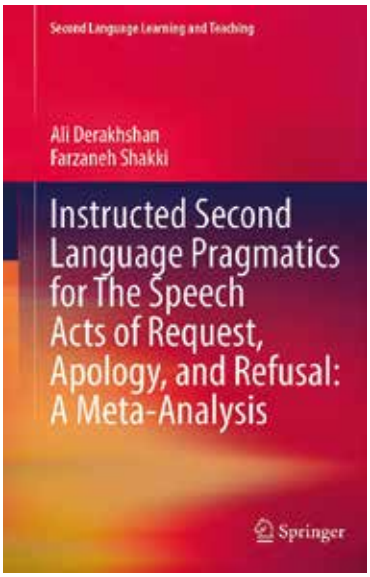
Instructed Second Language Pragmatics for The Speech Acts of Request, Apology, and Refusal: A Meta-Analysis

Ali Derakhshan & Farzaneh Shakki

(2023). Second Language Learning and Teaching, Springer Cham, 114 pages
ISBN: 978-3-031-37092-2

Yumeng Guo
School of Foreign Languages and Cultures, Nanjing Normal University, Nanjing, China

Yongliang Wang
School of Foreign Studies, North China University of Water Resources and Electric Power, Zhengzhou, China
School of Foreign Languages and Cultures, Nanjing Normal University, Nanjing, China
DOI: *https://doi.org/10.30827/portalin.vi43.31183*



The current era of globalization and the emergence of English as an international language has brought about new opportunities for L2 pragmatic learning and teaching (Sánchez-Hernández & Martínez-Flor, 2022). Consequently, there has been a growing body of research on the effects of instruction on learners' development of L2 pragmatic competence. However, the meta-analyses in this field are still in their infancy, most of which are restricted to examining the effects of instructional methods on just one speech act and the broader assessment of pragmatic competence in the context of requests, apologies, and refusals has been lacking. To address this gap in the literature, Ali Derakhshan and Farzaneh Shakki contributed a lot with their work titled *"Instructed Second Language Pragmatics for The Speech Acts of Request, Apology, and Refusal: A Meta-Analysis."* In their study, they systematically evaluated the effectiveness of instruction in enhancing pragmatic skills related to the speech acts of request, apology, and refusal within a second language context. Importantly, they also explored various variables not only limited to the instructional methods explored in most previous studies but also covered other seldom noted ones. Beyond its theoretical contributions, their work offered curriculum developers and educators valuable insights.

This book is divided into six chapters, the first of which explores the theoretical foundation of pragmatics. This part introduces a communicative competence model comprising grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, strategic competence, discoursal knowledge, and pragmatic competence. It is also presented that cognitive approaches in SLA explore how learners acquire and store knowledge about a new language. Furthermore, this book introduces two fundamental hypotheses. The first is the Consciousness-raising Hypothesis, which emphasizes increasing learners' awareness of language structures. The second

is the Noticing Hypothesis, which posits that language learners must actively notice and understand sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic features in the input. The latter hypothesis argues that attention plays a crucial role in language development, with understanding being more beneficial than mere noticing. Additionally, some key concepts in this book are precisely illustrated in this part, like pragmatics, speech acts, instructed language acquisition, and meta-analysis.

Chapter 2 presents a comprehensive overview of a range of experimental and quasi-experimental studies mainly aimed at investigating the effect of different instructional methods on the development of pragmatic competence. These studies primarily focus on speech acts like requests, apologies, and refusals. Together, these studies underline the importance of instruction in enhancing pragmatic competence, regardless of the cultural and linguistic contexts. However, some challenges exist in determining the overall effectiveness of these methods and identifying potential factors and moderators influencing effectiveness. Further, the previous meta-analyses and reviews related to this topic are analyzed and reported. These analyses, taken together, suggest that explicit instruction is more effective in teaching pragmatics than implicit instruction. The effectiveness of instruction can also vary based on factors such as learners' proficiency, context, treatment type, and outcome measures.

In Chapter 3, two research questions are presented. The first one is: What is the overall effectiveness of the instruction of L2 pragmatics, particularly the speech acts of request, apology, and refusal? The second is: What variables moderate the effectiveness of L2 pragmatic instruction, especially the speech acts of request, apology, and refusal? After establishing strict inclusion and exclusion criteria, the authors systematically collected relevant literature published between 2000 and 2022 through electronic and manual methods across various databases, resulting in 89 eligible sources. Subsequently, effect sizes are calculated through Hedge's g, and data analysis is executed through CMA (Version 3). The study also considers various moderator variables, including age, gender, proficiency level, research design, psycholinguistic features, treatment type, outcome measures, and speech act types. Moreover, the research maintains a high level of coding reliability at 96% and excludes the impact of potential publication bias by using funnel plots and trim-and-fill analysis.

