# The Effect of Pragmatic Instruction on Developing Learners' Use of Request Modifiers in the EFL Context

Mia Huimin Chen[1], Shelly Xueting Ye[1], Jingxin He[2], & Don Dong Yao[1,3]

[1] Department of English, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, University of Macau, Macau, China

[2] Lingos English Education Studio, Zhoushan, Zhejiang, China

[3] China Jiliang University, Hangzhou, Zhejiang, China

Correspondence: Shelly Xueting Ye, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, University of Macau, Avenida da Universidade, Taipa, Macau, China.

**Abstract**

The aim of this study is to evaluate the effects of three teaching approaches: a deductive teaching approach, an inductive teaching approach, and an inductive-deductive teaching approach on facilitating Chinese EFL learners' use of request modifiers. Written discourse completion tasks were employed to collect learners' request data and a follow-up interview reported Chinese EFL learners' overall positive attitudes towards pragmatic instruction with a preference for the deductive approach. The findings presented the necessity for instructions of request in EFL contexts and reveal the superiority of the inductive-deductive teaching approach on pragmatic knowledge. Combing the results of the experiment with learners' perceptions, it indicates that practitioners should consider incorporating both deductive and inductive instructions to fit learners' preferences of instructional styles and learning needs. Besides, in terms of learners' pragmatic competence, such a teaching approach would also guarantee the treatment effect in both short and long runs.

**Keywords:** teaching approaches, EFL learners, request modifiers, pragmatic competence

## 1. Introduction

The needed knowledge for appropriate and effective communication is closely related to pragmatic competence which is another vital component of communicative competence in Bachman's (1990) communicative competence model. As the development of the pragmatic competence is not always consistent with linguistic proficiency (Allami & Naeimi, 2011), language learners with adequate level of grammatical and lexical competence may still fail to express or interpret the intended illocutionary force or politeness value due to their pragmatic errors (Blum-Kulka, 2019). Hence, to make learners communicatively competent, developing pragmatic competence should also be valued in L2 teaching and learning. Given the limited opportunities to use the target language and the limited authentic pragmatic input in terms of speech acts provided in EFL context (Alcon-Soler & Safont, 2005), classroom instruction is decisive for learners to acquire L2 pragmatic knowledge and their development of pragmatic competence (Wang et al., 2018). Moreover, discrepancies in terms of social and cultural norms existing between their L1 and L2 may be indiscernible to learners without being explicitly pointed out (Halenko & Jones, 2011), which again justifies the necessity of instruction in an EFL classroom. Much empirical research on interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) development has focused on the effects of instruction on learners' development of pragmatic competence (e.g., Alcon-Soler & Safont, 2005; Félix-Brasdefer, 2008; Martínez-Flor & Fukuya, 2005). Mainly reporting the effectiveness of explicit instruction in non-Chinese EFL contexts, these studies, however, fail to answer how 'explicit' L2 pragmatic knowledge should be instructed to learners (Li, 2012).

To seek proper teaching approaches for pragmatic instruction in Chinese EFL classrooms, we examined the effectectiveness of three explicit instructional teaching approaches: a deductive teaching approach typically used in Chinese contexts, a 'western' inductive teaching approach, and a compromising inductive-deductive teaching approach in pragmatic instruction. As the speech act of request is the most frequently performed speech act in daily and cross-cultural communication (Deveci & Hmida, 2017), this study evaluated the effectiveness of different instructional approaches through comparing learners' use of request modifiers before and after the instruction.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Necessity of Pragmatic Instruction in EFL Context

As L2 pragmatic knowledge plays an essential role in appropriate cross-cultural communication, it is crucial to develop learners' L2 pragmatic competence (Bachman, 1990). Bardovi-Harlig (2001) argued learners' L2 pragmatic competence development could be determined by the availability of input, influence of instruction, the level of proficiency, and transfer. In the EFL context, all these factors are closely related to the instructional context. Regarding the *input* availability, the EFL context is seen as inferior to the ESL context where authentic input is more likely to be readily available (Cohen, 2008). Besides, input for EFL learners is highly restrained in the

classroom. Teachers select the target speech acts and model sequential position of linguistic formulae and realization strategies (Ohta, 1994). Such teacher-fronted input is bound to classroom settings and is rather simplified compared to the actual communication in the real world (Illes & Akcan 2017). In terms of pragmatic instructional materials, studies (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig, 2001; Alcon-Soler & Safont, 2005; Salazar & Uso-Juan, 2001) reported inadequacy in teaching content and resources. Providing learners with only linguistic forms is highly unlikely to achieve intended pragmatic development. Hence, an innovation in the quantity and content of the pragmatic instructional material in EFL contexts is needed.

Adult learners get a considerable amount of L2 pragmatic knowledge from the *transfer* of the universal discourse features and pragmatic knowledge, and their L1 pragmatic knowledge (Rose, 2001). Discourse features, including conversation organization skills (e.g., turn-taking, sequencing of contribution) and basic principles for effective communication (e.g., the cooperative principle [Grice, 1975], the politeness theory [Brown & Levinson, 1987]), universally regulate the communicative actions throughout different communities. The main categories of the communicative acts (e.g., greeting, leave-takings, requests, apologies, and complaints) are available in all communities and the realization strategies for these communicative acts show a universality across ethnolinguistically distant speech communities (Rose, 2001).

