

Interlanguage Pragmatics : Syntactic and Lexical Downgrading in Request Realization by Japanese EFL Learners

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Abstract. This study examines the use of syntactic and lexical downgraders by Japanese EFL learners in order to mitigate requests in high imposition situations to listeners of higher status. The relationships between learners' use of syntactic and lexical downgraders, and their grammatical competence and time spent in an English-speaking environment, were analyzed. Their request realizations were also compared with those of Native Speakers. In general the learners demonstrated the ability to use appropriate syntactical downgrading but an inability to use appropriate lexical downgrading. Reasons for this are discussed along with suggestions as to how instruction could have a more positive effect on the acquisition of forms of mitigation.

INTRODUCTION

This study investigates the extent to which Japanese EFL learners use syntactic and lexical downgrading in polite, high imposition requests, as compared to native speakers of English. Various studies have examined the use of internal and external mitigation of speech acts (Faerch & Kasper 1989; Trosberg 1995; Hassall 2001). However, there appear to be fewer studies which look in more detail at high-imposition requests and compare the respective use of syntactic and lexical downgrading.

This study also examines the relationship between learners' pragmatic competence and (1) their grammatical competence and (2) time spent in an English-speaking country. Studies have been undertaken comparing the pragmatic competence of EFL and ESL learners (Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998; Niezgodá & Röver, 2001). In contrast, this study compares the pragmatic competence of EFL learners with varying lengths of time spent in an English-speaking environment, and seeks to shed light on the matter of whether L2 exposure is more effective for pragmatic development than improving grammatical competence.

It is the aim of this study that, by focusing in detail on microlinguistic aspects of speech act production, it will be possible to see more clearly those aspects of speech act production which learners acquire more

easily, and those which cause more difficulty. Furthermore, it should be possible to see more clearly which factors are most effective in the enhancement of L2 pragmatic competence.

BACKGROUND

Speech Acts

Study into the second language learning and acquisition of the pragmatics of speech acts has developed strongly over the past two decades. Seminal works in this field include: Blum Kulka, House & Kasper (1989) and Kasper & Blum-Kulka (1993). A large number of studies have been undertaken into a variety of speech acts, with the strongest focus on requests and apologies.

This research has led to questions concerning what factors lead to the successful production of speech acts in the L2. Studies have been conducted in the area of instruction in pragmatics (Rose & Kasper, 2001). The relationship between pragmatic competence and grammatical competence has also been examined (Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998; Niezgodá & Röver, 2001) with the conclusion that there is no clear relationship between them. A further area of study has been the difference in pragmatic awareness between ESL and EFL learners. Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei (1998) concluded that ESL learners tend to have a more developed pragmatic awareness. However,

Niezgoda & Röver (2001) showed that highly-motivated and well-instructed EFL learners are able to become as aware of the pragmatics of an L2 as of the grammar.

Japanese EFL Learners (JEFLLs)

Various studies have examined the realization of requests by JEFLLs (eg, Tanaka & Kawade, 1982; Takahashi & Du Fon, 1989; Fukushima, 1990; Hill, 1997; Takahashi 1996, 2001). The typical finding of this research is that Japanese EFL learners tend to be too direct in the way they realize requests in situations where the imposition of the request is high and/or they are talking to someone with higher status. A typical example would be the use of a query preparatory strategy such as 'Can you lend me that book?' in a situation where a native speaker would consider it necessary to use more internal modification to downgrade the impact of the request. This internal modification can take the form of syntactic downgrading, eg, 'I was wondering if you could lend me that book?' or lexical downgrading, eg, 'Could you possibly lend me that book?'

Takahashi (1996) established that in a high imposition request a typical Japanese Preparatory question would be:

<i>V-te</i>	<i>itadak</i>	<i>e</i>	<i>nai</i>
	receive (honorific)	POT	NEG
	<i>deshoo</i>	<i>ka</i>	
	COP-uncertainty	QUES ¹	

She established that the conventional way of realizing this by EFL learners in Japan (it is typically presented as such in Japanese high school textbooks (Fukazawa, 2002)) is with the preparatory question:

Would/Could you please VP?

She also asked a group of Japanese-English bilingual judges to establish a functional equivalent to the Japanese sentence. They settled on:

Would it be possible (for you/me) to VP?

