
Total		% of Total	.0%	23.1%	55.8%	21.2%	100%

While the learners showed a similar tendency in their perceptions toward pragmatic instruction in terms of the four categories—*interest, usefulness, importance,* and *motivation*, they showed a noticeable difference in the degree of *difficulty* in learning them. Although the result was not significant between-subject examination (p=.088), confirmed by an independent sample *t*-test, the learners displayed some disparity in their responses. Two thirds of the learners in the intermediate group reported that learning L2 pragmatic features was *not at all* or *very difficult*. However, about a half of the learners in the low group answered that they were *fairly* or *very difficult*. Examining their responses of the open-ended question in-depth, the intermediate group attributed easiness of learning L2 pragmatics about the four speech acts to the regular input and output opportunities of the expressions with their native English speaking teachers in the classroom. Furthermore, they noted that these expressions were so routinized that they could employ them with ease for various situations. However, the low group reported that the patterns of the expressions were unfamiliar to them as well as complex to utilize. It was estimated that the low group did not possess sufficient linguistic facility to notice input like the intermediate group or utilize the routinized patterns of the expressions. In addition, it appeared that the degree of familiarity with the expressions is associated with Schmidt's (1993) noticing hypothesis that input can be intake when they attend to the target features. These features may have been salient to the intermediate group through the input and output activities given during the instruction, and they seemed to internalize the patterns better than the low group due to their higher linguistic facility.

B. Learners' Perception toward Learning Four Speech Acts

A one-way MANOVA was conducted several times to identify the main effect on the four speech acts (compliments, apologies, requests, and refusals) between the two proficiency groups. The results demonstrated that there was no significant effect found in terms of the four categories, which were *interest, usefulness, importance*, and *motivation*. Further, the between-subjects examination also indicated that there were no significant differences between the intermediate and low groups in terms of each speech act for the four categories. As discussed above, statistical significance was not found as most of the learners expressed the positive attitudes. However, there was significance for the category asking the degree of difficulty in learning L2 pragmatics regarding four speech acts, as seen in *Wilks' Lambda* values in Table 5.

TABLE 5
SUMMARY OF MANOVA RESULTS FOR FOUR SPEECH ACTS AND LEVELS

	F	Df	p	Partial Eta Squared
Interest	.442	47	.777	.036
Usefulness	.577	47	.681	.047
Importance	.430	47	.786	.035
Motivation	.833	47	.511	.066
Difficulty	3.424	47	.015*	.226

Also, there was a significant difference between the intermediate and low groups in the category of *difficulty*, as seen in Table 6. As discussed in the previous section, more learners in the low group expressed that learning L2 pragmatic features of the four speech acts were *very* or *fairly difficult* on account of unfamiliarity of the expressions. Further, although the speech act of refusals was not in the significance level of $p<.05$, it approached significance ($p=.053$).

TABLE 6
SUMMARY OF BETWEEN-SUBJECTS TESTS

Level	Group	M	SD	F	p
Compliments	Intermediate	2.11	0.58	4.172	.046*
	Low	2.44	0.58		
Apologies	Intermediate	2.07	0.66	6.424	.014*
	Low	2.52	0.59		
Requests	Intermediate	2.22	0.58	13.741	.001**
	Low	2.84	0.62		
Refusals	Intermediate	2.26	0.71	3.928	.053
	Low	2.60	0.50		

The learners' reflection journals revealed that learning L2 pragmatics was challenging as it consisted of some unfamiliar expressions and sentence patterns that the learners had not acquired yet. For instance, in terms of the instruction on compliments, the learners had a hard time making exclamatory sentences, particularly for the learners of the low group, as the sentence patterns are dissimilar between those starting with *how* and *what* (e.g., *"How nice (your shirt is)!," "What a nice shirt (it is)!"*) Also, they expressed difficulty in making the reasons or excuses for apologies and requests. It is noteworthy that most of the learners pointed out the complexity of the sentence patterns of the requests. Before the pragmatic instruction, they commonly employed the monoclausal patterns like *"Can/could/would you + Verb"* or *"Please___,"* in making requests. However, the instruction included an explanation about pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics as well as a range of examples of the constituents that make requests: alerter (e.g., *"Excuse me."*), head act (e.g., *"I was wondering if you could help me."*), and adjunct (e.g., *"I have to finish this work, but I don't know how to do it."*). They noted that biclausal expressions of requests such as *"Do you mind if Subject Verb?" "I wonder if Subject Verb", "If you are not very busy, could you Verb?"* were tricky to make grammatically correct as seen in the examples below.

