


The Effect of Consciousness-Raising Listening Prompts on the Development of the Speech Act of Apology in an Iranian EFL Context

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Abstract

In line with the previous bodies of research, the present study in interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) proved that some aspects of pragmatics were amenable to instruction even in foreign language (FL) contexts. However, there are still controversies over the best convenient teaching techniques and appropriate materials. Moreover, *production-oriented* approaches to teaching pragmatics caused scant practical studies over the *perception* of the frequent speech acts such as apology conducted to date. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the relative effectiveness of consciousness-raising (C-R) listening prompts on the development of the speech act of apology on 64 (34 male and 30 female ranging in age from 17 to 27) upper-intermediate Persian learners of English who were randomly assigned to two groups of 32. While the experimental group took advantages of listening prompts with C-R or input enhancement activities, the control group received the same listening prompts without any C-R activities. The two groups were then exposed to 20 conversation extracts during 10 sessions of instruction including different apology situations taken from *Interchange Series*, *Tactics for Listening Series*, *American Headway*, and *Top Notch*. The results of the multiple-choice discourse completion task (MDCT) indicated that learners in the experimental group benefited more from C-R activities via listening prompts and outperformed the control group. In addition, the results revealed that male and female learners' development in this pragmatic aspect of language did differ significantly. The findings throw light on practical as well as pedagogical implications of ILP and provide suggestions for English as a second language/English as a foreign language (ESL/EFL) teachers and materials developers.

Keywords

interlanguage pragmatics, consciousness-raising, listening prompts

Introduction

Effective communication requires more than just knowing the linguistic knowledge of the language such as phonology, morphology, and syntax. In other words, to make learners become communicatively competent in English language, there should be a shift from previous theoretical frameworks, which considered language as a formal system based on grammatical rules, toward a more communicative perspective (Martínez-Flor, 2004).

Research into pragmatic competence of adult foreign and second language learners has demonstrated that grammatical development does not guarantee a corresponding level of pragmatic development (Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1997), and even advanced learners may fail to comprehend or to convey the intended intentions and politeness values (Eslami-Rasekh, Eslami-Rasekh, & Fatahi, 2004). Therefore, to be a competent learner in English as a global language, the development of grammatical, pragmatic, and sociolinguistic rules of language use is important for language learners especially in the realm of interlanguage competence. Interlanguage has

been defined as a discipline concerning “the study of non-native speakers’ comprehension, production, and acquisition of linguistic action in L2” (Kasper, 1998, p. 184). As defined by Kasper (1992), interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) represents “the branch of second language research that studies how non-native speakers (NNSs) understand and carry out linguistic actions in a target language and how they acquire L2 pragmatic knowledge” (p. 203). ILP focuses on describing and explaining learners’ use, perception, and acquisition of L2 pragmatic ability both in L2 and second/foreign language (FL) contexts (Alcón & Martínez-Flor, 2008).

Teaching pragmatics, its components, as well as its factors which result in pragmatic learning development have been highlighted in educational contexts. One of these

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factors is the role of instruction on learners' awareness and production of speech acts which has generated a lot of interest in the field of ILP (Alcón & Pitarch, 2010). In fact, the rationale for the need of instruction in pragmatics is provided by R. Schmidt's (1993) noticing hypothesis postulating that simple exposure to the target language is not enough for developing pragmatic competence. He believes that pragmatic functions and relevant contextual factors are often not salient to learners and thus not likely to be noticed even after prolonged exposure. Kumaravadivelu (1994) explains

in the specific context of L2 learning and teaching, consciousness-raising refers to the deliberate attempt to draw learners' attention to the formal and functional properties of their L2 in order to increase the degree of explicitness required to promote L2 learning. (p. 168)

By the same token, Willis and Willis (1996) state, "We can provide learners with guidelines and, more importantly, we can provide them with activities which encourage them to think about samples of language and to draw their own conclusions about how the language works" (p. 2). Working on the impact of C-R and teaching methodology factors, Sedighi and Nazari (2007, p. 22) note,

Language awareness approaches do not in themselves cause language acquisition to take place but those approaches which focus on learner investment and learner discovery do help learners to pay informed attention to features of their input and can create the curiosity, alertness and positive valuation which are prerequisites for the development of communicative competence.

