Metapragmatic Instruction Effects on Indonesian EFL learners' Production of Refusals and Compliment Responses

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Abstract. The current study explored metapragmatic instruction effects on EFL learners' production of refusals, and responses to compliments. One pre-test and post-test research design was employed. Thirty-eight undergraduate students participated in this study. The data were gathered using a discourse completion task that was administered before and after the implementation of metapragmatic instruction. The EFL learners' performance in refusals and compliment responses were assessed before and after the implementation of metapragmatic instruction. The refusals and compliment responses used before and after the treatment were scrutinized. After the treatment, the scores of pre-test and post-test were compared. The finding revealed that the EFL learners' performance in using refusals and compliment responses improved. There were changes of the strategies employed by the learners. A paired sample test was performed to test the significant effect of metapragmatic intervention on the learners' performance in refusals and compliment responses. The analysis showed that metapragmatic intervention gave a positive effect on the participants' performance in refusals and compliment responses.

Keywords: *Compliment response; metapragmatic instruction, refusals, speech acts.*

1. Introduction

The second language (henceforth L2) speakers' interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) has fostered studies on how L2 is acquired. ILP studies focus on examining L2 Leaners' cross-cultural pragmatic behavior concerning the production, comprehension, and L2 pragmatic acquisition comprising strategies in linguistics, pragmatics as well as speech acts in L2 and foreign languages (hereafter FL) (Alcón-Soler, & Pitarch, 2010). ILP studies have investigated the aspects pondered to be likely to affect the learning of L2/FL pragmatics. The learning of L2 pragmatics has prompted researchers to explore the teachability of L2 pragmatics comprising speech acts (Kim, 2017). Scholars focusing on pragmatic instruction in L2/FL classroom have considered that pragmatic instruction is essential and can support pragmatic development of L2/FL learners (Mirzaee & Esmaeili, 2013).

Scholars who explored pragmatic instruction effects on the learners' awareness and production of speech acts showed the use of explicit and implicit pragmatic intervention in teaching language (Alcón Soler, 2012). Ishara (2011) initiates pragmatic instruction focusing on compliment and responses to compliments. The findings demonstrated that pragmatic instruction was not only increased learners' ability in complimenting but also providing responses to compliments. Martínez-Flor and Alcón-Soler (2007) explored the effectiveness of explicit and implicit approaches on the participants' pragmatic development of *suggestion* speech act. It was revealed that the learners' pragmatic awareness benefitted from both explicit and implicit instructions. The learning process needs constant innovation to align the teaching and learning goals with the modern life faced by students. However, the fact shows an irrelevant situation between school and the real world. As in the workplace, the majority of workers agreed (59%) that the skills taught in schools are not following the needs of future requirements (Isra, 2019). Alcón-Soler and Pitarch (2010) explored the effects of teaching refusals on

the participants' attention and pragmatic awareness. The results showed that learners' attention and pragmatic awareness developed after the pragmatic instruction applied. Similarly, Martinez-Flor (2016) investigated the effects of pedagogical model on the learners' production of apology at a discourse level. The results showed that, after the treatment, the learners' productions of apologies were more elaborated. Likewise, Delfi (2017) exploring Personal Reading Histories is useful for English Study Program. Dastjerdi and Farshid (2011) examined the effectiveness of Form Comparison procedure and explicit instruction of compliments. The results showed that explicit instruction of giving compliments performed better than Form Comparison procedure instruction. These studies have shown that learners' pragmatic development can be made possible by implementing pragmatic intervention.

In performing speech acts, L2/FL learners are required to possess both pragmalinguistic and sociopracmatic knowledge of L2/FL. As it is expected that L2/FL learners' language production should be appropriate in relation to the context. The inability to use L2/FL appropriately in appropriate context may result in communication breakdown. However, L2/FL learners often show that their pragmatic competence does not bring in line to their grammatical competence (Koike & Pearson, 2005). Therefore, it is considered necessary to provide pragmatic instruction for L2/FL learners. Suryoputro and Suyatno (2017) who investigated pragmatic instructions at junior and senior high school in Indonesia found out that pragmatic instruction was not a priority in English teaching in Indonesia. Additionally, pragmatic elements were presented partially in junior and senior high school textbooks. Similarly, Supriyadi's (2013) study revealed that English teachers in Indonesia focused more on the forms of linguistic elements and grammatical arrangements of the language. On the other hand, developing learners' pragmatic competence should become the objective of language teaching (Bouton, 1996, in Eslami-Rasekh, Eslami-Rasekh & Fatani, 2004). In this case, Ishara and Cohen (2010) have recommended pragmatic instruction to be incorporated in language teaching curricula, as L2 learners' pragmatic ability will positively develop.