- *I leaned various expressions about requests and refusals. However, although they sound more appropriate, it is very difficult for me to make a sentence. They are too long and complex. (from S 40)*

- *I don't know exactly what to do in making correct sentences by using them. It is hard to express my reasons for the request and refusal. (from S 43)*

Also, they noted that since there were multiple exemplar expressions for each speech act, they felt rather burdened to utilize them appropriately to different situations. Interestingly, it appeared that these expressions were memorized by the learners instead of the learners becoming familiarized with them for communicative purposes. This aspect seemed to be associated with their previous experience of learning English in Korea as well as the learning context where the opportunities for authentic input and output are not common. Below are the examples of the learners' perception related to this point.

- *I learned a lot of useful expressions. I will memorize them all to use them as automatically as I say "I'm sorry." (from S 4)*

- *I usually made a request using "Would you ~?" I realized through the instruction that there were a number of expressions for requests. However, although these expressions seemed useful, it is very difficult to memorize the grammar rules. (from S 46)*

Nevertheless, despite EFL context where the learners have fewer opportunities for authentic communication, a majority of learners acknowledged the importance of learning L2 pragmatic features for the four speech acts, similar to the findings of Liu (2007). They wrote that pragmatic instruction helped them to enhance intercultural communication skills by learning English formulaic expressions.

- *In Korea, there are a lot of sarcastic expressions for compliments, such as "Don't you think you look too nice today?" I realized from the instruction that English compliments are usually directed to the subject to be complimented, so I thought that I should be careful not to translate Korean words directly in English. It can cause so many errors in meaning and misunderstanding. (from S 13)*

- *I used to just add the word "please" to make a polite request. It was really meaningful to learn appropriate way to make requests to professors. It will be helpful in the future when I go study abroad. (from S 20)*

- *I didn't know if there was a polite way of speaking in English. Because they call older people's names, I thought that I could say anything in English. (from S 46)*

- *There are a lot of things that I did not know because I am not from English speaking countries. The expressions for apologies are one example. I thought that I would practice more in order to reduce unintentional mistakes in communication. (from S 8)*

Remarkably, a number of learners noted that they had learned a lot of useful information about the realizations of the four speech acts. Most learners thought that they already knew the expressions, but admitted that the instruction was helpful in performing speech acts.

- *When I had to refuse the invitation, I usually said, "Sorry, I can't." I felt like saying more as I thought that I was being rude, but I did not know how and what to say. It was great to know the expressions like "I wish I could, but I can't," "I would love to, but I can't," "I have a prior appointment," etc.. (from S 10)*
- *It was great to learn to start the request with "Sorry to bother you" instead of direct question. I always felt a bit strange to make a request to my English professor. (from S 29)*
- *I always used the same expression. But, I learned various expressions this time. (from S 33)*

Most importantly, it was revealed that the learners gained some confidence in communicating in English and were motivated to utilize the expressions, as seen in the examples.

- *I used the expressions that I had learned from this lesson when I talked with my native English teacher. He complimented my English and I gained some confidence in using them. I will practice hard to use them more. (from S 2)*
- *Even though I wanted to say something, I did not say it because I did not know what to say. But now I learned all these expressions, so I will use them confidently in the future. (from S 42)*
- *They are very basic and essential expressions, so I think I can use them often. (from S 47)*

To conclude, the learners displayed positive perceptions toward learning L2 pragmatics, in general. They noted that the instruction was helpful in enhancing their communicational skills with regards to politeness and intercultural differences, as well as gaining confidence for English conversation. Additionally, although they also expressed some difficulties performing biclausal requests and making reasons for their apologies or refusals, they noted that it was motivating to learn. These findings reflect the EFL learners' needs in English learning in the current era and suggest the need for incorporating L2 pragmatics into the curriculum.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

This study sought to investigate the EFL learners' perceptions towards learning L2 pragmatic features. The results were mainly examined to see if there is any difference in the learners' perceptions in terms of five categories--*interest, usefulness, importance, motivation,* and *difficulty*--depending on their language proficiency levels as well as in terms of the four speech acts (compliments, apologies, requests, and refusals). The participants received explicit pragmatic instruction with regard to the four speech acts for nine weeks, and a questionnaire and the learners' reflection journals were employed for the data analyses. The findings showed that the learners expressed positive perceptions toward the pragmatic instruction, in general. It was found that a majority of the learners answered that learning L2 pragmatic features was very or fairly interesting, useful, motivating, and important. They noted that pragmatic instruction could help them enhance basic English communication skills as the expressions they learned are frequently used in everyday conversation. Also, the learners appeared to have a fresh experience of learning about politeness in relation to English. It was revealed that they found it important to learn L2 pragmatics as they became aware of the social aspects of the situation where the conversation occurs as well as intercultural differences. However, although most of the learners answered positively in light of motivation, a quarter of the learners reported oppositely based on the lack of practicality for using the expressions in their life. This reflects the common challenges that teachers in EFL settings face with their students and calls for attention from language teachers. Additionally, as for the comparison of the results between the intermediate and low groups, it was found that there was no statistical difference in the learners' perceptions. Nevertheless, they showed some disparity in the results regarding the category of *difficulty* for learning L2 pragmatics; meaning that more than two thirds of the intermediate learners answered that it was not difficult whereas around half of the low learners found it difficult on account of unfamiliarity with the expressions.