The difference lies in the use of 'possible', a case of lexical downgrading through the use of a downtoner (see below). This demonstrates that to realize a high imposition request effectively in English it is common to use both syntactic and lexical downgrading (see also Faerch & Kaspar, 1989).

Categorizing Downgraders

The CCSARP Coding Manual (Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper, 1989) categorized extensively the ways in which the speech acts of requesting and apologizing can be syntactically or lexically downgraded. Common forms of syntactic downgrading are the use of the Interrogative, the choice of a Modal verb, the use of a Past Tense (eg, Could you...?) and the use of the Conditional (Would you mind if...?). As far as lexical downgrading of requests is concerned, the following are more commonly used: Politeness Markers (eg, 'please'); Understaters (eg, 'little'); Downtoners (eg, 'possibly').

Pragmatic Variables

Clearly the choice of syntactic and lexical downgraders depends on contextual factors of the speech act. Brown & Levinson (1987) categorized three pragmatic variables common to most speech act situations: Power (P), Social Distance (D), and Ranking of Imposition (R). More precisely, P (Power) refers to the relative social positions of the speaker and the hearer. D (Distance) refers to the extent to which the speaker and listener are familiar with each other. The ranking of imposition (R) refers to the extent to which the speaker or hearer (depending on the speech act) is imposed upon. As an example, in the case of requests, a +R situation is one where a great deal is required of the hearer in complying with the request, such as borrowing a car.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Based on the prior research detailed above, and the description of pragmatic variables and forms of internal mitigation, the research questions for this study were proposed as follows:

Q1: Is there a relationship between JEFLLs' use of downgrading and their level of grammatical competence?

Q2: Is there a relationship between JEFLLs' use of downgrading and the length of time they have spent in an English-speaking environment (ESE)?

Q3: To what extent do JEFLLs use internal syntactic and lexical downgrading in high-imposition (+R +P +/- D) requests as compared to NSs?

METHODOLOGY

Subjects

The subjects of this study comprised 85 third-year students at Hiroshima University, Japan. Within this group, English Education was the major subject of 26 students, of whom 22 had spent a period of four to five months studying English in the United Kingdom. Eighteen Native Speakers of English (10 Americans, 3 British, 2 Australians, 2 Canadians and 1 New Zealander) were also included in the research in order to attain baseline data. The majority of them were international students at Hiroshima University.

Grammatical Competence / Time spent in an English-Speaking Environment (ESE)

The grammatical competence of the students was determined by using the structure test (75 items) of the Comprehensive English Language Test for Learners of English (CELT Form A by D. Harris & L. Palmer, McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1986). This test was completed by 85 students. On the basis of this they were divided into three groups: high-level, 28 students; medium-level, 27 students; and low-level, 30 students. They were asked to state the length of time they had spent in an ESE outside Japan and were grouped as follows: more than 6 months, 5 students; 3 months – 6 months, 21 students²; 2 weeks – 3 months, 28 students; less than 2 weeks, 30 students; unspecified, 1 student.

Procedure

The students were asked to complete a Discourse Completion Test (DCT) for eight situations. These situations were varied according to Brown & Levinson's (1987) model, taking into account the

factors of P, D and R (outlined above). This DCT had previously been successfully piloted with a group of fourth year students at the same university. For the purpose of this study, the results of two situations were focused on (situations 2 and 3:)

Situation 2 +P ; +D ; +R

You are to have an interview with a professor in your department, whom you do not know very well. He told you to come to see him between 1-3 p.m. because he is very busy. But you are tied up with other appointments, so you want to have the interview rescheduled in the morning. What would you want to say to him?

Situation 3 +P ; -D ; +R

You went to the office of your adviser professor. He is very friendly and you know him well. Then you found a reference book, which you have been looking for in the library. The book is concerned with his research field and obviously he seems to be using the book, but you really need it to complete your term paper. What would you say to him?

Both these situations are +P and +R. The difference between them lies in the Distance between the student and professor. In situation 2 they do not know each other well, whereas in situation 3 the professor is the student's adviser.

