

# EFFECTS OF RECASTS ON EFL LEARNERS' ACQUISITION OF PRAGMALINGUISTIC CONVENTIONS OF REQUEST

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## ABSTRACT

The applicability of recasting to the pragmalinguistic level was the mission of this study. With its three research questions, this study investigated the effects of implicit feedback on Chinese learners of English in learning eight pragmalinguistic conventions of request:

1. Are pragmalinguistic recasts effective for teaching pragmatically appropriate requests?
2. Are they effective for teaching pragmatically appropriate *and* grammatically correct requests?
3. Do they boost learners' confidence in making requests?

Both pragmatic recast and control groups performed role-plays; the former received recasts on their request Head Acts whereas the latter did not. The results of discourse completion tests yielded the effect sizes of the pragmatic recast group: Cohen's (1988)  $d = 0.83$  for research question 1 and Cohen's  $d = 0.87$  for research question 2. Both groups also built up confidence in speaking to an interlocutor of higher status, perhaps due to the interaction with the instructor and their peers.

## INTRODUCTION

The last two decades have seen steady developments in interlanguage pragmatics (ILP). Because the vast majority of researchers have dedicated their work toward understanding L2 learners' pragmatic comprehension and production, the history of instructed ILP is brief. In the last 10 years, however, researchers' awareness of instructional intervention has been gradually and steadily raised. Undeniably, a conceptual and methodological key issue of these empirical studies has been the effect of explicit and implicit instruction on pragmatic learning. The vast majority of such pragmatists have investigated explicit instruction; no researchers have dared to apply recasts to the pragmatic level. The purpose of this study was, then, to examine the effects of recasting on learning pragmalinguistic conventions of request.

## **BACKGROUND**

### ***Instructed ILP***

Interlanguage pragmatists conducted two dozen empirical studies between 1981 and 2001 (for a comprehensive review, see Kasper, 2001a, 2001b). They explored the teachability of different aspects of pragmatics, such as various speech acts, conversational implicature, hedges, gambits, discourse strategies, and interactional markers. The learning contexts and the target languages for investigation have expanded: ESL in the U.S; EFL in Japan, Germany, Israel, and Hong Kong; Japanese as a FL in the U.S; German and Spanish as a FL in the U.S; French as a FL in Australia; French immersion in Canada. Of the 23 studies, only four studies (Kondo, 2001; Tateyama, 2001; Tateyama, Kasper, Mui, Tay, & Thananart, 1997; Wilder-Bassett, 1994) have targeted beginning learners; other studies have been directed at intermediate and advanced learners. Only Lyster (1994) targeted Grade-8 students; the rest of the studies aimed at adult learners.

Undoubtedly, a major assumption underlying these two dozen empirical studies in the last two decades has been the issue of explicit-implicit teaching/learning. Some pragmatists (Billmyer, 1990; Bouton, 1994a; Fukuya, 1998; Kondo, 2001; Kubota, 1995; Liddicoat & Crozet, 2001; LoCastro, 1997; Lyster, 1994; Morrow, 1995; Olshtain & Cohen, 1990; Rose & Ng, 2001; Wilder-Bassett, 1994; Wishnoff, 1999; Yoshimi, 2001) have taken pains to examine the effects of explicit instruction. The provision of metalinguistic information, as these studies have demonstrated, works for adult learners, regardless of whether they are beginning, intermediate, or advanced in either second or foreign language settings. Other researchers (House, 1996; House & Kasper, 1981; Pearson, 1998; Takahashi, 2001; Tateyama, 2001; Tateyama et al., 1997) have compared explicit with implicit instruction. Although explicit instruction has demonstrated some advantage (*viz.*, cannot be neglected) over implicit instruction, only Takahashi (2001) among these studies has shown statistically significant effects for the explicit instruction on pragmatic learning over implicit instruction.

Operationally, explicit instruction has enjoyed a firmly established status through a wide range of classroom activities that emit metapragmatic information to learners or

raise their consciousness of metapragmatic rules. For instance, explanation of rules and discussion about rules (Kubota, 1995; Olshtain & Cohen, 1990) are virtually common denominators among the explicit conditions. Quite a few other activities are metapragmatic judgment tasks (Morrow, 1995), introduction and analysis of prescribed speech-act formulae (Kondo, 2001; Morrow, 1995), narrative reconstruction (Liddicoat & Crozet, 2001), rule-discovery (Rose & Ng, 2001), and consciousness-raising tasks (Fukuya, 1998) that employed the analysis worksheet Rose (1993, 1994b, 1997, 1999) had suggested.

In contrast, the pragmatic implicit instruction seems to be a somewhat underdeveloped area, both conceptually and methodologically. Among six studies including an implicit condition, House (1996) and House and Kasper (1981) withdrew the metalinguistic information from the implicit instruction, that is, the metalinguistic information the comparable explicit condition received. Alternatively, other pragmatists have conceptualized the implicit instruction as additional, simple exposure to pragmatic examples while an explicit group received the metalinguistic information in addition to such examples. Learners in Pearson (1998), Tateyama (2001), and Tateyama et al. (1997) merely watched video clips; the meaning-focused group in Takahashi (2001) simply read NS-NS role-play transcripts to answer the comprehension questions.

In this sense, the empirical studies in instructed ILP seem to have had an explicit orientation in their research designs. The conventional ways of conceptualizing and operationalizing the pragmatic implicit instruction leave us with the impression that the pragmatists have been caught with a fixed notion of simple exposure to pragmatic examples; in other words, they have not paid adequate attention to the operationalization of implicit instruction. However, a few exceptions exist: Wilder-Bassett (1984, 1986) used a suggestopedic method (Caskey, 1977, 1980; Lozanov, 1979); Fukuya, Reeve, Gisi, and Christianson (1998) employed “interaction enhancement” (Muranoi, 1996, 2000) for the implicit treatment; Fukuya and Clark (2001) applied input enhancement (Sharwood-Smith, 1991, 1993) to the implicit condition. These exceptions have provided unique meanings to the pragmatic implicit instruction. Along this line of inquiry, the present study added another dimension to the pragmatic implicit instruction by employing recasting.

### ***Recasts***

The direct contrast hypothesis (Saxton, 1997) posits that implicit corrective feedback (i.e., recasts) promotes children's language acquisition probably because when a child produces ungrammatical utterances, to which an adult immediately responds with a grammatical form, the child may perceive the adult form as a correct alternative to the child form. On the basis of this assumption, second language researchers concerned with recasts have demonstrated that recasts are more effective than positive evidence in the form of models and a control condition (viz., no provision of models or recasts). Some examples are vocabulary acquisition in task-based interaction (Rabie, 1996), questions (Mackey & Philp, 1998), simple past verbs and past conditional in an ESL science class (Doughty & Varela, 1998), adjective ordering and a locative construction in Japanese (Mito, 1993), direct object topicalization and adverb placement in Spanish (Long, Inagaki & Ortega, 1998), and French past tenses in a written mode (Ayoun, 2001). Nevertheless, as these experimental studies demonstrated, recasts work when they are focused and only when linguistic structures are within reach of learners' morpho-syntactic ability (Mackey & Philp, 1998; Oliver, 1995) as specified by the processability theory (Pienemann, 1998). Also, recasts seem to be the most effective when the learner clearly understands that "the recast is a reaction to the accuracy of the form, not the content, of the original utterance" (Nicholas, Lightbown, & Spada, 2001, p. 720). Yet the applicability of recasting to the pragmatic level is unknown.

