Evaluating the Influence of Monocomponential and Polycomponential Types of Input-Based Task on Recognizing and Producing L2 Request Downgraders

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The present study evaluates the relative effectiveness of three types of input-based tasks for teaching polite request forms to Japanese learners of English: the monocomponential type (affective oriented activities alone), the monocomponential type (referential oriented activities alone), and the polycomponential type (referential oriented and affective oriented activities). Treatment group performance was compared to control group performance on pre-, post-, and follow-up tests comprising a discourse completion test and an acceptability judgment test. The results reveal that the three treatment groups outperformed the control group significantly and that there was no significant difference among the three treatment groups. The lack of significant difference among the three treatment groups suggests that processing of the target features through the pragmalinguistics-sociopragmatics connections is more important, regardless of the task type, and that effective learning occurs even with one activity involving the pragmalinguistics-sociopragmatics connections in teaching L2 request downgraders.

Key words: structured input task, referential oriented activity, affective oriented activity, pragmatic proficiency

INTRODUCTION

One of the key issues in teaching second language (L2) pragmatics is the question of how L2 pragmatics should be taught. Jeon and Kaya's (2006) quantitative meta-analysis of research on the role of instruction in the development of L2 pragmatics showed that explicit instruction is more effective than implicit instruction (for explicit instruction, see Fukuya & Clark, 1999; Lyster, 1994; Tateyama, 2001; Witten, 2000; for implicit instruction, see Fukuya & Zhang, 2002; Rose & Ng, 2001). Due to limited available data, however, Jeon and Kaya (2006) noted that the seemingly superior effects of explicit pragmatic instruction should not be taken as definitive but only as indicative of hypotheses to be examined in future studies. Some of the intervention studies in pragmatics teaching indicated that pragmatic features can be taught accompanied by some sort of input enhancement activities. These studies were largely motivated by theories and frameworks built for grammar teaching and took place through analysis of participants' language behaviour and sample conversation recording in House (1996), film in Fukuya and Clark (1999), Tateyama (2001), and Tateyama, Kasper, Mui, Tay, & Thananart (1997), analysis of native speakers' output in a spoken or written form in Rose and Ng (2001), structured input task and problem-solving task in Takimoto (2009) and comparison of participants' output and native speakers' output, comparison of non-native speakers' output and native speakers' output, and comprehension questions about native speakers' role-plays in Takahashi (2001, 2005).

As mentioned above, there is empirical evidence that input-based approaches do assist L2 pragmatic development. VanPatten and Cadierno (1993) argued that instruction that changes the way input is perceived and processed by learners is more likely to lead to intake. Similarly, Ellis (1997) proposed that the manipulation of input rather than output is more likely to result in the integration of intake into learners' implicit declarative knowledge. Finally, later work by Ellis (2003) and Takimoto (2009) suggested that one type of input-based approach, the structured input task,

can be best used in teaching grammar and that structured input tasks are effective in teaching L2 pragmatics. The present study investigates the effects of the structured input tasks in teaching L2 pragmatics from the task variety perspective.

STRUCTURED INPUT TASK

Structured input tasks take on an important role in processing instruction. According to Van Patten (1996), processing instruction entails three basic features: "(1) explanation of the relationship between a given form and the meaning it can convey, (2) information about processing strategies, showing learners how natural processing strategies may not work to their benefit, and (3) structured input activities in which learners are given the opportunity to process form in the input in a controlled situation so that better form-meaning connections might happen compared with what might happen in less controlled situations" (p. 60). In recent years, a number of grammar teaching studies have provided empirical evidence that structured input tasks themselves, without explicit instruction, are effective in improving learners' grammar proficiency (e.g., Van Patten & Oikennon, 1996).

Similarly, Ellis (1997) argued that structured input tasks need to be designed in such a way that the target forms are frequent, the meaning of the target form is clear, and the comprehension of target forms is essential for comprehending the whole text. The present study draws on the framework of structured input tasks proposed by Ellis (1997). Some general principles for the design of structured input tasks follow below:

1. An interpretation activity consists of a stimulus to which learners must respond in some way.
2. The stimulus can take the form of spoken or written input.
3. The response can take various forms (e.g., true/false, check a box, select the correct picture, draw a diagram, perform an action), but in each case the

response will be either completely non-verbal or minimally verbal.

4. The activities in the task can be sequenced to require attention to meaning first, followed by noticing the form and function of the grammatical structure and finally identifying the error.

5. Structured input tasks should elicit a personal response from the learners (i.e., learners will relate the input to their own lives) as well as a referential response (pp. 155-159).