The requests were analyzed for the use of syntactic and lexical downgrading in accordance with the CCSARP Manual. For each student in each situation it was noted down which types of downgrading were used in the Head Act³. For example, if a student used the request, '*Could I change the time of our meeting?*' s/he would be considered as having used an interrogative, a past tense form and a modal verb. On the other hand, if the student used, '*I wonder if you could possibly change the time of our meeting*', s/he would be considered to have used a conditional, the past tense, a modal verb, a subjectivizer (*I wonder*) and a downtoner (*possibly*). Six downgrading strategies were focused on for analysis: Interrogatives; Past Tense; Conditionals; Modal Verbs; 'Please'; Other Lexical Downgraders (OLDs). The reason for separating 'please' from other lexical downgraders is the viewpoint that it is more of a 'requestive marker' than a 'politeness marker' (Kasper & Rose, 2003,

p.142). The reason for putting subjectivizers, understaters and downtoners together into one group was the expected low occurrence of use of these strategies by the JEFLLs.

For each type of downgrader, subjects were marked as either using it (1) or not using it (0). Coding was carried out by the two authors of this paper. They met regularly to check and confirm consistent use of coding categories. The percentage of JEFLLs (85 subjects in total) and NS subjects (18 subjects for situation 2 and 17 for situation 3) who used each type of downgrader was calculated. Following that, separate percentages were calculated for each of the three grammatical competence groups (a total of 85 subjects who had completed the CELT test) and for the three groups of students with differing lengths of experience in an ESE (a total of 79 subjects as the over 6 month group was excluded from analysis on the basis of its small size).

RESULTS

Research Question 1:

Is there a relationship between JEFLLs' use of downgrading and their level of grammatical competence?

Figures 1 and 2 show the use of downgrading by the groups, divided according to their level of grammatical competence, for situations 2 (S2) and 3 (S3). For S2 (Figure 1) it can be seen that the High competence group use interrogatives, the past tense, conditionals and modals more frequently than the Low competence group. The greatest difference lies in the use of the past

tense as a syntactic downgrader. More than 85% of the High group use this to mitigate their request, as compared to 47% of the Low group. The awareness that the past tense can be used as a politeness marker appears therefore to develop with increasing grammatical competence. As regards the use of lexical downgraders, there is a slight decrease in the use of 'please' between the Low and High groups, but a doubling in the use of other lexical downgraders

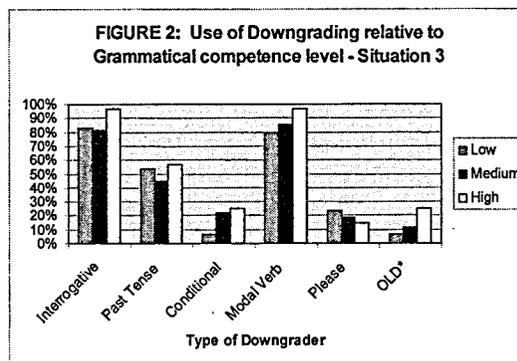
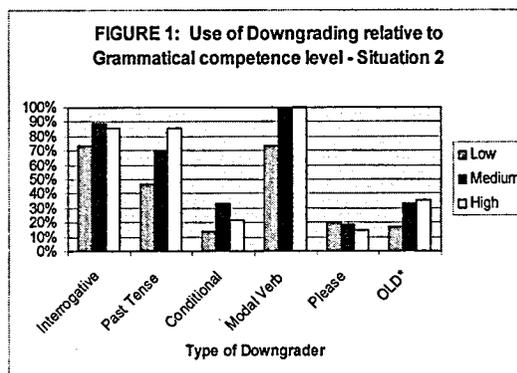


TABLE 1 : Use of Downgrading relative to Grammatical Competence - Situation 2

	Number in group	Interrogative	Past Tense	Conditional	Modal Verb	Please	OLD *
Low	30	22 (73.3%)	14 (46.7%)	4 (13.3%)	22 (73.3%)	6 (20%)	5 (16.7%)
Medium	27	24 (88.9%)	19 (70.4%)	9 (33.3%)	27 (100%)	5 (18.5%)	9 (33.3%)
High	28	24 (85.7%)	24 (85.7%)	6 (21.4%)	28 (100%)	4 (14.3%)	10 (35.7%)