Although positive transfer of L1 leads to the acquisition in both pragma-linguistic and socio-linguistic knowledge in certain contexts (Rose, 2001), the available pragmatic knowledge may not turn into property when learners do not have an adequate level of *language proficiency*. According to Schmidt's (1993) noticing hypothesis, pragmatic knowledge needs to be registered under awareness before being internalized by learners. Bialystok's (1991) cognitive-psychological model of pragmatic competence development suggests that, learners need to develop control over attentional resources and be selective about appropriate linguistic resources for the given context. Therefore, instruction is vital to help learners notice what they have already known and create opportunities for learners to practice their available L2 pragmatic knowledge. Recent effects-of-instruction studies on pragmatics have reported significant improvement in learners' production of desired speech acts (e.g., El Shazly, 2017; Katsos & Bishop, 2011; Li, 2012).

*2.2 Nature of Request and Modification*

*Request* is regarded as an illocutionary act which is carried out by a requester conveying to a requestee the wish of wanting the requestee to perform an act for the benefit of the requester but is not of requestee's own accord (Trosborg, 1995). The directive and exhortative characteristics of request make it face-threatening (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Request head act and request modification devices are the two components constituting the structure of request (Li, 2012): the head act is the core of request which realizes actual request function through a range of linguist devices verified in levels of directness; and modifications are optional items which are attached internally or externally to the head act with an attempt to soften the illocutionary force of utterances (Trosborg, 1995).

As linguistic forms related to the directness of the request vary across ethnolinguistic groups, making appropriate requests is more challenging for L2 learners. Completing desired actions in the target language, however, is significant for L2 learners as they may need to make requests to a variety of interlocutors with different social status and distance (Schauer, 2009). In terms of instruction on request, Thomas (1983) suggested, both pragma-linguistic and socio-pragmatic aspects should be considered to help learners avoid the pragmatic failures in request production.

Giving instruction on request modification devices is omni-relevant for the appropriate production of request. Faerch and Kasper (1989) framed internal and external modifications by localizing the internal modifications within the head act and framing the external modifications out of the head act. Specifically, internal modification devices are syntactic, lexical or phrasal devices mitigating the perceived threat of the speech act; the external modification constitutes supportive moves without directly modifying the illocutionary force (Faerch & Kasper, 1989). To be more specific, the development of internal modification is highly relevant to one's degree of automatic in synaptic parsing while adding lexical or phrasal modifiers to a head act may increase the formal complexity; the application of external modification would increase the discoursal complexity as it involves selection of topic or information which provides reasons for the request or prepares for the request (Trosborg, 1995). However, modifications (both internal and external) do not alter the level of directness of the act and its propositional content (Halupka-Rešetar, 2014).

According to Blum- Kulka, (1989), internal and external modifiers are two important parameters which help encode the request strategies linguistically. Drawn upon Woodfield's (2012) taxonomy, the present study, applied both internal and external modifiers as parameters to evaluate learners' acquisition of pragma-linguistic knowledge of request. To elicit rich quantitative data in learners' use of request modification devices in various social contexts, the study adopted three socio-contextual approaches: deductive, inductive, and deductive-inductive, in the design of written discourse completion tasks (WDCTs).

*2.3 Explicit Instruction: Deductive, Inductive, and Deductive-inductive Approach*

A wide range of interlanguage pragmatic (ILP) studies (e.g., House, 1996; Takahashi, 2001; Halenko & Jones, 2011) have focused on the effects of instruction in various pragmatic aspects. According to Doughty (2008), *explicit instruction* refers to all types of pedagogical interventions which deal with rules by providing learners with the specific metalinguistic explanation or directing learners to find the rules through attending to forms. The studies of explicit instruction revealed its effectiveness in teaching various pragmatic aspects (i.e., pragmatic awareness, pragmatic strategies, and pragma-linguistic forms). However, it is less clear concerning the effects of different explicit instructional approaches.

Explicit instruction typically involves the provision of the rules of the target language. Explicit instruction of rules can be realized either deductively (e.g., House, 1996; Takahashi, 2001) or inductively (Halenko & Jones, 2011). Deductive instruction offers specific metalinguistic explanation of the rules to learners and allows them to practice these rules with examples and expects learners (Decoo, 1996; Dekeyser, 2008). Inductive approach directs learners to work out the rules by attending to a series of examples which consist of the target features of the target language (Dekeyser, 2008).

Bunches of studies that examined the effects of deductive and inductive teaching approaches (e.g., Trosborg & Shaw, 1998; Takimoto, 2008) or a method combining both approaches (i.e., an inductive-deductive teaching approach) (e.g., Martinez-Flor, 2012) have reported a positive treatment effect. However, few researchers have compared the effectivess of all the three approaches. Although comparisons have been made between inductive and deductive approaches, no conclusive results were demonstrated. For example, Trosborg and Shaw (1998) compared a deductive versus an inductive approach in the teaching strategies of responding to complaints, but reported no major differences. Results of Rose and Kwai-Fun's (2001) study indicated that inductive instruction is more useful in terms of teaching compliments and compliment responses in Hong Kong. Takimoto (2008) investigated the effects of different teaching approaches on the acquisition of four request strategies among Japanese EFL learners and found that inductive instruction had made the pragmatic knowledge more accessible for learners than deductive instruction do in long-term.

## 3. Purpose of This Study

The current study intends to compare the effectiveness of three explicit approaches (i.e., a deductive instruction, an inductive instruction, and an inductive-deductive instruction) in developing learners' use of request modifiers in EFL context. Findings in the current study are expected to fill several research gaps: (a) the instruction effect on learners' acquisition of pragma-linguistic knowledge of request modifers is still unclear; (b) a limited number of research has compared the effectiveness of all the three approaches (i.e., a deductive instruction, an inductive instruction, and an inductive-deductive instruction) in pragmatic instruction; (c) insufficient attention has been paid to the treatment effect of the three approaches in both short-term and long-run. This investigation is believed to provide significant pedagogical implications to the pragmatic instruction in EFL context, especially in the Chinese context where the deductive teacher-fronted instruction is the dominant approach used in English learning classes (Li, 2012). These research purposes will be achieved by adressing the following research questions (RQs):

- **RQ1:** Do Chinese EFL learners use a greater number of appropriate request modifiers after being involved in three types of instructions (i.e., a deductive instruction, an inductive instruction, and an inductive-deductive instruction)?