Chapter 4 focuses on the results of this study. Based on 234 effect sizes from 89 articles, it is calculated that the overall effect size is 1.72. The overall effect sizes for the speech acts of apology, refusal, and request are 1.34, 2.213, and 1.341, respectively, all reaching statistical significance ($p < 0.001$). This suggests a substantial positive effect of second language pragmatics instruction on the pragmatic competence of learners, including their abilities in requesting, refusing, and apologizing. Demographic characteristics such as age, gender, and language proficiency, as well as design-related features including measurement tool type, psycholinguistic characteristics, instructional method type, and speech act type, all have highly significant moderating effects. Pairwise comparisons reveal that mixed-age, mixed-gender, and intermediate-level learners exhibit larger effect sizes. Pragmatics assessment through WDCT, explicit instruction, and the speech act of refusal all yield larger effect sizes.

Chapter 5 presents and compares the results of this meta-analysis with those of the previous meta-analyses. The overall effect size of this study supports the effectiveness of L2 pragmatic instruction. Compared with the previous meta-analyses, it is found that the effect size ranges from $d = 1.10$ to $g = 1.72$, confirming that instruction is pivotal and nec-

essary. As for the variables, it shows that age, gender, proficiency level, outcome measure, psycholinguistic features, and treatment type can moderate the effectiveness of instruction. However, the specific findings vary across studies. Additionally, explicit instruction outperforms implicit instruction, which is a consensus among all the literature, and the speech act of refusal demonstrates the highest effect.

Finally, Chapter 6 presents the conclusion, limitations, implications, and directions for further research. This book has identified several limitations, such as a limited number of studies available for analysis, missing data on critical variables, and a narrow focus on specific speech acts and variables. Despite these limitations, the findings underscore the importance of instruction for L2 pragmatics and indicate that explicit instruction is more effective than implicit instruction. It also suggests that future researchers explore underrepresented areas of pragmatics, such as compliments, complaints, and other speech acts. Additionally, researchers should consider context, cultural background, age, and ecological validity in their future studies to comprehensively understand L2 pragmatics instruction.

Overall, this book is entirely complimentary and readable. Firstly, this book is characterized by its impeccable structure and clear language, making it highly readable for those researchers interested in L2 pragmatics and other subjects. Therefore, these features enrich the book's readership and expand its reach. Secondly, in contrast to previous meta-analyses, this one is notably more formalized with transparent disclosure of selected sources and data. It establishes refined inclusion and exclusion criteria, ensuring a comprehensive selection of relevant sources. Thirdly, it has made a significant contribution to the literature. There has yet to be a meta-analysis on the effectiveness of L2 pragmatic instruction of request, apology, and refusal. Therefore, this book is the first one regarding this area, filling a critical gap in previous research. Fourthly, the research findings presented in this book further affirm the validity of the Input Hypothesis, suggesting that learning happens through exposure to language. In the teaching process, learners encounter real-life language situations like refusal, apology, and requests, providing relevant language materials. This aligns with the Input Hypothesis.

In addition to the theoretical value it provides, the book has some practical implications. This book highlights the significance of L2 pragmatic instruction, indicating that more focus should be placed on incorporating pragmatic knowledge in textbooks. Moreover, this book reveals that intermediate-level students struggle with second language pragmatics instruction compared to other students, prompting a need for tailored curriculum development based on learners' needs and proficiency levels. It also reveals that explicit instruction is more effective than implicit instruction. Consequently, teachers should have preferences in their teaching methods for L2 instruction. Finally, this meta-analysis provides valuable insights for future research. Some results of this study diverge from previous meta-analyses, such as in the debate on whether design is a significant moderator for L2 pragmatic instruction. The inconsistencies highlight the need for further investigation in future studies. Additionally, the study presents the frequency of effect sizes obtained for each sub-component. A closer examination reveals a need for more richness in the current academic research on specific moderators. For instance, research focused on male participants is notably scarce, with only eight studies conducted in the past 22 years. This finding also points towards a direction for future research.

However, one aspect of the book that needs improvement is that the variables examined in this book are confined to those outlined in the selected literature. Many additional factors may impact the effectiveness of L2 pragmatic instruction, such as students' cultural backgrounds and learning motivations, that have yet to receive extensive discussion in this book. Besides, it would be better if the study not only confines speech acts but expands to other features of pragmatic features, such as implicatures and routines (Ren & Han, 2016). Moreover, while most of the book's findings align with prior research, there are instances where its conclusions contradict established literature. Consequently, the book needs to provide an in-depth analysis of these conflicting results. It would be better for the authors to explore why such discrepancies exist. Also, this book only offers a partial perspective on L2 pragmatics instruction. Its primary emphasis lies in quantitative studies suitable for meta-analysis. Additional narrative reviews should be needed to complement the meta-analysis findings (Xiao, 2018). In conclusion, despite its imperfections, this book remains a valuable resource due to its profound theoretical and practical significance.

References

Ren, W., & Han, Z. (2016). The representation of pragmatic knowledge in recent ELT textbooks. *ELT Journal*, *70*(4), 424–434. https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccw010

Sánchez-Hernández, A., & Martínez-Flor, A. (2022). Teaching the pragmatics of English as an international language: A focus on pragmatic markers. *Language Teaching Research, 26*(2), 256-278. https://doi.org/10.1177/13621688211064933

Xiao, F. (2018). Advanced-Level Pragmatics in Instructed SLA. In P. Malovrh & A. Benati (Eds.), *The Handbook of Advanced Proficiency in Second Language Acquisition* (pp.463–483). Wiley. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119261650.ch24