TABLE 2 : Use of Downgrading relative to Grammatical Competence - Situation 3

	Number in group	Interrogative	Past Tense	Conditional	Modal Verb	Please	OLD *
Low	30	25 (83.3%)	16 (53.3%)	2 (6.7%)	24 (80%)	7 (23.3%)	2 (6.7%)
Medium	27	22 (81.5%)	12 (44.4%)	6 (22.2%)	23 (85.2%)	5 (18.5%)	3 (11.1%)
High	28	27 (96.4%)	16 (57.1%)	7 (25%)	27 (96.4%)	4 (14.3%)	7 (25%)

(OLDs) between the Low group (17%), and the Medium group (33%). This would appear to show an improvement in the use of lexical downgrading with increasing grammatical competence.

For S3 (Figure 2) the increases between the Low and High groups for syntactic downgraders are smaller than in S2, but there are nevertheless increases in each case. The most noticeable difference from S2 can be seen in the use of the Past Tense. Whereas nearly twice as many of the High group used it for S2, for S3 there is only a 4% increase (Low-53%; High 57%). On the other hand a conditional structure was used by nearly four times as many students in the High group (25%) as in the Low group (7%). The conditional may have been used instead of a past tense as a more polite form of syntactic downgrading. Regarding lexical downgraders, there is once again a decrease in the use of 'please' with an increase in grammatical competence, and there is a large increase (6% to 25%) in the use of other lexical downgraders (OLD) with increasing grammatical competence. The High group are more aware than the Low group that downtoners, subjectivizers etc. are more appropriate forms of lexical downgrading than 'please' in high-imposition situations.

Research Question 2:

Is there a relationship between JEFLLs' use of downgrading and the length of time they have spent in an English-speaking environment (ESE)?

Figures 3 and 4 show the use of downgrading by the

groups, separated according to the length of time they have spent in an ESE, for S2 and S3. For the purpose of analysis here, the 0-2 weeks Group will be referred to as Short, the 2 weeks-3 months as Medium and the 3-6 months group as Long.

Just as for grammatical competence, for S2 (Figure 3) it can be seen that there is a steady increase in the use of syntactic downgrading as the length of ESE experience increases. Again, the largest increase (from

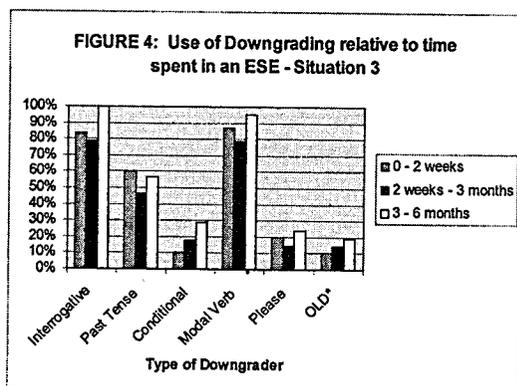
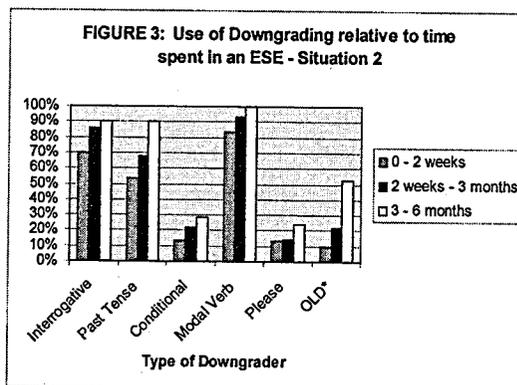


TABLE 3: Use of Downgrading relative to time spent in an ESE - Situation 2

	Number in group	Interrogative	Past Tense	Conditional	Modal Verb	Please	OLD *
0 - 2 weeks	30	21 (70%)	16 (53.3%)	4 (13.3%)	25 (83.3%)	4 (13.3%)	3 (10%)
2 wks - 3 mths	28	24 (85.7%)	19 (67.9%)	6 (21.4%)	26 (92.9%)	4 (14.3%)	6 (21.4%)
3 - 6 months	21	19 (90.5%)	19 (90.5%)	6 (28.6%)	21 (100%)	5 (23.8%)	11 (52.4%)