- **RQ2:** How do request modifiers (i.e., internal modifiers: lexical/phrasal, internal modifiers: syntactic, and external modifiers) change after receiving the three types of instructions?

## 4. Methodology

### 4.1 The Experimental Design

To assess the effects of the three teaching approaches on learners' use of request modifiers, learners were divided into four groups in this study. Three of them were assigned as the experimental groups. They learned the target request modifiers using the deductive, the inductive, and the inductive-deductive teaching approaches, respectively. The remaining participants served as the control group and received none of these instructions, but they had lessons designed to facilitate their performance in two tasks of the IELTS oral test.

First, authentic film excerpts were adopted as the main instructional materials instead of existing textbooks, hence avoided constrains of the instructional content. Second, as all participants were taking the IELTS preparation courses focusing on test-taking skills, the likelihood of interruption from other instruction on pragmatic knowledge was greatly reduced. Finally, the random group assignment assured the similarity in learners' language and pragmatic proficiency.

The speech act data was collected in the pretest, immediate-posttest and delayed posttest. The pretest took place three days before instructions and the immediate-posttest was implemented at the end of the instructional period while the delayed-posttest took place three weeks later after the immediate-posttest. WDCTs were used to elicit the data of requests. To ensure the comparability of results, the same WDCTs were used in all three test phases. A retrospective interview was applied at the end of the delayed-posttest to investigate learners' pragmatic knowledge development and their perception towards these instructions.

### 4.2 Instruments

WDCTs

The questionnaire included situtations that were adapted from existing studies (Martinez-Flor, 2008) for the purpose of findings comparability (see Table 1). The uses of request are affected by the socio-contextual variables of social distance, power/status and the degree of imposition. The WDCT situations in this study focused on students' management of social distance and power, while the degree of imposition was held constant. As all the participants were students, it was less likely for them to make a request to requestees with lower status than them. Hence, the situation S>H was not included in the DCT items and four items i.e., –SD, S<H; -SD, S=H; +SD, S<H; +SD, S=H were enough to ensure all combinations of variables. As the participant sample was limited, DCT items were doubled to eight to generate a total number of 160 head acts.

Table 1. *S*ummary of Written Discourse Completion Tasks

| Request Situation | Socio-contextual Variables | Resources |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Entry | -SD ,S<H, DI:L | Adapted from Martinez-Flor (2008) |
| 2. Help | +SD, S<H, DI:L | Adapted from Martinez-Flor (2008) |
| 3. Leave | +SD, S=H, DI:L | Adapted from Martinez-Flor (2008) |
| 4. Notes | -SD ,S=H, DI:H | Adapted from Martinez-Flor (2008) |
| 5.Feedback | -SD ,S=H, DI:H | Adapted from Woodfield (2010) |
| 6. Credit | -SD ,S=H, DI:H | Adapted from Martinez-Flor (2008) |
| 7.Extension | +SD, S<H, DI:H | Adapted from Woodfield (2012) |
| 8. Group work | +SD, S= H, DI:H | Adapted from Woodfield (2012) |

SD: Social distance +close –distant S:speaker H:Hear

S=H both S and H share equal status S<H the status of the S is lower than H

DI: degree of imposition H:the degree of imposition is high, L the degree of imposition is low

*4.3 Instruction*

The instruction for the deductive instructed group (DI) was essentially an application of *Modality A* in Decoo's (1996) deduction-induction continuum by teaching the use of request modifiers in various contexts. The inductive instructed group (II) applied *Modality B* by directing learners to find the rules of the appropriate use of request modifiers. The inductive-deductive instructed group (ID) adopted *Modality C* by letting the learners explore the use of target request modifiers through a series of activities. Then, the instructor would give a summary of the rules. There were three 2-hour instructional sessions for each group, while all the sessions were administered once every other day within a week. All of the three experimental groups were instructed on the same target pragmatic structures of request. In contrast, the control group was instructed on test-taking skills for the questions in IELTS oral test. Rose (2001) deemed that instructors should utilize film excerpts that resemble real life so as to facilitate learners' application of knowledge. On this account, this study selected 12 films which were produced from 1990 to 2014, as instructional resources. Nine out of the twelve films were adopted from Martinez-Flor's (2008) research which investigated the use of films as instructional resources in the EFL classrooms, and the other three films were also selected according to the criteria described in Martinez-Flor's (2008) study. First, different request situations were identified in all the films. All request situations were then transcribed in their full conversational context. Subsequently, the taxonomy of modification devices proposed by Woodfield (2012) was used to identify the modification devices. There were two main types of modifiers, namely, internal and external modifiers. The eight sub-types of internal modifiers (lexical/phrasal) were the target features of *session 1*, six sub-types of internal modifiers (syntactic) were taught in *session 2* while the 11 sub-types of external mitigators were instructed in *session 3* (see Table 2).