Both Van Patten (1996) and Ellis (1997) suggested that structured input tasks should include a mixture of referential oriented activities, that is, objective activities relating the input to other person(s), and affective oriented activities, that is, subjective activities relating the input to one's own life or one's own feelings. The referential oriented activities promote noticing the target features, and the affective oriented activities enhance the intake, helping learners compare what they noticed in another person's situation with what they currently notice in their own context. According to Wong (2004), the purpose of affective oriented activities is to reinforce form-meaning connections by providing learners with more opportunities to see or hear the form in a meaningful context. However, to teach pragmatics, instruction should aim not only at learners' conscious noticing of pragmalinguistic factors (the strategies for realizing speech intentions and linguistic items used to express these intentions), but also sociopragmatic factors (the social conditions governing language use). In the present study, therefore, the referential oriented activities in the structured input task are sequenced to require attention to sociopragmatic factors first, followed by attention to the pragmalinguistic factors relating to target structures and finally to make the connection between pragmalinguistic-sociopragmatic resources by providing participants with the opportunity to choose the more appropriate request form out of two objectively. The affective oriented activities are included to reinforce the connection of pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic resources by providing participants with the opportunity to rate each request form subjectively. The main difference between the referential referential oriented

activities and the affective oriented activities is that the referential oriented activities are objective, which guides participants to compare the two request forms and choose the more appropriate form, whereas the affective oriented activities are subjective activities, which leads participants to rate a request form based on one's own feelings or opinions. A key issue here is whether either the referential oriented activities or the affective oriented activities alone are sufficient to enhance intake and improve participants' pragmatic proficiency. Rosenshine (1971) argued that teachers should prepare a variety of activities and tasks to maintain learners' attention to what they are learning. In other words, it suggests that the combination of referential and affective oriented activities is more effective in enhancing intake and improving learners' pragmatic proficiency than either referential oriented activities or affective oriented activities alone. The present study focuses on the effects of the number of input-based tasks and input-based task types on learners' pragmatic proficiency.

Input-Based Intervention Studies of L2 Pragmatics Acquisition

As noted in the prior section, a number of intervention studies have employed input-based approaches in teaching L2 pragmatics (e.g., House, 1996; Rose & Ng, 2001; Takahashi, 2001, 2005; Tateyama, Kasper, Mui, Tay, & Thananart, 1997). Studies on the extreme of explicit instruction include teacher-fronted explicit explanation. For example, House (1996) examined how German university students with high-intermediate to advanced EFL proficiency improved their ability to initiate and respond to speech acts and conversational routines in a communications course. In the explicit group, students received teacher-fronted explicit metapragmatic information about the sociopragmatic conditions governing the use of telephone talk routines and their pragmatic functions. Students in the implicit group, in contrast, did not receive any explicit metapragmatic information about the target features. Students in both groups listened to tapes of their own language behavior and samples of tape-recorded conversations at

various stages of the course. Results indicated that both groups improved over the 14-week instruction period but that the explicit group outperformed the implicit group.

Another study with advanced EFL learners was conducted by Rose and Ng (2001) and they investigated the effectiveness of explicit and implicit approaches to teaching compliments and compliment responses. Implicit and explicit experimental groups followed the same procedure with one exception. The implicit group was exposed to film segments and received additional examples of the structures as well as questions to guide their discovery of the target features. After six 30-minute lessons, the results of three questionnaires (self-assessment questionnaires, discourse completion questionnaires, and metapragmatic questionnaires) showed that both implicit and explicit groups experienced gains in pragmalinguistic proficiency. However, only the explicit group effectively developed sociopragmatic proficiency. In a later study, Rose (2005) suggested that the similar improvement in pragmalinguistic proficiency for both single task demand groups could be due to the advanced proficiency level of participants or the relative easiness of the targeted pragmalinguistic features.

In contrast to House's (1996) study and Rose and Ng's (2001) study, Tateyama, Kasper, Mui, Tay, and Thananart (1997) investigated how beginner learners of Japanese as a foreign language developed Japanese pragmatic proficiency. The target pragmatic features were the three functions of the routine formula *sumimasen* as an attention getter, apology, and thanking expression. In the explicit group, students first discussed the different functions of *sumimasen* followed by teacher fronted instruction with further examples to illustrate the different uses of the routine formula. The explicit group also watched short video clips examplifying the targeted pragmatic routines. The implicit group did not engage in any explicit metapragmatic activities and simply watched the same video clips as the explicit group. After only 50 minutes of instruction, the quantitative and qualitative results (role-play, multiple-choice task, and self-reports) showed that the explicit group had an advantage over the implicit group. In a separate

study of instructional effectiveness, Takahashi (2001) proposed four input enhancement conditions: explicit instruction, form-comparison, form-search, and meaning-focused conditions. The explicit condition comprised a teacher-fronted metapragmatic explanation of the targeted form: request strategies. In the form-comparison condition, learners were instructed to compare their own request strategies with request strategies provided by native speakers of English. In the form-search condition, learners were asked to compare request strategies of other Japanese learners of English with request strategies provided by native speakers of English. Finally, in the meaning-focused condition, learners first listened to and read the input and then answered comprehension questions. The four conditions differed from each other in terms of degree of input enhancement with the explicit instruction exhibiting the greatest degree of input enhancement and the meaning-focused condition the least. After four weeks of instruction with 90 minutes per week, discourse completion tests and self-reports showed that the explicit group learned all of the request strategies more successfully than the other three experimental groups.