The investigation of the results concerning each speech act demonstrated that there was no significant main effect on their perceptions between two groups with regard to each speech act. The learners did not show any differences in *interest, usefulness, importance,* and *motivation* in terms of learning the four speech acts. However, the between-subject examination showed that there was a significant difference between the two groups concerning the category of *difficulty*. This result was attributed to a variety of expressions, complexity of some sentence patterns--exclamatory expressions for compliments and biclausal requesting patterns, in particular-- and consideration of different social aspects of the interlocutors and the specific conversational situations. Nevertheless, the learners' perception journals showed that learning L2 pragmatic features regarding the four speech acts was highly valuable to them. This instruction appeared to provide an opportunity to help them notice their deficiency in performing the speech acts as well as recognize the importance of learning L2 pragmatics as it enhanced their pragmatic awareness in terms of politeness, negative L1 transfer, and intercultural communication. Remarkably, they reported that it gave them a degree of confidence in English communication as well as motivation to learn. Another interesting finding is that a good number of the learners in the low group perceived formulaic expression that were introduced during the instruction as a collection of discrete grammar items which they should learn by rote and expressed the sense of pressure and burden of memorizing a variety of different expressions. These expressions carry communicative purposes and could be acquired by regular use in life

instead of the rote memorization. In this regard, different approaches and methods of language teaching designed for EFL learners should be practiced in consideration of the deficiency of EFL learners' communicative opportunities.

The findings of the present study highlighted the learners' need for pragmatic instruction. The knowledge of L2 pragmatic aspects, particularly for the speech acts in this study, can instill confidence and motivation for the L2 learners as the expressions are frequently employed in everyday conversation. Further, pragmatic instruction appears to be essential for EFL learners as they usually lack authentic input or output opportunities, so they might not be well-equipped to carry the illocutionary force that they intended in real situations. Also, it seems plausible to encounter communication breakdown or misunderstanding due to a lack of interpersonal or intercultural communicative skills since there are some major or minor differences in the expressions to perform the illocutionary acts as seen in the previous research. To this end, concrete efforts to include pragmatic instruction need to be taken into consideration. Also, a pragmatic instructional model should be designed based on experimental research so that language teachers as well as learners can achieve better effects from the instruction. In order to ensure good pedagogical practices, teacher training programs for L2 pragmatics should be developed especially for nonnative English teachers as they might not hold enough practical knowledge of L2 pragmatics themselves and have some difficulty gathering related information in an EFL settings. Finally, it would be helpful to create materials for teaching and learning about L2 pragmatics based on the contents of multimedia assisted language learning. Blended learning could offer vast resources of input and numerous output opportunities for EFL learners beyond the limitations of their classrooms.