TABLE 4: Use of Downgrading relative to time spent in an ESE - Situation 3

	Number in group	Interrogative	Past Tense	Conditional	Modal Verb	Please	OLD *
0 - 2 weeks	30	25 (83.3%)	18 (60%)	3 (10%)	26 (86.7%)	6 (20%)	3 (10%)
2 wks - 3 mths	28	22 (78.6%)	13 (46.4%)	5 (17.9%)	22 (78.6%)	4 (14.3%)	4 (14.3%)
3 - 6 months	21	21 (100%)	12 (57.1%)	6 (28.6%)	20 (95.2%)	5 (23.8%)	4 (19.1%)

Short (53%) to Long (90%)) is for the use of the past tense. The most noticeable difference among the groups here is in the use of OLDs. Five times as many students in the Long group (52%) use them as in the Short group (10%). This shows a clear development towards the native speaker standard (see below), and a larger improvement than between the Low and High grammatical competence groups, which suggests that time spent abroad is more influential than grammatical competence, as regards the use of lexical downgrading.

For S3 (see Figure 4), as was the case with respect to grammatical competence, there is not such a clear 'progression' from the Short to the Long group with regard to syntactic downgraders. It is true that for Interrogatives, Conditionals and Modals, the Long group uses these strategies more than the Short group, but for the Past Tense there is a slight decrease (Short-60%, Long-57%). This result is very similar to that found with the grammatical competence groups above.

Research Question 3:

To what extent do JEFLLs use internal syntactic and lexical downgrading in high-imposition (+R +P +/- D) requests as compared to Native Speakers?

As mentioned above, the 18 Native Speakers who completed the DCT were of five different nationalities, but there was a strong consistency in their responses. In Figures 5 and 6, the NS use of syntactic and lexical downgraders is compared with that of the JEFLLs, taken as a whole. This section will also include some qualitative analysis of the types of responses used, as this will help to shed light on differences in the

downgrading strategies adopted.

For S2 (see Figure 5), the following observations can be made. It appears that the interrogative and past tense are used to a similar degree by JEFLLs and NSs. However, reference back to Figures 1 and 3 shows that students with higher grammatical competence and those who have spent longer in an ESE use the past tense more than NSs in this situation. Also, regarding the use of modal verbs, the NSs use it noticeably less

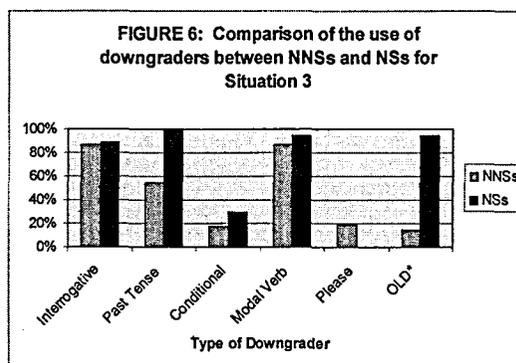
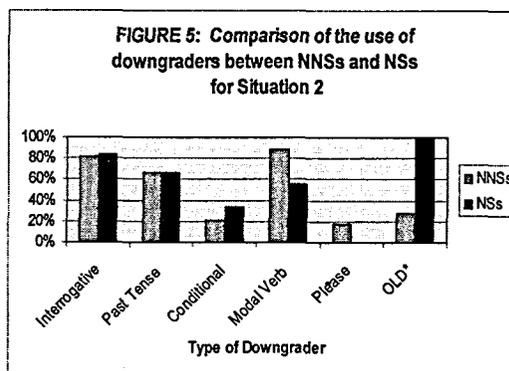


TABLE 5: Comparison of the use of Downgraders between NNSs and NSs - Situation 2

	Number in group	Interrogative	Past Tense	Conditional	Modal Verb	Please	OLD *
NNSs	91	74 (81.3%)	60 (65.9%)	19 (20.9%)	80 (87.9%)	16 (17.6%)	25 (27.5%)
NSs	18	15 (83.3%)	12 (66.7%)	6 (33.3%)	10 (55.6%)	0 (0%)	18 (100%)

TABLE 6: Comparison of the use of Downgraders between NNSs and NSs - Situation 3

	Number in group	Interrogative	Past Tense	Conditional	Modal Verb	Please	OLD *
NNSs	91	79 (86.8%)	49 (53.9%)	16 (17.6%)	79 (86.8%)	17 (18.7%)	13 (14.3%)
NSs	17	15 (88.2%)	17 (100%)	5 (29.4%)	16 (94.1%)	0 (0%)	16 (94.1%)

than JEFLLs. Furthermore, there is a very large difference in the use of other lexical downgraders (OLDs), with all the NSs using this strategy but only 27% of JEFLLs doing so. Closer qualitative analysis of responses should help to explain these last three results. The following responses for S2 (only the Head Acts are included here) were made by students who were in both the High grammatical competence group and the Long ESE group:

'Could you change the time of my interview?'