### ***Implicit Feedback in Interlanguage Pragmatics***

The pragmatists have paid scant attention to the effects of recasts on pragmatics. However, Fukuya et al. (1998) did explore the effects of implicit feedback on requests (see the discussion section for the operationalization of the implicit feedback). They found a positive effect ( $p = .033$ ) for implicit feedback on the ways learners made requests in terms of the degree of their directness. Unfortunately, their admirable attempt to study implicit feedback had four methodological drawbacks. The first is the instructor effect. An anonymous reviewer of *Pragmatics and Language Learning* commented on Fukuya et al's (1998) study: "Three different instructors were used in the experiment.

... We cannot know how the instructors themselves may have affected the realization of the treatments or the students' involvement in the treatments."

Second, Fukuya et al. (1998) compared two instructional methods (i.e., Focus on FormS and Focus on Form) against a control group. "Scale way back. We (the field) are just learning whether pragmatics can be taught. Choose one method for instruction and develop that" (An anonymous reviewer of *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics*, 2002). We do not agree with this position. The field, in 2002 or even in 1998, was mature enough for researchers to compare different instructional methods (see Takahashi, 2001; Tateyama et al., 1997). Yet the present study focused on an implicit instruction with a control group for a different reason: We wanted to study implicit instruction *per se*, not its value relative to explicit instruction.

A third problem involves the focus of the study, that is, sociopragmatics. At this stage, it seems wise to investigate the effects of recasts on pragmalinguistics rather than sociopragmatics, the former being more tangible for instruction than the latter. Referring to the implicit feedback during ongoing interactions in Fukuya et al.'s (1998) study, Kasper (2001b) does not believe that implicit feedback is an effective instructional option for sociopragmatics. Learning objects have to be focused (i.e., one learning problem), well identifiable, intensive, consistent, and unambiguously and promptly correctable (Doughty, 2000; Doughty & Williams, 1998b; Long, 1996; in press). However, the effectiveness of recasts to teach sociopragmatics will rest on the innovative ideas of researchers in the next decade. The final weakness lies in Fukuya et al.'s (1998) assessment. They assessed the learners' request as a whole, as the focus of their study was on sociopragmatics. Whereas this assessment was suitable from a holistic point of view, the scope of the assessment became too broad; rather, the assessment of a narrower focus may be more practical and workable for empirical studies. Considering the four methodological concerns about Fukuya et al. (1998), the present study focused on recasts of pragmalinguistic conventions of request given by one instructor with a more focused assessment.

### ***Research Questions and Hypotheses***

This study posed three research questions and three associated directional hypotheses. Theoretically motivated by the applicability of recasting to the pragmatic level, Research question 1 probes the effects of recasts on learners' acquisition of request conventions in terms of pragmatic appropriateness.

RQ1: Are pragmalinguistic recasts effective for teaching pragmatically appropriate requests?

Hypothesis 1 below answers RQ1. On the basis of the literature on the effects of recasts on syntax and vocabulary, we created the directional hypothesis.

H<sub>1</sub>: A pragmatic recast group will outperform a control group in producing pragmatically appropriate Head Acts (HAs), as measured by a DCT.

Research question 2 also looks into the effects of recasts on learners' acquisition of request conventions with an emphasis on their grammatical accuracy. Whereas linguistic forms are part of teaching/learning pragmatics, grammatical competence is considered theoretically and empirically distinctive from pragmatic competence (Bachman & Palmer, 1982; Verhoeven & Vermeer, 1992, 2002 for the empirical distinction; Bachman, 1988, 1990, Bachman & Palmer, 1989, 1996; Canale, 1983; Canale & Swain, 1980; Leech, 1983; Swain, 1984 for the theoretical distinction). Thus, it seems legitimate to assess learners' grammatical construct in addition to pragmatic appropriateness.

RQ2: Are pragmalinguistic recasts effective for teaching pragmatically appropriate *and* grammatically correct requests?

Hypothesis 2 answers RQ2.

H<sub>2</sub>: The pragmatic recast group will outperform the control group in producing pragmatically appropriate *and* grammatically correct HAs, as measured by a DCT.

Takahashi (2001) demonstrated a greater degree of increase of the learners' confidence in formulating their requests by explicit teaching. Parallel to her study, it seems worthwhile to investigate boosting learners' confidence by implicit feedback.

RQ3: Do pragmalinguistic recasts boost learners' confidence in making requests?

Hypothesis 3 answers RQ3.

H<sub>3</sub>: The pragmatic recast group will score higher than the control group in rating their confidence level, as measured by a Likert scale.

### ***The Foci of the Study***

We focused on requests because they contained pragmalinguistic conventions, linguistic resources that were salient and convenient for recasts. For these request conventions, this study employed Combinations A (-Power, + Social Distance, +Imposition) and B (+Power, - Social Distance, -Imposition) situations. In Combination A, the interactions are requests to a person with greater power than the speaker (-Power), who is unknown (+Distance), for a relatively big favor (+Imposition). In Combination B, the interactions are requests to a person with lesser power than the speaker (+Power), who is known (-Distance), for a relatively small favor (-Imposition). These two combinations were the opposite “setting” of the Power, Distance, and Imposition variables (Brown & Levinson, 1978) and therefore seem appropriate to help shed light on the contrast of the variables to learners implicitly. For the sake of convenience, Combination A was labeled as Higher Risk (HR), because requests in this kind of situation seem to involve a relatively higher risk for a speaker to obtain compliance. Combination B was labeled as Lower Risk (LR). Eight specific request conventions were the foci of the study: four request conventions (I was wondering if you could ...; Would it be possible to ...?; I'd be very grateful if you ...; I'd really appreciate it if you ...) were associated with the HR situations; the other four conventions (Do you want to ...?; Do you mind ~ing...?; Would you mind ~ing ...?; Do you think you can ...?) were associated with the LR situations.<sup>1</sup>

### ***A Framework for Pragmalinguistic Recasts***

We define pragmalinguistic recasts as the caretaker's (e.g., a teacher, a NS) reformulation of either (a) an utterance that is pragmatically inappropriate by changing the head act (and adding some hedges), or (b) an utterance that is pragmatically appropriate but grammatically incorrect by changing the linguistic part of the head act. Pragmalinguistic recasts can be divided into four cases according to their pragmatic usage and linguistic forms of request conventions. These cases are referred to as Types I, II, III, and IV. The main thrust of the framework is that when a learner makes an inappropriate request, the teacher recasts it by using one of the target request conventions. And when

the learner makes an appropriate request but with an incorrect linguistic form, the teacher recasts the form. The teacher ignores other cases.<sup>2</sup>

		Linguistic accuracy	
		Correct form	Incorrect form
Pragmatic appropriateness	Correct usage	Type I: Ignore it (No recast).	Type II: Recast only the linguistic forms of request conventions.
	Incorrect usage	Type III: Recast it by using one of the four target request conventions.	Type IV: Recast it by using one of the four target request conventions.

Figure 1. A framework for pragmalinguistic recasts

An example of Type II in the HR scenarios is a case in which a learner uses a target convention with a grammatically incorrect form, such as *\*I was grateful if you ~*. In this case, the recast concentrates on just its linguistic form. The correct form is *I'd be (very) grateful if you ....* In the LR scenarios (for Type II), a learner may say, *\*Would I mind ~?* Even though this was used in an appropriate context, it was linguistically inaccurate. In this case, an instructor recasts it by correcting the form (*Would you mind ~?*). Unlike Type II that focuses on the linguistic forms, Type III is concerned with pragmatic appropriateness. Imagine that you are a professor and that your student said to you, *I want you to take a look at my paper by next Monday*. This utterance is linguistically correct, but this should be recast, for instance, as follows: *I was wondering if you could take a look at my paper by next Monday*. This is an HR scenario case. In contrast, in an LR scenario, a situation might arise where a manager is asking a waiter to set up the table for the party. He uses the command (*Set up the table for the party.*). This is too direct and should be recast as, for instance, *Do you want to set up the table for the party?*



### ***Focused Pragmatic Recasts***<sup>3</sup>

We employed focused recasts of pragmalinguistic conventions of request. An example of a focused recast is as follows: (A situation for this recast: You as a graduate student asked Prof. Aston to borrow his book. You have never spoken to him before.)