In spite of the general trend in support of explicit instruction, particularly teacher fronted explicit explanation, Takahashi (2001) found that some participants in the explicit group used non-target pragmalinguistic forms in the discourse completion tests because the previous instruction they received was still operative in their restructuring process. Furthermore, some participants in the explicit group also used *I wonder if you could VP* across all situations, regardless of degree of imposition. The tendency to use *I wonder if you could VP* is partially related to limitations in processing control (Bialystok, 1993) which explains why fluent and appropriate conversational responses require a high degree of processing control and why such complex skills may be difficult to develop in short periods of instruction. House (1996) also found that neither the implicit nor explicit groups improved their performance in terms of appropriate routinized responses.

Degree of attainment and lasting effect are two additional concerns in studies on the acquisition of L2 pragmatic proficiency. In her study,

Takahashi (2001) found that the degree of attainment and lasting effect of L2 pragmatic proficiency under the explicit condition was doubtful. Instead, Takahashi found that several learners under form-comparison dual task demand condition used target structures successfully. As a follow-up, Takahashi (2005) conducted an in-depth qualitative analysis of the form-comparison and the form-search conditions for teaching request strategies. After four weeks of 90 minutes per week, discourse completion tests and self-reports revealed that learners in the form-comparison condition outperformed learners in the form-search condition on all request strategies. Although Takahashi reconfirmed the effectiveness of the form-comparison condition in her follow-up study, some learners in the form-comparison group were unable to demonstrate their pragmatic performance evenly across different situations. Similar results for some learners in the explicit condition were found in Takahashi's (2001) study, a study which provided no evidence of developing sociopragmatic proficiency, and attested to the necessity of developing both pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic proficiency. These mixed results contribute to the debate over the task types that are most effective in helping learners access and integrate sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic knowledge in an input-based approach to L2 instruction.

Takimoto (2009) examined the relative effectiveness of three types of input-based approaches for teaching English polite request forms to sixty Japanese learners of English: (a) structured input tasks with explicit information; (b) problem-solving tasks; and (c) structured input tasks without explicit information. Results revealed that the three treatment groups performed significantly better than the control group. Takimoto (2009) seems to provide some evidence for the benefit of structured input tasks. However, it didn't look into the relative effectiveness of referential activities alone and affective activities alone and more research is needed to investigate the relative effects of monocomponential type (referential activities alone or affective activities alone) and the polycomponential type (referential and affective activities).

The Present Study

The present study focuses on the effects of input-based task type on recognizing and producing L2 request downgraders. Of the two task types, the referential oriented activities direct learners to rate the appropriateness of two underlined requests in situations related to other people and selecting a more appropriate request form. The other task activities, the affective oriented activities, instruct learners to rate the appropriateness of one underlined request in a situation related to their own lives.

To date, no studies have investigated the effectiveness of the monocomponential and polycomponential types of task on recognizing and producing L2 request downgraders, and the following research question is investigated in the present study:

> What are the relative effects of the monocomponential and polycomponential types of task on recognizing and producing L2 request downgraders?

Participants

Participants were solicited through an employment advertisement provided on the Internet in Japan whose program targets students. All participants were paid for taking part in the present study and were unaware that English lexical and syntactic downgraders were the focus of the study. Each participant was required to submit a Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) score. After checking TOEIC scores, 60 individuals at the intermediate English proficiency level, defined as TOEIC score of 500-700, were selected for the study. Only intermediate English proficiency level participants were randomly assigned to one of four groups comprising three treatment groups and one control group because extreme ends of learners' proficiency (e.g., low or high) might obscure the effects of different types of instruction. The three experimental groups received the following instructional treatments: referential oriented and affective oriented activities (IB) ($N = 15$), referential oriented activities alone (IR) ($N = 15$), and affective oriented

activities alone (IA) (N = 15) The control group also comprised 15 participants. The participants' first language was Japanese, and their average age was 26 years old. Most participants had studied English for 10 years at schools in Japan.