As a field of study, ILP reflects the growing interest in understanding the social and pragmatic aspects of FL acquisition in general. In the study of apology, in particular as an important speech act in ILP and factors affecting that, many investigations have been done to examine the effectiveness of both explicit and implicit instruction on pragmatic development (Alcón, 2005; Dastjerdi & Farshid, 2011; Fukuya & Zhang, 2002; Takahashi, 2001; Takimoto, 2012).

Less or more the effectiveness of instruction has been proved in studies with almost *production-oriented* approaches. Consequently, the present study did not aim to broaden the results of the previous ones. But, on the one hand, due to serious pragmatic failure arising from misunderstanding of the *perception* of the speech act of apology in English as foreign language (EFL) contexts, our study has a *comprehension-oriented* approach. The perception of the speech act of apology was selected for pedagogical reasons. As many studies claim, perception precedes or is a pre-requisite for production (Cortés Pomacóndor, 1999; Neufeld, 1988). In both first- and second-language studies, the most widely supported hypothesis is that accurate perception is at least one necessary component of accurate production (Flege, 1995). On the other hand, lack of appropriate material for the English learners to be exposed to in natural

situations and controversies over the convenient teaching techniques made the researchers work on listening prompts through C-R activities as the focus in this research not been investigated sufficiently to date.

Review of the Related Literature

Authentic Audio-Taped Materials as Listening Prompts

Before 1960s, listening was considered as a passive skill and it was often overlooked by educational policy makers, methodologists, curriculum designers, and language teachers. After coming of new trends into existence in language learning such as Krashen's (1989) comprehensible input hypothesis and emphasis on receptive skills, listening skill, its techniques, components, and materials were given a boost. Until recently, not only has using authentic materials increasingly received a priority, but also working on these authentic materials in the form of explicit instruction and C-R activities has a prominence (Richards & Renandya, 2002).

One of the important principles of communicative language teaching is that authentic language should be used in instruction whenever possible (Hadley & Reiken, 1993). Nunan (1999) defines authentic materials as spoken or written language data that has been produced in the course of genuine communication, and not specifically written for purposes of language teaching. Little et al. (as cited in Guariento & Morley, 2001, p. 347) define authentic materials as those that have been produced to fulfill some social purpose in the language community in which they were produced. Gebhard (1996) gives examples of authentic materials EFL/ESL teachers have used. Some of his examples, which may serve as the source material for lesson planning, are listed as (a) authentic listening viewing materials such as audio-taped short dialogues, (b) authentic visual materials such as slides and photographs, (c) authentic printed materials such as newspaper articles and movie advertisements, and (d) Realia (Real world objects) used in EFL/ESL classrooms such as coins and currency.

In the present study, the researchers focus on the authentic listening materials. According to Brinton (2001), the use of authentic audio-taped materials should be the basis of in-class activities. Listening to the audio-taped materials can be enjoyable for students and can provide them with authentic practice in listening to native speaker speech. Some of advantages of using authentic listening materials mentioned by Lingzhu and Yuanyuan (2010) are as follows: exposing students to the real language, stimulating students' motivation, and accumulating students' knowledge.

Consciousness and Consciousness-Raising Activities

Indich (2000) maintained that to define consciousness, we can only use another word, that is, awareness. Consciousness

means you are conscious of something; it is opposed to inertness or unconsciousness. Consciousness, therefore, can be defined as what is manifest in all forms of perception, in all forms of knowing. Vygotsky defines consciousness as the “objectively observable organization of behavior that is imposed on humans through participation in sociocultural practices” (Wertsch, 1985, p. 187).