Learner: “ ... I want you to let me borrow the book.”

Teacher: “I want you to ↗ You said? ↗ I was wondering if you could let me borrow the book. Sí ↗“

First, the teacher repeated only the conventional part (*I want you to*) of an inappropriate request, using a rising tone. She did not repeat the whole utterance. After she added, *You said?* with another rising tone, she then stated an appropriate complete sentence. Finally, she added, *Sí* with a rising tone. With such a focused recast, we intend to indicate to learners an implicit contrast between inappropriate and appropriate pragmalinguistic conventions of requests. The combination of *You said?* ↗ and *Sí* ↗, both of which may send implicit messages to learners, would seem to achieve this purpose. Although *Sí* was in Spanish, which Long, Inagaki, and Ortega (1998) also employed, we used it for the present study because it sounded natural even in English.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### ***Participants***

In the summer of 2002, we called for participation in an extra-curricular classroom activity at a university in northern China, with the learning theme of “American culture through oral communication.” Twenty-four native speakers of Chinese voluntarily participated in the study. However, we analyzed the data of just those 20 students who took both the pre- and post- tests, all of whom were female, with 11 in the treatment group and nine in the control group. All of the participants, majoring in English, were either freshmen or sophomores. The average length of receiving formal English instruction for both the treatment and control groups was eight years. Consequently, they may be considered as intermediate learners of English. None of them had lived in an English-speaking country.

### ***Design and Procedures***

This study adopted a pretest-posttest design in which we could experimentally control the presence and absence of recasting, the independent variable of this study. The dependent variable was the participants' performance on discourse completion tests (see *Assessment* section). After randomly assigning the participants, the second author of this article, a female native speaker of Chinese, taught both the treatment (pragmatic recast) and control groups in the morning. The 10-day study involved the pretest, the posttest, role-plays, a questionnaire, question time, and a class evaluation.

We spent seven 50-minute sessions for seven consecutive days on 14 role-plays, seven of which were the HR (-Power, +Distance, +Imposition) and the other seven of which were the LR (+Power, -Distance, -Imposition) scenarios (see Appendix A for the two examples). Ideally, we would have employed an HR scenario and an LR scenario daily for counterbalancing; however, we did not do so because we presented the pedagogical sessions according to four cultural themes: relationships between students and professors, life in your department, relationships between students and campus officers, and off-campus life. Yet, by the end of the treatment, the learners had completed seven HR and seven LR scenarios.

The role-plays proceeded as follows: First, the students received a card showing a role-play scenario. After the teacher explained American culture related to the scenario, the students had a chance to ask any questions about it. Although they were permitted to make some notes, they were instructed not to write down the entire set of acting-out utterances. Pairs of students performed the role-play for practice, and then the partners switched roles in the scenario. At this time, the teacher walked around to assist their interactions without recasting the students' utterances. Finally, individuals role-played with the instructor in front of the class, which was the only time the teacher gave recasts. During one class session, every student had a chance to perform individually with the teacher once.

Only one operational difference existed between the two groups: The teacher gave focused pragmatic recasts to the treatment group whereas she did not do so to the control group. The pragmatic recast (PR) group received the treatment such that when they made a request by using a non-target HA, the instructor recast it by using a target form, thereby

conveying implicitly the pragmatic acceptability of the HA. In similar fashion, when they made a request by using a target HA, but the linguistic form was grammatically inaccurate, the instructor recast it by using the grammatically correct form and thereby showed her concern for grammatical accuracy.<sup>4</sup> By the end of the treatment, the instructor had roughly equalized the number of the eight target forms she used for recasts. We anticipated that the participants would ask some questions concerning the rules of making requests, in which case the teacher told the students that she would explain them on the final day. This was our strategy for maintaining the instruction implicit throughout the instructional treatment.

### ***Assessment***

We employed written discourse completion tests because they, as a form of free constructed response, were capable of eliciting the request HAs. Both the pretests and posttests in this study contained the same 14 items despite the altered order of these 14 items on the pretest and posttest. The time allotted for each test was 40 minutes. Seven of these 14 items were composed of the HR (-Power, +Distance, +Imposition) and the other seven items the LR (+Power, -Distance, -Imposition).<sup>5</sup> These 14 DCT items were distinct from the 14 role-play scenarios. For each DCT item, the participants also rated their confidence level in responding to the situation on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = not confident at all; 5 = completely confident). Additionally, the PR group alone took the post-treatment questionnaire, the purpose of which was to find out: (a) whether the participants actually noticed the recasts; (b) whether they attempted to discover the rules of making requests; and (c) to what extent they were able to articulate the rules, even though the participants were taught the rules implicitly during the on-going role-play interactions.<sup>6</sup>

### ***Data Analysis***

We identified and coded 560 request HAs (20 participants x 14 items x the pre- and post- tests) by initially employing 27-coding categories of HAs, with an additional seven categories introduced where necessary. Some of the original categories derived from Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper (1989), Hill (1997), and van Mulken (1996). Before

calculating the interrater reliability for the posttest categorization, we went through 30 of 280 items. Because one or the other of us considered that some of these 30 items had two HAs, we decided which HAs to choose for the data analyses. We did not initially concur with four of 280 HA categorizations of the posttest data because one of us originally categorized these four HAs into hints. The interrater reliability between the two researchers for the posttest was  $r = 0.986$ .

We analyzed two aspects of the HAs: Pragmatic appropriateness and grammatical accuracy. The scoring system for pragmatically appropriate HAs (for research question 1) was that one point was assigned per target form, but no point was assigned per non-target form. To state it differently, when the participants used the eight request conventions in an appropriate or associated (HR or LR) situations, their HAs were rewarded regardless of whether they are grammatically correct or not. The scoring system for grammatically correct HAs (for research question 2) was as follows: One point was assigned per target form that was grammatically correct. No point was assigned per target form that was grammatically incorrect. And no point was assigned per non-target form. In other words, only when the participants not only employed the eight request conventions in an appropriate (HR or LR) situations, but these conventions were grammatically accurate, were their HAs rewarded. The reason for this was that the grammatical accuracy of the request conventions was the secondary focus of this study after the pragmatic appropriateness.<sup>7</sup>

## RESULTS

### *The Overall Frequency of Request Conventions Used on the Posttest*

The overall frequency of request conventions used by the two groups on the posttest indicated that for the PR group 72.72% of all the items were of the eight target forms type (regardless of whether or not these forms were used in appropriate situations), whereas for the control group only 23.01% of all test items were of the target forms type. Another striking difference was that the PR group used *Can/Could/Will/Would you ~?* for 13.64% of all the items, but the control group used them for 42.86% of the items. The predominant use of these preparatory questions by the control group is consistent with the

current understanding of L2 request use (Hassall, 1999, 2001; le Pair, 1996; Nonaka, 1998; Rose, 2000; Takahashi, 2001; Trosborg, 1995). In the control group, these preparatory questions were followed by Mood Derivables, Hints, and *I was wondering if you could ~* in 7.14%. The PR group never used *Can/Could/May I ~?*, but the control group did on 9.52% of the items. Overall, the control group used these two types of request conventions (the preparatory questions and *Can/Could/May I ~?*) in more than half of the situations (52.38%).