Table 2. Targeted Features of each Instructional Session for Three Experimental Groups

| Session | Target features for instruction |
|---|---|
| Session 1 | **8 Internal modifiers (lexical/phrasal) :** Marker'please', Consultative devices, Downtoners, Understaters/Hedge, Subjectivisers, Cajolers, Appealers, Appreciative embedding |
| Session 2 | **6 Internal modification devices(syntactic):** Conditional structures, Conditional clause, Tense, Aspect, Interrogative, Negotiation of preparatory condition |
| Session 3 | **11External modification devices :** Grounder, Disarmer, Preparator, Getting a precommitment, Promise, Imposition minimiser, Apology, Discourse orientation move, Smalltalk, Appreciator, Considerator |

The instruction of socio-pragmatic knowledge would be explained according to the specific situations in the film excerpts. Productive activities (i.e., oral DCTs) were added at the end of each session. Students needed to complete the oral DCTs independently and no teacher feedback was provided. The reason for doing so was to avoid the undesired effect of teacher feedback on the results and hence ensured accuracy in result interpretation

### 4.3.1 Instruction for DI Group

The instruction for DI group consisted of two components: the deductive instruction with a teacher-fronted explicit explanation of the form of request modifiers and their functions. Additionally, the instructor also gave a metapragmatic explanation on how socio-pragmatic factors influence the appropriateness of requests according to the specific situations in the film excerpts (i.e., the oral DCTs). As the instruction of both pragma-linguistic and socio-pragmatic knowledge was based on the selected film scenes, learners would receive a handout of film excerpts transcripts after they watched the film excerpts. A mapping table containing the modifiers, their functions and the corresponding linguistic formulae were also provided to learners.

### 4.3.2 Instruction for II Group

The instruction for II group also consisted of two components：a) the inductive instruction session which engaged learners into the problem-solving tasks and b）the same productive activities as DI group had. The problem solving task was modified according to the prototypes in Takimoto's (2008) study. In the problem-solving task, the instructor manipulated the input and had the learners operate on these L2 data so as to achieve an explicit understanding of the target linguistic features. Hence, the problem-solving task was defined as inductive as it led learners to figure out the rules independently. The problem-solving task consisted of several sub-activities: activities focused on the pragmalinguistic features, activities focused on the sociopragmatic features and a summary of pragmatic linguistic formulae of both request head acts and modification devices. Activities focused on the pragmalinguistic features first let the learners produce requests based on written descriptions of the film scenes which they were going to watch in the next stage. Then, learners needed to compare their own productions with the requests in the film scenes and note down the differences in expressions on a worksheet, after watching the films. The acquisition of sociopragmatic knowledge was realized through the completion of analysis questions. Learners were supposed to identify the sociopragmatic parameters and figure out the relationship between these parameters and pragmalinguistic forms after finishing a series of analysis questions on the worksheet. The summaries of alternative pragmalinguistic forms were realized through "brain storm".

### 4.3.3 Instruction for ID Group

The instruction for ID group was adapted from the teaching approach used in the Martinez-Flor's (2008) study. The instruction consisted of three components: a) an inductive type of instruction, in which students were required to make form comparison and find out differences between their own expressions and expressions in the example film excerpts. Additionally, students needed to pay attention to the sociopragmatic features and note them down in a worksheet. The purpose of the inductive instruction is to activate learners' reasoning from both pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic aspects. b) The deductive instruction involved instructor's presentation of the different pragmalinguistic forms for both the speech act and the modification devices, and the meanings these forms convey. Besides, the instructor gave explicit explanation on how sociopragmatic features would affect the appropriateness of the request and taught students to modify requests appropriately according to different socio-contextual factors. c) The productive activities.

### 4.3.4 Instruction for the Control Group

The lessons for the control group were designed to help participants perform well on the questions of IELTS oral test so as to ensure instruction difference between the control and experimental groups. Participants in this group engaged in listening comprehension and discussion activities which helped them enrich the resources for answering questions in IELTS oral test. They were also taught the note-taking skills, and were then required to produce answers for example questions of IELTS oral test.

### *4.4 Participants*

Participants were 80 Chinese EFL learners studying in an English training school in China. Snowball sampling (Bryman, 2008) was employed to recruit participants. It was started with the recruitment of one subject who recommended more potential individuals This procedure was repeated until there were 80 participants.   Participants were equivalent in their language proficiency and experience of English learning, with an average age of 18. Participants were university students who had taken the IELTS test. As their IELTS band scores were within the range of 5.5 to 6, these participants were considered as intermediate in terms of English language proficiency level. They were randomly assigned in three treatment groups and a control group, with 20 participants in each group.

### *4.5 Data Analysis*

To identify participants' use of request modifiers, the coding and analysis of the request data followed the taxonomy used by Woodfield (2012). There were eight sub-types of internal modifiers (lexical/phrasal), including Marker 'please', Consultative Devices, Downtoners, Understaters/Hedges, Subjectivisers, Cajolers, Appealers and Appreciative embedding; six sub-types of the internal downgraders (syntactic), namely, Conditional structures, Conditional clause, Tense, Aspect, Interrogative, and Negotiation of preparatory condition; 11 sub-types of external modification devices, namely, Grounder, Disarmer, Preparator, Getting a precommitment, Promise, Imposition minimizer, Apology, Discourse orientation move, Smalltalk, Appreciator and Considerator. To ensure inter-rater reliability, each researcher coded and analyzed the data independently and confirmed the result together. A total of 2177 request modifiers were identified

with an inter-rater reliability of 94.37%.

To answer RQ1, the results for the number of modifiers used in learners' speech act data were computed with the SPSS v. 26.0. Descriptive statistics for the number of used modifiers in the WDCTs were computed. Then a analysis of variance (ANOVA) with post hoc multiple comparison tests using the method of Mauchly was performed to examine how the three instructional approaches differed in the three test phases. To answer RQ2, quantitative analysis was conducted to identify learners' choices of specific types of modification devices (internal lexical/phrasal modifiers, internal syntactic modifiers or external modifiers) before and after instruction. To provide more extensive answers to the research questions, illustrative examples from learners' retrospective interviews were used to further explore how different instructional approaches facilitate their production of appropriate requests, so as to provide more sounded implications for instruction in the EFL classrooms.