Target Structures

Studies of learners' request strategies have indicated that non-native speakers of English typically lack the L2 knowledge to enable them to mitigate English by means of syntactic and lexical/clausal downgraders (Faerch & Kasper, 1989; Hill, 1997; House & Kasper, 1987; Takahashi, 1998, 2001). For this reason, the current study focused on teaching syntactic and lexical/clausal downgraders in English request forms.

Syntactic downgraders modify the main clause internally by means of mitigating the imposition force of a request through syntactic choices, while lexical/clausal downgraders soften the imposition of a request by means of modifying the main clause internally through lexical/clausal choices (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989). A list of these internal modifiers is shown below in Table 1.

TABLE 1
A List of Some Internal Modifiers

Some Internal Modifiers	Examples
Internal syntactic downgraders	
Aspect (durative aspect marker)	I *am wondering* if you could lend me a book.
Tense	I *wanted* to ask you to come here.
Internal lexical and clausal downgraders	
Lexical downgrader	Could you *possibly* lend me your textbook?
Clausal downgrader	*I wonder if* you could come here.

Instructional Treatments

The four groups of learners participated in four types of English language classes. Each teaching session for the three treatment groups and the control group lasted for 40 minutes, and the instructor gave all directions in Japanese during the instruction. Sessions were conducted twice a week for two weeks at an English conversation school in Japan by the same instructor. The instructor was also the researcher. [1]

The three instructional treatments were matched for target pragmatic structures, and all the four groups were matched for time on task. The first class for all treatment groups was spent on lexical/clausal downgraders in English requests, the second class on syntactic downgraders, the third class on a repeat of the first class, and the fourth class on a repeat of the second class.

Treatment for the first experimental group (IB) comprised both referential oriented and affective oriented activities (see APPENDIX). Each referential oriented activity lasted for eight minutes while the affective oriented activities lasted for five to six minutes. During instruction, participants received handouts with three referential oriented activities and three affective oriented activities. In the referential oriented activities, participants read situations and dialogues, rated two underlined request forms and then chose the more appropriate form objectively. After choosing the form on their own, learners listened to an oral recording of the dialogue and underlined the actual request. In the affective oriented activities, participants read each dialogue in the handouts and then listened to an oral recording. Participants were then asked to relate the situations to their own lives and rate the level of appropriateness of each underlined request on a five-point Likert scale subjectively.

Treatment for the second experimental group (IR) consisted of just one component: engaging in the same referential oriented activities as the first experimental group (IB). Each referential oriented activity lasted for about 13 minutes.

Treatment for the third experimental (IA) group comprised affective oriented activities only with participants engaging in the same affective oriented activities as the first experimental group (IB). As with the second treatment group, each activity for the third treatment group lasted for about 13 minutes.

Lessons for the control group were designed to help participants perform well on the TOEIC; participants in this group engaged in TOEIC reading comprehension exercises. Participants in the control group were not exposed to the target structures during the lessons.

Testing Instruments and Procedures

The present study used a pre-test, post-test, and follow-up test to measure the effectiveness of the instructional treatments. The pre-test was administered two to three days prior to the first instructional treatment, the post-test eight to nine days after the treatments, and the follow-up test in the fourth week following instruction. Each test consisted of an acceptability judgment test, and a discourse completion test.

Situations in the two testing instruments comprised one speech act, a request, with three sociolinguistic variables: Power (the status of the speaker with respect to the hearer), Speaker Difficulty (the difficulty that the speaker experiences when asking the hearer to perform the request), and Distance (the relationship between the speaker and the hearer). These three variables were chosen because in cross-cultural pragmatics, they are considered to be the three independent and culturally sensitive variables that subsume all other variables and play important roles in speech act behavior. The study focused on situations with a high level of Speaker Difficulty combined with Power (the status of the hearer is higher than the status of the speaker or the status of the speaker and the hearer is equal) and Distance (the relationship between the speaker and the hearer is not close) because English downgraders are inclined to be used in the situations with a high level of Speaker Difficulty (Hill, 1997; Hudson, Detmer & Brown, 1992, 1995; Takahashi, 1998, 2001).

Situations with a low level of Speaker Difficulty were added as distractors in order to increase the reliability of the instruments. Both the discourse completion test and the acceptability judgment test consisted of 20 situations, a total of 10 High Speaker difficulty items and 10 Low Speaker difficulty items.

The situations with a high level of Speaker Difficulty were modified from items validated by Hill (1997), Hudson, Detmer, and Brown (1992, 1995) and Takahashi (1998, 2001).

Three versions of the discourse completion test and the acceptability judgment test were developed and counterbalanced for order of presentation of the same situations across the pre-tests, post-tests, and follow-up tests. The three different versions were used to minimize the test learning effect.[2]

Participants had to complete the pre-tests, post-tests, and follow-up tests in the following order: first the discourse completion test then the acceptability judgment test. The acceptability judgment test was administered second to avoid providing participants with models that could be used in the discourse completion test.