### ***Research Question One***

We set the alpha level for this study at  $\alpha = .05$ . Because we conducted five ANOVA procedures in this study, we felt it would be wise to apply Bonferroni's adjustment to the statistical analyses. "The Bonferroni's inequality states that the overall alpha for a set of tests will be less than or equal to the sum of the alpha levels associated with each individual test" (Weinfurt, 1995, p. 248). By way of illustration, when a researcher performs ANOVA five times for a study using .05 as the criterion for rejecting the null hypothesis for each, then the overall alpha level will be approximately  $6(.05) = .30$ . Bonferroni's theory postulates that the more ANOVAs researchers conduct on the same population, the higher the probability they will come up with statistically significant results by chance. To reduce this chance, researchers must divide the experiment-wise alpha (.05 in this case) by the frequency (five times in this case) of ANOVA. Therefore, in this study, only when we obtain  $p < 0.01$  for each hypothesis will we claim it to be statistically significant.

On the pretest, the PR group used the target forms 10 times out of 77 items (11 participants x 7 items), which is 12.98% and the control group used the target forms 4 times out of 63 (9 participants x 7 items) or 6.35%. All of these target forms were grammatically incorrect and used in the HR situations. With a between-subject factor (groups) and a within-subject factor (Linguistic Assembly), a repeated Two-Way (2X2) ANOVA was conducted on the pretest HA data.<sup>8</sup> No statistically significant difference was found between the PR and control groups in using the eight target forms on the pretest,  $F(1, 136) = 1.69, p = .20$ .

Table 1 illustrates the frequency and percentage of the target and non-target forms used in the posttest. On the HR items of the posttest, for the PR group 32.47% of all the items were target forms, whereas the control group used 12.70%. As Table 2 shows, the PR group had a mean of 0.65 ( $SD = 0.48$ ); the control group had a mean of 0.25 ( $SD = 0.44$ ). The range of these mean scores must be between 0 and 1, as one point was awarded for target form, but no point was assigned per non-target form. On the LR items of the posttest, the former group used the target forms 21.43% whereas the latter group used the target forms 3.17% (see Table 1). The PR group had a mean of 0.43 ( $SD = 0.50$ ) and the control group had a mean of 0.08 ( $SD = 0.27$ ) (see Table 2).

Table 1

*Frequency and Percentage of the Target and Non-Target Forms Used on the Posttest*

Request conventions	PR ( $n = 11$ )		Control ( $n = 9$ )	
	Freq	%	Freq	%
I was wondering if you...	21	13.64	8	6.35
I'd appreciate it if you...	7	4.55	3	2.38
HR I'd be very grateful if you...	14	9.09	0	0
Would it be possible to...?	8	5.19	5	3.97
Sub-Total	50	32.47	16	12.70
Do you mind ~ing...?	10	6.49	1	0.79
Do you want to...?	6	3.90	2	1.59
LR Do you think you can...?	3	1.95	0	0
Would you mind ~ing...?	14	9.09	1	0.79
Sub-Total	33	21.43	4	3.17
Non-Target Forms	71	46.10	106	84.13
Total	154	100.00	126	100.00

*Note.* Freq = Frequency.

Table 2

*Means and Standard Deviations of the Pragmatically Appropriate Request HAs on the Posttest*

Group	NI	HR		LR	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
PR	77	0.65	0.48	0.43	0.50
Control	63	0.25	0.44	0.08	0.27

*Notes.* NI = Number of Items

A two-way (2X2) ANOVA with repeated measures on the LA was conducted on the posttest HA data, which yielded a statistically significant difference between these two groups,  $F(1, 136) = 47.74, p < .0001$ ; the PR group outperformed the control group (see Table 3). Therefore, hypothesis 1 was supported. A statistically significant difference was also found between the two LAs,  $F(1, 136) = 15.36, p < .0001$ . The four request conventions associated with the HR were used significantly more often than the ones associated with the LR. The interaction between group and LA was not found to be statistically significant,  $F(1, 136) = 0.20, p = .65$ .

Table 3

*Analysis of Variance for the Pragmatically Appropriate Request HAs on the Posttest*

Source	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Group	1	47.74*	< .0001
LA	1	15.36*	< .0001
Group x LA	1	0.20	0.65
Error	138		

\* $p < .01$  LA = Linguistic Assembly

Cohen's (1988)  $d$  was calculated for the effect size estimate:  $d = 0.83$  and the 95% confidence intervals of the effect size were computed: Upper limit,  $d = 1.07$ ; lower limit,  $d = 0.59$ .<sup>9</sup> The strength of association was computed:  $\eta^2 = 0.257$ . For the reliability of the DCT, Cronbach's Coefficient alpha was calculated:  $\alpha = 0.86$  for the seven HR items;  $\alpha = 0.67$  for the seven LR items.

### ***Research Question Two***

Because neither the PR group nor the control group used any target forms that were both pragmatically appropriate and grammatically correct, no statistical analyses were conducted on the pretest HA data. On the HR items of the posttest (see Table 4), for the PR group 24.03% of all the items were target forms, but for the control group the target forms constituted 3.97%. As Table 5 shows, the PR group had a mean of 0.48 ( $SD = 0.50$ ); the control group had a mean of 0.08 ( $SD = 0.27$ ). On the LR items of the posttest, the former group used target forms 17.53% whereas the latter group used the target forms 3.17% (see Table 4). The PR group had a mean of 0.35 ( $SD = 0.48$ ); the control group had a mean of 0.06 ( $SD = 0.25$ ) on the LR items.



Table 4

*Frequency and Percentage of the Grammatically Accurate Target Forms Used on the Posttest*

Request conventions	PR ( <i>n</i> = 11)		Control ( <i>n</i> = 9)	
	Freq	%	Freq	%
I was wondering if you...	16	10.39	1	0.79
I'd appreciate it if you...	4	2.60	0	0
HR I'd be very grateful if you...	13	8.44	0	0
Would it be possible to...?	4	2.60	4	3.17
Sub-Total	37	24.03	5	3.97
Do you mind ~ing...?	10	6.49	1	0.79
Do you want to...?	6	3.90	2	1.59
LR Do you think you can...?	3	1.95	0	0
Would you mind ~ing...?	8	5.19	1	0.79
Sub-Total	27	17.53	4	3.17
Non-Target Forms	90	58.44	117	92.86
Total	154	100	126	100

*Note.* Freq = Frequency.

Table 5

*Means and Standard Deviations of the Pragmatically Appropriate and Grammatically Correct Request HAs on the Posttest*

Group	NI	HR		LR	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
PR	77	0.48	0.50	0.35	0.48
Control	63	0.08	0.27	0.06	0.25

*Notes.* NI = Number of Items

Another two-way (2X2) ANOVA with repeated measures on the LA was conducted on the posttest HA data, which yielded a statistically significant difference between these two groups,  $F(1, 136) = 48.70, p < .0001$ . The PR group outperformed the control group (see Table 6). Therefore, hypothesis 2 was supported. However, a statistically significant difference was not found between the two LAs,  $F(1, 136) = 2.73, p = .1$ . The interaction between the group and LA was not found to be statistically significant,  $F(1, 136) = 1.42, p = .24$ .

Table 6  
*Analysis of Variance for the Pragmatically Appropriate and Grammatically Correct Request HAs on the Posttest*

Source	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Group	1	48.70*	< .0001
LA	1	2.73	0.10
Group x LA	1	1.42	0.24
Error	138		

\* $p < .05$ . LA = A Linguistic Assembly

Cohen’s (1988) *d* was calculated for the effect size estimate:  $d = 0.87$ ; the 95% confidence intervals of the effect size were computed: Upper limit,  $d = 1.11$ ; lower limit,  $d = 0.63$ .<sup>10</sup> The strength of association was computed:  $\eta^2 = 0.2608$ .