'Would you mind if I change my interview time?'

These are examples from the responses made by NSs:

'Would it be possible for you to reschedule my interview for the morning?'

'Do you mind if we meet in the morning instead?'

The typical 'advanced' JEFLL response included an interrogative using a past modal with, in some cases, a lexical downgrader such as 'possibly' or 'mind'. The NSs used a broader range of strategies, and it appears from the results that a combination of a more complex syntactical structure plus lexical downgrader(s) is the most common way to make a request in a high-imposition situation to a professor you are unacquainted with. Modal verbs and the use of the past tense appear therefore to be unmarked forms for polite requests, with lexical downgraders other than 'please' and more complex syntactic downgraders, such as conditionals, being used as a strategy to mark a higher degree of politeness.

For S3 the use of interrogatives was once again fairly consistent between the JEFLLs and NSs, as was the use of a modal verb. Standard forms exemplifying this for JEFLLs were:

Can I borrow this reference book?

Could you lend me the reference book?

Typical responses for the NSs were:

Would it be possible for me to borrow the book for just a couple of days?

Would you mind if I took a look through this book?

All of the above samples include interrogative plus modal. Most of them also include a past form, which was used by all of the NSs (in a clear contrast to S2) and by around a half of the JEFLLs. Once again the

major difference between the two groups, as can be seen from Figure 6 and from the samples from the data above, was in the use of lexical downgraders. All but one of the NSs used this strategy whereas less than a fifth of the JEFLLs did. Moreover, many of the NSs used more than one lexical downgrader other than 'please', as can be seen from the first example from their data above, where a downgrader (*possibly, mind*) is used with an imposition minimizer stating that they would only need the book for a short time (*just a couple of days*). It is important to note here that not one of the JEFLLs used the latter strategy, demonstrating quite clearly that a substantial gap exists between their downgrading strategies and those of NSs in high-imposition (+R) situations. The last point to be made concerns the use of 'please'. None of the NSs used it whereas in both Situations nearly 20% of JEFLLs did so. This appears to support the supposition outlined above that 'please' is more of a requestive marker than a politeness marker and is not considered appropriate for high-imposition requests.

In the following discussion section the results will be connected to broader issues of SLA, metapragmatic awareness, and classroom pragmatic input.

DISCUSSION

This study shows that in situations requiring high imposition requests (+R) to people with higher status (+P), as compared to NSs, JEFLLs use syntactic downgrading more accurately and with more variation than lexical downgrading. It is apparent from this data that whilst JEFLLs are generally able to produce appropriate syntactical forms for the mitigation of polite requests, they are generally unable to include lexical downgraders which would increase the mitigation in a request to the level used by NSs.

There appears to be a relationship between the use of internal downgrading and both the time students have spent in an ESE and grammatical competence. With regard to syntactic downgrading, the effect appears to be similar for each of the two variables. On the whole, JEFLLs are able to use appropriate syntactic forms for polite requests, and this ability improves both with grammatical development and with time spent in an

ESE. However, for lexical downgraders other than 'please', the students who have spent longer in an ESE use them more than the High grammatical competence group. Presumably, those students who spent several months in an ESE have had greater exposure to positive evidence regarding the use of these lexical downgraders than the students studying in an EFL classroom in Japan.

JEFLs have limited opportunities to experience NS use of requests in their daily life. As a result the classroom is the best opportunity for development in this area. Takahashi's (2001, p.197) study demonstrates that 'target pragmatic features were found to be most effectively learned when they were under the condition in which a relatively high degree of input enhancement was realized with explicit metapragmatic information.' This supports Schmidt (1993) who argues for the importance of learners consciously noticing important features of the L2. In an EFL situation it is the role of teacher or textbook to increase the level of 'noticing'.