McLaughlin, Rossman, and McLeod (1983) in their attention-processing hypothesis argue against Krashen’s “learning-acquisition” distinction and his claim about not having interface between these two terms. Because Krashen’s “learning-acquisition” hypothesis rests on what McLaughlin (1990) considers being an unsupportable distinction between conscious and unconscious knowledge. By the same token, McLaughlin (1990) noted that “the literature in experimental psychology indicates that there is no long-term learning (of new material) without awareness, an observation well documented by Leow (1997) and R. W. Schmidt (1990) for second language learning in particular.”

According to Gilakjani and Ahmadi (2011), one of the major concepts of consciousness is awareness. From their point of view, in this sense, awareness can be distinguished at these levels: *Level 1: Perception*. It is generally believed that all perception implies mental organization and the ability to create internal representations of external events (Baars 1986; Oakley 1985). *Level 2: Noticing (focal awareness)*. Bowers (1984) points out the crucial distinction between information that is perceived and information that is noticed. *Level 3: Understanding*. Noticing is the basic sense in which we commonly say that we are aware of something, but does not exhaust the possibilities. R. Schmidt (1995) argues that learning without awareness is not possible, and that learners need to notice a feature consciously to acquire the feature.

Ellis (2003) defines the features of C-R approach as follows: (a) There is an attempt to isolate a specific linguistic feature for focused attention; (b) The learners are provided with data that illustrate the target feature, and they may also be provided with an explicit rule describing or explaining the feature; (c) The learners are expected to utilize intellectual efforts to understand the target feature. Moreover, he accounts that a C-R task consists of (a) data containing exemplars of the target feature and (b) instructions requiring the learners to operate on the data in some way. It has also been argued that C-R tasks appear to be an effective means of achieving a focus on form while providing opportunities to communicate.

Previous Studies on Consciousness-Raising Activities in Teaching Pragmatics and Gender Differences in Pragmatic Comprehension

Many researchers have examined the effect of consciousness-raising activities through implicit and explicit instructions on pragmatic development in different contexts. Some of the relevant studies are as follows:

Eslami-Rasekh et al. (2004) carried out a study to explore the effect of explicit metapragmatic instruction on the comprehension of speech acts of request, apology, and complaint on Iranian advanced EFL students. Teacher-fronted discussions, cooperative grouping, role-plays, and other pragmatically oriented tasks were used to promote the learning of the intended speech acts. A pre-test–post-test control group design was used. The subjects included Iranian undergraduate students in their last year of study in the field of teaching EFL. A group of American students were used to provide the baseline for the study. A multiple-choice pragmatic comprehension test was developed in several stages and used both as a pre-test and post-test to measure the effect of instruction on the pragmatic comprehension of the students. The results of the data analysis revealed that students’ comprehension of speech act improved significantly and that pragmatic competence is not impervious to instruction even in EFL settings.

Takimoto (2006) has provided empirical evidence for the claim that pragmatic features can be taught explicitly or implicitly together with input enhancement activities. He evaluated the relative effectiveness of two types of input-based instruction, C-R instruction (the C-R task only) and C-R instruction with feedback (the C-R task + reactive explicit feedback) for teaching English polite requestive forms, involving 45 Japanese EFL learners. The results of data analysis indicated that the two treatment groups outperformed the control group.

Kargar, Sadighi, and Ahmadi (2012) investigated the relative effectiveness of different types of pragmatic instruction on the production of apologetic utterances in Iranian EFL context. The instructions included two collaborative translation tasks and two structured input tasks with and without explicit pragmatic instruction. The participants were 150 university low-intermediate EFL learners in four experimental groups, and one control group participated in pre-tests, post-tests, and 2-month follow-ups consisting of oral pragmatic discourse completion task (OPDCT), mobile short message tasks, and telephone conversation tasks. The results of the study showed that pragmatic instruction may enhance ILP. The researchers found that the participants receiving explicit pragmatic instruction outperformed the implicit and control groups, and the two collaborative translation task groups showed better retention of pragmatic knowledge.