**Research Question Three**

The confidence-level pretest indicated that the PR group had a mean of 3.58 and the control group had a mean of 3.62 on the HR items. And the former group had a mean of 4.24 and the control group had a mean of 4.03 on the LR items (see Table 7). A two-way (2X2) ANOVA with repeated measures on LA was conducted on the confidence-level pretest data, but the results revealed no statistically significant difference in confidence-level in making requests between these two groups,  $F(1, 136) = .37, p = .55$ . A statistically significant difference was, however, found in the learners’ confidence level

between when they used the LAs associated with the HR and LR,  $F(1, 136) = 26.93, p < .0001$ ; the latter mean was significantly higher than the former mean. There was no significant interaction between the group and LA,  $F(1, 136) = 1.37, p = .24$ .

Table 7

*Means and Standard Deviations of Confidence Level on the Pre- and Post- Tests*

Group	NI	Pretest				Posttest			
		HR		LR		HR		LR	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
PR	77	3.58	1.21	4.24	0.83	4.14	0.82	4.43	0.72
Control	63	3.62	0.93	4.03	0.89	4.13	0.68	4.06	0.69

*Notes.* NI = Number of Items.

On the confidence-level posttest, the PR group had a mean of 4.14 and the control group had a mean of 4.13 on the HR items. Correspondingly, the former group had a mean of 4.43 and the latter group had a mean of 4.06 on the LR items (see Table 7). A two-way (2X2) ANOVA with repeated measures on LA was conducted on the confidence-level posttest data (see Table 8). The results showed no statistically significant differences in (a) confidence-level in making requests between these two groups,  $F(1, 136) = 3.57, p = .06$ , (b) learners' confidence level between when they used the LAs associated with the HR and LR,  $F(1, 136) = 3.09, p = .18$  (see Table 8), nor (c) any significant interaction between the group and LA,  $F(1, 136) = 5.64, p = .02$ . Therefore, hypothesis 3 was not supported.

Table 8

*Analysis of Variance for Confidence Level on the Posttest*

Source	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Group	1	3.57	.06
LA	1	3.09	.08
Group x LA	1	5.64	.02
Error	138		

*Note.* LA = A Linguistic Assembly

## DISCUSSION

### *Research Question One*

To ascertain the effects of the treatment on learning requests in terms of pragmatic appropriateness, we analyzed the HAs produced on the DCT with an eye on the target forms employed in the two types of situations in which different combinations of sociolinguistic variables were embedded. In the PR group, 53.9% of all the items were of the target form (32.47% for the HR situations plus 21.43% for the LR situations). In the control group, on the other hand, the target form constituted 15.87% of all the items (12.70% for the HR situations plus 3.17% for the LR situations), see Table 1. The statistical analysis, then, found that the PR group used the target form significantly more often than the control group did. Therefore, it follows that the treatment of the implicit feedback had notable effects on Chinese learners of English in learning acceptable requests.

The effect size of the pragmatic recast treatment in relation to the control group in terms of appropriateness was  $d = 0.83$ , which is considered a large effect (Cohen, 1988). This effect size is close to Norris and Ortega's (2000) finding that focused L2 instructional treatments outperformed control (including comparison and baseline) conditions by  $d = 0.96$ .<sup>11</sup> The strength of association ( $\eta^2 = 0.257$ ) indicated that 25.7% of the variance in appropriate use of the target request conventions was attributable to the treatment of the pragmatic recasts.

The posttest results of the PR group appear to indicate their internalization of the cognitive mapping instead of mere imitation of the request conventions. During the treatment, not only do they seem to have recognized the linguistic forms, their function (i.e., request), the (role-plays) situations, and the appropriateness of the target request conventions, but they also seem to have reasonably established the cognitive mapping of these inextricably linked pragmatic parameters through the implicit feedback. This study's design served to illuminate their learning. Situations were set up in the role-play scenarios requiring the PR participants to make requests. During their interactions, the instructor let them figure out the pragmatic appropriateness of the request conventions through the diametrically opposite settings of the power, distance, and imposition variables, not to mention provision of the linguistically accurate forms. Even more importantly, one of the participants' tasks was—though they were unaware of it—to connect these sociolinguistic components with an invisible thread in their mind. In brief, the posttest results were indirect evidence of the participants' cognitive learning. Had the PR group not accomplished the cognitive mapping even reasonably well, the posttest results would not have shown the positive effects of the pragmatic recasts.

Why did the pragmatic recasts work sufficiently for teaching the target request conventions? The PR learners seemed to have noticed the linguistic contrast between the HAs they provided and the target HAs they received from the instructor. The post-treatment questionnaire inquired whether the PR participants, during the role-plays, noticed the teacher's pedagogical resource, "... You said ㄤ ... Sí ㄤ" All of them ( $n = 11$ ) said that they noticed it. Eleven of them stated that their ways of making requests were "not appropriate" or "not suitable" for a situation and therefore the instructor would encourage them to speak appropriately. In addition to the cognitive mapping of pragmatic parameters, which was explained in the last few paragraphs, a psycholinguistic component, noticing, was also involved in their learning. Schmidt's "noticing" hypothesis (1990, 1993a, 1993b, 2000), in a nutshell, states that focal awareness of language features must exist at the time of learning. The recasting also concerns the learners' cognitive comparisons between two linguistic structures. In first language acquisition, based on Nelson's (1987) rare event cognitive comparison theory, the direct contrast hypothesis (Saxton, 1997; Saxton, Kulcsar, Marshall, & Rupra, 1998) assumes

that children's and caretakers' linguistic forms are directly juxtaposed with each other. Recasts can inform children, if the children notice them, not only that their caretakers' form is grammatically correct, but also that the child's utterance is ungrammatical. The adult rejects the child's form while preferring an alternative form. This interaction thus provides the child with an ideal opportunity to observe the contrast in usage between the two forms. In second language acquisition, the concept of "noticing the gap" (Schmidt & Frota, 1986) corresponds with the idea of cognitive comparison; learners notice the gap between their interlanguage and the target language. With this cognitive comparison, learners receive negative and positive evidence. Their improvement through recasts is likely to be due to enhanced positive evidence rather than implicit negative evidence (Leeman, 2000).

The formulaic nature of the request conventions may have made the PR participants' task of cognitive comparison easy and efficient, at least easier and more efficient than is the case for sociopragmatics, which was the focus of Fukuya et al. (1998). Fukuya et al. (1998) employed "interaction enhancement" (Muranoi, 1996, 2000) for the treatment, comparing Focus on FormS (interactions followed by explicit debriefing on pragmatic forms) and Focus on Form (interactions followed by debriefing on meaning) against a control group (interactions followed by debriefing on the content-of-interaction). They operationalized the Focus on Form as the instructor's raising a sign that depicted a sad face when a student made an inappropriate utterance. This raised sign was accompanied by the instructor's repetition of the student's inappropriate utterance with a rising intonation. This implicit feedback facilitated the participants' task of figuring out the sociopragmatic rules of requests, more precisely, their task of establishing the cognitive mapping of power, social distance, and imposition situated within the requests. The present study, in contrast, was designed in a more focused way. The cognitive task of the PR group was to connect these three variables implicitly embedded in the role-play situations with eight specific request conventions. That task was more tangible and, as a consequence, more manageable for them than sociopragmatics was.

Despite the efficacy of the pragmalinguistic recasts as a group relative to the control group, the cognitive mapping of the PR participants was far from complete after the seven 50-minute treatments. The posttest of the PR group indicated that the eight target

forms constituted 72.72% of all the items regardless of whether these forms were used in appropriate situations or not, but that 53.9% of all the items were used in appropriate situations (either the HR or LR). Hence, in this group, the eight target forms constituted 18.82% (=72.72% minus 53.9%) of all the items in inappropriate situations, which was indicative of their incomplete cognitive mapping. In fact, three PR participants contributed to most of this 18.82%, which was the primary reason for high within-group variability as the standard deviations indicated in Table 2. To state it differently, those three participants did not benefit much from the recasts. This implies that the pragmalinguistic recasts interacted with individual factors, probably other than those which this study controlled—cultural background (Chinese), gender (female), age, and length of residence in English-speaking countries. Therefore, a possible topic for future research is to investigate the interactions between the pragmalinguistic recasts and individual variables, such as aptitude. Some researchers have conducted (Robinson, 1995) and recommended (DeKeyser, in press; Skehan, 1998) empirical studies of an interaction between explicit/implicit learning and aptitude on the syntactical level.