APPENDIX. QUESTIONNAIRE ON STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF PRAGMATIC INSTRUCTION

Please check √ under the appropriate item.
1. How interested are you in learning the pragmatic features of the specific speech acts?
Very interested (4)__ Fairly interested (3) __ Not particularly interested (2) __ Not interested (1) __
Write the reason why you marked the item.
→_____
2. How interested are you in learning the pragmatic features of the speech act of compliments in a target language?
Very interested (4) __ Fairly interested (3) __ Not very interested (2) __ Not at all interested (1) __
3. How interested are you in learning the pragmatic features of the speech act of apologies in a target language?
Very interested (4) __ Fairly interested (3) __ Not very interested (2) __ Not at all interested (1) __
4. How interested are you in learning the pragmatic features of the speech act of requests in a target language?
Very interested (4) __ Fairly interested (3) __ Not very interested (2) __ Not at all interested (1) __
5. How interested are you in learning the pragmatic features of the speech act of refusals in a target language?
Very interested (4) __ Fairly interested (3) __ Not very interested (2) __ Not at all interested (1) __
6. How useful is it to learn the pragmatic features of the specific speech acts?
Very useful (4) __   Fairly useful (3) __   Not very useful (2) __   Not at all useful (1) __
Write the reason why you marked the item.
→_____
7. How useful is it to learn the pragmatic features of the speech act of compliments in a target language?
Very useful (4) __   Fairly useful (3) __   Not very useful (2) __   Not at all useful (1) __
8. How useful is it to learn the pragmatic features of the speech act of apologies in a target language?
Very useful (4) __   Fairly useful (3) __   Not very useful (2) __   Not at all useful (1) __
9. How useful is it to learn the pragmatic features of the speech act of requests in a target language?
Very useful (4) __   Fairly useful (3) __   Not very useful (2) __   Not at all useful (1) __
10. How useful is it to learn the pragmatic features of the speech act of refusals in a target language?
Very useful (4) __   Fairly useful (3) __   Not very useful (2) __   Not at all useful (1) __
11. How motivating is it to learn the pragmatic features of the specific speech acts?
Very motivating (4) __ Fairly motivating (3) __ Not very motivating (2) __ Not at all motivating (1)__
Write the reason why you marked the item.
→_____
12. How motivating is it to learn the pragmatic features of the speech act of compliments in a target language?
Very motivating (4) __ Fairly motivating (3) __ Not very motivating (2) __ Not at all motivating (1)__
13. How motivating is it to learn the pragmatic features of the speech act of apologies in a target language?
Very motivating (4) __ Fairly motivating (3) __ Not very motivating (2) __ Not at all motivating (1)__
14. How motivating is it to learn the pragmatic features of the speech act of requesting in a target language?
Very motivating (4) __ Fairly motivating (3) __ Not very motivating (2) __ Not at all motivating (1)__
15. How motivating is it to learn the pragmatic features of the speech act of refusing in a target language?
Very motivating (4) __ Fairly motivating (3) __ Not very motivating (2) __ Not at all motivating (1)__
16. How difficult is it to learn the pragmatic features of the specific speech acts?
Very difficult (4) __   Fairly difficult (3)__   Not very difficult (2)__   Not at all difficult (1) __
Write the reason why you marked the item.
→_____

17. How difficult is it to learn the pragmatic features of the speech act of <u>compliments</u> in a target language?
Very difficult (4) __   Fairly difficult (3)__   Not very difficult (2)__   Not at all difficult (1) __
18. How difficult is it to learn the pragmatic features of the speech act of <u>apologies</u> in a target language?
Very difficult (4) __   Fairly difficult (3)__   Not very difficult (2)__   Not at all difficult (1) __
19. How difficult is it to learn the pragmatic features of the speech act of <u>requests</u> in a target language?
Very difficult (4) __   Fairly difficult (3)__   Not very difficult (2)__   Not at all difficult (1) __
20. How difficult is it to learn the pragmatic features of the speech act of <u>refusals</u> in a target language?
Very difficult (4) __   Fairly difficult (3)__   Not very difficult (2)__   Not at all difficult (1) __
21. How important is it to learn the pragmatic features of the specific speech acts?
Very important (4) __   Fairly important (3) __   Not very important (2) __ Not at all important (1)__
Write the reason why you marked the item.
→_____
22. How important is it to learn the pragmatic features of the speech act of <u>compliments</u> in a target language?
Very important (4) __   Fairly important (3) __   Not very important (2) __ Not at all important (1) __
23. How important is it to learn the pragmatic features of the speech act of <u>apologies</u> in a target language?
Very important (4) __   Fairly important (3) __   Not very important (2) __ Not at all important (1) __
24. How important is it to learn the pragmatic features of the speech act of <u>requests</u> in a target language?
Very important (4) __   Fairly important (3) __   Not very important (2) __ Not at all important (1) __
25. How important is it to learn the pragmatic features of the speech act of <u>refusals</u> in a target language?
Very important (4) __   Fairly important (3) __   Not very important (2) __ Not at all important (1) __
26. Have you ever learned the pragmatic features of the specific speech acts in your English class before?
  <u>Yes / No</u> (If yes, when did you learn?)
27. What do you think is important to learn in English class? (Multiple responses are allowed.)
Grammar__   Speaking__   Vocabulary__   Reading__
Listening__   Pragmatics__   Writing__   Pronunciation__
28. Is learning pragmatic features of the specific speech acts in English class necessary?
Very necessary (4) __   Fairly necessary (3) __   Not very necessary (2) __ Not at all necessary (1) __
Write the reason why you marked the item.
→_____
29. Is the use of movies appropriate in learning pragmatics?
Very appropriate (4) __   Fairly appropriate (3) __   Not very appropriate (2) __ Not at all appropriate (1) __
Write the reason why you marked the item.
→_____
Background Information
Please mark √ next to the appropriate item or fill in the blank.
Gender: Male_____   Female_____
Age: 18-20____   21-23____   24-26____   27-29____ 30+____
Have you lived in an English speaking country? (e.g. Canada, U.S.A. England, etc.)
Yes___ No___ (If yes, how long did you live there?_____)
School year: _____
Major:_____

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