Birjandi and Derakhshan (2014) investigated the relative effectiveness of C-R video-driven prompts on the comprehension of three speech acts of apology, request, and refusal on 78 (36 male and 42 female) upper-intermediate Persian learners of English who were randomly assigned to four groups (metapragmatic, form-search, role-play, and control). The four groups were exposed to 45 video vignettes (15 for each speech act) extracted from different episodes of *Flash Forward*, *Stargate TV Series*, and *Annie Hall Film* for nine 60-min sessions of instruction twice a week. Results of the multiple-choice discourse completion test (MDCT) indicated that learners’ awareness of apologies, requests, and refusals

benefit from all three types of instruction, but the results of the Post hoc test of Tukey (honest significant difference [HSD]) illustrated that the metapragmatic group outperformed the other treatment groups, and form-search group had a better performance than role-play and control groups.

Birjandi, Khatib, Fahim, and Derakhshan (in press) investigated the effectiveness of C-R video-driven vignettes on the development of two commonly used speech acts of apology and request on 60 (22 male and 38 female ranged in age from 17 to 26) upper-intermediate Persian learners of English who were randomly assigned to three groups of 20 (discussion, role-play, and interactive translation). The three groups were exposed to 36 extracts including 18 requests and 18 apologies taken from different episodes of the *Flashforward*, *Stargate TV* series, and *Annie Hall* film. Results of the MDCT indicated that learners' awareness of requests and apologies benefit from all three types of instruction, but the results of the Scheffe test illustrated that the discussion group outperformed the other two groups.

Psychologists have demonstrated that there are significant differences in cognitive performance of males and females. For example, Batters (1986) found that

First, females spent more time on attentive activities than males. Attentive activities included listening to the teacher, to the tape, to other classmates, observing and reading. Second, males were more dominant in oral and participatory activities, such as speaking to the teacher and to other pupils in the foreign or native language, taking part in group work or demonstration and showing spontaneity. (p. 78)

A few studies have examined the relationship between gender and language learning especially in the field of pragmatic competence, some of which are presented below.

Farashaiyan and Tan (2012), for example, investigated the relationship between gender and language proficiency and pragmatic knowledge. That is, the study examined whether there is any significant difference between the performance of males and females regarding their pragmatic knowledge and language proficiency. Participants in this study were selected randomly and placed in the beginning, intermediate, and advanced levels based on the results of the proficiency test. A pragmatic competence test was used to determine participants' pragmatic knowledge. The findings of the study indicated that female participants performed better in pragmatic and proficiency tests than male ones.

In a similar kind of inquiry, Safa and Mahmoodi (2012) attempted to see if any relationship can be found between EFL learners' lexico-grammatical and interlanguage pragmatic competences and if such a relationship is found, whether the gender variable affects it or not. A group of 110 male/female senior university EFL students took a standardized lexico-grammatical proficiency test and a researcher made and validated MDCT including four speech acts of disagreement, scolding, request, and complaint at four levels of formality and familiarity. The results indicated that there is a

positive correlation between the learners' lexico-grammatical and pragmatic competences. Moreover, this positive correlation is stronger for female EFL learners than the male participants.

The present study. The present study seeks to answer the following questions:

Question 1. Does raising consciousness of listening prompts have any effect on Iranian EFL learners' perception of the speech act of apology?

Question 2. Is there any significant difference between the perception of male and female learners in the speech act of apology taught through raising consciousness of listening prompts?

Method

Participants

The participants of the present study were 72 upper-intermediate learners from 2 intact classes. All the participants had passed the pre-intermediate and intermediate levels of English courses in Iran Language Institute. None of them had the experience of living in or visiting an English-speaking country, and English was studied as a FL. They were divided into two intact groups. Among all participants, 6 were excluded due to not having enough English proficiency for the purpose of this study and 2 more students were excluded since they missed some of the treatment sessions. A final participant pool of 64 learners was yielded, each group comprising 15 female and 17 male participants.