Bridging the gap between earlier investigation on speech acts and the lack of pragmatic interventions in Indonesian EFL settings, the present study focuses on metapragmatic instruction of English refusals and compliment responses. Implementing explicit metapragmatic instruction, Wen and Jun (2017) investigated metapragmatic instruction effects on the participants' ability to respond to compliments. Their study revealed that the experimental group lessened the use of Accept Strategy, but at macro level they developed Combination Strategies. These studies together with previous research on the acquisition of pragmatics revealed that metapragmatic instruction possibly advance the pragmatic competence of L2/FL learners. Farahian, Rezaee, and Gholami (2012) investigated the influence of an explicit metapragmatic approach on EFL learners' use of refusals. The findings showed that explicit metapragmatic intervention was in effect for increasing the pragmatic ability of L2 learners. Ülbeği (2009) also investigated pragmatic intervention. The finding showed that implicit and explicit approaches could possibly be employed to develop EFL learners' pragmatic ability. Taking insight from these studies, the present study focuses on implementing metapragmatic instruction of refusals and compliment responses. Accordingly, the researcher addressed the research questions, as in the following:

- Do Indonesian EFL learners perform different choices of refusal strategies before and after the implementation of metapragmatic instruction?
- Do Indonesian EFL learners employ different choices of compliment response strategies before and after the implementation of metapragmatic instruction?
- Does metapragmatic instruction affect the Indonesian EFL learners' pragmatic performance in refusals and responses to compliments?

2. Methodology

2.1 The participants

The participants of this research were the fourth semester Indonesian undergraduates majoring in English Education at a public university in Pekanbaru - Indonesia. There were three classes of the fourth semester students. One class was selected using cluster random sampling. In the selected class, there were 38 students participated in this study.

2.2 The Treatment

This study implemented one group pre-test and post-test design to determine metapragmatic intervention effects on the EFL learners' performance in producing refusals as well as compliment responses. The treatment of implementing explicit metapragmatic instruction was conducted after the participants did the pre-test, and following the treatment they did the post-test. The metapragmatic instruction was conducted for five weeks; with approximately 100 minutes of teaching for one session a week. The metapragmatic instruction procedures were modification and incorporation of metapragmatic instructions applied by Alcón-Soler and Pitarch (2010*)* and Eslami-Rasekh et al. (2004). This study employed explicit metapragmatic instruction that consisted of instructional activities, as in the following:

Step one: Awareness raising instruction activities:
- Begin with a discussion of politeness led by the lecturer
- Students discuss the strategies used to perform refusals and compliment responses in L1 in different social contexts, and compared the results to the other groups
- Discuss the strategies the students used to perform refusals and compliment responses in L2 in different social contexts, and compared the results to the other groups
- Open discussion of the choices of strategies they made (factors in choosing certain strategies) related to L1 and L2 culture.

Step two: Explicit metapragmatic instruction activities:
- Provide information about various strategies (direct and indirect) used in the speech acts taught (Refusals/compliment responses)
- Provide information dealing with factors determining politeness: status, distance, and power.

Step three: Exposure to native speakers' model
- In group, students watched downloaded videos of naturally occurring interactions from talk show English television programs and collected L2 data of refusals and compliment responses.
- Students shared their data in open discussion by presenting the strategies used, explaining kinds of the strategies, the pragmalinguistic elements, and the speaker-addressee's relationship.

2.3 Data Collection

A discourse completion test (DCT) was used to gather the data of EFL learners' performance regarding refusals and compliment responses. The DCT for refusals consisted of 9 scenarios (adopted from Usó-Juan, 2013). The scenarios were constructed involving different social status (equal, low, and high) and social distance (intimate, acquaintance, and stranger). For compliment responses, the

DCT involved 4 scenarios adopted from Chen & Yang (2010). The participants were requested to give the most appropriate refusals or responses to compliments based on the situations given.