## 5. Results

Amount of Modification Devices

Table 3 presents the descriptive results of the number of modification devices used by the participants in the three tests: pretest, posttest 1 (i.e., the immediate posttest) and posttest 2 (i.e., the delayed posttest). It showed the average numbers of modification devices used in WDCTs among the four groups are similar in the pretest, with their mean ranging from 28.80 to 29.00. Subsequently, a one-way ANOVA was conducted and revealed no statistically significant group differences in the pretest of WDCTs among the four groups (F=3.10, $p >$ 0.05 ns).

As shown in the posttest 1 result, both the ID and DI groups increased their use of modification devices immediately after the instruction, with average numbers of 47.00 and 46.60, respectively. However, the II group using an average number of 44.40 in the WDCTs posttest 1 made slightly less progress. Besides, a one-way ANOVA with multiple comparisons revealed that there were significant differences between the control group and the three experimental groups (F = 2.03, $p < 0.01$), confirming the treatment effects of the three instructional approaches.

For the posttest 2 result, all three groups showed a decrease in the average number of modifiers used in WDCTs compared with the posttest 1. Among the three experimental groups, the DI group showed the sharpest decrease, and the mean score falled from 46.60 to 37.60. The second largest decrease was in the II group whose mean score decreased from 44.40 to 37.60. The ID group decreased the least with its number falling from 47.00 to 42.60. Additionally, a two-way ANOVA with the amount of modifiers used in WDCTs as dependent variable, and with both the testing phases and the three teaching approaches as independent variables was conducted. The result revealed that there were significant differences between the experimental and control groups (F = 2.03, $p < 0.01$), implying that the three experimental groups outperformed the control group.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of the Use of Modification Devices

| Instructional types | Pretest | | Posttest1 | | Posttest2 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | M | SD | M | SD | M | SD |
| Deductive | 29.00 | 2.97 | 46.60 | 2.42 | 37.60 | 5.12 |
| Inductive | 28.80 | 2.40 | 44.40 | 3.77 | 37.60 | 4.03 |
| Inductive-deductive | 28.80 | 2.93 | 47.00 | 2.10 | 42.60 | 1.96 |
| Control | 29.00 | 1.26 | 30.40 | 2.24 | 33.60 | 0.08 |

To summarize, the three experimental groups outperformed the control group in the tests, suggesting pragmatic instructions are effective in facilitating learners to use a greater number of modifiers in both short-term and long-term periods (see Table 4). However, though experimental groups showed significant gains in posttest 1, they experienced a decrease in posttest 2. It implies an inevitable knowledge loss in learning retention, in spite of the success in modifier instructions. In addition, the ID groups outperformed the other two experimental groups, indicating the superiority of the inductive-deductive instructional approach in both short-term and long-term learning. Both the DI and II groups showed significant gains in posttest1 but falled dramatically in posttest 2, implying the deductive instruction and inductive instruction are effective in modifier instruction, but their treatment effect fails to last for a long period.

Table 4. Summary of Treatment Effects of Three Teaching Approaches

| Posttest1 | * DI II ID> C   *DI>II   ※DI≈ID   *ID>II |
|---|---|
| | ** ID> C |
| Posttest2 | *DI II>C   *ID>DI   *ID>II   ※  DI≈II |

Note: DI=Deductive instructed group, II=Inductive instructed group ID=Inductive-Deductive instructed group, C= Control group, *p<0.05, **p<0.01, ※p>0.05

Types of Modification Devices

*Internal Modifiers (Lexical/Phrasal)*

Figure 1 summarizes the use of internal modifiers (lexical/phrasal) in DI group and shows two types of modification devices were added after the instructions. Among the devices used after instruction, *consultative devices* (%posttest 1= 5.30; %posttest 2= 6.22) and *Cajolers*

(%posttest 1= 4.95; %posttest 2= 6.12) were used the most. *Downtoners* (%posttest 1= 2.36; %posttest 2= 2.36) and *Understaters/Hedges* (%posttest 1= 2.36; %posttest 2= 2.36) were acquired after instructions. *Appealers* were hardly used in the tests.
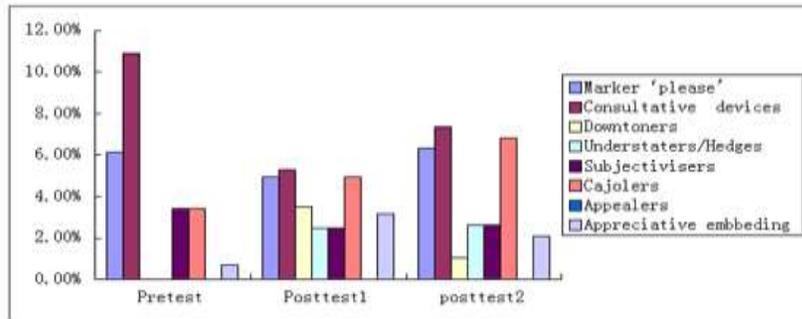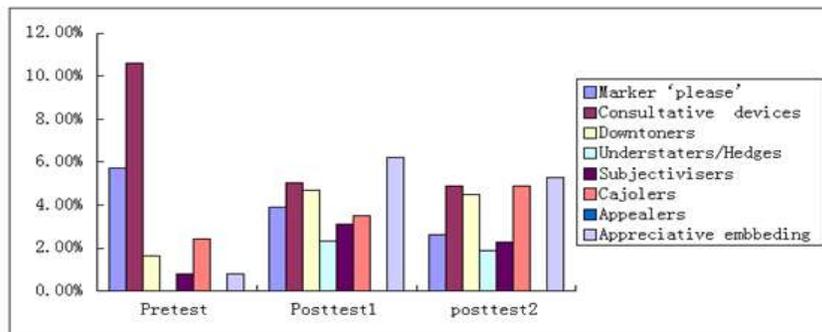


Figure 1. Summary of Learners' Use of Internal Modifiers (Lexical/Phrasal) in DI Group

Figure 2 presents learners' use of internal modifiers (lexical/phrasal) in II group. It shows participants used *Undersaters /Hedge*s only after receiving instructions. The most frequently used devices were *Consultative devices* (%posttest 1= 5.60; %posttest 2= 5.57) and *Appreciative embedding* (%posttest 1= 6.22; %posttest 2= 5.92). Similar to the results in II group, *Appealers* were seldom used.