The researchers used accidental or convenience sampling in intact classes. Accidental or convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling technique that simply uses conveniently available subjects (Dörnyei, 2007). However, the participants were randomly assigned to two groups, that is, group assignment occurred randomly.

Instrumentations and Materials

This study is anchored in the field of ILP, the approach of which is speech-act based. In particular, the investigation compares the perception and understanding of the speech act of apology in pre- and post-test between two groups. Data were collected by a MDCT for the speech act of apology.

Blum-Kulka (1982) defines the DCT as a questionnaire containing a set of briefly described situations designed to elicit a particular speech act. An MDCT is a pragmatics instrument that requires students to read a written description of a situation, but, unlike the written discourse completion test (WDCT), an MDCT requires the students to select what would be best to say in that situation. Following is a sample of MDCT prompt for an apology item (Jianda, 2006, p. 5):

Situation. You are now in a bookstore. While you are looking for the books you want, you accidentally find a book that you have been looking for a long time. You are so excited that you rush out of the bookstore with the book without paying it. When the shop assistant stops you, you realize that you forgot to pay for it. You apologize.

- a. Oh, I'm sorry! I was too happy! I like this book and have been looking for it for a long time.
- b. I'm very sorry that I forgot to pay the book because I was so excited. I've been looking for it for a long time. I hope you can forgive my behavior.
- *c. Oh, I'm so sorry. I was so excited about finding this book that I have been looking for ages that I just plain forgot to pay. I really am very sorry, how much do I owe you? (Jianda, 2007, p. 415)

The researchers selected the MDCTs as they are fitted in with the research aims and had been carefully designed, taking into account the pragmatic and social variables of *relative power*, *social distance*, and *degree of imposition*. According to Linde (2009), MDCTs are flexible devices for collecting data and assessing pragmatic competence on many aspects. Some researchers capitalized on MDCT as a data collection instrument. For example, Rose (1994) studied non-Western contextual speech acts; Rose and Ono (1995) dealt with the methodological validation in speech act research; moreover, Roever (2005) assessed implicature and routines, among others.

MDCT used in this study is a standard multiple-choice format of one answer and two distracters, which cover 21 situations in speech act of apology, involving pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic knowledge. The students were asked to assess each situation and choose one answer which is considered to be the most appropriate of the three possible choices. The MDCT used in this study is a combination of two MDCTs developed by Birjandi and Rezaei (2010) and Jianda (2007). The reason supporting these two tests for the MDCT was that the number of items in each MDCT mentioned above was not enough for this study. Although the MDCT was a mixture of two reliable tests the reliability for Birjandi and Rezaei (2010) study was 0.86 and Jianda (2007) study was 0.78, the researchers estimated its post-test reliability to make certain that the combination of MDCTs used in this situation is also reliable. KR-21 formula was used for the computation of the internal consistency of the test. The reliability index for the MDCT in this study was found to be 0.79, which is, according to DeVellis (1991), a respectable reliability.

Listening Prompts

The pragmatic listening comprehension task or listening prompts (LPs) used in the study consisted of 20 tape-recorded conversations extracted from a corpus of academic spoken language that was collected by the researchers (see Appendix

A). This kind of authentic materials used in this study contained conversations taken from *Interchange Series* (Richards, 2005), *Tactics for Listening Series* (Richards, 2003), *American Headway* (Soars & Soars, 2002), and *Top Notch* (Saslow & Ascher, 2006).

LPs in this study were 20 different structures to perform the speech act of apology in different situations. They were transcribed by the book, or the researcher. These target forms were selected for containing pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic patterns under the effects of various situational, social, or cultural factors of variability of English taught in Iran EFL context. These materials then become input for subsequent in-class activities, such as oral reports or discussions.

The Structured Form for LPs

In the experimental group, the students were given the structured form to work on what they had heard as C-R activities (see Appendix B). Using structured form, students were given an opportunity to specify the categories in each LPs and mark the characteristics of each apology speech act situation. The structured form is a modified version of Kasper's (1997) form, taken from Eslami-Rasekh (2005).