### ***Research Question Two***

Research question 2 examined the effects of the pragmatic recasts on learning requests in terms of grammatical accuracy. We analyzed the HA data with a focus on the target forms; to put it differently, when a learner produced non-target forms that were grammatically correct, we excluded these HAs from the statistical analysis. This is because, in the treatment, only when a PR participant provided the target request conventions that were grammatically inaccurate did the instructor give recasts to the linguistic forms.

Overall, as Table 4 displays, in the PR group the grammatically correct target forms constituted 41.56% (24.03% for the HR situations plus 17.53% for the LR situations) of all the items on the posttest. In contrast, in the control group, the grammatically correct target forms were 7.14% (3.97% for the HR situations plus 3.17% for the LR situations) of all the items. The ANOVA results, then, showed that the PR group used the grammatically correct target forms significantly more often than the control group did. This result signifies that the pragmatic recasts had positive effects on Chinese learners of

English in learning the target request conventions that were grammatically correct, since none of them on the pretest produced the target forms that were grammatically correct.

The effect size of the pragmatic recast treatment in relation to the control group in terms of grammatical accuracy was 0.87, which is, again, considered as a large effect (Cohen, 1988). This effect size is similar to Norris and Ortega's (2000) finding. The average effect size of four recast treatments was 0.81, two treatments being from Long, Inagaki and Ortega (1998) and the other two being from Mackey and Philp (1998), all of which focused on syntax. The strength of association ( $\eta^2 = 0.2608$ ) indicated that 26.08% of the variance in grammatically accurate use of the target request conventions was attributable to the treatment of the pragmatic recasts.

The learners' success rate regarding grammatical accuracy was high. To illustrate this rate, let us compare the eight target forms that were used just pragmatically appropriately with the same eight target forms that were used pragmatically appropriately *and* grammatically correctly. The posttest of the PR group (see Table 1) demonstrated that the pragmatically appropriate eight target forms constituted 53.9% of all the items (32.47% for the HR situations plus 21.43% for the LR situations). Correspondingly, Table 4 shows that the pragmatically appropriate *and* grammatically correct eight target forms constituted 41.56% of all the items (24.03% for the HR situations plus 17.53% for the LR situations). This disparity implies that for the PR group the eight target forms that were grammatically incorrect constituted only 12.34% (53.9% minus 41.56%) of all the target items.

In terms of grammatical accuracy, why were the learners quite successful in producing the target request conventions? The Chinese learners did not have to go through a syntactic analysis of the request HAs. Instead, they may have simply combined the linguistic chunks with some creative constituents as these request conventions are formulaic speech learners generally process and use as unanalyzed wholes. The formulaic speeches, as Hakuta (1976) and Krashen and Scarcella (1978) distinguished, could be routines (viz., learners internalize whole utterances as memorized chunks) or patterns (viz., learners learn part of utterances as memorized chunks and produce them by combining them with other creative constituents). The request conventions for the present study were the latter case. Furthermore, these conventions are "conventions of means"



(Kasper, 1995), which refer to semantic structures that have a standardized illocutionary force. An error analysis of grammatically incorrect target forms (i.e., the request conventions were used in an appropriate HR or LR situation, but they were grammatically incorrect) in the PR group demonstrated that one particular participant combined *Would you mind ...* with bare forms of verbs without *~ ing* six times. Some participants used *Was it possible to ...* instead of *Would it be possible to ...*; others employed *I wonder if I can ...* in place of *I was wondering if you ...*. Even these pragmatically appropriate but grammatically incorrect examples seem to demonstrate that the Chinese learners stored these expressions as patterns.

A match between the teaching styles and the participants' learning styles might have reinforced their learning of formulaic speeches. The way the instructor taught the conventions seems to be in concordance with the way Chinese learners learned the linguistic forms of the conventions, although this cognitive learning remains speculative. The instructor orally presented the conventions without analyzing them grammatically in on-going interactions, the instructional process that may have guided most of the PR learners through a "cognitive window" (Doughty & Williams, 1998b) of processing the conventions in a certain manner. In cognitive psychology, the exemplar-based processing model claims that individuals store memory of whole exemplars (Brooks, 1978, 1987; Jacoby & Brooks, 1984). Following this model, the present study was designed to assist the learners in storing memory of request conventions as whole exemplars through the implicit feedback. Moreover, one of the defining characteristics of implicit learning is that the acquired knowledge is difficult to express (Berry, 1997; Berry & Dienes, 1993; Reber, 1967, 1989; Winter & Reber, 1994). The post-treatment questionnaire asked the Chinese learners to verbalize the rules of making requests, even though the instructor employed the implicit instructional technique. Only one of the 11 PR participants rightly articulated which request conventions are supposed to be used when she was speaking to "a person with a higher position" and "a lower position." The juxtaposition of this low rate of verbalization and the high rate of appropriate use of the request conventions seems to be a clear indication of their implicit learning.

The pragmalinguistic recasts adopted in this study differ from those on morphology, syntax, and lexis in three respects. First, the pragmalinguistic recasts, as the framework of

the pragmalinguistic recasts outlines, concern both the pragmatic appropriateness and linguistic accuracy of learners' utterances. Second, recasts on morphology and syntax have obligatory contexts, whereas the pragmalinguistic recasts do not have such obligatory contexts; rather, the pragmalinguistic recasts have merely a certain range of appropriateness. As an illustration, consider contexts for recasts in which learners must use the past tense of a verb, say, *took*, instead of the present tense, *take*. In contrast, many possible contexts exist for pragmalinguistic recasts in which learners could employ either *Could you possibly...?* or *I was wondering if you ...*, but not *I want you to ....* Yet there remains the issue of which linguistic resource native speakers of English use more frequently depending on the context.

Finally, unlike recasts on morphology, syntax, and vocabulary, pragmalinguistic recasts may break off on-going interactions (G. Kasper, personal communication, December 2, 2002). Morphological, syntactical, and lexical recasts are brief in form—consisting of just one morpheme, one word, and a few structural elements. On the other hand, pragmalinguistic recasts are longer on the sentential level and thus may direct learners' attention away from the ongoing interactions more than the morphological, syntactical, and lexical recasts do. The instructor of this study observed three cases regarding the flow of the interactions:

1. An interactant noticed the instructor's recast, repeated the instructor's appropriate request convention, and continued with the interaction after a brief pause.
2. An interactant did not repeat the instructor's appropriate request convention, but paused for a moment and continued with the interaction.
3. An interactant just ignored a recast and went on without a pause.

The former two cases are examples of breaking off the flow of the interactions.

However, it is our belief that this instructional break-off does not carry negative, pedagogical and theoretical implications; on the contrary, this focus on form technique on the pragmatic level should be considered appropriate. The focus on form involves the learners' engagement in meaning during which instructors briefly intervene the meaning-exchange for the purpose of an intermittent attentional shift to linguistic features (Doughty & Williams, 1998a; Long & Robinson, 1998). On the basis of the psycholinguistic literature, Doughty (2000) suggests that the "cognitive window"

(Doughty & Williams, 1998b) for provision for focus on form may be as long as 40 seconds when learners can rehearse linguistic items in the perceptual store and when their already stored interlanguage knowledge is engaged. This suggestion is especially based on the current conceptualization of working memory. This is Cowan's (1988, 1993) view that working memory is a hierarchical construct representing the currently activated portion of the memory system that comprises the current focus of attention.