Open-ended discourse completion test (DCT). The discourse completion test required participants to read short descriptions of 20 situations in English and write what they would say in the respective situations in English. Participants were given a Japanese translation for reference, if needed. Two native speakers of English (Englishmen) who were trained for an hour rated the appropriateness of the request forms on a five-point Likert scale. An answer that reflected the most appropriate use of downgraders in participants' requests was given five points. For example, for the High Speaker difficulty items, 1 point was given to *Please ~*, 2 points to *Can you ~?*, 3 points to *Could you ~ ?*, 4 points to *Is it possible for you ~ ?*, 5 points to *I was just wondering if you could ~*. As there were 10 High Speaker difficulty items on the test, the maximum score was 100 points (50 points× 2 native speakers). One sample item is shown below.

> You are writing a difficult paper for Professor Hill. You need some help with the paper but Professor Hill is away for a month. A friend of yours has suggested you go and see Professor Watson. Although you do not know Professor Watson and Professor Watson is extremely busy, you have decided to ask Professor Watson to look through your long paper before you hand it in the next day. What would you ask Professor Watson? *(based on Takahashi, 1998, 2001)*
>
> *Note*: speaker difficulty $=+$; power $=-$; distance $=+$
> $+=$ more; $-=$ less; $\pm=$ equal
>
> You:_____
> _____

Acceptability judgment test (AJT). The acceptability judgment test required participants to read written descriptions of 20 situations in English, accompanied by a Japanese translation. Participants received three isolated requests, one at a time, and they scored each request on an 11-point scale.[3] Participants who rated the three requests in line with the acceptability judgments of native English speakers,[4] were awarded five points. Participants who did not rate all three requests in line with native English speakers were awarded nothing. As there were 10 High Speaker difficulty items on the test, the maximum score was 50 points. A sample example is shown below.

> Professor King at your university is a famous psychologist. You are now reading one of Professor King's books and finding it very complicated. You would like to ask Professor King some questions about the book. Professor King does not know you and Professor King is extremely busy. However, you decide to go and ask Professor King to spare you some time for some questions. What would you ask Professor King? *(based on Takahashi, 1998, 2001)*
>
> *Note*: speaker difficulty $=+$; power $=-$; distance $=+$
> $+=$ more; $-=$ less; $\pm=$ equal
>
> a: I want to ask you some questions.
>
> not appropriate at all 0—1—2—3—4—5—6—7—8—9—10 completely appropriate
>
> b: I was wondering if it would be possible for me to ask you some questions.

not appropriate at all 0—1—2—3—4—5—6—7—8—9—10 completely
appropriate
c: Could I possibly ask you some questions ?
not appropriate at all 0—1—2—3—4—5—6—7—8—9—10 completely
appropriate

Reliability

Interrater reliability was estimated by calculating the correlation of the two
raters' scores. For the discourse completion test, the resulting correlation
coefficient was .998, which was statistically significant ($p < .001$).

Average Cronbach alpha reliability estimates for the three test forms of the
discourse completion test and acceptability judgment test were 0.950 and
0.932 respectively, showing a fairly high internal consistency for the two
tests.

Validity

To ensure content validity, test items were carefully planned and matched
to a theoretical framework based on speaker difficulty, power and distance
variables. Table 2 indicates the variable distribution across tests.

TABLE 2
Distribution of Variables (Version A for the DCT and AJT)

	S4	S6	S10	S18	S2	S8	S12	S14	S16	S20	S1	S3	S5	S11	S13	S7	S9	S15	S17	S19
SD	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	−	−	−	−	−	−	−	−	−	−
P	±	±	±	±	−	−	−	−	−	−	±	±	±	±	±	+	+	+	+	+
D	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	−	−	−	−	−	−	−	−	−	−

Note: S = Situation; SD = Speaker Difficulty; P = Power; D = Distance
+ = More; – = Less; ± = Equal

RESULTS

The following section summarizes the results for each test instrument. The

overall alpha level was set at .05 with two group comparisons (the discourse completion test and acceptability judgment test) for one item type (High Speaker difficulty).

Results from the discourse completion test. Results of a two-way ANOVA with repeated-measures showed a significant main effect for Instruction (the IB, IR, and IA), $F (3, 56) = 12.49$, $p = .000 < .05$, a significant main effect for Time (the pre-test, post-test, and follow-up test), $F (3, 56) = 90.56$, $p = .000 < .05$, and a significant interaction effect between Instruction and Time, $F (9, 56) = 5.53$, $p = .000 < .05$. Table 3 summarizes the descriptive statistics.