2.4 Data Analysis

The data of refusals were scrutinized in terms of semantic formulas grounded on refusal strategies by Beebe, Takahashi, and Uliss-Weltz (1990 in Shishavan & Sharifian, 2013). The head acts of refusals and the supportive moves were classified based on Shishavan and Sharifian's (2013) classification. The data of compliment responses were analyzed based on Holmes' (1988, 1993 in Khanesha & Bonyadi, 2016) classifications of compliment responses consisting Accept, Evade, and Reject. The EFL learners' pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic ability can be considered from by the way they chose vocabulary and phrases in their responses, and sociopragmatic competence was shown by the way the level of politeness selected.

To find out the effect of metapragmatic instruction, the data gathered were analyzed quantitatively. To determine whether there was a significant difference, the quantitative data were analyzed statistically using SPSS Statistics 23.0.

3. Results and Discussion

This session presents the findings according to the research questions. To provide the answers of the research questions, the EFL learners' performance in using refusals and compliment responses were assessed before and after metapragmatic instruction was implemented. The refusals and compliment reponses used before and after the treatment were scrutinised based on the taxonomies used for this study.

The choices of refusal strategies before and after the treatment were analyzed and categorized into refusal head acts as well as supportive moves. Refusal head acts consisted of direct and indirect strategies. After the implementation of metapragmatic intervention, the learners made some changes in the way they used refusal strategies. The use of direct refusal strategies decreased. Explicit refusal strategies used before the implementation of metapragmatic instructions were changed to Regret/apology or Promise for future acceptance. They mostly employed more indirect strategies and utilised indirect strategies that they did not used before the implementation of metapragmatic intervention such as Wish, Positive opinion, and Let interlocutor off the hook. The strategy preferred most by the participants was Regret/apology. The changes also occurred in the way they employed refusal supportive move strategies after the metapragmatic instructions. They combined supportive move strategies such as the combination of Reasons and Alternatives, Reasons and Promise for future acceptance. The changes showed the improvement of learners' pragmatic ability.

In responding to compliments the learners preferred Appreciation token as their compliment responses before the implementation of metapragmatic instruction. Many of them also used Informative comments to give responses to the given compliments. They also combined Appreciation token and Return compliment. After the implementation of metapragmatic instructions, the learners' strategies in responding to compliments increased, even though Appreciation token was still the preferred one. They also used Downgrading, Shift credit, Request reassurance, Request interpretation, Return compliment, and Informative comments. The participants also employed combination of strategies such as Appreciation token + Shift credit, Request reassurance + Informative comments, Return compliment + Appreciation token, Appreciation token + Downgrading, Appreciation token + Return compliment, Request reassurance + Appreciation token. When responding to different topics of the compliments, the learners appear to combine Appreciation token and Return compliment when the

compliments were on appearance. They combined Appreciation token and Downgrading more to respond to compliments on ability/skill. When answering to compliments on possession, they utilised more arrangement of   Appreciation token and Informative comments or Request interpretation. The use of varied strategies in responding to compliments after the implementation of metapragmatic instruction displays that the learners' pragmatic ability developed.

To find out metapragmatic instruction effects on the Indonesian EFL learners' pragmatic production of refusals and compliment responses, a paired sample test was carried out on the scores of pre-test and post-test obtained from DCT. The analysis results are displayed in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1. The Means of the Pre-test and Post-test.

Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pretest	65.7895	38	6.20879	1.00720
	Posttest	79.3421	38	5.83223	.94611

Table 1 shows that the means obtained from the pre-test and post-test were different. From the two means, the participants made higher mean score (79.34) after the metapragmatic instruction, while the mean score before the implementation of metapragmatic instruction was 65.78.

To evaluate whether the participants' performance in the pre-test and post-test had a significant difference, inferential t-test statistics shows whether the different mean scores in the pre-test and post-test were significant or not. The result is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Equating Pre-test and Post-test

Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences							
					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1	Pretest - Posttest	-13.55263	3.65910	.59359	-14.75535	-12.34991	-22.832	37	.000

Table 2 displays the results of a paired sample test to investigate the significant effect of metapragmatic instruction on the participants' performance in refusals and compliment responses. The results showed that t(37)=-22.83, p.= .000. The Sig. (2-tailed) value was (.000) which was less than 0.05. Thus, it can be concluded that the difference between the mean scores of the participants' performance in the pre-test and post-test was statistically significant. The lower and upper intervals of the difference were negative, meaning that there is positive effect of the metapragmatic intervention. Consequently, this means that the implementation of metapragmatic instructions gave a positive effect on the participants' performance in refusals and responses to compliments.