In summary, learning through pragmalinguistic recasts involves a coordination of, at least, attention (Schmidt, 2000; Simard & Wong, 2001; Tomlin & Villa, 1994), cognitive comparison, exemplar-based processing, working memory, and cognitive-mapping, which can lead to pragmatic restructuring.

### ***Research Question Three***

Takahashi (2001) motivated research question 3. In her study, the Explicit Teaching group, who obtained metapragmatic information on the form-function relationship of the request strategies, demonstrated a greater degree of increase in their confidence in formulating requests. This finding was understandable because they received explicit information on appropriate request forms. So can the pragmalinguistic recasts boost learners' confidence in making their requests?

The pretest (see Table 7) of the present study (on a scale of 0 to 5) showed that the two groups had a nearly equal level of confidence. The PR group had a mean of 3.91 (the average of 3.58 and 4.24) and the control group had a mean of 3.83 (the average of 3.62 and 4.03). Another similarity was that both the PR and control groups felt more confident answering in the DCT situations when they were speaking to an interlocutor of lower status significantly more than when they were answering the items in which they were speaking to an interlocutor of higher status. These findings seem to indicate that both groups were uncertain about their own ability to speak English appropriately to an interlocutor of higher status in comparison with their ability to do so to an interlocutor of lower status.

On the posttest (see Table 7), the two groups again showed an almost equal level of confidence. The PR group had a mean of 4.29 (the average of 4.14 and 4.43), and the control group had a mean of 4.10 (the average of 4.13 and 4.06). Unlike on the pretest,

the posttest did not show any significant difference in their levels of confidence between when both PR and control groups were answering the HR situations (i.e., speaking to an interlocutor of higher status) and when they were answering the LR situations (i.e., speaking to an interlocutor of lower status).

Now let us compare the Chinese learners' levels of confidence on the pretest with those on the posttest. Both groups retained their level of confidence from the pretest to the posttest for the LR situations, but they improved their confidence levels on the posttest over the pretest for the HR situations. The statistical analyses, then, confirmed the significant improvement by the two groups for the HR situations, because a statistically significant difference was found between the two types of LAs on the pretest, but not on the posttest. Because both groups enhanced their confidence levels for the HR situations, this study concludes that the pragmatic recasts did not boost the Chinese learners' confidence. Instead, the improvement might have been due to an interaction effect of the role-plays. Whether they received the recasts or not, they may have built up confidence in speaking to an interlocutor of higher status as they performed the 14 role-plays with the instructor and their peers during the seven-day period.

## CONCLUSION

This study was theoretically motivated and primarily investigated the effects of recasts on Chinese learners of English in learning eight pragmalinguistic conventions of request in a foreign language setting. The results of this study yielded large effect sizes for pragmatic recasts: Cohen's (1988)  $d = 0.83$  on learning pragmatically appropriate requests; Cohen's  $d = 0.87$  on learning pragmatically appropriate *and* grammatically accurate requests. We compared the PR group with a control group who merely performed the role-plays without receiving any pragmatic recasts.

Employing the DCTs, we measured these effects through the learners' production ability to make requests with a focus on the HAs. We employed the DCTs because they were a sufficient and valid instrument to elicit the request HAs. The reliability of the DCT (the posttest) was  $\alpha = 0.86$  for the seven HR items, which can be considered "good" (George & Mallery, 2003, p. 231), and  $\alpha = 0.67$  for the seven LR items.<sup>12</sup> However

reliably and validly we assessed the participants' improvement, one critical perspective of this measurement is that this study relied solely on one assessment instrument, which raises the issue of task effect.<sup>13</sup> A number of studies have reported task effects (viz., task-induced interlanguage variation) on empirical research findings in different language areas: phonology (Sato, 1985); morphology (Larsen-Freeman, 1976); syntax (Schmidt, 1980); pragmatics (Brown, 2001; Hinkel, 1997; Hudson, 2001; Rintell & Mitchell, 1989; Rose, 1994a). Rintell and Mitchell (1989) attested to the fact that the oral role-play responses were, on average, longer than the DCT responses in English requests and apologies. Hinkel (1997) reported that Chinese learners of English favored less direct advice on the DCTs than they did on the multiple-choice questionnaires. We fully acknowledge the possibility of a task effect on the findings of this study. The task effect of the DCT may derive from a drawback of the instrument, namely, "the underspecification of scenarios" (Kasper & Dahl, 1991; Rose, 2001, p. 320). DCTs are generally constructed in such a way that, in order to complete the task, participants supply contextual information of their own due to lack of detailed information on the contexts, a process that is unquestionably unwelcome.

Another limitation of this study related to the use of DCTs may lie in the lack of metapragmatic assessment of contextual features (Rose & Ng, 2001). Through the pilot studies (see Note 5), we have taken the time to develop 14 DCT items. The participants were, moreover, a relatively homogeneous population in terms of their cultural background (Chinese), gender (female), and academic/linguistic experiences (majoring in English; either freshman or sophomore; having never lived in an English-speaking country). Even Spencer-Oatey's (1993) study, which demonstrated different conceptualizations of status among people with the different socio-cultural background, provided evidence that people with the same socio-cultural background tended to have similar conceptualizations of a given role relationship. However, a word of caution seems in order here. We did not validate, through metapragmatic assessment, how the participants perceived the context-external factors (viz., power, social distance, and familiarity) in these scenarios.

Any empirical studies are a trade-off between internal validity (i.e., the extent to which variables are tightly controlled) and external validity (i.e., the extent to which the

findings of a study are generalizable to other contexts). In simple terms, the more the researchers control the variables, especially in experimental studies, the less the findings tend to be generalizable to other education contexts. The present experimental study was designed and executed in such a way that the Chinese learners, through implicit feedback, could unravel the complex web of the pragmalinguistic conventions of request while going with the flow of the dynamic role-play interactions. Whereas, for this purpose, we carefully manipulated the instructional procedure, this study has moderate ecological validity as well, contrary to the conventional idea of the validity trade-off. In effect, teachers can readily prepare for role-plays comparable to the ones used in this study. With a practical, pedagogical purpose (viz., promotion of oral communication with its clear themes of American culture), we also conducted this study in an actual classroom setting. Indeed, the findings of this study appear to be generalizable to a population that has the following six human, environmental, and evaluating characteristics:

1. Chinese learners of English
2. Learners with an intermediate English proficiency
3. College students majoring in English
4. Female
5. A foreign language setting
6. Learners' pragmatic improvement measured by learners' productive ability through a DCT

Nonetheless, for any instructors to make the pragmalinguistic instruction effective, as this study has demonstrated, the foci should be narrow, the combination(s) of sociolinguistic variables selective, and the treatment focused, consistent, and lasting.

This study targeted learners with intermediate English proficiency. Specifically, most of the participants were proficient enough to combine successfully a pragmalinguistic chunk with a creative constituent. For instance, they could combine *Would you mind* with *call my husband* by adding *-ing*. Although we could have targeted beginning learners, the pragmatic recasts on the bi-clausal request conventions (e.g., I was wondering if you could...; I'd be very grateful if you...; I'd really appreciate it if you...) may not be particularly effective for the beginning learners, because they are not likely to notice a discrepancy between their interlanguage and the target language during on-line

interactions. Even if they did notice the linguistic discrepancy, they may not be able to incorporate the target language form into their interlanguage system. Another reason is that beginning learners would be overwhelmed by the cognitive demand of processing a linguistic form as well as the mapping of the inextricably linked pragmatic components in dynamic interactions. The effects of pragmatic recasts on beginning learners are, nevertheless, an empirical question.<sup>14</sup> Other pragmalinguistic forms may be more appropriate for recasts.