Figure 2. Summary of Learners' Use of Internal Modifiers (Lexical/Phrasal) in II Group

Figure 3 displays the use of internal modifiers (lexical/phrasal) in ID group. It shows there were five types of modification devices used before instruction, while seven out of eight types were used after instruction. The most frequently used devices were *Consultative devices* (%posttest 1= 5.14; %posttest 2= 5.02) and *Appreciative embedding* (%posttest 1= 6.22; %posttest 2= 5.23). Besides, participants started to use *Understaters/Hedges* (%posttest 1= 2.24; %posttest 2= 1.86) and *Appreciate embedding* only after instruction. Similar to the results in the former two groups, no *Appealers* were identified.
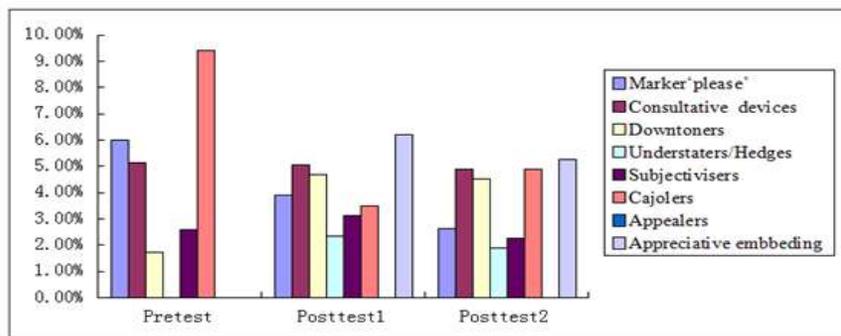


Figure 3. Summary of Learners' Use of Internal Modifiers (Lexical/Phrasal) in ID Group

Overall, the proportion and variety of internal lexical/phrasal modifiers increase among all experimental groups after instructions, however only the ID group and II group are able to sustain such variety in long-term while a regression of types appeared in the DI group but not in proportion. Considering specific modifiers, only four types of internal lexical/phrasal modifiers (i.e., *Consultative devices, Cajoler, Marker 'please' and subjectivisers*) are familiar to the learners before instruction in all groups. Learners in all groups managed to use all the other six types of internal modifiers, except for *Appealers*. Among all the modifiers, *Consultative devices* is the most frequently

used, and *Understaters/Hedges* were only used by learners after receiving instructions from teachers.

*Internal modifiers (Syntactic)*

Figure 4 showcases learners' use of internal modifiers (syntactic) in DI group. It indicated that before receiving instructions, students did not use any syntactic modifiers. After instructions, five out of six types of modification devices were used, and among which, *Aspect* (%posttest 1= 5.02; %posttest 2= 2.86) and *Conditional clause* (%posttest 1= 3.47; %posttest 2= 1.89) were the most frequent. However, *Negotiation of preparatory condition* was hardly used before and after instruction.
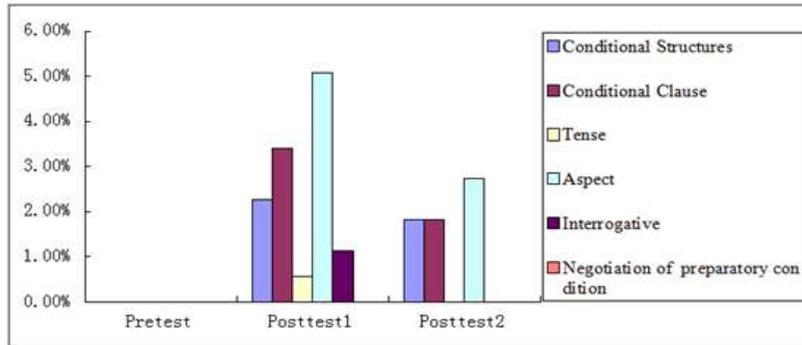


Figure 4. Summary of Learners' Use of Internal Modifiers (Syntactic) in DI Group

Figure 5 shows participants' use of internal modifiers (syntactic) in II group. The use of syntactic modifiers expanded to four types in posttest 1, including *Conditional Structures* (%posttest 1= 4.86; %posttest 2= 5.27), *Conditional Clause, Aspect* (%posttest 1= 5.02; %posttest 2= 2.86)*, Interrogative.* However, regarding the *Tense* and *Negotiation of preparatory condition*, learners did not use this type of modifiers before and after instruction.
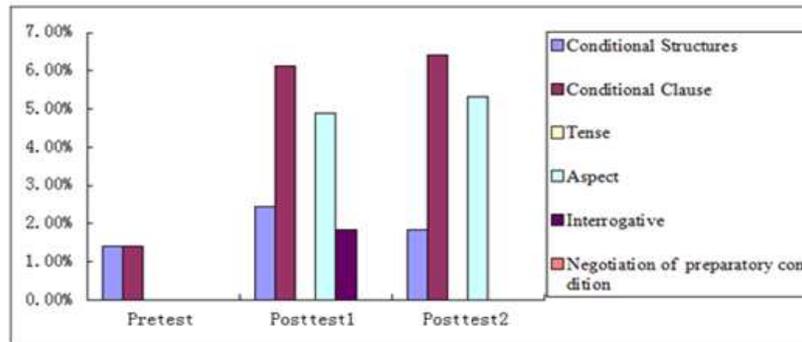