TABLE 3
Descriptive Statistics for the Discourse Completion Test

Test	Instructional Groups							
	referential oriented activities + affective oriented activities (N = 15)		referential oriented activities IR (N = 15)		affective oriented activities IA(N=15)		control (N = 15)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Pre-test	53.67	11.19	57.33	4.82	56.93	4.27	49.87	12.29
Post-test	85.00	13.33	79.93	19.48	80.00	17.79	54.33	9.55
Follow-up test	84.53	13.82	78.87	18.12	83.33	15.83	59.47	5.00

Note: Maximum score = 100.

Results of the one-way ANOVA analysis in Figure 1 indicate that although there were no statistically significant differences among the four groups on the pre-test scores, $F (3, 56) = 2.27$, $p = .90 > .05$, the three treatment groups showed gains from the pre-test to the post-test and the follow-up test and that positive effects for the three treatments between the post-test and the follow-up test were maintained, as revealed by a two-way ANOVA with repeated-measures, $F (2, 42) = .44$, $p = .649 > .05$. Furthermore, the interaction reveals

the relative superiority of the three treatment groups over the control group with no crossovers between the three treatment groups and the control group after the treatments. Post-hoc Scheffé tests for the main effect for treatment show the following contrasts: The three treatment groups perform significantly better than the control group, and there were no significant differences among the three treatment groups.
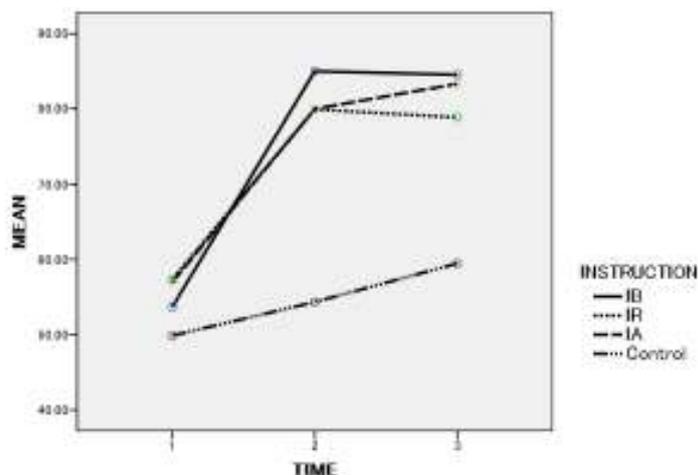

FIGURE 1
Interaction Plot for DCT
Note: IB = Instruction with referential oriented activities and affective oriented activities; IR = Instruction with referential oriented activities alone; IA = Instruction with affective oriented activities alone.

Results from acceptability judgment test (AJT). Similar to the discourse completion test, results of a two-way repeated-measures ANOVA for the acceptability judgment test revealed a significant main effect for Instruction, F (3, 56) = 5.15, p = .003 < .05, a significant main effect for Time, F (3, 56) = 28.96, p = .000 < .05, and a significant interaction effect between Instruction and Time, F (9, 56) = 2.36, p = .035 < .05. Table 4 summarizes the descriptive statistics for the acceptability judgment test.

TABLE 4
Descriptive Statistics for the Acceptability Judgment Test

Test	Instructional Groups							
	referential oriented activities + affective oriented activities ($N = 15$)		referential oriented activities IR ($N = 15$)		affective oriented activities IA(N=15)		control ($N = 15$)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Pre-test	27.33	17.10	28.64	16.29	26.67	19.43	23.67	14.33
Post-test	41.67	13.58	42.73	12.12	43.33	9.00	23.60	14.37
Follow-up test	40.00	14.01	42.73	14.72	39.00	16.92	23.53	14.42

Note: Maximum score = 50

The results displayed in Figure 2 indicate that although there were no statistically significant differences among the four groups in a one-way ANOVA analysis of the pre-test scores, $F (3, 56) = .28$, $p = .838 > .05$, the three treatment groups gained significantly from the pre-test to the post-test and the follow-up test, and positive effects for the three treatments between the post-test and the follow-up test were maintained, as evidenced by results from a two-way ANOVA with repeated-measures, $F (2, 42) = .37$, $p = .694 > .05$. Such an interaction shows the superior performance of the three treatment groups relative to the control group with no crossovers between the three treatment groups and the control group after the treatment. As with the discourse completion test, post-hoc Scheffé tests for the main effect from treatment on the acceptability judgment test reveal the following contrasts: The three treatment groups performed significantly better than the control group and there were no statistically significant differences among the three treatment groups.
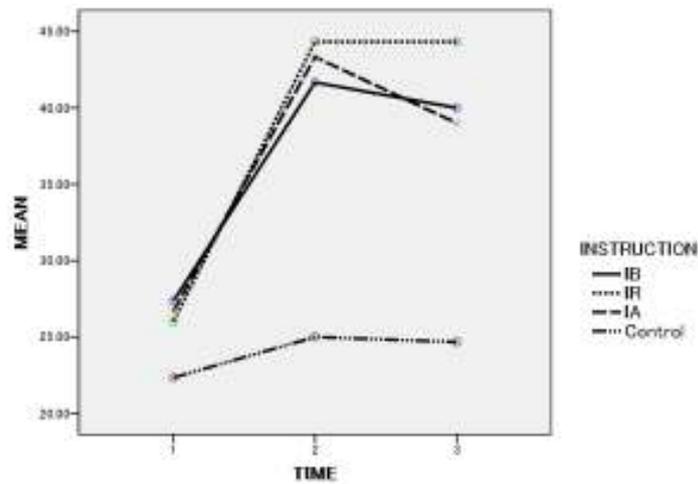
FIGURE 2
Interaction Plot for AJT
Note: IB = Instruction with referential oriented activities and affective oriented activities;
IR = Instruction with referential oriented activities alone; IA = Instruction with affective
oriented activities alone.