The findings of this study revealed that the EFL leaners' pragmatic ability improved after the implementation of metapragmatic instruction. The learners used more indirect strategies and developed combination of the strategies after metapragmatic instructions. This result appears to confirm Ishara and Cohen's (2010) claim that pragmatic instruction have an important role to develop L2 learners' pragmatics ability. The instruction of pragmatic features was beneficial for L2/FL learners (Tajeddin & Ghamari, 2011). Tajeddin and Ghamari (2011) examined pragmatic instruction. The result revealed that pragmatic instructions developed the learners' pragmatic ability. Besides, pragmatic instructions facilitate the learners' pragmatic performance (Kim, 2017). In addition, this study supports the claim that after pragmatic intervention the learners used varieties of speech act

strategies learned (Usó-Juan, 2013). Relatedly, The result of this study is in line to Wen and Jun's (2017) findings that, after metapragmatic instruction, the learners developed combination of strategies. The learners in this study employed varied combination strategies in responding to compliments and combination of supportive move strategies in producing their refusals.

The result of t-test analysis shows that there is a positive effect of metapragmatic intervention on the learners' production of refusals and compliment responses. Therefore, this study supports prior studies on the positive effect of instruction, metapragmatic instruction, on the improvement of EFL learners' pragmatic ability in producing speech acts (Martinez-Flor, 2016; Usó-Juan, 2013; Farahian et al., 2012; Tajeddin & Ghamari, 2011; Kim, 2017; Ülbeği, 2009). The finding of this study is relevant to Kim's (2017) finding. Kim (2017) studied the effect of pragmatic intervention on pragmatic awareness and production. The result revealed that the pragmatic intervention gave a positive effect significantly both on raising pragmatic awareness and production. Similarly, Eslami-Rasekh et al. (2004) investigated metapragmatic instruction effects on the way learners comprehend apology. The result exhibited that learners' comprehension of apology developed significantly. Likewise, the result of the current study exhibits that the implementation of metapragmatic instruction facilitates the learners' performance in refusals and compliment responses improved. This is also in line with previous research that claim the role of teaching is central to facilitate L2 pragmatic development (Martinez-Flor, 2016; Usó-Juan, 2013). In short, metapragmatic instruction is necessary to develop EFL learners' pragmatic ability.

This study also revealed that explicit metapragmatic instruction could improve L2/EFL learners' performance in refusals and compliment responses. Other scholars (Martínez-Flor & Alcón-Soler, 2007; Ülbeği, 2009) compared the effectiveness of explicit and implicit pragmatic instructions. However, this study did not make comparison of implicit and explicit pragmatic approaches, but only focused on explicit instruction. Explicit metapragmatic instruction was considered effective to increase L2/FL leaners' pragmatic ability (Dastjerdi & Farshid, 2011; Farahian et al., 2012; Usó-Juan, 2013). This study supports Farahian et al.'s (2012) claim regarding the effectiveness of explicit approach. Farahian et al. (2012) examined the influence of explicit instruction on the learners' refusals. The finding showed the effectiveness of explicit pragmatic instruction to develop the learners' performance in refusals.

4. Conclusion

The central objective of the current study is to examine whether metapragmatic instruction gives an effect on the learners' performance in using refusals and compliment responses. The findings show that the learners' pragmatic ability in using refusals and compliment responses improved. The findings showed that the use of direct strategies decreased. The learners' refusal strategies developed and they used strategies that were not employed before the implementation of metapragmatic instruction. Besides, the learners employed combination of supportive move strategies. The finding also revealed that the learners' compliment response strategies improved. They used more compliment response strategies and responded to compliments using combination of strategies.

A paired sample test used to find out the significant effect of metapragmatic instruction on the learners' performance in refusals and compliment responses show that there was statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the participants' performance in the pre-test and post-test. This means that metapragmatic intervention gave an effect positively on the participants' performance of using refusals and compliment responses.

This study shows that the implementation of metapragmatic instruction facilitates the leaners to have more pragmatic ability in using refusals and compliment responses. This study strengthens the findings of previous studies that metapragmatic instructions can improve L2/FL learners' pragmatic ability. Future research can possibly focus on implementing explicit and implicit instruction on different speech acts in different languages and cultures.

Acknowledgement

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