An analysis of Japanese high school textbooks for speech acts used in dialogues shows that request forms rarely include lexical downgraders (Fukazawa, 2002). It is commonly claimed that textbooks play a vital role in contributing to the development of learners' pragmatic competence in EFL contexts. Fukazawa examined how some English Oral Communication textbooks for Japanese high school students illustrate examples of authentic pragmatic interaction and concluded that very few dialogues present status-unequal and high imposition situations.

Most requests presented depend on syntactic downgraders but lexical downgraders such as 'just' or 'a little' are rarely seen in the textbook dialogues. Without exposure to the use of lexical downgrading, in an EFL situation it would appear to be extremely unlikely that a learner could acquire this skill. Further research is required along the lines of Takahashi (1996, 2001) in order to investigate the best ways of teaching EFL learners how to internally modify speech acts.

From an SLA point of view, developmental sequences of for the acquisition of pragmatics have been posited (Kasper & Rose, 2003, for overview). Certainly, studies have shown that the use of the past

tense or past progressive (*I was wondering if..*) as 'pragmatic softeners' (cf. Bardovi-Harlig (2000, p.429) occurs at the end of the acquisition sequence of those syntactic forms. It may be the case that the acquisition of certain forms of lexical downgrading also occurs at the end of developmental sequences. As this study is cross-sectional in nature, developmental sequences cannot be truly identified. Longitudinal studies of learners speech act strategies using similar forms of data collections could help to clarify this situation.

An assumption underlying this study is that learners of English, whether in an EFL or ESL situation, are trying to attain Native Speaker like pragmalinguistic norms. It is clear in this study that the NSs from a variety of different countries, use consistent strategies in +P, +R situations, and it is also clear that the Japanese learners are moving towards those norms, with much more success regarding syntactic than lexical downgrading. However, the issue of NS norms is highly controversial, and as Kasper & Schmidt (1996) state, '*total convergence to NS norms may not be desirable, either from the NNS's or from the NS's point of view*'. Learners may choose to maintain L1 sociopragmatic norms when communicating in the L2 in order to maintain their cultural identity. However, learners need to be able to make that choice, if they so wish, so it would appear that the aim of teaching pragmatics in the classroom is to raise the student's awareness of what NS norms are.

This study was limited in certain ways. Firstly, it focused only on learners' production and not on their perception of pragmalinguistic forms. A similar study to this one which looked at learners' perception of requests could tell us the relationship between grammatical competence and pragmatic perception, and also look at the extent to which living in an ESE helps develop this perception. Secondly, as a cross-sectional study it could not tell us about the way in which individuals' IL develops. It would be possible to understand more about the processes underlying pragmatic development and learners' choice of strategies by undertaking longitudinal research. Repeated testing at intervals of speech act production with controlled variables would elicit useful data in this respect.

CONCLUSION

This study finds that both grammatical competence and time spent in an ESE are positive indicators for the development of pragmatic competence towards NS norms. Closer microlinguistic analysis reveals that syntactic elements appear to be acquired sooner than lexical elements. However, more exposure to positive evidence, as experienced by EFL learners spending time in an ESE, contributes favorably to the latter.

More specifically, as requests requiring the highest degrees of politeness appear to be achieved using lexis as much as intricate syntactic forms, it would seem that the role of lexis in the development of pragmatic competence has been under-emphasized. In light of this, materials for the teaching of speech acts, at least in the Japanese EFL context, may need to be reviewed and aligned more closely with authentic use drawn from spoken corpora and also designed to cover the full range of pragmatic variables.

NOTES

- 1 POT = potential; NEG = negation; COP = copula; QUES = question
- 2 Most of these students spent between four and five months studying English at universities in the United Kingdom, during which time they stayed with homestay families.
- 3 Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989) describe the Head Act as 'the minimal unit which can realize a request; it is the core of the request sequence.' In this research any 'external mitigation', ie, outside the Head Act in Supportive Moves, is not considered. Faerch & Kasper (1989) show that 'internal modification is an obligatory choice, external modification an optional choice in the realization of conventionally indirect query-preparatory requests'.

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