Procedure

Two intact groups were used to compare the effectiveness of C-R activities through listening prompts. To feel certain that all the students are at the same level of language proficiency, "Nelson English Language Proficiency Test" was administered at the very beginning in one session. Before starting the instruction, the participants were given the MDCT of English apology as a pre-test. The session after the pre-test, the researchers started to teach both groups. One group as the experimental group listened to LPs accompanied by C-R activities (introduced by Eslami-Rasekh, 2005) through integrating implicit and explicit instructions for teaching English apologies and the other group as control group took advantage of LPs without C-R activities for teaching the same apology situations.

Twenty apology LPs were chosen to be taught. In each session, only one apology LP was presented to each group, and after the sixth session, the previously taught apology LPs were reviewed in the seventh one. Both groups were presented the same apology LPs. The same apology LP was heard by each group in every session. C-R group listened to apology LP, and then they were asked to do some C-R activities through implicit and explicit instructions as follows:

- I. The students were asked to underline some phrases and sentences containing intensifiers such as, *I'm terribly sorry*, *I'm so sorry*, *I am very sorry*, and *Sir, excuse me very very much*, on their transcribed conversation text and then translate into Persian. Some examples are presented:

Oh, my gosh! I'm so sorry. I completely forgot. Can we schedule another time to meet?

Ei dad, agha! Kheili sharmande shodam. Kolan yadam raft. Mishe hamin jalasero ye zamane dige dashte bashim?

After that, the researchers got the students to provide other equivalent alternatives for the phrase or sentence appropriate based on each situation they heard.

II. The students were presented the structured form to specify the social status of speaker (S) related to hearer (H) as being higher ($S > H$), equal ($S = H$), or lower ($S < H$). For example, if the situation involved a student making an apology to a professor, the relationship would be marked as $S < H$. Distance shows how well the interlocutors know each other. In the student/advisor example, the category ($S = H$) would be marked since the student and adviser are neither strangers nor intimates. Depending on the nature of the offence, the intensity of the offence can vary. For example, being late for an important meeting with an advisor for the second time would be marked as maximum intensity of offence. In the apology section in the figure, students should write the strategy that was used for apologizing.

III. Student volunteers were asked to role-play the intended apology speech act situation speech acts for the whole class in each session.

IV. Sociopragmatic or pragmalinguistic deviations observed in students' structured form and their performance in role-play were taken as teaching points in teacher-fronted discussion or explicit comments on the apology speech act LP as a feedback phase to the whole class.

Allotted time for performing each phase of C-R activities in this group was considered 5 to 10 min. In non-C-R group, the students listened to LPs without any implicit or explicit pragmatic instruction. The students were just taught in accordance with the usual instructional programs of the institute. The transcribed conversations were read out loud to them without any pragmatically oriented tasks or C-R activity. They worked on new topics and vocabulary in the text.

At the end of the course, in the 10th session, the MDCT post-test, which was exactly the same as the pre-test, was administered to both groups. After collecting the data, appropriate statistical tests were used to find out the significance of the results.

Results

The Results Concerning the First Research Question

To answer the first research question, the researchers ran an independent samples *t*-test to compare the means of the scores between control and experimental groups. In Table 1, the descriptive statistics and the results of *t*-test are presented.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and the Results of *t*-test for the Perception of Apology in Pre- and Post-Tests in Both Groups.

Group	Perception of apology in pre-test	Perception of apology in post-test
	Mean \pm SD	Mean \pm SD
Control	11.81 \pm 3.24	12.09 \pm 3.36
Experimental	11.75 \pm 2.98	15.22 \pm 3.79
Total	11.78 \pm 3.09	13.66 \pm 3.87
<i>p</i> -value	.936	.001

As indicated in Table 1, while in the pre-test, there was no significant difference between the mean scores of two groups regarding the perception of apology (p -value = .936), an observable statistical significant difference between the mean scores of control and experimental groups was seen (p -value = .001), $*p \leq .05$.