DISCUSSION

The research question in the present study examined the relative effectiveness of referential oriented activities, affective oriented activities, and a combination of referential and affective oriented activities to improve Japanese participants' English pragmatic proficiency. Participants in the first treatment group (IB) received both referential oriented and affective oriented activities during the treatment, while participants in the second (IR) received the referential oriented activities alone and third (IA) groups received the affective oriented activities alone. Results indicated that the three treatment groups performed similarly and that all treatment groups outperformed the control group as measured by a discourse completion test, an output-based test and an acceptability judgment test, an input-based test. Furthermore, no

significant difference among the three treatment groups in terms of the syntactic and lexical/clausal complexity scores for the discourse completion test was found. Given the lack of significant difference between the three treatment groups, it seems that variety of task activities did not have a strong effect on recognizing and producing L2 request downgraders.

Any explanations of these results must be speculative in nature, as no information regarding the psycholinguistic processing involved in either the treatments or the tests is available. During the referential oriented activities, participants in the treatment groups had to discover the rules for themselves by attending to not only the relationship between forms and meanings of target features but also the sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic features of the target structures. In the referential oriented activities, participants chose the more appropriate of two pragmalinguistic request forms objectively, an exercise that highlighted paying attention to pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic meanings. In the affective oriented activities, participants rated the level of appropriateness of each bold-faced underlined pragmalinguistic request form subjectively, paying attention to pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic meaning it carried. In earlier work, Craik and Lockhart (1972) claimed that the quality of a memory trace depends on the level or depth of perceptual and mental processing where meaning plays a very important role. Meaning, in this case, includes both pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic meaning. In other words, when participants focus more on the pragmalinguistics-sociopragmatics connections of the target feature, whether activities are objective or subjective, they are inclined to process it at a deeper level, which leads to greater retention. Both the referential and affective oriented activities in the present study were designed to focus participants' attention on the pragmalinguistics-sociopragmatics connections by requiring participants to access and integrate their pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic knowledge. Thus, it is likely that the referential and affective oriented activities involved greater depth of processing, resulting in improved pragmatic proficiency. If so, it is most likely that the knowledge established through the referential oriented activities in the first group (both referential and affective oriented

activities) had already caused participants to notice specific target features and facilitate the process of comparison between their norms and target norms appropriately in the first part of the instructional treatment. In the second part of the instructional treatment, the affective oriented activities could not fulfill the primary functions of adjusting the process of comparison between participants' norms and specific target norms. Perhaps the affective oriented activities would have had a greater effect in the first experimental group if the referential oriented activities had not been so effective and if the referential oriented activities had not been repeated.

CONCLUSION

The present study examined the relative effects of a variety of activities on recognizing and producing L2 request downgraders. Results indicate that processing of the target pragmatic features through the pragmalinguistics-sociopragmatics connections has a strong effect on recognizing and producing L2 request downgraders, regardless the number of tasks.

One pedagogical implication for teachers, then, is that they should be aware that effective learning occurs even with the referential oriented activities alone or affective oriented activities alone as long as the activities are effective. It is possible that the referential oriented activities, the affective oriented activities, and the combination of the referential and affective oriented activities can be repeated and that their repetition can reinforce the connection of the pragmalinguistic-sociopragmatic factors of target structures. Such tasks may prove of great value in improving learners' L2 pragmatic proficiency.