Figure 5. Summary of Learners' Use of Internal Modifiers (Syntactic) in II Group

Figure 6 enumerates the use of internal modifiers (syntactic) in ID group. In contrast to the two syntactic modifiers (i.e., *Conditional Structures* and *Aspects*) used before instruction, four out of six types of modification devices were used after instruction. *Conditional Structures* (%posttest 1= 6.32; %posttest 2= 5.58) and *Conditional Clause* (%posttest 1= 5.74; %posttest 2= 4.67) were the most used ones. However, participants in this group did not use this type *Tense* and *Interrogative* at all.
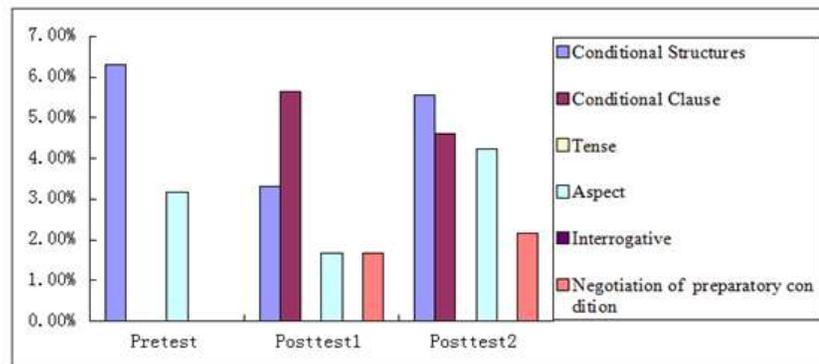


Figure 6. Summary of Learners' Use of Internal Modifiers (Syntactic) in ID Group

To sum up, even though there were increases in both the proportion and variety of internal lexical/phrasal modifiers after instructions, learners still used limited types of internal syntactic modifiers at a low-frequency level. Only the ID group and II group were able to sustain the proportion and variety of types in the long-run while significant decreases appeared in the DI group. Regarding specific types, *Conditional Structures* were the most frequently used in all groups, while *Interrogative* and *Negotiation of preparatory* condition were used less frequently. Participants still showed little familiarity with the *Tense* after the instructions.

*External Modifiers*

Figure 7 presents the use of external modifiers in DI group, which increased from ten to 11 in posttest 2. *Discourse orientation move* (%posttest 1= 15.02; %posttest 2= 12.07) and *Promise* (%posttest 1= 7.88; %posttest 2= 8.37) were the most frequently used modifiers, while *Imposition minimizer was seldomly used.*
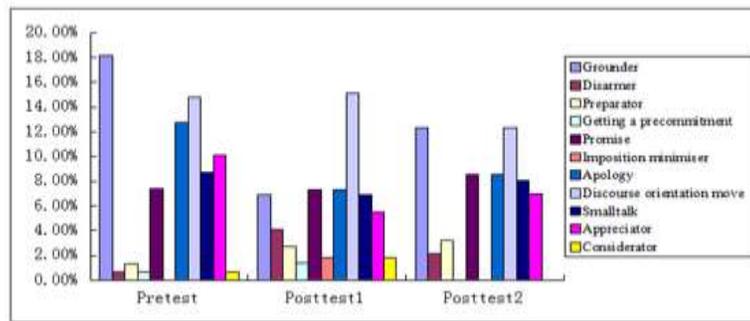


Figure 7. Summary of Learners' Use of External Modifiers in DI Group

Figure 8 shows the use of external modifiers in DI group. In terms of the types of external modification devices, it increased to 11 after the instructions. *Discourse orientation move* (%posttest 1= 14.28; %posttest 2=11.37) was the highest.
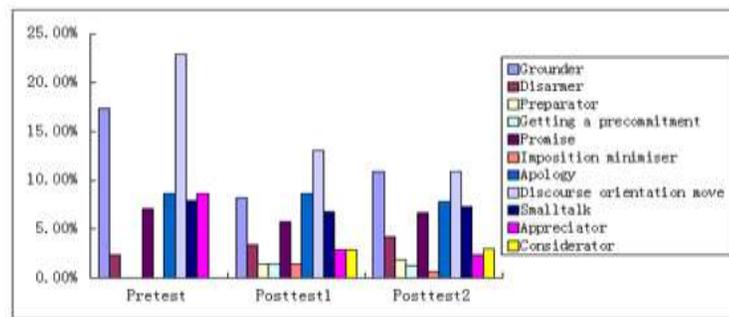


Figure 8. Summary of Learners' Use of External Modifiers in II Group

Figure 9 reports the frequency of the use of external modifiers in ID group. Types of external modifiers used increased significantly after the instructions. *Discourse orientation move* (%posttest 1= 3.89; %posttest 2= 11.36) and *Grounder* (%posttest 1= 2.36; %posttest 2= 8.17) accounted for the biggest .
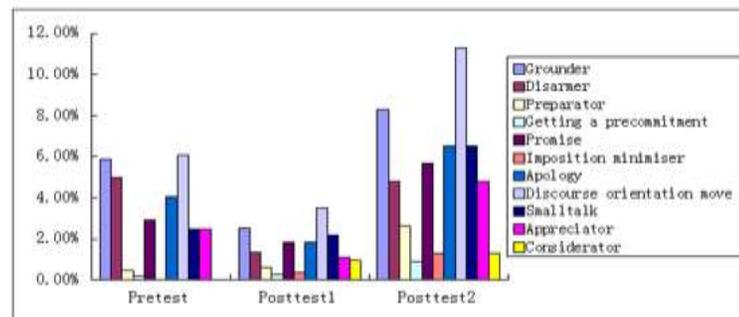


Figure 9. Summary of Learners' Use of External Modifiers in ID Group

To conclude, the variety of external modifiers increased among all experimental groups after instructions. Only ID group and II group, however, managed to sustain the long-run effects. Still, learners in all experimental groups used external modifiers at a lower frequency after instructions. Considering specific types of external modifiers, *Discourse orientation moves* was the most frequently used modifier among all groups*,* while *Imposition minimizer* is the least used one.