Comparing the mean scores of both groups shows that after receiving treatment via C-R activities on listening prompts of apology, the mean score of the experimental group was higher than that of the control group in MDCT of post-tests. In other words, the experimental group had a better performance on multiple-choice tests. So, it is inferred that C-R listening prompts had a positive effect on the perception of the speech act of apology.

The Results Concerning the Second Research Question

To answer the second research question, a paired-sample *t*-test was computed. The results of pre-test are illustrated in the Table 2.

As Table 2 indicates, in pre-test, there was no significant difference between females and males in the control group regarding the perception of apology ($p = .479$). While, in experimental group, there was a significant difference between females and males regarding the perception of apology ($p = .045$), $*p \leq .05$.

The results of post-test to compare the performance of males and females in both groups are illustrated in Table 3.

As Table 3 displays, in post-test, there was no significant difference between females and males in the control group regarding the perception of apology ($p = .335$), while, in experimental group, there was a significant difference between females and males regarding the perception of apology ($p = .012$), $*p \leq .05$; therefore, it is concluded that female participants of the experimental group had a better performance in MDCT both in pre- and post-tests than the male ones.

Discussion and Conclusion

As the results of the study indicated, there was a significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental and the control groups on the pragmatic comprehension of the speech act of apology in the post-test. Actually, the participants

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics and the Results of Paired-Sample *t*-test for the Perception of Apology Between Males and Females Participants of Two Groups in Pre-Test.

Group	Sex	N	M ± SD	p-value
Control	Female	15	12.27 ± 3.97	.479
	Male	17	11.41 ± 2.43	
Experimental	Female	15	12.37 ± 3.13	.045
	Male	17	10.76 ± 2.49	

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics and the Results of Paired-Sample *t*-Test for the Perception of Apology Between Males and Females Participants of two Groups in Post-Test.

Group	Sex	N	M ± SD	p-value
Control	Female	15	12.73 ± 4.044	.335
	Male	17	11.53 ± 2.63	
Experimental	Female	15	16.93 ± 3.17	.012
	Male	17	13.71 ± 3.64	

in the experimental group outperformed the control group which was only exposed to the listening prompts and with no C-R activities. Hence, it was concluded that audio-taped materials accompanied by C-R activities could significantly improve the perception of the apology as an indispensable aspect of pragmatic competence. The second research question addressed the differences between the perception of the male and the female learners in the speech act of apology in both control and experimental groups. As revealed in Table 3, while, in the control group, no significant difference was detected between the males and females' mean scores in the perception of the speech act of apology in pre- and post-tests, the females in experimental group outperformed the males both in pre- and post-tests. Although the females had a better performance on the test than males in experimental group, this difference was not statistically significant in control group.

The first result of this study holds up the effective role of C-R activities in the form of explicit and implicit instructions on the EFL learners' pragmatic development. It is in line with the Takimoto's (2006) findings reporting empirical evidence for the effectiveness of input enhancement or C-R activities on the Japanese EFL learners' pragmatic improvement. The results are also consistent with the results of Eslami-Rasekh et al.'s (2004) study on effectiveness of explicit metapragmatic instruction on the improvement of speech acts comprehension. Alternatively, Birjandi and Derakhshan (2014) found that metapragmatic awareness-raising group outperformed the other groups since sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic features were explicitly taught to them compared with form-search and role-play groups. Moreover, in another study, Birjandi et al. (in press) found that the discussion group outperformed the role-play group and interactive translation. The findings are legitimized on the grounds that

the learners in the discussion group had more opportunities to discuss and compare the sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic features of apology and request.