Several limitations of the present study should be considered in future research. One of the main limitations of the study involves the choice of testing instruments. The assessment instruments in this study consisted of the different kinds of tests: a discourse completion test and an acceptability judgment test. As both the tests were administered without any time

constraints, participants were likely to resort to controlled processing because they had plenty of time for the task. Accordingly, judgment and production modes of testing were adopted for assessing controlled processing skills, but there were no tests for assessing automatic processing skills. The addition of an on-line speaking test or listening test would have added an additional measure of automatic processing skills. Second, the treatments in the three control groups were repeated to make the initial input enhancement more effective; as a result, the task repetition proved very effective. However, the present study did not explore the effects of task-type repetition. Ellis (2003) has also proposed that more research is needed to examine the relative effects of asking learners to perform the same and similar tasks, particularly tasks of the same kind with similar content. Perhaps a topic for future research could be the relative effects of task repetition and similar task repetition on the development of learners' pragmatic proficiency.

In spite of these shortcomings, the present study contributes to our understanding of the effectiveness of tasks for the acquisition of L2 pragmatics in two important ways. First, tasks are more effective in promoting gains in recognizing and producing L2 request downgraders when accompanied by processing of the target feature through the pragmalinguistics-sociopragmatics connections. Second, effective learning occurs even with one activity of the pragmalinguistics-sociopragmatics connections in teaching L2 request downgraders. Thus, one implication of the present study is that researchers and teachers might find the results rewarding if they would devote some energy to designing the best possible tasks to assist learners process both pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic resources in greater depth in teaching L2 pragmatics.

NOTES

[1]In behavioral research, researcher expectancy can be a problem when the researcher teaches and select experimental groups. The researcher followed the instructional guidelines rigidly controlled for the effect with the double-

blind technique after the data were collected in order to minimize any researcher expectancy effect during the treatments.

[2]If the study begins with pre-test, the test can affect performance during the treatment and on future tests. The test alerts participants as to what researcher expects them to learn.

[3]The acceptability judgment test used an 11-point Likert scale. According to Hatch and Lazarton (1991), a broader range in scale encourages more precision in respondents' judgments.

[4]Ten native speakers of English were required to read written English descriptions of 20 situations with a Japanese supplement. They were then presented with a series of isolated requests and instructed to score the first request on an 11-point scale and then to score subsequent responses proportionally higher or lower in accordance with the degree of perceived acceptability. The native speakers' data was relatively uniformed and consistent (SD = .82 ~ 1.08, range = 2.00 ~ 4.00). This data was used as the baseline data.

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APPENDIX: EXAMPLES OF REFERENTIAL AND AFFECTIVE ORIENTED ACTIVITIES

Referential activity: Read the following situation and the dialogue and choose the more appropriate request form out of two offered for each underlined part and indicate your choice by circling '(a)' or '(b)'. Then, listen to an oral recording of the dialogue and indicate whether the actual request used in the dialogue is '(a)' or '(b)'.

Situation: Yuka is about to start her car when she notices that her car battery has gone flat. She needs to go to school now and she does not have any other means but to ask her landlord, Mr. Brown, whom she has never spoken to before, to give her a ride to school. Her landlord is extremely busy, but she decides to ask her landlord to drive her to school.

Brown:	Hello.
Yuka:	Hi, you are Mr. Brown, aren't you?
Brown:	That's right.
Yuka:	I'm a tenant next door. My car battery has just gone flat and I can't start my car. I really need to get to school. 1. (a) I was just wondering if I could by any chance get a lift; (b) I am just wondering if I could by any chance get a lift.
Brown:	Well, actually, I am really busy helping other tenants moving into this apartment. So, I can't really help you.
Yuka:	I understand, but it's important that I get to school today because I have exams.
Brown:	Tell you what. I've got my mobile phone. Why don't you call a taxi company?

Affective activity: Read the following situation and the dialogue and answer the following questions.

Situation: John is living in an apartment. He is extremely busy working on his assignment, but he needs to send a big parcel to England today**.** His landlady, Mrs. Taylor, whom he has never spoken to before, is extremely busy, but he decides to ask his landlady to send the big parcel. John sees the landlady.

John:	Hi, you are Mrs. Taylor, aren't you?
Taylor:	That's right.
John:	Hello. My name is John.
Taylor:	Oh, you are the tenant.
John:	Yes. I live next door.
Taylor:	How is it going?
John:	Pretty good, thank you. I'm very busy working on my assignment. 1. I wondered if I could possibly ask you a favor.
Taylor:	What's the favor?
John:	I need to send this big parcel to England today and 2. I was wondering if it would be possible for you to take it into town.
Taylor:	It's quite big, isn't it?
John:	Yes, It's quite large. Usually I would do it myself, but since I need to turn in the assignment today, I won't be able to do so.
Taylor:	I understand.

Indicate the appropriateness level of the two underlined requests from your point of view on the scale below.

1. very unsatisfactory 1—2—3—4—5 completely appropriate
2. very unsatisfactory 1—2—3—4—5 completely appropriate