## 6. Discussion

### 6.1 Effect of Three Teaching Approaches on the Amount of Request Modifiers

The three experimental groups' performance revealed that the groups of deductive- instructions (i.e., the DI group and the ID group) outperformed the group of inductive instruction (i.e., the II group). In terms of the treatment effect in learning retention, the deductive-type of instruction has a more significant immediate treatment effect while the inductive type of instruction has a more sustainable treatment effect in long-run. Additionally, the inductive-deductive instruction is the most superior teaching approach in facilitating learners' use of modifiers among the three teaching approaches.

According to the interviews, the possible reasons that immediate treatment effect of the deductive instruction is more prominent than inductive instruction are as follows: Firstly, deductive instruction helps to satisfy learners' needs of learning more linguistic forms. Three interviewees mentioned they had focused more on pragma-linguistic forms instead of the socio-pragmatic features. Pragma-linguistic forms refer to the combination of pragmatic competence and linguistic knowledge in understanding the intended meanings of utterances. Socio-pragmatic features denote the cultural knowledge of a society that uses this language (Leech, 2016). and the deductive instruction seemed to better serve learners' needs of vocabulary learning, as it emphasizes more on pragma-linguistic forms learning by presenting forms before the explanation of rules. This is in line with Long and Robinson's (1998) claim that the effectiveness of instructional method mainly depends on the need of learners. Secondly, Chinese EFL learners are more used to deductive instruction, this is in conformity with Takahashi's (2001) view, as the deductive instruction is consistent with the predominant instructional style in the Chinese EFL classroom, and hence it showed a better immediate treatment effect. Three interviewees mentioned that they are more used to the traditional way of classroom instruction as the teacher-fronted presentation is much clearer, and consequently is easier for comprehension and memorization.

The long-term effectiveness of inductive approach is consistent with the findings of many interventional studies in ILP (e.g., Trosborg & Shaw, 1998; Takimoto, 2008). Takimoto (2008) pointed out that deductive treatment helps participants to receive the knowledge, while the inductive instruction involves learners into an active learning process by exploring the underlying rules and internalizing the knowledge. This internalized knowledge would be more likely to maintain in long-term, as participants have to make efforts to figure out the rules in the inductive instruction. They tend to make stronger connections between rules and forms instead of simply memorizing the forms. This idea is also reflected in participants' interviews in which qustions about their perceptions of the three instructions used in this study, were asked.

### 6.2 Changes in Number and Type of Requested Modifiers after Instructions

It was revealed that learners from all groups employed more external than internal modifiers. In posttest 1, the amount and types of internal modifiers increased significantly immediately after instructions, although learners used a greater number and types of internal *Downgraders* in posttest 2 than they did in the pretest. Corresponding to the changes of the internal modifiers, the variety of types of external modifiers also increased after instruction. However, external modifiers experienced a fall in posttest 1, while increased slightly in posttest 2. These results are consistent with Safont's (2003) results, but contradictory to Martinez-Flor's (2008) study which found learners used more internal than external modifiers.

One potential reason is that this study used WDCTs as the data-eliciting tool while Martinez-Flor's study used the oral role-play. In WDCTs learners allowed more time to plan, hence they may produce more external modifiers "that may involve more complexity and, consequently, are probably more difficult to produce in spontaneous oral speech" (Martinez-Flor, 2008, p. 209). Learners' answers to the interview reflected that some learners felt that it was an obligation to produce longer answers in written tasks and consequently rejected the short expressions containing the internal modifiers. Secondly, according to Hassall (2001), "the addition of supportive moves will not generally result in more complex pragma-linguistic structure to be planned" (p. 274). Learners' interviews also revealed that the application of internal syntactic modifiers was even more difficult than using internal lexical/phrasal modifiers. Finally, the interview results indicated that the L1 pragmatic knowledge and identity also played an important role. Two participants reported that though they knew native speakers would not make requests in this way, they still preferred to make apologies and state the reasons when making requests, as they felt such movement would be more polite and help justify the legitimacy of requests in the Chinese culture.

## 7. Conclusions and Implications

To conclude, the three instructional methods are effective in developing learners' pragmatic competence. However, comparing the performance of the three experimental groups, the ID group outperformed the other two, indicating the inductive-deductive instruction is superior to the rest. According to participants' responses to the retrospective interview, the inductive-deductive instruction combining the advantages of both deductive and inductive instruction may be advanced in the following ways: it fits Chinese EFL learners' needs for learning more linguistic forms; it is consistent with the instructional style that the Chinese students used to have; it ingeniously inserts the inductive activity into the instruction which successfully involved the learners in the active learning process for internalizing the pragmatic knowledge. Hence, integrating the inductive-deductive teaching approach into the Chinese EFL classroom, is probably a good idea.

The study provides significant implications about teaching pragmatics to Chinese EFL learners. First, it would be ideal to combine inductive and deductive approaches when instructing pragmatic knowledge to the Chinese EFL learners. However, the inductive approach

should be implemented before the deductive instruction so as to involve learners in active learning and enable them to better understand the pragma-linguistic forms and the socio-pragmatic knowledge. Second, it indicates that the selection of instructional approaches should take learners' preferences into consideration, as various factors such as gender and age might affect the acquisition of pracmatic knowledge. Third, there is the need to understand learners' current pragmatic competence before instructions, which facilitates more effective pragmatic instructions in the target language.

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