Any research studies need to limit their investigative scope for practical reasons; the present study was no exception. The foci of the present study were on the eight target forms of request conventions, four of which were considered appropriate for the HR situations, and the other four of which were for the LR situations. In spite of these associations between the target forms and their appropriate situations in the present study, the fact is that a speaker can make an appropriate request by using an HA other than these target forms. The *Can/Could/Will/Would you ~* form is an example of this case for the LR situations. Conversely, a speaker can make an inappropriate request by using one of the target forms, especially when internal and external modifications are not at a speaker's disposal. So, has this study really cultivated the Chinese learners' sense of pragmatic appropriateness? Maybe, it has not much. The concept of request is holistic; the eight target HA forms are merely a tiny part of the construct. Limiting the scope, the primary purpose of the study was not to remarkably improve their interactional competence (such as their ability of pragmatic appropriateness), but to examine the effects of pragmatic recasts on their learning. It was our intention that the learners, through implicit feedback, would establish the cognitive mapping of the linguistic target forms, the function (request), the (role-plays and DCT) situations in which three sociolinguistic variables are embedded, and the appropriateness of the target request conventions. This study has indirectly demonstrated that the PR group actually did so.

While we acknowledge that implicit pragmatic instruction in a second language is an arduous task, this study represents a small but valuable step towards a common goal among a number of researchers, namely, the demonstration of the positive effects of instruction on learners' interlanguage. Indeed, more research on pragmatic recasts is called for. This is partly because some experimental studies have demonstrated the

effects of recasts in the areas of syntax and lexis, yet the applicability of recasts to the area of pragmatics has been uncertain until the present study. And it is especially because two dozen empirical studies of instructed ILP in the last two decades appear to have had an explicit orientation in their research designs.



## Notes

1. These eight target forms were derived from Fukuya and Clark (2001) and the pilot study of the present study, in the latter of which native speakers of American English took a discourse completion test. In addition, because many different but perfectly appropriate request conventions exist in one context, we took other factors into consideration: (a) We eliminated query preparatory (*Can/Could/Will/Would you ~?*) and permission (*Can/Could/May I ~?*) in the LR situations because the participants presumably knew them; and (b) we excluded *Could you perhaps ...?* in the HR situations because it was not our intention to teach the function of hedges such as *perhaps* in this study, unlike Fukuya (1998) and Wishnoff (1999).
2. In this framework, some exceptions exist: Query preparatory (*Can you ~?*; *Would you ~?*) in LR scenarios. Although these request conventions are acceptable, we recast these requests by using the target forms for an instructional purpose. On the last day of the experiment, the instructor mentioned to the students that although expressions, like *Can you ~?* and *Would you ~?*, were appropriate for these situations, she implicitly corrected them for an instructional purpose.
3. Before carrying out the present experiment, we had a 100-minute practice session of the focused recast with a male Chinese learner of English living in the U.S. The purpose of this practice was to find out: (a) whether the 14 role-play scenarios were reasonable for him to perform; (b) whether the teacher can give recasts to his pragmatic errors appropriately or not; and (c) what types of request HAs would show up in the 14 scenarios.
4. When learners used two HAs in one role-play scenario, the teacher recast both of them.
5. We collected the 14 DCT items from Fukuya and Clark (2001), Fukuya et al. (1998), Hill (1997), and Hudson, Detmer, and Brown (1995). We are grateful to Professors Hill, Hudson, Detmer, Brown, and the National Foreign Language Resource Center at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa (Director: R. Schmidt) for granting us permission to use their items. We not only revised most of the DCT situations to make them easier for a prospective Chinese target population to understand, but we also provided Chinese translations for some vocabulary words in the items. We then piloted these DCT items on two native speakers of American English in the U.S. and two Chinese

learners of English in Harbin, China, whose English proficiency levels were presumably similar to the level of the target population. We thank Mr. Ye Tian for assistance with the pilot study in China.

6. The two actual questions of the questionnaire were (a) Did you notice that the teacher sometimes said, "... You said ㄤ ... Sí ㄤ" during the role-plays? If your answer is yes, please describe in English why you think she did it; (b) Did you try to find the rules of making requests? If your answer is yes, please describe in English what you have discovered.
7. A few examples of our decision on the grammatical correctness are as follows: (a) Intensifiers, *very* and *really*, in *I'd be very grateful if you ...* and *I'd really appreciate it if you ...* respectively, were optional. (b) Both *Do you mind if you ...?* and *Would you mind if you ...?* were rewarded.
8. We asked a fourth research question: Which assembly of request conventions, ones associated with the HR on one hand, or ones associated with the LR on the other hand, is more learnable through pragmatic recasts? Linguistic Assembly signifies two groups of the request conventions. We omitted a report on this question, however. Because of this fourth research question, we conducted Two-Way ANOVA for research questions 1, 2, and 3, instead of using *t*-tests.
9. For the calculation of Cohen's (1988) *d*, descriptive statistics regarding the pragmatic appropriateness (for research question 1) are as follows: The treatment group (Number of items = 154; Mean = 0.54; *SD* = 0.50) and the control group (Number of items = 126; Mean = 0.17; *SD* = 0.37).
10. For the calculation of Cohen's (1988) *d*, descriptive statistics concerning the grammatical accuracy (for research question 2) are as follows: The treatment group (Number of items = 154; Mean = 0.42; *SD* = 0.49) and the control group (Number of items = 126; Mean = 0.07; *SD* = 0.26).
11. Forty-five studies provided sufficient interpretable data to calculate an effect size estimate for the quantitative meta-analysis. All of these studies focused on morphology, syntax, and lexis, except Bouton (1994b), Kubota (1995), and Lyster (1994), the former two studies focusing on conversational implicature and the last one exploring speech acts, registers, and the use of the *tu/vous* distinction.

12. Although there is no consensus as to what is an acceptable Cronbach alpha value, a rule of thumb that can be applied to most situations is as follows:  $\alpha > .9$  - excellent;  $\alpha > .8$  - good;  $\alpha > .7$  - acceptable;  $\alpha > .6$  - questionable;  $\alpha > .5$  - poor;  $\alpha < .5$  - unacceptable (George & Mallery, 2003, p. 231).
13. Actually, we administered pragmatic judgment tasks as well. However, we concentrated on reporting the DCT results here because the pragmatic judgment tasks for this study were still at an embryonic stage and needed further pilot studies for their development.
14. No empirical research on recasts on syntax and vocabulary (Doughty & Varela, 1998; Long, Inagaki, & Ortega, 1998; Mackey & Philp, 1998; Mito, 1993; Rabie, 1996) has been directed at beginning learners.

#### **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

We would like to thank Prof. Wenpei Xu and staff in the English Department at Heilongjing University, China, for assistance. We are also grateful to professors Shuqiang Zhang, Gabrielle Kasper, Craig Chaudron, Catherine Doughty, and James D. Brown for their comments.

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**Appendix: Two examples of HR and LR role-play scenarios****A HR scenario:**

You are revising your thesis, which is due in two weeks. You need five articles recently published on your topic, *The Computer of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Although the library on campus does not have them, the library can ask other libraries in other states to send you the copies. This usually takes you at least one month to receive them. Because these five papers deal with the recent development of your topic, it will add much weight to your thesis if you include them. This will also increase the chance of getting your paper published. You go to the head of Book Management Office (Miss. Anderson) to ask her to get these five articles in one week.

**A LR scenario:**

You are the director of a computer lab. A graduate assistant, Joan, has a duty to delete trash files in the computer every day. Today you wanted to install software into the computer. However, you found out that the trash files took too much space. It seems that Joan has not deleted trash files for several days. You ask Joan to delete them immediately.

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