The second result of the present study for the experimental group is compatible with Safa and Mahmoodi's (2012) findings who found a positive correlation between the learners' lexico-grammatical and pragmatic competences as well as a stronger positive correlation for female EFL learners than the male participants. The findings in this study regarding the difference between males and females are consistent with the results of Farashaiyan and Tan's (2012) study. Their findings revealed that female participants performed better in pragmatic and proficiency tests than male ones. The reason that can be given for such findings may be traced back to the learners' current educational learning context in addition to the differences between male and females' psychological traits and multiple intelligences.

In EFL contexts, in which learners cannot acquire a perfect native-like performance, it is necessary for the learners to be exposed to natural language materials such as authentic audio-taped. But it is not sufficient for the case mentioned. It is strongly proposed that some problematic aspects of language learning such as apology speech act requiring the complicated knowledge of pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic dimensions of each language should be salient through C-R activities in the classroom. Accordingly, through C-R activities, the students can gradually develop their language comprehension via speech act listening prompts as they have more opportunities to be exposed to the language used by native speakers of the target language.

The obtained results in the present study have a proposal for syllabus designers and material writers to have a new insight to the content of syllabi and textbooks especially for EFL contexts. As Martínez-Flor and Usó-Juan (2006) state, it is possible to focus on pragmatics as part of the language teaching syllabus, together with the lexical and grammatical competencies in FL contexts. Based on Bachman and Palmer's (1996) comprehensive model of communicative competence becoming a competent second language user involves knowing more than just the correct rules and forms of a language—it also involves knowing how to use language in social and pragmatic appropriate ways.

In conclusion, it is proposed that C-R listening prompts can be incorporated in the communicative language teaching activities to cope with the insufficient interlanguage pragmatic competence and breakdowns in communication. By considering a new approach and optimizing the appropriate strategies and techniques, an effective language learning and teaching can be achieved. Despite practical demonstration to the use of listening prompts with C-R activities in developing pragmatic comprehension, more investigations with sufficient *n*-size participants and different proficiency levels have been proposed.

Appendix A

An Example of Apology Speech Act Listening Prompt

(Adopted from Summit 2, page 18)



 Statement Attitude or action A Conversation

SNAPSHOT

A: Tim, I hate to tell you this, but I dropped the camera you lent me, and it can't be fixed.

B: oh, no. How did *that* happen?

A: well, I tripped, and it fell out of the bag. I feel awful about it.

B: Are you sure it can't be fixed?

A: pretty sure I took it the camera shop and they said to forget it.

But I can replace it with a newer model. Ways to express regret

B: That's really not necessary.

I'm so sorry

A: No, I insist. And please accept my apology.

I feel awful (about it).

I feel (just) terrible.

B.  Vocabulary. Ways to take and avoid responsibility. Listen and practice.

He said, "I'm sorry. I'll pay for the damage."

He took the responsibility for the damage.

He said, "it wasn't my fault. I'm not paying for it."

He avoid taking the responsibility for the damage.

He said, "I'm sorry. It was my fault."

He admitted making a mistake.

He lied and said, "It was Bob's fault."

He shifted the blame to someone else.

He overslept but said "sorry, the train was late."

He made tip an excuse.

After he broke the camera, he said "I'll buy for you a new one."

He made tip for it. (He made up for breaking the camera by a new one.)

C.  Listening Comprehension. Listen to the conversations. Then listen again. After each conversation, choose the expression that best completes each statement.

She.....the damage.

a. took responsibility for

b. avoided taking responsibility for

Hethe damage.

a. took responsibility for

b. avoided taking responsibility for

He.....

a. admitted making a mistake

b. shifted the blame to someone else

She

a. admitted making a mistake

b. made up an excuse

She.....for being late.

a. made up an excuse

b. made up

She.....losing the scarf.

a. avoided taking responsibility for

b. made up for

Appendix B

Participants:

Speaker: M/F

Age:

Hearer: M/F

Age:

Dominance: S > H

S = H

S < H

Distance: intimates/family members friends/acquaintance strangers

1

2

3

Situation:

Place:

Time:

Offence committed:

Intensity of offence: Minimum Maximum

1 2 3

Apology

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